



a report from

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Notes

A New President, A New Decade

On the presidential campaign trail in 1976, I found myself keeping a speaking engagement in the South, and unexpectedly sharing the podium with a former governor of California. We were introduced, shook hands, exchanged brief but pleasant remarks and completed our respective parts of the program.

That was my first meeting with Ronald Reagan. I'm sure we will be meeting again over the course of the next four years, and I hope we get to know each other a bit better.

President Reagan is the sixth man to occupy the White House during my 20 years in Washington. Since 1961, three Democrats -- John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Jimmy Carter -- and three Republicans -- Richard Nixon, Gerald R. Ford and now, Ronald Reagan -- all have sat in the Oval Office.

Among my proudest possessions are personal letters from each man, from Kennedy through Carter, usually thanking me for my help in some endeavor of mutual interest.

I have had political differences with every President, but these differences have never degenerated to bitterness or hatred. That kind of poison helps no one, benefits nothing. A good, healthy exchange of ideas, and a big dash of compromise, can accomplish much, much more.

I have been privileged to have been invited to the White House by five Presidents since 1961. A couple of times there were private chats over coffee or lunch. Usually, others were present. But in either case, the meetings always afforded a change to get things done for Arizona that otherwise might not have been possible.

A special niche of my memory is reserved for my meeting with Jack Kennedy. He was the first President to invite me to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and a special excitement charged the air in those days of the New Frontier.

Having been born and raised in the Southwest, I think I had a better understanding of Lyndon Johnson than many of my colleagues in those days. His was a time of bright promise that ended with dashed dreams and bitter divisions all across the country.

I met Richard Nixon on several occasions during his Presidency and helped him enact major legislation. But Richard Nixon was not an especially warm person, and I don't know that he had any close personal friends. At any rate, I wouldn't describe our relationship as close. But it was always cordial.

Jerry Ford was a different matter. President Ford was a "man of the House," having spent a good part of his life as a Republican congressman from Michigan and as the Minority Leader for his party. While on opposite sides of the aisle in the House of Representatives, we got to know each other fairly well, sometimes talking or joking with one another. He was an absolutely dedicated public servant and our friendship continues today.

During the administration of Jimmy Carter, I talked with the President often. We once attended a basketball game together, coming and going in Army One, the presidential helicopter. (We had no trouble with seats or parking.) President Carter was an intelligent, dedicated man who wanted to do a good job. Like Lyndon Johnson, he became a victim of events.

* * *

It's my hope that I'll get to know President Reagan as I have been able to know the other five men who have gone before him in that tough job. I hope we can work together when we agree and share honest differences openly and frankly when we disagree.

In the weeks and months ahead, President Reagan will be sending his legislative proposals to Capitol Hill. Congress will begin the long and laborious task of examining and debating each one, voting some into law and some out the door.

When I'm convinced this Administration is on the right track, it will have my support. And when there is disagreement, the White House will know why.

* * *

A few days after the 1980 election, a Washington reporter asked me to analyze the results, to tell him what it all meant.

My answer, tongue in cheek, was that the Republicans got more votes than the Democrats.

But I'm not going to play political analyst in this limited space. First, I have no magic insights and second, by now, most Americans have heard or read more election analyses than they either want or need.

However, I do have a few thoughts on a trend that we seem to have become locked into. In keeping with the theme of this newsletter, I have some mental "notes" about this election, and our political process in general, that I want to share. To begin, let me back up a bit.

We have developed a "national mind-set" about a couple of aspects of modern politics. The first of these may have begun with the defeat of my good friend Barry Goldwater, when he ran for President in 1964.

It was after Senator Goldwater's crushing loss that there was a rush to write the "political obituary" of the Republican Party.

When George McGovern went down to defeat in 1972, there was the same rush to write the same obituary for the Democratic Party.

And the obituaries resurfaced when Richard Nixon was forced to resign the Presidency in 1974. Once again, the Republican Party was declared dead.

It seems to matter little that history has proved each obituary to be quite premature. But the "mind-set" persists and every four years we are treated to it anew.

A more recent development has been the "we're-in-for-trouble-because-we're-doomed- to-have-a-string-of-one-term-presidents" line. This is based on the fact that no president since Dwight D. Eisenhower has managed to serve two full terms in the White House and retire after eight years in a quiet, ordinary way.

It is true we have gone through this for about 20 years now. But it's also true that in the early days of our country, the one-term president was more the rule than the exception. Many early Presidents accepted their nominations as a call to public service. The thought of campaigning to keep the job for another four years was unthinkable to most. There was nothing unusual about a president stepping down after a single term of office.

Some early presidents, in fact, put little stock in the importance of the Oval Office. Thomas Jefferson directed that his tombstone at Monticello be engraved with three achievements he considered his life's greatest accomplishments. Being President of the United States was not one of the three.

Harry Truman served a part of Franklin Roosevelt's last term of office. He was elected, on his own, only once. Yet today, he is among our most respected Presidents, not a man discounted because he was elected on his own but a single time.

In the case of our contemporary single-term presidents, tragic, special and even accidental circumstances have influenced their tenure more than anything else.

John F. Kennedy's administration ended tragically in Dallas in 1963, when the young president was murdered by a hidden assassin.

Lyndon B. Johnson chose retirement over the prospect of a difficult reelection campaign in the middle of an unpopular and highly divisive war.

Richard M. Nixon, facing impeachment by the Congress, chose resignation in the wake of the Watergate scandal.

Gerald R. Ford, who, fairly or unfairly, was dubbed by many a "president by accident," fell victim to an anti-Washington sentiment that had been pushed along to some extent by the Nixon shortcomings.

Jimmy Carter fell victim to inflation and trouble overseas. He was a good and decent man who tried his best.

* * *

There was mentioned earlier in this newsletter of what the election last November "really meant." Aside from the obvious defeats and victories, Southern Arizonans had some messages:

- * Clearly, Americans want a healthy economy that allows our people to plan for the future.
- * Efficiency in government and in government programs. If a program isn't working, then it should be discarded. If a program is working, let's see that it works well. Above all, let's make certain that programs promote the broad public purpose and not stifle progress.
- * Cut away at areas where government has been intrusive or heavy-handed.
- * Eliminate useless or conflicting and overlapping regulation.
- * Insure that America has a strong and adequate defense.

Those goals are easy to endorse. I haven't heard anyone argue that we should work for a weak defense, for over-regulation, that our privacy needs intruding. Or that government should be inefficient or our economy unhealthy.

The election said a few other things, too. Among them:

- * Let's treat our ill, disabled and aged fairly and with dignity and respect.
- * A balanced approach to conservation and development of our natural resources is essential.
- * Let's have decisions that help and not hinder free enterprise.
- * Let's restore American leadership in the world.

From what I've heard and read, President Reagan agrees with each of those statements. Already, he has promised not to cut the fundamental features of Social Security. In his recently-declared federal hiring freeze, there was a subsequent clarification that agencies that perform "vital services" would not be touched. A couple of weeks ago, the White House went one further, and released a list of 7 major programs that would not be cut. The President and I agree that the truly needy, infirm and aged do need caring for.

* * *

America in the 1980s is at the gates of an historic period. For all of this country's life we have had it comparatively easy. Resources were so abundant we thought they could never run out. We made progress on a scale that we believed uniquely American -- and a lot of it was.

But beginning in 1973, the Arabs suddenly and jarringly reminded us how much we had relied on cheap energy. A lot of what we had done was made possible with cheap energy, and cheap energy became history.

While I've been harping about all of this for the past several years, I may have been negligent in telling you the good news. And there is some to be told.

- * For example: people today are conserving energy at a rate unexpected before the call to conservation, and are responding to higher energy prices at a much greater clip than expected.
- * Exxon now forecasts that the nation's demand for oil will be 5 million barrels below the forecast of a year ago.

- * Coal production in the United States is now 300 million tons greater than our annual coal production 20 years ago.
- * Texaco now believes gasoline consumption is expected to decline by half, to 4.2 million barrels a day, by 2000. And virtually all of that savings is due to smaller cars. Our total mileage is down by only 1 percent!
- * Between 1972 and 1978, heating oil consumption in this country declined by 20 percent and natural gas, by 18 percent.

There is more to the list, but those are some of the more impressive points. I think it's some of the best news I've read in years. Clearly, we are making real progress. All the indications are that we will do still better as time goes by. Our progress is slow and not always readily visible. But it is solid.

* * *

As promised, this newsletter this time around has been a collection of notes -- thoughts on the election, on the presidency, on public service, the economy, government and the current status of our battle with the energy problem.

If there is a message, it is this: let's enter the 80s in a mood of determination and not desperation. If there is cause for concern, there is no cause for panic.

As in the case of the "obituaries" of both our political parties, let us not be too quick to believe the worst.

Uncle Sam is rolling up his sleeves. We can all lend a hand.



Rep. Morris K. Udall
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
Official Business



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Morris K. Udall", written in a cursive style.

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