approach to the nation's problems. Sixty-two percent of the Democrats said they preferred Senator Kennedy as the party's nominee (compared to 24 percent for Carter). In the leadership category, Kennedy led all the candidates. Fifty-eight percent felt he was "very strong." Carter, with 12 percent, ranked last, below even Crane, Dole, and Bush.

Stu Eizenstat, however, insisted that Carter was getting a "bum rap," predicting Kennedy's strength would be weakened when issues were raised. What Eizenstat could not have predicted was that Carter would be able to shore up his national home base as he had once done in Georgia, by "proving" himself in a broader political arena, linking his own political fortunes with the restitution of feelings of worth in a polity feeling diminished by outside forces.

CARTER'S increasingly conservative domestic policies and his neglect of many party leaders had created a restiveness among Democrats. On top of this, his dramatic decline in the polls in the summer of 1979 promoted open challenges to his renomination. Most of his opponents looked to Ted Kennedy to carry their banner in 1980. Though Kennedy would not formally announce his candidacy until November, the expectation that he would run haunted Carter throughout 1979. The Senator had openly broken with Carter over his refusal to offer a comprehensive medical care program in 1978, and at the midterm Democratic conference in Memphis, he had presented his plan in a speech that evoked spontaneous emotional response of the sort Carter could not elicit.

On May 14, 1979, Kennedy introduced his own competing health care program in Congress. On June 24 the Americans for Democratic Action started a dump-Carter movement, voting to endorse Kennedy for the presidency instead. Several leaders of unions associated with the liberal coalition in 1976 were pressing Kennedy to challenge the President in the Democratic primaries. The National Organization of Women voted in early December not to endorse any candidate, a slap at the President. Earlier, in late 1978, the National Conference of Democratic Mayors had assailed Carter on the budget cuts he planned for urban areas. And George Meany had told reporters that Carter was "the most conservative president I have seen in my lifetime." The President, he charged, was trying to curb inflation by encouraging unemployment.

Congressional leaders, too, were backing off. In an August, 1979, poll two thirds of the members of Congress rated Carter's performance below average. Lack of leadership was considered his greatest weakness. (Sixty-four percent ranked him below average; 47.5 percent said his greatest ability is in foreign
policy.) By September, 1979, Carter's support in Congress was so low that Tip O'Neill told reporters he didn't think Kennedy "could be denied the nomination if he were to run." Several leaders of Congress said they would support the Democratic nominee in 1980, leaving their allegiance open. Included in this category were O'Neill, James Wright (House Majority Leader), John Brademas (House Majority Whip), and Alan Cranston (Senate Majority Whip).

Carter is not one to give up, in any circumstance. In early 1979 he had authorized Democratic National Committee Treasurer Evan Dobelle to establish committees to raise money for his 1980 campaign. The day after Kennedy introduced his own health care program in Congress, Carter warned Kennedy he would "whip his ass" should he enter the race. And in the fall of 1979 he moved to put together his campaign organization. No amateurs were found at the top this time. Bob Strauss would manage the campaign and Bob Keefe, Scoop Jackson's campaign manager in 1976, would play a key role.

Hamilton Jordan had told a reporter in 1978 that the theme in 1980 would be Carter as the "experienced outsider": one who is still with the people but has gained the inside access and experience needed to govern effectively. There were elements of that mixed theme at Carter's domestic Camp David meetings, as well as in Carter's reduced interactions with the national media—with the explanation that he had to relate more directly with the people.

Actually Carter had been acting as a Washington insider from the beginning of his term. Like other Presidents before him, he had used appointments to position his own people in key spots and win support from new groups. But he went beyond most other Presidents in the volume and variety of intangible rewards—those little signs that suggest to "average people" that they, too, have a moment in history and a chance to influence policy. He worked the country as if it were a smaller district—sending out volumes of invitations to White House affairs and making other forms of personal contact with people from all sectors of the population. At Christmastime in 1978, for example, there was a ball at the White House for members of Congress; and nearly 5,000 individuals—White House staff members and volunteers, Secret Service people, congressional aides, journalists, senior citizens, and mentally handicapped children—were invited to parties and tours at the executive mansion. A long list of performers entertained the crowds, including the Smothers Brothers and newscaster Walter Cronkite, who read "The Night Before Christmas." Additional invitations went to government officials; another 6,000 invitations went to mayors, governors, and average people. "To get one of the coveted invitations, it also helped to be an early Carter supporter, . . . or a potential supporter next year."

Rosalynn Carter from the very beginning had aided Carter in these activities. A cumulative list of her activities during her first two years in the White House included the following: 400 White House official and social functions, 248 major speeches and remarks, 154 press interviews, 68 appearances at political events, 641 briefings attended, 36 countries visited, 152 United States cities visited. By the summer of 1979, she was campaigning almost full time for her husband. In June she was raising money for the 1980 campaign. By late fall she had visited twenty-nine cities and towns and collected $700,000. She also took to the hustings, flying in an Air Force DC-9 jet called the "Executive One" to Florida, Illinois, New Hampshire, Iowa, and other early caucus or primary states (expenses paid by the Carter-Mondale Committee), bringing her personal blessings from Jimmy and defending his programs.*

*With all these activities the size of the first lady's White House staff had expanded to an all-time high of twenty persons. Forty years earlier, Eleanor Roosevelt had done her work with three aides—an administrative secretary, a social secretary, and a messenger.

I was inaugurated, we had 800 people with whom we had spent the night during the campaign in for a White House reception. . . . And every week I call a few old friends. Rosalynn does the same thing. Fritz Mondale does the same thing. My son Chip does the same thing. "He was quite aware of how those visits affected people.

And sometimes it only takes a 2-minute visit in the Oval Office from a person to let them feel that we really have a close relationship with them and that we really appreciate what they've done—that they can come in and bring their family, shake hands, see the Oval Office, have a photograph taken. I never saw the Oval Office till after I was elected President. I had never met a Democratic President. And so this is a way to let them know we care about them.

By the fall of 1979 invitations from the White House were flooding the country, as Carter entertained groups from SCLC, the Mayors Conference, stock car racers, the Country and Western Music Association (headlined by Dolly Parton); and the Gospel Music Association. Carter began holding White House briefings on policy matters for the public. "One bewildered legislator [Florida]—a black woman—found herself on the manifests both for the Mountbatten funeral and for a SALT II briefing in the White House."

The visit of Pope John Paul II in October, 1979, provided the opportunity for broadly scattered rewards and favors, since the Administration was in charge of the Pope's itinerary and invitations to several functions in Washington, D.C. The President arranged, for example, for the Pope to make a short foray to Iowa to visit a very small but politically supportive group of Catholics. The political highlight of the trip was the reception in Washington itself. Being a Catholic was not the most relevant consideration. The largest group of invitations went to government officials; another 6,000 invitations went to mayors, governors, and average people. "To get one of the coveted invitations, it also helped to be an early Carter supporter, . . . or a potential supporter next year."

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Mrs. Carter was joined in these trips by Cabinet members, White House staff aides, and other top political appointees. Her two-day fundraising trip to Florida in late September was followed by a visit by three of the top presidential advisers the next week. Vice-President Mondale was sent on a five-day, eleven-city blitz. One observer commented: "If Carter would only work Congress or the Russians over like he's working Florida, he would have less to worry about."

Carter had made it clear that he expected Democratic leaders to work for him, and they would be rewarded or punished accordingly. When legislation implementing the Panama Canal treaties failed in the House, Carter angrily warned that the Congressmen who constantly voted against his bills would not receive favors such as invitations to White House dinners, help in their campaigns, appointments for filling patronage jobs, etc. At a political dinner for the Cabinet and other political appointees on November 6, 1979, he said that he expected all his appointees to be "actively engaged" in the campaign. The implicit message, according to one guest, was that those not wishing to do so could resign. Cabinet members should coordinate their travels with the campaign staff so that political appearances could be worked into their schedules. Carter covered himself, however, adding that appointees covered by the Hatch Act—and thus legally unable to campaign—would not be subject to these directives.

In preparation for Campaign '80, Carter also began distributing programmatic favors to various Democratic areas and persons. Before the elections for the state convention delegates in Florida in October, there were presents galore. The White House instructed government agencies to expedite grants earmarked for the state, and they were announced by Mondale and the Cabinet members while they campaigned there. (According to one Democratic Congressman from Florida: "I've never seen anything like it. We're getting money for highways, for housing, for hospitals. One more grant and the state will sink under the weight of these projects."

For New Hampshire, Carter had instructed the Department of Energy to see that heating oil supplies were on hand for the winter of 1979-80.)

Carter announced some of the important favors himself. Earlier Carter had ignored and irritated the Cook County Democratic organization in Illinois by his reluctance to address their annual meeting. But Illinois would be crucial in the 1980 campaign—the first head-to-head contest between Carter and Kennedy in a big industrial state, the kind of state Democrats have to win in presidential elections. So in mid-October he came courting Mayor Jane Byrne and the Democratic organization there. HEW had been trying to promote racial integration in the Chicago schools. Carter now said that the school integration question should be answered by the federal courts, which took the pressure off himself and the mayor. Carter also pledged early clearance for plans and funds to add to the O'Hare Airport complex. Byrne, in this meeting, said that if she was making a decision at the time, she would support the President.

When Byrne decided in late October to switch her support to Senator Kennedy, the Administration openly resorted to threats.* New Transportation Secretary Neil Goldschmidt told reporters in late November that Chicago would receive less federal aid for transportation as a consequence of her shift. "My confidence in her has gone down a great deal," he said. "I've got a lot of pink slips [telephone messages] stacked up on my desk. Hers would not be the first one I'd answer." This kind of statement buttressed Byrne's charge that the Administration was engaging in "dirty politics." But as Newsweek noted on December 3, "the message would not be lost on other local officials." Capitol Hill sources were quoted as saying that real danger to Chicago could be expected in long-term projects the President could block, for example, O'Hare Airport expansion and snow removal aid.

Finally, Carter courted new supporters in early primary states with the federal jobs in his pocket. Reubin Askew, who had been neutral when Carter campaigned in Florida in the 1976 primaries, was appointed chief trade negotiator in 1979. In the summer of 1979 William Dunfrey, a leading New Hampshire politician-businessman, was named a cabinet member of the United States delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, the third Dunfrey to receive an appointment. Jean Hennesy, a member of the Democratic National Committee and an ally of Governor Hugh Galen of New Hampshire (a Carter supporter), received a year's job as a member of the United States-Canadian International Joint Commission. Earlier, the same job had been discussed with Dudley W. Dudley, a former Carter supporter, who decided instead to lead the Draft Kennedy Movement in New Hampshire. A former Kennedy aide, Mary Louise Hancok, was offered a $32,000-a-year job as special assistant to a regional administrator of HUD. As David Broder noted, the actions seemed to be an attempt to pick off past and prospective Kennedy supporters, despite White House denials.

Carter also used a loophole in his new Civil Service Reform Law to keep presidential patronage alive in the hiring of 275,000 temporary workers needed to conduct the 1980 census. In March, 1979, in accordance with a provision allowing the President under exceptional circumstances to waive the prohibition against patronage hiring, Carter directed the Census Bureau to hire census employees as much as possible from the neighborhood in which they would work. As Robert L. Hagan, the bureau's acting director, noted, "the political

* Michael Sneed, speaking for Byrne, said her decision was based on an Illinois poll showing Carter doing poorly against both Kennedy and a number of Republicans, and on her talks with local party leaders who thought he was unlikely to win in Illinois. County Chairman George Dunne suggested that the backtracking was also due to personal resentment against Carter, based on his earlier neglect. The President, he said, "hasn't shown the kind of respect for the people of Cook County" that they deserve. He failed to consider us for any possible appointments in his administration.

† Carter made his political awards, however, on the basis of future political service, not past contributions. Joe Timilty, who had run Carter's Pennsylvania campaign, had hoped for a sub-Cabinet post, but received instead a part-time slot on an obscure commission. When he decided to contest Mayor Kevin White of Boston, Carter aides came forth with only token assistance. It was a waste to fight Kennedy in his home state no doubt.
parties provide an ideal network for recruiting temporary employees such as these.” By the fall Carter aides were making it clear that he would not simply accept the recommendation of local Democrats on these matters. They would have to support him actively in order to receive this bounty.

To mobilize support from blacks and Latinos, White House staff aides distributed lists of minorities appointed to high-level positions by the Administration. Rick Hernandez, one of Tim Kraft’s two deputies in the Office of the Assistant to the President for Political Affairs and Personnel, organized a coalition of Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans called the Hispanic American Democrats, ostensibly to increase their political awareness while helping them and the party. He began distributing information in early 1979, pointing out that the Carter Administration had appointed 131 Hispanics to super-grade, non-career (i.e., political) positions.

In January, 1980, White House aide Louis Martin mailed to black leaders around the country a fact sheet that listed all the blacks in the government, from Patricia Roberts Harris and Donald McHenry in the Cabinet through 12 black ambassadors, 30 federal judges, 25 generals, admirals, and other military officers, 6 United States Attorneys, 118 sub-Cabinet officials, 110 members of advisory boards and commissions, and 25 White House aides. Carter’s flair for the politics of trying—i.e., his intentions to aid the poor and the unemployed in the future—were also advertised in this fact sheet. In January, it noted, he asked Congress for $2 billion in federal funds by the fiscal year 1982, for the “most comprehensive youth employment and training program ever accomplished or envisioned in our nation.”

Carter also tried to preempt the Kennedy challenge by collecting political endorsements from Democratic movers and shakers across the country. In late October, 1979, he invited Democratic leaders from across the nation to a dinner in Washington to mark the unofficial opening of his campaign. Those invited were informed that their attendance would be construed as an endorsement of the President. It was an attempt to tip the undecideds over into the President’s camp—threatening them with political isolation if they did not. Overall, 500 party influencers showed up—including 109 Congr...
At his announcement celebration another reporter asked Kennedy whether his wife, from whom he had been living apart for some time, planned to campaign. The fragile Joan Kennedy stepped forward to handle that herself, saying she would. Later Reader's Digest and The New York Times would raise other questions about what Kennedy had really done that night at Chappaquiddick. There was an even more crucial political liability, however, that Kennedy could not have anticipated. The President would be aided in his campaign by the Ayatollah Khomeini, by Leonid Brezhnev, and by the press and evening news television shows.

The Administration's first responses were restrained. A mission headed by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark was sent to Iran to negotiate. He was stopped in Istanbul, Turkey, however, when Khomeini refused to meet him. At another level there was an attempt to mobilize world opinion against the Iranian actions. On November 9 the United Nations Security Council unanimously (the U.S.S.R. included) voted in favor of a resolution calling for the release of the hostages. And on November 29 the United States took its case against Iran to the International Court of Justice at The Hague. Two weeks later, in a unanimous decision, the fifteen members of the court called on Iran to release the hostages and restore the United States embassy to American control.

While these avenues were being pursued there was an effort to get the Shah out of the United States. It would clearly change the bargaining situation—the United States would no longer be in a position to return him to Iran. On December 2 the Shah officially went under government protection as he was taken to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, pending other arrangements. On December 15 the former monarch flew from Texas to Contadora Island off the coast of Panama.*

The Administration also took two preemptive steps just in time to avoid further embarrassment at the hands of Iran. On November 12 Carter announced an indefinite halt to U.S. oil imports from Iran, a week after the Teheran militants called for a cutoff of oil to the United States and just before the Iranian government moved to institute the oil boycott on its own. On November 14 Carter signed an order to freeze all Iranian assets in the United States—after receiving reports that Iran planned to withdraw all assets here. Finally, on December 25 the Administration asked the United Nations Security Council to recommend an economic boycott of Iran to the nations of the world. (Another deal was worked out, however. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim would fly to Teheran to negotiate release of the hostages. If no agreement could be reached, the economic sanctions resolution would be introduced.)

There were signs of vacillation. On December 12, more than a month after the embassy takeover, the State Department ordered all but 35 of the 218 Iranian diplomats accredited to the United States to leave the country in less than a week. Not for four months would diplomats actually be expelled. The military option, publicly rejected by the President at first (a foolish signal, hints in late November and December that it might be used after all. On No-

*Ironically, in the middle of this very delicate negotiating period the Shah's memoirs were published in Paris—and in them he blamed the United States for his downfall, claiming a NATO official had instructed the Iranian military to stand back and allow the revolution to take place.
November 20 President Carter sent out the message that "other remedies available to the United States existed under the charter of the United Nations." Subsequently, the Navy ordered the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk and several escort vessels to the Indian Ocean. Carter warned that Iran would face "extremely grave" consequences if any hostages were harmed, that freeing the hostages would not "wipe the slate clean." In December the White House warned that the United States might take punitive measures if the hostages were placed on trial as spies. And Secretary of State Vance refused to rule out the possibility of a naval blockade against Iran.

The escalating rhetoric covered what appears to have become a stalemate. There was no viable military option that would actually rescue the hostages. The United States had not found any political or economic levers to move the hostages, or the hostages, from their positions. After two months of pressure and exchange Carter seemed to have few options. The United States could only hope that the Iranian elections, scheduled for January 25, might bring a more responsible government to power.*

Afghanistan

On December 28, just at the point when Americans were becoming restive over the stalemate in Iran, Russian tanks and troops moved across the border into Afghanistan to support Babrak Karmal in a bloody coup, the third in two years.

The extent of the Soviets' ambition was not completely clear at the outset. Initially some officials in Washington saw the move as an attempt to preserve Soviet influence there, against the disintegration of the Afghan government and army. The number of Soviet troops and tanks that rolled in, however, combined with the chaotic situation in Iran, opened up the possibility that the Russians might be positioning themselves for a drive through Iran or Pakistan to the Persian Gulf and valuable oil fields as well.

President Carter, right after the invasion, told reporters at the White House that the Soviet intervention was a "grave threat to peace." On January 3 he recalled from Moscow the American ambassador, Thomas J. Watson (the first political appointee to have held the post since World War II)—going beyond the United States' response to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, when the ambassador had stayed in Moscow. The next day on national television, Carter announced an embargo of economic and cultural exchanges with the U.S.S.R. which included a partial embargo on the shipment of American grains to Russia, as well as a deferral of most Soviet-American cultural and exchange programs, including plans to open new consular offices in New York and Kiev. After several trial balloons Carter announced on "Face the Nation" his plans to pursue a boycott of the 1980 Olympic games in Moscow, should Soviet troops not be fully out of Afghanistan by mid-February. He asked Congress to suspend a ban on nuclear trade with Pakistan (imposed earlier because that country seemed to be working on nuclear weapons) and offered Pakistan's President Mohammad Zia $400 million in aid (Zia said that he had not been consulted before the public offer of aid had been made, that it was only "peanuts," that military assistance had to be coupled with long-term economic aid. Eventually his request for "billions" led the Administration to put aside its plans to ask Congress for the aid).

Within the month Carter had inflated a serious problem into the "most serious threat to peace since World War Two" (as he said in his State of the Union Address). He also had outlined a new doctrine, hinted at earlier in the month, that was reminiscent of John Foster Dulles's attitude toward the Middle East back in the 1950s. Any attempt by an outside force "to gain control of the Persian Gulf Region," he declared, "will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States. It will be repelled by use of any means necessary, including military force." He looked forward to the establishment of a "cooperative security framework in the area" and pledged assistance to Pakistan against outside aggression. Beyond that, he called for the revitalized Selective Service System (with the institution of military registration), an increase in American defense expenditures, and approval of a new CIA charter. In the space of a month, "detente" had been laid low and a new cold war was in the making.

There were second thoughts about some of the United States' responses as time wore on. Carter himself backed down from a tentative decision to cut the number of American diplomats in the U.S.S.R. when Ambassador Watson opposed it. (It was foolish to consider cutting down just at a time when the United States needed all the information it could get on what was happening there.) Further, some of United States Western European allies saw the economic and cultural boycott as going too far. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, in mid-January, was able to get several European nations to agree not to increase their own exports to undermine the American embargo; but they would not cut back on their own trade. (In the meantime Brazil and Argentina were stepping up their grain exports to the U.S.S.R.) The Olympic boycott brought similar results. The initial trial balloons over the boycott won the support of the United States Congress as well as editorial support in The New York Times and the Washington Post. But the United States Olympic Committee, the American athletes on the Olympic teams (according to an AP poll) and the International Olympic Committee were opposed to such action. The head of the United States Olympic Committee when first approached called the idea "inappropriate and gauche." Lord Killanin, president of the International Olympic Committee, said: "I deplore athletes being used as pawns in political

* It still might have helped, earlier, if Carter had attempted to take the spotlight off the hostages, rather than vowing that his attention would not be diverted from them. Carter's publicly making their release his top priority and going along with daily press coverage of the same in Teheran, the militants were reinforced in their idea that they had considerable leverage vis-a-vis the United States.
problems that politicians cannot solve themselves.” Secretary of State Vance’s plea to the International Olympic Committee just before the winter games opened at Lake Placid, New York, was met coolly and unanimously rejected by that body.

Carter led a public, frustrated over the apparent inability of the United States to find quick solutions to these two crises, into symbolic displays of commitment and strength. The Christmas tree lighting ceremony at the White House in 1979 showed the quintessential Jimmy Carter. The tree had been lit each year since Calvin Coolidge started the ceremony in 1923. But when Carter pulled the switch, only the white star on its top came on, while blue lights, set off by Amy, sparkled on fifty smaller trees. To the astonished onlookers Carter explained that there was one small tree for each hostage: “We will turn on the rest of the lights when the hostages come home.” In his call for American support of economic and cultural sanctions against Russia, Carter called upon Americans to make patriotic sacrifices for the country—while assuring them they would not be hurt. Except for the Olympic boycott, the bottom line in every case was that there would be no real costs. The grain exporters would receive government economic supports, the women who might be registered for the draft would never have to serve in combat. The high point of this reassurance came on February 15, when 200 student body presidents from across the nation met with Carter in the East Room of the White House. He assured them that his call earlier in the week for draft registration was only “symbolic.” It did not mean that they would actually have to come up for service.

**Oval Office Strategy**

Carter and his Administration forestalled public discussion of alternative ways of dealing with the Teheran impasse with the suggestion that discussion would be a sign of disunity that would hurt the hostages. Right after the hostages were taken in Iran he asked members of Congress and the other presidential candidates to refrain from criticism. It would enable him to keep his options open and present a unified front to Khomeini and the militants in Teheran. When Republican presidential hopefuls John Connally and Ronald Reagan nevertheless commented on the President’s handling of the situation, Howard Baker, the Republican leader in the Senate and a contender in presidential lottery himself, rebuked them. Senator Henry Jackson of Washington declared after a briefing session at the White House, “Restraint is the order of the day.” The result: throughout November and early December the presidential challengers in both parties checked potential criticisms of the President.

When Ted Kennedy, after weeks of silence on the Iranian matter, publicly criticized the Shah, saying he had run “one of the most violent regimes in the history of mankind” and had stolen “umpteen billion dollars,” the media and the Administration hit him hard. (Kennedy’s remarks were in response to a question suggesting that the United States owed the Shah a permanent home here because of his long friendship with this country.) The New York Post ran the headline “Teddy Is The Toast of Teheran.” The State Department suggested that Kennedy might have jeopardized the delicate negotiations for the hostages. And Carter himself fed the “stab in the back” interpretation. “I don’t give a damn whether you like or do not like the Shah,” he told a bipartisan group from Congress in an off-the-record briefing. “The issue is that American hostages, so of them, are being held by kidnappers—radical and irresponsible kidnappers. They’re trying to blackmail this country. Anytime we try to interrelate the two issues, even we hurt the prospect for the release of the hostages (emphasis added).”

Carter also withdrew, on December 28, from the Iowa debate with Kennedy and Jerry Brown on grounds of patriotic duty. (He had agreed to the debate after the hostages had been taken.) In an appearance on NBC’s “Meet the Press” the Sunday night before the Iowa caucuses, Carter himself said, “In a time of crisis for our country, I believe it is very important for the President not to assume in a public way the role of a partisan campaigner in a political contest.” (After the Iowa caucuses campaign manager Robert Strauss, conceded that Carter did have some time to campaign in primary states; but Carter would not risk damaging the **unity** behind the President.) Later, in a phone call to leaders of the American Olympic hockey team, after they had won their medal at Lake Placid, Carter again implied that he and his aides were too busy working on Iran and the economy that they could not even give the games their undivided attention on TV.

Rosalynn, campaigning in Iowa, had explained that she and others had “begged” the President to stay in the debate, but he had felt that national unity during the Iran crisis would be jeopardized by participation in a partisan event. He would do what was good for the country, even if it was bad for him politically. Actually, the Oval Office strategy was to Carter’s political advantage, as it had been to other Presidents before him (Nixon in 1972, Ford in 1976). The President has ways of politicking that a challenger does not, and Carter used them to the hilt.

While Carter refrained from personally taking to the hustings, his family and Cabinet members and other political associates continued to do it for him. Vice-President Walter Mondale worked Iowa. Calling for the grain embargo against Russia, he said the President “put the country first”; Kennedy (who opposed the grain embargo) was playing “the politics of the moment.” Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland spent his Christmas vacation flying about the country. In Iowa he gave the call to colors, “We’re being tested by the Russians to see what we’re made of,” he said. But the farmers could be patriotic without getting hurt. Bergland promised the farmers emergency economic relief. And in an unusual weekend action shortly before the voting, Stuart Eizenstat told the press that the Commodity Credit Corporation would pay local market prices for corn and soya products in states that had surpluses. (Eizenstat denied that Carter did this for political reasons.)
Carter, himself, freed from the need for personal appearances, had time to use one of his trump cards—direct people-to-person contact. This time he did it via telephone in a “Reach out and touch someone,” strategy. Every night he made twenty to forty phone calls (many more on weekends) to political leaders and backers in Iowa, Maine, and New Hampshire. In New Hampshire, according to Evans and Novak, Kennedy’s precinct workers were finding some blocks where nearly every Democratic household had received a presidential phone call. “More people were called by the President than at any time since we had phones,” complained Maine’s governor, Joseph E. Brennan, in early February.

Nor did the Oval Office strategy end Carter’s policy of bringing groups through the White House. On Monday, February 4, 1980, Carter entertained 205 guests, including members of Congress, Cabinet officers, business types (the chairmen of Aetna Life Insurance and Braniff Airways), the head of the American Legion, and campaign supporters—for example, a Chicago couple whose invitation was a reward for the volunteer work on an earlier fundraising dinner, and the cochairs of the Carter-Mondale artist and athletes committee. (When asked who was paying for the affair, Powell said it was not really a campaign event—just a social to which you could invite anyone you want. That meant it was paid for out of the White House entertainment budget.) The conference with the student body leaders has already been noted. Aside from their meeting with Carter, the students had been briefed earlier in the day by National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and Domestic Affairs Administrator Stuart Eizenstat. (The effect of such invitations: University of Illinois Senate Student Association President Matt Bettenhausen, upon receiving the invitation, said, “At first I thought it was a joke . . . I’m going to believe it when I leave.” The trip, he said, is a “once in a lifetime opportunity.”) That same day, Carter also met with editors of several national magazines. He told them that a review of relations with Iran before the ouster of the Shah would not be appropriate at this time, but that he was looking forward to establishing “normal relationships” with Teheran. On February 19, Carter spoke to 500 American Legion members. He appreciated “the firmness, patience, the unity and the will” extended by “almost all” Americans during the crises in Afghanistan and Iran.

The strategy also removed Carter from certain temptations of the campaign trail. His tendency to take swipes at his opponents undermined the “presidential” look. Earlier, in September, 1979, at a town meeting at Queens College, New York City, he had said that at least he doesn’t panic in a crisis. Which caused him and Powell to spend a day denying that he was making any reference to Kennedy and Chappaquiddick. (Powell said that Carter was referring to his own composure during 1977 when U.S. helicopters in North Korea were shot down, during the fall of the Shah, and in September, 1979, when Soviet combat troops were discovered in Cuba.) Later, at his dinner for party supporters in late October, Carter openly mocked Kennedy and his earlier statement that the attitude of his mother and wife would influence his decision about running for President. Carter said: “I asked my mama . . . She said it was OK. My wife, Rosalynn, said she’d be willing to live in the White House for four more years.” One Carter operative said the point was to see if Kennedy “has the stomach to go through the humiliating, deflating experience of fighting for the nomination.” Another added, “He’s going to get clawed. He’s going to bleed, and then he’s going to start dropping in the polls.” To which Carter himself added: “Kennedy has no idea what he’s in for.”

Carter’s Oval Office strategy and his call for unity worked for almost two months, as both Republicans and contenders within his own party held their fire. On January 1, however, Bill Brock, the Republican National Chairman, broke ranks, assailing Carter for using the Iranian crisis to divert attention from his foreign policy weaknesses. “It’s time to take the gloves off.” After Carter had canceled his appearance in the Iowa debate, Kennedy and Brown had accused him of using the hostage situation to help himself politically. On learning that Carter would not debate as scheduled, Brown charged that Carter was “ducking the debate and using Iran as his excuse. The hostages will not get home any sooner by Jimmy Carter hiding in the White House.” And Kennedy struck out at Carter’s foreign policy for the first time in two months. The Administration, he charged, has been “lurching from crisis to crisis” in international affairs.

After his defeat in the Iowa caucuses, Kennedy threw off the remaining constraints. (Aside from avoiding foreign policy criticism he had been downplaying his traditional liberalism with a guarded approach to domestic issues his aides were calling “pragmatism.”) His most slashing attack was at Georgetown University on January 28. Kennedy suggested that the President had exaggerated the foreign policy crisis in Afghanistan. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was brutal, he admitted, but was it really the gravest threat to peace since World War II as Carter claimed? He recalled the Berlin blockade, the Korean war, and the Cuban missile crisis. This country, he warned, should not “rush into a helter-skelter militarism.” Moreover, he suggested, the President may have “invited the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan” by doing nothing when that country first came under Soviet influence in 1978 and ignoring warning signals thereafter. Indeed, the President had little credibility with the Russians, having first said that Russian troops in Cuba were unacceptable and then later accepting them. Kennedy’s own view: that it is more important for the United States to keep up its conventional forces than to rush to the development of new nuclear weapons. As for the hostages in Iran, he proposed the establishment of a United Nations Commission to investigate Iran’s charges against the Shah, with the condition that the hostages be released before the investigation began. Later, in an interview with CBS News in Boston, Kennedy said there is “a war hysteria in this country now. It’s diverting.”

Kennedy also staged a mock debate with Carter before the Consumer Fed-
eration of America. Carter addressed the group first, complete with "Hail to the Chief" (reinstated several months earlier) and the Presidential seal on the podium. He quickly left the hall after his speech. Kennedy came up afterward, joking about the removal of the seal and how Carter had to rush back to the White House "to read a vital national security document—the Portland, Maine, telephone directory." Kennedy held up a tape recorder, pressed a button, and out came Carter's statement at a 1978 news conference that a project had exceeded 13 percent inflation rate was "a temporary aberration." (The 1979 inflation rate exceeded 13 percent.) Launching into a stinging attack on Carter, Kennedy pointed to his economic policies and his refusal to come out and campaign: "We do not pick a president for eight years, but for four-year terms. The referendum we are holding in 1980 is not a secondary side show, it is a primary element of our freedom."

A week later, buoyed by his near victory in Maine, Kennedy accused Carter of seeking "blank-check" approval of a "failed foreign policy." In a speech at Harvard University, Kennedy blamed Carter's policies for helping create the crises facing the nation. Claiming that Carter had ignored "months of signals" about the Soviet move into Afghanistan, Kennedy said another President "would have raised the issue in advance, instead of drawing a line after it was already crossed." And if the Administration had not "parlayed the SALT treaty into nearly certain Senate defeat," he said, "the Soviets would have had something to gain by restraining their aggression." Had he been President, Kennedy suggested, "the crisis might have ended with nothing more than Soviet military maneuvers near the Afghan border. . . . No president should be reelected because he happened to be standing there when his foreign policy collapsed around him." The Senator repeated his earlier charge that the hostage situation was the "predictable" result of the decision to admit the exiled Shah of Iran to the United States. In addition, the Administration had delayed the release of the hostages by first threatening and then withdrawing economic sanctions against Iran, by rejecting and then moving to accept a "commission of Iranian grievances." Kennedy said: "We are now in the 101st day of a crisis that never had to happen. . . . The last gasp of a failed policy is war."

Carter aides, in their regular meeting with the President the following morning, were angry. Later that day they lashed out at Kennedy on several fronts. By noon Jody Powell had summoned reporters to his office, where he characterized Kennedy's speech as "offensive, inaccurate, and obnoxious." Later, Secretary of State Vance issued a statement saying that, "Contrary to the Senator's charge, and as he knows, we have been working with the United Nations Secretary General for months on the possibility of creating an international commission that could lead to the release of the hostages." That same night, when asked about these comments in his televised press conference, Carter said the Kennedy statements on Iran have not been "true" or "responsible," and "they have not helped our country." Carter also interpreted Kennedy's attack on him as an attack on America: "Somehow the Soviets [in Ken-
taken in mid-February, after Kennedy’s Harvard speech and the President’s counterblast on national television, showed twice as many people were finding fault with Kennedy for “trying to capitalize politically on current international tensions” as were finding fault with the President on the same grounds. A majority of those polled did not see the President’s decision to remain in Washington as a political tactic. Most did not want the policy on Iran debated. Even Kennedy’s advocacy of wage and price controls and gasoline rationing had not won him support. Seventy percent of the respondents did not even properly perceive his stand on those issues. Carter maintained a 58 percent lead among Democrats, compared with 23 percent for Kennedy, 7 percent for Brown, with 12 percent undecided. The Iran and Afghanistan crises, then, and Carter’s initial responses to them, had given him a political rebirth his reassessment at Camp David had not.

It was not clear how a show of unity to the Iranians would get them to change their minds, or how economic or Olympic boycott threats would get the Russians to leave Afghanistan. Carter had gotten himself on a slippery slope diplomatically speaking and might have to pay the political costs as these American displays came to naught. Further, the economy was heating up. By early March the inflation rate would be running near the 18 percent mark, interest rates nearing 17 percent, and the unemployment rate threatening to climb. Maybe the voters would start voting their pocketbooks, as the traditional wisdom says they do.

In late January there were signs that the moratorium on criticism was breaking down. Tom Shale, television critic for the Washington Post, wrote on January 30: “And all the while TV has been beating up on Kennedy, there’s been almost benign neglect of Carter. Here you have a guy who is really a disaster, but the networks have gone right along with his Rose Garden strategy. There is absolutely no innovation in their coverage.” Anthony Lewis, in The New York Times on February 4, noted a “creeping deification of Jimmy. Portions of the American press, both print and television, are treating him with a hushed reverence.” James Reston on February 6 queried: “Having cheered President Carter’s . . . warning to the Russians to stay out of the Persian Gulf . . . or else, Washington is now beginning to ask: ‘or else what?’ ”

On February 20 Reston further shared with the nation his “Doubts in the Night”: “The allies from the start, and lately the American press, have begun to question Mr. Carter’s judgment that Afghanistan was the most serious foreign policy crisis since the last World War; and most recently, Mr. Carter has begun to agree with them and withhold sanctions against Iran and his opposition to a U.N. commission to investigate the charges against the Shah before the American hostages are released.” Moreover, Carter’s talk about “more sacrifices to come, about the possibility of war in the Persian Gulf, higher defense budgets, higher unemployment, new mobile combat units and new missile and conscription systems” ran contrary to the traditional orientation of the Democrats “as the party of the young, the old and the poor; of low prices and interest rates, and cooperation with the allies.” The party, he suggested, “is divided and troubled because many of its leaders fear that its political success for the moment rests on a false premise—an exaggerated and maybe even a contrived fear of war—and that this will become clear during the long Presidential campaign—especially when the major threat of the domestic economy finally becomes the central issue for debate.” According to Reston, Carter’s “natural political supporters are beginning to wonder where it’s all going.”

The irony of the 1980 primary campaign was that Carter’s party never required him to account for departing from its traditional domestic concerns, as Reston thought it might. Nor did his increasingly obvious use of the foreign policy crises for his own political advantage, his failures to secure the return of the hostages from Iran, or to get the Russians out of Afghanistan ever catch up with him in the primary returns.

There were, it is true, serious setbacks. He “lost” several industrial states to Kennedy—New York, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. And midway through the season, in April and early May, the Gallup polls showed a drop in Carter’s popularity relative to his opponent in the party—down from 59 and 60 percent in March to 53 and 51 percent in April and early May.

There was also a steady decline in Carter’s standing relative to Reagan—from a 58 to 33 percent lead in the Gallup poll at the end of February to a 6 percent lag behind Reagan in an ABC-Louis Harris poll in mid-May. Further, many voters were dissatisfied with the Carter and Reagan alternative by April. A New York Times-CBS poll showed both had been running in a dead heat, but half of those polled were dissatisfied with the two candidates. Even as the primary season came to an end there were indications that the support for Carter was lukewarm at best. In the May 3 Texas primary almost 20 percent of the Democrats voted for neither Carter nor Kennedy. And an Associated Press-NBC exit poll in Indiana showed that 50 percent of those who voted for Carter were voting more for the presidency or against Kennedy than for Carter. Carter were voting more for the presidency or against Kennedy than for Carter. Then on May 5, Governor Hugh Carey of New York noted that events since the New Hampshire primary might have changed the minds of the delegates, and suggested that the best way to unite the Democratic Party would be for both Carter and Kennedy to release their delegates.

Despite these problems, and except for that dip in April and early May, Carter sustained an almost two to one edge over Kennedy throughout the primary season, with the rest of the voters favoring Brown or undecided. He was able to prevent a more serious defection from his candidacy for several reasons. Partly it was his ability as an incumbent to win over local leaders through the use of spoils. Partly it was that the “character” issue played to his advantage. Kennedy had been seriously wounded by press questions about his role at Chappaquiddick and his relationships with his wife and other women—while his political character went virtually ignored. Carter, by way of contrast, was still perceived as a highly moral man—a theme played upon, indirectly, in his advertisements used in Illinois and Pennsylvania. One adver-
tisement emphasized Carter as "father, husband, President. He does each job with distinction." Another featured men and women on the street, saying that they could not trust Kennedy, that he was too big a spender.

In addition, Carter was successful in convincing many Americans that his problems in governing were not of his doing. He had long blamed his legislative failures on the "selfish interests" that controlled Congress, and at his domestic Camp David meeting he had ever so subtly suggested that his problems also resided in the people, who were not inclined to sacrifice for the greatest good. Aides elaborated on these themes in their exchanges with the press. Ignoring the Great Depression, World War II and the near collapse of Europe after it, and the development of the atomic bomb, they claimed that the great unprecedented complexity of the problems Carter had to deal with made it impossible for any man to do better. Many Americans bought this view.

Carter and his aides also showed their extraordinary ability at "damage limitation," even when they made mistakes during the campaign season and when the Carter foreign and economic policies failed to accomplish their objectives. U.S. backing of the United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Israel for the establishment of settlements in occupied Arab territories was repudiated by the President within seventy-two hours, as Israeli and Jewish-American leaders expressed their outrage. The Administration explained that there had been a communications failure, and Cyrus Vance took full responsibility for the mistake. The potential losses from this fiasco were limited to the New York and Connecticut primaries. A possible slide away from Carter was checked the following Tuesday, the day of the Wisconsin and Kansas primaries. Carter, in an unusual 7:18 A.M. television announcement, informed the American public that there were indications that the Iranian militants would soon hand over the hostages to the Iranian government. The announcement was clearly premature, but it had a positive effect on Carter's showing in the Wisconsin race. Carter beat Kennedy there by a margin of 56 to 30 percent (with Jerry Brown taking 12 percent). Of those who made up their minds in the last two days before the election, Carter gained 47 percent of the vote (as contrasted to Kennedy's 35 percent)—reversing the tendency of last-minute deciders in New York and Connecticut.

When the hostages were not transferred to the Iranian government, Carter resorted to a new tough line, making public his threat that the United States might have to use force should America's allies not gather around his economic and Olympic boycotts. With this new show of toughness, America's allies began to fall behind his policies and Carter regained some of the authority he had been losing at home.

Even the ill-fated hostage rescue operation on April 24 worked to his advantage. There was a potential for real political damage, for not only did the operation fail, it seemed to have been conducted in an amateurish way. It was undertaken without advance consultation with any members of Congress, which gave rise, for a moment, to the concern that the President might have violated the
were foreshadowing a serious recession. Carter, who had earlier said that any recession would be short and mild, had to concede the next day that it would be much “steeper than we’ve anticipated.”

By that time, however, Carter was but twenty-eight votes short of having the majority of delegates needed for nomination, and the final primary round could bring him embarrassment at the worst.

Carter had won, once again, by a combination of luck, a skillful political strategy, and an almost uncanny ability to influence how people interpreted him. From the earlier expectation he had raised that he might be great, he had managed to convince many people that greatness was impossible—that the best America could hope for was a man who said he was honest and showed he was trying. The man who asked “Why not the best?” in his 1976 campaign autobiography now argued for reelection on the theme that things could be worse.
BETTY GLAD

Jimmy Carter

In search of the great White House

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