

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

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Guest: Gary Bauer, Domestic Policy Advisor to President Reagan, Conservative Activist

Table of Contents

I: Main Street Conservatism 00:15 – 17:50

II: Activists vs. the Establishment 17:50 – 46:05

III: In the Education Department 46:05 – 1:00:52

IV: A Conservative with Reagan 1:00:52 – 1:16:08

I: Main Street Conservatism (00:15 – 17:50)

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome back to CONVERSATIONS. And it's a special pleasure today to welcome my friend, Gary Bauer.

BAUER: Good to be with you, Bill.

KRISTOL: Thanks for joining me, and thanks for everything you've done over the decades and fighting for the conservative cause.

BAUER: And you.

BILL KRISTOL: Well, thank you. You've been a conservative activist, really a conservative leader for – since 1980 at least, maybe 1981 when you joined the Reagan Administration. But let's just begin at the beginning. What made you a conservative? What is American conservatism to you, and why have you devoted so much of your life to fighting for it?

BAUER: Well, early on, very early on, I developed an interest in politics because of where I grew up. Newport, Kentucky, right across the river from Cincinnati, Ohio, a blue-collar town. It ended up that in the years I grew up there, the town was literally under the control of an organized crime syndicate out of Toledo, Ohio. And when I say under the control of it, literally the mayor, the city council, even the police department were all being paid handsomely to allow the city to engage in all kinds of activities. There were casinos in Newport, Kentucky, in the 50s and 60s, when gambling was not legal anywhere in America other than Las Vegas. There was open prostitution, there was graft, corruption, etc.

In the middle of all that, I saw what happened to families where people like my father, at the local steel mill, men would work hard, make their money, and they never got home with the paycheck by the time they had spent it in various activities available in Newport. So I saw sort of the impact on my own neighborhood and my own family. Early in my high school years, there was a reform movement that grew up, local businessmen and local pastors, they ran candidates for local offices to try to clean up the city.

As a kid, idealistic kid, I volunteered for those things, learned hard-knocks politics real quick. The locals were not happy about this reform movement. But many of the people I met as a young man were Republicans, they were successful business people or these local pastors. And then later, we talked – Then, later, when I found out more about Ronald Reagan, heard some of his famous speeches, my views began to develop on a lot of issues, but particularly on foreign policy, which I felt very strong about –

KRISTOL: But you really got into, you became a conservative and a Republican as a reformer, not as a –

BAUER: Very much so.

KRISTOL: Sort of defender of the status quo, which is I think quite different from a lot of people.

BAUER: Well, that's right. And look you and I have talked about this occasionally, I think Republicans today, conservatives today, would be really well advised to make corruption and reform a major issue. I think the country is hungry for that. And in its own way, it's not ideological. So I think it expands as the potential of expanding the conservative movement beyond the more well-defined things that we've been associated with over the decades.

KRISTOL: Corruption meaning a kind of crony capitalism and the inside baseball of the welfare state and all of that?

BAUER: Absolutely. You know, no handouts at the bottom and no bailouts at the top, I think, would be a good theme. I bristle at how often conservatism gets linked with corporations that are in bed with big government. When I look at those corporations, I seldom see them doing anything that I would define as friendly to conservatism. So I hope our future presidential candidates talk a lot more about the workers in America and the middle class in America than they do about the corporate suites of America.

KRISTOL: Yeah, you've always been a Main Street and Middle America conservative.

BAUER: In addition to everything else, it has the advantage of actually working. You know when we nominate candidates that send that kind of a signal that they understand Main Street, I think we're a lot more successful.

I'm actually surprised since we make our home in the Republican Party, I'm surprised we do as well and Republicans do as well as they do because if you listen to the narrative of the Left, which is often repeated without question by the media, you would think that the conservative agenda is your mom's Social Security check is too big and no matter what, no tax hikes on billionaires. And I'm not sure there are many congressional districts where that's a winning formula.

And, quite frankly, Bill, over the years, I've always felt that it's the perception of the Republican economic agenda, and by linkage, the conservative economic agenda, that holds us back – not our foreign policy views, not our views on values or on marriage, the sanctity of life, and many other things that the conventional wisdom says is the reason we're not winning elections.

KRISTOL: And that's so contrary to the conventional wisdom. I'm with you, but let's talk about it a little. Yeah, the conventional view if more of the social conservatives, religious conservatives hold us back or the foreign policy stuff is too aggressive. But if only we could focus on the economy – that was Romney in 2012 – we'll win.

I very much agree with you. And I think the data actually agrees with you. But elaborate a little both on the foreign policy side, which I think you've been much more involved in than maybe people who associate you more with the cultural and social issues realize. And then, of course, on the cultural side as well.

BAUER: Well, you know on the foreign policy side, the American people – you know things change, there's cycles and so forth. But I think it's not that much different today than it's ever been. The American people see America as a force for good in the world.

The Left may think that we're the problem. I often think the President thinks that the problem in the world is that America has been too much in it. I think we're seeing what happens when America is not in it, and

it's not a pretty sight, and it's not good for people, no matter what their backgrounds, faiths, or ideologies are when America is not actively involved.

So I think a conservatism that avoids any neo-isolationist tendencies is extremely important. We had a whole generation of Republicans in the 1930s who lost any chance for political careers because they made an isolationist case that might have fit the tenor of the times but the after Pearl Harbor, they looked like fools, and none of them went on to hold a higher office of any consequence after that. And I certainly wouldn't want to see Republicans make that mistake today.

KRISTOL: Right. And you've always made the case for what, I think, was called in the Reagan '76 platform fight that Reagan engaged in in '76 at the Republican convention – morality and foreign policy. You've never shied away from without being crazy about exporting democracy or expecting the rest of the world to look like America tomorrow – but you've always made the case for American values and for standing up for those values abroad.

BAUER: European history is much more replete with examples of real politick; you know, you align with one country or one king with another queen when it suits your purposes today. And it may very well be that Europeans are much more comfortable with those kinds of shifts that can take place overnight. I think the history of America is much more that Americans want to see a moral rationale about why we're doing something in foreign policy, and clearly, when it involves putting the lives of their sons and daughters on the line, they want to know that there's a greater cause than the machinations of some bureaucrat sitting in the State Department who decides that, well, today we ought to be on this country's side.

I thought it was very revealing that when Reagan gave his speech about the evil empire that he chose an evangelical audience in Florida to give the speech to because I think he instinctively knew that was an audience that would be very comfortable with talking about foreign policy in terms of good and evil. And just as it set the foreign policy establishment's hair on fire, Middle America, I think, understood exactly what the President meant and what he was trying to do when he famously rebuilt America's defenses. And I know we both believe he, with Prime Minister of England, Thatcher, and the Pope brought down the Soviet Union.

KRISTOL: Yeah, the moral component of that was so important, I think, to the internal weakening, so to speak, of the Soviet hold over Eastern Europe.

BAUER: Yes, very much so.

KRISTOL: People forget that. And on domestic policy, you've been an advocate for working families and sort of Main Street policies but also for American values. That's the name of the group that you run very successfully.

BAUER: Yes. Look I'm not – you're called often a neocon, I've been called a neocon, a social-issue conservative or whatever.

KRISTOL: Theocon, probably.

BAUER: Exactly, right, right. I think we both see ourselves as Reagan conservatives. And what did Ronald Reagan believe? He wanted smaller government and lower taxes. He did believe in a strong national defense and a strong American foreign policy that stood up for American values. But he also famously felt strongly about the issue of the sanctity of life. He thought all of our children should be welcomed into the world, protected by the law, have a seat at the table.

One of the reasons he did a lot better than Barry Goldwater did, I think, was these values issues that made it a lot easier for Southern voters, mostly Protestant, to leave voter loyalties that they had had

literally from the Civil War, and then Midwestern Protestants and Catholics, the kind of people I grew up with who saw the Democratic Party as the party of the little guy. But then as that party began to move culturally, it became famously in the McGovern years, you know, San Francisco Democrats, etc., who were no longer comfortable in that party and began the Reagan Democrats. I still think there are millions of them out there that we, unfortunately, still often lose because we don't sound a coherent message on some of those values issues.

KRISTOL: And it is amazing these fights have been going on for so long within the Republican Party and to some degree within the conservative movement. Are you optimistic, I mean, that sort of a middle American-oriented American conservatism can dominate? We've had our wins, had our losses over the years. It seems to be in recent years, the Republican Party has tilted more, at least the elites have, in the opposite direction.

BAUER: They have, and, you know, we had a famous or infamous Supreme Court decision that, I think, most conservatives supported that brought more money into the political process, big money into the political process. I've always been ambivalent about that. One of the unintended consequences of it has been that the division in the Republican Party between the funding wing and the – for lack of a better word – the philosophical, conservative, philosophical wing of the party has become a Grand Canyon.

And it's very hard for somebody with, not only that feels strongly about the social values but somebody that does want a conservatism that addresses struggling families trying to figure out how to put their kids through college and have safe streets and all those things. A candidate that talks about those things has a tough row to hoe whereas the candidate that can talk sweet-nothings into the ears of a couple dozen individuals around the country can often find enough funds to mount pretty formative media and other types of campaigns to overwhelm that grassroots conservative.

On whether I'm an optimist or a pessimist, I'm a worried optimist. I – you know, Reagan, you know, used to pound into us that we ought to be optimistic, and he was even known occasionally to fire a pessimist. So I learned to get any dark tendencies out of my brain as quickly as possible. But it's hard not to look at the headlines and look at the continued growth of big government, particularly in recent years, and our drift around the world, a rising China, a re-assertive Russia, radical Islam on the march.

I have great sympathy for the next conservative president because they're not only going to have to believe in all these values that I think Reagan personified and that you and I try to fight for, but they're going to have to work at least as hard as the current President has to take us, I think, in the wrong direction. It's going to be tough to undo some of these things domestically. But internationally, rebuilding our credibility, making our friends still trust us and our enemies fear us, that's not going to be easy.

KRISTOL: Well, I hope the next president listens to your advice on this, but I think especially your advice on how to get elected, which is a minority, it's a minority view, I think, and certainly among Republican elites and among the establishment types.

But the degree to which the party, I think, is seen as out of touch with Middle America on economic issues, on values issues, even on foreign policy issues, actually is worrisome. And the donor, you know, the dominance of money, the donor class is stronger than it was certainly 25 years ago when I was involved in some of these campaigns.

BAUER: It's really amazing. I, you know, going back to Newport and Covington, these cities in northern Kentucky, part of greater Cincinnati, I think our elites could do really well to skip some of the receptions and just drive around some of those cities and realize that, first of all, these cities today vote overwhelmingly Republican.

But you could drive around Covington or Newport, Campbell County, Kenton County, and I don't think you'd see many people that you would guess were Republicans just by looking at them. Most people have second-hand cars in front of their houses. Folks, there are still a lot of rentals in those places.

But these are people that love America. You know, they want the same thing for their kids that your parents and my parents wanted for me. I think one of the things that's broken my heart in recent years is to see a lot of those people now when they're asked saying that they often don't think their children will have a better life than they did. And that's a crushing thing to read because that's been essence of this experiment in democratic capitalism and constitutional republic that's made it such a special place.

KRISTOL: And Reagan really was able, I think, to convey sincerely that that's what he was about. I mean, that he was going to restore American not just prosperity in the short-term but the sense of that our kids would do better than us. And yeah, the next, it seems to me the next Republican candidate, the next conservative leaders will have to also have a compelling policy agenda that makes that a serious – you know, makes – offers a serious way forward in that respect.

BAUER: No question about it. You know, Reagan worked for General Electric, was the host of General Electric Theater. And as part of that, he traveled all over the country and spoke at GE factories. He would always visit the local CEO that ran the factory. But Reagan always lunched in the lunchroom with the workers, and it was there that they would see the Ronald Reagan that many of them would later vote for.

And I think there's a lesson even in that, you know, that don't talk about how our policies are going to cause more businesses to be formed and then the businesses will hire people, which then gets summarized as trickle-down economics. Talk about what you're going to do about the people that get up every day and are never going to have a couple million bucks in their IRA or retirement account but really are the heart and soul of the country. They come in all shapes and sizes, all ethnic backgrounds.

And I think they legitimately feel that there's plenty of voices for the very poor, and there's plenty of voices and plenty of accountants and attorneys and PR people for the very rich. But the folks in the middle still are getting the short end of the stick. We should not allow the Left to take that issue or somehow deceive those voters that big government, all these schemes in some way is ultimately going to help them. It won't. We've got the ideas that will help them. But we've got to be much better salesman than we've been.

KRISTOL: Well, I hope our candidate is as good a salesman and articulator of those ideas as you have been for your career.

BAUER: Thank you, Bill.

II: Activists vs. the Establishment (17:50 – 46:05)

KRISTOL: So you were a kid from Newport, Kentucky, not from – never lived in California, I think. And that you ended up in the Reagan Administration. How did that happen?

BAUER: As you know, the California thing was a big deal. I mean, a lot of the folks around him were people that had been with him for a long time. I was one of those people whose numbers were legion that saw the famous speech he gave on TV for Barry Goldwater and so I developed an affinity for, an admiration for Ronald Reagan very early on in my life.

KRISTOL: Is that right? So you were then, what high school, college?

BAUER: I was a high school senior, and my father and I were sitting there watching TV, and both bemoaned the fact that some half-hour ad was coming on. I mean, what the heck, a half-hour ad? My father didn't pay much attention.

I started listening and in spite of myself, it grabbed me. He was talking about America and our place in the world, how the world couldn't remain half-slave and half-free, that one would prevail and it was important that liberty would prevail. And people don't believe this, Bill, but for me, this does seem like it was yesterday. At the end of it, I turned to my dad and I said, "Dad, I don't think Goldwater has got a chance. But this actor, Reagan, I bet this guy is going to be president some day. And when he is, I'm going to work for him in the White House."

KRISTOL: Is that right?

BAUER: Seriously. And my father –

KRISTOL: Your dad should have written it down or something.

BAUER: Well, we reflected on it later. But he looked at me and he said, having never read books about how to encourage your children, he looked at me and said, "Gary, you're nuts." So with that as my encouragement –

So, for years, I followed him. I read his speeches. Every once in awhile, would actually get to go to one. I was heartbroken when he tried to get the nomination from Gerald Ford in 1976, and I assumed that that was probably the end of it. So when 1980 came along, I thought, here's one more chance and –

KRISTOL: And by this time, you've gone to law school and you're working in Washington.

BAUER: I had gone to law school, graduated from Georgetown Law. I had worked at the Republican National Committee for a number of years, which is where I met Carol, my wife, who as you know, also shares our love of public policy and politics.

So after Watergate, I went through a little period of disillusionment about politics. I was out of direct involvement in politics when that campaign took shape in 1980. I tried to get into the campaign, and the best I could do was being told that I could join the 50-year-old ladies stuffing envelopes on Wednesday night, which really wasn't what I wanted. But not having the California background, I wasn't finding the doors opening very easily.

And then the evening paper, it was the *Washington Star*. Yeah, the *Washington Star* ran an editorial attacking Reagan, generally but specifically on foreign policy. And I, of course, was furious. I wrote a long, much too long, letter to the editor back. And they called and said, "We'd like to put it as sort of a guest editorial by one of our readers."

KRISTOL: Is that right?

BAUER: Yeah, really kind of totally unpredictable. You know, I wish I could tell you this was part of my ten-point plan, but it wasn't. A day or so later, I got a call from a couple of those California people that were in the campaign – Ed Gray, one of them who was one of Ed Meese's guys, and he had seen this letter and he said, you know, "You're obviously a real Reagan fan, you know his views. Come on over, and maybe we can find something for you." Which was sort of funny since I had been over there a number of times. But that led to my involvement in the campaign.

KRISTOL: So that was in Washington when you were involved?

BAUER: Yes, yes.

KRISTOL: Yeah. But I guess, was the campaign run from California or Washington? Or I guess they must have had offices in both.

BAUER: I think they had offices in both. We liked to think that it was being run where we were. But in retrospect, I'm not so sure, whether it was a big California for two. I ended up, by the way, sharing an office with James Brady who would go on to be the Press Secretary and then there was that tragic day in March. But again sort of an example of how these things happen.

I had very little assignment. You know, I was just – I knew Reagan and liked Reagan; I mean, I knew what he believed. And one day I noticed on James Brady's desk a press release that was getting ready to go out. And I don't even remember the issue. But it was not Reagan's view. And I said something about it – that's not what the governor has said over the years. And so it was checked out, and I was right, and Gray or somebody said, "How did you know that?" and I said, "Well, I've read everything he ever said." So I think got the assignment of being one of the last people that would look at press releases and issue papers to make sure they were consistent with Reaganism.

KRISTOL: Wow, that's great. So Reagan won. And everyone was trying to get jobs in the Administration to help bring about a conservative revival in America, an American revival after Carter. And you did get a job.

And what was it like? It must have been such an exciting time, though, with the sense that Reagan was changing things and then the drama, obviously, of the fights with Congress, the assassination attempt. I mean.

BAUER: It was an incredible period for the country. We had just gone through the Carter years, which had been horrible economically, foreign policy-wise, a disaster. The more things change, the more they stay the same. We, a couple years before, had had the Islamic revolution in Iran and we're still dealing with that. In fact, you could argue as they're going toward a nuclear weapon that that's still coming to head with consequences that we can't really determine.

So when Reagan came in, and the hostages were immediately released, the atmosphere in the country was incredibly optimistic that this was a real change, a change that would matter. And then as you mentioned, the assassination just a couple of months later where we round out later that the President had very nearly died. That was an extraordinary time and a time when for a brief period there, we all wondered whether this wonderful new thing literally was going to end.

KRISTOL: Yeah. So, how long were you in the Reagan White House?

BAUER: I was in the Old Executive Office Building in the Office of Policy Development for a couple of years. Early on, I had no – that office was led by Dr. Martin Anderson who was another California guy.

KRISTOL: He just recently passed away, actually. Was very close to Reagan, Domestic Policy Advisor.

BAUER: Right, and he was a libertarian, however, in his impulses and so some of my issues that I cared about, some of the values issues and so forth, I don't think Dr. Anderson was really, that didn't float his boat as much as some of the other libertarian causes.

I do recall one staff meeting where we were talking about the priorities of the Department, and I complained that none of the issues, like tuition tax credits and the school prayer – the President had talked about amending the Constitution to permit school prayer again – that our office really wasn't dealing with any of those, and Marty Anderson said a very odd thing to me. He kind of chuckled and he said, "That's a good point, Gary, those are your issues." And then he went on with the meeting, and I don't really know what that meant.

So in the days that followed, I had a brief conversation with Ed Meese and others, and they said, it was a little vague, but why don't you just take this opportunity to start writing issue papers and memos to the

President on anything related to values, which is what I did for a couple of years. Occasionally, we'd get some reaction to them but was never sure they were going anywhere regularly. And that all culminated ultimately in being asked to – because many of these issues were educational related issues, being asked to let my name be put up for nomination as Deputy Undersecretary of Education.

KRISTOL: Which was a high-level job. I mean that was – was that Senate confirmed?

BAUER: It was, yes.

KRISTOL: So the President nominates you to be Deputy Undersecretary. Was that for Policy or for Budget or –

BAUER: It was Policy, Budget, and there was something else in the title.

KRISTOL: But it's high up. In those days, I guess, the number-two was the Undersecretary and became Deputy Secretary, so it's sort of one of the – right below the first two. And you had a Senate – you had to be confirmed by the Senate, you had a hearing. I can't remember, was that contentious or were you –

BAUER: You know, it's funny because it really wasn't contentious because most of my work had been within the Administration. I really wasn't a public persona at that point. I had become known to some of the outside conservative groups just because I was working on issues on the inside that they were interested in. But I hadn't caused any ripples on the Hill so it was a smooth confirmation and which was exciting. It was exciting to go up and have those hearings and so forth. My next confirmation that took place a few years later was a little bit more problematic.

KRISTOL: Because you'd become – well, so let's talk about what you did between those two confirmations. So you – I mean, people don't appreciate sometimes how Washington works. So you were nominated for this position. I don't think Secretary Bell necessarily chose you, or maybe didn't even know you much, I suppose. I mean, he was –

BAUER: Usually a Cabinet Secretary will work closely with the White House for positions at this level that both would agree that this would be somebody. In my case, there was such tension between Secretary Bell and some of the other political appointees at the time and the White House that I was told when I was going to be nominated that my main assignment was to try to get the Secretary in line. Now, how I was supposed to do that while working for him was not clear to me. But so there was a certain degree of tension there from the day I walked into the Department.

KRISTOL: So you get to the Department, and the Department becomes pretty central pretty quickly because there's that "Nation at Risk" report, which I think was '83, and education – education reform becomes a big deal and President Reagan embraces it, though his view of reform might have been different from that of some of the education establishment.

So what was it like? You got over there, I mean, what's the most memorable things for those – what were you about two or three years before you then became number two, Deputy Secretary?

BAUER: Yes, yes. Well, because I had budget responsibilities, I not only had to go up with Secretary Bell when he testified to present the budget but I had to go up with each of the Assistant Secretaries when they would be the main witness to testify and present a budget –

KRISTOL: For their parts of the Department?

BAUER: For their part of the Department, right. And what happened very early on is I saw firsthand what the White House was so concerned about which is that the Secretary and I would sit at the witness table and the hearing would open and the Committee Chairman would say, "Mr. Secretary, we have received a

budget that you have submitted, and we know it is your budget but we're not going to waste time talking about that because it's dead on arrival. And we want to ask you if you were in charge, if you were making the final decisions, is the amount of money that was asked for in elementary and secondary education, is that the amount of money you would ask for?"

KRISTOL: This is the Reagan Administration, as I recall, submitting budgets that had pretty big –

BAUER: Big cuts. Yeah. And Secretary Bell, God bless him, would say, "No, no, this is not an adequate amount of money to support that work." And, of course, you can't do that in a hearing and continue to be a loyal member of the Cabinet.

So I found myself in the very uncomfortable position of either waiting until the Secretary answered or even on a couple of occasions – you know, youth is wonderful – actually interrupting him and saying, "Just a second, I want to sure, Mr. Chairman, that we all understand that our budget that we want to talk about today is the President's budget, you have it right up there and that is the budget we want to explain to you – will adequately accomplish the goals that the President and hopefully this Committee share."

So there was even one occasion when I was doing that and Secretary Bell, who was a very nice man, reached over and grabbed my coat and started pulling on it to try to get me to be quiet. So as I recall, that was the first time I actually took tranquilizers. Those were difficult hearings to go through.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Even though, I guess, it was a Republican Senate, but it was a lot of liberal Republicans, and I think that Committee, in particular, was dominated by Republicans who liked the idea of a bigger federal role in education.

BAUER: No question about it. And in fact, they were often a little bit more vitriolic in their criticisms than some of the Democrats were. You know today, there's a lot of – as there always will be, divisions in both political parties and people complain about the Republican establishment and I include myself among those people sometimes – but when you look back on those years, I mean, there were members of the United States Senate who to this day, I can't figure out why they had an R next to their names because there wasn't any issue they were conservative or arguably Republican on.

KRISTOL: So what was most memorable from those couple of years? This is like the last half of Reagan's first term, really. Terrel Bell is Secretary, Bill Bennett takes over in February of '85 in Reagan's second term. And that's when, after which I come down, and we meet. But I know a little bit more – but what was most striking, what did you learn?

BAUER: Yeah, well, there were a couple of things. For one thing, I learned – and you could say unfortunately or fortunately that, at least, what I concluded from my experience was that there would always probably be some tensions between movement conservatives and governing conservatives, just because where you stand is where you sit.

And movement conservatives were very upset that there was still this separate entity called the Department of Education. And it really didn't do much good in that first term or the second term, quite frankly, to go to them and say, "Well, we can only find five sponsors for our bill to get rid of the Department, what do you want us to do?" So that was one thing that, I think, became very evident to me.

The other thing that made it even more challenging as we got to the end of the first term is that Secretary Bell and the Undersecretary and others were so often off the page of where they should be that tensions got higher and higher. And it was absolutely clear that there would be a new Secretary of Education. I'm even to this day, not privy to all the maneuverings that were going on but I knew that there was in that last year that there was a good chance that we would get somebody else. As you may remember, the Undersecretary at that point was very interested in becoming Secretary. And the Bill Bennett, who both of us knew –

KRISTOL: Was head of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

BAUER: Right. And I'd gotten to know a little bit and then, I think I did an op-ed with him on an issue when I was Deputy Undersecretary. And so as that first term, Reagan term ended, I had to make a fairly early decision whether I would cast my lot with, even before the new Secretary was selected, with Bill Bennett or whether I would cast it with the Undersecretary that was still there and was trying for the job, too. And it was an easy call, but it was also one where if Bill Bennett had not gotten the post, I probably would be talking about my four years in the Reagan Administration.

KRISTOL: Yeah, despite your friends in the White House. I guess they would have been able to – maybe you could have gone elsewhere. But people – it is hard, it's hard from the outside. I remember when I came just being so surprised by the complexity of government and politics, that not everyone is on the – quite on the – they're on the same team but there are a lot of rivalries within the team and personal loyalties and ideological loyalties. It's not simple and straightforward the way it sometimes looks in textbooks.

BAUER: It isn't. It's always much more complicated. And I think that you're absolutely right, personal loyalties play a huge role in a lot of the battles that go on within an administration. Ideology is always there, there's always disagreements about whether an administration is pushing too hard or not hard enough. But a lot of the other things that go on really ends up being oh, well, he's a Meese guy or he's a Baker guy or he's a, you know, whatever.

KRISTOL: For people of our age, of course, the controversy between Meese and Baker, the fight between Meese and Baker, it brings back all these memories, and we understand immediately what it was. But maybe not everyone was around then, so give a quick synopsis of what that fight within the Reagan Administration and, really, within the Republican Party was about.

BAUER: Absolutely. Well, of course, Ronald Reagan, while he's everybody's favorite today, was not everybody's favorite in 1976 or 1980. The party establishment was very much skeptical about whether he was a man that could lead the party to success, they saw him as another Barry Goldwater. And so there was all this tension.

And the battle in 1980 ended up between being a battle between Ronald Reagan representing the conservative movement and George Bush representing the establishment. At the Convention when it got to the point of picking a Vice President, it's a long story, but the President for a variety of reasons, I think, felt that he had to bring the party together. There was already talk about a third party, and there ended up being one, of an established Republican, John Anderson from Illinois. And so when Bush was picked as the running mate, James Baker who had played such a role in that campaign, was obviously brought into the Presidential campaign along with some of his loyal people.

And from that point on, there was the Meese wing of the campaign and the Baker wing of the campaign, and then later when governing particularly in that first term, the same two sides asserted themselves, both of them agreeing on a lot of issues broadly but disagreeing on strategy and what was and was not doable.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it was amazing. Reagan presided over a divided White House, a divided Administration, but seemed on the big issues to be able to assert his will.

BAUER: Amazing, yes, absolutely amazing that he was able to do that. And, you know, this was always something on the Meese side of the shop that people felt that when there was a disagreement down below the President, we were always in favor of getting the disagreement to the President because if we could, 99 times out of 100, he would do the right thing, which led to this funny little saying: "Let Reagan

be Reagan.” That was our trump argument against some of the moderate folks. Look, just let him be who he was, right? He ran on these issues, why shouldn’t he govern on these issues?

KRISTOL: What struck me when I got here – and you must have done this, I assume, pretty self-consciously or maybe it just happened in your two years at Education and I guess the two years before that in the White House – was how you weren’t that well-known publicly – you’d done some media but obviously you’re Deputy Undersecretary and most people outside of Washington don’t know those people except in the education world – but you were very well-known to conservative activists in Washington, it seemed to me when I got here, and people respected you and liked you very much and regarded you as very accessible.

Was that sort of just an accident? Did you do that, did you see that as a way of increasing your leverage and, frankly, helping what you regarded as the President’s agenda to overcome the bureaucracy? I’m curious about that.

BAUER: Yeah, it was a very conscious decision.

Now, part of it was driven by the fact that these issues I had early in the Administration were issues that a number of these conservative activists around town felt strongly about. And so I can’t remember who gave me the advice, but somebody said, “You’ve got to get out of the building,” I mean, go to these meetings that are held all over Washington, various coalition meetings of conservative groups, tell them, you know, remind them of the good things that are happening in the Administration; and to the extent you can, explain why progress may not be as good as they wanted in some other areas.

So I did make a point of doing that, and I think over time, that ended up being a tremendous asset because when, periodically, as we all would get into difficulties or controversies or anger even one of our colleagues about something, the fact that there was this great reservoir of people that had actual organizations whose members overwhelmingly were and remained Reagan’s supporters, that was an important thing to sort of have as a trump card.

KRISTOL: Yeah. No, I was struck when I got here how many of them knew you and respected you and did view you as an advocate inside for what they believed in and also someone who was accessible. One forgets sometimes how people go in the White House and suddenly can’t be – won’t return phone calls to –

BAUER: Yeah, it’s amazing.

KRISTOL: Or in not just the White House, but even at high levels of the Administration.

BAUER: Very true. There was a couple of times – and I don’t even remember the circumstances – but where I got invited on various conservative radio shows, including the Focus on the Family program, which was the host of it at that point was the founder of Focus on the Family, Dr. James Dobson. And of course, that had a tremendous following around the country.

So I started getting invitations to give speeches out of Washington and whenever I could, took those up. And over time, met a lot of good people that shared the same hopes we did being inside the government about what we hoped would be accomplished.

KRISTOL: And then Bill Bennett gets nominated to be Secretary of Education in January or so of 1985, I think, at the beginning of President Reagan’s second term. And you pretty quickly get nominated to be Deputy Secretary.

BAUER: Undersecretary at that point, right. And got the delightful task – in parentheses or quotes – not so delightful, you know, as coming in as a new Secretary, Bill Bennett certainly didn’t want those that had

been loyal to the previous Secretary to still be around and asked me as one of my first unofficial acts to go over and tell a few folks to clean out their desks, which I did. But Bill came in and you and I were both really blessed to work in a place in the Reagan Administration where the Reagan Revolution was very much alive. I did have to go back up for confirmation.

KRISTOL: Yeah, talk about that because that was before I got here but I remember hearing a little about it.

BAUER: Yeah, it was a lot more dicey. The Democrats on the panel, on the Committee were adamantly opposed. As you know, when you're nominated, you go up and do courtesy visits with each Senator and ask them if they have any questions, any concerns or whatever. And generally those are civil but they also can be meetings where a Senator will say, "Well, I have to be honest with you, there's no way I'm going to vote to confirm you." And I had more than my fair share of Democratic Senators, Democrat Senators say that in my, in these courtesy meetings.

And I even had a couple of Republican Senators, which was key because, I think, we had a one-vote margin on the Committee at that point, who had some real concerns about me, too.

KRISTOL: So you were pretty well known as a strong conservative at this point. And a strong conservative on the social issues, which particularly annoyed some of these liberal Republican Senators, I imagine.

BAUER: Very much so. It ended up again something I wouldn't have – I really didn't think ahead about this – but I always tried to have an open door in the role I had with the budget because lots of outside groups obviously have interests in each of these budget areas. And so I would regularly meet with groups that weren't conservative. And over a period of a couple of years, I met with a lot, broadly speaking, civil rights groups, black civil rights groups. And we disagreed on lots of things but I made it a point to always make sure the door was open, I always responded to phone calls, etc.

And I didn't even – I didn't even initiate this but somebody did. A number of those groups got together and signed a letter saying that they disagreed with me on virtually everything but that I was a reasonable person, a decent person, and that they supported my confirmation since if I didn't get it, somebody else that agreed with Reagan would get it and they had a relationship, at least, with me. So that took a lot of the edge off, and it ended up that the opposition kind of evaporated. And I think I only had a couple of votes at the end against me.

KRISTOL: I can't remember: did you actually have a contentious hearing, or did they kind of let you go through without too much trouble?

BAUER: No, no. There were – there was, at least, one long contentious hearing that I still occasionally wake up in the middle of the night dreaming about. And but, you know, that was in retrospect a small price to pay. And, you know, there's a rulebook in those hearings. You, when one of your supporters says something, you, of course, agree with them and say looking forward to working with you on that. And when one of the critics says something, you apologize for this difference of opinion but look forward to working with you and trying to find common ground. You don't want the hearing to be a real back alley fight at midnight. Those generally don't end well.

KRISTOL: Yeah, well, yours ended well.

BAUER: Mine ended well, yes, in the final analysis.

III: In the Education Department (46:05 – 1:00:52)

KRISTOL: Okay, so President Reagan's been reelected, Bill Bennett is the Secretary of Education, you're Undersecretary. And I think it gets promoted, the job title gets changed to Deputy Secretary, at some point of, Education. And you stayed there for two years, basically as I recall. And I joined you and tried to help both of you. Tell us –

BAUER: I should be interviewing you because you were Chief of Staff and –

KRISTOL: You guys were leading the charge. So what was it like, what did you learn? I mean, it was a second-tier department, that it was kind of unknown. But I think you and Bill made quite a splash.

BAUER: Well, look, seriously, I want to edit that to Bill and Bill Kristol and I. You know, I think we – I think we acquitted ourselves well. It was an unusual position to be in because we were in a Department that again the President really didn't want and our most fervent supporters around America didn't want that bureaucracy, believing in local control, school boards, and parents making decisions, not government bureaucrats. So what do you do?

We tried to make the budget reflect the kind of priorities that the president had. One of our big issues was the idea that competition is missing in American education, particularly for the poor and minorities. And so we pushed a number of the President's initiatives on turning the Chapter One program aid to low-income children into a voucher program so that those minority, mostly minority, families could take this piece of paper, a voucher, and spend it any way they wanted for the education of their child. Maybe it would be a tutor, maybe it would be part of tuition for a private school, or maybe it would be to go to a better public school. And that was, I think, a very valuable fight because in addition to being right, it was a good thing to try to do, beyond that, I think it gave a lie to the idea that conservatives don't care about the poor and struggling families.

The great irony there – and you remember this – was the people most vehement in Congress trying to stop this idea were the people that would be in any hall of fame of elected officials that care about the poor, etc., etc. So that was an interesting battle but a frustrating one. We made very little progress. I think we got a demonstration program at one point.

KRISTOL: Which changed the debate, maybe, a little bit.

BAUER: It did, oh, no question.

KRISTOL: The principle of letting the funds go to the parents and follow the child, as opposed to going to the school district.

BAUER: Yes, and you know, and it led, I think, to a lot of other things. Charter schools, things like that, and we saw just a year or so ago in New York where they've got a charter program that involves something like a voucher and it was a newly elected liberal mayor that wanted to end it and in the streets, saying, "No, don't hurt our children," were literally thousands of low-income minority parents and their children. So I'm not sure why that whole thing doesn't get more traction, but I think it's a battle worth having.

In addition to that, Bill Bennett was really a special Cabinet Secretary because the last thing he wanted to do, and you and I didn't want to do it either, was just to get bogged down in the day-to-day bureaucracy. We wanted to move the ball down the field. And Bill did that in a number of ways, one of which was coming up with this great idea – and it may even have been your idea – of teaching the *Federalist Papers* in the public schools.

KRISTOL: No, it was his idea or maybe Elayne Bennett's idea, his wife's idea, maybe.

BAUER: Ah, yes, sorry, Elayne. Elayne's idea. But it was a wonderful way to highlight a lot of different things that conservatives around the country did agree with us about, and one of them being this concern all of us had. We still had a Soviet Union, there was still a Cold War. Were we adequately educating our children for liberty? Did they know the minutes of the last meeting? Did they understand why this was a special place, and why it was considered a shining city on a hill? And Bennett and you and I did a lot, I think, on that issue.

KRISTOL: I mean, the teaching in the schools, I'd sort of forgotten about it but it was very important at the time. And you'd go to a place for a speech or a meeting, go to a city, a town, a rural area and insist on teaching a class. And it got a huge amount of local attention, of course. It's a great local story. He'd talk to the kids. He was a good teacher. He knew the *Federalist Papers* well. And it did make several points at once.

But one of the points it made I always thought – and I didn't appreciate this when I came, I came, he was already doing it, so it really wasn't my idea. And I remember being Chief of Staff and worrying about his schedule and saying, "Is this really worth doing every trip we go, you're going to teach a class somewhere?" And of course, there are unanticipated moments when you do that, too. And he said, "No, no, it's very, very important to really –" and I didn't appreciate how important it was to both get across the sense that this should be taught at every school, the *Federalist Papers* in America, and American history and American principles.

But also I think for him personally and therefore for the Reagan Administration, the sense that he was accessible, that he was a regular guy, a nice guy, he wasn't some distant bureaucrat, you know, scowling at the federal budget and trying to cut things out. I mean, I think conservatives underestimate the importance of that. I certainly did.

BAUER: Well, I agree completely. There were even a few conservatives that were upset about it because they thought it was inadvertently making the case for a federal Department of Education. I totally disagree. And look that whole issue, whether it's the *Federalist Papers* being taught or, you know, today I mean a lot of kids if you look at textbooks are not being taught American history, they're being taught anti-American history. They're only being taught our flaws.

So the issues we were dealing with this, and they were kind of cutting-edge, continue to be incredibly important issues today, and I'd like to feel that we played a role in putting those things on the map to that people could debate them and understood that it was something here important to deal with.

KRISTOL: Bilingual education, I remember, I think one of our few Congressional victories – we had very, very few, I mean, insofar as Bill Bennett was a successful Cabinet Secretary and you were a successful Deputy Secretary and we had a pretty good Department I think, it wasn't because we won a lot of legislative victories.

One we did what, I think, was – we were able to, at least, partly establish the principle that you could teach kids whose first language wasn't English, English as a second language or immersion rather than bilingual education, or at least the federal funds could go to any of those. And people forget. Bilingual education was really riding high, and Bill and you took it on, and I think that began a process, which is one of the maybe rare cases where conservatives really won, I think, where we persuaded an awful lot of people that you're not doing anything good for these kids. Obviously, they might need a year or two of transition, and that's what English as a second language is all about. But keeping them in a Spanish-only or some other language-only class for 12 years isn't helping their prospects in America.

BAUER: No, not at all. And unfortunately, it was another debate which it so happens – it so often happens to be the case where the other side argued we didn't care about those kids, we wanted to make it too difficult for them. They actually had very low expectations of these kids, first of all. But second of all,

common sense as well as research show that you want in an English-speaking nation for young people to know English if they're going to be economically upward mobile.

I remember on this issue as well as on a number of other ones, you'll recall that Secretary Bennett talked often about the importance of homework. It seems like a silly thing to have to talk about. But I think he made the point that if you assign homework, the research shows that kids' grades go up. And if they actually do the homework themselves instead of subcontracting it to their parents, the grades go up even more. And we actually did a study at the Department proving that. And I recall at some hearing a Senator saying, "Why did you spend the taxpayers' money on something that we could have told you?" And Bill's response was, "Well, because of the drift in recent years away from common sense, we have to spend money to rediscover the obvious." And it was a good point because the educational establishment had gone off into all kinds of dead ends. You know schools without walls, classrooms without walls – clearly thought up by somebody that had never taught a day in their lives, right? You need walls. You want the classes to be separated.

KRISTOL: Another issue, I think, that we didn't – I didn't spend much time on, you spent a little more time on it but, I think, in retrospect, make a pretty big difference, was home-schooling, which was not a – which was only then beginning to take off, and I guess there were state obstacles to it. And we had a couple of people – and you took a particular interest in this – in the Counsel's—well, in the Counsel's Office and elsewhere who were interested in just beating back state efforts to suppress home-schoolers, right.

But now, of course, it's a huge thing, and it's not really home-schooling anymore, it's, you know, parents getting together to school and sort of non-government schools. But talk a little bit about that because I think you were very – I think you were the ones who awakened, you were the one who awakened Bill and me to the potential importance of this because it was a pretty small number back in '85.

BAUER: It was a small number. There were a lot of folks, conservative Christians, who saw this as an alternative that they wanted because they were growing more and more alienated from some of the requirements of public education as far as how sensitive issues like sex education were being taught. Interestingly enough, if you go back into the 60s and 70s, there was a home-schooling movement on the Left because they wanted to get away from the corporate control educational system in America.

So both on the Left and on the Right, there were Americans that simply wanted, in a free country, to do something, which for many years in early America, parents were primarily responsible for, which was educate their own children. And we did speak about that and earned a lot of brickbats from the National Educational Association and other groups, but I think it was a battle worth having.

KRISTOL: And I think we won pretty much because, I think, in most states now, the requirements for home-schoolers or the obstacles home-schoolers have to overcome are pretty minimal. They show maybe that it's safe in their house and the kids get tested once a year or something but not – but there was an attempt to – it was close to being prohibited in some states, as I recall.

BAUER: No question about it, and again in the Administration, there was, it was not unanimity on this. As I recall, some of the folks associated with the Vice President were not as excited about educational choice or this home-schooling movement. You know, it's been interesting because I think we all worried about, well, what do you do if somebody is just not capable of adequately educating a child, so you have to some – you have to have some safeguards. But it's been interesting in the last couple of decades to see how often spelling bees and other competitions are actually won by home-schooled children. And there's now a local university outside of DC that specializing in accepting into the university students that were home-schooled.

KRISTOL: And with the Internet, you sort of wonder whether home – kind of aversion of home-schooling won't take hold not just in the K through 12 level, but for college since people can now take courses

online and arrange – get together with others to have a seminar without having some – going to some university and accepting whatever professor they give you or whatever.

BAUER: Good point, yeah. I'm sure you remember, Bill, that Bill Bennett got into difficulty a couple times because in addition to all these things, which were great battles to have, he periodically would comment broadly on the culture. I remember one firestorm when he suggested that it really was not a good idea for a university to permit there to be intimate relationships between professors and their students. And you would have thought that, you know, he said that the moon was made out of green cheese or whatever. There was this incredible blowback to that conversation. And another time when we were decreasing the amount of money and some federal higher education grants, Bill suggested that maybe students could save a little bit more if they cut the spring break in Florida out of their schedule. You would have again thought that we were drafting everybody and sending them to some god-forsaken place.

But because he was willing to talk about those things, I think some of these other issues that we dealt with, the ones you mentioned and his teaching of the *Federalist Papers*, I think put a different perception about him and gave him some ability to deal with a lot of other things.

I don't know if anything like this happened in your experience, but Carol told me that during this period when we were all in a lot of controversy, she was grocery shopping and the wives of two other political appointees from other Departments were approaching her. And as they got close, they all greeted each other and the other two ladies said, "Carol, we just wanted to express our sympathy, I mean, things must be really tough. And we just want you to know we're pulling for you." And Carol goes, "My goodness, has something happened?" And they said, "Well, no, Gary's in the news and Bennett and Bill Kristol, and there's all this criticism, it must be very tough for all of you." And Carol said, "My gosh, Gary can't wait to get out of the bed in the morning, he comes home late. This is why we're all supposed to be in government." And even for some of our fellow Reagan appointees, that was not their image, I think, of what government is supposed to be like.

KRISTOL: No, no, especially as an Administration gets along, people lose some of the –

BAUER: Right, start thinking about your next life and –

IV: A Conservative with Reagan (1:00:52 – 1:16:08)

KRISTOL: Right. So that's – and speaking of that, so you left the Education Department, much to our distress, but we were gratified that you were recruited for such a high-level job. So when was that, I can't remember, that was early –

BAUER: It was '87.

KRISTOL: Early '87.

BAUER: Right, yes.

KRISTOL: And you'd been Undersecretary for a couple of years and then the White House, someone at the White House called and said they wanted you to come over to be the top policy advisor to the President.

BAUER: Yeah, which was a wonderful thing to go back there and be in that same, heading that same Department that I had struggled in early in the years of just getting an assignment. You all had been – Bill Bennett and you had been gracious enough to allow me to do a couple things. We did this working group on the family and delivered a report. So there were a few things like that that, I think, caught people's attention at the White House.

But ironically, I think the thing that set it off is I was asked to read a letter from the President at a meeting of mayors in Washington. And I think both you and Bill were out of town, so I was the next person, and Reagan couldn't make it. So it was one of these perfunctory letters. I was on my way out of town, and I stopped there on the way to National – then National Airport – and heard a bunch of mayors taking the dais and the podium and criticizing the President for the troubles they were having in their cities. And so when I got up to read the letter, I said, "I have a really nice letter here, I'll leave it up on the podium for any of you that want to read it. I just want to say I've never heard such whiners in all my life. If your schools aren't working, you're the mayor, not the President of the United States." I said a few words and walked out and ended up there was a *Washington Post* story written, a bunch of mayors quoted, they had never been so insulted in their lives. And when I flew back to National Airport, I was being paged and I called my office and was told that –

KRISTOL: This is pre – seems like ancient – pre-cell phones, pre-email.

BAUER: Right. Don Regan who was then the Chief of Staff wanted to see me in his office immediately, and I assumed the worst. I called Carol and said, "I probably crossed that line, it's been a great run," I'm assuming I'm going to be told to move on. And I went over and he told me that the President had seen this article and said, "Look, we've got two years, we're fighting the lame duck – the lame-duck syndrome." There had been some rough periods in the Administration, we need people that are willing to still fight back, and that's another one of those cases where life just sort of happens. You can make your plans, but it's often just being there, you know, show up early and leave late.

KRISTOL: So you didn't plan to make those remarks, then. You didn't plan for it to be in *The Washington Post*? And the President personally saw that?

BAUER: He did, yes, yeah.

KRISTOL: And asked that you be brought back over. So you came back to the White House. So, tell us what that's like? I mean, very few people have the privilege of working, have an office in the White House itself, seeing the President, if not every day, at least every week, certainly. And being, you know, having the ability to get memos directly to him. Just –

BAUER: Extraordinary. I had a parking place, of course, in that little avenue that previously I couldn't walk across from the Old Executive Office Building to the West Wing. Had a beautiful office in the West Wing. The offices are actually a lot smaller than people imagine if they rely on various popular TV series set in the White House. But it was just an amazing experience.

And looking back on it, there were Cabinet meetings I would attend and other policy meetings. But there was a lunch every Monday with the President, and I think there were 10 assistants to the President. And if he was in town and other things, you know, didn't have another conflict, we would have this lunch and they were much like this conversation. They were very relaxed, the President would come in and crack jokes often at the expense of the Vice President, which he got a great kick out of doing. And –

KRISTOL: And these would be where, in the –

BAUER: They would be in the Cabinet Room. And –

KRISTOL: So you'd all be around that long table that you see in TV shots all the time.

BAUER: Yes, and there was a little bit of a policy element. If you had something that you wanted to talk to the President about, you would submit a one- or two-page memo, which was put into a book that he would get a day ahead of time. And then he would go around the table and say, you know, "Gary, you know I saw that, what would you like to add to it?" And you could ask him to take action of some kind. Not, you know, not introduce a bill or whatever but, you know, writing a letter or maybe adding something

into a speech or calling somebody, that if you had seen an article about somebody that was standing up for a Reagan principle, that was the place where you could get his attention about it. And those were special lunches.

KRISTOL: And I remember that you were – you occasionally were a little more forward-leaning or you didn't let the opportunity pass to try get the President to do a few things that maybe some of your colleagues were trying to downplay. I remember hearing about that at that time.

BAUER: Yes, I was in the doghouse occasionally, and that's when the contacts we had made with conservatives out of the Administration came in so handy. I wouldn't want to say I was un-fireable. Nobody is un-fireable. But it meant if somebody wanted to send me some place else that they had to think there might be a little bit of push-back.

KRISTOL: And you were asking the President to do things that were more combative and conservative than maybe some of the senior White House staff wanted, is that?

BAUER: Not only did the senior White House staff want it but that the First Lady wanted. I very early on did an interview with the *Washington Post*, it almost seems quaint now, where I said, "Look, we know it's the last two years, we know things are going to be more difficult." But I reminded the reporter that a President does have some executive authority and when appropriate, if we can do something by an executive order, we would do that. Now, not in my wildest imaginations did I think some of the things we've seen in recent years could be done by an executive order. But there was an article in the *Post* about that, and the First Lady thought that was a bad tone. She didn't want to be combative. And I was told in no uncertain terms that she did not want to see articles like that again.

KRISTOL: How does one get told that?

BAUER: I got a call from one of the people under Don Regan. I think it might have – looking back on it, I can't recall exactly which one. I asked to see her, fool that I was, and I was told no. And I said that in all due respect to her, and I have the utmost respect for her, that the President had seen the article, and he liked it. And until he told me not to talk about trying to accomplish more things, I was going to continue to, continue to do what I did in that article. So I have reason to believe I might have missed out on a few social events at the White House as a result. But I'm not one for tuxes anyway. So –

KRISTOL: No, you were – I mean, people don't appreciate how much pressure there is. It's like any other institution, I suppose, but maybe more so since it's the White House, to conform, to not rock the boat, I would say.

I mean, I remember talking with Bill Bennett at the time. We were admiring what you were doing over in the White House, and we were obviously in very close touch. It's one thing to do it out of an agency because you're a little protected. I mean, you're out there, you know, Secretary of Education; of course, you're in touch with the White House, they can call and complain as they did a few times. But you sort of have the excuse of, well, I wasn't aware that you didn't want – the President didn't want Secretary Bennett to discuss this. I remember saying that a few times to various senior staff of the White House who called to complain that Bill was in the paper popping off about Nicaragua or various other issues that he thought he could weigh in on.

BAUER: Saying sorry is a lot easier than asking for permission, and we were doing that quite a bit.

KRISTOL: Though in the White House, I mean – I know this from when I was there as Quayle's Chief of Staff, Vice President Quayle's Chief of Staff after you – they're just tougher. You're there at the senior staff meeting in the morning. I mean there's just a huge amount of peer pressure to go along and get along, and we very much admired that you resisted it, and there is real pressure, though.

BAUER: Yeah, at the end of the day, I mean, I think you and I have always agreed about this, you've got to be able to look yourself in the mirror. And I don't think any of the things we ever did – I always tried to use the check of myself – if President Reagan was aware of this particular order or whatever, would he agree with what I wanted to do or what I was being told not to do? And I don't think there was ever an occasion I felt that perhaps I was doing something that President Reagan wouldn't have wanted to do. And so it was easy to justify being a little bit more edgy than perhaps some people were comfortable with.

Our mutual friend, Elliott Abrams, you know, had a rocky moment there in the Administration. I remember a senior staff meeting where we were told, "Look, there's some problems, so best to lay low, don't be having meetings with Elliott until this is all cleared up." And I said, "Well, that's ridiculous, I mean, these attacks are absurd," etc. And, no, no, we don't. You know, so I promptly went back to my office. And I didn't really know Elliott to any extent. I called him and invited him over for lunch in the White House Mess, which Elliot did but it went over like a lead balloon as you can imagine from a few of my colleagues.

KRISTOL: And the press heard about it, I think. And it was a good gesture. I think he very much appreciated that support. A lot of people around the country thought, "Well, it's good that someone is standing behind people" –

BAUER: Yeah. And we became great friends, which, of course, that alone was worth it.

KRISTOL: Congress, do you have any thoughts about Congress one way or the other? I mean, having to work with them and –

BAUER: You know, there are liberals and there are conservatives, and then there are real ideologues. And there are some people in Congress that it's just almost impossible to ever work with. But, again, my experience was if I went up to the Hill even to meet with somebody that was diametrically opposed to us, to give them the courtesy of explaining why we were going to move forward or what we had in mind, that that was better than ignoring them.

You'll probably recall we had a couple of heated hearings when I was still back at Education where Bill Bennett and I went up. And again with Senator Weicker or Senator Stafford from Vermont. Often much more heated with those liberal Republicans even than with the Democrats. As I recall, I think I was actually banned from testifying for a period of time until I wrote a letter of apology to one Senator I had insulted in one of the hearings.

KRISTOL: Is that right? I had forgotten that.

BAUER: Yeah, I should forget it. It was not a pleasant time. But look, I'm just astonished really that a janitor's son, to go back to close the circle, that I was able to have this opportunity to work for one of the – I think one of the greatest presidents of modern American times. I think he's going to be judged by any fair history as one of the handful of great U.S. presidents. And –

KRISTOL: Well, he was lucky to have you working for him, in my opinion but let's just – what about Ronald Reagan, so you saw him quite a lot really in those last two years. Personally, he had slowed down a little, I guess, after the shooting but he was in good shape, right, and just what was it like and what's the truth about Reagan sort of close up compared to all the images, both positive and negative?

BAUER: Yeah. Unlike so many people in Washington we both have met, the closer you got to Reagan, the more you realized he was exactly the person you saw publicly over all those years. I mean, there wasn't some hidden personality trait or approach or whatever that wasn't evident from the very beginning.

I'm always amazed at the fact that when I look at his career, he had the speech – as it's referred to – this set of ideas that I think he gave from 1964 right up to 1980. He'd throw in new jokes and a few references to current events to make it timely but the core of the speech was the same. And the thing that was remarkable about that is that when he gave that speech in the 60s and 70s, a lot of it was unpopular. He didn't trim his sails, he didn't change it to fit the tenor of the times. He was telling people that we couldn't just contain the Soviet Union, we had to defeat them at a time when there were 30,000 nuclear warheads pointed by both sides. And that was scary rhetoric to a lot of people.

When it got to be his moment, when people were seeing what a foreign policy looked like that was a foreign – work based on a lot of talk instead of on a strong role in America in the world, and they were ready to try something else, they didn't go to Johnny-Come-Latelies that were criticizing that foreign policy. They went to the guy that had been saying the same thing for several decades.

And they made him President over all of the guesses and assumptions of a Washington establishment and media establishment that thought there was no way he could be elected. So I took from all that there is really a value not to go into public policy with your finger up in the air trying to figure out which way the wind is blowing. Decide what you believe. Decide why you believe it. Decide how best to defend those beliefs. And then let life and events determine whether you ended up being on the right side or not. But don't try to become the latest reflection of whatever wind is blowing through our culture.

KRISTOL: Well, you haven't been the latest reflection of whatever wind is blowing through our culture, much to your credit over the years.

BAUER: Thanks, Bill.

KRISTOL: And on that note, thank you, Gary Bauer, for joining me on CONVERSATIONS. I hope everyone else enjoyed this and learned as much from it as I did.

BAUER: I enjoyed it. Thanks for having me, Bill.

[END]