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Reflections
on Presidential
LEADERSHIP

by **William D. Ruckelshaus**

The Henry M. Jackson/
William J. Van Ness
Lectures on Leadership

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The Henry M. Jackson Foundation was founded in 1983 to continue the unfinished work of the late Senator Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson in the fields in which he played a key leadership role: international affairs education, human rights, environment and natural resources management, and public service. Through its grantmaking and strategic initiatives, the Foundation seeks to make a lasting impact and perpetuate the Jackson legacy for the benefit of future generations.

The Henry M. Jackson / William J. Van Ness Lectures on Leadership honor two men who exemplified throughout their lives and careers the qualities of judgment, integrity, and character inherent in a true leader. The series was established by the Foundation earlier this year to promote effective leadership and demonstrate through the selection of speakers the attributes discussed in the Foundation's twenty-fifth anniversary publication, *The Nature of Leadership, Lessons from an Exemplary Statesman*.



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**Inaugural lecture presented on
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Seattle, Washington**

Introduction

John Hempelmann: Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the inaugural Henry M. Jackson / William J. Van Ness Lecture Series on Leadership.

I want to recognize representatives from the Henry M. Jackson Foundation who are in attendance, particularly Linda Mason Wilgis and Craig Gannett, vice presidents of the Foundation, and Lara Iglitzin, the Foundation's executive director. I particularly want to welcome Bill Van Ness's family, his brother, his wife Patricia and their children and grandchildren. Thank you all for coming.

Why did we create the Henry M. Jackson / William J. Van Ness Lecture Series on Leadership?

Bill Van Ness worked for Senator Jackson in the '60s and in the '70s. I first met him when I worked there as a young staff member and he was already a legend among the staff and in the senate. He was special counsel and then general counsel to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources when Senator Jackson was chair. Some of the most important environmental and natural resource legislation in the history of this country has the imprint of Bill Van Ness on it. Legislation like the National Environmental Policy Act, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Act, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and the Energy Policy and Conservation Act all bear the fingerprints of Bill Van Ness, and are incredibly important to this country.

Bill exemplifies many of the same qualities—inquisitiveness, intelligence, diligence, perseverance, real smarts—that we highlighted in the Foundation's 25th Anniversary publication, *The Nature of Leadership*, which talks about the qualities of leadership that Scoop exemplified.

Introducing our speaker tonight is another important leader in our community, Jerry Grinstein. Jerry was general counsel to the senate Commerce Committee under Senator Warren Magnuson at the same time that Bill Van Ness was general counsel to the Energy and Natural Resources Committee under Senator Jackson. It was a time that we were all very lucky to be a part of because it was an era of civility in the U.S. Senate. It was remarkable, the bipartisanship and the legislation that was passed in the '60s and the '70s. The collaborative nature of the relationship between the Republicans and the Democrats was something that you would think could never have happened given current experiences.

Jerry, as you probably know, has an illustrious history in the community and in the country. Jerry went on to take Western Airlines to new heights, literally, and then ran Burlington Northern. Most recently, Jerry's leadership first on the board and then as CEO of Delta Airlines helped the company exit bankruptcy and become the powerhouse airline that it is today. He has had a remarkable career. I am delighted that he's on our board, and that he is here tonight to talk about Bill Van Ness and to introduce Bill Ruckelshaus. Thank you, Jerry.

Gerald Grinstein: Thank you, John. I think the idea of having these discussions about leadership is extraordinarily timely. People have been studying leadership since Plato. I'm not going to go back and trace the history of that, but when the age of science came about in the 1920s, it was decided that there were specific leadership traits that would indicate exactly how people would perform. So they took leaders, and they weighed them, and they measured them, and they submitted them to a variety of psychological tests. And they came out with the fact that men of just below or just above medium height were the best leaders—which, of course, is perfectly useless.

Then in the '30s and early '40s, you had so-called “command and control” leadership, which was emblematic of General Motors. You can see how that went.

Then there were a series of books on how certain leaders fit certain challenges, whether it's in a company or in government. It was called the “Contingency Theory” in that it was contingent on exactly what kind of situation that person was in and what qualities that person had. Needless to say, that in life, there are endless contingencies, and there are endless characteristics to human beings. And so, like all of the previous theories on leadership, it too, would get discarded and had almost no meaning.

So let's talk a little bit about the three people that we're going to honor tonight. One is here in spirit, and that's Scoop. Helen and the Foundation have wisely kept that spirit alive.

Sometimes, you may wonder, do you really have to do that? Well, I'll tell you a story. About three years ago, I was the master of ceremonies for a dinner and Scoop was the honoree. Just before I got up to speak, a youngish man came over to the table and said that he was a public official in Snohomish County, and that “I got into politics—into running for public office—because of Scoop.” And then he hesitated a second, and he said, “But I'd never met him.” It was really a telling story about Scoop. All of the things that he did in his lifetime inspired and motivated people to take on leadership roles.

Then we come to Bill Van Ness. He's described in a variety of ways by people, but I think of him as relentlessly unassuming. He could walk into an empty room, and you wouldn't see him. And yet the most important legislative issues, the things that really went to the core of Scoop's being, were assigned to Bill—the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the Environmental Policy Act—because he thinks strategically, he has enormous drive, and that very quality of

being totally unassuming inspires trust.

He's not aiming to do anything else except that which he's working on. You know that he's going to do exactly what he says he's going to do and in the way he says he's going to do it. In the book of leadership, those qualities are the most important you can have.

Now we get to Bill Ruckelshaus. You could not describe him as modest. There would not be the William D. Ruckelshaus Center if he were modest. But he is humble. I don't know what he is going to talk about tonight, but I did read, in one of the speeches he gave at Ohio State Law School, that he urged them to start a leadership program and used the terms "humble" and "humility" several times. It's his leadership style. It's the way he gets things done. He also has endless patience. I don't know how the hell he goes through all of those meetings. He sits and listens to everyone. And everyone is convinced that they've had a hearing.

I'm going to tell one story about him, which will say a lot about his character. I was on the board and was also the chairman of the Compensation Committee at a company at which he was the CEO. He came to me and said, "I'm going to cut my compensation in half. The company's had a bad year." Now, I'm sure that none of the people that have been fired from some of the major corporations have done that, but Bill did it, and he did it without any fanfare, without any discussion.

Like Bill Van Ness, when you have a serious mission, you call on him. If you have a major environmental issue such as the Puget Sound or are trying to work your way through dispute resolution, you call on Bill Ruckelshaus.

When the University of Washington's School of Medicine got itself on its own critical list because of compliance issues, they needed somebody who could discreetly do a total analysis of it and

come up with a precision solution to it. They called on Bill Van Ness. You will not hear another issue arising out of compliance at the University of Washington School of Medicine as a result of his work. It's extraordinary.

Bill Ruckelshaus has not only taken leadership roles, but he leads others to think about it. He has that capacity to put himself into other people's heads. They call it empathy. But whatever you want to call it, it's an extraordinary quality to be able to think how other people will see a situation and then adapt, so that you can bring them toward you.

I don't know what he's going to talk about tonight, but I do think that he will talk about leadership, and in this day and age of political warfare, extraordinary political warfare, when he's finished with his speech, I hope that everyone here will join in drafting him to run for public office.



Photo by Chris Bennion

WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS

William D. Ruckelshaus became the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) first administrator when the agency was formed in December 1970 under President Nixon. During his early tenure he oversaw a seven-month hearing on DDT, after which he instituted a ban on that pesticide. He also served as acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and deputy attorney general of the U. S. Department of Justice. Under President Reagan, he became the EPA's fifth administrator. In 1985, he joined Perkins Coie, a Seattle-based law firm.

Ruckelshaus currently serves as Strategic Director at Madrona Venture Group, L.L.C., a Seattle-based investment company. He is also active in many regional and national causes relating to energy and the environment, serves on the boards of numerous non-profit organizations including The Energy Foundation, the Center for Global Development, and is a founding director of the Initiative for Global Development.

Reflections on Presidential Leadership

The sponsor of this series, the Henry M. Jackson Foundation, has two fearless role models in Senator Jackson and Bill Van Ness on which to base the theme of leadership that I want to talk about tonight. Needless to say, I'm honored, and as Jerry has suggested, humbled, to inaugurate this effort to try and shed some light on its meaning.

Leadership, of course, has many forms. All entail one person, enlisting the aid and support of others in the achievement of a shared task. These others, or those being enlisted for support, could work for an identifiable, nongovernmental entity, like say the Boeing Company or the Gates Foundation—or smaller units within large institutions, or a small business or a not-for-profit organization, or smaller yet, a neighborhood cause or even a family.

To be successful in all of these leadership challenges takes intuitive and learned skills and character traits, all of which could be the subject of separate examinations. But given the sponsorship of this series—and that it's in the name of two great American governmental leaders, Scoop Jackson and Bill Van Ness—I will concentrate on governmental or political leadership, and in particular, on presidential leadership.

When my wife Jill and I moved back here to Seattle from Texas in 1997, I decided to study our nation's history by reading a biography of every president sequentially from George Washington to the present. I had some help from a historian friend in choosing the biographies. It took me about three years to complete the effort, but I found it enjoyable and instructive. If you ever have trouble getting to sleep, try Chester A. Arthur at bedtime. Besides, being presi-

dent has been described as similar to being the groundskeeper at a cemetery. There are a lot of people under you, but none of them are listening. So what better institution is there to talk about leadership?

Let me be clear. It does matter where the leader wants to take us. There have been many examples of leaders past and present that were very effective as leaders, but whose stated objectives ranged from the protection of the Aryan race to the pursuit of an appealing ideological goal such as “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” This brand of ideological leadership so prevalent in the 20th century has resulted in the slaughtering of tens of millions of people.

Hitler, Mao, and Stalin certainly fit this category. A recent book by the Harvard political scientist, Daniel Goldhagen, called *Worse Than War*, estimates that during the 20th century alone, close to 175 million people were murdered within the geography of these monstrous leaders.

Rather than make this talk an analysis of the defensibility of a leader’s goals or means to achieve them, I’m going to assume that, while American presidents’ goals may not be universally embraced—they never are—they were defensible in the pursuit of that president’s view of higher public values such as political or economic freedom or justice and human rights.

I know this is quite a leap for some, like say James Buchanan, the last president before the Civil War, who in every ranking I have ever seen is always at or near the bottom of all of our presidents. But I am going to ask you to assume, in assessing their leadership qualities, that our presidents were trying to do the right thing as defined by democratic values. Just assume it for this talk. You don’t have to do it after you leave this room, but just assume it for this talk.

So what are the qualities a president should possess? And

how should they bring those qualities to bear on their goals? Both of these questions must be answered to provide some sideboards to the subject of presidential leadership.

First, a word about the context of political leadership. It's much easier to be recognized as a leader during a time of overriding national crisis, like a war. It's no accident, that in any survey of our great presidents, the same three presidents appear at the very top of the rankings. All three of these presidents were wartime leaders and were seen as strong, reassuring figures. Starting with our first president, the father of our country, followed by Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, all reigned during periods of great personal insecurity for the American people.

From the start of the American Revolution to the adoption of our Constitution, there was a twelve-year period, the Civil War, which had already commenced when Lincoln took office, and which lasted about four years, to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, almost ten years into Roosevelt's reign. Just think about that for a minute. Our involvement in Afghanistan has now been nine years, and in Iraq, just short of eight years.

But during the periods of our greatest presidents, we Americans had one overwhelming, unifying concern: survival. Obviously, that issue concentrates the mind and unifies a people behind a political leader. It's easier to lead within the context of war, but it is often much harder to lead immediately after a war.

Woodrow Wilson, our president during World War I, usually ranks in the top ten in all of the surveys. And believe me, there have been many surveys conducted over the last forty years ranking our presidents. However, in none of the surveys is Wilson in our top three. He's not even close. In 1916, he ran for reelection on the slogan, "He kept us out of war." Thus, he was never riding a national consensus that our survival was at stake.

I'm focusing on Wilson because he was a wartime president, and you might ask, "Why wasn't he in the top three?" I would argue that it was because our involvement in what was seen by many Americans as a European struggle did not have the unifying effect of other conflicts. Wilson sold our entry into World War I as a noble gesture on our part to inject the principles of freedom, self-determination, and the perfectibility of man. He believed it was our destiny to promote democracy throughout the industrial nations of the world.

He virtually killed himself trying to convince Americans we should join the League of Nations, an organization that he believed embodied these values. He took a tour, as most all of you know, from Washington, D.C., to the West Coast on a railroad train and, using his great oratorical skills, tried to convince the American people that joining the League of Nations was essential for their well-being.

The failure of that effort and his ideas, the rise of pacifism in the 1920s, isolationism in the 1930s, and the resumption of world war in the late '30s will probably permanently confine Wilson to a lesser perch on the list of our great presidents. Most of the other wars occurring under lower ranked presidents were not as publicly threatening as the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, or World War II, or were instigated by us. In any event, they did not provide the backdrop for historical greatness.

Several presidents became famous as wartime heroes. James Monroe fought in the Revolutionary War. Andrew Jackson was in the War of 1812. William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor were famous generals in their day. Ulysses S. Grant was a Civil War hero. And almost every post-Civil War president, up to Teddy Roosevelt, with the exception of Grover Cleveland, had fought in the Civil War. Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders, who cavorted around Cuba,

vaulted him to national fame and ultimately the White House, and on and on, through Eisenhower, the last purely military man to occupy the White House. None of these men were inspirational wartime presidents.

For some, the wars occurring during their time in office were short and we were victorious, and their popularity spiked as a result. George H.W. Bush and the Gulf War is an example. Alternatively, for other presidents the wars were long and fruitless and destroyed their presidency, like Lyndon B. Johnson and Vietnam.

When we compare President Obama to our three great presidents, let's not forget the societal context under which these great presidents flourished. I believe Obama has tried to be a great unifier, a conciliator, and a collaborative president. Issues like our limping economy, healthcare, immigration, our rising yearly deficit and soaring national debt, climate change, Social Security, and how to extract ourselves from our most recent international adventures in Iraq or Afghanistan are not unifying our country. On the contrary, they divide us along party lines and sometimes within parties.

The conditions of visible, admirable, embraceable leadership do not exist today and haven't for some time. Therefore, it's unlikely any of our post-World War II presidents will be considered by historians as great. I think there may be three exceptions to that. Reagan, Truman or Eisenhower, on careful analysis, may deserve to be elevated to that capacity, but the societal complexity and the lack of unifying issues during the times in which they reigned make it unlikely.

It's interesting that if you look at all of the surveys of ex-presidents, they reach their peak of popularity when they're out of office about twenty years, and then they begin a decline until they settle in to where they are going to be judged by history.

There are occasional presidents who move well past that

twenty-year period, well past the time when you'd think it would be apparent how they are going to be judged by history and then suddenly rise or fall. Ulysses S. Grant, in the last ten years, has risen appreciably in these surveys. Eisenhower has also moved up.

There is a Princeton professor of history who has written a book in which he emphasizes the "hidden hand." He uses Eisenhower as an example of somebody who played the fool in many cases to the public, but behind the scenes he was extremely effective in accomplishing what he wanted to do. If that theory holds up, after further research, Eisenhower could be elevated to a form of greatness.

So back to the question of what qualities a political leader must possess, and how should he use them? I won't try to deal with them all. Time doesn't permit. I will only touch on those I deem most important. I also ask you to join me in a bit of humility. As we've been told, you must walk a mile in the leader's shoes before criticizing him. This is good advice because when you criticize him you are a mile away and you have his shoes.

Above all, a political leader must have judgment. Something from their experience or intuition must tell them: "What are the big issues I must address and in what sequence? What groups do I need to get on my side to succeed? Who can stop me, and what can I do about it? How do I enlist the uninterested public in my cause to make success more likely?"

President Obama has been criticized widely for pushing forward on too many fronts at once and thus diluting his ability to advance on any one of his goals. The claim is that he didn't think enough about sequencing. Whether fairly or not, Rahm Emanuel, the departing White House chief of staff, is blamed for this "all-at-once" strategy.

A proper sequencing, so goes the argument, would have

focused just on the economy, as it overrode all other issues in the public's mind. Obama chose healthcare and got extended coverage for the uninsured, but did little about the cost of providing healthcare. Did Obama exercise good judgment in his initial push on all fronts? Or should he have husbanded his political capital, concentrated on the economy, and only in the light of progress there, addressed healthcare and other issues? History will ultimately judge, but the early returns are not promising.

But be careful. They weren't promising for Reagan at this time in his first term. In the early '80s, unemployment was rising and so were interest rates. You remember stagflation. He and Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker both stayed the course. The economy recovered, and he was reelected overwhelmingly in 1984. This could happen to Obama. In fact, at this juncture, I think it's likely to happen.

Two historical examples of presidential judgment will illustrate my point. Abraham Lincoln drafted the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves several months before issuing it in September of 1862, after the North's victory at Antietam. He wanted to issue it when he felt the public was ready for it. He needed a victory by the North to make its issuance seem like a statement of confidence. His cabinet was almost unanimous in opposing Lincoln's desire to make such a public announcement. Lincoln had showed them the proclamation the previous July, but did not ask them to approve it. He knew they wouldn't. Lincoln followed his own instincts and history has ratified his judgment.

By the way, I mentioned it was issued in draft form in September. The Emancipation Proclamation was actually signed January 1, 1863, in the White House, in a ceremony in which there were about five people present. The draft had done everything Lincoln wanted it to do in communicating to the American people

what his intention was.

In 1940, Franklin Roosevelt needed a crisis to justify America's entering the war raging around the world. While he made several helpful gestures toward England and our allies, and clearly felt our presence in the war a necessity for our own survival, it was only after Pearl Harbor that he felt secure in asking the Congress to declare war on Japan and, almost immediately, on Germany as well. His timing, restraint, and understanding of the need for public support, like Lincoln's, was an example of sound presidential judgment.

What's frustrating about speaking of the importance of judgment is that it's really better suited to define a whole career than to try to illustrate it by a few isolated examples. I believe Washington, Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt all fit the career-based definition perfectly. I have not mentioned Washington in any of these examples. It's a little more difficult to translate his form of greatness into modern day realities, but it was nevertheless there.

Having the ability to connect with the American people through oratory is thought of, at least by politicians and many others, as an important quality. It clearly assisted Obama greatly in his last election and Kennedy during his time. I think it may be overrated. Wilson's oratory gained him little in convincing the American people they should embrace the League of Nations. By all accounts, Woodrow Wilson was a great orator. Jefferson was so poor a public speaker that he rarely spoke in public. In fact, he didn't even deliver his State of the Union orally. He delivered it in written form. Warren Harding, on the other hand, was widely regarded as a riveting public speaker. That great balloon popper, H.L. Mencken, once described a Warren Harding speech as "an army of pompous phrases marching across the landscape in search of an idea."

An inspiring speech can help a president, but it is of little use without goals, sound, well-thought-out objectives, and a clear strate-

gy to achieve them.

The ability to choose good people is a hallmark of great presidents. It's a mark of their self-confidence that they are not afraid of being surrounded by smart people. Harry Truman was an example of this. Smart people don't make leaders look dumb. They make them look smart. To miss this point means you won't be president very long.

After great presidents hire smart people, they listen to them, really listen. They insist on hearing every point of view as they arrive at important decisions and only then exercise their judgment. I think it's better to receive such advice in person, but it's not essential. President Nixon did not like personal contention played out in front of him. He relied on option papers in which all the relevant players were to give their points of view. The various viewpoints were then summarized by his staff and given to the president for a decision. I saw several of the option papers that I had commented on, and they were complete and fair. You were asked to review the summary to determine whether it was an accurate depiction of your views and that it was comprehensive.

It may be accurate to claim that Nixon walled himself off from interested parties because he was not comfortable in the face of personal controversy. But if he read the option papers, and those close to him insisted that he did, he would have been well informed before he exercised his judgment.

As we have since come to appreciate President Nixon's darker side, he was also perfectly willing to use his staff to conspire and to cover up. Nixon had serious character flaws that ruined his presidency. But studying his reign reveals much about the subject of presidential leadership.

Great democratic leaders are people of high solid integrity. They deal with people openly. They are sure of their values and how

these values inform their decisions. And the processes they use in arriving at those decisions reflect those qualities. That does not mean presidents are not subtle and flexible and, in some cases, full of guile in their approach to their goals.

Presidential decisions and actions can only be judged in their historical entirety. That's why it's best to wait before making a final judgment on a contemporary president. But how a president says he will approach his job in a campaign should be carefully observed and analyzed. I remember hearing Jimmy Carter, when he was running for president say, "I will never lie to the American people."

After that, I remember hoping we weren't at war when he was president. Because when at war, a president often has to deceive the American people in order to deceive their enemy. Were Eisenhower to provide, in response to a press inquiry, the date and time of invading Normandy to avoid lying to the American people, it would not be an exercise of good judgment. So lying and integrity are not always the same thing.

More often than we would care to admit, presidents must deceive to achieve, or as W.C. Fields reminded us, "If the end doesn't justify the means, what the hell does? Just don't make a habit of lying on the basis of any rationale. Of course, it's not normally a good thing to lie, and particularly when you do it to save your own skin. We have enough examples of that in the last forty years to last us for several millennia.

To get elected, a president should be likeable. That's not so much a quality of leadership, but it sure helps. I think Ronald Reagan personified that quality. In his presence, he made you want to protect him.

I was once flying with President Reagan in 1984 on Air Force One. We were going first to California and then up to Seattle. Somebody, in the White House, had told him that I used to live in

Seattle, so they put me on the plane. I was ushered up to the place where the president was. Whenever the president flew across the country, he always went north over Elmira, Illinois, his birthplace. As the plane was about to dip its wings over Elmira, which it always did, he said, “Bill, come over here and look out the window down there.” He said, “That’s the Elmira River.” He said, “When I was a young boy, I used to swim in that river. We never got sick, and there was raw sewage going into it from towns up and down the river.” He said, “We never got sick at all, so why are we spending all this money on pollution abatement?” I said, “Well, Mr. President, I don’t normally like to disagree with presidents, but removing sewage from our waterways has been a great boon to public health in this country. We have virtually wiped out cholera, typhoid, and a lot of other water-borne diseases. While it’s cost us a lot of money, it’s been a great thing.” “Well,” he said, “I never really realized that before.”

Three weeks later, I was summoned over to the White House to brief the president and the cabinet on the Clean Water Act, which was up for reauthorization in the Congress that next week. I brought over a lot of charts and I was about three minutes into my presentation when the president said, “Say, Bill, when I was a young boy, I used to swim in the Elmira River.” You have to love a guy like that. I mean, impervious to facts, but he was our president, and you’ve got to love him.

I think there are other desirable qualities a great leader should have. He should be consistent and predictable most of the time. Like integrity, this quality needs to be put in context. I think in the current political landscape, there are issues on which we can judge a president’s character, issues where political leaders should take a deep breath and ask themselves what they really think about social issue like abortion, or gun control, or gay marriage. They should then state their belief and be forever consistent, knowing

they will alienate some voters, regardless of what their position is.

A candidate's position on these issues reflects their character, not their judgment, and in the end, consistency on social issues demonstrates integrity and character—both of which are terribly important qualities for an American president.

There are also some issues for which a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds. When, if ever, it is advisable for our country to invade another is not a decision where a consistent position is necessarily an asset. Obviously, doing so only where our national interest dictates is a sound starting point and, let's be fair, defining our national interest and what should be done to pursue it is a dauntingly complex challenge. It entails knowledge of history and its lessons, as well as the current political context in which such a decision is being made. Having good people around you, insisting on hearing a variety of informed views, asking the right questions, understanding the level of public support necessary to make such a decision effective, realizing the full implications of attempting to impose our will on other nations by force, and finally, having the judgment to put all this together to make a decision and then sell it to the American people, are all elements a great leader must pursue to make a wise choice.

We've had countless examples in the twentieth century and first decade of this century of presidents making judgments about invading a country or overthrowing a regime where almost none of the necessary elements of success were present. In those cases, the results have almost always been predictable and bad. In my judgment, this does not mean we should never resort to force, only that we should have our eyes open and our minds working when we commit American blood and treasure.

A great democratic leader must also care about what the public thinks about them. I remember reading George W. Bush claim

that he never read the polls, that he was not a slave to public opinion. Never mind that the polls all show that the public doesn't like a president to be guided by the polls. It's unlikely that Bush wasn't aware of that or that if Karl Rove works for you reading any poll would be redundant.

Does this approach that he outlined make any sense? Is President Bush right to say, "I never read the polls"? Certainly, if the only reason he read the polls was to find out what the public thought and then claim those thoughts as his own, he was right to assert, "That's not what I do."

On the other hand, if your goals for your country are what you believe to be in the national interest, knowing what the people who live in the nation think about your goals is probably a good idea. After all, we live in a democracy. The people's beliefs and thoughts are important. Knowing where the public is on any issue is crucial in developing an approach to gain their support for acting in their interest.

Let me give you two examples. Last April, I was invited to the Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, California, to be on a panel celebrating the fortieth anniversary of Earth Day. Other members of the panel were John Whitaker, the head of Nixon's domestic counsel and his chief environmental advisor, and Chris DeMuth, who at that point in his career was a young staffer in the White House. He afterwards was the head of the American Enterprise Institute.

As a result of this experience, we all had a chance to review Nixon's environmental record. It was extraordinary. During his administration, sixteen major pieces of environmental legislation were passed, most of which he had introduced and all but one of which he signed. More legislation was passed on one subject than at any time in our history, with the possible exception of the New Deal.

In 1970, the year most of this legislation started, Nixon stated, “The 1970s must absolutely be the year when America pays its debt to the past by reclaiming the purity of its waters and its living environment. It is literally now or never.” That was President Nixon as he very publicly signed the National Environmental Policy Act drafted and shepherded through the Congress by Bill Van Ness and Senator “Scoop” Jackson.

There are memos in the Nixon archives expressing his great admiration for Senator Jackson, by the way, and considerably less enthusiasm for Senator Muskie and his environmental initiatives.

In his State of the Union that same year, 1970, just three weeks later, Nixon said the following: “Making peace with nature is a cause beyond party or faction. It has become a common cause of all the people in this country.”

In the spring of 1970, the House of Representatives passed the Clean Air Act, 374 votes to 1. And three months later, the U.S. Senate passed it 74 to nothing. Imagine that.

In 1970, Nixon also, with congressional support, reorganized the executive branch to create the Environmental Protection Agency and made one of the finest appointments of his administration, the first administrator of the EPA. You don’t have to believe that.

Nixon, like the Congress, was responding to public opinion spurred on by flammable rivers in Cleveland, Ohio, and the desire of people living in Denver to see the mountains again, and those in Los Angeles to see one another. This was really a, “smell, touch and feel,” kind of pollution, and the public had had enough of it. And the president and the Congress were responding.

People have criticized President Nixon for not having his own agenda and instead, responding to public opinion. What’s wrong with that? That’s the way democracy is supposed to work.

It’s important to remember, I suppose, that Nixon became

increasingly disillusioned with his own environmental initiatives. He felt that what he was getting back from the Congress was too extreme and in 1972 he sort of pivoted against his own record. I mentioned that he did not sign one of those sixteen environmental laws. He vetoed the Clean Water Act in October of 1972, three weeks before his election, and the Congress overrode his veto in both houses with very large majorities.

Was what he did leadership? Not in the sense that the term is usually used. But while his motives may not have been pure, the results were a cleaner environment and a more trusting public, at least, for a while.

I contrast this with Teddy Roosevelt, whose vision for wild things and places were way out in front of the American people during his administration. Roosevelt's actions were visionary. He has been called the first environmental president, and richly deserved it. He created innumerable national parks, national forests, bird sanctuaries, national monuments, and wilderness areas that subsequent generations of Americans have greatly enjoyed.

So one president leads public opinion, and the other reads the polls and follows. In both cases, the results for the American people, in my judgment, have been overwhelmingly positive, and it's hard to say that the motive for presidential leadership mattered. One thing I can say, I would prefer to work for a leader who believed in where we were going rather than being dragged there, kicking and screaming.

In preparation for a panel on Earth Day, we were given memos by the Nixon Library on which the president had made marginal notes. These were not nice notes. I'd never seen them before. I particularly noticed, on a memo from me, recommending that he sign the Clean Water Act, where his marginal note referenced the effluent emanating from a bull.

John Whitaker told a wonderful story. He said about a year before Nixon died, he was in his office in New York. Nixon was standing up against a window looking down Park Avenue and he said, “Well, John, whatever they say, they’ve got to acknowledge that we did a lot of great things while our administration was in office.” And Whitaker said, “I felt I had to say something, so I said, ‘Mr. President, one thing they’ll never take away from you, is that you were probably the greatest environmental president in the history of the country.’” And he said Nixon turned around and looked at him and said, “God, I hope not, John.”

Today, the science is pretty clear that the earth is warming and that man is contributing to that process primarily because of our heavy reliance on fossil fuels for the majority of our energy. The science is not as clear on the pace that this is occurring or the effects. Effects, such as moving the wheat fields 150 miles north in North America, might be good news in Canada and not so much in Oklahoma. I don’t personally believe we’ll do anything serious about climate change until the public demands it, much like they did in 1970, which motivated President Nixon.

I do think President Obama believes we should act. But without much public support, his opinion will not carry the day. I am sorry that it’s true because I believe our country, indeed the world, needs to move away from reliance on fossil fuels and we have needed to do that for over forty years.

The American people, on issues like climate change, have been called ideological liberals and operational conservatives. They are all for doing something about a problem in the abstract, but when the solution affects them, their enthusiasm cools. We must remember that the issue of climate change is one where the source of the problem is remote from its impact, chronologically.

There aren’t many issues like that. We have some in our eco-

conomic puzzles right now involving the deficit and Social Security. But as it relates to these kinds of issues, we've apparently embraced the philosophy of Groucho Marx who once observed, "Why should I care about posterity? What's posterity ever done for me? Our current attitude about Social Security's mounting deficits and our \$13 trillion national debt evinced the same attitude. Hand them off to our grandchildren.

The week before last, I spent four days in Washington, D.C. One of the reasons I was there was for the 40th anniversary celebration of the Clean Air Act. All of these things happened in 1970. It's really quite amazing. In Washington, there are some serious people, pretty glum about the partisanship, the bitterness, the acrimony, and the lack of progress on so many fronts that they see in our national government. I heard the term "unprecedented" used a lot.

There are many things to decry today, but my reading of history suggests we are not in unprecedented trouble. I believe we will come out of the phase we are in a stronger nation. In a strange way, our troubles could even be helped by this coming election. Now, I'm not going to tell you how that's going to happen because I don't know. But it could. What appears to be a Republican upheaval today also happened in 1994 and, after that, we passed welfare reform, something nobody ever thought would happen. We also balanced the budget twice at the end of that decade, which all seemed very unlikely at the time.

After all, we've had some unprecedented problems in the past. In 1804, a sitting vice president shot and killed in a duel a former secretary of treasury. The vice president was Aaron Burr and the secretary of treasury was Alexander Hamilton. That was unprecedented then and it still is. We also had a Civil War in which some 500,000 Americans were killed and we recovered several decades later as a stronger and more prosperous union.

What this all suggests is that we have to go to work on our problems, not just wring our hands. We must help our presidents, not simply expect them to lead where no one will follow. In other words, now is not the time to sit on the shore and jeer as the ship of state floats by, but to get in the boat and row. We all need to pull an oar in support and follow our leaders when they offer reasonable solutions to some of our most difficult problems. I think if we all do that, if we do our part, our leaders and our country will be better off, and so will the rest of us.

Thank you very much.



Questions & Answers

Q: Thank you for that impressive survey of American history. I was wondering, to what extent do you think that sitting presidents are thinking about their legacy while in office?

WR: I think some of them think about it a lot, maybe even too much. But I think we'd all be a lot better off if they simply concentrated on the job at hand, provided some vision for where they'd like to take the country, articulated that very clearly to the people, and then developed policies that will implement their vision. Their legacy will take care of itself. For example, I think we can go back and comment on some presidents who seemed to be very concerned about their legacy, but they didn't necessarily succeed. Wilson, to me, is an example of a man with a really great vision. Some of what he wanted to do had been embodied after World War II, but he may have been too concerned about his own legacy. When he went to Europe, and the League of Nations was created, primarily as a result of his Fourteen Points, he got a little thrown off, I think, in terms of not having the country behind him when he went there, and maybe believing too much that he was the savior of the world. He suffered greatly for it, as did his legacy. So I think there are a lot of examples of presidents who have suffered as a result of caring too much about that. I don't know that Lincoln paid a lot of attention to that, but maybe George Washington did and, to a lesser extent, I think Franklin Roosevelt did. I think Lincoln almost always comes out at the top of these lists and I don't think he spent a lot of time worrying about that.

Q: Bill, you mentioned Jimmy Carter. What do you think about his

struggle to try to micromanage the country as hard as he did? He clearly meets some of your judgment qualities as a leader.

WR: I think by everybody's acknowledgment, he's a great ex-president. He had a tough situation. Stagflation was there in spades during his administration. I never got the sense that he had a lot of understanding of what that was all about and what to do about it. He clearly got way down in the weeds too far. To try to actually control who was going to use the White House tennis court, which he did, was micromanaging in the extreme. He was leading a country then of about 250 million people and he had to realize it was a very diverse group. He had to keep thinking about how to keep them moving in the direction he wanted to go and what he needed to do to deal with people in his own administration and, in particular, in the Congress to accomplish his goals. I never got the sense that Carter was very good at that, but in many ways he's a very admirable man. If you read the biographies of these men, even Buchanan, he was a bastard of the Court of St. James. He was a governor several times. He was a senator. He had a distinguished career and from what you could see, at least on the surface, he should have been a fine president. He wasn't. He was elected beholden to the South. He was a Pennsylvania man, and pretty much tried to do everything his southern supporters wanted, and it absolutely ruined him as a president. These are not, by and large, marginal people. While we've marginalized them in our own eyes historically, that's really not true.

Q: *You made two points about climate change. One, that the president won't be able to act until the public is behind it and, secondly, that its effects are remote from its cause, suggesting a time lag. That seems like a potentially fatal combination.*

WR: Well, it is. Acid rain was a similar kind of problem. The source of acid rain was remote from its impact geographically, not chrono-

logically. We overcame that by emphasizing the reduction of sulfur oxides from power plants in the Midwest, gave them some incentives to do it, and used a cap in trade system, which we have now attempted to apply to everything else involving carbon.

Q: If you were advising President Obama, how would you advise him to communicate the urgency of climate change?

WR: Well, it's already too late. We already have so much carbon in the air that we're going to have some of the effects of global climate change in spite of any carbon reductions we do. Now, that doesn't mean we shouldn't do anything. We ought to do all kinds of things, and there are a lot of security reasons why we should not be reliant on places like Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Russia, and Nigeria for our energy. It's just silly for us to have our future held hostage by those societies, and silly for the world to do that. There's a lot of discussion about energy independence. The world, not just us, has got to be dependent on different forms of energy. If we're independent, and nobody else is, it isn't going to do us any good. So you say, what could I do to advise the president? Presidencies, in my judgment, are all about agendas. Whatever they put on the agenda is what people pay attention to. We didn't go into Iraq because the American people were demanding it. It was because President Bush put it on the top of his agenda. And this president has a sort of rectangular agenda on which there are a number of things that he'd like to pursue, which makes it difficult for people to focus on what he thinks is really important. He's probably right in saying there are a half a dozen things that are really important, but that doesn't mean you can talk about them all at once and not confuse people. If he thinks it's important enough to deal with, then he's got to move it up on his agenda and talk about it enough so that the public begins to understand it. There are more people today who don't even believe

global warming is real than there were two years ago, so we've had two years of trying to work through a series of solutions to the problem that have only increased the denial on the part of the American people. I haven't got any magic solution, but I think the only way you're going to do this sensibly is to tax carbon. Do you want to have people use less of something? Make it cost more. And you make it cost more by taxing people.

Q: You've given a really elegant retrospective and definition of leadership that I think fits the American experience in the past. Do you believe that a future president can look at history to deal with a world that is so increasingly interdependent and what would that leader look like?

WR: She'd be a hell of a woman. That's really a good question. I think if you go back and look at the beginning of the Civil War or even the Revolutionary War period, you could ask the same question. Lincoln was not even on anybody's radar screen until he got nominated. And he turned out to be probably our greatest president, seeing us through our most incredible crisis. I think we have people with the capability in this society; it's how you promote them. It's also true that all of us have an obligation to help set the conditions where leadership will work, not just wring our hands and say, "Oh, what a bunch of dopes there are in Congress." When I was back in Washington, D.C., two weeks ago, I had a dinner with six members of Congress, three Republicans and three Democrats, three of whom were women and three of whom were men. We had a very broad discussion on things like climate change and other issues that the country faces. These were remarkably smart young people and very insightful, thoughtful people. I thought, "Boy, I wish there was a television camera in here that nobody could see, so that the American people would know that we've got people like this in the

Congress who are very thoughtful.” Unfortunately, too many of them get discouraged and leave, but there are a lot of people around who have the capacity. I think conditions change way beyond what any individual can do or even speculate. It’s just like this coming election. Who knows what’s going to happen? There’s some certifiably crazy people running for office, but they may get elected. Everybody else might be repelled by them and say, “We better do something here or there will be more of these guys around.”

Q: I'm interested to know, as you did your amazing odyssey through the biographies of all the presidents, if there were any standout presidents who grew the most in your esteem from where they were when you started? And then the opposite, who plummeted the most in your esteem as you learned more about them?

WR: Well, there were some in the nineteenth century that I was not all that familiar with. James K. Polk is one, who was a remarkable president. He usually is ranked in the top ten by most historians. He said he was going to do three things: Lower the tariff, end the Mexican war, and end up with Texas and New Mexico and extend our “manifest destiny,” which he did. He did all that in one term. At the end of that term, he retired. He took a trip down to New Orleans and then back up to Tennessee where he lived, and he was dead three months later. A relatively young man, he acquired more territory for the United States than we did in the Louisiana Purchase, and most of that’s unknown. Another one of these hidden hand presidents was McKinley, who preceded Roosevelt, who was his vice president. He did a lot of things that Roosevelt then carried through with his great leadership capacity, but he did them behind the scenes. And most people thought he was not such a good president. There are people like that in our history who are quite remarkable.

Q: There has been a lot of talk these days about bitter partisanship and how it cripples the ability to get things done, but historians tell us there have been lots of periods of bitter partisanship in our history. My question is are there any examples of presidents who succeeded in the face of bitter partisanship?

WR: Abraham Lincoln. My God, how partisan can you get? I mean, 500,000 people were killed between the North and the South, and there were innumerable periods when fistfights broke out on the House and the Senate floors. One person was almost killed as a result of being caned on the floor of the House. When John Adams was elected president, and Thomas Jefferson was his vice president, they hardly spoke to one another. Then Jefferson ran against him and beat him, tying Aaron Burr. It took thirty-six ballots to elect Jefferson over Aaron Burr, his vice president, so there have been periods in which people didn't get along very well. Today, the problem is the rules that we have, particularly in the Senate, that make it so difficult to get things done. A determined member of the Senate—and there are plenty of them—can stop anything. We've got something like 70 people now who have come out of committees in the Senate who are potential appointees of the president who have been held up. One person can hold them up. Someone has to come along and try to change those rules. The average person in this country has no idea those rules exist.



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