Young: This is the Ronald Reagan Oral History Project interview with Michael Deaver. We had a chat beforehand about some of the general and particular interests that the project has in getting a picture of the Reagan presidency drawn in the words of the people who knew it best, that is, the people who knew it from the inside, and some of the general areas we’d like to cover, including, but certainly not restricted to, Mike’s time with Ronald Reagan in the pre-presidential years. We had a little meeting yesterday about some of the things we’d like to get your thoughts on, which I reported to you, and I won’t waste time here by repeating on the tape. If you’d like to start out with any general comments, you can, or we can start right in, and you can talk about how you got to know Ronald Reagan.

Deaver: First of all, I’d like to apologize for all the difficulty it has been setting this up. I’m sorry. I think you’ve been writing me for years about this.

Young: No, not that long.

Deaver: No, I think so. So I’m glad that we’re finally getting together.

Young: We appreciate the generous time you’re giving us, and we know what that means to a busy person.

Deaver: The only other caveat is that Ronald Reagan isn’t the only one who suffers from early onset Alzheimer’s. I have a terrible memory, always have had. I always laugh about those people who say that Reagan’s Alzheimer’s started earlier, in the White House. Reagan was always refreshing my memory and always telling me I was wrong. “You know, Mike, you’ve got that wrong. It was this or that.” He had a much better memory than I did, so, for whatever it’s worth, what you’re going to get today, I have no idea.

Hargrove: He was sometimes said to have had a photographic memory. Did he have a good memory for print and facts?

Deaver: Oh, yes. My admonition to people always was, “For God’s sake, be sure of your facts before you give them to him, because they’ll get in that computer, and God knows when they’ll come out.” And, in fact, if you recall, the first ’84 re-election debate with [Walter] Mondale was a disaster, and it was because the [David] Gergens and the [Dick] Darmans of the world, who never had a lot of confidence in Ronald Reagan to begin with, decided—and Jim Baker went
along with this—that we had to do the same thing we’d done in ’80, in preparing him for the debates. Well, in ’80 he’d never been President. In ’84 he’d been President for four years. What they did was fill his computer with a whole bunch of facts instead of giving him broad themes, which is what he can do much better. In the second debate, I refused to allow debate preparation. I said, “You just submit broad themes,” and, of course, he hit a home run.

Knott: I think perhaps the best place to start—and I know you deal with this in your books—but if you could just take us back to your initial contacts with Ronald Reagan and your impressions of him as he’s making the transition from the entertainment world into the political world.

Deaver: I was not a big fan of Reagan’s. I was a young guy in the Republican Party in California, and I had worked in Santa Clara County as executive director of the Party. I was a northern Californian in my politics, although I’d been a big [Barry] Goldwater young person. But always being a pragmatist, when I woke up the morning after the Goldwater election and realized that we had carried five, six states, or whatever it was, I decided I was never going to do that again. I wanted to win elections.

You have to remember, we had four or five Goldwater organizations that wouldn’t speak to each other in California. It was just terrible, and the whole Goldwater organization, you talk about right wing. These were scary people, when I look back on it now. It was the John Birch Society, and it was get us out of the U.N. [United Nations], and don’t let them fluoridate our water, and all that kind of stuff. Those were the people who were involved in it. So I just didn’t want to have anything more to do with that. And George Christopher looked to me like a pretty good idea. He was the mayor of San Francisco, a moderate Republican. He was kind of in the tradition of Earl Warren, which is what the Party was in California. I had seen Ronald Reagan. As I say in my book, the first time I ever laid eyes on him was at the Ambassador Hotel. He came in, and, of course, he really was a nice guy, and he was very bright. So that left me with a pretty good impression. I think I ultimately voted for George Christopher in the primary, and Christopher lost. Then I went on working for the Republican Party.

I met him at a dinner when he had decided to go around the state and allegedly test the waters. He was coming into every town and meeting with the Republican leaders. At that time I was working for the Republican State Committee in Santa Barbara, and about thirty of us got together for dinner at the Talk of the Town restaurant there in Santa Barbara. He was very impressive because here you could ask him anything, and you could see how his mind worked. And he certainly was an agreeable guy. Because of his size, he was imposing in a room, but then when he spoke, he was even more unforgettable because he was such a nice guy. He really was a nice guy, and he was very bright. So that left me with a pretty good impression. I think I ultimately voted for George Christopher in the primary, and Christopher lost. Then I went on working for the Republican Party.

I was not involved in the Governor’s race. I was running assembly races, trying to get back control of the lower house in California. Either Stu Spencer or one of these guys in California, after the election—I had been very lucky, I’d won all three of my races out there—said I should go up to Sacramento and work on the transition. I did and was assigned to Bill Clark. He asked me to stay on as his Assistant Cabinet Secretary, and I did. I didn’t have any contact with Reagan. I don’t think I went to the inaugural. I wasn’t part of the southern California group that was around him, and he always had a lot of people around him. But then we had an upheaval on
the staff. Phil Battaglia and Sandy Quinn and others were gone, and Bill Clark took over. And all of a sudden, I was the number-two guy in the office, at least from an administrative standpoint.

Clark really was a novice when it came to politics. He didn’t want to have anything to do with that, and I think he was a little uncomfortable around Nancy Reagan and didn’t want to have anything to do with that. So he told me that he wanted me to take care of the political liaison as well as what I had to do in the Governor’s office, which was the administration of the office. I did the administration and also ended up supervising the Governor’s schedule and his personal staff. That then would put me in touch with Nancy Reagan.

In addition to that, my wife [Carolyn Deaver] and I lived four blocks from where the Reagans lived in East Sacramento. I’d married a Sacramento girl. So we developed a personal as well as professional relationship with the Reagans. Because Reagan was a very sought-after Republican figure in the country within the Republican Party, he did an awful lot of traveling as Governor, probably much more than any other Governor. We did a lot of fund-raisers for the Republican Party. He spoke on behalf of candidates for Congress and so forth, and I supervised all that. I was also the liaison with the Republican Governors and the National Governors’ Conference.

So I would travel with him. In those days it was me and him and maybe the press secretary and later a security guy, and that was about it. If Nancy went along, then it would be somebody to handle whatever her needs were. So it was a very small organization, five of us, maybe, traveling, and many times it was two of us. It would be me and Governor Reagan. You know, when you travel that way with somebody, over and over and over again, you sit next to each other in an airplane, you talk about yourself, you talk about your family, you get to know each other. That’s pretty much the way it was, and the same was true with Nancy.

When all that started, when I began that traveling, it was just an instant affection for this human being. He was just such a gracious, kind—You watch him go through an airport, or getting on the airplane, or dealing with the stewardess or total strangers, he was always the same, just kind and gracious to everyone. If you knew his brother, you knew that that it really was not a genetic thing. His big influence was his mother, and I always thought that Neil [Reagan] was more like Jack Reagan, and he was much more like Nelle [Reagan]. Jack, of course, was a Roman Catholic, and Nelle was a fundamentalist Protestant. That was where he got all of that.

Somebody told me that when they cleaned his desk out at the office out in Los Angeles, when it was clear that he was not going to be coming back, in the top drawer there were five or six poems that his mother had written that he kept in there, which I think is fascinating because I had never heard of them. It was certainly not anything he ever kept in the top drawer of any desk that I knew of, and I knew usually what was in the top drawer of his desk. It must have been something that either he had found, or maybe it was searching to try to help him with those memories of his past, as he was losing his ability to remember. Also, as you know, with Alzheimer’s, all of that long-term memory is the last to go. One of the last times I saw him, he went into great detail about the Rock River and when he was a lifeguard there. That’s all he wanted to talk about, and he was totally surprised that I knew all about it: “How could you possibly know about that?” I said, “Well, I must have read it someplace.” Of course, I had heard it a hundred times.
So, anyway, we developed a wonderful relationship—almost all of the time by traveling. Also, of course, when you travel like that, hotels and motels all over the world, you’re the first guy he sees in the morning and the last guy he sees at night. So you develop a trust, and I think there was a tremendous trust. After a couple of years, I just instinctively knew what he would want, and knew what was best for him, and was completely devoted to him. He was the first priority, even above myself or my family. I think he knew that. I would think anybody in that position, if they got to be President, should have somebody like that around.

Young: Did you help him with his speeches or his talking points?

Deaver: Not really. I would read his speeches. We would talk about them, but in those days, he wrote almost all of his speeches himself. There wasn’t a lot of discussion about speeches because they were the same speech. He didn’t believe that, but we would go someplace, and it was a big-deal speech. I can’t give you an example now, but we would write a speech for him, and he would give it on that occasion. Then, we’d get back in the limo and say, “That was really a good speech tonight. You ought to use that speech.” He’d say, “Yes, it was a pretty good speech.” About two speeches later, we were back to “the speech.” He would have changed or inserted some little line or paragraph. So to him that was a new speech. But it was always “the speech.” I can’t argue with that, because it was a great success.

Hargrove: What was your estimate at this time of his range of abilities and his talent? How did you sum him up as a political leader?

Deaver: I thought he was brilliant. I thought he had a great perception of, a great instinct for people, and it was clear from the very beginning that this was a guy who had a sense of himself and a set of values from which he wasn’t going deviate. And he had such a reasonable way of explaining his position, even though that position, to others, would seem to be strident or extreme in the political climate of the day, coming off the Goldwater—

I think I said this in the first book I wrote—you wanted to help Reagan to float through life. You wanted to make it easy for him. You wanted to be sure that everything was taken care of. I can’t tell you why that was—everybody who has ever worked for him felt that way. He never asked for it, but it was just instantly apparent that that was something that everybody was going to do. I think there are very few people around, certainly nobody in my life that I’ve ever met, whom you had this respect for. You wanted him to succeed, and you’d be willing to do whatever it took to take the load off him of all the shitty little things that normal people have to do.

Hargrove: It wasn’t lack of doubt in him. It was confidence in him that—

Deaver: Oh no, I never had any doubt in him.

Hargrove: When you say brilliant, you mean gray cells. He was smart.

Deaver: I think he was smart. I think he had a lot of common sense. There are people here in this office who sit around and laugh about my quirky behavior, the poor old guy, you know. And we did the same thing. We would laugh about “the speech” and sometimes the clothes he wore. I say in the second book about my wife, when we came home one night from some party in the summertime. He had on this God-awful white wool jacket in Sacramento. I’d never seen
anybody wear a white wool jacket, a sport coat. We were in the car, and I said, “Jeez, did you see that coat the Governor had on? It was just awful. Why doesn’t somebody help him with his clothes?” Carolyn said, “You know, what you don’t seem to understand is nobody looks at his clothes.” She was absolutely right. Nobody looked at his clothes, except me, because I was always so critical. He was such a presence that he could have worn a gunnysack and he would have dominated the room.

**Hargrove:** Actually, he wasn’t that tall, was he?

**Deaver:** He was six feet tall.

**Hargrove:** It was the way he stood.

**Deaver:** The way he stood, but it was also the massiveness of his shoulders and chest. He had a little head. He had all of these little things that were always kind of funny to me. For instance, I said to him one time, “How come your collar has got this big spread in it? All of us have a collar that buttons up here. Yours is a little wider.” But his collar buttoned, and when it buttoned, it was out here, so that the tie was this big knot up here. I said, “Why do you—” he had all of his shirts made “—why do you have your shirts made that way?” He said, “Well, I have a little head.” I said, “What do you mean, what’s that got—?” “Well,” he said, “they told me in Hollywood that if I had a wide spread up here, it would make my head look larger on my shoulders.” Somebody told him to never wear gray, so he never wore gray. There were all of these things.

I can remember in New York, one time, at Justin Dart’s apartment, which is a two-story apartment on the river, where they stayed always. I didn’t stay at that apartment. I stayed at another apartment. I came in, and Nancy was having breakfast. I said, “We’re late. Where’s the Governor?” She said, “Well, he’s upstairs. Go on up.” I went up, and he was in the bathroom. He had just a t-shirt on, a t-shirt and shorts. He was combing his hair. It was all wet, and he had it parted, and he had combed it down over his forehead before he combed it up. Honest to God, it just shocked the hell out of me because it was like the portrait of Dorian Gray. This was when he was sixty-something, you know—he looked eighty years old.

I watched him. I said, “I never realized how much your face is changed when you comb your hair up in that pompadour.” He said, “Oh Yes, it takes all the lines right out of my face.” He had all of these little things. He was convinced, and how can I argue with it? He was right. He didn’t know that people were sneaking in and getting the hair at the barbershop because they were convinced he dyed his hair all those years. He never dyed his hair. That wet look he always had, in the black-and-white photos, looks like a big helmet. In the White House I finally discovered he had all of these years been putting Brylcreem on his head. So, he had that wet look, and when I finally got the Brylcreem away from him, people stopped writing about him dying his hair. It was the Brylcreem.

**Jones:** I once heard that even his adversaries felt bad when things weren’t going well for him, which is an extraordinary characteristic for a man. To back up to the conflict you said associated with the Goldwater group in California. Was that only within the group, or were you speaking more generally about the Party, with the Goldwater folks in the Party? Do you see what I mean?
Deaver: First of all, you had the conflict within the Goldwater movement. Then, you had the conflict with the Party and the Goldwater movement, because the Party, when Goldwater was running, was pretty much a [Nelson] Rockefeller organization in California. The Party became much more conservative, because the Party changed with the new elections.

Jones: Then the follow-up turns attention to Reagan. What was his effect, then, on that mosaic of conflicts?

Deaver: Of course, it became, after Reagan got the nomination, not the Republican Party or the Goldwater party, but the Reagan party. You know, the Republican Party in California had been divided since the ’50s when Joe Shell started the conservative wing of the party, and then you had Max Rafferty. When Reagan got the nomination, the first question he was asked was, “What are you going to do about the John Birch Society?” which was a big deal in the press. It wasn’t a big deal. There were probably ten of them in the whole state, members of the Birch Society, but the press loved to write about it.

The Birch Society endorsed Reagan in the primary, and Reagan had that famous line, which ended it. He just said, “I didn’t endorse the Birch Society. They endorsed me. You know, a lot of people endorsed me. That doesn’t mean I accept their philosophy.” That was the end of it. It was just amazing. He walked away from that and was able to continue to do that on such issues as abortion and gun control and a lot of other things that were highly controversial within the party and in the media. Reagan simply sidestepped it and was strong enough in his own convictions—people believed that he had his own convictions, that he was his own man—that he could get away with it. Whereas other politicians, i.e., George Bush the first, couldn’t.

Reagan never went to the pro-life rallies that they had here every year in Washington, D.C., never attended one. And yet he was their darling.

Jones: Would it be fair to say that he didn’t actively resolve the disputes, but that he became the figure around which they could unite without really resolving—?

Deaver: They couldn’t criticize him. Reagan had a quality of making people believe that he was theirs and that he believed in whatever it was they believed in without necessarily believing it. There were people in the conservative movement who were unhappy with Reagan, but they were a very small number of people. You may remember that in ’78, something like that, there were a bunch of people—Joe Coors and Howie Phillips and all of that crowd—who met with him here at the Madison Hotel and wanted him to leave the Republican Party and be the independent. He said, “No, I’m a Republican. If I’m going to run for anything, I will do it as a Republican.” And yet, all of those people supported him, maybe with the exception of Howie Phillips.

Jones: So, just to complete this, you would generalize that, to then, when he ran for President, you had the same, nationally within the Republican Party?

Deaver: Maybe this President will prove to be the most conservative President in history. Reagan was always thought of as being the most conservative President. I never thought of Reagan as a conservative, myself. I thought of him as a moderate man in almost everything. His rhetoric sometimes was more strident than his actions, but I knew him as a moderate guy with moderate views, with common sense—on national defense, tough, on crime, tough. On a lot of
other things, he was old-fashioned common sense—older American values rather than the current American values, if that’s the right way to put it. But I never thought of him as over here on the right with those people—it just wasn’t Ronald Reagan.

Riley: Can I build one question on that? One person whose name hasn’t come up in the discussion of California Republicans of the era is Richard Nixon. Where were the Nixon people? Was there just a complete separation?

Deaver: The Nixon people would have been the Party, in ’64. The old Nixon people were running the Republican Party in California. They would have been the Rockefeller-Nixon wing. I don’t think Nixon and Goldwater were very close, and I don’t think Nixon ever thought of himself as a right-winger.

Riley: Nixon’s relationship with Reagan at this time, was there any to speak of?

Deaver: Oh, sure. Reagan always respected Nixon. I’m not sure what Nixon thought of Reagan. Well, I do know what Nixon thought of Reagan. Reagan had that abortive attempt in ’68 for the nomination, which was more Tom Reed and Cliff White and those people. When they lost—when Reagan then placed Nixon’s name, and the nomination was seconded—Strom Thurmond thought it would be a good idea to get Nixon and Reagan together in the Fontainebleau Hotel down in Miami. Nixon said, “Well, Ron, you’re a young guy. You’ll have another shot at this.” Reagan said, “Mr. Vice President, you’re three years older than I am.”

Hargrove: Did Reagan have to learn how to be Governor? What did you observe as he fell into that role?

Deaver: Oh, sure. I think he had to learn, but he was a quick study, and he had awfully good people, as he always did. He made some mistakes in appointments, I think, at the beginning, which happened also in Washington. It also happened when he was running in the campaigns.

Young: John Sears.

Deaver: Well, Sears in the campaign. Particularly, I think, in California with Gordon Paul Smith, who was the Director of Finance, the guy out in San Mateo who had been with one of the big accounting firms. He was about five foot six, and had no political experience, and was a disaster. Of course, the Director of Finance was such a key job in California government. Hale Champion had come in during the transition and said to Reagan, “You know—” this was Brown’s Director of Finance—“we’re spending a million dollars a day more than we’re taking in. Good luck.” And he turned around and walked out of the room. A million dollars a day doesn’t seem like very much today, but in 1966 it was a lot of money. Anyway, he got rid of Gordon Paul Smith and hired Cap [Caspar Weinberger]. So that was a good move for him.

In the Governor’s office, we experimented in the first six to eight months with how we were going to run this thing. I say “we,” but I didn’t have a lot to do with it at that time. We had the issue of the changing of the guard. I mean Battaglia and those people really never had developed a management style for Reagan. I think the operation was pretty loose or muddled. When Clark took over, he had long conversations with the Governor about how he wanted to run the office. Reagan said, “Well, I would like to use a board of directors approach. I like to get everybody’s
thoughts, and so I want to use my cabinet. I think I picked good people, and I want the benefit of their experience and advice.”

So the whole cabinet process became important to Reagan. As Clark moved on and Ed [Edwin] Meese came in, the beginnings of the sub-cabinet process started there in California. I suppose, if there was a criticism of Reagan then, it would have been that he didn’t question more the recommendations of his cabinet. But Reagan always had three or four things that he was really wanting to concentrate on. Those things he drilled down very deeply. If something interested him, he would get more involved in it. At that time in California, it was obviously the education issue, higher education, which he was deeply involved in and making very bold strokes in firing Clark Kerr, and trying to reorganize the Board of Regents, and raising tuition, and fighting the professors and the senate of the University of California. Those took a lot of his time, and also the fact that the state was bankrupt.

Those were the two big things in the first term that he really spent a lot of time on. So, then, if you had all of these other issues—Are we going to change the tolls on the bridges? Are we going to make the cougar an endangered species?—all of that kind of stuff, yes, he’d be interested in it. But, Reagan always kept himself for the two or three big things that he wanted to do or that he thought were important.

Hargrove: But he would go into details of that?

Deaver: Oh, yes. He would go into details on the others. As I say, he was a quick study. And then, as he did in the White House, he always had two or three hours a day at his desk, where he studied and read and wrote. And he took piles of stuff home. Reagan was always reading. I think one of the things that most people are skeptical about is the fact that he constantly read. I think part of it was because he was so competitive that he wanted to be knowledgeable. He knew people were going to say, “What the hell does an actor know about all of this?” So that was always something he was doing.

All of those times that I talked about when he and I traveled—as soon as we’d buckle up and go through whatever you had to before you got comfortable—he’d pop open the briefcase, and out would come all of this stuff. When he was through with doing his mandated work, whether it was writing a speech, or reading briefing papers, or whatever it was, he would take out a book on economics—somebody would have sent him something, usually on economics or defense, even in the Governor’s office. He was constantly reading economic pieces. That was his relaxation. I was forever, of course, reading the latest five books on the New York Times list. And when we’d break for a meal, he would say, “Gosh, I’m so jealous. You get to do that, and I have to read all of this stuff.” But that stuff was what he read. In all of those years, I can remember giving him a couple of books of fiction that he thoroughly enjoyed, but then that was it. He never read any fiction. If he did read anything for pleasure, it would be a biography or a historical book. He was constantly reading.

Jones: I don’t think I’ve ever heard that particular description of Reagan, that he was so competitive. Would you play that out a little bit more? Is it related back to his own sports background and what—
Deaver: Well, it’s hard for me to psychoanalyze. What I know is that—as I said in the last book, I think—he was nine or ten years old before they discovered he couldn’t see anything. He had to sit in the front row, and they never picked him for any of the teams.

Jones: I have some sympathy with that, actually.

Deaver: Yes, his glasses were thicker than yours. Nobody would pick him because the ball would hit him in the head or go past him. He told me that when the visiting nurse pulled him out and gave him an eye test, and he got his first pair of glasses, he said, “I never knew there were leaves on trees. I never knew there were butterflies.” He’d never seen a butterfly until he got a pair of glasses. So I’m sure that had something to do with the competitiveness. I don’t know what else. Who knows? His father’s alcoholism? I don’t know.

Young: Can you give us some examples of the way that revealed itself?

Deaver: Well, there are a couple of stories. One, when he was an actor. He told me once that when he finally got to play in a movie with Errol Flynn, which was huge, he thought he had finally made it. He went out on the set that morning, and he was known as “one-take Ron,” because he always said his lines, when the other people would have been up all night drinking or carousing, and they would have to do their takes ten times. “One-take Ron” was his nickname. When he got out that morning at 6:30 and realized that Flynn was a half an inch taller than he was, he took three takes, because he was mounding the dirt underneath his cowboy boots, to make him as tall as Flynn. I love that story. It really is an example of his competitiveness.

The other one is when he was President. I always say he wanted to get the Soviets to the table, and he wanted to get the economic system back in shape, and the third reason he ran for President—he wanted to throw out the first ball in baseball. He was shot the first year, so he couldn’t. Boy, right about a month before the season the next year, he called me in. He said, “Remember, we’re going to throw out the first ball this year.” I said, “Yes, I remember.” We went over to Baltimore, and the pitcher and the owner, Ed Williams, took him out. They were about halfway from home plate to the mound. Reagan had his back to the mound. The pitcher was saying, “Right about here, Mr. President, is where I’d throw the ball.” Reagan’s walking backward, smiling the whole time. Within a minute or so, they were on the pitcher’s mound. The pitcher said, “Mr. President, it’s a long ways from here to home plate. With all due respect, you’re 70 years old.” Reagan said, “Well, I think I can do it.” And he threw a strike. The crowd went wild. Reagan bounced off the field. What everybody hadn’t known was that he had been practicing for three weeks at Camp David with the Secret Service, making these guys catch and pitch the ball to him. That’s what I mean, it was the little things.

Hargrove: His resilience is the same thing, isn’t it?

Deaver: That’s right.

Hargrove: Drive never stops.

Deaver: That’s right. Incidentally, I was talking to a nurse the other day who works with him. She told me that he still has to get his hair cut about every two weeks, that he still has that full head of hair. I haven’t seen him in about four years now.
In preparing, for instance, for his first meeting with [Mikhail] Gorbachev—I had called him the night before because I wanted to talk to him for two seconds. Then, I went through this big thing with him. I had left the Governor, the President, the White House, and he clearly did not want to see me. You know, he didn’t have time. He said, “Mike, I’m going to Geneva tomorrow.” I said, “Well, shit, everybody in the world knows you’re going to Geneva tomorrow. You don’t have to tell me that. I just want two minutes of your time.” He said, “Well, I’m very busy. I have to get ready for this.” I said, “Please let me just have two minutes of your time.”

So, when I got to the White House and rode up in the elevator, he was standing at the elevator when I got off, with his briefing books underneath his arm. It wasn’t a show. He wouldn’t even ask me to sit down. I said, “Could we just sit down for a second?” He got that kind of frown. We walked over and sat down.

Then, I started in on this business about the fact that he had taught me that we all had a purpose, that there was a reason for each of us, and that I thought this trip he was taking tomorrow was his reason. Well, by that time, the radar was locked on. He instantly was interested, because, as you know, he was a very spiritual, mystical guy, who believed in destiny. I said, “If that’s true, that each of us has a purpose, I think this is your purpose tomorrow. And, if it’s your purpose, it’s not [George] Shultz’s, and it’s not [John] Poindexter’s. So you ought to kick those guys out of the room and get together with this guy. Which, of course, is what he did.

But the point of all that is that he was probably reading 50 times more stuff than he needed to, to have this meeting with Gorbachev, because he knew that people would think that he wasn’t up to it. Yet, the truth of the matter is, if you talk to [Ken] Adelman or any of those guys who were involved in arms control, Reagan was extremely knowledgeable about throw weight and all of the details of previous arrangements. But what made Reagan’s ability to get us where we are today was none of that. It was who he was and his ability to either put someone at ease or intimidate them in his own charming way.

Hargrove: Where does the impression come from, though, that he was not knowledgeable and not curious? You know, it’s a common impression.

Deaver: I think that if anybody got into politics from the movies, the assumption would be that he was reading from a script. I think Reagan always understood that, and it was the reason that he tried so hard, and the reason he went out. When they came to him and said, “We want you to think about running for Governor,” he said, “Well, I’m going to go across the state and listen.” Because he thought that if he went across the state and made speeches, people would say, “Oh, he’s just an actor. I mean, he gave that speech. That’s how he got to be where he is today.”

The truth of the matter is that Reagan always soared rhetorically when he was challenged. It wasn’t the speeches, necessarily. It was after he became President, and he became sort of the father and the healer and all of the rest, and his speeches were so eloquent. But in the early days, in my opinion, Reagan succeeded and continued to achieve not necessarily because of his speeches, but because of his off-the-cuff responses, particularly when challenged.

I tell the story in my book about setting up a Chamber speech one time when I first took over and going in and saying, “I’ve got all of the questions.” He said, “What do you mean, you’ve got all
the questions?” I said, “Well, I worked it out with the master of ceremonies, the host. They’re going to write these questions in, but we’re going to get six cards here that we’re going to pretend are the questions that came from the audience.” Reagan was horrified. He said, “Mike, don’t ever do that.” It wasn’t, don’t ever do that because it’s dishonest. He said, “Don’t ever do that, because I can’t hit a home run on a soft ball.” It was absolutely right.

If you go back to the debate in ’68 with Bobby Kennedy via Telstar, Kennedy in Paris and Reagan here, in Sacramento, on the Vietnam war—Years later, I was with an assistant to Bobby Kennedy at a dinner in Boston, and I said, “Gosh, you remember when Reagan debated Bobby Kennedy?” He said, “Oh, I was with him in Paris.” He said Kennedy came off the set and said, “Don’t ever put me on with that son of a bitch again.” Most people have forgotten that Hubert Humphrey said pretty much the same thing when they debated at a big AFL-CIO conference here.

We were on your question about why people thought he was not very smart. I don’t know. I still think it comes from the fact that he was a television personality, that he was an actor. You know, when I first went to Sacramento, I spent most of my time trying to get the Los Angeles Times to not refer to him as “Ronald Reagan, the right-wing former actor, Governor of California.” They always had all of that before. Finally, after he was the Governor for four years, they took out the “former actor” business. They just called him “the right-wing Governor of California.” It was a long time—probably finally getting the nomination, maybe a little bit after ’76—until they would just call him the former Governor of California. That took a long time.

Riley: You mentioned this spiritual, mystical aspect. Can you take us back to when you first started recognizing this in him, and how it manifested itself, and maybe even deal with the question of how that related to his approach to organized religion?

Deaver: The first time I realized it was when I went into the Governor’s office, into his corner office, one day. He had his back to me. He had a bottle up in the air, and he was drinking out of this bottle. It obviously wasn’t liquor, but it was like a bottle of Pepto-Bismol or something like that, Kaopectate or something. I said, “Oooh, what’s wrong? Are you not feeling well?” He said, “My stomach’s been bothering me.” It was at about the time when he was going to have to make a decision on executing the first prisoner in about ten years in California. It had been a long time, because Pat Brown had not done that. Then, abortion was an issue in the Legislature, and he’d never dealt with that.

This went on for several weeks. Finally, I went in one day, and I said, “I haven’t seen you drinking your Pepto-Bismol. How’re you doing?” “Well,” he said, “I kept turning around, looking for an answer. I realized that I had to look up for the answer.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “I’ve always known this, but the answer is upstairs.” Never, ever had a stomach problem again. I never knew him to have a stomach problem after that. How he came to that, I don’t know. Probably sat down with Donn Moomaw, who was his pastor.

It was clear, the more I got to know him, the huge influence his mother had on him on that, being a fundamentalist. There were some times when I would cringe when he would begin one of these discussions, which he did once in the Oval Office with the Korean President. He started talking about Armageddon and the Middle East. After the meeting was over, I said to him, “This is not a
very good idea. I mean, you’re the leader of the western world, and when you start talking about Armageddon and the Bible, it scares the hell out of people.” He said, “Well, yes, you’re probably right.” I don’t think he ever did it again.

He read the Bible. He prayed every day. I can remember one time in the late ’60s in a crowd of people, some young person grabbing him by both arms and saying, “Do you believe?” Reagan said, “Yes.” This was at a time when the whole reborn thing was a really big movement. This young woman said, “No, no, no, no, I mean, do you really believe?” Reagan got this look on his face and said, “Yes. Yes.” It was clear they were connecting.

His relationship with Billy Graham went back a long time. Whenever he had difficulties, he would be on his knees. Whenever he had difficulties, he would get help from his pastor or somebody. There were constant references to it, both in his speeches and in his conversation. It was clear he believed that there was a divine purpose, believed that each of us had a purpose, and that our lives were controlled by a higher power. As he said in his first inaugural, he believed that there was a design about this country being placed here, as he put it, “between two great oceans,” for a reason.

Knott: There were some accounts that came out later that said that the assassination attempt reinforced that.

Deaver: Oh, no question in my mind. You asked me earlier if he had changed. I’ve always said that of all of us who came back here, he was the only one who didn’t change, except when it comes to the assassination attempt. Dick Allen and others misinterpreted what I said. I did not ever say that Reagan’s view of the Soviets was changed by the assassination attempt. What I have said was that Reagan was changed by the assassination attempt, and he was changed to the point that I have said that John Hinckley, in his own twisted way, may have altered the course of history. I think Reagan became less willing to be moved by arguments of others on issues that he felt very strongly about. He told me two weeks after the shooting that he thought there had been a reason for his being spared, and that he was going to rely on his own instincts more strongly. I think that was true. He got much more stubborn on issues after the shooting.

Young: Issues in general?

Deaver: Yes, but on those things that I think that he really felt—I’m convinced Reagan ran for President for one reason. He was absolutely convinced that he was the guy who could end the cold war. He was convinced of that because he was the last one who had lived through the two World Wars, and he had this image of being a hardliner, and he thought of himself as a good negotiator—he had learned the art of negotiation as the President of the Screen Actors Guild—for all of those reasons, he could get the Soviets to the table, and he could get a deal. I don’t think anybody else in the world believed that. I’m not sure I believed it, but he told me that enough times. In the face of his own children and others accusing him of being a war monger, all of those early nuclear freeze people who came out against him, all of that, just absolutely made his resolve only stronger that he had to do something. He was visibly disappointed when these guys kept dying. He had three of these heads of the Soviet Union who died on him, and he couldn’t do anything about it.
I'll never forget how the CIA, the State Department, National Security Administration, would set up these briefings on the Soviet Union for him. After about 15 minutes, he would glaze over, and sometimes, he’d doze a little bit. [Robert] Bud McFarlane brought this Suzanne Massie in to see him. She’s writing a book, by the way—I don’t know if you know that—about all of these meetings. She had something like 23 meeting with Ronald Reagan. I didn’t know that. Most of them were after I left.

I sat in that first meeting with Suzanne Massie, and she was talking. She wasn’t talking about throw weight and the military of the Soviet Union. She was talking about the people and the spirit, and, boy, the old radar homed right on it. And he had 23 meeting with her. She was the one who was responsible for getting Reagan ready for the summits, not the experts over in the State Department or the CIA. That was exactly what he wanted. He wanted to learn about how these people were made up.

**Young:** What made them tick.

**Hargrove:** A good actor is a student of human nature.

**Deaver:** Well, he thought of himself as a good actor, even though others didn’t. He always thought he was.

**Riley:** I want to go back to the part of your job description when you first went to Sacramento. You said one aspect of your portfolio was taking care of Mrs. Reagan and her concerns about the administration. Can you tell us how that evolved, your earliest relationship with Mrs. Reagan, how you learned—

**Deaver:** Well, everybody was scared to death of Nancy Reagan, or Mrs. Reagan, as you refer to her. Of course, I was petrified because everybody else was. I never really had anything to do with her. The first time I ever had to deal with her—of course, I had the schedule, and my secretary came in and said, “Mrs. Reagan is on the phone.” I picked up the phone, and she said, “I need Ronnie in Los Angeles on Friday”—or whatever it was—“so you’re going to have to change his schedule.” I said, “Mrs. Reagan, we can’t.” “Well, why can’t you?” I said, “Because we have this tax bill”—or whatever it was—“and he’s got to meet with the Republican leadership.” Dead silence on the other end of the phone. “Okay,” she said, “that makes sense, but can we work it out so that you get him out of town as early as you can on Friday?” I said, “Sure.”

I thought, **well, that wasn’t very hard. All of you have to do is explain to this lady what the facts are, and she’ll be all right.** And that’s pretty much the way I dealt with her. She didn’t want to deal with everybody in the Governor’s office because I think she probably felt that the more she dealt with individuals, the more people would say things about her, or these people would talk about her. She was very private and very concerned about stories about her, because she thought it would take away from him. She also had young children to take care of, and that was her principal concern. So she liked the idea of dealing with one person. After that first conversation, I think both of us probably delivered a big “Whew!” She found somebody who would deal with her as a human being and somebody who thought she had a brain and wasn’t afraid of her. That’s pretty much the way the relationship grew. I think, over a period of time, she realized that she
and I were interested in the same thing, that I really was interested in him first. Then, he became comfortable because she was comfortable with me. So, the whole thing just worked that way.

I can’t remember an issue in Sacramento that Nancy ever got involved in, an issue of government. Maybe there was, but I can’t remember it. In Washington, the only one time I ever saw her interject herself into a piece of policy was when she came downstairs when [Andrei] Gromyko, the foreign minister for the Soviets, came. This was a big deal, because we had never met a high-ranking Soviet leader. So everybody knew this was a big meeting, Reagan’s first meeting. There’s a wonderful story about that meeting. We had lunch over in the East Room. We were having cocktails in the Red Room, or one of those rooms, and in walks Nancy Reagan with all of these men from the State Department, translators, and people from the Soviet Embassy. And Nancy Reagan comes in in a bright red dress, and everybody ooh’s and aah’s over her. Gromyko is quite taken aback. She comes up to him and leans over and says, “My husband is really interested in this,” something like that. He says to her, “Tell your husband to pray for peace.” She said, “I’ll pray for you, too,” and left the room. Of course, it became a big deal. But she didn’t do that because she knew anything about the negotiations or anything. She simply did that because she wanted to make an impression that would go back to the Kremlin. She was smart.

Never, ever got involved in anything, I think much more like Laura Bush than anybody I’ve ever seen before. Or Bush is more like her. She was only interested in him. If she got into it, it would be over something that was a continuing bad press story: “Why is it this way? Why isn’t somebody doing something about it?” Usually with me. Or, if somebody was a continuing problem in the press, “Why don’t we fire that person? Why don’t you get rid of him? Why are we continuing this?” Or—if her husband made a big mistake—“Why are you over-scheduling him? I think you need to give him more time to rest”—that kind of stuff, all related to him. It never was related to anything that she was interested in. She had her own anti-drug stuff.

**Young:** It wasn’t policy that she involved herself in.

**Deaver:** Never. Never.

**Young:** It was how her husband, the President, was being seen and portrayed.

**Deaver:** It was. When you say policy, she knew, as I knew, that his single priority was the Soviet Union. Yet, there were those in the White House and in the National Security Council who were—how can I say this?—appealing to the darker side, the old cold war instincts. She would get into that. She would call George Shultz up on the phone and say, “You’ve got to get in to talk to Ronnie. These people”—Because he would come home at night over dinner and say, “I’ve talked to someone. They brought these people in from the National Security Council.” And she’d call Shultz or me or George Bush and say, “You’ve got to get in there and talk to Ronnie. You can’t let these people dominate the conversation, because that’s not what Ronnie wants to do.”

Of course, Reagan would probably give the impression to all of those people, obviously, of politeness and listening to them, and she knew that, too. She knew him better than anybody else.

**Jones:** What was the basis of the fear in Sacramento that, it seems to me, carried over to Washington as well, among the staff?
Deaver: The fear of Nancy?

Jones: Yes, right.

Deaver: Well, she didn’t suffer fools. She didn’t waste any time. I mean, if she called you up on the phone, it wasn’t, “Hi, what are you doing?” It was, “I have this newspaper story in front of me. I don’t understand this, can you please explain it to me?” Well, if you already had this impression that the newspapers or somebody has written, then you get a call like that, it’s fairly intimidating. She would do it with me, and by that time I had a relationship where I’d say, “I can’t talk to you. I’ll call you back when I can,” or “By the way, before we start this conversation, how are you doing?” She would laugh and say, “Oh, yes. How are you doing?” It’s just the way she was. She just didn’t waste a lot of time.

I think, in some ways, she had better antennae than he did, certainly in the short term. You know, Reagan’s great greatness was his ability to have a long-term view of things, whereas all of the rest of us, Nancy and I and, to some extent the others, would be always reacting to whatever the above-the-fold was. That never bothered Reagan that much. It just totally amazed me during the [Bill] Clinton years, to watch the way they dealt with things—polling every night, changing words here and there. I think we had three polls a year, maybe, when I was in the White House.

Jones: But, it wasn’t her style to stroke the staff. The contact was a contact when she wanted an answer.

Deaver: Right.

Young: Wasn’t it also the fact that everybody knew how strongly interested she was in the political welfare of her husband? It can be rather intimidating to have that coming—

Jones: So, any contact was because she was reacting. She wouldn’t be reacting because things were going well.

Deaver: She never called anybody in the White House unless there was a problem. So you knew if you were getting a call, there was a problem, she had a problem someplace. But the other thing that I’ve always thought was funny is that Nancy was basically a pussycat. “Nancy would tear up,” as Ronald Reagan used to say, “when we sent the laundry out.” Whereas Barbara Bush had this reputation of being this grandmotherly woman, and she was tough. I mean, you never wanted to get at cross-purposes with her. One of the things about Nancy was that she’d forget. Once she got it out, it was over with. She wouldn’t harbor a grudge particularly.

Hargrove: Did she talk to him about these things, or do you think she—

Deaver: Well, some of those things. Some of them she didn’t. Some of it was sort of a conspiracy between the two of us that continued. A lot of it she would talk to him.

Hargrove: She would talk to him about policy questions?

Deaver: Not policy questions. Well, policy questions only if they would rise to being a problem. A lot of the issues with her were personnel, and, you know, the Don Regan thing was—
**Hargrove:** She could smell out staff that she didn’t think were—

**Deaver:** Oh yes, because Reagan trusted everybody. Reagan trusted everybody to a fault, and I think it was a fault. But she knew when people were taking advantage of him.

**Hargrove:** Tell us the Edmund Morris story, the little anecdotal story. How did he get selected? You had a hand. She had a hand.

**Deaver:** We were trying to find somebody to do the Arthur Schlesinger role, and Mark Hatfield and I were talking one day, and he mentioned Edmund Morris. I always thought of Hatfield as a student of the presidency and more of an intellectual than at least the other members of the Republicans in the Senate. He said, “I’ve got some other people we can have over for dinner. Why don’t we have two or three of these guys, and let Reagan get a sense of them, and they can get a sense of him, and then we can go from there.” One of the people at that dinner was also the former Librarian of Congress, Daniel Boorstin, and there was a third, but I can’t remember who that was.

Also, Lucky [Selwa Showker Roosevelt] and Archie Roosevelt were very high on Morris because he had, of course, done Archie’s grandfather’s first volume, which I read, and which the Reagans read after the dinner. Edmund was charming and witty, and the Teddy Roosevelt book was wonderful, and that’s what happened. Edmund had a lot of access, particularly after I left. But I don’t know what happened. I can’t tell you what happened. Edmund and I had conversations up until the last four or five years, when I didn’t hear from him. But up until that time, we would meet every two or three months for lunch or something, and he would always come back to the same point: “I’m having this terrible time. I can’t figure out if he’s the most complicated or the simplest man I’ve ever met.” I said, “Well, he’s pretty simple as far as I’m concerned. What you see is what you get, Edmund. There is no big mystery here.” But Edmund couldn’t get past that.

[BREAK]

**Jones:** Just before we leave Sacramento, could you reflect on that experience for him as preparation for both running for, and then serving as, President, and on those years between when he has completed his service as Governor, the two terms, and before he runs, just to reflect on that period in terms of his running and serving?

**Deaver:** I think the preparation for running for the presidency was he had eight years of running something, which he had never done before. He had run a ranch, but he had never supervised a staff of people. He never had to deal with a bunch of personnel problems or explaining all of that to the national media. So, there’s no question that the experience of running for election, running the first four years, which were extremely turbulent, and dealing with the media—

You’ve got to remember that he had a press conference every Monday at one o’clock in the Capitol. You could ask any questions you wanted to. I think it lasted an hour. We did a little bit of briefing, but it wasn’t anything compared to what I can remember later doing for national press conferences. The press guys would come in. We’d say, “George Skelton from the Times will probably ask you this,” and “So and so has been bugging us about this.” That was pretty
much the extent of it. Reagan would go in and field those things, and they went well. They were broadcast, usually on PBS.

It was in one of those press conferences where he got the question, “Have you paid any state income tax?” And he didn’t know. Of course, it was some state franchise tax worker who leaked the fact that he hadn’t paid any taxes that year because he had had some depreciation issue or something, where he was able to not pay any taxes. It was one of the really big stories and serious problems of his governorship, for a guy who had said taxes should hurt. His feet were in concrete on withholding and a lot of other things. To have not paid any state income taxes—and to have not known it was even worse. You ask about where I think all of this came from about did he have a brain or was he smart. That really hurt, for a guy not to know he didn’t pay any taxes. He didn’t know what his tax situation was. You know, there are hundreds of thousands of us who just sign our taxes and write a check every year. I suppose if he’d written a check, he would have remembered it.

Anyway, the fact that he went through some really big personal and critical situations in those eight years, the fact that he learned how to manage issues and how to get facts from people and how, I think, in his own way, to learn to gather information in order to make a decision on a subject that was complicated that he had never thought about before in his life—all of those things helped prepare him.

Jones: Working with the Legislature.

Deaver: Oh, sure.

Young: That was certainly a new thing. Didn’t he have a Democrat—

Deaver: He had a Democrat the second—Let’s see, in ‘68, I think, we got a Republican Assembly for two years. Then, of course, it was almost as bad as having a Democrat Assembly, or maybe worse. And that was difficult because all of those guys who went to Sacramento loved Sacramento, to get to Sacramento, to get away from their wives—it was allegedly a part-time legislature—and go to Frank Fats and Posey’s every night and sit around and chase young staffers and drink. And Reagan went home at six o’clock every night and had a TV tray with Nancy or the kids or whoever was at home and never did that.

They were always bitching about that. “Why doesn’t he ever do like the Governors are supposed to? He’s supposed to have us down to his office at six o’clock at night, pull out a couple of bottles, and we put our feet up on his desk, and that’s how we get things done.” That was never going to happen.

In fact, we finally tried to have the legislators over to the house once a week. We’d pick five or six of them. I don’t think we had the wives. I think we just had the legislators. They would have dinner. Nancy would be there. Then they’d go down in the basement, and they had a pool table down there. It was just awful. It just didn’t work. I mean, he could be charming, and he would have a good time. But it just wasn’t what they—they didn’t want to be at somebody’s house with a wife there.
But they grew to respect him because he understood how to talk to the people. He maybe couldn’t talk to them as well, but he could talk to the people. If he needed them to do something and they wouldn’t do it in the normal sort of way—calling them down and saying, “I want you to do this,” or “I’m going to veto that bill if you don’t,” or whatever—he would just go on television or on the radio and talk to the people. Bob Moretti, who was the Speaker, finally came down one day and said, “Stop. Stop. Stop the cards and letters. I’m going to do it.”

Jones: So he replaced the old-time shmoozing with a kind of a public—

Deaver: He understood he could communicate retail, and—

Young: That was enough?

Deaver: Well, no, he did a lot of talking and shmoozing, if you want to call it that, with the legislature in California. But on the really big issues, he would go to the people, because he knew it was the only way he could get past a Democratic legislature, and he had one for the whole time.

Jones: And would you say a little something about when he first got to Sacramento, the matter of setting up staff, and how is that going to work, and his interest in a kind of cabinet arrangement? Would you say something about how well he adjusted to that? Did it work well over the eight years as Governor? Were there lessons there that he may have taken to—

Deaver: I think the cabinet system worked well for him, probably worked a lot better than it did in the Federal government. He still had the two or three or four people who saw him every day, who really ended up being the largest influence on him on 90% of the stuff. If it was really a big issue, you would have input, but you know, he might go outside. He might go find somebody else he wanted to listen to on the subject, or he would go into the Cabinet and get people in, or he would call them all over and talk to them about it.

Let’s face it. He had never had an office he went to every day. He’d never had all of these resources available to him. He had to learn how to use that, and I think the Governor’s office was a great way to get him into it. I think all of that was a learning experience, and I do think he developed a style of management that we all got used to and that he got used to. I don’t think it changed one bit the way he thought or how he ultimately made up his mind, because so much of it was this other peripheral stuff that would come to him, either from friends or people he would meet or from writings and readings. As I said before, he read a lot of stuff.

Jones: It was once said that he so clearly projected goals that it made it simpler for staff, even in framing options, to frame them in the context of these goals. That was a sort of staffing relationship.

Deaver: No question. I talk with some regularity to office-holders and people who serve in the White House, who want to talk to me about issues and how they develop them. I never worked for anybody except Ronald Reagan, and there was never a question in my mind, ever, about what we were going to do, or what we were going to work on, or what was important, because he would have enunciated it. If you ever tried to get him off on something else, he would always come back to those things anyway.
Now, in the second term, I remember that I thought we were kind of floating, because we had dealt with the University of California issue in one, and we had a $700 million surplus because Reagan had had to raise taxes. Everything was moving along pretty well. So I convinced Ed Meese and Reagan that we ought to have a day where we would get out of there and sit around the table and try to figure out what we wanted to do in the second term.

As far as we got was across the street to the Transportation—they had a big conference room. But it was out of the Governor’s office. And we talked and talked and talked and talked and talked. Then we broke for lunch. Then we talked some more. About two o’clock in the afternoon, I said, “You know, Governor, I have heard you talk about reforming welfare forever, and we haven’t done a goddamn thing about it. And you’re going to talk and talk and talk—

In about every speech you make, you talk about the ‘Welfare Queen,’ but you haven’t done anything.” Dead silence around the table, and Reagan said, “Well, why don’t we do that?” Everybody thought that was a good idea. So they put me in charge of coordinating that, and Bob Carleson, and a couple of other guys.

That, then, became the mantra for the second Reagan term, and it meant dealing with Washington as the first step. As you know, Nixon sent several people out to sit down with Reagan to shut him up on welfare reform. You remember Nixon had the Family Assistance Plan, finally. But then, the welfare reform that we began—by the time Reagan got to the White House, 35 states had the Reagan welfare reform plan, and Clinton ultimately signed welfare reform many years later.

The second thing that occupied us, of course, was the property tax reform in California, which he lost. Those were the two big issues. I think Reagan knew that he could only do so much, and I always saw my role as the guy with the whip who was keeping him and everybody else focused on what I interpreted was his big issue. And I was usually right. I didn’t have to do much to keep him focused, but sometimes everybody else would get him going some other direction, and we’d steer it back.

Jones: You said there were three or four people that he relied on in the staff. Who were those three or four?

Deaver: Of course, Ed Meese—

Jones: Yourself.

Deaver: Myself. I’m trying to think. Ed and I were certainly the principals. Vern Sturgeon—I don’t even know whether he’s still alive—and George Steffes, who were the legislative guys there, and Cap, being a Director of Finance, would have been pretty much it.

Hargrove: Would you characterize Meese’s skills and role? He was Chief of Staff for a length of time, wasn’t he?

Deaver: He was.

Hargrove: Particularly as they related later to how he worked in the White House.
Deaver: This is a rather touchy subject with me and Ed. Ed’s a great guy. Nobody was more loyal than Ed Meese. He certainly was the keeper of the flame. He was smart, intellectually, and understood where Reagan wanted to go and could intellectualize even beyond where Reagan could. He just wasn’t a very good administrator. And he could never understand it if you’d question him. He thought he was a superb administrator because he also thought of himself as a military man. He was a reserve colonel in the Army, or something, and had that background in procedural emphasis—

Anyway, when we got to the White House, I was at Middleburg—this was like three weeks before the election—and we were having a drink one night, Reagan and Nancy and I, and I said, “I know you’re superstitious. You won’t ever think about doing anything until you actually win.” He was very superstitious. He used to carry things around in his pocket that people would give him, to the point where you would have to clean his pocket out because he would have 20 little rocks or beads or whatever somebody had given him. “Keep this. It saved my mother’s life,” or whatever. He would keep these things forever.

So I said, “I think we really need to start thinking about the White House staff. You know, I love Ed, but I really do think we need somebody who’s had Washington experience and who has some street smarts.” Reagan knew Ed was a place where paper could get lost, let me just put it that way. He said, “Who are you thinking about?” I said, “I’ve been thinking about Jim Baker. I’ve talked to Stu about this, and I’ve talked to Bill Clark about it, and Bill Clark’s idea is that we make Ed counselor, and Jim would be Chief of Staff.” Reagan said, “Well, let me think about it.”

I didn’t do anything more about it, because I knew he didn’t want to talk about it. But Ed called me and said that he had talked to the Governor and—this was election day. We were going to go up and have lunch with the Governor and talk about the way the staff was going to be organized. I said, “I think you ought to do that on your own.” He said, “No, I want you there.” It was not pleasant.

Ed got out his yellow legal pad that had this organizational chart on it. The Governor said, “Ed, put that away.” He then told Ed what he wanted to do, which was to have Jim Baker as Chief of Staff and Ed as the counselor. He did it in a very nice way. He said, “Ed, you know, there’s nobody whose counsel I value more, and I need you to be free to do that. If you become burdened with all the details of the White House, you’re not going to have time.” Ed was just totally devastated. When we got out of the house, he turned to me and said, “Did you know anything about this?” I said, “Some of it.” He said, “I don’t know what I’m going to do. I just don’t know whether I can accept this.” Of course, ultimately, he—Reagan won that night. Who’s going to not?

Interestingly enough, the day after Reagan won, we went down to the Century Plaza for a press conference, where Reagan was going to, I guess, announce Ed Meese as head of transition, I think that was it, and Jim Baker was there. Jim Baker said to the President-elect, “I need to see you and Ed in this room here.” He said, “Mike, I don’t want you in the room.” I was stunned by this. I had never been “out of the room” of any discussion.

Good old smart Jim Baker had a piece of paper he wanted them both to sign that said what their roles would be. Jim said, “I don’t want to have this thing go on any longer, because there’s going
to be speculation, and things get out.” It was what Jim’s role was, what Ed’s role was. Jim would be on the National Security Council, a member of the Cabinet, and so forth and so on. It was signed by all three of them. And Jim kept that piece of paper. Every time—and there were many times when we got in the White House where he and Ed would get into a “healthy” discussion, and Jim would pull that piece of paper out, and say, “Ed, see the signatures.”

**Hargrove:** I’ve heard and read that Meese was very good at presenting options. He could sum it up.

**Deaver:** Yes, excellent.

**Hargrove:** Now, tell me about that. He did it in a fair-minded—

**Deaver:** He did it in a fair-minded way. Ed was a very fair guy, particularly as it related to Ronald Reagan. I don’t think he ever tried to not give the President the full picture. He was superb at that. No question. I think that’s what the President respected in him and wanted to be able to have from him. Unfortunately, their styles were so different that Ed’s style frustrated Baker greatly. I think Baker had respect for Ed, and I don’t think it was ever, ever a philosophical issue, as the Meese people would like to portray it.

Then, when Clark came in, it just became almost intolerable. But most of that was a product of the second and third string of the Meese and Baker operations, not the Meese and Baker people themselves.

**Young:** Before we get ahead to the White House again, we have a campaign here for the presidency. Reagan’s own thinking about being President, was that in him long before he became Governor?

**Deaver:** Long before he became Governor? I can’t tell you. I don’t think so. I suppose if you ever get into the public, working on issues, you think about it. I never heard Reagan talk about it. Cliff White, I think, always thought he was going to be the guy behind the Reagan presidency, up until after the re-election in ’84, when he tried to remove everybody in the White House.

I really do think Reagan was reluctant in ’68. I think he loved going around the country making speeches. Whether he really thought he had a shot—there were some of us who thought it was way too early, and I think down deep he did, too. I think if lightning had struck, it probably would have been a big mistake. I even think that it was fortunate he lost in ’76. It goes back, I guess, to what he had taught me on the whole business of your destiny, whatever your destiny was. When it was time, it was going to be time. I’m sure that in the back of his mind there was that.

But in ’76, when everybody was trying to get him to run against Jerry Ford, it was late—I can’t remember when it was, but I can remember the incident. We were on a plane, the PSA [Pacific Southwest Airlines] commuter from San Francisco to L.A. Everybody had the same class on there. The only thing they would do for us is that the security people would put us on in the first two seats as you got on the plane. So we’d get on first. Reagan would sit by the window. I’d sit on the aisle. Then, 126 people would get on, and everybody would either say hello, or stop and
say something to him. There had been hundreds of thousands of people who had said practically
the same words. But this one woman stopped and said to him, “You have to run.”

We buckled up, and the plane is taxiing down the runway, and he turns to me and says, “You
know, she’s right.” I said, “What are you talking about?” “That woman who said I have to run. I
have to run.” I said, “You do?” He said, “Yes. I just don’t think Jerry can do it,” meaning the
Soviets. “And if I don’t do it, I’m going to be the—” these were his words—“I’m going to be
the player who’s always been on the bench who never got into the game.” About two weeks later
we made the announcement.

I had been in dozens of meetings where we had endlessly talked about whether he should run. He
would sit there, stone-faced. And this woman comes on the plane and says, “You’ve got to run,”
and it was [snaps fingers], “She’s right.”

Young: That was not the reason, but that was the occasion.

Deaver: In ’76, Bob Ajemian from Time magazine did a big piece. I was sitting there when he
asked Reagan—Ajemian made this the lead and made it a big deal because he was an actor. He
asked Reagan, “Why are you going to run against Jerry Ford?”

Reagan said, “Well, I was in a movie—” I can’t remember whether it was Red River Valley or
one of those. It was a western. He said, “I was a young cavalry officer, and the fort was
surrounded by Indians. The captain was shot and dying in my arms—” He named the captain,
Brian Aherne or somebody, and he said, “My line was, ‘You can’t die.’ And the Captain said to
me, ‘I’m dying. You have to take over.’ I said, ‘I can’t. I can’t.’ The Captain’s last words were,
‘You have to. It’s your duty.’” End of story. Ajemian said, “That’s it?” He said, “I think it’s my
duty.” Which gets back to the spiritual thing in all of it, always.

Hargrove: And a sense of destiny, which I think he had as a young man.

Deaver: You’re absolutely right.

Riley: About the campaign—

Deaver: Are we talking about ’76 here?

Riley: Yes. This would be ’76 and the difficulties experienced in running—

Deaver: This gets back to both the destiny issue and the competitive issue. Once Reagan got into
it, it was out from six o’clock in the morning until midnight. All of the rest of us are dragging.
Reagan is bouncing. New Hampshire—well, you all know what New Hampshire campaigning is
like. It’s six people and a donut, and it’s 14 times a day.

Incidentally, an interesting thing about that and the whole issue of the Panama Canal—ironically,
I now represent the Panama Canal Authority, which is now a private organization. In one of
those—you know, Murphy’s Gulch, or one of those little towns up there in New Hampshire—
there were six people, and some woman says to Reagan, “What do you think about the Panama
Canal? Should we give it away?” Reagan has never thought about it, and he says, blah, blah,
blah, blah, and he’s looking for a get-off line. He says, “Well, we bought it. We paid for it. It’s ours.” All six people clapped. So he tries it at the next stop. And pretty soon, it’s the central issue of the Ford-Kissinger policy and then the Carter thing. That’s the way it evolved.

What I started to say there is how competitive he was. Once he got into it, it was dogged. He would do interviews on the plane at 11 o’clock at night, whatever you asked him to do, whatever it took to win. Never discouraged. Unhappy that we lost by one-half a percentage point against an incumbent President, which was a huge defeat, according to the press, which taught me something. We accepted it as a defeat when we came out that morning, and the press could see it in our faces, and it was all about impression. We could have spun that, but we weren’t wise enough. We were a bunch of kids from California. If we could have spun it, we would have probably turned that into something totally different for the rest of the states that came up.

We lost and lost and lost and lost, and we were about a million dollars in debt, which is a lot of money. Reagan wouldn’t get out. I remember calling Joe Rogers one night at midnight. He was a businessman, a young self-made guy in Alabama. I said, “Joe, I don’t know, maybe you can help us. We need a million dollars. Just to clean up.” We were about three days away from the North Carolina primary. He said, “Well, if you need a million dollars, you really need two million dollars, because you’ve got to keep going.” I said, “I wasn’t talking about keeping going.” He said, “I’m not going to give you any money unless you keep going.” So he promised that night to give us two million dollars. As it turned out, because of the election laws, it was a lot more complicated than that, but we got the money. Then, Reagan won North Carolina, and it was a whole new ballgame.

When you think about whether Reagan had the fire in his belly or whether he was competitive enough or whether he wanted to do this, all you have to do is look at Dick Schweiker. To me, I just couldn’t believe it. John Sears came to me. He wanted to talk to me, because, he said, “I want to see Reagan tomorrow. I’ve got an idea.” I said, “What’s the idea?” He said, “We pick our vice presidential candidate early because Jerry Ford—” We had lost the momentum. The primaries were all over with, and we have six weeks. Jerry Ford’s got the Rose Garden, and we’ve got nothing. We’re sitting in Pacific Palisades. “We announce our vice presidential guy, and we announce a guy nobody would expect us to pick, and everybody’ll think we’re really smart.” I said, “Who is Dick Schweiker?” Then when I started hearing about who Dick Schweiker was, I said, “He’ll never buy it.”

Reagan listened intently when Sears went through this whole thing, and Reagan said, “Will he take it?” I couldn’t believe it. He said, “Well, let’s get Schweiker out here. I want to talk to him about a couple of things.” The abortion issue was one of them. When you look at that, and you look at the way Ronald Reagan, once he sat down with Dick Schweiker for four or five hours, and then defended Dick Schweiker forever, it was amazing to me. Either he was absolutely convinced in his mind, and I think he was—Dick Schweiker was a very religious and spiritual guy—and he had convinced Reagan that they had the same values.

But what Reagan had to go through to defend that thing—Holy Toledo—long-time supporters who sent him pieces of silver, you know. Just terrible stuff. You read that story about the man down in Alabama. The southern Reagan thing just fell apart overnight because of Schweiker. We go down to Mississippi, and we start meeting with all of the delegations, and it was just a total
disaster. The whole point of picking Dick Schweiker was to cut into the northeast, and to see if we could get Pennsylvania. Then maybe we could get a little bit of New Jersey, New York, and then it would all start to unravel for Ford. Of course, Schweiker couldn’t even deliver Pennsylvania.

So then we had to go defend our base, which was in the south. We’d had these delegations into this Marriott or Ramada Inn, or wherever it was, in Jackson, Mississippi. The Alabama delegation, there were four of them, I think. We’re in this room that’s about four times the size of this, with these four little people sitting out there. Schweiker, and Mrs. Claire Schweiker, and Ronald Reagan are up at this head table. They go through this whole thing, and this man from Alabama stands up. He’s got a bow tie on, perfectly dressed. “Governor,” he said, “I am not a drinking man. But when I heard that you picked Dick Schweiker to be your running mate, I went home and drank a pitcher of whiskey sours.” And he said, “I would rather have had my doctor call me at home and tell me that my wife had a venereal disease.”

I looked at Claire Schweiker, who just looked straight at Dick. Of course, Reagan totally ignored that and went on to defend Dick Schweiker. But it was painful.

Jones: The defeat in ’76, was that the beginning of the campaign for ’80? After all, even if Ford had won, he would have been just a single term, because he came in—

Deaver: Interestingly enough, Reagan’s long-time friends and supporters, Jus Dart, William French Smith, Holmes Tuttle, and Jack [Jaquelin] Hume from San Francisco, woke me up at 7:30 the morning after Ford won the nomination, all in their blue blazers and perfectly dressed. Of course, I had been up with the staff drinking until four o’clock in the morning. I opened the door, and these guys were saying, “We want to see Ron.” I said, “I think he’s still asleep.” “Well, get dressed and go get him.”

So I get dressed, go in the bedroom, and the Reagans are asleep. I woke them up. I said, “Jus and Bill and all of them are out there, and they want to see you. They want you to be Vice President.” Reagan said, “I don’t want to be Vice President. Go tell them I don’t want to be Vice President.” I said, “Governor, they’re not my friends. They’re sitting out there. They want to see you. They’ve already seen me.” “Dammit!” He storms around. “Tell them I’ll be there in 10 minutes.”

So I go out and start making coffee. As he walks into the room, the telephone rings. I go pick it up, and it’s Jerry Ford. I said, “Just a minute.” Reagan picks up the phone. He says, “Yes, yes. I think that’s terrific. I think that’s just great. I’ll do everything I can.” Hangs up and says, “He just picked Bob Dole.” These guys wept.

Jones: Is that right?

Deaver: Yes. Anyway, Reagan said to them what he said to everybody else, “Only the lead dog gets a fresh view. I don’t want to be Vice President.” He would have been a terrible Vice President. It just wasn’t his role.

We had raised a lot of money and put it in the Citizens for the Republic, which was our PAC [Political Action Committee], which Lyn Nofziger ran in Santa Monica. All of the money went
to candidates. There was never any money that went into Reagan for President. But when you go around the country speaking for candidates, obviously, you pick those carefully.

Once again, it was not quite as much a mystery, I think, to any of us, that Reagan would run again. But we did go through another whole process of him trying to decide whether he wanted to do it again. And she had been through it now, once. At any rate, he did ultimately decide, even though once we got started, and Sears got into it, he ended up with nobody, with the exception of Ed Meese, left of his old team, because Sears got rid of us.

Riley: How did Sears end up in that position?

Deaver: Me. Like Edmund Morris. I was a poor choice of people. Seriously, I think we all, including Reagan to some extent, had sort of a western inferiority complex. Everybody comes out of the east. The media all come out of the east. That’s why we convinced Reagan to come back to Middleburg to live, you know. John had this apparent, we thought, ability to deal with the political press in the east. Our experience really was with Dick Burkholtz of the Los Angeles Times and somebody at the Sacramento Bee. Occasionally Bob Novak would come out, or something like that.

Sears drank with these guys, and we thought he could convince them of anything. We still had this business that Reagan was an actor and a fluke and could only make a speech and had to be told how to do everything. That’s allegedly what the eastern press thought. We had used Sears in ’76, and then went back to him. It was a terrible, terrible mistake. But fortunately, Reagan came to his senses and ultimately turned the thing around himself.

Knott: It’s during this ’76 to ’80 period, I believe, when Governor Reagan is making these—I think they were weekly—radio addresses? Could you tell us about that?

Deaver: That’s an interesting story. When he left the Governor’s office, Walter Cronkite had called me, which impressed me, and said that he would like to have Reagan do a twice-weekly five-minute commentary on the CBS Evening News, and that [Eric] Sevareid would do it on two other nights. Well, I thought this was incredible. The CBS Evening News, at that point, was 30 or 40 million people a day. Then, this old guy from Hollywood named Harry O’Connor, who was a radio producer who didn’t have any “active” clients at the moment, had come in and seen Reagan and told him he could get him on the radio, a five-minute radio show a day.

So, the hour of decision came, and I thought this was going to be a slam-dunk. And Reagan said, “I’m going to do the radio show.” I said, “What? You’re not going to do the CBS?” “No, I’m not going to do the CBS Evening News.” I said, “I don’t believe this. I can’t believe this.” He said, “Mike, people will tire of me on television.” Absolutely right, but I didn’t know it. He said, “They won’t tire of me on the radio.” At the end of that, when we finally had to give it up when he announced, we were speaking to about 50 million people a day on the radio. In the key cities, New York, L.A., we were speaking to them twice a day, both commute times, morning and evening.

Walter Mondale came up to me one night, after he was elected President, at some party here in town and said, “Do you really think that radio show had any impact on Reagan getting the nomination?” I said, “I think it had everything to do with it.” He said, “Well, I’m thinking about
doing that myself, a radio show.” I said, “Well, good. Mr. Vice President, let me just tell you one thing. Ronald Reagan wrote every radio show himself.” Mondale said, “You’re putting me on.” I said, “No. He wouldn’t let anybody write them. He’d let Pete [Hannaford] write his newspaper, but he always said, ‘I think I can write the spoken word better.’”

**Knott:** Could I just bring you back, one more question about the ’76 campaign. Governor Reagan makes a concession speech at the Republican National Convention that lights the place on fire.

**Deaver:** Right.

**Knott:** Was that completely ad-libbed, or did he realize he was going to be called up to the stage to make that? It was quite a performance.

**Deaver:** No. It was quite a performance, but it’s an example going back to knocking it out of the ballpark on a hard ball. We were in the box. Mike Wallace was in the box with the Reagans, because Mike Wallace and Nancy Reagan go way, way back. John Sears is at the back of the box with me and Bryce Harlow, who was a lobbyist for General Motors here in town.

**Young:** He worked for Proctor & Gamble.

**Deaver:** Proctor & Gamble, right. Bryce Harlow was working for Jerry Ford, obviously. Sears brought Bryce Harlow into the box and said, “Jerry Ford wants Reagan to come down and make a speech.” Sears said, “I’ve told him we’re going to do it.” I said, “Wrong.” By this point I was a little tired of Sears. “We’re not going to do that.” And Harlow says, “Why aren’t you going to do that?” I said, “Well, because this is Jerry Ford’s night, and I don’t want it to appear on national television that Ronald Reagan’s raining on his parade. I think that’s a bad idea. The only way Ronald Reagan will go down there tonight is if Jerry Ford, from the podium, says, ‘Come on down,’ and everybody sees that this is something Jerry Ford wants, not something Ronald Reagan wants.”

So Bryce said, “Well, I’ll go talk to Ford.” I went over and leaned over and told Reagan about the conversation, and he didn’t say much. I don’t think any of us expected Ford to do it, but that’s exactly what Ford did. He said, “Ron.” Reagan gets up, and as he goes out of the box, he looks at me and says, “What am I going to say?” I said, “I don’t have any idea. I’m sure you’ll think of something.” And I sat there stunned with the story about the time capsule, which I’d never heard before. It was pure Reagan.

I remember the next morning, in the motorcade going from the hotel out to the airport to get our airplane, there was a great big sign across a bakery, some guy had made out of butcher paper. It said, “Republicans, you picked the wrong guy.”

**Jones:** Yes, I remember that. I’m interested in your talking a little bit about staffing up for the campaign, when you’re out of office. If you were still Governor, there’s a relationship between the staffing you’ve got there in the Governor’s office and the emerging campaign. Obviously, it’s different, but you still have a base there. But what about when you’re out?
Deaver: Well, in ’76 it was difficult because we had an incumbent Republican President. So we had four members of the House of Representatives, two Governors, and two United States Senators who supported us, and that was it. We were running against the entire establishment of the Party, which was very tough. We had Sears and some of his cronies, and we had, in each state, the ragtag, to some extent old Goldwater people, people who had been with Reagan in ’68. On the research and issues end of it, we had the Hoover Institute, and that was pretty much it.

Jones: But, then, looking forward to ’80.

Deaver: In ’80, first of all, those were people who’d been with us, so they were all people who were true believers, who had never left. They had been there during the years where we were trying to make up our minds what we were going to do. And we kind of deposited all of those people in the Committee for the Republic, the Nofziger organization, and they became part of that. You know, we had Deaver and Hannaford, which was the PR firm in Los Angeles and Washington, and we managed Reagan at that time, managed the radio show, managed his speaking. We worked in conjunction, of course, with the political people, to coordinate all of that. Had regular meetings of a loosely knit steering committee, which was Paul Laxalt, Sears, Nofziger, me, and Meese.

Riley: What’s Mrs. Reagan doing at this point?

Deaver: She was around. She wasn’t intimately involved. I think Nancy thought that he had to get it out of his system, probably, a second time. She did not look forward to that.

Riley: She didn’t like campaigning.

Deaver: I don’t think she liked the lack of privacy. I don’t think it was the campaigning as much as it was the invasion of their lives, what it was doing to their kids. I think, probably, she reluctantly went along with it. She knew it was something he wanted to do. So obviously she would do it.

Hargrove: How did Sears come back into it, then?

Deaver: He never left. There was a lot of discussion, particularly with Laxalt, who did not want him. I was really the guy who argued strongly for him, and finally won. Most of the old ’76 operation did not want him. His people, Charlie Black, Jim Lake, Darrell Trent—those people all wanted him, of course, because they’d been brought into the campaign by him. But the old Reagan guard that had been there from ’68 on, the original Cliff White organization, without Cliff White, didn’t want him. And Laxalt didn’t want him.

Riley: Did you feel like Sears had a good sense of Reagan as a—

Deaver: No, I never thought he had a good sense of Reagan. But, I didn’t need anybody who had a good sense of Reagan. I had a good sense of Reagan, and that was my job. I wanted somebody who would be a strategist, which, unfortunately, he never was. I wanted somebody who could deal with the eastern media, because we didn’t have anybody—or with the national political press. I thought that was critical, but the rest of it we could manage. Sears, however, into the ’80 campaign, just decided that he didn’t want to compete with all of the rest of us. He never had any
confidence in Reagan particularly. I always loved Reagan’s remark, after Sears was gone: “I never understood why he always talked to my tie.” Because John never looked you in the eye.

Young: Well, then it came to a head.

Deaver: It came to a head. First Lyn was kicked out. Then I left. I didn’t have to leave, but I could see the handwriting on the wall and left. Meese stayed in, and then Reagan just got fed up with it and fired him and Black and Lake the day before the New Hampshire primary. Then we all came back.

Young: Mrs. Reagan was involved by then—

Deaver: Oh, yes. She could see that it was a disaster. She wanted the old team back, and so did he.

Hargrove: It was poor strategy, in part, not campaigning in Iowa and so on. But it was also a personal chemistry.

Deaver: Right. No question. And chemistry was extremely important to Reagan. I’m sure his stomach was in knots most of the time over personnel issues, and that’s not where you want your candidate.

Knott: You do talk about this in your book, but that was a difficult decision, I would assume, for you to come back in, or was it? You felt a certain personal betrayal?

Deaver: Oh sure, but I loved the guy. I think it was difficult because my wife said I was out of my mind to go back. But she thought I was out of my mind when I came back here after he was elected. But Reagan just acted as if nothing had ever happened.

Knott: He never really brought it up again. I think you mentioned—

Deaver: I came back in the campaign—I think it was fairly late, like May or June—and I went on the campaign plane, and they told me to be in Los Angeles. They had a whole new organization at that point. I didn’t ride up with the Reagans this time. I rode in the staff area. Landed in Iowa someplace and did an event. Then we all went to the Tall Corn Towers, a hotel there where we stayed, horrible place, and I went to my room. Reagan’s personal aide came down and said, “The Reagans would like you to come down for a drink.” When I walked into the room, Reagan was standing there in shirt sleeves with a scotch and water, which was my drink of choice, and looked at me and said, “Where you been?” I said, “Well, a funny thing happened to me on my way up to your house one night.” And that was the end of it. I said something about Mrs. Reagan, and Nancy said, “When are you going to start calling me Nancy?” It started all over. It was as if I’d never left.

Hargrove: Did he ask to have you back, do you think, or who triggered—

Deaver: He or she, or the two of them together. Meese had stayed in, and all the people who used to report to me, or all of the functions, were now reporting to Meese. So they called me. Bill Casey, by that time, was running the campaign, and Bill Timmons was involved. They had this
big meeting. They didn’t know what to do with me. They brought all of these scheduling and
advance people and press people into this room and had me meet them all. Some of them I knew,
and some of them I didn’t. Then they said, “Well, if you could just ride on the plane with the
candidate, that’s what we would like you to do. This guy’s going to be in charge of the schedule,
and this guy’s going to be in charge of such and such.”

I said, “That’s fine with me. I only have one proviso. Nothing gets put on the schedule unless I
approve it. I don’t care if he’s in charge of the schedule or if he’s in charge of that, but that’s the
only way I’ll operate.” That was the end of the battle, because whoever controlled the schedule
and the body was going to control, pretty much, the campaign. I had gotten Stu Spencer on the
plane with me, and that was the end of it right there. We’d get these dispatches daily from
Arlington, which would all get tossed away, and we’d—

Young: Let’s say Ed Meese and Casey were running the campaign from Arlington, so to speak.

Deaver: Right, but the campaign gets run from the plane.

Young: From the plane, and on the plane with you were Stu—

Deaver: Stu and me and Lyn and Marty Anderson. Basically, that was it. Poor Marty had the
task of dealing with Arlington, and he was the perfect guy to do that, because they knew he was
not a devious political animal. He was an economist and a researcher. And he was great, great.

Riley: How big a mess did you have to clean up when you came back?

Deaver: Well, you know, most of the advance guys were guys I’d put in there anyway, so they
were delighted I was back, and once I had control of the schedule, where we were going to go,
what we were going to do—that was the only part of the mess that I had to deal with. There were
a lot of big messes in administration and financial and so forth, which Casey did a pretty good
job of cleaning up. It just went right back together again. It just became our old organization, and
it worked fine. I brought Joe Canzeri on the plane, too, which was terrific.

Hargrove: What criteria guided you, a strategy about where you went and why?

Deaver: I’m not saying I had the last word on all of that. After that conversation back here, they
understood they were going to have to deal with me. So I had no problem. [Richard] Wirthlin
knew about where we were supposed to go, from the research standpoint and the political
operation that—whoever it was in charge of the political operation at that point, I don’t
remember—and there would be a daily phone call where we’d all participate. So it was fine. It
all just worked. Everybody was happy with the fact that “those guys” were gone, and that the
candidate was back on track, and that the old team was working. I mean, even if they didn’t like
me or resented me or were jealous of me, they knew it was going to work on the airplane because
I was going to make it work. They couldn’t argue with that.

Jones: It was once written that in the ’80 campaign, the Reagan operation was described as a
trifocal campaign in this sense, that there was sensitivity to what happens to Party unity in the
primary, that is one focal point. Then, to the convention, that that ought to be run in a manner
that comes out with Party strength and unity. Then, for the final campaign, thinking about, also,
what happens otherwise in other elections, so that you come in with a unified Party. My question is, was there that kind of thinking?

**Deaver:** I guess somebody was thinking that way. I don’t think I ever thought about that. First of all, the Party was pretty well unified. Reagan was going to win, as far as I was concerned. Reagan was a unifier. People wanted a winner, and they thought he could win. I’m sure there were people in Arlington who were thinking about that, and I’m glad they were. There was probably a lot of work to be done in all of those areas. That’s the first time I’ve ever heard that.

**Jones:** There were actions along the way. Wasn’t there an effort on the part of the Reagan folks to help with the debts of the candidates after the primaries, and at the Convention to showcase the other candidates?

**Deaver:** Sure.

**Jones:** And more than the usual meetings with congressional candidates and so forth in the general campaign?

**Deaver:** I don’t remember that last part but, you know, we always were meeting with congressional candidates and campaigning for the whole ticket. When he ran for Governor the first time, Reagan gave a million or two million dollars to the rest of the ticket in the last ten days. He wanted a Republican ticket all the way the down, always believed in that.

**Jones:** Well, this may be intellectualizing what, in fact, were Reagan’s own instincts, perhaps. Just plain instinct—

**Deaver:** Sounds to me like a Wirthlin strategy, based on Wirthlin’s knowledge of Reagan. That would make sense to me.

**Young:** Maybe even a Wirthlin conceptualization.

**Hargrove:** Wirthlin knew Reagan pretty well, didn’t he?

**Deaver:** Sure. He’d worked with Reagan from ’66 on.

**Hargrove:** I once heard him say on television, “Reagan was an extremely good listener.” He said, “I could always talk with him.”

**Deaver:** Well, anybody who says somebody is a good listener means that they listened to them.

**Young:** Sure.

**Knott:** I was wondering if you could talk just a little bit about William Casey, since he becomes such an important figure throughout both administrations.

**Deaver:** Well, you asked me earlier about where we found the campaign to put it together, and I said it was difficult. I think a couple of things. One, Casey had come out of the Wick connection, Charlie Wick, and was a fundraiser, particularly in New York. At that time, when I was out of
the campaign and the campaign was kind of all screwed up, I remember Bill Casey flying out to Los Angeles to have dinner with me, which I thought was odd since I didn’t have anything to do with the campaign. I wasn’t really in contact with the Reagans that much. He told me that the campaign was in serious trouble, and that there were real financial difficulties, and that something had to be done.

There was somebody else at dinner. I don’t know whether it was Pete [Hannaford] or Dick Wirthlin, but it could have been one of the two—and that he was trying to pull this whole thing together. That was the first clue I had that Casey was something other than a New York fundraiser, that he thought of himself as a political strategist. How that all happened I can’t tell you, because I wasn’t part of it. Meese had a great deal to do with it. Once again, I think it was part of this regional inferiority complex that we had, as Californians. We wanted to have somebody who had a national name or an eastern reputation, and there probably wasn’t anybody else. That’s the real answer to it.

Riley: What about the ’80 convention?

Deaver: What about it?

Riley: You were there. Any specific recollections from the time? The one thing that people spend a lot of attention focusing on is the vice presidential business there.

Deaver: Well, this is recorded for posterity, and I have to be careful what I say here. I have read people who’ve written about “what really happened.” One of the most amazing things to me is that we went to that convention without knowing who was going to be Vice President. I think that’s just fascinating. It didn’t seem so odd at the time. I honestly believe Ronald Reagan had thought about this and eliminated people, and that George Bush was the guy who made sense to him. Wirthlin and others came up with this Jerry Ford idea. We had to pull the Party together. This would unify the Party. And from our standpoint, and I’m sure, from Ford’s, ’76 had been very divisive. Half the delegates at that convention were Ford delegates and so forth.

And so that all sounded reasonable to Reagan to try. “Let’s test the waters” was kind of Reagan’s idea. Well, testing the waters got out of control like a prairie fire, just way out of control. Meese and Wirthlin were assigned to go talk to the Ford people, or wanted to go talk to the Ford people, and I sat down in the suite with Reagan the whole time. I read Dick Allen’s story where he was in the suite the whole time. I don’t remember that. Reagan was very uneasy about this when there wasn’t an easy answer coming back after an hour or so, and the Reagans finally decided to have dinner. This was about 6 o’clock, I think.

So dinner was brought into the suite, and they’re eating. And Jerry Ford’s in a booth with Cronkite, and Jerry Ford starts talking about the co-presidency, at which point Reagan almost choked on whatever he was eating, and said, “Co-presidency? Where the hell is that coming from?” He said, “We’ve got to do something about this right now. You go up and tell Ed and Dick that I want them to come down here right now.”

So I go. They’re on the floor above. I had to fight my way through the President’s and Jerry Ford’s Secret Service detail, get up on the floor, to Meese and Wirthlin. I said, “You guys have to come downstairs. The Governor is really upset. He’s just seen Ford on television with
Cronkite.” And they said, “Get out of here. We’re just about ready to make a deal, and you’re going to screw this whole thing up.” I said, “I’m telling you, you better not make a deal because Reagan wants to talk to you.”

At which point Henry Kissinger walks in, he’s part of the negotiating team on the other side. I said, “I really do think it’s important that Reagan talk to Ford,” and Kissinger says, “Oh, that’s impossible, he’s gone to bed.” I said, “Well, I’m telling all of you people, you better get President Ford down to talk to President Reagan. Reagan has just seen this thing on television, and he’s livid.” The guys said something, at which point Kissinger could see that I had obviously just come down from Reagan, so he comes back and says, “Ford will come down in ten minutes. He’s getting dressed.” Meese and Wirthlin are all upset with me because they’re negotiating this thing, and I just screwed it all up.

At any rate, we all go downstairs. Jerry Ford comes in. They go into a room together. Jerry Ford and Reagan come out of the room. We’re in a living room, and there’s like an entry room, and then there’s the bedroom where they have been. Reagan says good-bye to Ford, comes into the room and says, “Jerry didn’t want to do it. Jerry thinks it’s a bad idea. Jerry’s going to be with us all the way, said he would do whatever it took to help us. Unless somebody’s got a better idea, get me George Bush.”

I never knew at the time, but I’ve always thought, thinking back on that, that he had George Bush on his mind. And Ed says that they had conversations up to that hour about George Bush. Ed’s convinced that the Ford thing was a diversion that Reagan was willing to experiment with, but that he had really thought there wasn’t any other choice to unify the Party and to win without picking George Bush.

Hargrove: But what was the deal they were negotiating upstairs?

Deaver: The deal was that Ford was going to be in charge of foreign policy and going to be on the National Security—all this stupid stuff, which Ford realized was a dumb idea.

Jones: But Meese and Wirthlin were advancing these things?

Deaver: I’m not sure whether Meese and Wirthlin were advancing it. I think Kissinger was on the Ford team advancing it. Meese and Wirthlin would say, “Well, that’s interesting, we’ll take that to Reagan.”

Jones: Possibly shaping a role for—

Hargrove: Kissinger is a strange man to be in that role, I would think.

Young: I can imagine one of the many reasons for Reagan’s upset was hearing about the foreign policy when that was very much his thing.

Deaver: You go back to ’76, “but I just don’t think Jerry can do it,” that sort of thing.

Hargrove: I heard William Casey talking on television saying that Ford would oversee domestic policy, and it was quite viable, and it wouldn’t be a co-presidency. I heard Casey try to defend it.
Deaver: I’m sure Casey believed that, but somebody had told Ford something else when he went on Cronkite. Thank God he went on Cronkite. Thank God Reagan was watching. Amazing that it was resolved by television. And then, of course, Paul Laxalt flies home in a fury that night, because they picked Bush without ever discussing it with him.

[BREAK]

Young: Unless you would like to say more words about the election, we can start with the transition and formation of the administration, and get into some of the ups and downs.

Deaver: I can’t be a lot of help on the transition because I was out in California for most of it with the candidate. I really don’t know too much about it.

Young: But, you were in on the formation. You were part of the original—and you had a few things you’ve already put on the record about the formation of the staff arrangements concerning Jim Baker and the rest.

Hargrove: But you didn’t say anything about your selection.

Deaver: Me?

Hargrove: Yes. Baker, Chief of Staff. Meese, Counselor. But what about you?

Deaver: I was not going to go. I did not want to come back here. I told Reagan—finally, I got up enough nerve. My wife really didn’t want to come back here. One Friday in Los Angeles, I told him I didn’t want to come. He seemed to be very surprised and said, “Well, if that’s the way you feel.”

I took the plane home to Sacramento, told Carolyn, and we had just opened a bottle of ’68 Chardonnay that I had saved for a special occasion, Heitz. I remember it. She was out on the terrace, and the telephone rang. It was Ronald Reagan. He obviously went home and told Nancy that I had had this conversation, and he called back and said, “Gosh, Mike, I’ve been thinking about this, and I really need you to come back there with me.” I said, “I just don’t think I can do that.” He said, “I just can’t go back without you. So come back for one year, and then you can come back.” I said okay. I walked back out onto the terrace, and my wife was in tears. She hadn’t heard the conversation, but she knew.

When I got back—this story is in my book, but it’s such a great story about Reagan—we went back into the Oval Office off the reviewing stand. There were just the two of us in the office. He had opened up the drawer of the desk, and there was a nice note there from Jimmy Carter wishing him the best. We got up—we’re still in our cutaways—and he said, “Now, where’re you going to be?” I said, “I only decided ten days ago that I was coming back here, and Meese and Baker have this place real carved up. I don’t know. I’ll find out tomorrow.”

He said, “Come here.” He opens up a door off the Oval, and there’s this magnificent study with a fireplace and a gorgeous Childe Hassam flag painting, terrace off the back. I said, “What’s this?” He said, “This is my study. I want you to have it.” I said, “I can’t take this place. It’s ridiculous. Where are you going to go when you want to get out of the Oval?” He said, “Look, I’ve tried for
25 years to get that round office. Why would I want this little square office?” That’s how I got the best real estate in Washington, D.C.

**Hargrove:** You had a door out. You didn’t have to go through—

**Deaver:** I had lots of doors. I had a door out. I had a door into the Oval. I had a door out to the hall, to the Roosevelt. I was in the catbird seat.

**Hargrove:** But the job, the Deputy Chief of Staff, how did that get set up?

**Deaver:** That sort of evolved. Once again, Meese and Baker had pretty well carved up the responsibilities.

**Jones:** You weren’t on this piece of paper.

**Deaver:** I was not on the piece of paper. I suppose I was, but I remember my old pal Stu Spencer, and Jim Baker—when I had finally decided to come back—called me on the phone. I was in California, and they said, “Look, we’ve been talking, and we think you ought to be the Press Secretary.” Jim and I had been friends, but not close friends, but Stu and I had gone way back. I said, “Are you out of your mind? I thought you were a friend of mine. I can’t do that.”

They said, “Jody [Powell] was really close to Carter, and we need the person who’s perceived as being close to—” I said, “You think I’m going to get up every day and go into the Press Room and brief the press? I’m not going to do that. Besides, that’s not a good use of me. I need to do what I’ve always done.”

Baker had no problem with that. Baker was superb. Baker came to me and said, “You know, you can do whatever you want to do. You just tell me what it is, name it, and you’ve got it.” I said, “I want to do what I’ve always done. I want to take care of him, and I want to be in charge of the schedule and the advance operation, and I think that ought to include the liaison with the Secret Service and the military office, because it’s all one package, and his personal staff. If I have time after that, I really would like to get into communications because I think it’s important.” It wasn’t until Gergen left that I officially took over the Office of Communications, but that was pretty much what I did. I was allegedly a member of the Cabinet and the National Security Council, but I only went when Jim asked me to go for some particular reason, if he needed another vote, or I was concerned about some issue that was coming up that I wanted to be sure he was protected on.

**Jones:** In my interview with you, which was in ’95, I think, one thing you said was, “We had to learn the system. We knew the substance when we came in. This was the importance, as you explained it, of Jim Baker. You also said, “We didn’t know anything about Washington, D.C. essentially.” Can you expand a little on that?

**Deaver:** My argument in the first place for somebody like Baker was that he knew the street here, the street being the Hill and the media. And he brought in, much to the chagrin of the Reaganites, all of these old Ford people, Gergen and Darman. Pretty much the entire nuts and bolts of the White House were Nixon-Ford people. Then there was this little group over here of Meese’s people. The Ford-Nixon thing never bothered me. They were dedicated to the office of
the President. They didn’t even know Ronald Reagan, most of them, but I found, with a couple of exceptions, that they served the President very well. He wouldn’t have done as well if he hadn’t had those people. I’m not sure Reagan would have been re-elected without Jim Baker. I’m not sure he wouldn’t have been a one-term President.

That the first day in the White House, when I didn’t even know where the men’s room was, he came in and sat down, pulled a chair up to my desk, and said, “Look, you want this guy to be a two-term President. So do I, and if that’s the case, you and I have got to make a pact here. Those guys down in the National Security Council want to get us into a war in Central America. Now, we’ll be out of here so fast it’ll make your head swim if we get ourselves involved in a war down there. So you need to keep your ears and eyes open, and I do, too. Anytime you hear anything from him or you hear anything from the National Security people, you come and tell me, and we’ll keep him out of a war, and he’ll be a two-term President. We have to turn this country around economically, or we’re not going to make it. And, if we get all involved—”

It made eminent sense to me. It was one of the reasons why, early on, when I first met Oliver North I did everything I could to keep him out of the Oval Office, or certainly out of there unless he was with a lot of other people.

Hargrove: You could tell right off about him.

Deaver: Yes, for a couple of reasons. One, he bothered me, but secondly, I could see Ronald Reagan’s response to this bushy-eyed, bushy-tailed young Marine, who was playing to Reagan’s patriotism every chance he got, much more so than any other military guy that I ever saw go into the Oval Office. It was clear.

So Baker and I really did that, and I’ve always thought that if one of us had stayed, we wouldn’t have gotten into the Iran-Contra thing.

Jones: Again, referring to the interview I had with you, you then went on to make this connection. You said, “We have to learn the system, the way it works here in Washington. We know what it is we want to achieve, but, in learning the system and then settling in, one of the problems is staying the course.” Was that an example of how, because of the structure there and your learning that structure, you could not then keep your eye on—

Deaver: Baker knew how it worked. He knew how the day would evolve. The President would have a briefing in the morning by his top aides, and then we’d go into the National Security briefing and so forth. He didn’t know precisely how Reagan would react to all of that and how Reagan would use all of that. So, part of what he was saying to me was, “You and I have got to work together on this.” Until I can figure it out, maybe he was saying. I don’t know.

But from my standpoint, since I was totally naïve, it was great to have somebody like Baker, who knew how it all worked, knew how the paper flow worked, understood the staffing system, what went over to the President at night. I didn’t have a clue. I knew how we’d done it, but it was obviously a much bigger pile of issues, and we had the whole National Security, foreign policy stuff, which we’d never done before. And we were in the middle of 1,200 reporters who lived in the same building that we lived in. It was a pretty awesome and intimidating, for me, experience. I was delighted that those other guys were there who’d been there before.
Jones: Could you say more about what came to be called, popularly, the troika, which suggests a three-cornered, continuing relationship? Was that what it was, or what would be your description of the relationship among the three of you? You've given some examples.

Deaver: Right. Yes, it worked pretty well. It got called the troika the morning after the President was shot. If you remember, Meese and Baker and I came into the hospital, and that’s when somebody labeled us the troika, that we’re now running the government, they said. But it worked. Meese and Baker and I got together every morning at eight o’clock in Baker’s office, and we went over whatever the staff meeting was going to cover, that is, the meeting in the Roosevelt Room with the directors of each of the departments. Then, what we’d do at nine o’clock with the President, we would have all had the PDB [President’s Daily Brief] by that time, so we would know what the National Security briefing was going to be about. We would discuss that.

Then, for the first—almost year, I guess—we met almost daily in Baker’s office at four o’clock to go over the appointments, appointments to the departments and agencies. That was an interesting experience, because you had Baker, who was trying to get competent people to manage the government—who were mainly Bush people—and then you had the keeper of the flame over here, Meese, who was guarding the Reaganites. I was in the middle. I didn’t really have a position. I suppose it was mixed. I didn’t care a lot about all of that. Occasionally I would know either the position or have a candidate myself, or would have been asked by either Meese or Baker to weigh in at the meeting for their candidate. It got to be one of the acrimonious meetings of the day. Then, at five o’clock, Meese would sometimes be involved in the legislative strategy meetings with Baker and Baker’s team.

Young: Did Baker’s team dominate the LSG [Legislative Strategy Group]? 

Deaver: Yes.

Young: Did you regularly attend those meetings?

Deaver: Probably for the first year, but after a while my plate got so full that I would go if Jimmy asked me to or if there was something that was particularly hot or if it was going to affect the schedule that I’d need to know about, or the President.

Young: What was that LSG for? What did it do?

Deaver: Well, I think it, in many ways, became the issues—

Young: It did?

Deaver: I think it was one of the reasons why Meese was there so much. Meese had the subcabinet and all of this stuff—

Young: The Cabinet councils.

Deaver: Right. You know, the issues, as I’m sure in any White House, were more driven by legislative strategy and the schedule than anything else. You had all of this stuff out there, but—
I remember, we could never get an education policy out of the subcouncil or subcabinet or whatever it was. So I just put six weeks of speeches on education all over the country on the schedule and, boy, we got a policy. Real quick. The schedule became a real management tool.

Hargrove: That’s the way to tell the government what you want.

Deaver: Or the White House, even.

Hargrove: Yes. What was the importance of the Gergen-Wirthlin memo in the transition?

Deaver: Well, the part of the Gergen-Wirthlin memo that had significance to me, and I think ultimately to all of us, was the first hundred-day plan, if that’s what you’re talking about.

Hargrove: Yes.

Deaver: I think it did. I think the fact that you had something like that that was interesting to the press and got the media thinking we had a strategic approach to all of this, particularly since you had this guy, really from the outside, this westerner, this guy who didn’t know anything about how it all worked. It gave them a lot of things to talk about. We followed it, probably 50% of the time.

Hargrove: There was a focus on domestic policy first, leave foreign policy aside for a minute.

Deaver: That’s pure Baker. That gets back to the conversation he and I had. That was his focus forever.

Hargrove: Okay, but that memo talked about that.

Deaver: Sure. But that’s Baker saying, “I’m going to set the agenda here, in the first hundred days.” In that first year and a half I used to have a favorite phrase, because I had a meeting every Friday—at 1:30 I think it was, in the Roosevelt Room—with all the department heads, a scheduling meeting. The scheduling guy would come in, and we would have a stack of requests like this, which I’d go through. These were the requests they had all sent in for time on the President’s schedule. I’d look at this thing, and it would be, you know, the congressional guys have got Congressman So-and-So, who wants to come in for 15 minutes with the pickle queen, or whatever it was. I would say, “Okay, give me a 60-second visual on the evening news, and how this relates to economic reform.” Well, after about three weeks of this, the stack was about that high because they understood we weren’t going to do anything except economic reform. They got very creative, too, about how they—

Young: And one with the visual. That was another control on that.

Deaver: Yes. It had to, because that was all I was interested in, the visual.

Riley: Can I ask you about the development of your own craft? We haven’t talked about this, but I’m wondering, how did you—
Deaver: I have no idea. First of all, I’ve always been interested in the visual. I’ve always believed that we live in a world of impressions, and what the eye sees is much more important than what the ear hears, particularly for people like me, who are more like the average person than people like you, who listen and hear.

So, when I first started working for Ronald Reagan, all of my attention went to the still photographers, because in 1967, the visual was a picture in either a magazine or the newspaper. Television was coming along, but it really wasn’t where most people got their news. I made buddies and friends of all of the still photographers, so that I was never going to get a guy who was going to get down on his knees and take a picture of Ronald Reagan which shows all of this stuff underneath him. They knew that when I let them in the room, it was going to be absolutely lit to perfection. I learned all of that stuff.

Riley: In the process of working with Governor Reagan, you learned this stuff? Or before?

Deaver: In the process of working with Governor Reagan, who was a very visual guy, who understood camera. All of this was sort of osmosis with him. He’d tell me, “Don’t ever turn the lights down in the room when I’m speaking, because I want to see their eyes.” Most politicians want the lights down and the spotlight on them. Reagan wanted to share it. That became very interesting to me.

Taking a still photographer into his office and watching the back of his neck stiffen, and bringing cameras in—moving cameras, at that point, before tape—and watching him go about whatever he was doing without even knowing they were in the room. Finally, one day I said to him, “I don’t get it. How come when I bring a still camera in here, I can see the back of your neck stiffen?” He smiled at me and said, “You’re the first person who ever said that to me.” He said, “Mike, I can never recover from a still photographer. If they take a picture of me with my finger at my nose, I’ve got my finger in my nose and that’s all. But with a movie camera, I can move it across. I can’t recover from a still.” Very interesting, all of that stuff.

Plus, in ’76 I was convinced we lost the nomination because Jerry Ford could own the evening news. He could get on television. He was the President of the United States. So I spent a lot of time between ’76 and ’80 talking to producers of the evening news. I just understood that if I could produce a picture that was so good that the producer in New York couldn’t refuse it, I could get on the evening news every night. So producing a picture that’s going to beat out a story in Rome and London and wherever else the guy’s got to make a decision about for the 18 minutes he puts on every night meant that I had to produce. I had to fill in the space around his head, and I had to make it either funny or exciting or shocking or something that would stop people, the producer, and get him to say, “We’re going to use that Reagan shot tonight. That’s pretty good out there in Indianapolis.” It worked about 50% of the time in ’80.

Remember, though, that by the time I left the White House, we still had only three networks. CNN was just coming in. We had 14 telephone operators plugging in all of the calls, and we had one computer. It was in Craig Fuller’s office, and it was really a word processor. Look at what’s happened in 18 years. What I believed to be true then is exponentially true now, because now we have these channel selectors on the end of our hands, and we’re just surfing through life. We stop here and there. We’ve got 50 news channels and all of this stuff, and it really is what I learned.
back in ’76—whatever is shocking, entertaining, funny, sexy, whatever it is, will get us to stop for a second. But more importantly, you’ve got to get them to stop on that over and over and over again for a period of about three weeks, in every different kind of venue you can think of, in order to get it to sink in. George Bush lost—I’m making a speech here—because he thought he could say something once, and you can’t. Franklin Roosevelt could, but not today.

Riley: One more follow-up. Can you tell us a little bit about those sessions that you had with the producers when you were trying to educate yourself?

Deaver: It was just shmooze, and from the shmooze, I would pick it up. Why are you doing that? What are you looking for when you go out to do a story? You’ve got to call this in tonight to New York, what are they? How do you win the ones you get on? And I’m really talking to the L.A. guys for something like that.

Riley: But then, you’ve got the perfect person to work with.

Deaver: I’ve got the perfect person to work with. All I have to figure out is how I can frame him and pre-sell it, which is part of it, because you’ve got to get the cameras out there to cover it.

Riley: Right, and he developed confidence in your ability to produce over time.

Deaver: He knew. I always laughed because the Bushes have this noblesse oblige idea, “Don’t tell me to stand on the chalk. That’s not what I’m in this for.” So you get these terrible pictures of them. This guy obviously has learned that you stand on the chalk. If you watched him last night, walking to the Statue of Liberty and all of this business, you know. It’s production. He’s got it. His father never did.

Reagan understood it because, obviously, he’d been in the business, and if he had a good producer who lit him well and never screwed him, he’d do whatever he told him to do, and that’s what he developed with me.

Riley: You remember other instances where he was correcting you in the process of education, specific cases of his—

Deaver: One of the things you understood with Reagan was that you never tried to over-direct him. You could do anything in filling up the space, but don’t ask him to act. Early on I remember telling him, “Okay now, we’ve got this NBC crew coming in, and what I want you to do is take your jacket off, throw it over your shoulder, and walk pensively.” I remember saying “pensively.” I was 29 years old. He looked at me and said, “I can’t do that.” I said, “What do you mean, you can’t do that? It’s Kennedyesque.” He said, “Exactly. You know I’d be very uncomfortable. And Mike, you’ve got to remember, if I’m uncomfortable, the people watching it are uncomfortable. So I’ve got to be comfortable.” I never forgot it. I never did anything that I didn’t think he would be comfortable doing.

Every once in a while you’d be cutting a film for a campaign or something, and you’d get a director in. Sears was great at this, bringing directors in. The guy would say, “Now, Governor, what I want you to do is, the first 3½ minutes, we’re going to have you behind the desk. Then, I want you to get up and come around and sit on the edge of the desk. Then, after a few minutes, I
want you to cross your arms like this.” Reagan would be smiling at this guy. He’d say, “I don’t think so. I tell you,” he said, “all the direction I really would like you to do is with the lens. You can move in and out on me. But it’s really better if I stay in one spot.” Of course, the head was what you wanted. If I’d had my druthers, it would have never left the head, but the director has to have something to do, so—

Reagan always told me never to put the first row more than eight feet away from him, because so many rooms you get into, you’ve got the audience out there. Nixon told Reagan, “Never eat with them. Go up to your room and have a steak and a good wine and then come down when you’re announced.” Reagan said, “Well, Dick, you know, I kind of like to be with them. I get a feel for the room.” It was the actor. It was a performance for him. Every speech was a performance.

Riley: At least by ’84, and maybe earlier, you began to get some adverse feedback from some of the media people about the manipulation.

Deaver: Oh, I loved it. It was backhanded criticism. But the guys who were writing the books were calling me the producer of the evening news, and that was fun. But, you know, the working guys who were covering us loved it, because they didn’t have to do anything. They got to the point where they knew, like Reagan did, that when we went out they were going to have a shot that they had a 50% chance of getting on the evening news, and they got new contracts every year if they were on the news every night. So I was their big buddy. I was producing for them.

Hargrove: Were these events related to issues, or just events?

Deaver: Anything. We had a bad event one day, and Sam Donaldson said—oh no, we had a bad event that we turned into a good event, that was it. It was going to be a bad event. And Donaldson went by and said, “Deaver could have sold the Edsel.” You had to use what was left in the picture to tell the story. It wasn’t just the spoken word that people were going to hear. What went in, you were going to get from watching.

In ’82 we were desperate to get the economy to turn around. Reagan kept saying it was going to, and it was getting worse and worse. Finally, somebody came in one morning and said to me, “You know, the housing starts are going up.” Everybody said, “Oh God, we’ve got to get him in the press room.” I said, “Wait a minute. Go find me the five cities in America where it’s going up the fastest.”

The next day, we took everybody out to Ft. Worth, Texas. So the evening news that night is Reagan in a framed-out house with a couple of carpenters. And I’ve gotten letters on this because I said on television a couple of times, “…and that working stiff at home.” All of these working stiffs at home wrote me a letter and said, “Don’t call me a working stiff.” They’re watching television and drinking their evening beer and somebody says, “Why’s the old man on television?” “He’s talking to carpenters in a new house. Huh! Housing starts are going up.” They started thinking things are getting better, and they got better, because Reagan was talking them into getting better. But I don’t think that would have happened if Reagan had made that announcement about housing starts in the press office with the seal of the White House behind us. They would have turned on wrestling or something.

Hargrove: Were you guided by polls to any extent?
Deaver: Sure. I saw polls, but I used polls to tell me where I needed to shore up our negatives, largely. That’s the only thing I ever used the polls for.

Riley: So you’re mostly going on instinct rather than focus group testing.

Deaver: I never did a focus group the whole time I can remember. Never saw one.

Knott: What was President Reagan’s attitude about polls or polling data?

Deaver: Didn’t pay a lot of attention to it. We didn’t have that many. I think Wirthlin did maybe four a year. If you came in with a negative poll, Reagan would blame it on me. He would say, “You’re not getting me out there to talk on this or that,” whatever it was, as opposed to immediately changing his position.

Hargrove: Now, when you came in, Gergen was Communications Director. Did he attempt to do this kind of thing, or did you just ease your way into it?

Deaver: I did all of it. He was a big fan and a big supporter. One of the things that Gergen and I did together was the radio show, which is still an institution in the White House, I’m happy to say. I did it because I wanted to give Reagan something to do on Saturdays because he was so unhappy about not going to the ranch, and he was really on me all the time. I figured, if I can get him to do a radio show—he loved radio—he wouldn’t bitch so much about having to be at the White House on the weekends. And that was true. He loved the radio show. I even got a commitment out of him that we would do the radio show live wherever we were. That worked until we got to Beijing, and it was, like 3 A.M., and he said, “I’m not going to do it live.”

Jones: Could you have been as successful with successive Presidents?

Deaver: I don’t think so. I think it was learning this over the years with him, knowing instinctively, practically, how he’d tilt his head at any given moment, what I could do, and what I couldn’t do, what would be believable, and what wouldn’t be believable, which is very important. I could advise somebody, but I think it was just the chemistry. It just worked.

Jones: So the success goes back to what you were describing in your first relationships in Sacramento, of coming to know the man well enough, and obviously associated with his own understanding of all of this. But you’re coming, in a sense, to know him well enough, to think like Reagan did, and then teaching yourself about the—

Deaver: I think that, plus I loved it. I loved the visual part of it. I always wanted to be in advertising. I loved the idea of being able to persuade people by the use of visuals. So this was, sort of, my poor man’s way of doing what I wanted to do anyway.

Jones: Have you ever reflected much on what difference it makes?

Deaver: No, I haven’t. I think with Reagan it probably wouldn’t have made a lot of difference. You could have put him anywhere. As long as the camera concentrated on his head, you would probably have been all right. One of the interesting things about Reagan to me is—and most people don’t realize this—look at political speakers over your lifetime. Reagan never moved
anything except his head. Occasionally, his shoulders. He never gestured with his arms or his hands, and for somebody to be that persuasive, simply using his voice, is pretty remarkable. That’s why he knew he would be better on the radio. He would last longer if he didn’t stay on television all the time. He was not a theatrical speaker, in spite of the fact that he was an actor. I guess he learned that.

**Jones:** I first observed that at the ’80 convention where, you remember, the keynote speaker was, [Guy] VanderJagt, the Congressman from Michigan, who would practice out in the cornfields and wave his hands and so forth. He was a total bust at the convention, and Reagan’s acceptance was just— And he never moved.

**Deaver:** No. No. The classic to me of that is the *Ich bin ein Berliner* speech, where Kennedy is jabbing into the air, and Reagan’s “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,” which is a much more demonstrative statement, never moving anything except his head. He didn’t say, “Tear down this wall.”

**Hargrove:** Finger pointing.

**Knott:** Shifting gears just a little bit. This morning you mentioned that you always considered Ronald Reagan to be something of a moderate and not a conservative. My question is, on these controversial social issues like abortion, and school prayer, and perhaps affirmative action, and aid to the Contras, which you talk about in your book, were these simply bones being thrown to the right, to keep them happy? How do you fit that into your labeling him a moderate?

**Deaver:** Well, on almost all of those issues, I think his position was moderate. There was no stridency or anger in any of those positions of Reagan. It was a reasonable position on abortion that he had come to 20 years ago in Sacramento, when he first had to deal with it. He had talked to doctors and ethicists and lawyers and all kinds of people—nurses. He came to the position, and he never changed it. It was not something that he went out and—You know, the tactics of the right offended him on that issue. He was just a moderate person. What were the other positions you said?

**Knott:** School prayer. I think, occasionally, he referred to an amendment.

**Deaver:** School prayer. I guess that’s a right and a left thing, but I don’t think about it that way. I think you could be just a moderate American who believes that having some spiritual values in our schools is a good idea. None of those were at the top of his list. He believed in his position on each of those.

**Knott:** His reluctance to appear in front of the Right to Life rallies every January 20th or so. That was due to what? What prevented him from making personal appearances?

**Deaver:** Oh, I think we persuaded him not to.

**Knott:** Politically, it would not be a good idea.
Deaver: All you had to say to him on something like that was, “Mr. President, remember what our priorities are here. You go out there, and we’ve got three days of this. It’s just three days that we cannot get the tax bill through,” or three days we can’t do this or whatever. We knew, we were being honest. “You’re going to divert your energies. Everybody knows your position on that. You don’t have to go out there.”

Knott: He was consistently committed to aiding the Contras. Is that a fair statement? And you saw yourself as moderating, during your tenure there?

Deaver: Well, yes. I suppose so. I think I was back to the Baker warning at the beginning. If we get too deeply into this, we’re going to have a serious problem, once again diverting us from our real goals. I used that argument carefully on the Regan issue. I used that argument, finally, because all of the other arguments wouldn’t work with him—that you had to do something to get past the Iran-Contra issue and that getting past, in this town, means firing somebody and then moving on. He wouldn’t hear of it. Finally, I said, “You want to sit down with the Soviets, you’re going to have to get past this. You’re going to get stuck in this forever.”

Knott: If one of the original team had still been around in 1986-87, you’re fairly convinced that Iran-Contra could have been avoided?

Deaver: Yes.

Hargrove: Was he sometimes not discerning of what he needed from staff, or when staff were not helping him?

Deaver: Well, I think it was a combination of things. First of all, all of us probably think we’re not that dependent on staff. Secondly, he was not a guy who, after a while, would stand in your way if you wanted to move on and do something else. He understood that these were tough jobs, and we all had to get out of there. I was there almost five years. That’s a long time in those jobs.

Hargrove: When you came to him and told him about the Baker-Regan swap, he seemed to be indifferent to it, or was that not right?

Deaver: Well, first of all, he knew both Jimmy and I were going to go. So I think, on the one hand, he probably hadn’t thought a lot about it because he hoped it wasn’t going to happen. But when it was a reality, and I went in and told him about the Regan-Baker thing, it was not an immediate—he didn’t say to me, “Oh, that sounds like a good idea.” He said, “I’ll think about it.” I said, “Well, do you want me to talk to Don and have him come in?” He said, “No, let me deal with this.” That was the last I heard about it until he pretty much announced that Don was going to come over. I think it was a mistake in a lot of ways, but any of us could have made that mistake.

Hargrove: Yes, but do you think he might have perceived the mistake in time? Do you know why he didn’t?

Deaver: I don’t think personnel was one of his long suits. He was such an agreeable guy and never believed that people might have other than the best of motives.
Hargrove: Was he good at reading people, though?

Deaver: I think when it was something that he really had committed himself to get done and do, then yes, he could, Gorbachev, [Thomas] Tip O’Neill, people like that. People in his staff, around him all the time, I’m not sure. And he hated it. Meese and Baker and Clark were having such an awful time. And it was just God-awful on me because I’d worked for Clark, and I’d worked for Meese, and now I was supposedly working for Baker, although I was really working for Reagan. I felt myself much more that way. I went to him, and I said, “You know, this is just awful. I don’t think you understand what’s going on around here.” And he said, “Well, Mike, I think you’re exaggerating. I think this is just the media.” I said, “Well, if you think that, we’re in bigger trouble than we’re in.” And he said, “What are you talking about?” I said, “I’m telling you it’s guerilla warfare, and I can’t take any more. I’m the guy standing holding all the goddamn coats, and I don’t like it. You should be doing this, not me.”

He said, “What do you want me to do?” I said, “What I want you to do is I want to bring them all in here, and I want you to bang some heads together.” Well, we went in, and everybody sat, nobody’s speaking at that point. We all sat there.

Jones: When was this, Mike?

Deaver: Oh gosh, those are the worst questions. This must have been—

Riley: Clark didn’t come over until— Summer of ’82, probably.

Deaver: Well ’82 maybe. Well, everybody sat there, and nobody would say anything. Reagan kind of was talking about anything. So finally I said, “Mr. President, you know, you and I have had this conversation. Nobody seems to want to get into this thing except me, but I can’t do this any longer, and here’s what I’m asking you to do. Would you please tell us to go out and come back to you with either a solution or a plan to resolve this or make changes, whatever it takes. We can’t operate this way anymore.” And Reagan said, “Yes, yes. I think that’s a good idea.”

That was the meeting. So then I tried to get everybody together to do what Reagan had allegedly proposed to do. I couldn’t get anybody together, so I finally decided that we’d all go over to Blair House and have drinks one night, and that maybe if we had a couple of drinks, you know, we could—It was terrible. That was at the point where it was really bad. Then it wasn’t much later after that that Clark went to Interior.

Riley: Was Clark the difference in the mix, or was this just something that matured so much over time?

Deaver: It matured over a period of time. Clark, I think because he was an old ally of Meese’s, made it much, much more difficult. Bill had had a relationship with the President that went back to cowboy days, Rancho Visitadores and all that stuff. And immediately when he came into the White House from the State Department, we had a whole set of procedures. And he wasn’t going to go through the Chief of Staff. He was going to go directly to the President. And of course, Baker said, “That’s how we’re going to get into a war. You get the National Security Advisor not going through any kind of a procedure in this White House, we’ll be in a mess.” It went from bad to worse.
Riley: Allen had not been a problem in that regard?

Deaver: Allen had not been a problem, he was there such a short time. Allen had not been a problem because Meese pretty much—how long was Dick there?

Knott: A year.

Deaver: A full year? Well, for a quarter of that year he was under siege, so that may have been part of the problem. But Meese pretty much kept a lid on the Allen—

Riley: And officially he was supposed to report through somebody else.

Deaver: Right, right.

Knott: Was Clark pushed out? How did Clark finally reach the point of leaving?

Deaver: I think Clark finally got tired of it, too.

Hargrove: Then Interior came up.

Young: The irritation, the conflict, the friction, was over what?

Deaver: Power, it always is.

Young: Taking the form of differences over Soviet approaches?

Deaver: I suppose, to an extent, there were perceived differences on that. I really have always thought it had more to do with Clark’s feeling that he had a special relationship with the President, that he knew where the President wanted to go on these issues, much better than anybody else, and—maybe more importantly—that you couldn’t trust any of those people. They were all leaking like sieves, and Darman was the worst, according to Clark. Clark had the dial changed in the National Security room so that Darman couldn’t get in. It was pretty bad.

And there was some justification for that belief, believe me. The real part of the thing I could never solve was to get Clark to believe that Jim Baker had the President’s best interests in mind. Jim Baker was, as a lot of us are, ambitious, and a real player in Washington, talked a lot to the press. But it seems to me there comes a time in the White House, particularly since we were dealing then with the cold war, that you’ve got to trust at some point. And there just wasn’t any trust at all. You can’t operate that way, and I think the President knew it.

Jones: So if you think back then to what you were talking about in the Governor’s office in Sacramento, and looking at it from Reagan’s point of view—a concept of “I want to work through the cabinet and three or four close people”—would you compare that, how that went, with how it was going then, during those years in the White House?

Deaver: Well, I think initially it worked pretty well, although you really can’t use the Cabinet the way we used it in Sacramento in the White House. It really is a small group of people, and
the national security operation is such a big part of the White House today. But it did work pretty well for a while.

Then this whole business about who’s leaking. There was a point when I went into the Oval Office, and Meese and Clark were in there. They were both sitting on either side, and the President was reading something. The President said, “Well, I don’t know. I guess maybe we ought to do this.” Because the President was very frustrated with leaks. And I said, “Excuse me, can somebody tell me what’s going on here?” And nobody said anything. I said, “Hey, wait a minute. I’m a part of this, what are we talking about?” And the President said—neither Meese nor Clark said anything—“We’re talking about doing lie detector tests for national security leaks.” I said, “You’re going to require lie detectors?” He said, “Well, that’s what this order is.”

I went out, and Baker and I were going over to the Madison Hotel to have lunch with Stu Spencer. We got in the car, and I told him about this conversation. He turned the car around, called Margaret [Tutwiler] and said, “Call Stu and tell him we’re not coming to lunch.” Walked back into the Oval Office. The President was having lunch with George Shultz. And we walked in, and Baker said, “Mr. President, I’m sorry to interrupt you, but Mike’s just told me about this conversation.” George Shultz said, “Lie detector? Mr. President, I won’t be around if we’re going to do that.”

The President said, “Wait, wait a minute. I haven’t agreed to do this.” I said, “Well, I suggest you get everybody in the room this time.” So about 40 minutes later, we had William French Smith and everybody in there, and the President decided not to do it. Ed and Bill were very, very, very unhappy. My God, what if I hadn’t gone into the room? I think I was trying to break up whatever the meeting was so the President could get on with his lunch.

Hargrove: Do you remember a time when George Shultz, who was newly in office, struggling with the Lebanon affair, brought several of his aides up to Camp David? You and Meese were there, and he had them role-play different parts. Shultz tells that story in his memoir, and I read it on the plane. He says you and Meese sat there fascinated with how he involved Reagan. Reagan got very interested in the role-playing and in the diversity of opinion. Remember that?

Deaver: No.

Hargrove: The point he wants to make is, he says, “I thought it was extremely important to get the President involved in these decisions.” By implication, [Al] Haig did not, and maybe others did not.

Deaver: No, but that’s very interesting. Reagan would have enjoyed that and wanted to do—yes, yes, I understand the point.

Hargrove: Were there people who didn’t have confidence in the President and tried to keep him out of things, or tried to manipulate him?

Deaver: Sure, sure there were, yes.

Hargrove: Haig was one of them, I gather.
Deaver: Well, you know, I think Haig never understood Ronald Reagan, didn’t know quite how to deal with him. He used to walk around with his letter of resignation all the time, was constantly taking it out. The President would say, “Al, put that away.” The day that Ronald Reagan took it, we were all high-fiving inside the Oval Office.

Hargrove: But was there a problem with some people underestimating him?

Deaver: Oh yes, the whole world—Of course, yes.

Hargrove: Talk about that a little bit.

Deaver: Of course, there were people who underestimated him. I was talking about the ’84 debates. That was a question of underestimation on Darman’s and Gergen’s part. I think Gergen probably more than anybody else underestimated Reagan, didn’t really think he was up to it. But Gergen, of course, considers himself to be an intellectual so—

Young: There is, I think, a kind of thinking that if you underestimate the President, and by that same line of thinking you overestimate your own—

Deaver: That’s dangerous

Deaver: Well, you know, Gergen had worked for Nixon and Ford. Here was a man, in Reagan, who was not a guy who directed people, particularly. He was not a guy who would say, “Goddamn it, I want to get this done. You go do this.” I never heard Reagan ever talk like that. Gergen would have respected that in Nixon or others. That would have been his experience. He was not a guy who sat around and liked to talk out an issue forever and ever and ever with the likes of Gergen. I’m not deprecating Dave, because I have a lot of respect for him in many ways, but Reagan wouldn’t share his thoughts or his strategic thinking about the Soviet Union or a tax policy, necessarily, with Dave. So I don’t think they ever got that experience to see. They saw Reagan listening a lot. I’m just not sure they had a lot of respect for him, because of that.

There are a lot of people in this town who have enormous respect for Bill Clinton, because he could speak on anything, and tell you about any thought that you wanted him to talk about any time, ad nauseum. Reagan would politely shake your hand, and listen to you, and—

Young: We’ll come back again to that subject, but would you say that Reagan was a natural politician?

Deaver: Well, I don’t know what you mean by a natural politician. He was not a guy who would say what you wanted to hear. He was not a guy who enjoyed working a room. He is not a guy who liked, necessarily, the political action of going to conventions and being in hotel rooms and drinking until 3 o’clock in the morning.

Hargrove: He did like to win people over, didn’t he?

Deaver: Yes. I think he thought that he could persuade anybody, just about, and he would be frustrated if he couldn’t, yes.
Young: Lyndon Johnson—the Johnson treatment—is famous. Reagan had none—

Deaver: No, he did not have that at all. He didn’t know how to cajole, he didn’t know how to threaten. He didn’t have a drawer full of goodies—I don’t mean money necessarily, but I mean favors. He never thought in terms of, *I’ll get this guy by promising to put his brother-in-law in the FEC* [Federal Election Commission] or something. He never thought in those terms. He would spend hours if you asked him to, working on the phone, or having people down to see him, talking about the issues and trying to persuade them intellectually to do this. One of the things I learned early on with Reagan is you could never get him to do something by telling him it was the political thing to do, which I always thought was fascinating. If you said to him, “You know, if you don’t do this you’re going to lose the Hispanic voters,” it wouldn’t make any difference to him.

So, did he enjoy politics? Do I think of him as a political animal? No. I think he understood human nature and understood how to talk to people. The great difference between him and Richard Nixon I always felt was so wonderful, because Reagan understood what his strengths were. I don’t think Nixon ever got it figured out.

Riley: How did he deal with political opposition in Washington? I mean, he’s coming in, he’s confronting a House of Representatives that’s controlled by the Democrats. What kind of relationship—

Deaver: He tried very hard, you know, to work with them. I think after about the second year he gave up. I saw him blow up one time with Baker when they were arguing on the budget, and he said, “These guys are not going to give me a budget, and I’m not going to worry about it any more. I’m going to go get this Defense Department built up, and if we have a bunch of deficits the end of my term, so be it. I’ll take it. But they’re going to have to share the blame.” And they never gave him a budget. They continued resolutions forever. He went through the motions, but he knew it was politics. They weren’t going to give him anything.

Jones: When you described again—going back to Sacramento—the impact that he had on legislators, it was because of his public image and his natural inclination. I suppose number one, he believed he was right on an issue, and that he could convince the public, that that then would be a bank shot to the legislature.

Deaver: It was his greatest power.

Jones: Did he have that same attitude in Washington?

Deaver: Sure, sure. Yes. I don’t think he used it as much, because you can’t overuse it, for a lot of reasons: one, the networks won’t give you the time, and people would tire of you. He had the wonderful sense of timing of the old actors, “always leave them wanting more” kind of thing. So he couldn’t use it like he did in California as much.

Young: At one point in your book you mention what you thought your job, or your value, to Ronald Reagan was. As far as your job was concerned, to put him in a favorable light always, and to budget—that was your word—his exposure to the media, which is a very striking
perception to somebody from the outside who thinks that more is always better. It communicates the thought that rationing exposure and limiting the circumstances rather than—

**Deaver:** Yes. I always loved the Clinton people who talked about the 24-hour news cycle. We had two news cycles. We had the noon news, and we had the five o’clock news—those were the two news cycles. The Clinton people talk about 24-hour news cycle—they *made* the 24-hour news cycle. There was a classic picture one time of Clinton in the Rose Garden, talking to the press—it was some kind of a Bosnian issue or something—and the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense behind him in the Oval Office making the decisions. He was out there talking about this whole thing—he wasn’t saying much, he was just talking. It was just such a classic example of their making this thing news every five minutes.

Reagan wouldn’t have gone out there for anything in the world. It might be days before Reagan went out, which drove everybody crazy in the media. They still talk about the fact that he had fewer press conferences than anybody. They always say it was because we didn’t trust him to do press conferences, but it didn’t have anything to do with that.

**Riley:** You’ve talked a lot about Jim Baker’s role in trying to get the President acclimated to Washington, or serving as a—

**Deaver:** I really didn’t talk about Jim Baker acclimating the President to Washington. I talked about Jim Baker understanding how Washington worked. Reagan became acclimated wherever he was.

**Riley:** The question I wondered was whether you had additional responsibilities for helping get Mrs. Reagan acclimated, or something similar in that—

**Deaver:** Well, I worked closely with her and her staff, probably more so than anybody else in the West Wing. I had a struggle at the beginning to find a role for her. Nancy wanted to dig in right away and fix up the living quarters. They hadn’t been touched since Nixon, and the Carter years had left it not exactly the way they would want to live. She got a tremendous amount of criticism early on for redecorating—none of it, of course, at public expense. So finding a role for her was important. Ultimately, she said, “I want to work on the drug issue.” I said, “Great, if that’s what you want to do.”

**Young:** Did you work on her skit?

**Deaver:** No, I didn’t. I really didn’t.

**Young:** How did that come about?

**Deaver:** She and Sheila [Tate] did that. I don’t know. I guess somebody in the press corps very timidly handed her these words. It was just wonderful, and she loved it. She loved getting all dressed up in all those funny old clothes. It was one of the great turnarounds, for a period of time, in Washington. You may recall they made her come out and do it a second time.

**Riley:** Early on, the assassination attempt occurs. Can you tell us your recollections of where you were and what you were doing on the day this happened?
Deaver: I was standing next to him when he was shot. Hinckley was shooting over my right shoulder. The Secret Service at that point did not have the media, the press, roped off in any way. It wasn’t until after that we started all these procedures, so that anybody could have been standing in the press, as Hinckley was with a gun, standing right next to the ABC cameraman, who I always thought could have whacked him with the camera, but didn’t.

I’ve never been around a revolver in my life. Been around a bird shooter and so forth, shotguns. So if I hadn’t been as close, I probably wouldn’t have known what was going on. But since he was shooting right here, I could smell it.

Riley: How far away were you from him?

Deaver: The gun was right over my shoulder. I was coming around the limo. We came out of the door, Mike Putzel from AP shouted a question, and I just grabbed Jim Brady by the arm, as I would have grabbed whoever was on the press detail with us, and shoved him over to the press to take the question so that Reagan could then move into the limo, which is exactly what I did. And as I moved around the rear of the limo, Hinckley stepped forward right over my shoulder and shot across me.

I went down. I mean, I crunched down and tried to get into the limousine, but couldn’t, because it was locked, obviously—it was the opposite door that Reagan would have come in. I ran and got in the control car, which I knew would move. The control car always moved with the President, because it has the mil aide with the nuclear codes, and the doctor, and that has to go with him. So I was in that car, and we took off.

Riley: Had you been given any instructions previously about what to do in case of an emergency?

Deaver: Well yes, but the only briefings were on nuclear—if there was a nuclear emergency, nothing like this. And, you know, I could see Reagan in the back of the car. We couldn’t use the radios, because you didn’t know whether it was a conspiracy, or if other people would be listening in, so I couldn’t talk to the limousine to find out. But I could see Reagan sitting up in the back seat, so I figured he was all right. I thought we were going back to the White House. And then the car—there were three cars in this little motorcade—and the lead car went across the yellow line on Connecticut, and we started going into traffic, with the sirens on. I said to the mil aide, “What the hell are we doing?” And he said, “I think we’re going to the hospital.”

We pulled up in front of George Washington, and I jumped out of the car. Reagan had a habit—if he’d been sitting in a plane or car, or even on a podium—when he got out, he would cinch his pants up like this, and then he’d button his coat. And that’s exactly what he did, cinched his pants up and buttoned his coat. He looked all right to me. The minute he crossed the frame of the door, it was like being behind the curtain. He collapsed. He got there and collapsed.

By that time both the Secret Service and the Emergency Room people—the Secret Service had radioed ahead—had hold of him, running with him. There’s a picture in my head of running through George Washington Hospital to the emergency room. By the time we got to the emergency room, he did not have a stitch of clothes on him. Here’s the President of the United States being held like this, with nothing on. It was, what? 25 minutes before they even found out
he’d been shot. They didn’t turn him over. On the left side, a .22 went right up his—And his blood pressure kept going down and down and down and down, because he was bleeding internally.

I kept going in there and asking, because I had opened up a phone to the situation room, and Meese and Baker were on that. I said, “He hasn’t been shot, but I don’t know what’s wrong with him. Maybe he had a heart attack. I don’t know. Maybe Jerry Parr broke a rib when he threw him in the car.” I had to hold this phone—it was before we had phones you could walk around with, so it was a phone with a cord—I kept going into the emergency room, the door, kind of looking in there. And he kept looking worse. He was getting whiter and whiter and whiter, just staring up. I then saw the doctor holding up the coat, finally seeing this tiny little bullet hole. You know, today, in an emergency room, none of that would have happened. They would have scoped him—instantly they would have found it today. That was 20 years ago. Anyway, then it got serious.

Jones: Tell me, was the craftsman in you thinking? What were you thinking at the time as—

Deaver: I wasn’t thinking about any of that. I was thinking about—

Jones: Later?

Deaver: Yes, when it was clear he was going to be all right. You know, he really came through the surgery pretty well, but it was a staph infection that almost got him, which was 36 hours later. He was really, really sick then. You know, you have a 70-year-old person with a staph infection, and they’ve been shot, and they’ve had serious surgery. I remember the thoracic guy saying to Nancy, “God, I never thought I’d get through that chest of his. I can’t believe that man’s 70 years old.” He did have massive pecs. He worked out and was in good condition. But yes, I did think about it afterwards, and I remember the first picture we released, in the hospital, in his bathrobe. I was very careful about that picture.

Hargrove: How about, “I forgot to duck, mommy. I hope you’re all Republicans,” and all that.

Deaver: He didn’t say mommy.

Hargrove: He didn’t say mommy. But those stories got out right away.

Deaver: Lyn did that. I wasn’t writing all that stuff down. I wasn’t thinking in those terms. I was thinking I had to keep the guys in the White House informed, and I had to stay there with Nancy. I had my hands full. I didn’t know what was going to happen to Reagan. My friend was in serious trouble. That’s all I was thinking about.

I watch this stuff now, and I see Lyn almost walking away and then coming back and saying, “Oh wait a minute, I just forgot, I have these notes, I wrote down what he’d said,” and he gave that to the press. It’s funny, I just got off a cruise where I lectured, and some woman came up to me and she said, “My son was at the University of California, hated Ronald Reagan, public enemy number one, until he was shot. Then his whole attitude changed by the grace with which Reagan dealt with it.” And I think that was true. I think that the shooting changed history. I think it changed Reagan.
Hargrove: You think at the time it helped with the budget? Helped with Congress?

Deaver: Oh, I think it helped with the Congress, sure, no question. When he walked back into that Congress after the shooting, it was incredible.

Young: I’m wondering how it changed, or if it did change, Mrs. Reagan’s concerns. Did she become a lot more interested in his schedule?

Deaver: No question, no question. Very, very, very protective, insisting that he come home for a nap in the afternoon, which he never did. He would go home because she was insisting on it. She had a favorite expression. She would come into the bedroom, and he’d be sitting there working. If he was at his desk, he was in real trouble. He’d be working, and she’d say, “Horizontal, I want you horizontal.” And we would go around the office saying, “I want you horizontal.” She used to tell him, “Lyndon Johnson took a nap, in his pajamas, every day,” which I think was true. He did take a lot of naps. I don’t think he went to sleep, but he got into his pajamas and got horizontal.

You know the whole business about the horoscope and all that. Nancy called me a couple of weeks after the shooting and said she’d talked to this woman, Joan Quigley, who somebody had referred. Somebody had called her—Merv Griffin, I think—and said, “I talked to this woman I know, Joan Quigley, and she says she could have predicted this. You ought to talk to her.” So Nancy talked to her, and Joan Quigley said, “Yes, I could have predicted this. If you just give me his schedule, I can tell you what are good days and bad days.” So she called me, said, “I want you to send the schedule out to Joan Quigley.” I said, “Yes ma’am.” It didn’t make any difference to me, if it kept her happy. I never changed the schedule all those years. I did tell Don Regan when I left because I had never breathed that to anybody. Nobody else knew it except me and Nancy in the White House. It’s the only secret except Grenada that we ever kept.

Young: We want to hear about that one, too.

Deaver: So I told Don Regan when I left, “There’s a little issue of the astrologer that I want you to know about. You may not have to deal with it, but you ought to know about it.” Then he, of course, wrote about it in his book.

Hargrove: So the budget’s passed. Then we have a hell of a recession for a couple of years, then we come out of it. But he was confident the entire time it was going to be all right.

Deaver: He was.

Hargrove: He believed evidently in his economic theory.

Deaver: He did. He may have been the only person in Washington, D.C. who did.

Hargrove: That’s right.

Deaver: I think there were moments when he was praying a lot—and I mean that seriously—but he certainly never, ever faltered. And when everybody was telling him that he had to give up some of this DoD [Department of Defense] money, he wouldn’t budge at all. I remember Baker asked me to go over and see Cap, because if Cap told Reagan he could give it up, some of it,
Reagan would have done it. But it was like talking to Reagan, I mean, it was a wasted trip. Cap said, “If the President tells me to do this, I’ll do it.” “No, I’m asking you to tell the President.” “Well, I can’t.”

I think one of the reasons Reagan, in hindsight, was such a success, in my opinion, was that he had this resolve. Frankly, you see a little bit of it in this guy who’s over there right now.

**Knott:** Can I ask you about some specific events from that first term, particularly some crises. You mentioned Grenada just a few minutes ago. It also occurred, I think, within 48 hours or so of the Marine barracks bombing in Lebanon. Any particular recollections from those?

**Deaver:** Painful. I watched how painful it was for Reagan, for him personally. I think anybody, any President, takes that stuff so personally.

**Knott:** Did he have a difficult time going to those services?

**Deaver:** Oh, I’m sure. We all did. But not only did he go to the services, but he had what we would call staff time, which was his own time at his desk, and for weeks after that I’d sneak in there to go either see him about something, or check on him, and he would be hunched over. I could always tell when he was having a painful conversation, because he would have the phone clear up here like this and his head way, way down. He kept calling those families. He just couldn’t get rid of it. You know, he would read the stories of [Abraham] Lincoln, all night long being up watching the tickertape, thinking about everybody who’s getting killed.

**Knott:** Shortly after the assassination, I believe, maybe two or three months, was the air traffic controllers, the PATCO [Professional Air Traffic Controllers Association] strike, and that was said at the time to have been a kind of seminal moment for him.

**Deaver:** Oh, I think it was. I don’t think he thought of it as a seminal moment, but it turned out to be. It was interesting to me, because it goes right to this business about staff, and who’s making the decisions. I remember that morning in the Cabinet meeting—the Cabinet’s all around the table, and everybody had ideas, and Drew Lewis—who was at Transportation—and others were going back and forth across the table. I looked over at Reagan, because it dawned on me that he wasn’t saying anything. He was writing on his yellow pad, writing, writing, writing. This went on for about 15 minutes, and finally I heard him say, “Excuse me, fellows, but let me just read you something here. Tell me what you think about it.” It was the statement he gave in the Rose Garden about half an hour later, word for word. Nobody changed anything. Everybody said, “Oh, yes, that’s great.”

But it wasn’t a surprise to me, because it had been a Reagan position in California when the firefighters, I think it was, went out. Reagan said, “A public employee does not have the right to strike. How can you strike against the public? They’re the people who hire you.” He’d had that experience with teachers, saying, “They insist on the right to strike and tenure at the same time, how can you do this?” So it wasn’t a real surprise to me. I guess what was the surprise was that in this first example of his own action, it was pure Reagan, and it wasn’t changed in any way.

**Young:** A little bit about Grenada. How did that bubble up, or come about? Was this from the White House basement, or what?
Deaver: I haven’t thought about that for a long time. I’m not sure I can tell you.

Young: You did have the rule of keeping the press under control for that and away from the scene.

Deaver: We had an assistant press secretary who resigned because he was not informed of it. I must tell you that one Saturday, the Saturday before Grenada, there was a meeting in the Deputy Secretary’s office at State that I was supposed to go to, and I couldn’t go to it because I had to be with him. So I called my assistant in, who knew nothing about any of this, and I said, “I’m going to tell you something that if you ever breathe it, you will be shot. This is a state secret. Nobody in the White House with the exceptions of the President and the Vice President, Meese, Baker, and I know this, and the National Security Advisor.”

Well, this kid’s eyes were about this big. I said, “I want you to go to this meeting for me, take notes, and come back.” He came back, and he handed me this document that had 148 people or something like that, on the document, 27 people in Defense, and 46 people in the State Department. Everybody in the world knew about this. He thought I was an idiot. There were still only eight people in the White House who knew about it.

Hargrove: I wonder, Jim, if we shouldn’t ask about Gorbachev and Reagan, if you only have a half hour, their relationship, the development of that relationship.

Deaver: Of course, I wasn’t there. I told you about my meeting with him the night before he left. When I came back, he called me and told me to come over to the White House. He wanted to tell me. He was very enthusiastic about the meeting. In his enthusiasm at the end of this telling, he said, “And I think he believes.” I said, “You’re not telling me that the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union believes in God.” And he said, “Well, he believes in a higher power.” I said, “How do you know that?” He said, “I just know it.” And that’s all he needed.

Hargrove: That’s fascinating. Never heard that story.

Deaver: All he needed, to trust him.

Hargrove: In other words, if there was that fundamental belief, then you could trust him about everything else.

Deaver: I guess if you were Reagan, yes. The fascinating thing to me about that meeting, though, is Reagan’s sense of the perception. To me, one of the great pictures is of Reagan coming out on the steps of that chateau where he was staying, with nothing but a very light wool suit on—I know that suit well—and standing there in the freezing cold as this old Zil drives up. And Reagan’s on the fourth step, so he’s way up here to begin with. He doesn’t come down to the driveway. He does, finally, when the Zil comes around. Gorbachev gets out—an old cloth coat and a hat and a muffler and gloves—don’t you remember?

Hargrove: Very well.
Deaver: And walks up, and Reagan sort of pulls him up. It was just a classic understanding of the photo, and what it was going to mean forever, and what it did to Gorbachev.

Jones: Could you reflect on the most prideful moments?

Deaver: Prideful moments? His or mine?

Jones: Yours, yes, yours.

Deaver: Certainly the inaugural, number one, had to be the high moment, and I’m sure it is for everybody. This is before you have to do anything, so it’s a lot of fun. Walking into that office with him—he sat down behind the desk, as I said earlier. And before he opened that drawer that had Carter’s note in it, he looked over at me. He had both his hands on the desk, and he looked at me and said, “Have you got goose bumps?” And, of course, you know his reverence for the office was—I told this story on the cruise about the fact that he never took his jacket off in the office. I then made the mistake of not leaving it there and letting everybody make their own determination. Then I said, “Then we had a President who couldn’t keep his pants on.” It got a lot of laughs, but it was not the right thing to say. It took away from the point I was trying to make. But he never did.

Jones: But what about your own achievements, that you really felt, in reflecting on it, that this was a great achievement, or an achievement of which I am very proud.

Deaver: I don’t know. I suppose the Lebanon bombing thing that I did, that’s interesting to me because I have a lot of people come up to me, only recently—not a lot, half a dozen, total strangers every one of them, who are all Jewish—who asked me if I have regrets that I had this role in stopping the Israelis, and then maybe we would have ended the Middle East problems if I had only not stopped Reagan. And I said, “No, I don’t have any regrets at all.” I doubt very much if another week of bombing would have ended the Middle East problem.

Hargrove: George Bush was with you on that, wasn’t he?

Deaver: Yes, I suppose. You mean after it happened? Yes. And so was Shultz, as it ultimately turned out, because I called George when Reagan—

Hargrove: Yes, George Shultz, I meant to say.

Deaver: Yes, Reagan picked up the phone and called [Menachem] Begin, and then I really didn’t—I thought I was just having a conversation. I went over to the other phone and said to Shultz, “You better get over here because Reagan’s on the phone to Begin, and I hear what I just said to him.” And Shultz just said, “Thank God.”

Young: You reported in your book, right after the conversation with Begin, Reagan saying to you, “I didn’t know I had that kind of power.” Was that a moment of discovery for Reagan?

Deaver: No, I don’t think so. It was just a joke, an aside.
**Young:** You later said—this is after you left the White House, this is a passage from your book—this is the question of aid to the Contras. You’re citing some cases of disagreement you had with the President, the lie detector tests, the [Aviv] Shiron campaign in Lebanon, and you said, “It was by necessity that I found myself trying to be a moderating influence on Ronald Reagan. He needed no reinforcement from the right.” Months after leaving office you reached the President on the phone, or else talking with him, and you quote—this is a quote from your book—“I worked four and a half years to keep the right-wingers from getting you out front on this Central American issue.” And then you say you laid it out for him, what you think it will cost him, it’s the wrong issue at the wrong time. And you don’t prevail. “The President said, ‘No, no, I have to do it. I believe in it.’” Part of the story, however, of the Contras that the public has heard, is that the President was gulled into this. And so, “I believe in it”? Or was it something that Ollie North and the—

**Deaver:** I think what Reagan was talking about there was aiding the Contras. What the public may be believing that he was “gulled into”—if that’s the right word—is trading the hostages to help the Contras. I think he was committed to the Contra issue and helping them in whatever way he could. I think that moved to this disastrous policy that they ended up with, and I think this is before the trading of hostages. What that is about is the first day of my life in the White House when Jim Baker said to me, “We can never let this thing get out of hand,” and I thought it was. There were a lot of people in the National Security Council who wanted to aid the Contras, and I think Reagan bought that. I think of the outside fundraising for the Contras, he was all-supportive. That’s where Oliver North and some of these other shady outside people were. I don’t think Reagan was ever shady.

A lot of that was happening when I was in the White House, and it escalated when I got out. And then it ultimately moved to Bud McFarlane being involved in the hostage issue. This is before the hostage issue. I still think I was right, from a political standpoint. Reagan was committed to that.

**Young:** Nancy Reagan was—

**Deaver:** I don’t think Nancy Reagan—Maybe she knew.

**Young:** Did she weigh in on that?

**Deaver:** On the Contras? No, she wouldn’t have weighed in on the Contras.

**Hargrove:** But she weighed in on Don Regan, getting him out.

**Deaver:** She sure did. Sure. But, as I said in the very beginning of this, she would weigh in when she thought somebody was hurting the President, or Ronald Reagan. And, of course, Don Regan hung up on her twice, so that was enough to get her going.

**Hargrove:** Could he have protected the President? He argued he was not privy to what Poindexter was doing.

**Deaver:** What is his job? That was my point. Where does the buck stop? It stops with the President, but particularly in the Reagan White House, it also stopped with the Chief of Staff, at
least it had when I was there. And I think when Baker left—the whole problem that we had that whole time was Baker saying, “We’ve got to have some systems in this place. Everybody has to report through a system.” Clark saying, “No way.” Clark telling Poindexter and McFarlane, “Don’t ever let the Chief of Staff run foreign policy because he doesn’t know anything.” Regan coming in, and probably feeling a bit insecure about all of this, and Bud—or Poindexter or whoever it was, Poindexter more than likely—running over him. But that’s the first conversation, as I said, I ever had in the White House, and it was good advice. It is today.

Jones: Wasn’t there also a difference between Baker and Regan as Chief of Staff in this regard, illustrated by his right away taking you aside to prevent the buck from moving to the President? And so a more proactive role in what’s going on here and making certain that—

Deaver: That’s exactly right. Baker was trying to protect the President, and it was a lot better to get a political evaluation of a strategic move than just having it go directly in without getting any input—What’s Congress going to say on this? Or what’s the Washington Post going to do with this?

Riley: Did Bill Casey ever circumvent this process or was he—

Deaver: Probably every chance he got. You know, Bill Casey, or the Director of the Central Intelligence, and the Attorney General of the United States, I think, under statute, have the right to see the President at any time. At least that’s what I was told. So whenever Bill Smith called and wanted an appointment with the President, he got it. And anytime Bill Casey called—he didn’t even call me—he just called the President’s secretary, and got it. Every time that happened, I would always go in right afterwards and say, “How’d the meeting go? Is there anything I should know? Anything I can follow up on?” And I’d usually get the gist of the meeting. There was nobody to do that after I left.

Riley: Exactly.

Knott: When Don Regan comes over to take the Chief of Staff position, I think you mentioned this morning you felt a little bit of guilt later on, that the old team was leaving the President by himself. Was there any talk at that time of bringing somebody in?

Deaver: No.

Knott: So you, even at this time you might have had some qualms about the—

Deaver: I didn’t, because I had to get out of there. I was a sick guy. I think we talked in my office about this. Today, I would have probably gone and got treatment, and it would have been fine. I mean, we have a television show where we have an alcoholic, a recovering guy, who’s Chief of Staff in the White House. But I didn’t understand all that, and I didn’t understand my disease. I was just sick, and I wanted to get out of there. I spent almost two weeks at Georgetown Hospital with kidney failure, and I just had to get out of there. So no, I knew it was not a good idea, but let somebody else worry about it for a while. I did it for 25 years.

Riley: So there was not anybody there who really was filling the kinds of roles that you had filled for the Reagans—
Deaver: Nancy, that was it. And she wasn’t there, I mean, she was—

Hargrove: Did Jim Baker understand what he was suggesting?

Deaver: I don’t know. I have never talked to Jim about it.

Jones: But he was going to leave.

Deaver: Well, you know, interestingly enough about Jim, you remember when there was this idea that Baker would become National Security Advisor and I’d become Chief of Staff?

Young: Yes.

Deaver: And the Meese, Casey—because Casey never forgave Baker for the “papergate,” if you remember that, of the campaign.

Knott: The briefing books?

Deaver: Yes, the briefing books, which fell on Casey, because Baker got everything cleaned up. Clark, Meese, Casey, Weinberger—it was all set. Reagan had agreed to it, had the press release. And he goes to the National Security meeting, and Baker and I had thought, “Should we go to that meeting or not? No, it’s better if we don’t go.” Well, on the way to the National Security briefing, the President shows Clark the press release. Clark pulls Weinberger out of the National Security, Casey out of the National Security, and there’s this huge brouhaha.

Reagan comes back from the National Security briefing and starts to tell me about this serious problem. He had no idea, and I said, “Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. Before you go any further, let me get Jimmy in here. He ought to hear this.” So Baker and I are standing there—it’s now about 6:30 or 7 o’clock at night. Reagan is telling us about this problem he’s got. And I remember I’m standing a little bit behind Baker, and I’m thinking to myself, “Goddamn, here we go again. First it was Sears, and now it’s this.” I didn’t really want to be—honest to God, I didn’t want to be Chief of Staff. Baker had talked me into it—because I said I didn’t want to be Chief of Staff, never wanted to be Chief of Staff—saying, “It’ll be great. I’ll be down in the National Security room. You’ll be up here. It’ll be just like it is today.”

But then when it looked like the President was backing down on it, I was getting mad. I was thinking, you know, Come on, I’ve been around here for 20 years. All of a sudden I heard Jimmy Baker say, “Mr. President, when I came here, I said I’d do whatever you wanted me to do. Don’t you worry about it. Don’t you worry about it. I don’t have to do this. I’ll be whatever you want me to be as long as you want me to be.” I said, “God, what kind of a jerk am I?” Here’s Baker, he’s only been here three years, and he’s being what an American is supposed to be. He’s loyal. I’ve never forgotten that.

Young: That’s interesting.

Deaver: The President went to Camp David immediately, and they all weighed in all weekend long, Jeane Kirkpatrick and all these people. It was the best thing that ever happened. Can you
imagine if I’d become Chief of Staff with the problems I had? It would have been awful. So, like Reagan, I believe in destiny.

Riley: What kind of relationship did he have with George Bush?

Deaver: Good, superb. I think Bush was the only guy that I really think, besides Nancy, including me, that he thought he could talk to securely. He used Bush as a sounding board. They had that lunch every week, and never once was there ever a word out of any of those lunches. You know, when we were having such a problem in getting the President to deal with the Regan issue, I remember calling George—I was out of the White House—and saying, “You’ve got to go tell him.” And he said, “He’s the President of the United States.” “Get off it. Of course, he’s the President of the United States, but he needs your help. He listens to you.” He said, “For that very reason, I’m not going to tell him who he’s going to have for his Chief of Staff.”

So, I think maybe Reagan was disappointed in the Bush presidency to some extent, but when he was his Vice President, I think he was extremely pleased with the choice, never regretted it, thought George was very loyal. As I say in my book, when the President was shot, I was so impressed with the way Bush handled himself, never seated in the President’s seat at the Cabinet table. Never having his picture taken in a position where it could be misinterpreted that he was taking over. Very loyal guy.

Jones: Getting a copy of the Succession Act over to Al Haig—

Deaver: Poor Al Haig. You know, as many difficulties as I had with him, and you know, I was the guy who was supporting Al Haig in the White House for a long time, because I was convinced that politically it would be terrible if Reagan lost his Secretary of State the first year. I mean, here was a guy who didn’t know anything about foreign policy, and he can’t even keep a Secretary of State. So Larry Eagleburger and I used to talk five times a day, trying to keep Al Haig happy, which was a full time job for both of us.

But that day, Al Haig’s problem was—first of all, he’d had a triple bypass—and he raced up the stairs from the National Security Room to the Press Room. If somebody had just stopped him and said, “General, catch your breath for a second here before you go in.” It wasn’t what he said, it was the way he said it. Once again, it was the impression. He was out of breath, and he said, “I am in control here.” Obviously he wasn’t even in control of his own body.

Jones: He looked panicky.

Deaver: Yes, but he was because he’d run up the stairs, trying to beat Cap from getting up there first.

Hargrove: In my interview with you, which was mostly on transition, first hundred days and that kind of thing, you did mention surprise when Bush became President about some of the animosity between Bush folks and the Reagan folks and Bush’s becoming President and forming his government.

Deaver: Well, there was, yes. I wasn’t around, obviously. The Reagan people who’d served the President were asked to clean out their desks by midnight and all this kind of stuff, which I
thought was not—I understand it’s a new broom. I think somebody had convinced George Bush
that he had to make a clean break. So they threw out all of the Reagan people, and he made that,
what I thought was a stupid statement politically, about “kinder, gentler.” Most people voted for
George Bush, in my opinion, because they thought they were getting a third Reagan term. Why
would you want to make this that different? Sure, you need to put your own stamp on it, but he
had lots of opportunities in the four years to do that. Did. Didn’t have to do it the first 24 hours.

Hargrove: But the Reagan people interpreted that statement as—

Deaver: No question about it. And you know, Reagan had been extremely generous to the Bush
people, so-called Bush people. There were a lot of Bush people in key positions in the Reagan
administration, much to the chagrin of the Reaganites.

Jones: Now, George Shultz and Cap Weinberger are both carrying out presidential policies with
relation to the Soviet Union, and yet they feuded all the time. But the President could cope. Was
he unhappy about it, or how did he approach that? Was it working towards his purposes?

Deaver: I think when it came to the Soviet Union, George won over the National Security
Council and over DoD. But George was very unhappy that the President didn’t cave at
Reykjavik. And it’s one of those little Reagan stories, the Reagan luck, that six months later he
 got the whole thing. How many Presidents wouldn’t have caved? How many Presidents wouldn’t
have said, “I’ll take what the last eight Presidents would have given their right arm for.” And
Reagan’s reason for it is even more interesting to me. It is this bond he’s got with the American
people, he thinks. He gets in the car, and George says, “I don’t believe this”—I’m
paraphrasing—“You could have had what the last eight Presidents—what the Hell?” And
Reagan said, “I made a promise to the American people about the shield.”

Go ask a thousand Americans, “Are you counting on him to keep Star Wars?” I don’t think so.
But Reagan said, “I promised them this. I couldn’t give up on this.”

Hargrove: This is the elusive quality of his personality that I can’t quite capture.

Deaver: Well, I’ll tell you, Richard Reeves is writing a book on Reagan. He was in to see me. I
said to him that I’d read his book on Nixon and Kennedy, and they were both about the dark side
of these two guys, and that there is no dark side about Reagan to write about. He said, “I don’t
know how he did it. That’s what I writing about.”

Hargrove: Very elusive.

Deaver: I’ve never figured out whether that was by design, or whether that was just who he was.
I think it was who he was. One of my favorite stories about Reagan is this time after the shooting
when we were in the Oval Office at 11 o’clock at night. There was some national security thing
that kept us going, and everybody had left. He was picking up his papers, and I decided I’d walk
over to the residence with him. I looked at him, and he looked a hundred years old, and I
thought, God, he’s never going to be the same. And he kind of hunched over and had these
folders in his arms. The Secret Service guy opened the French doors, and it’s like the hospital
story, when he got through the frame of the door and got to the other side and collapsed. When
he got outside on the Colonnades there in the Rose Garden—it’s 11 o’clock at night, there’s not a
soul anywhere near except Secret Service agents—he throws his shoulders back, strides over to the—because of the curtain. He gained 20 years by stepping across. He was on.

Jones: The role of a lifetime. That's a great title.

Deaver: That's right, really.

Young: You’ve got other things to do, and I want to thank you for a very enlightening day. I hope you think it’s worthwhile, what you were saying—

Deaver: I hope when I see it—

Young: Well, you’re free to add to it, I’ll put it that way. Please don’t take out very much. We’ll have a transcript for you in a few months. We have a little bit of a backlog. Nobody else will see it until you have said okay.