



SECRETARY JAMES BAKER, III IMPARTS WISDOM TO NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

State Bar of Texas Executive Director Trey Apffel sits down with former Chief of Staff and Secretary of State James Baker, III for upcoming CLE.

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PHOTO BY ROB GREER

The walls leading to Secretary James Baker, III's office at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy are adorned with funny art. Political cartoons hang alongside doodles of cowboys, bulls, and foreign leaders. In one photo, a younger Baker is asleep on a plane while another man points and laughs. The laughing man—and doodle artist—is 40th U.S. President Ronald Reagan. The subject of the cartoons: Baker himself. As the hall narrows on his office—punctuated with large, framed commissions with cursive declarations “secretary of state” and “chief of staff”—the picture becomes clearer: For an afternoon in mid-April in Houston, the State Bar of Texas would be chatting with “the man who ran Washington.”

“Ah, you're with the *Texas Bar Journal*? Maybe you can ask the bar when they'll stop requiring 93-year-olds to do CLE!” Baker joked as he waited for the camera to start rolling.

Across from him was State Bar Executive Director Trey Apffel, clutching a list of questions for their interview. The discussion, being filmed for a June CLE, would hit on the topics of negotiating deals and legal education as well as a look back at Baker's career. His resume is vast from his beginnings

as an attorney at Andrews & Kurth in Houston to becoming the arm of conservative Washington in the 1980s to becoming honorary chair of the Baker Institute at Rice University.

Baker was born in Houston in 1930 in a lineage of Baker Botts lawyers. His father partnered there, as did Secretary Baker's grandfather and great-grandfather, an early founder of the firm. As a Baker Botts partner (then Baker, Botts & Baker), his grandfather, known as “Captain Baker,” helped solve the murder of friend and Rice University namesake William Marsh Rice.

Because of the firm's nepotism rule in his earlier days of practice (later amended), Baker found work elsewhere. With Andrews & Kurth, he sat in with trial attorneys before switching his focus to mergers and acquisitions, banking, and real estate, among other areas of law.

Growing up, Baker understood that while he may not earn a lot of money as an attorney, it would ultimately be a rewarding career. He also understood and took in, *partially*, a lesson from his grandfather: study, work hard, and stay out of politics. When Apffel asked the former secretary of state, secretary of the treasury, and chief of staff why he didn't take

to heart every one of those, Baker replied he got two out of the three—.666 isn't a bad batting average."

Baker's quick wit and willingness to quip with anyone in his office was one insight into his ability to win over a room. That trait—and stamina at the negotiating table—perhaps served him well when dealing with the likes of former Reagan adversary Mikhail Gorbachev, political opponents in the capital, or Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad, or in attempts to broker peace between Palestine and Israel. "You're not going to succeed if you can't relate to people," he later said during the interview.

Baker spoke in quotable phrases throughout the afternoon. "Leadership is knowing what to do and actually doing it" would be followed by "we send folks to D.C. to do the bidding of the people" on a few occasions. But the sincerity in his tone shone through each time. "I ascribe my commitment there to my dad," Baker said. "My dad always told me don't start something you can't finish and always finish what you start."

There were a few pillars of negotiation Baker focused on when Apffel asked him where lawyers could succeed:

- "Working hard is really a big part of negotiation."
- Understanding an opponent's red line is key.
- Build trust with people.
- Focus on "parallel reciprocal confidence building," which is to accomplish small things before bigger things.
- Use "principled pragmatism" where, to make both sides happy, one is willing to compromise without sacrificing principals. "You'll never get 100% of what you want in a deal."
- Decorum. "You can't lead through force of arms. It has to be by principles. You've got to win people over with the principle of your values."

Baker's entrance into national politics began with one tragedy and one friendship with a future president. In 1970, 16 months after being diagnosed with breast cancer, Baker's wife, Mary Stuart, died at 38. His close friend, George Bush, had an assignment he told Baker would take the grief off his mind: Lead his Senate campaign.

It would be the first of several campaigns Baker ran, which ramped up to presidential races for Gerald Ford, Bush, Reagan twice, and Bush again, helping secure three terms in the 1980s and '90s. It would also mark the start of Baker, office holder. He was brought on to serve in the cabinets of the aforementioned presidents (as well as Richard Nixon's) and also had stops as undersecretary of commerce, Economic Policy Council member, and National Security Council member. He even took a shot at elected office, running for attorney general of Texas in 1978, ultimately losing to Mark White.

"When my grandfather told young lawyers 'work hard, study, stay out of politics,' I think he meant stay out of elective politics!" Baker said.

In the late 1990s, he was personal envoy to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan in Western Sahara, an adviser to George

W. Bush on Iraqi debt in 2003, a co-chair alongside Jimmy Carter of the Federal Commission on Election Reform in 2005, and a co-chair of the Iraq Study Group.

After the interview, Baker led an entourage of Presidential Elections Program head John Williams, State Bar staff, and a photographer through Dorè Commons. Its large atrium is surrounded by three stories with tiled terraces capped by dark wooden tops. Indented columns separate the terraces into segments, forming arch-shaped openings. Above the open floor, iron rings spiral up toward the ceiling with lamps tracing the way. "It's a replica of a blue mosque," Baker said. On the other side of the commons is a sort of museum at the building's entrance. Artifacts chronicle the development of the Baker Institute. Pictures of Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton, Joe Biden, Bush Sr., and other dignitaries who have spoken here decorate the walls. Outside the building, amid auburn, burnt yellow, and seafoam green, "A bridge between domestic policy and foreign policy" is inscribed above one entrance; "A bridge between the world of ideas and the world of action" above another.

"There's a real hunger here, Trey, for substantive policy debate," Baker said.

The post-Washington years saw the secretary become the namesake and honorary chair of the institute, established at Rice in 1993. The non-partisan think tank gears its programs on research and analysis of foreign and domestic policy as well as areas of health and science, finance, and energy. More than 40 fellows work here, which costs the institute \$2 million to sustain, Baker said, touting the institute's international reputation despite its smaller budget and relatively young life.

When Apffel asked how he maintains his energy at 93, Baker attributed it to good health. "I've still got my marbles and I pray every day," he said, emphasizing his lifelong belief in a higher authority. Baker's weekly routine includes walking a few miles and strength exercises at the gym. With a wry smile, he also said he drinks a martini every night and used to smoke three packs of cigarettes a day. "I would not recommend," Baker said. "Keep using [points to his head] or you'll lose it." **TBJ**

James Baker and the Art of Negotiation

MCLE Course #174194614

Description: Former Secretary of State James Baker, III is widely acknowledged as a master negotiator. In this webcast, Secretary Baker joins State Bar of Texas Executive Director Trey Apffel at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy to discuss what lawyers need to know about the art of negotiation, how a legal education can help you make deals in Washington, and how to enjoy a long and productive career in the law.

To access this 45-minute free ethics course beginning June 7, 2023, go to texasbarcle.com and click on "free online classes."