

ADVERTISEMENT

August 19, 2005

latimes.com : National News

Print E-mail story Most e-mailed Change text size

Reagan Files Paint Court Nominee as a Watchdog

By David G. Savage, Richard Simon and Henry Weinstein, Times Staff Writers

WASHINGTON — As a White House lawyer in the Reagan administration, John G. Roberts Jr. did not spend all of his time analyzing the great legal issues of the day. Instead, judging from the thousands of pages of his files that were released Thursday, the Supreme Court nominee spent much of his time acting as a gatekeeper and editor for the president.

He repeatedly tried to keep President Reagan's friends from taking advantage of his office. He sought to keep the president from lending his name or office to promoting commercial interests. Sometimes, he intervened to keep Reagan from saying things he might regret.

ADVERTISEMENT

When actor Jimmy Stewart wrote to Reagan in 1983 to ask him to serve on an advisory board for his son's prep school in Arizona, for instance, Roberts wrote a stern memo advising that the president "should not accept Stewart's invitation." The school planned to use Reagan's name to raise money. It would be "demeaning to the [president's] office, using it as a huckster's ploy," Roberts wrote.

When some wealthy Republicans from Dallas invited the Reagans to a gala dinner, Roberts advised against attending on the grounds that sponsors were using the event as part of the grand opening of a shopping mall.

In December of 1985, Jerry Weintraub, chief executive of United Artists, offered to have actor Sylvester Stallone personally give Reagan the boxing gloves and robe he wore in the newly released "Rocky IV." The gifts were to end up in the Smithsonian Institution, Weintraub said.

Roberts said the president should decline the offer. It "is a rather transparent publicity stunt to promote the film," he said in a memo to his boss, White House Counsel Fred F. Fielding.

And when a publicist for Michael Jackson proposed in 1984 that Reagan thank the pop star for giving tickets to needy youngsters so they could attend a Washington concert, Roberts demurred. "I hate to sound like one of Mr. Jackson's records, constantly repeating the same refrain, but I recommend we do not approve this letter," he wrote.

He gave the same advice even when the cause was dear to Reagan's heart.

In January of 1985, the president was asked to speak to a group of corporate executives who had shown a willingness to support Nicaraguan refugees. "I recommend stopping any White House involvement in this effort," Roberts wrote, adding that the president should not participate in private fundraising.

Comments reflecting Roberts' political views were rare in the more than 38,000 pages of files that were released Thursday by the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library near Simi Valley and by the National Archives in Washington. With the papers released Monday, the files contain all of the material from the Reagan Library that was written by or compiled in the office where Roberts worked from 1982 to 1986.

PHOTOS



From the archives (Larry Downing / Reuters)

PHOTO GALLERY



Bush's choice

RELATED STORIES

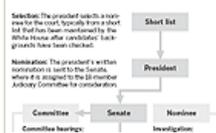
- Bush Order Lets Him Control Roberts' Memos August 11, 2005
Judge Roberts' View From the Bench August 10, 2005
Ad Attacks Roberts' Role in Clinic Case August 9, 2005
Portrait of Nominee as a Young Lawyer August 7, 2005
With Starr, Roberts Pushed Reagan Agenda August 5, 2005
Roberts' Gay Bias Case Role Debated August 5, 2005
Roberts Donated Help to Gay Rights Case August 4, 2005

MULTIMEDIA FEATURE

U.S. Supreme Court
President Bush has nominated Federal appeals court Judge John G. Roberts Jr. to the Supreme Court for the position vacated by the late Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.
John G. Roberts Jr.
Born: Jan. 17, 1955, in Buffalo, N.Y.
Education: St. Vincent's University, 1976; J.D., Harvard Law School, 1981
Career: Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, 1989-93; Justice, Supreme Court, 1993-95; Justice, Reagan-Bush National Republican Party, 1995-96; Chief Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives, 1996-98; Chief Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives, 1998-2001; Chief Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives, 2001-02; Chief Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives, 2002-03; Chief Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives, 2003-04; Chief Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives, 2004-05

The U.S. Supreme Court (AP) (Flash)

PDF



Reaching the court July 20, 2005 (Acrobat file)

U.S. SUPREME COURT

LIVECURRENT BLOG
Everybody has an opinion about the future of the Supreme Court. Share yours.

NATION

Instead of providing insight into his beliefs or reinforcing the conservative ideology found in some papers released earlier, the documents offered a glimpse into Roberts' personality — his wry sense of humor, his efforts to steer Reagan clear of controversy, and his attention to detail — even punctuation.

And they shed light on the often dry, tedious work of a young White House lawyer who, in addition to dispensing advice on complex legal issues and congressional legislation, responded to mail sent to the White House from citizens. He even issued a memo about a Christmas party invitation: "The only change I am considering is a more festive color."

Roberts also said "thanks, but no thanks" was the right response to an \$8-billion crime-fighting strategy proposed by Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.). The proposals "are the epitome of the 'throw money at the problem' approach" to crime fighting, Roberts wrote. His blunt rejection of Specter's idea may not sit well with the Pennsylvania senator, now chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which is to begin confirmation hearings on Roberts' nomination in September.

Sometimes, Roberts objected to words and phrases in Reagan's speeches.

In October of 1984, the president was set to conclude a campaign speech in South Carolina with the rousing line that the United States was "the greatest nation God ever created."

Roberts said he had no legal objection to the president's prepared remarks. He added, however, that the final line struck him as "ill-advised and, particularly in the light of the focus on the religion and politics issue, a likely candidate for the 'Reaganism of the Week.' "

"According to Genesis, God creates things like the heavens and the earth, and the birds and fishes, but not nations," Roberts wrote.

His commitment to Reagan was clear: In his April 1986 letter of resignation, Roberts wrote to the president: "My years in your service will always be very special to me. The inspiration you have given me will burn brightly in my heart long after I have left the lights of the White House behind."

Some of the boxes of records opened to public scrutiny Thursday were filled with memos in which Roberts recommended that the White House deny requests for the president to be photographed while — among other things — reading the Washington Times, working out in Nike apparel or riding in a Jeep, or requests for presidential messages commemorating the anniversary of Disneyland or the opening of a shopping mall in Arizona.

Roberts routinely said the White House should strictly adhere to the policy of "not permitting use of the president's name, likeness or photograph in any manner that suggests or could be construed as an endorsement by the president of a commercial product or enterprise."

After a car accident, Roberts sounded a bit like others who believed they had unjustly received traffic tickets when he wrote, in a 1984 memo to Fielding, his boss, that he had to leave work to fight a ticket he had received.

"I was cited for 'failure to devote full time and attention' — a laughable catch-all charge that the prosecution will be hard-pressed to prove.

"The ticket was for a mere \$25," he added, "but having never been cited for a moving violation in my entire 15 years of driving, and feeling confident I was not at fault in this instance (and of course fearful of an increase in my insurance rates), I have decided to take the matter all the way to the Supreme Court, if necessary."

Savage and Simon reported from Washington and Weinstein from Simi Valley.

[Reagan Files Paint Court Nominee as a Watchdog](#)

[Court Upholds Restrictions on Pentagon Coverage of Abortions](#)

[Ohio Governor Found Guilty of Ethics Violations](#)

[BTK, Who Inflicted Pain for His Pleasure, Gets Life](#)

[Federal Officials Announce Meth Measures](#)

[Nation section >](#)

MOST E-MAILED STORIES

[Rapper Clears the Field](#)

[Dreyer's Scoops Up a Share of Doggie Treats Market](#)

[Movies, Shmovies -- TV's Taking Over L.A.](#)

[> more e-mailed stories](#)

 **CLICK HERE to have Times news sent to your inbox**

TOP OF THE TIMES

SIGN UP NOW FOR HOME DELIVERY!



DOG DAYS OF SUMMER: RECENT TIMES ARTICLES

- ['Ugliest' Dog Is a Thing of Beauty to His Owner](#)
- [Servants -- and Weapons -- of War](#)
- [Do Trail Leash Rules Go Too Far?](#)
- [Dreyer's Scoops Up a Share of Doggie Treats Market](#)

SECTIONS

- [calendarlive.com](#)
- [Arts & Entertainment](#)
- [California | Local](#)
- [World](#)
- [Nation](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Editorials, Op-Ed](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Food](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Highway 1](#)
- [Home](#)
- [Outdoors](#)

 **Enjoy seven-day home delivery for as little as \$2.50 a week.** [CLICK HERE](#)

Ads by Google

Free Ronald Reagan Books
Letters from Desk of Ronald Reagan Free - Hurry While Supplies Last!
[www.FreeGiftWorld.com](#)

God And Ronald Reagan
Shop for Christian books and more today at Christianbook.com!
[www.christianbook.com](#)

President Ronald Reagan

Get Instant Access To Famous Speeches. 100% Free!
www.ez-tracks.com

Ronald Reagan - BIOGRAPHY

Shop A&E for Biography Episodes & Celebrity Profiles - Order Online!
www.ShopAETV.com

Library Automation System

Alexandria library automation software used by 1000s of libraries
www.goalexandria.com

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2005 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

PARTNERS:  