
Interview with James Cicconi

The interview was conducted by David Welborn in Washington DC on July 12, 1997

Audio cassette 65
DW: This is an interview with James Cicconi in the offices of Aiken, Gump, Strauss, Howard, and Feld in Washington, D.C., and, _______, and the date is July the… the 12th, 1997, and the interviewer as usual is David Welborn. [Well], it’s always a pleasure… to meet and talk with a Texan as we go about doing the Howard Baker Oral History Project, and, we could ______, and it’s interesting that… I, too, am a Texan, and now at The University of Tennessee and doing… and engaged in this project. Let me begin by asking you to describe the path you took that led you to the Reagan White House in 1981.

JC: All right. I was actually introduced to Jim Baker through a mutual friend who shared an office in the Legislature where I worked part-time while I was in Law School, and he was [a] active Republican and… I was a Democrat at the time. And close to George Bush and the Bush circles, and Jim Baker had just come off running Gerald Ford's campaign was thinking about running for statewide office in Texas, and this person, Karl Rove, who is now Governor Bush's top political guy… suggested me to him as someone who knew state issues and could help him in his race. And we got together, hit it off very well, and I went to work for him… in that campaign, fresh out of Law School. [And] was his Issues Director --

DW: [He was running] for Attorney General.

JC: Right, right --

DW: ____.

JC: [He considered running] for governor, and decided instead to run for Attorney General ______ --

DW: And that was in 1978?

JC: 1978. And… unfortunately he lost that race, and, but Republican Dick Clements was elected Governor. The first Republican since Reconstruction, and… I had run into him in the course of the campaign. He tried to hire me away from Baker, and so I ended up going to work for him, and really kind of avoided the Bush campaign at the time, which was forming up following that, because I had a new baby and I would have had to move to Iowa or something of that nature, and it was not something I really wanted to do. And so, I went to work for the State government. Meanwhile the campaign went on. I stayed in touch with Baker, and he was named White House Chief of Staff, and, called me up one day and asked me if I wanted to come up to Washington and be his Assistant in the White House. That's how I got there.

DW: You stayed… in the White House… as best I can tell, until Baker moved to the Treasury Dept.

JC: Right --

DW: What, what, did you go to Treasury with Baker?
JC: No, no. I really needed to get out and practice law, which I had done in State government in Texas, but had not done privately. And, and I [had began] talking to various firms in the course of the 1984 election year. It, as you know, was considered bad form to kind of leave in the course of the Presidential election, and, so I stayed an extra year primarily because I kind of got caught there. In hind sight I probably should have departed in late 83 and gone to private practice. But, I [waited until] after the election and then helped with the transition, and then joined Aiken, Gump here at the time, in February of 85, I believe it was.

DW: Then, am I correct when Ken Duberstein became… Chief of Staff, replacing Senator Baker, you went back to the White House --

JC: No. No, I stayed here, but I… actually became pretty active in George Bush's campaign, you know, in late '87 and early 88, and helped him in the primaries and was Senior Issues Advisor, and worked in the general and, you know, handled the platform and various things like that. And then when Bush won the election, I was asked to be one of the two Deputy Chiefs of Staff… in the Bush White House.

DW: That was, that’s the basis of my [confusion].

JC: But I stayed [in very close touch with Kenny] ______.

DW: So, did you… stay on through the whole of the Bush presidency?

JC: No. I stayed there the first two years… and… and then left in January of 91, and came back to [a] law firm here, and, and then in 92 went to the re-election campaign [to be] Issues Director. So it’s, there’s a lot of back and forth… involved here.

DW: Well, that's not unusual in this town, obviously. As Baker’s, Jim Baker's Special Assistant, what were your major responsibilities?

JC: Major responsibility was for keeping Baker informed on all policy matters and handling follow-up for him on various policy questions, and helping him coordinate and run the various parts of the White House that reported to him, which were most of the implementation side of the White House. The policy development side was really reporting to Ed Meese during that period, and so I was kind of Baker's staff ambassador to that part of the White House, and sat in on all the, all the meetings, cabinet council meetings, cabinet meetings, _____ meetings, things of that nature during that period, and… you know, so.

DW: Could you give me a couple of examples of types of policy matters that you followed for Baker?

JC: Um… gee, I'm trying to think back. Well, they would range from… you know, I guess virtually all non-national security matters. Trade policy, textiles, _____ example, where we were having to negotiate a new multi-fiber agreement, and this was a big source of controversy, and… there was an effort to impose quotas and in fact there was a _____ of
quotas in place through the VMFA, and I coordinated a series of meetings at the White House with Senators like Strom Thurmond and others, and [worked] on that, and got very much involved in the United Nations population conference when that all blew up internally, and… had a hand in the resulting compromise which became the Mexico City policy. I got heavily involved in a number of civil rights matters in our outreach to Hispanics, because obviously that was going to be an important group for us in the 84 election. And the U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO, and actually, you know, when I left the White House, remained on a, was named to a panel to oversee the reforms within UNESCO and evaluate whether the United States should reconsider its withdrawal. And, and I'm pleased to say, you know, we, you know, haven't yet gone back, although I guess the Clinton Administration is now thinking about it. But, so it ran the gamut. It even covered things like the Delaney clause, involving… cancer substances _____, environmental. _____, so [there was] the entire range of issues that percolate up to the White House.

DW: You were dealing with, in relation to these matters, you were dealing both with the relevant departments and agencies, and the relevant administrative positions and, and I assume also with the Congress to the extent that legislation would be involved.

JC: Well… yes, certainly that was true in something like textiles, and it was true in many things. Given Baker's responsibilities, he needed to know what was going on, and have the capability of influencing it in a way where, where it would be easier to do legislatively, or would avoid political problems, with _____ [since] the politics and the Congressional were, broadly speaking, his main areas of authority. And so I helped him be aware enough to exert his influence and in fact, you know, in many instances exerted that influence on his behalf. And, you know, there were advantages to me doing it because a. I could catch something at an earlier stage, and b. I could do it at the staff level where [if] Baker did it, it could provoke a conflict in the Oval Office with Ed Meese, or a Cabinet member. So this, you know, it was a strange organizational set-up in the White House, even as White Houses go, it was a little bizarre, and it was difficult to make it work, and yet it did work, and in fact may well have worked best of all of Reagan's staff structures with the possible exception of the last 2 years he was there. But certainly when you measure the issues before us, I think that Reagan had many gifts, and one of them was an unerring ability to make the right decision when presented with the full range of options. And it was truly a gift. I mean, he was an excellent decision maker. And knew his own mind, and knew public thinking, and I think if the staff did its job in preparing the options and laying out the arguments, he was unerring in his ability to pick the right options. So, under this structure, unlike when Don Regen was there, you had a lot of contention at the staff level, and as a result it usually insured that the full range of options was presented to Reagan, simply because you didn't have an all powerful single person like Don Regen, who would impose his will and restrict the range of options. And I think that that approach that Don Regen took did not serve Reagan well, and nor do I think it was well-suited to Reagan's style of decision-making. You know, I mean, if you think about it in that overall context, it's a small _____ in helping making that process work as best it could. And it meant that people like me got in a lot of fights with people down the hall a lot of times, or [with] people in Cabinet departments, [or agencies]. But it was all, I think, in the end, resulted in pretty good decisions. I mean, it was a very successful 4 years.
DW: I want to come back to certain aspects of this a bit later, and let's move toward that in this way. What do you know about the origin of the concept of the Legislative Strategy Group?

JC: Well, as legend has it, it was Dick Darman's idea. I think it really came more from Baker's thinking, and Jim Baker's area of responsibility for legislative strategy, and there had to be a mechanism for him to deal with it and make decisions. And given the trifurcation of responsibilities in the White House, it was Baker's way of influencing the policy decisions in the end, too, because while he was not, [and] didn't have responsibility for the Cabinet council and things like that, and I would attend them and certainly try to influence them as much as I could, keeping him informed the whole way, but once it got to the point where he could inject himself given his area of responsibility because the Congress was entering into it, then he was able to exert more influence. Obviously he needed some means of getting all the key players to the table under his aegis, which was a key point, to be able to have a smooth Congressional operation, and achieve some successes for Reagan, whether it was on the budget or what have you. A tax cut, issues large and small. So that became a vehicle for Baker to deal with that, and Dick was the person who coordinated it, the activities of that, and because of his job as being the kind of the nerve center of the White House. And it was a job that I know well because I ended up having the exact same job and title under Bush. You have a unique responsibility because you decide when things are right for the President to make a decision, and you pass on how that decision is presented to him, and the range of options and things of that nature. And like Dick, who I learned a lot from watching, your constituent is one person, and it's making certain that the President has the full information from which to make his decisions. And a lot of times in government, this is where the theories will fall down sometimes, is that, you could have a Cabinet Council meeting, where one particular department is making [a vigorous argument], and then you look at the memo that’s prepared for the President, and it's either not there or it's greatly watered down in some way. Either because the person drafting the memo wanted to give short shrift to the argument, or, in some cases, the department itself wasn't as vigorous in writing as it was in the meetings. So, you often find yourself in a position of having to compensate for that by making certain the President either gets a flavor for what they really think, or going back to them and telling them “the President needs to know what you think.” And, “this isn't what you said in the meeting, and is your position changed, or what?” So, you have to be an honest broker. Dick was obviously in that position there, and because of that, [I know this is a long answer to your question], was able to help Baker see when issues were right or the legislative strategy, it in essence became an alternative decision-making or policy formulation entity. And you would have a cast of people in the room that generally encompassed everybody who had to be there on a particular issue, including whatever Cabinet departments were directly affected. And it was principles only, because. And Meese was there. Deaver was invited. The power centers were seen to.

DW: So, these [would] be meetings that were formally designated as meetings of the Legislative
Strategy Group.

JC: Um hm.

DW: And --

JC: They would be set up, and they would be topic specific. They would not kind of wander. They would not be an agenda per se. They would be a meeting to discuss a particular subject.

DW: Would the formal meetings of the LSG be... formally... well, would the agenda item be one that was being prepared to go to the President for formal decision?

JC: Sometimes. And sometimes it was something where the President had already made decisions, and they would be meetings to implement his decisions in the Congress. The tax cuts, [a] good example. Obviously the implementation of that policy decision was long and difficult. And sometimes you would have legislators like Senator Baker there at the meetings, because of the nature of the subject or the decisions that had to be made.

DW: I guess what I'm trying to understand is what the Legislative Strategy Group did as a group, as a collective, as it were. And what Jim Baker did on the legislative side in relation to what was going on in Congress on a day-to-day basis.

JC: Well, I think the important thing to understand is that the White House generally didn't deal with the day-to-day... goings on. The White House would focus on whatever were the most important issues at a given moment. And one of Baker's gifts was that he... he was excellent at focusing on whatever those two or three or four big issues were at any given time, and excluding everything else, which is, by the way, one of the reasons I was there was to follow the everything else. And when something got right for him, he'd home in on it and it would become major focus of his days and weeks until resolved or moved along to a sufficient point. And obviously what those were at any given time would vary, but he was excellent at not getting lost in the forest on these things. And the group itself was convened to make decisions, and they were not, they could be decisions on what should be presented to the President, or they could be decisions on what things we should do in order to further the President's wishes, policy wishes. Generally, though, because of the sensitivities to the structure inside, there had to be some sort of legislative or Congressional nexus to ______. If it hadn't gone to the President for a decision yet, generally your nexus was Congressional interest, Congressional views, our ability to pass something here, which Reagan always wanted to be aware of before he made a decision. It was a calculation. He has this image right now of some sort of uncompromising person. The reality is, one of the reasons he was so successful at governing is he had a remarkable feel for the possible, and rarely staked himself to positions that were untenable. He knew that the way you govern is in part perception of your ability to succeed. And in your influence is proportional to that. You don't like to enter and lose fights as a president.

DW: No, absolutely not.
JC: You go in, you want to win. So if you're going to make decisions on a range of options, what type of proposal do you send to the Hill is a relevant factor to consider as to what, whether you could pass one versus another.

DW: Did [the] --

JC: Senator Baker, by the way, was excellent at being able to provide that type of guidance, and I think was a major factor in that success that we had legislatively, because he did not give a blank review, and it was always with the best interests of the Party and the President as well as the country in mind. And it was always very direct and candid. Not a lot of fluff, and you didn't have to read tea leaves with him, I mean, he would tell you very plainly what the situation was and he would express his opinions, you didn't have to pull them out of him.

DW: Did the Legislative Strategy Group operation change in any fundamental ways or major ways during the course of that first term?

JC: No, I think… obviously like a lot of things it evolved into a more powerful group the more it became the center of decision-making on so many things. But other than that, no, I mean, it became an _____ important tool. I think you had to have something like that, given the troika structure that we had in the White House. You had to be able to bring these power centers together at one table to agree on things. Otherwise they ended up each getting to touch upon an issue later. Deaver was dealing with speeches. If he wasn't on board with what you were trying to do. You couldn't schedule the President to do stuff. [You'd get a speech done the right way]. [If] Meese wasn't on board, the policy structure and the Cabinet officers would go south on you. Baker wasn't on board, you wouldn't get it implemented, in terms of Congress or public liaison or intergovernmental or all the arms of the White House that he covered, or get it even on the President's desk, because Don would control the paper. So, they each needed each other, and there had to be some vehicle for bringing them together to make decisions, otherwise one would make a decision and the other would jam it up, nothing would have ever happened. So the LSG really became a vehicle for that. It doesn't mean it was needed in any presidential context, it would not be. It was a unique product of a unique structure. It was designed to make that structure work and be effective. We had to have something to make it effective, because otherwise it was a disaster as a structure.

DW: One gets the impression from what one hears that in a sense the origin was in the fact that you had three principles who were going to be in the White House, and you had to have some sort of institutional framework in which they could work.

JC: Right. They had to have that. I think, and I think it just happened that Baker came up with the solution to that before any of the rest of them thought about it. Given his political and Congressional responsibilities, that was obviously within his purview. Darman was able to catch the issues at the right time, and in a not insignificant little fact was that Baker was the only one with an office large enough to accommodate the meetings.
DW: _____?

JC: No, although when they divided up the world between them, the three of them, and there was actually a written agreement as to the areas of responsibility and the various titles and things like that among Baker, Meese, and Deaver, one of the things Baker insisted upon was that he have the office traditionally used by the Chief of Staff if he was Chief of Staff, and wrote that in there. And so it was not a small point. He almost had to chair the meetings. I suppose you could have had them in the Roosevelt Room or something, but then, the larger the room, the more people end up filling it. It's kind of like your --

DW: It's a [natural] _____ White House.

JC: Yah. Your expense is rising to meet your income, and it's kind of like the number of people at a meeting increases to fill the room, so the bigger the room, the more people. You know, this way you kept it manageable, but you had to have something big enough for the core group to meet there.

DW: How often and in what sorts of settings did you have the opportunity to see Howard Baker in action?

JC: Congressional Leadership meetings, LSG meetings when he came to those, private meetings with Baker, many or which I sat in on, most of which I sat in on, and Baker just used to have me sit in on most of his meetings with outside people, unless it was really, really private, and that was rare.

DW: When Baker went to the Hill, would you generally go with him?

JC: No, generally not. But keep in mind, Baker's style was to do things solo when he did that. In fact, he did the same thing when he was at the State Department… preparing to be Secretary of State. I was actually there helping him during his transition before I went into the Bush White House, and one of the things I did was deal with the Congressional stuff and all that, and he obviously had to go do his courtesy calls before confirmation and all that. And I did all the scouting. I talked to, like Luger's staff guy, and found all the things Luger was interested in, and did the prep work, and briefed Baker, and he went through and he made his notes, and I set up the meetings and all that. But he went up there by himself. And that was the image he wanted to present to that member, not as somebody who was being ushered around by staff people, and who was relying on others for information, he went up there by himself, he had a yellow pad with him, he took notes, and that was his style, the same way in the White House, when he was the Chief of Staff.

DW: What do you recall about how Baker handled himself in the Congressional Leadership meetings? I assume you are talking about the meetings in the Oval Office with the President.

JC: Howard Baker?
DW: Yah.

JC: As opposed to Jim Baker?

DW: Yes.

JC: A minute ago I was talking about Jim Baker.

DW: [I followed that, yah.]

JC: I thought Howard Baker and Jim Baker had a very good rapport, first of all. I think that's important. I think they're both complex individuals. But they really understood each other well. I think both of them were very oriented toward accomplishment, and achieving things, without making enemies, if it's possible. And I think both of them are just nice people, which is not an insignificant point, and I think you can sense that about other people, and I think you'd sense it about the other, and there's one other factor I think that helped that relationship overall. But also, I think Jim Baker's relations with the Congress, [I know this isn't about Jim Baker but Howard Baker], but I think this was a factor, and that is that Jim Baker's Chief of Staff was very, very cognizant of the difference between elective and appointive office, which is something his successor didn't quite understand, and he ran a cropper because of it, I think, a large part because of it. Jim Baker was extremely deferential to members of Congress, recognized the different role they played, recognized the political role they had, how their constituencies felt, the constraints on their actions, as well as the deference that they were due constitutionally. Again, very cognizant of that. And he had rules about returning calls [from] members of Congress. You do it the same day they call. And he did it, and you did it, and that was expected, _____ better not hear from a Member of Congress that so-and-so in the White House didn't return their call. And it was a rule he followed himself, and expected everybody else to follow. This, I think, is important in terms of understanding relations overall between the Reagan White House in the first term and the Congress and the Senate under Howard Baker. Because I think there was a rapport and an ability to work together which was forged from Baker to Baker, that filtered out to others. You had some other important players, like Paul Laxalt and others, who… Howard Baker was very, very adept at dealing with and recognizing their independent relationships with President Reagan. Paul Laxalt's case, particularly. Laxalt and Howard Baker remain friends, at least by all outward appearances, to this day, and I've certainly _____ together it seems to be a good strong rapport, and [it] was very, very important _____ because Laxalt had been a colleague Governor of Reagan's. You know, contiguous states, they were kind of allies in the Governors' Association. They thought alike, in terms of policy. And they were very close personally. And in many cases, Laxalt was a very good window to Reagan's thinking for Howard Baker. And Howard Baker recognized that. [And this is one of the] things that impressed me, because I saw it at the time. Rather than view him as a rival for influence at the White House, or with the President, Howard Baker viewed him as a tremendous asset, and I think it strengthened their [friendship]. I'm not sure how close they were as friends to that point, because Laxalt hadn't been in the Senate that long. And --
DW: A part of this exercise is to sort of exchange information. I can [adjust] the transcript on this. But let me respond. Baker and Laxalt had been pretty close, personally, prior to the debate on the Panama Canal Treaties. They played tennis together, both were members of that group that played tennis out at the _______ Cathedral and so on.

JC: Oh, that explains a lot. ______. It really was evident in their dealings with each other. But, I think it also speaks volumes about Howard Baker and why he was successful in very different jobs, because he, a lot of people, I think, in that position would have, again, viewed even a friend as a rival for influence, or, somehow diminishing his role as Majority Leader.

DW: Then there was some tension that arose in their relationship because of the debate over the Canal Treaties. And… in the run-up to the election, there had been some talk around the Senate that if Reagan [had] won the presidency, that he might wish that Laxalt would become the Republican Leader.

JC: Yah, I remember that

DW: Alright. Election night, November 1980, when it became clear that Reagan was going to win, Howard Baker and his people were in his office downtown. He started making the calls, and I think perhaps the first call he made to Senate colleagues that night, and it was looking like the Republicans were going to take the Senate. He went in the back room by himself to do that with Paul Laxalt. And in the course of the conversation, I think Laxalt was up for re-election that year, I could be corrected on that. But [assuming] he was, Baker congratulated on Laxalt victory re-election, and then he asked Laxalt if he, Laxalt, would nominate Baker in the caucus to continue as Republican Leader when they met in January. And Laxalt said, “Well, of course [I shall].”

JC: Very good.

DW: And then, come January, Baker made Laxalt a de facto member of the Republican Leadership in the Senate. Laxalt attended all the Leadership meetings, Senate _____ meetings.

JC: [That was] a very interesting situation, given the relationship he had with the President. But many, many Senators would have fumbled that egregiously. And, it wouldn't have been hard to do, and I think normal ego, just normal ego, not _____, would normally go, would have caused irritations _____, and things like that. And I think it's a measure of Howard Baker as a man that he viewed that as an asset, _____ [viewed] that as an asset, and never allowed [an] ego to get in the way.

DW: Let me ask you a somewhat related question going back to the relationship between James Baker and Howard Baker. My perception is that from 1980 onward, going back to the presidential campaign that year, there was always a little tenderness in the relationship between Howard Baker and George Bush.

JC: Um hm.
DW: Some people who _____ attribute it to the fact that Howard Baker endorsed Reagan at a time when Bush still thought he had a chance --

JC: Um hm.

DW: in 1980. And whether this is true or not, I don't know. But assuming that there is something there, it is interesting that Jim Baker did not react in the same way as some think George Bush did to the Baker presidential candidacy in his subsequent endorsement of Reagan. Have you picked up any vibrations as to what the relationship, or did you pick up any vibrations as to what the relationship between Vice President Bush and Howard Baker was during that period of time?

JC: At that time, less than later. I think there was, during that period, I mean, you have to recall Howard Baker was spoken of widely as a candidate himself, a potential candidate himself. And his prestige was very high following the Watergate hearings and, independent guy, and when the Party was down, I think he was a very important voice for the Party. And I think there was a tendency, there is a tendency, on the part of the members of the Senate club to prefer and defer to fellow members of the club, many of whom had their ambitions for the Presidency as well. And George Bush was not part of the Senate club. And, I think we saw that become a, I think, a point of tension, later, in the run-up to the 88 campaign. And many of us felt it at the time.

DW: There was some sense that Howard Baker was... perhaps, in some sense, _____ White House _____ helping Bob Dole in that.

JC: There [is] just no question there was a lot of sub rosa going on. The question was, [and I was involved] _____, and I had a lot of friendships on the staff, and with Howard Baker's staff, at the time, and, so we had pretty direct sources of information on what was being discussed and what was occurring, and things like that. And there was tension there. The question in my mind is how involved Howard Baker was in any of that. I think that it was definitely there on the part of many of his people. There was a clear preference for Dole, there was a clear view that George Bush was a weak candidate, and that Bob Dole [was] a strong candidate, and again, I think in their own interests, I think many of them, because they had come from the Senate, had relationships with Senator Dole and his staff, and felt that they would certainly be better situated themselves if he won than if George Bush won. Which [in many cases] turned out to be true. But I think that colored their behavior and views, and there was jockeying at the time for Reagan's attention and smiling gaze and benevolent countenance, and he was the imposing figure on the horizon there, and I think the Bush people kind of felt more entitled there, and certainly as the incumbent Vice President, they were due, I think, a certain amount of deference as to their wishes, and I think, what you found is that [the] tensions developed with the White House staff as it got closer to the 88 election, because of a sense that the staff was denying Bush... the spotlight at different times, and even in fact going out of their way to provide the spotlight for Dole. And I'm trying to remember what [the] particular announcement it was, but it was of some particular initiative that the
President had, and Dole, after playing Hamlet for quite a long time, decided to back the President's position, and _____ --

DW: I think it was the [IMF] Treaty, perhaps.

JC: Yah, I'm not, maybe it was that. But instead of simply announcing his position, he extracted a, the opportunity to come to the White House briefing room and do it there with the President, and have it be a very big deal. And Bush, as you can well imagine, was, I think, I can't speak about his personal feelings on it, but I can tell you that the staff was fried. Because, number one, this was a treaty negotiated by Ronald Reagan, and everybody felt it was due the support of the Republican Leader. That it was not something that should be bestowed after, [and be] bestowed as some gift, but that [was owed] by the Leader. And that we shouldn't reward him for having stood on the sidelines for far too long and leaving in doubt whether he was going to support the President. And then secondly, it was obviously the political point of giving him a podium for national press, with Ronald Reagan there. And I can remember at the time that the word I got [out of] there was that the staff basically set it up, programmed the President to do it, and the President wasn't terribly thrilled about it. And if you will recall the scene, he literally went in, made a very quick statement, and then left, and did not stand there with Dole, for posing for pictures or while questions were being asked or anything else. Went in, made the briefest of statements, and then got the heck out, which all of us took as a sign of the President's displeasure with the position he had been put in by the staff. And I remember watching it on TV, and watching Reagan's face, and I could tell that this guy was not pleased to be there. You could just look [at him]. I'm sure you can go pull the tapes now and, [he's] a great actor and all, but he almost went out of his way to demonstrate that this was duty, and he was there out of duty, and collecting the support, and then leaving. But, so there were things like that that went on, and I think that, a lot of us felt that there was a bit too deliberate a distancing. We [recognized] that Reagan had to follow his own eleventh commandment on the nomination, and all that, and wasn't going to endorse Bush in the primaries, per se. That was understood, but we felt that the staff particularly went to the other extreme, to the point where the press was reporting that [Reagan staff] was distancing itself and trying to distance Reagan from Bush. And this obviously was a [bit much].

DW: Yes.

JC: And some of that… clearly, I think, was attributable to the relationship at the staff level between _____ excellent staffers with Howard Baker, and _____.

DW: Did Vice President Bush attend the meetings of the Legislative Strategy Group?

JC: No.

DW: [He did not].

JC: Although he did come in on occasion, _____ to say a few words and things like that. But no
DW: He had a regular invitation to meet with the weekly meeting Baker had of the Senate Republican leadership in Baker's office.

JC: Um hm.

DW: And often he came, and people who sat in on those meetings... unanimously say that Bush, when he did come, which was not every time, was notably reserved and quiet, and rarely said a word.

JC: Um hm.

DW: And, but my larger question is, and I don't know whether this is something that you can answer, _____, other than preforming the Constitutional duties of presiding over the Senate, when that was being desirable, to what extent was Bush actively involved in promoting the Regan legislative program on the Hill?

JC: Well, I think that he was certainly a big part of the sales team any time you went public on something, and I think that's not to be underestimated. There are only two people in our system who are elected nationwide, the President and the Vice President, and so they certainly have the forum to do it. And I think that's a big part of it. It doesn't surprise me about his reticence in a Congressional Strategy meeting in Howard Baker's office. He was very much the same way in Cabinet meetings, certainly with the President. [And] I think there was some deference there, [certainly] a great deal of deference to the President when they were together. And the nightmare of any Vice President is to express views or opinions in the meeting and find that the President disagrees with you, or may think differently, and have that aired out in public. He felt that his effectiveness was based on having a private, personal relationship with him and being able to give personal advice, and keep it between the two of them. And that's how he approached the office. And he had, with Reagan, a standing invitation every meeting, and exercised it in many of them, National Security briefings certainly, [morning meetings], and he was in many, if not most of the meetings in the Oval Office, with the President. But I would think that the same type of reticence and deference would have been there in a meeting that Howard Baker was chairing, certainly about Congressional strategy, with Howard Baker's lengthy service. I think... again, it's the type of thing where, knowing Bush, he would not have wanted to try to dominant a meeting that was Howard Baker's meeting, or appear to be usurping Howard Baker's authority as Chief of Staff, by trying to drive a discussion or something like that --

DW: Or appearing to be serving as the surrogate spokesman for the Administration in a kind of a surrogate presidential role _____.

JC: Yah, I think that's right. And, a lot of it just has to do with how George Bush approached the office. I think if he had had a strong view on something, he would have been inclined to say it to Howard Baker in private.
DW: Yah.

JC: Just as he did with Reagan. That was how he conducted the office. Plus, there was a tendency when you were meeting with outsiders, especially Members of Congress, for them to go back and report verbatim what you say to everybody and their brother, including the press. And when you're Vice President of the United States, and somebody could twist the statement you make to try to demonstrate some other political point, or even the distance between you and the President or something like that. So that doesn't surprise me.

DW: Okay.

END OF TAPE