
Interview with Rhett Dawson

The interview was conducted by David Welborn in Washington DC on March 7, 1993

Audio cassette 66a
DW: First of all, Mr. Dawson, thank you so much for having us over on a beautiful spring morning. We appreciate you giving us some time. Talk a little bit about your background leading up to your arrival as a Senate staff member.

RD: I had gotten out of the Army in 1972 after a three-year hitch where I had been the counsel to an Army Intelligence group over in Munich, Germany. I graduated from law school in 1969.

DW: Where did you go to law school?

RD: Washington University in St. Louis. I had the misfortune to land a job at what was then the Office of Legal Services and desperately wanted to get out. It turned out that I got wind through Senate sources that John Tower was looking for a lawyer with an intelligence background. So I threw my hat in the ring and landed a job with the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, then called Senate Select Committee to Study Intelligence Activities with Respect to Government Operations—very longwinded—[usually called the Church Committee]. The Watergate Committee had just vacated the spaces in the old Senate Auditorium, which were being occupied by the Church Committee, and the same kind of fever-pitch frenzy of investigation that had overtaken the nation in the early and mid-1970s was still going on; this time the CIA was the target. The ranking minority member, vice chairman actually, was John Tower. The next in line, if I recall, in Republicans was either Barry Goldwater or Howard Baker. I don't think Baker very much wanted to continue the distraction that he had had with Watergate, but he wanted to be involved because I believe Baker had a particular view that the CIA knew a hell of a lot more about Watergate than had been let on. He had a staffer on that Committee, a fellow named Michael Madigan—whom I'm sure you know of, he is with Ake & Gump now—and Madigan was very much one of the senior counsel, participated in many of the aspects of that year-long investigation. So that was my first introduction to the Senate and my first introduction to Howard Baker.

DW: Then you moved from intelligence work to the Armed Services Committee, at some point in time.

RD: Not immediately, at some point, a year or about nine months after the Church Committee. In the meantime I went to work for a joint committee. Then in 1976, I guess, I started work for the Senate Armed Services Committee.
DW: And you were minority counsel?

RD: Not immediately, but about a year thereafter.

DW: When the Republicans took the majority in the Senate, what was the nature of your position on the Armed Services Committee?

RD: I was the staff director and chief counsel.

DW: You remained as staff director for how long?

RD: About two and a half years.

DW: Then where did you go?

RD: Into law practice with Dickstein, Shapiro & Moore, which is a local law firm. I stayed there about four years, went to work for David Packard on the Packard Commission, which did the investigation of the Pentagon, called the President's Blue Ribbon Commission. That was a year, went back into private practice, and then in 1986, I guess it was, in December, I was called by John Tower to be the staff director on the Tower Board, the president's special review board on Iran Contra. That finished in March and then in April, March, some point, I got asked by Howard Baker who by then had become the chief of staff to join him in the White House. I left the White House after Reagan left office—or shortly before he left office—went to the Pentagon to manage Tower's Pentagon for him while he was seeking confirmation. I had been selected to be Secretary of the Army after Tower's name went up, and I told them I didn't want my name to go up until he had been confirmed. Then the rest of that is history. I left there and joined PEPCA.

DW: You've had some fascinating experiences. What were your first impressions of Howard Baker?

RD: I was already impressed by him; I had seen how he handled himself during Watergate, but only knew him as someone would who had watched television or the televised hearings. But a very gracious, warm, friendly but very driving intellect.
DW: What you mean "driving intellect"?

RD: A very keen mind; the first impression was as the quintessential country lawyer, slow talking but mind like a steel trap, not to be taken lightly. Very, very impressive.

DW: How was this demonstrated, this keenness of mind.

RD: Just repeatedly, by his incisive questioning, his efforts to recognize, as I believe Tower did, that there was a lot of mischief to be made here by Frank Church in relation to national security policy—a very large staff, and a lot of ambitions. I don't remember any particular episode that sticks in my mind.

DW: Several people have brought up his knack for framing questions in a certain kind of way.

RD: I don't think I saw that much of that, initially, on the Church Committee because, as it turns out, the Church Committee had very few hearings. The one success that the Republicans can claim in the Church Committee was to keep some of the more sensitive information the Democrats wanted to reveal out of the public eye. That was a major undertaking on their part. The second major undertaking of the Church Committee was to try to get to the bottom of the attempts to assassinate foreign leaders. I don't recall Baker asking questions along that line either.

DW: In Church Committee meetings or any other meetings of Baker involving other Senators that you were able to observe, in the meeting setting, what was the chemistry between Baker and his colleagues. That's a very vague question—

RD: He was obviously someone who had a very, very bright future, whether it was going to be in the Senate or elsewhere; he was deferred to, he was recognized for having surrounded himself with some very good staff. He was generally admired; I don't know of anyone who didn't admire him, which was unusual.

DW: What I'm trying to get at—did you observe—whether he was purposely trying to do so or not, serving in a leadership function in relation to his colleagues?
RD: Always; he had emerged as the natural leader, the heir apparent to the leadership, for the party—in the Senate for sure. I was trying this morning to rack my brain to think who was the majority leader back then. I guess it must have been Hugh Scott.

DW: You mean the Republican leader?

RD: Right.

DW: It was Scott.

RD: Hugh Scott, his star had fallen; he had gotten older, and he had become an _____. Howard Baker was being recognized back in the mid-1970s, when I first met him, as the person who was going to succeed him. That was becoming more and more obvious.

DW: I've been told that one of Baker's major accomplishments—especially in the 1979 and 1980 period—was to prepare the Republicans in the Senate for a transition from minority to majority status. Could you reflect on that a little bit?

RD: Sure. It was a surprise when the Republicans won the Senate in 1980, no doubt about it, but it was viewed as a better than even chance that we would take over the Senate in 1983. I'm not rewriting history—there wasn't anybody that I knew of that really thought we were going to pick up that many seats. Even so, Baker had a very quiet project that started back in 1979 or 1978 to try to understand what it was to run the Senate. There was a lot more to it than managing the floor; there's also managing the institution of the Senate. Getting ready to manage the leadership, take on the leadership role. It had to do with communicating the ability that the Senate—and the government, more broadly—could be managed by Republicans better to people like David Broder. I remember David Broder wrote a column, and I think he recognized in that column Howard Baker as one of the luminaries that gave him the hope that the government could be well led by Republicans. It wasn't an academic exercise, it also had a more practical side to it.

DW: What were some of the specific things he did that you think are important in this connection?

RD: The most important thing was to make us organize ourselves as a minority, which had not occurred previously, to the extent and level that he made it happen. In my own corner of the
world in the Armed Services Committee, they had a long-standing tradition of having a bipartisan staff; there was no majority, there was no minority staff—I'm sorry, there were two minority staffers, one who owed his allegiance to Strom Thurmond and the other to Barry Goldwater. So when Tower became the ranking minority member of the Armed Services Committee in 1978, we sat about changing that. All of that was coordinated and blessed and discussed and reviewed with Howard Baker. It was a major departure in the institution. When you make a major departure in an institution like that, you want to make sure you're not going break too much glass, so Baker was thoroughly briefed on all that. It was organized; there was something called S. RES 2 that passed that gave members more committee staffers, more staffers on committees. Also, at the same time, it allowed the creation of a minority staff; we then exploited that.

DW: How Baker and others got the Democrats to agree to that must be a fascinating story that I'm going to have to try to get into.

RD: They gave up a lot to get it; there was a lot of trading going on there.

DW: What was given up?

RD: In no small part, every Democrat ended up getting a subcommittee chairmanship. Of course, every Republican, virtually, ended up getting a ranking minority membership on subcommittees, so there was a diffusion of control. I think that was one thing—I should not try to remember too much of that, because I will mislead you. But it's a door that was open, and we walked through it.

DW: On the Foreign Relations Committee, the same thing happened there as happened on the Armed Services Committee.

RD: Yes, but they didn't have John Stinniss. They probably had Sparkman as the chairman, and Sparkman was no John Stinniss. I remember when I was hired—this is before we actually voted officially to have a minority staff—Tower came in and he tried to get more staff for the minority and ended up getting Will Ball and myself hired on virtually the same day. John Stinniss interviewed me for 35 minutes. You think today how many committee chairman of his stature would ever go about spending 35 minutes with some 32 year old counsel.
DW: What was he interested in finding out about?

RD: Wanted to make sure you're going to be a team player, you're not going to be provoking controversy, you're not going to be partisan—lectured at me for quite a long time. Didn't care about my background particularly, but wanted to make sure I wasn't going to be partisan. As it turned out, I was very partisan. To talk about my little corner of the world some more, as it related to Howard Baker, one of the first things that Jimmy Carter did was to cancel the B1 and set about reducing our military readiness. I don't think he would have said that's what he did, but that's what it ended up being. And that turned out to be one of the real driving issues for Republican politics in the late 1970s and throughout much of the 1980s. That became an organizing principle for Republicans in the Senate that Howard Baker fostered and nurtured, without ever having it be openly a so-called "wedge issue." We certainly had a difference between the parties in the question.

DW: My understanding is that you participated in drafting a position paper on defense and national security matters that received a good bit of attention in the late 1970s and assisted in defining the Republican position on defense matters, vis a vis Carter.

RD: Right, you bet. Going into the campaign, it was a good organizing document for intellectually pulling everybody together. It was preceded by an even more—I shouldn't say that, because I don't remember exactly when that document was produced—but I thought it was about 1979, at which time we actually had a minority staff. One of the first things we did—and, of course, the second thing that was going on then, I'm sorry, I should have mentioned, was the SALT agreement, SALT II. In the fall of 1979, the budget resolution came on the floor of the Senate, and for the first time in memory, the United States Senate, the Congress, actually added to the defense budget. Tower and Baker were able to attract Sam Nunn onto their side of the issue and passed what was then called the 3-5-5 Amendment; they were going to increase defense spending by 3 percent in FY80 and 5 percent in the next two years. That really became an organizing principle. About that same time, the SALT agreement was before the Foreign Relations Committee, before the Armed Services Committee; then in early 1980, after the invasion of Afghanistan, Howard Baker took a delegation to Moscow. I think my timing is right on that.

DW: I think so; Brezhnev was still, in some technical sense, alive.

RD: By that time, if my memory serves, the SALT II agreement was over.
DW: The Afghanistan invasion killed SALT.

RD: It took place in December of 1979; I can't remember when our visit went, but I think it went in early 1980. One of the other vignettes about Howard Baker was that he had—I think Ron McMahan was along on the trip and Bill Hildenbrand—I've got a picture of the three of us on Red Square. Back then, Red Square was hostile territory.

DW: You did not often get there!

RD: When we got there, there was like a blizzard going on, but it was a holiday for the Muscovites. We were at Lenin's Tomb; our convoy of vehicles pulled up in front of the entrance of Lenin's Tomb, and Red Square was empty, because they had cleared it all off to make room for these dignitaries. There was a mile-long line waiting to see Lenin that was stopped while we made this tour. It was a real insight into Russia; it all had a very profound effect on everybody.

DW: People were just standing there placidly.

RD: Yes, yes. Cold as it could be outside. Things have changed remarkably since then. One of the other parts of that trip—which was the point of the story actually—was when we stopped off in Brussels. At time, if you recall, Al Haig had ambitions to be president of the United States and was sending up all kinds of trial balloons to try to gather support. Here he was, sitting with his colleagues—

DW: He was the NATO Supreme Commander at the time.

RD: Sitting with his Republican colleagues, although he wasn't necessarily Republican—exactly—he was the Supreme Allied Commander. Hiakawah, Danforth, Baker, Jake Garn, John Tower—and this guy went about irritating, to a man, everyone of those Republican Senators because he was so full of himself and so arrogant and danced so close to saying he was going to declare. It was one of those things that make it worthwhile to be there to see.

DW: Did anyone try to, in a sense, pull him off his pedestal?
RD: Yes, they all did. I can't remember the story, but I have a very clear memory of Baker poking fun at him. I think Cran might have been along on that trip; he might be able to help you. I remember everyone was trying to dig him, because he was so pompous, hopelessly pompous.

DW: Did he realize he was being digged?

RD: No, I don't think so. Cran had an excellent relationship with his staff, so it wasn't as if there was anything personal there. But it was fascinating.

DW: On SALT II, was there in effect a coordinated Republican position or strategy on that? Or was it Baker and Tower and a few other who were especially interested just working their way through it and coming to a decision?

RD: The answer is yes to both; we worked our way through it to a certain point and then realized more and more fully how flawed the agreement was, the more we got into it. Once we fully realized that, and that would have been in August of 1979, became more organized in our opposition to it—briefing sessions for the staff on the Republican side, better understanding by all the Republicans, bringing them together, pulling everybody into the tent, organizing our forces, figuring out what I guess today would be called message points, and really doing a better job of educating our members. By the way, today, if you think about politics, it's routine to do that—back then, it was unheard of, virtually unheard of, to be that organized on foreign policy, the national security policy. For the Republicans; the Democrats had been very well organized on getting SALT I passed. They had done a very good job, but the Republicans had not done that. One of Baker's real achievements as the majority leader was to try to coalesce his Republicans on that. I'm trying to think of exceptions, and I'm not sure there were very many, if any.

DW: When a matter such as SALT II arose, where both had substantial interests, how would Tower and Baker go about communicating and deliberating and deciding on what to do and what not to do and that kind of thing?

RD: First of all, they had an excellent relationship, and it was genuine. John Tower was well regarded by his colleagues for his intellect and his sense of purpose. I don't know how well he was liked as a human being. But Howard Baker had a genuine affection for him, so they could communicate more quickly than you needed to to have endless meetings. But they
had meetings; I was constantly being told to make sure I could clear a particular activity with Baker, whether it was him personally or Cran or whoever else it might be. So we were constantly talking about strategy and organizing. Another thing that Baker had done shortly after becoming the minority leader was to start having Friday morning 8:00 meetings of all the staff directors. We would get together and compare notes about agenda and try to figure out what was going on. Over time, those really became not just from foreign policy but more largely from a point of view of what was going on in the Senate floor—very key meetings.

DW: Those continued after 1980, and you found them valuable?

RD: Yes, very much so. Because there was a tendency in the Senate to become very focused on your committee, and you never really talked to your colleagues. That was occurring on the Democratic side, and it really needed to happen on the Republican side, too.

DW: He also instituted ranking member meetings, and that then became the chairmen's meetings.

RD: Right; those occurred at 11:45 on Tuesdays in advance of the 12:30 luncheons on Tuesday.

DW: Did you attend those on occasion?

RD: No; that was only Baker's staff and maybe Stevens' staff, but they were not open to—well, wait a minute—they weren't open to me, but I remember attending one or two as they were important to my area where I either had to speak or I had to know something.

DW: Do you have any sense as to what Tower thought of those meetings?

RD: He didn't miss a one; he would no more miss one of those than the man in the moon. Tower was a very big supporter of Howard Baker and me; in fact, Tower who never withheld criticism from many of his colleagues, was certainly more admiring of Howard Baker than practically any of his other colleagues. Tower could be very critical.

DW: What I'm about to ask is one of the things that I'm most curious about and most uncertain about. It touches on something we've already talked about: Baker's role in bringing Republicans together when there was substantial disagreement. I'd like to get you to talk a little bit about the basic budget decisions that were made in 1981, 1982, etc., particularly
concerning defense, in which you had a number of important participants. You had the Budget Committee, you had Tower and the Armed Services Committee—Tower, I believe, was also on the Budget Committee—then you had the Appropriations Committee, and there you had Hatfield who was somewhat dovish on defense spending.

RD: But he had told Tower even before he was elected as the chairman of that Committee that he was not going to be "a dog in the manger."

DW: Then you had Stevens, who chaired the subcommittee on Armed Services; then you had the executive branch, you had Weinberger, and you had the White House—all pulling and tugging to some degree. First of all, how did Baker as leader position himself in relation to these various forces?

RD: I could fast forward it to April, maybe May, of 1981, with just a little bit of background. Ronald Reagan was in fact focused like a laser beam on the economy and spent very little of his time, initially, as president—first year or better—talking about defense. It was not until September or October that I can even find out that Ronald Reagan ever focused very much on his defense budget and the buildup. So the first long months of the Reagan administration were not given over to much talk about defense. However, as a strategy that Tower had devised—which was blessed by Howard Baker—Tower believed there were some deficiencies in the supplemental appropriations, which was called the FY81 Supplemental Appropriations Bill, that Ted Stevens had put on the floor in May. It was deficient in three respects, Tower felt. The first is that it did not put in the battle ships, bringing the battle ships out of mothballs, that Tower felt would give some quick-fix muscle to the hollow Navy. I think the New Jersey was the one that became the issue. Secondly, there was a shortage of pilots throughout the services, so he wanted to give bonuses to pilots and the Supplemental Appropriations Defense Bill had not funded those. Third, they had deleted funds for binary chemical munitions, so Tower offered a series of amendments. Frankly, up until the defense authorization for FY82 went on the floor, this may have been the only defense matter that was considered by the Senate in that first year. And all three of those amendments passed, by the way; they would not have passed if Howard Baker had disapproved of them.

DW: Did this create a problem with Stevens?
RD: He was hopping mad. But I think Tower convinced Baker that—with administration backing, mind you—this was in the best interest of the Reagan administration and it was worth fighting for and that Stevens had compromised too much to the Democrats, who had taken all these things out. So we basically put them all back in; Tower had an amendment, and each of the three amendments gained a greater number of votes. That story illustrates a lot of different things, and I can go through those if you want.

DW: Please do.

RD: It illustrates that Baker was very supportive of the defense buildup and was not going to countenance too much compromising with Democrats over administration politics. He was, in fact, urging administration policies forward. Two, he was willing to let votes occur rather than his famous reputation for compromising between his colleagues when his two colleagues disagreed. Three, he was willing to have those disagreements break out in the open and risk disharmony among his colleagues.

DW: In a situation like that, would he probably have initially tried to get Stevens and Tower together?

RD: Yes, and he did; Stevens wouldn't budge. My memory is that Stevens said, "I'm sorry, this is the deal I've got. I can't budge off of it." There was a lot that went on in the cloakroom back in those days; I don't know if it still does. There was a lot of hurt feelings and bruised egos, and Ted Stevens was certainly one of them. Of course, you have to know that Mark Hatfield, despite his statement that I quoted to you a minute ago, had very strong feelings about chemical weapons production.

DW: Do you think Baker might have had something to do with Hatfield's statement or the attitude he reflected?

RD: My memory is that that's who Hatfield gave the pledge to. And because Tower was viewed as somebody who might lead an attack on Hatfield, Hatfield was telling Tower that at the behest of Baker.

DW: By the way—this is a little out of sequence—during those days, did you ever have the opportunity to attend any White House meetings in which Reagan participated?
RD: No, God no. In fact, I don't know any—maybe there were some staff who did that, but there weren't many. It was a pretty infrequent thing.

DW: When Tower went to the White House for meetings, would he come back and comment on what had happened?

RD: Tower didn't go to that many meetings at the White House.

DW: They had leadership meetings periodically there, but you don't have much in the way of recollections of his reactions?

RD: Tower was very exasperated for the first 12 months or more, first nine months, with the White House inability to focus on anything other than domestic policy. Of course, the best case for that statement is the fact they almost lost the AWACS fight in September and October of 1981 over just that focus.

DW: Were you involved deeply in the AWACS fight?

RD: Yes, very much so.

DW: Describe how they pulled that off.

RD: My view is that Jim Baker came in, finally got the White House organized to go do something about this, and he then turned to the Senate and got the Senate to have confidence that the White House was going to follow through on some of the organizing strategies they had undertaken. But until Jim Baker started playing in that game, it was going right through the floor.

DW: Let me go back and ask you—

RD: Tower, by the way, I'm sure you know, is the person who is generally credited with getting Bill Cohen to come over and vote on AWACS.

DW: I didn't realize that.

RD: That was one of Howard Baker's missions to John Tower, to get Bill Cohen on board.
DW: I understand that Baker often would give his colleagues assignments to do specific things in connection with specific votes.

RD: Right; certainly on AWACS. It didn't happen that often, then or now—at least then or thereafter—where there were Senators trading vote counts among one another in Howard Baker's office, saying, "OK, you're going to talk to him, let's get back tomorrow and see how we did." The sort of thing the staff did all the time, but this was a fairly unusual occurrence, from my perspective anyway.

DW: Let me go back and see if I can get you to elaborate a little bit on a point you made a moment ago in regard to at some point Baker being willing to let conflict erupt, just to see who had the votes. He's known to some as the Great Conciliator; can you elaborate just a little bit as to the dynamics here of seeking conciliation and then at some point letting it come out and then be decided.

RD: Yes, your point about his trying to bring Ted Stevens around—we had been following very closely the markup in the Defense subcommittee and knew exactly what they were doing and what they were not doing. We had a wish list of things that we had expected to see that would increase readiness and, as those things got compromised away for a variety of reasons, we kept talking to Baker and Baker's staff about our concern. Ted Stevens wasn't buying any of it: "The tradition is that this is my bill, and the leadership will defer to me on my appropriations bills."

DW: This was his first bill.

RD: His maiden voyage, that's exactly right. It's his first defense bill; it may have been his first bill, for all I know. It may have been his first appropriations bill, his first money bill. I don't know, but it could have been. We had gone a long way towards trying to reach out to Ted Stevens; they had shut us out. We had made our unhappiness and our complaints known. Tower was viewed by Baker as a major player in the defense area; he had been very active in the confirmation process, and he had been the chairman of the Platform Committee the preceding summer on defense and had been a driving force on the budget and on SALT II. So I think Tower won the issue somewhat on the basis of his relative stature to Ted Stevens. But, Tower was very forceful to Baker making known why this had to be done this way.
DW: When conflicts arose between Stevens and Tower—

RD: "[We’re cowboys], let's work it out"—famous quote.

DW: In this situation, his preference was known.

RD: I believe it was. I think he said to Ted, in effect, "I can't help you" or "I'm going to vote with John." It was a big shock; Stevens was hopping mad at Baker about it. Has anybody else talked about this—or am I only one?

DW: No, this is new information for us. So when it was Tower and Dominici and other kinds of relationships where there may be strong differences of views, did Baker generally indicate a preference? Or would he try to remain aloof?

RD: No, he generally would try—not to remain aloof—he would try to actively intervene to get people to compromise.

DW: To move the process.

RD: You bet, you bet. But in this case, the supplemental on defense was a key bill, it was something that the administration very much wanted to push forward. It just had to happen, and Ted Stevens wasn't budging. He had already marked up, nothing he could do.

DW: But, if I understand it correctly, it wasn't Baker's practice or it wasn't his habit to take a side.

RD: No, to the contrary; he tried to be a conciliator, somebody who could stand and be available at the end of the day to try to resolve these things.

DW: Let me ask you about another area where there was some degree of sensitivity if not conflict, and that was between Armed Services and Foreign Relations and, to a certain extent, Appropriations—Senator Caston—on foreign security assistance.

RD: This is not a story on Howard Baker very much—unless you think it is—I don't know of Baker's involvement except probably to maybe put the stake through the heart of this matter. Al Haig, in his most aggressive way, when he was up for confirmation and maybe before
had given assurances—no, had actually urged Tower to seek the jurisdiction over security assistance in the Armed Services Committee. We already had jurisdiction over leasing of security assistance matters, but the sale—like AWACS—was in Foreign Relations. So, Haig put him up to that—and there's some logic to it, as an extension. Rather than putting foreign troops overseas or rather than putting troops on the ground in a base, you could actually give them M1s or tanks or something instead. Tower had a lot of enthusiasm for the idea and directed me to put a plan together to make that happen. I put a plan together and told him how it happened; suddenly, the State Department disappeared from view, and Al Haig was nowhere to be heard from. I had this plan in motion, had made some noise about it; the Foreign Relations Committee was obviously privy to all of it. My memory is that Chuck Percy, who was held in very low regard by John Tower as a force in the Senate, demanded a meeting with John Tower, just John and Chuck Percy. I was present at the meeting in which Tower—for the only time in my life with him on Senate matters—totally collapsed, totally conceded, with just the slightest bit of pressure from Chuck Percy. Of course, I was greatly frustrated by this, having gone out on point.

DW: How do you explain Tower's—

RD: He had nobody behind him; he was alone. My guess is—I had not thought about it until this moment—Baker probably engineered this thing, and let the two of them resolve it. In fact, I may have known that at the time. It's kind of an amusing story about how Percy bested Tower. Other than security assistance, we generally showed a deeper interest on security assistance matters as they came to the floor or as they were considered by the Foreign Relations Committee. But after that, we didn't make any serious efforts to try to assert jurisdiction over things. We did have AWACS hearings.

DW: Talk about the role Cran Montgomery played for Baker.

RD: Cran was his top foreign policy advisor, national security advisor; we worked constantly closely together. Baker had few weapons interests. A lot of the things that came across my desk in relation to members and members' staff, which was Cran's role, had to do with trying to further the interest of constituents, like Lockheed or McDonnell-Douglas. Baker didn't truly have very many of those. So I didn't have very much contact with Cran about those specific projects, but Cran was constantly, I'm sure, getting presentations because of Baker's role. We worked very closely together, on up through his being an ambassador to Oman; I still see him.
DW: I'm trying to get a feel for the nature of Cran's interests, ostensibly reflecting Baker's interests, in your area and what he was trying to get done.

RD: My sense was that as majority leader and as the leader of the Armed Services Committee, our job was to get the Reagan budget through. In general, with very few exceptions—MX being one of the big ones—that was our goal. We really were there to further the president's agenda. So, to the extent Baker had any specific instructions for Tower, they generally were of a tactical nature: how can we achieve this or that legislative end? If they were legislative in nature, in terms of the floor action, my cues were more often taken from Jim Range than anybody else or Bill Hildenbrand or Howard Greene.

DW: Again, let me see if I understand correctly. It was not that Cran in any sense was trying to influence what the Armed Services Committee was doing—

RD: He may have, I just don't remember.

DW: —but it was more a matter of joining forces to advance the Reagan position in defense matters and figuring out what needed to be done to do that and then doing it.

RD: Yes. Plus, we traveled together a couple of times.

DW: Did you get the impression that Baker, through his staff and other means, was pretty well informed as to what was going on in the Committee at any given time?

RD: Yes; my job was to keep him informed. Mistakes were made, though. Going back to one of your earliest questions about _____.

DW: To your knowledge, did Howard Baker ever get John Tower to do something or agree to something he really did not want to do or did not like?

RD: Yes, and it popped in my mind that he might have gotten him to vote for some nominations of some people who he didn't want to vote for, to go along on something. Yes, I think it happened on more than one occasion.

DW: Do you have any sense as to how Baker would go about doing this?
RD: They were old buddies; they had been around the barn many times. He would try to talk him into it. We would usually have a little warning that it was coming—not specifically, but we would catch hints. We would tell Tower, "He's likely to raise with you," "wants your support on this or that," and it could well have been something that Tower was diametrically opposed to for ten years and Baker would set out trying to talk him out of it. More times than not, Baker would succeed. And the appeal would be: this is for our political interests, this is for your president, this is for the Republicans in the Senate. Tower was a powerful party man, and he would appeal to put the interests of the party above his own personal principals. I don't know if he very often ever opposed that point.

DW: One person I spoke to, talking about Tower, observed that he was—she meant this in the larger sense—a great fraternity man and that he enjoyed and gained strength from being a part of a group.

RD: Very much so. I never could swear—during Tower's confirmation—not being a member of the club, but Tower lived on being part of and was enormously proud of being chairman of the Armed Services Committee and was enormously proud of his success in gaining leadership generally in the Senate.

DW: I promised one more, but let me break my promise—but I promise this will be the last. What was the nature of his interest in the Policy Committee as opposed to his obvious interest in the Armed Services Committee? Why did he want to be chairman of the Policy Committee and what did he gain from being chairman?

RD: He wanted the Republicans to have a coherent set of policies they could influence and they could further to advance their own political interests as well as the national interest. When Tower took over the Policy Committee, it was virtually moribund; it did very little more than track legislative and give updates to individual offices about what the content of the legislation might be, making summaries. He expanded under Baker's leadership—he and Baker took over about the same time—they greatly expanded the Policy Committee as the base for research, for using it to organize task forces on foreign policy, on defense, on whatever the current topics were back then. And made it the real focus, without Tower ever—at least from my perspective—trying to over control that.

DW: My recollection is that the study you did on defense was issued by the Policy Committee.
RD: Absolutely right, and it was issued before we were in the majority. It was used as a forum to really debate and talk things over.

DW: Was that study discussed at Policy luncheons before it was released, do you know?

RD: I think there was a presentation made about it, generally. Jack Javits might have been on it; I remember Jack Danforth very much being on it.

DW: On the subcommittee.

RD: On the task force.

DW: Thank you very much, Mr. Dawson.

RD: Come back, I've got a lot more.

DW: We want to get it!