
Interview with Pat Butler

The interview was conducted by David Welborn in Washington DC on March 4, 1993

Audio cassette 28
DW: This is a continuation of the interview with Pat Butler. We are once again in his offices at Legislative on North Capitol Street in Washington, D.C. The date is March the 4th, and I’m still David Welborn. When you were working for Baker in that 1979-1980 period, technically which staff were you a part of?

PB: I was on the Republican Leader’s staff.

DW: You were on the Leader’s staff.

PB: I was special assistant to the Republican Leader.

DW: Did you have any working relationship with the Policy Committee?

PB: I had one earlier; I had one in 1977 after I’d finished working for President Ford on his transition staff and before I went to New York to be director of public relations for Bristol-Myers. I was with the Policy Committee staff for about three months, doing work for Senator Baker principally, but also for other members of the Republican membership of the Senate.

DW: What did the role of the Policy Committee seem to be at that time?

PB: It was chaired at the time by John Tower and the staff director was Max Fridersdorf, and we functioned principally as an in-house think tank, basically, not so much to bind Republican senators to any one policy or point of view but to give them some various options and explain how they might be presented to the public and how compromise might be struck and that sort of thing. It was sort of an in-house policy wonk shop, which had a lot of good people working there at the time, who’ve gone on to other things. Bill Gribbin I think of, for example, who was then one of the policy analysts who went on to become Dan Quayle’s assistant for legislative affairs when Quayle was Vice President. There were a number of other people there at the time.

DW: Do you know where Gribbin is now?

PB: He’s somewhere in the Senate; I don’t know where he has wound up. That’s where he wanted to be, once he left the Vice President’s office, but I don’t know exactly what office he wound up in.

DW: Of course you were on the Policy Committee staff just for a short period of time, and Tower, my recollection is, became Chairman in 1977 so he was becoming acclimated, too. Do you recall what Tower’s view of the committee was?

PB: He viewed it, insofar as I remember now, this is a long time ago, but he viewed it as a service organization for the membership. He was not intent, as far as I was concerned, on imposing any sort of rigid orthodoxy on the Republican senators. He was happy, for example, to bring me in on Baker’s recommendation, but also because he and I had known each other from my days with President Ford as sort of an all-purpose advisor and
speech writer and so forth for any Republican who wanted those kinds of services. And I would find myself working for Jacob Javits one day and John Heinz the next day and Jesse Helms the next day and Bob Dole the next day and Howard Baker every day. It was a very ecumenical sort of environment, at least as far as I was concerned.

DW: Tower did not view the chairmanship as a, in any major sense at any rate, a major resource for the exercise of his personal influence.

PB: Oh, I wouldn’t say that, but it may not be in the way you’re thinking. Again, he was not trying to make people see everything his way, but he was trying to be as helpful in as many ways and to get as many chits with as many people as he could, which was smart and he was very clever about it.

DW: I’m glad to have those observations. We left off last time after having discussed the announcement and the Maine caucus and the disappointment there. As I recollect, the next focus of the campaign was Iowa, once the caucus season got started. What do you remember about campaigning in Iowa?

PB: I didn’t really do very much in Iowa. My focus became New Hampshire, because the Iowa, Iowa being a caucus state, it was more of an organizational effort and making sure you got out your votes and people to come to the living room they were supposed to come to at the appointed hour. That was more of a Don Sundquist operation and they didn’t need, as I recall this, they didn’t need very much of my particular expertise there. I was detailed to start thinking about what we were going to do in New Hampshire and how we were going to sell ourselves up there and what the best points to make were for a New Hampshire audience where we had to contend with Ronald Reagan and George Bush and John Connolly and a cast of thousands, all very good, and Bob Dole, all very good candidates in their own right.

DW: What did you do in regard to New Hampshire? I assume you started working in December, or had you started before then?

PB: Thinking about New Hampshire in particular, I guess that started around December, and what we were trying to do was to come up with a collection of policy issues and personal issues that he could be comfortable with, that he could use in a coffee klatch environment or in making a big speech at a Rotary Club in Manchester, whatever. So we spent a fair amount of time in December and January trying to refine all those things and also to put together a media plan where we could have him and where others could go on his behalf to radio stations, to television stations, doing the local talk show circuit and editorial boards and that sort of thing. Our basic pitch was that we were happy to take the pledge, as one is required to do in New Hampshire, that you don’t want higher taxes, which we did not want; we were in favor of tax cuts also, maybe not to the extent that Ronald Reagan was, but we thought they were advantageous. We were talking about a strong defense, we were talking about getting the country out of energy dependence on foreign oil, and we were talking about how Baker himself was the best all-around candidate to do what people in New Hampshire and people around the rest of the country would want
done, based on his experience and based on his personality. He wound up sort of selling himself; there used to be the line about DeGaulle [sic] that he offered himself as a gift to the nation, and that was in a way, in a subtle way, what Baker was doing also. Here I am, you all know me from Watergate days and the Senate leadership and so forth, and this is what I believe, and let’s do it. So that was the gist of the New Hampshire effort and for whatever other efforts we made that year.

DW: How much time did you spend in New Hampshire?

PB: I spent a lot; I moved up there, effectively, for the last several weeks of that campaign. I would be going around doing interviews and also hanging out at the New Hampshire campaign headquarters in Concord. A bunch of us volunteered to go up and we all stayed at the New Hampshire Highway Hotel in Concord, which was a short distance from campaign headquarters. We were in a store front up there, on the main street of Concord, I’ve forgotten what it is now. We had one-half of this store front and Lyndon LaRouche had the other half, and we shared a bathroom with him in the back. It was a little bit scary, because some of them carried guns, which wasn’t something that had occurred to us. It was an interesting time. In effect, you have to go up there, and lots of people from Tennessee came up there to do the retail politics that New Hampshire expects.

DW: Who was his campaign manager in New Hampshire?

PB: We had – I’m getting this confused with Vermont, we had Governor Snelling in Vermont. I guess Tom Rath was our guy in New Hampshire. We also had a Governor, I’ve forgotten who it was, it’s getting to be a long time ago. We had a good piece of the leadership up there. Rudman was helping us, Sununu was sort of sitting this one out, as I recall.

DW: This was really before he became a major figure in [New Hampshire politics].

PB: He was active in the party, but he hadn’t been Governor yet, that’s right. I guess this was a Rudman enterprise.

DW: How much time, roughly speaking, did Baker spend up there?

PB: A good bit. That would be hard to say, but he was up there many days in the weeks just before the balloting. Our perennial problem was that the senator was very conscientious about doing his work here. I may told you in some earlier conversation that he was keenly aware that he was the highest ranking Republican in the country, he’s got a Democratic president, a Democratic majority in the Senate and in the House, and if he weren’t here, he was afraid they would unbolt the desks on the Republican side and do away with them, so, he spent more time here than is prudent for a presidential candidate to spend in Washington, just because he was trying to fulfill his obligations. But having said that, he was in New Hampshire quite a lot, although not to the extent that Reagan and Bush were because they had no other obvious means of employment at the time.
DW: How did he seem to go over, as a southern Republican, with the New Hampshire Republican voters?

PB: He didn’t go over as a southern Republican, he went over as the hero of Watergate, which sort of cut two ways as it always did with Republican audiences. He went over as the guy who had helped engineer the Panama Canal treaties, which is another thing that was not particularly popular in conservative New Hampshire, although they didn’t know much about the issue; they just knew he was on the other side from Ronald Reagan on this issue. But, in personal terms, he went over very well. His campaigning style was really quite well adapted to New Hampshire politics. They like the personal touch, and he’s a very congenial fellow in one-on-one kinds of situations. What he would like to do, when he spoke to the Rotary Club for example, was not to spew out a lot of applause lines which would whip up the crowd but to get them to listen to him. He much prefers a totally quiet audience to one that’s raising the roof. He wants them to listen to what he’s saying and applaud him at the end. And they were doing that, they were very respectful to him personally and of his position here and of what he was saying. He had the refreshing absence of cant that first attracted me to him in 1964, when he first ran for the Senate, and he seemed to be talking straight and dealing with big issues that they were concerned with. So I think in personal terms he was doing very well. As I recall, Doug Bailey had put together some really first-rate television advertising that reinforced that; it was a lot of Baker talking into the camera in informal kinds of situations, which showed the Senator off to his best effect. I thought overall we had put together a pretty appealing package for the people of New Hampshire. What we had not put together was an effective organization. When a bunch of us went up there, I guess toward the end of January 1980, we were way behind in the polls, I mean way behind. I think we were in single digits or something, and it was apparently the expectation that Baker’s aura was just going to win all this on its own and that was just not going to happen, obviously. So a bunch of us descended on New Hampshire and started doing the blocking and tackling and phone banks and walking tours and all the rest of it that one had to do. By the end, four weeks later, let us say, we were up, I forget what our final total was, 21, 23 percent, something like that, and we came in third. Had we started that campaign in earnest a good deal before that, we’d at least have come in second, in my estimation. Beating Ronald Reagan, I would say in hindsight, was going to be a very difficult proposition going in, but nobody knew that or thought that at the time. It was thought, on the contrary, that here is an old extremist politician who had seen his best days and who was not going to be the cock of the walk anymore. Ha ha!

DW: Have those of you who participated in the enterprise ever sat around and speculated as to what would have happened subsequently if Baker had managed to come in second?

PB: Oh, sure. We would have gone south and we would have done very well, I think. We would have had the Big Mo behind us and the next set of primaries were all going to be in places where we were very comfortable and where we had at least the beginnings of some good organizations. Baker was particularly interested in campaigning in South Carolina, for example, where Strom Thurmond was going to be a big help to him. We had lots of good financial support from New York. Jesse Helms was going to help us in
North Carolina. The funny thing is that Jesse and the Senator were on opposite sides of the Panama Canal issue, for example, but in personal terms they got along splendidly and had a lot of respect for each other. Senator Helms is the epitome of the courtly southern gentleman, in personal terms; the guy you actually see bears little resemblance, if any, to the image that he portrays around the country. He’s a fine man in personal terms, and does all kinds of wonderful things for people on a one-on-one basis. He and Baker have just always been friends based on that personal bond. I think you can say that looking at the campaign schedule map, if we’d won in New Hampshire, or even if we’d come in a close second in New Hampshire, we could have turned south and given Ronald Reagan a real run for his money, at least.

DW: On election eve, what were you realistic assessments of the size of the Baker vote, do you recall?

PB: We thought we’d probably come in second, thought we might come in second, anyway. We knew that Bush was running hard. We knew that Reagan was going to win the primary by then, certainly, but we thought we might have a good chance to be number two. The story that we were intending to spin the next day was that we’d come from literally nowhere four weeks earlier to being right on Reagan’s heels.

DW: What was the atmosphere at headquarters, or wherever all of you congregated on election night, as the votes came in?

PB: Well, it was a bit of a disappointment because here was Bush getting in our way again, as he had done in Maine, and we were sort of kicking ourselves also for not having gotten up there to New Hampshire earlier than we had to do the kinds of things that we did. Again, if we’d done them a few weeks, if we’d started a few weeks prior to when we did, there might have been a very different story. We were sort of kicking each other and whoever else was around for not kicking off that organizational effort a bit earlier.

DW: Was money a problem in New Hampshire?

PB: No, at least not that I was aware of. We had Ted Welch and others, who were very good at raising money, working with us. I don’t remember having a lack of money to go on television and that sort of thing. It really was more that we had started too late.

DW: How did Baker himself take the result?

PB: With his usual equanimity, but clearly he was disappointed in the outcome and was frustrated, as were the rest of us, by the fact that this could have gone a good deal better than it went. There was some reassessment going on about where this was going to go and how much of a chance we really were going to have, given Reagan’s overpowering victory in New Hampshire, and where things were going to go. So he said, “Let’s turn south and see how we can do there for a while, and then we’ll reassess after a few more weeks of this.” It didn’t take too many weeks after that, I’ve forgotten exactly when he withdrew, it might have been, what, two weeks, three weeks, something like that?
Where he just said, “I’m not going to win this; there’s no, I don’t want to continue to be slogging out here with no realistic chance of winning the nomination. Let’s just cut this while we’ve still got some dignity intact,” and so forth. So that’s what he did.

DW: How long was it after that that he endorsed Reagan, do you recall?

PB: I believe he endorsed Reagan in, it was just before the Pennsylvania primary, I recall that was in April, but I’m not sure about that. But I am sure it was just before the Pennsylvania primary, and the Bush people were really quite upset with us for the Senator’s decision to endorse Reagan rather than Bush, which they had sort of been counting on. But the senator’s calculation was that Reagan was going to win anyway, he was going to win the nomination anyway, whether he actually won Pennsylvania or not. Baker had become convinced by then that Reagan was not what everybody had thought he was to begin with, that he was a credible candidate who could be a good president, and he thought he might as well go ahead and help the eventual nominee win the nomination.

DW: Was he subjected to political pressures coming from the Reagan and Bush camps for his, perhaps pressure is not the right word, but importunings coming from the Reagan and Bush camps for his endorsement, or was he sort of let alone to --

PB: No, I wouldn’t say he was let alone. I would say he was, after he withdrew, he was the subject of considerable importuning from everybody. This was not the easiest decision he ever made, either, because a lot of the people in this race were long-time friends of his, among other things, and it was a tough decision. One decision he could have made was just to leave the thing alone entirely, not endorse anybody and let the campaign play itself out, but he thought it would be better to try to start building momentum for a win in November which was, after all, the point of the exercise and to be as big and as constructive a player in that effort as could be, as soon as he could be one. So that was the basis of his decision to endorse Reagan before Pennsylvania.

DW: How did he see George Bush in the context of the fight for the Republican nomination? How did he evaluate him?

PB: It’s a little difficult to describe that. I would say that, two or three things. One: Baker thought that he was at least one of the best; that he, Baker, was one of the best qualified people to serve as President, given everything he had done in his career, his Senate leadership and so forth. He thought Reagan, having been Governor of the largest state for eight years, also had a similar claim. He saw Bush, as many people saw Bush at that time, as somebody who had held a lot of staff jobs, being appointed by Nixon and Ford to a variety of important positions but they were all appointive positions, and having served two terms in Congress a long time before as not being as good a preparation for the presidency as what he had and Reagan had. And maybe some others had in the race. I don’t want to ascribe this to Baker directly, but there was a feeling held by at least some of us in that campaign, who had known Bush in the Ford administration for example, that here was a guy who sat in the room, around the table or behind the table with some of the rest of us, and here he was running for president! And wasn’t that sort of interesting, the
way American politics can thrust people into the middle of things who wouldn’t be your
natural choices. I think there was a little bit of that to Baker, but generally speaking, I
think he and Bush had known each other for a very long time, they’d come to Congress at
the same time, Baker to the Senate and Bush to the House; their wives got along well, it
was a very friendly relationship, but it was, you get to the point where you’re rivals at
that level of politics and you are forced to think, “I am better qualified than he is, and
that’s why I’m running, and there’s that.”

DW: Dole was a candidate that year, wasn’t he?

PB: Yes, Dole was a miserable candidate that year. Dole was just, Dole, having run for Vice
President in 1976 and having been widely blamed for at least a share of the Ford loss, I
think he was interested in, one, redeeming his national reputation, but, two, there is a
sense in Republican politics, the sense or primogeniture: “All right, if I was the Vice
Presidential candidate last time, I ought to be the Presidential candidate this next time.”
It’s a much more structured sort of pecking order than Democrats tend to sit still for. So
he ran, and one of my jobs in this campaign was to watch the other guys work. I watched
all of them, and Dole was terrible in those days. I like Bob Dole a whole lot, but he was a
terrible campaigner in 1980 in New Hampshire. He was just not very effective. He’d get
on stage and he’d get into very arcane discussions very quickly. He knows a lot of stuff,
but he wanted to tell you everything he knew. It was situation that left people sitting on
their hands quite a lot. That was just not the right year for him. The chemistry just wasn’t
there. It was much like the situation Robert C. Byrd experienced in the same state in
1976, I guess it was, when he ran for President and was just not a credible candidate.

DW: Do you have any insights as to how Baker and Dole managed their relationship in the
Senate while they were both presidential candidates?

PB: I’m not sure how much there was to manage, frankly. Dole was not a committee
chairman at the time. He was ranking on Finance and Baker had a regular meeting of all
the ranking members of all the various committees, but it was not a situation where Baker
saw Dole as a real rival, frankly. You look at the polls, you look at the actual polling
results and Dole just wasn’t in that race. Baker was, and Bush was, and Reagan was, and
that was about it. It was not a matter, I don’t recall anyway, of having to manage a rivalry
in the Senate, much as Dole I’m sure would have wanted to be such a rival; I just don’t
think was a major factor that year.

DW: In regard to Baker’s emerging views on Reagan, were there some specific things that
Reagan did or did not do that contributed to --

PB: Sure, there was one in particular in New Hampshire which was this awful debate
situation in Nashua where Bush wanted to limit the debate to himself and Reagan and
where Reagan in an absolutely brilliant maneuver, which I believe was at least strongly
endorsed if not initiated by Nancy Reagan, who was sitting in the room and doing, she
was very good and he was superb, just insisting that they all be allowed to participate in
this debate. Bush came off as the real villain in the piece there. That’s something that a
lot of us still remember and are not inclined to forgive even these long years later. But Reagan wound up having the best of both worlds, which is another thing Baker admired. The best of both worlds in that he wanted to invite all the other candidates to participate in the debate and yet he wound up just debating Bush himself, after bringing everybody else on stage and getting them a round of applause and making Bush look awful. Baker, the politician, said later, “That was a good piece of work.” So Baker starts admiring Reagan the politician for the way that sort of thing was handled, in addition to admiring the way Reagan could move a crowd. He just found him personally appealing. He’d known Reagan a long time, too, and thought Reagan was past his prime and then decided he wasn’t.

DW: What were the effects of the presidential race on Baker? What did he take away from it?

PB: A few things, among others I won’t think of, but, for example, he didn’t like running for President. He found that out pretty early in the game. He didn’t like having to call people and ask for money. He didn’t like having to gallivant all around the country at all hours of the day and night, showing up here and there and being met by small crowds in some places and big crowds in others. A very erratic business is running for President, and that was just not his idea of a good time. As it was Hubert Humphrey’s, for example. It was often said Humphrey would have run for President even if the office hadn’t existed. He liked getting out there. That was not what Baker was interested in doing. He was interested in governing, he was interested in being President, he was interested in setting the national agenda and reconciling the country and all the rest of it, but it was not, the mechanics of running for President themselves left him quite cold. He was not in absolute despair when he pulled the plug on this campaign, because he thought, “Well, at least I don’t have to do all this stuff I don’t want to do anymore.” Having said that, though, he was very disappointed that it hadn’t gone further. He thought that it was a good time for him to run and would have been a good time for him to win, a good point in his career where he’d learned a lot and really was, genuinely felt he was the best prepared, best qualified person to serve as President in that period of time. So there was a lot of disappointment to it. I think he got a better sense of how vast this country is, how different are its interests from region to region, even from person to person, how difficult it is to govern all of these fractious and independent people, but how much fun it would be to try. He really would have preferred, I think, the British system which is if you get to be the top legislator, you are perforce the prime minister. In that kind of system he would certainly have risen to that point and would have done a superb job.

DW: What was his attitude at that time about running at some future point?

PB: He thought that if Reagan won in 1980, that he would do his best to help him win again in 1984. There was never any, after Reagan got the nomination, there was never any inclination on Baker’s part to try to be his rival in the Senate. He decided he was going to be the President’s Lieutenant and to get his program passed and to make the President look good and to succeed and to be a shoo-in for re-election in 1984. And all of that happened. So he was going to give Reagan his eight years and at the end of those eight years he was going to look at it again. Lo and behold he did, and we were looking at it
very serious in 1987, at least, probably the latter part of 1986. And we were starting to organize and we had, again, Warren Rudman and Tom Rath and all of those guys in New Hampshire who were going to help us get started, putting the money together and learning, was sort of gritting his teeth and saying, “OK, this is going to be unpleasant and I know what’s unpleasant about this, and I’m going to do it anyway.” It was a bit of a different mindset; he knew going in what he wasn’t going to like and he was going to do it anyway. But then, the President calls him in February of 87 and says, “Howard, I need you over here. I’m in a bad way,” in effect, and Baker the patriot can’t say no. So there went our presidential campaign in 88, but he was really geared up to do it, in a personal way, and we had the beginnings of a good campaign structure, a good deal better one than we had in 1980 because we were all older, we were all more experienced, and we knew what we had done wrong and what we’d done right in the earlier campaign. We were ready to do it all right this time. The opportunity just vanished with his acceptance of the Chief of Staff position.

DW: So you’re pretty certain in your own mind that if the call had not come he would have gone ahead and run.

PB: Oh, yes.

DW: Do you think, in some strange sense perhaps, that Baker welcomed the call?

PB: Well – sure. For the reasons I’ve stated, which are that he hates campaigning, at least at a national level. He loved campaigning in Tennessee, but he hated having to go through time zones and so forth. He was relieved by the call in that sense, but that’s almost a physical sense. In the political sense, I think he was not relieved. I think he would like to have made this race one more time and done better and Hopefully won what he was trying to win, which was the White House.

DW: What kind of effect, in any, did the presidential campaign experience and the implications of all that have on the kind of majority leader Baker was?

PB: I think he understood, on election night in November of 1980 that he was going to be Majority Leader because Ronald Reagan was President. Ronald Reagan brought in on his coattails at least half a dozen marginal candidates who wouldn’t have been senators had it not been for Reagan’s strong lead in their states. So Baker understood, first of all, that he was Majority Leader because these guys got elected on Ronald Reagan’s coattails and he never forgot that. He had made the decision long since, as I said, that if Reagan was going to be President, he was going to be the biggest supporter he could be. So looking at the political realities, he just saw, “Here’s a strong President who’s going to need some strong help up here, and I’m going to be that help.” He also brought from the experience of the campaign the, perhaps a deeper, broader sense of what the country was about, what it was looking for, what it was not looking for. He’d played the inside game here brilliantly, knowing how to massage and schmooze with this Senator and that, but I think he took a bit broader view of what the country really wanted having had this presidential campaign experience. That made him a better Majority Leader because he and Reagan
were fundamentally in tune on the big things that had to get done. And they got them done.

DW: What happened to you after the campaign came to a close?

PB: On the day that the Senator called his press conference and withdrew from the campaign, a half hour after the press conference, a guy called me from RCA and said, “We’d like you to come up here and be a Vice President,” and he made me an offer I couldn’t refuse and in June of that year I didn’t refuse it. I went to work at RCA in New York. I had come down here, come back down here from New York two years earlier to help the Senator with all the things that he asked for help on and substantially those were all done. The culmination was going to be the presidential campaign, and once he was out of that, it didn’t seem so compelling to me to stay around. I offered to help him as was appropriate to do in a private capacity, and I did, and as you can see I still am, but I didn’t see a need for me to stay on staff there after he withdrew from the presidential race. I probably would have stayed through the election of that year if this call hadn’t come; I wasn’t looking for a job, they came looking for me with something that just sounded terrific, so I came back to New York.

DW: Realizing that you were in New York, how much in the way of opportunity did you have to observe Baker in action as Majority Leader?

PB: Oh, quite a lot as Majority Leader, because I came back here to run government relations for RCA in 1981. I was only up there for a year then RCA transferred me back down here, and then after another year of that I decided to go into the consulting business. I had quite a lot of people who wanted some communications consulting, and I wound up with about 40 or 50 clients, I guess, and the Senator was one of them. As majority leader he had two consultant slots at his disposal, and I had one of them, so I was with him every day from 1982 until 1985 as a consultant. So it wasn’t just this two-year window I was actually on his staff, there were three more years when I was not exactly a full-time consultant but at least an every day consultant. So I got to watch him up close. I don’t know if you’ve gotten into this story about the 1980 convention in Detroit when Baker was in the final three for the vice presidential nomination again, but he had asked me to come to Detroit with him and help him with the convention, which I did. Then when he wasn’t chosen, I went back to New York before the convention was over. There had been a lot of discussion in Detroit about Baker’s possibly coming on as the running mate. We thought for at least several hours that Baker might actually get the call, mostly because, among other reasons, because at that time at least Reagan didn’t really seem to like Bush very much and didn’t like the fact that he kept challenging him after everybody else had pretty much concluded that Reagan was going to win. So we thought there was at least a good chance that Baker
might get that appointment, but I think in the end there were just too many people who had gotten Reagan where he had gotten in the very conservative wing of the party who just couldn’t forgive Baker for some of the transgressions, by their lights, on policy matters and effectively scuttled the nomination. Baker and Reagan got along very well personally, and I think Baker could have helped that ticket, which didn’t need much help as it turned out, but that would have been yet another chance for him to be vice president. The Baker vice presidential sweepstakes began in 1968, for goodness sakes, and went on right up to 1980.

DW: Who, besides you and Jim Cannon, were up there sort of having the conversations?

PB: You mean about Baker?

DW: Yes.

PB: There was… Tom Griscom was there, and, oh, who else was there? Was Ron McMahan still there? Ron may have still been there by then, yes, I guess he was. Yes, Ron was there. Who else? Gosh, it’s so hard to remember, Sundquist might have been there, I’ve just forgotten frankly.

DW: What was Baker’s own attitude about the possibility?

PB: He had sort of soured on the whole notion of running for vice president after the experience of 1976, which he likened to trying to drive a car on a sheet of ice, you just had no control over the situation, and your chances of crashing are very good. So he just declined to play the game in 1980 and said that if Governor Reagan wanted him, he knew where he was and if he got the call he would accept it, but he was not going to through a lot of gyrations to get it. That view became even more pronounced eight years later when George Bush wanted him to think about, or at least consider, the possibility of being vice president. But Baker wouldn’t even fill out the papers that year.

DW: Is that right? That was 88, the year Quayle was selected.

PB: Yes. Baker said, “I’m just not going to go thorough this again. If you want me, I’ll do it, but I’m not filling out any papers. I’m just too far along for this sort of thing.” That’s 20 years of vice presidential politics, 20 years.

DW: It does seem a bit much. Who were you and Cannon and the others talking to?

PB: We were talking to Lynn Nofzinger, we were talking to, I guess Charlie Black was involved in that, we were talking to Jim Baker, no not Jim Baker, we were talking to John Sears, we were talking to Ed Meese, Bill Clark, people like that.

DW: Were you advocating Baker or just trying to keep up with what was going on?

PB: We were answering questions. The way Baker wanted to pitch this thing, “I’m here if
they want me, I’m not campaigning for this.” So we were telling them everything about Baker that they wanted to know and all the rest of it, but it was a reactive mode we were in.

DW: And he wasn’t particularly bothered by the outcome then?

PB: Well, I think that may be overstating it. I think he would like to have been the vice presidential nominee, but given the strictures he put on himself, he was not particularly surprised by what happened. Particularly given the fact that he had had these sort of policy differences and so forth, he was not too surprised.

DW: When you came back to Washington in the consulting business and became a consultant for Baker, what did he want you to do for him?

PB: Same stuff.

DW: Writing and issues?

PB: [Thinking, yes].

DW: How much time did you physically spend in the leadership offices?

PB: Several hours a day.

DW: And did you attend all the meetings?

PB: Well, not all of them. I attended the daily senior staff meetings and other meetings as appropriate during the day. But I wasn’t there all the time, I had other business.

DW: Did you attend the leadership meetings and the chairmen’s meetings?

PB: No.

DW: What were the senior staff meetings like?

PB: They were largely given over to the traffic cop duties of the majority leader. What are we taking up today? What do we need to take up today? How do we need to get there? What kind of bridges do we need to cross before we bring something up? Why isn’t this committee ready with its legislation when they told us they would be? A lot of the mechanical nature of the job went into the staff meeting. There was also a general discussion of politics and what the White House was doing. The traditional political gossip that you just can’t get away from, it’s part of the fabric of the job. Just generally, what is the organization for the day? What do we have to respond to? What do we have to initiate? What do we have to get done today? And then we’ll do something else tomorrow. So that was the general tenor of those meetings most of the time.
DW: What was Baker’s style in the meetings?

PB: He’d sit at the head of the table and there’d be people arrayed around him down two sides of his long conference table. Usually Jim Range would be sitting at the other end of it. Jim was the legislative counsel and in effect the chief traffic cop. He’d start with, there was no particular order, but often he would start with Jim. What are we doing today? And then what are we not going to do that we planned to do? We’d have a report from Jim on that, and then Tommy would talk about what the press was doing, what they were planning to do with the press. He also had Dan Crippen in there and John Tuck and Howard Greene. Greene and Tuck were the, and Bill Hildenbrand, all three of them were the guys who managed the floor, in effect, for Baker. And Marty Gold, the parliamentarian, and Howard Liebengood, and Jim Cannon and me. There may have been a few floaters in there from time to time, but I think that was the core cast. It wasn’t so much a matter of going around the table asking everybody something, nobody would have any patience for that, but if you had something to offer, you’d always have the opportunity to bring it up. Or he would ask you if there was something on his mind. It was a good session, which had a sort of accordion-like nature to it. He would, Rob Mosbacher was also a part of that group, and he would expand it from time to time to include more people from, say Cran Montgomery and Fred Bernthal and people like that from the, what we called the Tennessee staff over here in the Dirksen Building, and then he’d add another person or two and then he’d say, “Well, this meeting’s gotten too big,” so he’d go back to the smaller group again, then they’d expand again and contract. But sometimes he would come with an agenda, you could see his scribbling, he’d have five or six things that he’s just sort of, five or six words, in effect, that he’d just scribbled out that he wanted to get some further detail on. But quite often he would just say, “Now what have we got?” And he would always be very well informed about what that was, but he wouldn’t have a, he knew exquisitely what all the senators were saying about this and that, he relied on the rest of us, Jim and so forth, to let him know what kind of mischief the staff was getting involved in, and that was an interesting and useful division of labor. He ran a good meeting. It was crisp and yet it was informal and everybody got to say whatever they wanted to say, and it was a useful exchange and it was frequently interrupted by calls from Strom Thurmond or Bob Dole or somebody else who was, a committee chairman in particular, any senator had the right to interrupt Baker at any time, on anything. That was just his code. If you really wanted to get through to him, you could, any time. Jim Baker would call him, who was by then the White House chief of staff, often during those meetings just to compare notes on, “We’re thinking about this today, what do you think?” And they got, Baker and Baker, got to be what Howard Baker called “masters of the 30-second conversation.” Jim Baker would call, you’d do your business, and you’re off. There was not a lot of folderol you had to go through. “What do you want? Okay, I can do this. Thanks a lot.”

DW: Would it be fair to say that, given the multiple channels through which information flowed to Baker, there was probably very little of any consequence going on, in and around the Senate, that he didn’t know about?

PB: I’d say that’s fair.
DW: And he probably was better informed about what was going on than any other single individual?

PB: Yes, that’s right. Ted Stevens would often be in that meeting also, and usually one of Steven’s staff people. That’s a very important point to make. Stevens was there whenever Stevens wanted to be there, which was not every day, but whenever he wanted to be there.

DW: Do you have any insight as to how Baker’s view on information as a resource for exercising influence --

PB: Yes. He used it creatively. He was not inclined to use it in the way that Lyndon Johnson would do, which was just to have some information he sort of hold over your head to make you do what he wanted you to do, but it was more, “I know what makes this guy tick, I know what’s important to him, I know what’s not important to him, I know when I can press him to do something for the president or for the leadership or for the party and when he is going to have to take a stand for constituent reasons or for personal reasons, whatever, that will be contrary to what I want him to do.” And he was always understanding about that because he had a full understanding of it, he never, well, he rarely got mad at somebody for taking a stand in opposition to him, even within his own party, because he tried to be very ecumenical about these things and to understand where people were coming from. But he knew where they were coming from, because he’d spent a lot of time here and as new senators would come in, he would go out of his way to get to know them and to help bring them along, give them opportunities to shine. That’s what everybody liked about Howard Baker. He was so unlike Lyndon Johnson in that he would make sure that everybody on his side of the aisle got to be the star of something. Committee chairmen loved that, and so did the lowliest freshman. Baker’s style was in effect the mirror image of Johnson’s, although they were both highly effective leaders. They just came at it from exactly opposite directions. So Baker made a point of doing his political homework, his personal homework. He was much more comfortable doing that than he was doing, let us say, policy homework because he was more of an intuitive politician than a policy wonk. He would sort of cut to the chase and say, “Okay, this is what I think about this after a not particularly elaborate examination of issues.” But he spent a lot of time on the personal and political relationships.

DW: This ability to tell where someone is coming from, what someone needs, is that the product of a conscious analytical process or is it more intuitive?

PB: I think it is intuitive. I think that’s just Howard Baker. But as it happens, Howard Baker was perfectly positioned in that office. It was the ultimate use of his skills and experience and personality, and it was doing what came naturally to him in exactly the right forum for that sort of person.

DW: What was the relationship like between Baker and Stevens?
PB: It was good. Stevens is not the laid-back character that Baker is, and so there was a bit of oil and water on the personality front. But Stevens was loyal, Stevens knew how to count votes, which is a very important trait in a whip, and Stevens could do dirty work that Baker didn’t want to do.

DW: Like what?

PB: Well, I shouldn’t even call it dirty work. It’s more a matter of being quite firm, let us say, and trying to impose party discipline where Baker would not wish to crack the whip. He had a whip to crack the whip. Stevens would be the bad cop to his good cop on many occasions, and that was a constructive partnership. Everybody knew that Ted Stevens was an up-front, hard-nosed guy with what was at least sometimes a kind of prickly personality, but they also knew they could appeal whatever Stevens was asking them to do to Baker, if need be, and things would get worked out. It was a good partnership. Stevens ran for leader to succeed Baker when the Senator retired. It was Stevens and Lugar and Dole. There may have been somebody else, there was somebody else, but I’ve forgotten, McClure, Jim McClure. There was a multi-ballot sort of affair, which Dole ultimately won, of course. Stevens obviously was not the guy that they would eventually choose to be the leader, but as the whip he had all the right stuff for that job.

DW: Let me ask you a couple more questions, then we’ll conclude this session. You’ve observed the Senate for quite a period of time and you were there during this particular period of time. I’m curious as to your view as to the relative power and influence that Baker exercised as leader, in an independent fashion, as opposed to the power and influence of the Republican leadership in general, and the power of committee chairmen. Sometimes it seems as if the leader is more clerk than the leader, in the sense of influencing in a positive sense. And then when viewed in another way, the leader does seem to be a leader in the true sense.

PB: I just had a conversation very much along these lines with the senator last week. This is a personal digression, but as life has unfolded for me, after the Senate, I am the new chairman of a collection of companies which are interested in getting into the personal telephone business, the microcellular telephone business, the Washington Post company and Time-Warner and many other companies, large and small. I’m the chairman of this group which is a very fractious group at the moment, which has very different agendas on one issue and another. We’ve come together on about six issues and have agreed to advocate those collectively within the councils of power. I called the senator after a very long and fractious meeting of these company officials last week, and I thanked him for letting me learn at the feet of the master how to let everybody say everything they want to say and making sure at the end they say what you want them to say. And that was Baker, he gave everybody the full opportunity to vent their spleens and to pursue their agendas and so forth and so on, but at the end of the day, 90 percent of the time at least, they were doing and saying what he wanted them to. It was the art of quiet persuasion, of being able to truly be an honest broker of differing points of view, to have your own points of view on a few big matters and not having to sweat, not bothering to sweat the details on things that don’t matter so much. But making sure on the big things there is a unity of purpose.
and that it’s your purpose. That’s the way he did it, and by osmosis I learned some of it, anyway, and I think it is a tribute to people like him that you can get these kinds of results when nobody thinks that you’re really trying to. But he did it for years, he did it for eight years as Republican leader and then as majority leader, and he did the same thing in the White House when he was chief of staff. Even within that White House there were a lot of people who didn’t like him, didn’t trust him, didn’t think he was a Ronald Reagan Republican and all the rest, and he co-opted them. He was just good, because he wanted to let them do what they wanted to do, he adopted the president’s agenda once he got down there, as he had done in the Senate, and said, “I might not do all these things, but this is what he wants to do and I’m going to help him do them.” And he did, and he won over all kinds of people for that approach to things, and at the same time he was able to move the president along in ways that he thought useful as well. You look at this Moscow summit in 1988, which just was a very unlikely thing only a year and a half before, and that was Baker. Baker was getting a lot of stuff done without anybody raising alarms about it, because he was nontenacious, but more than nontenacious, he was an honest, prestigious, good person, who you just sort of instinctively trusted.

DW: A related question. During that time as majority leader, was there a basic inclination on the part of other Republicans including committee chairmen to defer to Baker in addition to because of the kind of process that you’ve just been talking about, but to defer because he was the leader?

PB: Yes.

DW: There was independent weight simply in being the leader.

PB: Oh, sure, sure. And the reason for that was that everybody knew two things. One, and most important, I think, was that he controlled the legislative calendar. If they wanted their bills considered on the floor, they had to get them through him. That’s it, okay? That’s the ultimate power of the majority leader. He sets the legislative schedule, and if you want to make sure your legislation that you’ve worked on for all these years never sees the light of day, you continually antagonize the leader and see how far you get with it. So everybody understood, “Well, nice as he is, he does have this ultimate power over the things that I want to get done, and so I’ve got to be nice to the leader, whatever I may think of him or his ideas on this.” That’s one thing. Second thing, he had been so loyal and so helpful to the president and to the president’s men that they, Ronald Reagan looked to Howard Baker as sort of the embodiment of the Senate. He did this with his own people also, but if you wanted something done in the Senate, clear it with Howard. Everybody over here knew that Howard Baker was the ultimate conduit to the White House also and that if they wanted good things said about their ideas, he could say them or he could be conspicuously silent. So it was a matter of, it was not altogether just sort of laying down for people, that was not it at all, but there was a civility and a sophistication about it all that everybody found a reasonable way of doing business.

DW: Did Baker use scheduling, there’s another side of it, there is a potential sanction here in scheduling, but did he use it in a positive sense to create obligations? What I mean is this.
This was one of Lyndon Johnson’s tricks, when he was president, something would come up that he was perfectly willing to go along with, but he would instruct his people to say, in effect, the president has some real doubts about this and whether he can do it and then drag it out and then go ahead and do what he was going to do all along.

PB: Baker was a wonderful horse trader about that sort of thing. You’ll get better information about that, much better witnesses than I, which would be people like Range and Jim Cannon and Hildenbrand and so forth. They were the guys who actually did all that trading for him. I was not much involved in that. I watched it and admired it, but I was not a real principal in it.

DW: Well, let’s draw this to a close, Pat. It’s 12:00 and you need to get back to revolutionizing the personal telephone technology of the nation.

PB: That’s right!

END OF INTERVIEW ON SIDE A