



Remember the 1980 Campaign

During the summer of 1979, Ronald Reagan's campaign reported that it was broke. The candidate had to explain his weak fundraising and big spending, as well as overcome doubts about his age and ability. The campaign faced the decision of closing its doors or accepting restrictive federal matching funds. Reagan lost the Iowa caucus. Not only that, the campaign also experienced a dramatic staff shake-up in the middle of the primary season. But by the spring of 1980, closing in on the nomination, the *Washington Post* wrote, "*As Ronald Reagan sees it, the seeds of his victory in the Republican presidential contest were sown in the dark hours of defeat.*"

As the second quarter of 1979 came to a close, Ronald Reagan did not lead the Republican candidates in fundraising. He didn't even come in second. As a matter of fact, Reagan trailed Rep. Philip M. Crane of Illinois, former Texas Gov. John Connally, and former CIA Director George Bush. Reagan not only lagged in fundraising, he outspent the other candidates, burning through \$1.3 million of the \$1.4 million the campaign had raised. Things only got worse—by September, the campaign was \$500,000 in debt. By January, the campaign ultimately decided to take federal matching funds and the strict spending limits that accompanied them.

In addition to financial distress, the campaign also endured internal staff disputes. In December, 1979, campaign director John Sears moved to oust a trio of close senior Reagan advisers: Lyn Nofziger, Mike Deaver, and Marty Anderson. Ronald Reagan then lost the Iowa caucuses to George Bush on January 21. Then, on the day of the New Hampshire primary, February 26, Reagan took the dramatic step of firing top leadership and bringing in Bill Casey. Many other top staffers also left, either being let go or resigning. Reagan ended up winning New Hampshire by a ratio of 2:1. Ultimately, when Ronald Reagan took control of his own campaign, he started to see successes. In this way, "the seeds of his victory" really were "sown in the dark hours of defeat." By March of 1980, the *National Journal*

reported that Ronald Reagan had a “commanding lead” for the Republican nomination.