

## Howard H. Baker, Jr.



Howard H. Baker, Jr. served three terms as a United States Senator from Tennessee (1967-1985) and was Tennessee's first popularly elected Republican Senator. He rose to national prominence during the Watergate Hearings of 1973-1974 as Vice Chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee, the highest ranking Republican on the Committee. He served as Minority Leader of the Senate from 1977-1981 and as Majority Leader from 1981 until he retired from the Senate at the end of this third term in January, 1985. He was a candidate for the 1980 Republican presidential nomination and served as President Ronald Reagan's Chief of Staff in 1987-1988. For the next thirteen years he worked in several Tennessee law firms. In 2001 President George W. Bush appointed him as U.S. Ambassador to Japan.

Howard Henry Baker, Jr. was born to Howard Henry Baker and Dora Ladd Baker on November 15, 1925 in Huntsville, Tennessee. His mother died when he was eight years old and his maternal grandmother, Lillie Ladd Mauser, helped raise him and his younger sister. When Howard Baker Jr. was eleven, his father married Irene Bailey. Howard Jr. attended primary and secondary public school in Huntsville before going to the McCallie School, a military preparatory school in Chattanooga, in 1941. He graduated from there in 1943 and immediately enlisted in the U.S. Navy. As a candidate in the Navy's V-12 officer training program, Baker studied electrical engineering at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and at Tulane University. During the summer and semester breaks he assumed naval duties. When his

naval career ended Baker earned a law degree from the University of Tennessee Law School in Knoxville. During his senior year (1948-49) he served as student body president. After graduation he joined a law firm in Huntsville which had been started by his grandfather.

While practicing law, Baker was an active member of the Huntsville community. He was an active member of his church and belonged to a variety of civic groups. He also enjoyed several hobbies. Notably, Baker was an avid amateur photographer, and he remains one today. In 1950 he served as campaign manager for his father's successful bid for the United States House of Representatives. During his father's first term Baker met and began dating Joy Dirksen, daughter of Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen. Baker and Dirksen married in December, 1951. The couple established a home in Huntsville where Howard Jr. continued to practice law. The couple had a son, Darek, in 1953, and a daughter, Cynthia, in 1956. Baker's father served in the House until his death in 1963. After his father's death the people of Tennessee elected his stepmother, Irene, to complete the term.

As a young man Howard Baker Jr. did not have political ambitions. However, in 1964 he decided to run for the United States Senate in a special election to fill the vacancy created when Senator Estes Kefauver died. Baker narrowly lost this election to Democrat Ross Bass. In 1966 Baker ran again, this time winning fifty-six percent of the popular vote, making him Tennessee's first popularly elected Republican Senator.

During his first term Senator Baker helped pass legislation that enabled the federal government to share revenues with the states. He also helped draft the Clean Air Act and he played a key role in securing Tennessee as the location for the world's first nuclear breeder reactor power plant. Also during his first term he was twice narrowly defeated for Senate Minority Leader.

Tennessee's voters re-elected Baker in 1972. The Watergate Hearings occupied much of his time during the first half of his second term, and he was named to the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities. Over the years Baker had become a friend and advisor to President Richard Nixon, yet he was determined to behave in an objective and non-partisan manner. During the nationally televised Watergate hearings Baker became best known for his repeated question "what did the President know and when did he know it?" Initially Baker believed Nixon to be innocent of wrongdoing, but as evidence to the contrary mounted Baker changed his mind. Although he angered some members of his party by contributing to the resignation of President Nixon, Baker's skill, style, and persistent search for the truth had earned him the respect of millions after the Watergate ordeal had ended.

Baker was the keynote speaker at the Republican convention in 1976, and was considered by Gerald Ford as a running-mate. In 1977 his Republican colleagues elected him Senate Minority Leader. During this time Baker helped revise the Clean Air Act, and he supported the Panama Canal Treaties. Baker won a third Senate term in 1978, and in 1980 he entered the presidential race. He withdrew from the race in March of that year and placed his support behind Ronald Reagan.

When the 1980 election gave control of the Senate to the Republican Party, Baker became Senate Majority Leader, a post he held until the end of his third term in 1985. Baker did not seek a fourth term. Baker remained a loyal member of the Republican Party throughout his Senate career. However, he was typically a moderate who did not hesitate to vote independent of party influence. For example, his support for the Panama Canal Treaty was opposed by many Republicans. Also, as majority leader he did not see eye-to-eye on some of President Reagan's proposals, such as Reagan's attempt in 1982 to cut federal social programs.

Baker returned to private life and law practice after he left the Senate, but in 1987 President Reagan asked him to become White House Chief of Staff. Baker accepted the position and served until July, 1988. He considered a second presidential run in 1988, but decided against it. For the next thirteen years Baker worked in several Tennessee law firms, including Vinson and Elkins; Baker, Worthington, Crossley, Stansberry, and Woolf; and Baker, Donelson, Bearman, and Caldwell. Baker lost his first wife, Joy, to cancer in 1993. On December 7, 1996, he married Kansas Senator Nancy Kassebaum. In 2001 President George W. Bush appointed him U.S. Ambassador to Japan, a position in which he served until 2005.

Howard H. Baker Jr., U.S. senator, Senate minority leader and majority leader, and White House chief of staff, was born in Huntsville in Scott County on November 15, 1925, the son of future congressman Howard Baker Sr. and his wife Dora Ladd Baker. He attended the University of the South, Tulane University, and the University of Tennessee, where he was the 1949 student body president. He also received his law degree from the University of Tennessee. World War II and his service as a lieutenant and PT boat officer in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific interrupted his college studies. Baker married Joy Dirksen, the daughter of U.S. Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois, in December 1951.

Baker's Scott County legal practice flourished. In 1959, while representing the Stearns Coal and Lumber Company, Baker won a one-million-dollar judgment from the United Mine Workers for their use of violence and sabotage to disrupt Stearns's contract with a rival union. After his father's death in January 1964, Baker turned to politics. That November, as the Republican nominee, he lost to Democrat Ross Bass in a race to fill the unexpired U.S. Senate term of the deceased Estes Kefauver. Baker, however, ran a very strong campaign, and two years later he easily defeated former governor Frank Clement in a second bid for the Senate. Baker was the first popularly elected GOP senator in Tennessee history and the first Republican to win a statewide election since 1920.

Baker proved himself a moderate conservative in Congress, urging the Nixon administration to implement a revenue sharing program with the states. In 1972 Baker won reelection by carrying all three of the state's grand divisions and defeating Democrat Ray Blanton. He even received considerable support from the black community at a time when many African Americans had abandoned all ties with the Republican Party.

Baker served as Republican leader and vice-chairman of the 1973-74 Senate Watergate Committee, asking the pivotal question, "What did the President know, and when did he know it?" Baker's performance in the hearings brought national attention, and he received praise from both sides of the political spectrum as a fair and thoughtful legislative leader. In 1976 Baker

considered a run for the presidency but withdrew his bid when incumbent Gerald Ford decided to seek the nomination. Baker gave the keynote speech at the 1976 Republican national convention. In 1977 he was elected Senate minority leader, and in 1980 after a failed presidential campaign bid, he became the Senate majority leader in the wake of the Reagan landslide. As majority leader, Baker was very popular on both sides of the aisle, with many of his strongest boosters among the Democratic senators.

In 1985 Baker retired from the Senate amid speculation that he would be a candidate for the presidency in 1988. However, during the midst of the Iran-Contra controversy in 1987, Baker accepted an offer from President Ronald Reagan to be White House Chief of Staff. The appointment of Baker instantly restored much credibility to the administration. Six months before Reagan left the White House in 1988, Baker resigned to be with his critically ill wife Joy, who died shortly thereafter of cancer. In 1996 Baker married former Kansas Senator Nancy Kassebaum.

Since leaving the public arena, Baker has maintained an active life. His law practice, Baker, Donelson, Bearman, and Caldwell, is among the state's largest firms, with offices in Knoxville, Nashville, Jackson, Mississippi, and Washington, D.C. Baker has served on the boards of directors of several corporations including Federal Express, United Technology, and Pennzoil. His principal hobby is photography, and he has taken particular interest in the outdoor recreational activities of his native state. In 1993 Baker authored an article for the National Geographic magazine on the Cumberland River's Big South Fork National Recreation Area, which had been developed under legislation sponsored by him. Most recently, Baker was active in the failed 1996 presidential campaign bid of his former political protégé, Lamar Alexander.

Capping a distinguished public-service career as senator, presidential advisor and ambassador, Howard H. Baker, Jr. returned to Tennessee in February 2005 to Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC, the law firm his grandfather founded and where he formerly practiced with his father, the late U.S. Rep. Howard H. Baker. As Senior Counsel to the Firm, Senator Baker focuses his practice on public policy and international matters. In 2005, he joined Citigroup's International Advisory Committee as Senior Advisor.

Senator Baker's return to Tennessee followed his service as 26th U.S. Ambassador to Japan, a position to which President George W. Bush appointed him in 2001. The appointment was yet another milestone in a public-service career that began in 1966, when Senator Baker became the first Republican popularly elected to the U.S. Senate from Tennessee.

Sources: Michael Rogers <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net>; <http://bioguide.congress.gov>; <http://bakercenter.utk.edu>; J. Lee Annis Jr., *Howard Baker: Conciliator in an Age of Crisis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Knoxville, 2007).



*Senators Sam Ervin, Jr., and Howard Baker, Jr., (right) at the Watergate hearings, November 1973.  
Tennessee State Library and Archives.*



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## The Right Man at the Right Time

By Jacob V. Lamar Jr.

The circumstances were similar: the White House was embroiled in scandal and a presidency tottered on the brink of disaster. At the Senate Watergate Committee hearings during the summer of 1973, an earnest Republican lawmaker from Tennessee became famous when he framed the essential question concerning Richard Nixon: "What did the President know, and when did he know it?" The answer led to Nixon's downfall.

Nearly 14 years later, another White House crisis is thrusting Howard Baker back into the headlines. This time, however, he may be the best hope to rescue a floundering President. Last Friday he accepted Ronald Reagan's offer to become White House chief of staff and injected a note of optimism into an otherwise dark week. "I expect that there will be good things out of the last two years of the Reagan Administration," said Baker. "And I intend to help him."

Baker's appointment was the most encouraging sign in months that Reagan is still capable of saving his Administration from the Iran scam quagmire. The retired Senate majority leader was

hailed as a principled pragmatist who is also a respected public figure. "It was a first-rate appointment that provides the White House with instant credibility," said Kenneth Duberstein, a prominent lobbyist and Reagan's former legislative liaison. As congressional hearings on the Iran-contra affair get under way this spring, the Administration might also benefit from the respect Baker commands among his former colleagues on Capitol Hill. Said Senator Alan Dixon, an Illinois Democrat: "We know he's fair, we know he's honest, and we know he's decent." Robert Dole, who succeeded Baker as Senate G.O.P. leader in 1985, called his friend "the right man at the right time at this critical period for the White House."

The new chief of staff and his predecessor are about as different as two people can be. While Donald Regan is forceful and autocratic, Baker is easygoing and self-effacing. Regan had no feel for politics and disdained the often subtle maneuvering that makes for a constructive relationship between the White House and the Hill. Baker is the consummate insider. In three terms as a U.S. Senator from 1967 to 1985, he mastered the art of political compromise and cajolery. In all likelihood he will actively seek help outside the White House as he attempts to get the presidency back on track.

While Baker's selection was widely popular, his name had not even been on the President's short list of possible successors to Regan. It did not come up until Thursday afternoon, when the President met with his close friend Paul Laxalt, former Senator from Nevada. Laxalt himself had been considered, but he is still mulling a run for the presidency in 1988, and told Reagan he was not available; instead he recommended Baker. Two other key advisers, Attorney General Edwin Meese and Pollster Richard Wirthlin, agreed with the suggestion. Reagan phoned Baker that afternoon. Less than 24 hours later, Baker arrived at the White House. "We sneaked him in," chortled a presidential aide. "Not a \$ soul knew." After conferring with both the President and the First Lady, Baker got the job.

Reagan and Baker are not ideological twins. Indeed, Baker is a political moderate who is likely to come under attack from conservative hard-liners, particularly for his call for a solid arms-control agreement with the Soviets. In fact, Baker was Nixon's personal favorite among Republican contenders for the '88 race; the former President felt Baker would restore "hardheaded detente" to U.S.-Soviet relations. As Senate minority leader in 1978, Baker earned the enmity of the right, including Ronald Reagan, for supporting the treaties ceding U.S. control over the Panama Canal. As majority leader during Reagan's first term, Baker labeled the President's supply-side economic proposals "a riverboat gamble" and was lukewarm toward proposals to ban abortion and require prayer in schools. Nevertheless, he loyally proclaimed himself the President's "spear carrier" in the Senate and helped push through his sweeping tax cuts. "My approach with the President is very straightforward and direct," he said. "We communicate easily."

As fate would have it, Baker, 61, agreed to go to the White House just as he was preparing to announce his candidacy for next year's presidential race. Baker, who launched a halfhearted presidential campaign in 1980, did not seek re-election to the Senate in 1984 so he could mount a more serious run for the presidency. Before he received the phone call from Reagan, Baker said, "I had pretty much made up my mind to run."

Why did he take the job? For Baker it was a call to duty. The President had offered him "the most sensitive position in his personal entourage." Given the chance to help put Reagan's troubled affairs in order, Baker said, "I didn't see how I could turn that down." Although accepting the appointment means he must give up the race for President, it puts Howard Baker in the White House after all.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,963713,00.html>