

March 11, 1987

Dear Mr. Blair:

Thank you for your kind message. I appreciate your warm words of support and confidence.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Howard H. Baker, Jr.
Chief of Staff to the President

Mr. W. Robert Blair
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Chicago, IL 60603

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March 3, 1987

Honorable Howard H. Baker, Jr.
Chief of Staff
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator:

In prevailing upon you to become his Chief of Staff, the President made the right move at the right time. No one could have summed it up better than the Chicago Tribune did in its March 1 editorial where it stated

"In persuading Howard Baker, former Senate Majority Leader to replace Regan, he put into the key job the most qualified man in America to hold it".

While the White House clipping service undoubtedly picked up the Tribune editorial as well as the Sun-Times editorial of March 1, which was also laudatory, I am enclosing copies of both of them for your perusal just in case you missed them.

I can certainly understand your feeling that your duties and responsibilities as Chief of Staff would preclude you from running for President, but I wouldn't shut the door too firmly on this. By this time next year, no potential candidate is going to be as knowledgeable as you in running the country and this will be apparent to the Congress, the media and to the people. A genuine draft movement might be started and you could end up being the nominee of the Republican Party.

In any event, if I can be of help or assistance to you in your new role or with regard to the politics of 1988 please don't hesitate to call upon me.

Sincerely,



W. Robert Blair

WRB:ek
Enclosures

Chicago Tribune

FOUNDED June 10, 1847

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Sunday, March 1, 1987

Reagan must rescue his presidency

This never would have happened to Gary Cooper.

The leading man, which Mr. Cooper epitomized and fellow movie actor Ronald Reagan always wanted and finally became in the ultimate real-life drama, is not supposed to lose it all in the end. He is supposed to ride off to glory in the sunset, having overcome the greatest of odds and the fiercest of enemies.

But in his most important role, that of President of the United States, Ronald Reagan's final act may be stumbling off toward the horizon. With less than two years left, what had been a rather outstanding performance is bordering dangerously on the pathetic, an ending so sad and out of character that even the harshest of critics would rather not watch.

Ronald Reagan, the President if not the actor, deserves better than finishing up a tired and confused figure, tortured by a failing memory, a failed staff and a defensive wife meddling in the affairs of state.

Incredibly, that was the picture of the President that emerged this last week in the wake of the Irangate scandal which has decimated his administration at home, tarnished his once-brilliant image abroad and, perhaps most important, sapped his own strength and confidence.

In less than a week, Mr. Reagan has been embarrassed by his own faulty recollections about whether he ordered the delivery of U.S. arms to Iran in exchange for hostages; endured the humiliation of a silly public spat between his wife, Nancy, and former Chief of Staff Donald Regan; received diplomatic insults from ungrateful and opportunistic Middle East allies; suffered the polite but forceful rebukes of a commission he had appointed to tell him what went wrong with his foreign policy; and heard scandalous reports of possible criminal indictments against a wide array of close friends and former White House insiders.

Beneath it all, a terribly difficult but unavoidable question is nagging the nation and begging to be answered: Is Ronald Reagan still capably in charge?

The reasons for asking it are both legitimate and compelling. For starters, the President is 76 years old and plagued with health problems. Even more alarming was the miserable performance of his administration at Reykjavik last October in a potentially disastrous confrontation with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. And most recently, as the Tower Commission report proved, the handling of the Irangate policy scandal has been positively abysmal, topped last week when the President finally met with a few reporters and explained his loss of memory on a major policy decision by asking them,

were and what they were doing on the day he allegedly approved the arms for hostage swap.

On Friday the President finally dumped Donald Regan, years too late, and took the first step in a long time that suggests he hasn't played one scene too many. In persuading Howard Baker, former Senate Majority Leader, to replace Regan, he put into the key job the most qualified man in America to hold it. Now if Mr. Reagan decides to hand off presidential responsibility now, he will at least be passing it to the most capable hands in Washington.

It might not be a bad idea if Mr. Baker is only the beginning. In recent weeks the Reagan inner circle had been reduced to two—Atty. Gen. Edwin Meese and the First Lady. Both are fine and loyal friends but neither has nor deserves the confidence of the American people as a Svengali on the affairs of state.

There is still plenty of room in this administration for people of stature, experience and expertise. And there is still plenty of time for them to come on board and put the Reagan presidency back on track.

The next step should be the return of Gen. Brent Scowcroft, a member of the Tower Commission, to the White House as the national security adviser, a post he held under President Ford. No one ever did the job better.

If Secretary of State George Shultz has lost his credibility and zeal, as he may have, then he too should be replaced. Treasury Secretary James Baker, who appears to be our most effective foreign envoy at the moment, or former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, could fill the void.

Even former President Nixon could be enlisted on a special emissary basis to help deal with the Soviet Union and re-establish some sense of strength and stability abroad, where Mr. Nixon's reputation was never damaged the way it was at home. And he might have some good advice on other matters, too. No president alive has suffered so deeply from scandal. If anyone knows the mistakes that must be avoided, it is Richard Nixon.

All these people have qualifications the Reagan administration sorely needs. They are all battle-hardened veterans in the wars of public policy. And they are patriotic enough to answer as Howard Baker did the call of a U.S. President in dire trouble, which this one seems to be whether he realizes or not.

This country is tired of watching its presidents limp from office. And if there is one who ought to go marching off stage proudly it is Ronald Reagan, even if he has to do it firmly in the grasp of such a high-powered supporting cast.

Reagan must do two things

The damaging Tower Commission report should force President Reagan to do two things:

- Modify his style of detached management in a way that demonstrates he is firmly in charge.
- Fill in whatever gaps of information he can in his speech to the nation later this week, with a commitment that more will follow.

Reagan's first major action following the report was commendable. He chose former Senate Republican leader Howard Baker to replace the discredited Don Regan as White House chief of staff. Capitol Hill reaction to that news ranged from praiseworthy to descriptions of it as "brilliant" and a "masterstroke."

But it would be a mistake to exaggerate Baker's potential for shaping changes. His popularity with Congress, of course, will help the president with a Senate and House now fully controlled by the Democrats, and the Tennessean's credibility among the media will bring new respect for operations at the center of government power.

However, that appointment does not relieve No. 1 of responsibility for what has gone wrong, nor will it allow Reagan to continue to rule without immersing himself in the detailed grunt work of running the government.

It does not really matter whether Reagan actually uses the word "sorry" in his speech Wednesday. His actions will tell whether he truly is or not. Surely, there is plenty to be sorry about.

As forceful as the language is in the Tower Commission's report on the Iran and contras affair, it still seems to soft-pedal the fundamental fact that when all is said and done, the man to ultimately blame is not Regan, or John Poindexter, or Robert McFarlane, but Ronald Reagan. No amount of finger-pointing by anyone can—or should—obscure that central fact.

We are not sure the president realizes the ridicule he has invited by seeking to make light of the fact that he does not remember whether he authorized the shipment of arms to Iran in August, 1985—if inability to recall is indeed the reason for two contradictory responses he gave the Tower Commission on this crucial question.

Nor are we sure the president has, as yet, taken the kind of aggressive approach in ferreting out the truth that an angry chief executive should on learning his trusted subordinates have misled and deceived him. One is entitled to wonder why.

No changes in the White House staff or in the Cabinet will help if the Reagan style does not change. We don't agree with partisan critics who say Reagan is incapable of demonstrating mastery of governmental mechanisms. A number of past actions have proved otherwise.

Irangate does not represent the first time high-level presidential aides operating from their bureaucratic fortress have created a monumental mess. And this will not be the last time, either.

Only a president alert to the need of those sensitivities will be able to avoid such debacles. And if a president is, like Reagan, not given to attending to details, he needs to be doubly careful.

The same thing applies to the National Security Council, the advisory agency that went operational with a

vengeance. All bureaucracies—in government and in the private sector—tend to run rampant if not kept under constant scrutiny. The NSC is particularly vulnerable to this tendency because it is so isolated from the outside world.

Dealing in secrets of the highest order, it has the capability of getting away with secret doings. Apparently even the topmost officials of the Reagan administration were not always fully aware of what the NSC was up to. A White House chief of staff more attuned to the problems that secrecy can help create would have been more alert.

Baker in that role can be of inestimable value to the president. Baker can be trusted to advise Reagan fully on the political and public-opinion fallout—and the ethical implications—from proposed options which other aides bring to the Oval Office.

As it is, military people like Poindexter and Oliver North, taking upon themselves the responsibility of achieving the president's compassionate aim of gaining the freedom of American hostages held by Iran's friends in Lebanon, went seemingly berserk.

And the president either did not quite understand what they were doing or did not care what methods they were using—in either case a disastrous situation. This merely emboldened them to do something for another cause the president passionately espoused—the contras.

One must remember that the Tower Commission did its diligent digging in the narrowly prescribed framework traditional to presidential panels. The president had asked it to look into the working of the National Security

Council and to come up with recommendations for improvement. It did not have, nor was it supposed to have, the tools or the power of a prosecutor. Other investigations therefore will go into greater details and other areas, especially the contra connection, the alleged diversion of proceeds from the sale of U.S. weapons to Iran. Wherever the trail of possible illegality leads—in the Iran affair or the contra connection—it must be followed.

In dealing with those inquiries, Baker again will be of enormous help. He draws on his experience as a member of the Senate Watergate Committee that probed abuses of power in the Nixon administration. He is fully aware of the line between presidential and congressional authority that must be observed in maintaining our system of checks and balances.

But once again, the point needs to be stressed that Reagan's performance is what really matters. It remains a sad irony, indeed, that a president who restored the shattered credibility of the country in world affairs, gave the people cause to rejoice and lifted their morale with firm and vigorous leadership has now, in the final years of his presidency, managed to inflict such grievous damage on the same restored credibility and rejuvenated spirit.

The president must demonstrate that he appreciates the gravity of what happened. Charm and amiability, which he has in plenty and has put to good use before in getting out of bad situations, will no more suffice.

Reagan cannot afford—and the country cannot afford and the free world cannot afford—to have a wounded, discredited administration for two years.

March 11, 1987

Dear Mr. Nunley:

Thank you for your kind message. I appreciate your warm words of support and confidence.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Howard H. Baker, Jr.
Chief of Staff to the President

Mr. Harry H. Nunley
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Harry H. Nunley
Route #5, Box 444
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(Proud American)

March 1, 1987

Honorable Howard
Baker

Just a word of
congratulations
I feel like President
Reagan made a wise
decision

Mr. Baker I am an
invalid, but still take
time to watch the News

Respectfully,
Harry H. Nunley
Phone 1-615-658-6098

March 11, 1987

Dear Mr. Wilkins:

Thank you for your kind message. I appreciate your warm words of support and confidence.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Howard H. Baker, Jr.
Chief of Staff to the President

Mr. Roger Wilkins
Institute for Policy Studies
1901 Q Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20009

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HAB-1

Institute for Policy Studies

March 2, 1987

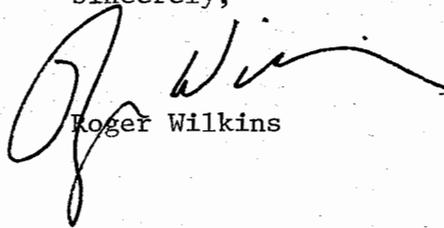
Senator Howard Baker
The White House
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Senator Baker--

Once when I was writing for The Washington Star, you gave me a splendid telephone interview about Senator Dirksen. I thought you were a good guy before that and I thought you were a wonderful guy after that.

As a liberal black Democrat--long before we ever knew about the arms sales to Iran--I believed all the things about your new boss that the Tower Board said about him. BUT, I think the nation surely doesn't need the spectacle or the ordeal of a presidency disintegrating over 22 months. So, this is all to say that I think you're a great fellow and a real patriot and that we all owe you a large debt of thanks--Evans & Novak notwithstanding.

Sincerely,



Roger Wilkins

P.S. Don't ever let Novak know you got congratulations from IPS or you're dead.

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March 11, 1987

Dear Reverend O'Brien:

Thank you for your kind message. I appreciate your warm words of support and confidence.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Howard H. Baker, Jr.
Chief of Staff to the President

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CHESTER O'BRIEN
MINISTER TO SENIOR ADULTS
AND EVANGELISM

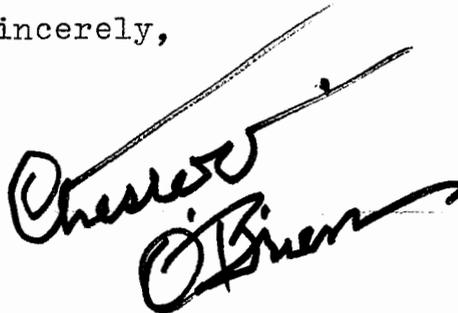
Senator Howard Baker
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator Baker:

You have no idea how relieved I
am since you came on board as
Chief of Staff.

We're pulling for you and the
Reagans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chester O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive style and is slanted upwards to the right.

*A Window
Toward Heaven*

Chester O'Brien, Jr.

TO PRESIDENT REAGAN

Best Wishes,

Charles D. Brown

*"... his windows being open... he kneeled
three times a day, and prayed, and gave
thanks before God..."*

Daniel 6:10

A devotional study of prayer...