



**All the Best Podcast**  
**Episode 37: "George Did It"**  
*Featuring Former Chief Legal Counsel, Ambassador Boyden Gray*

Ambassador Gray: "On Thursday, I signed the Clean Air Act. Lots of congressmen there. What got me was the emotion of it. You could sense in the East Room a strong emotional commitment to this legislation. In fact, it was somewhat overwhelming. After I walked out, it was genuine expression of appreciation and thanks from many, many people, including George Mitchell, and a lot of people from the business community and the environmental community. It took me by surprise, and I realize more fully now how important this legislation was." Signed, George H.W. Bush

President Bush: In the first place, I believe that character is a part of being president.

Barbara Bush: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best," the official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans, through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best."

We're mountaineers, we're volunteers  
We're the tide that rolls, we're Seminoles  
Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right

President Bush: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, "Write your mother, serve your country," and he said, "Tell the truth." And I've tried to do that in public life all through it.

And we're one big country nation, that's right.

Barbara: You are a human being first, and those human connections, with children, with friends, are the most important investment you will ever make.

President Bush: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, this is "All the Best."

Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

Sam: Ambassador Boyden Gray is the founding partner of Boyden Gray & Associates, a law and strategy firm in Washington, D.C. Ambassador Gray worked in the White House for 12 years, first, during the Reagan administration, as counsel to the Presidential Task Force on Regulatory Relief. He later went on to work in my grandfather's administration, where he was in charge of judicial selection, and was instrumental in the enactment of the Clean Air Act amendments of 1990. Finally, under my uncle George W. Bush's term, Ambassador Gray was named U.S. Ambassador to the European Union, and U.S. Special Envoy to Europe for Eurasian energy. Welcome, Boyden. How are you today?

Ambassador Gray: I'm fine, I'm fine.

Sam: You know, the main theme of our podcast is service. And few people have rendered a more durable or important service to my grandparents than you. How did you first come to meet them?

Ambassador Gray: There was a family connection. My father was an occasional golfing partner of Senator Bush, President Bush's father, and there were other links between the two families, so I was not an unknown quantity to President Bush, or then Vice President-elect Bush, although he was an unknown quantity to me. I mean, he knew more about my family than I knew about him. And what made it more immediate was, work I'd done for a group, now quite famous, called The Business Roundtable, was just beginning back in the late '80s, and I was the first general counsel, and one of the lawyers, who was with Eli Lilly, was, in effect, the chief mastermind of what I was to do and not do, and you have to remember that, in those days, there was no email and there were no cell phones, so I operated off of instructions given once a week or once every two weeks. So it was a tricky relationship.

The lawyer who did this was the then general counsel of Eli Lilly, and had been a great friend, and was a great friend, of Bush all his life. They were roommates at Andover and/or Yale, I can't remember which. It was this general counsel who got President Bush to join the Eli Lilly board before his re-entry into

government service as vice president. He thought highly of me, evidently. I remember being in a meeting after the election, after Reagan had won, Reagan and Vice President Bush had won.

But I'd been on sabbatical. I came back to vote. I went to a Business Roundtable meeting in New York, very fancy, General Motors building, and this general counsel came over and said, "Boyd, can I sit next to you?" And I said, "What do you mean, can you sit next to me? You're my boss." And he laughed and said, "Now, I told George that if he doesn't hire you, I'm never speaking to him again. And now I'm telling you that if you don't accept, I'm never gonna speak to you again." So that was sort of what sealed it, I think. But there was a relationship between the two families, which didn't hurt.

Sam: For you, is there one thing you observed first hand about him, that our listeners might not know, in those 12 years, as you served as his legal counselor?

Ambassador Gray: Well, this is sort of a personal thing, but he had a glorious sense of humor, and that was part of his charm, and I think President Reagan was very similar. They both were very, very funny people. No wonder they enjoyed their Thursday lunches, where I'm sure they just traded jokes all the time, instead of doing business. But he was very, very funny, he had a great store of jokes, and I don't think the public saw much of it until much, much later. I think after five or so years out of the White House, he began to show it to the public, and sort of capped towards the end of his life by the funny socks he would wear. But he had a wonderful, wonderful sense of humor, and that's what I wish he had shown the public more of when he was president.

Sam: Did that atmosphere, the humor that he showed, did that help? I mean, I'm sure it was very high stress for you, as a legal counselor for those 12 years in the vice president's and then the president's administration.

Ambassador Gray: Yes, it was essential. It was something that works its charm on me, but it worked with everybody else on the staff, and the captain. And foreign leaders. They loved talking to him. They loved being with him, because he was so funny. I remember once he made this joke, the Gorbachevs came over, and he was sitting next to Mrs. Gorbachev, and some famous Russian opera singer sang a little thing before dinner, and the story is that, I think he was then vice president, leaned over to Mrs. Gorbachev and said, "I think I'm falling in love."

Sam: Mister Ambassador, Secretary Baker and many others have said that my gampy was maybe the finest vice president ever to serve in that office. What's

your assessment, and would you tell us about his relationship with President Reagan?

Ambassador Gray: Well, yes. I mean, one of the people who encouraged me to take the job, although there wasn't much doubt about whether I'd do it or not, was Bryce Harlow, the famous lobbyist who had worked for Nixon, headed up his legislative affairs. And he knew both of them quite well, both Reagan and Bush. I had done a lot of work with him in connection with the Business Roundtable, and he knew my father well. And so, I could trust Harlow completely, and I asked him, I said, "Should I take this job?" and he looked at me and said, "Are you crazy? Of course you should take it. You know, this is the first, certainly in my lifetime, the first president and vice president who are both gentlemen, and who will both get along incredibly well. And I couldn't think of a better team for you to go work for. So don't disappoint me, and take the job."

Sam: In your assessment, what was my grandfather's most important contribution to the country as vice president?

Ambassador Gray: You know, that's sort of a tricky question, because it involves some work I did, but I think it's pretty clear that it was his help, with President Reagan in the beginning, with foreign policy, when there was turnover in the Security Council advisor, and also in the State Department, Secretary of State. There was a lot of uncertainty in those two places until George Shultz came aboard, and Bush really became the principal foreign policy advisor to Reagan. People don't really realize this. Reagan made him head of crisis management. Well, if you think about it for a minute, what is the national security about? It's about crisis management. So any difficult issue was directed or overseen by his vice president, any difficult issue, until Shultz came fully aboard.

And so, I think an illustration of how important it was was the contribution that Vice President Bush gave to Reagan in the early '80s, 1983, I think, in defeating the Russian effort to stop the deployment of the Pershing missiles, mid-range missiles, in Europe, the defeat of which was the Soviets' number one foreign policy objective for the whole decade. Reagan sent then Vice President Bush over to Europe to do a whistle-stop retail political tour of all the capitols, including Berlin, where he and Kohl were pelted by rotten eggs and tomatoes and stuff, to try to change the European opinion, which was very much opposed to the deployment. And he succeeded in a three week tour to do that. It was a real tour de force, a really important foreign policy success for Reagan, maybe the most important of his first term, and it let directly to the fall of the wall. You could draw a straight line if you want.

There was this wonderful editorial in the Washington Post after he returned, and after it was clear that he had turned Europe around. The headline read, "George Did It," and the thing was that the George in the "George Did It" was not George Shultz, it was George Bush, and I don't know whether George Shultz was a little miffed by that or not, but it's something I'll never forget. It was a really important contribution. I did a lot of work for him, that's why I'm putting it second, on the deregulation front, to stop the overregulation of the prior years, and the contribution of that to the economy I think was substantial, and many of the building blocks that now are infrastructure that's being used by the current administration to cut back on regulations were really set in place back in those days. But there's no question that the foreign policy advice, especially in the first term, was indispensable.

Sam: I'd like to shift gears to the presidency. My grandfather was widely appreciated for his leadership in foreign policy. But you worked closely with him on several critical pieces of domestic legislation, including the Americans With Disabilities Act, 30 years ago. Can you talk about how this landmark, bipartisan civil rights legislation became a reality?

Ambassador Gray: You look back at it with some wonderment, because it became the model for the world, and I think almost every country in the world has copied it. It really has had a huge impact, not just domestically, but abroad. People tend probably to forget, but Reagan had a very soft spot in his heart for the disabled. They got along very well together on that one issue, and I could remember the vice president was speaking with a group of Down syndrome kids from California, and he looked at his watch and looked at the schedule, and said, "You know, I don't think anything's on Reagan's schedule at this hour, and maybe he's still in the office. I think I'm gonna take this group down." And he took them down the hall to see the president, and they spent almost an hour with the president.

It was an astonishing revelation to me about the common bond between the two executives over disability issues. So, it was not a big leap, or anything but a continuation of what Reagan would have done, if he'd had a third term, to promise civil rights legislation for the disabled, which had never been enacted, as essential campaign promise. And he did it quickly, early because of this prior familiarity with the issues, and Dukakis had no choice but to agree. And once you have two candidates agreeing to landmark legislation in a campaign, it becomes politically quite doable. And the details, of course, were difficult to work out, but it passed with huge majorities in both houses.

One thing to remember about his domestic achievements, which included the Clean Air Act, and the judges, and whatnot, was that he was dealing the entire time with a Democratic Senate, and got all of this legislation done with the Democratic Senate. It was an unusual accomplishment, when you look and see that Obama had a Democratic House and Senate when he started out, and of course, Trump has had a Republican Senate during the entirety of his presidency, first term, anyway. President Bush was dealing with a Democratic Senate, so his achievements, I think, were all the more important, because of that.

There's one thing I just want to add about the Americans With Disabilities Act, which you might appreciate. You could have said that you could describe it as being legislation to ready my generation for becoming the aged, you know? Cuts in the sidewalks, and wheelchairs, and all that. Well of course, he ended up himself in a wheelchair, and used to joke about the fact that he was very mobile and could go almost anywhere because of the legislation that he had passed when he was president, with no idea that he would be himself in a little motorized scooter so many years later.

Sam: You just mentioned another underappreciated success my grandfather had, with your help and others, the Clean Air Acts of 1990. In 1988, gampy was derided for saying he wanted to be the environment president. But he made good on that pledge, didn't he?

Ambassador Gray: He certainly did. It was a very important piece of legislation, the Clean Air Act. And it was very difficult to do. There were many long nights, some without any sleep at all. George Mitchell, who was in the letter that I read, he was majority leader of this Democratic Senate. And he was, of course, from Maine, and it was important to him to get it through. He had not been able to do it. He had been trying for several years to get the Clean Air Act revised to deal with acid rain primarily, which was damaging a lot of the beauty of Maine. I don't think any other person could have gotten it adopted but Bush. And he did it, again, with wide majorities, and it's stood the test of time. It hasn't been amended. It probably now deserves some amendment, but it has had a huge long life since 1990, and we have, as a result, the cleanest air of any country on the planet. Any industrial country, I should say. It's really a testament to his tenacity, to be able to get this done, again, with a Democratic Senate.

Sam: Yeah, I read mercury emissions have been reduced by 45% since 1990.

Ambassador Gray: Well, SO<sub>2</sub> has been reduced, I think when we were dealing in 1990 with the Clean Air Act, there were 18 million tons being emitted, and

now, the number's down to about 2. Now, that's an incredible reduction, and it's all because of this statute.

Sam: Ambassador Gray, you spent a lot of time with both my grandparents. I'd like to hear a story about my grandmother.

Ambassador Gray: Well, of course, she was this fabulous character and partner for her husband, and they were a glorious couple. My contact with her was more up in Kennebunkport, up in Maine, than it was in Washington, actually. They adored my daughter, Eliza whom you know, who was born on their watch. And so, we had a deal for, I don't know, well over 20 years that we'd spend the night at Kennebunkport, the two of us, my daughter and I, either on my way up to my house in Maine, which is further north, or on the way back down, and that's when I saw Mrs. Bush the most. And of course, it was glorious. She was absolutely indispensable in helping me, both of them were, raise my daughter after I became a single dad, and one time, there is a story that, my daughter, and she was running around the house, eight years old, something like that, and by mistake, she knocked over the puzzle table.

Sam: Uh-oh.

Ambassador Gray: Uh-oh. That's right. And of course, she knew how important the table was, and it was something that would take weeks to do a puzzle on, and she had knocked it over. And Mrs. Bush came up to her and said, "Young lady, you must shape up." And then she put on a little bit of a smile and said, "But I still love you." And that was one of my favorite stories. Later, I mean, when I did become a single dad, I had said to the president that I was gonna get divorced, and I was very nervous about it, because, as you know, your family's not in favor of divorce. So, it was tricky, and I told him first, but I was nervous about telling Mrs. Bush. And I said, "Please don't say anything. Let me tell Mrs. Bush first." And he said, "I won't say a word until you give me the high sign," and I did catch her in a lone moment at the Christmas party, which was difficult, because she was being mobbed, usually the whole time. And I said to her, "I have some very bad news I've got to convey." And she grabbed my arm, with a stricken look on her face, and said, "You're not leaving George, are you?" And I said, "No, no, no, no, no. I'm leaving Carol." And she smiled and said, "Oh, thank God. About time."

Sam: Oh, gosh. She really had no filter.

Ambassador Gray: She had no filter.

Sam: Well, Boyden, you and I can readily confess our bias where my grandparents are concerned, but where will historians rank our 41st president?

Ambassador Gray: One of the difficulties is historians tend to, totally without sense, but they tend to divide the presidents who had two terms from the ones who had only one. I don't think there'll be any question that he'll rank as the best one-term president. But I think, as time goes on, it's already begun to happen, where people begin to realize the legislative achievements that he was able to do in one term. In many instances, they exceed the output, and he was dealing with an opposition Senate, as I have said. He got more legislation done than many two-term presidents have been able to accomplish. So, you put that together with events in the foreign policy realm, you know, the reunification of Germany, the fall of the wall, the breakup of the Soviet Union, when you put all that together, you sort of wonder, "How on Earth could one man have done this in one four-year period?" So, I think history is going to treat him very, very well, and they've already started to do so.

Sam: Well, Boyden, I'd like to end with this question, and as we record this podcast, it's June 10th. We are celebrating the birthday week of both of my grandparents. My grandmother was June 8th, and my grandfather was June 12th. I was wondering during this week if you had any thoughts, or what do you miss most about not having them around? Because I know you guys had a very close relationship.

Ambassador Gray: Well, gosh, there were so many things that we agreed on. I'm not talking here about strict policy, but about comportment and behavior and whatnot. And I think the thing that I admire the most about him, and think is such an important part of the presidency is he was a man of towering integrity, and character and trustworthiness and honesty, and it was just a wonderful relationship to have with him. I could be completely candid with him, and vice versa, without any fear of retribution, if you will. And I think the country needs that kind of person at the helm. In many ways, singular accomplishments, whether it's the Pershing missile deployment, or whatever, you know, eventually gonna get kind of forgotten. But what really does last is character. And character is destiny, and that's what I miss seeing in the world today, is that kind of fidelity to honesty and integrity. It's maybe a throwback to an older generation, but hopefully, maybe we can see it again.

Sam: Amen to that. Well, Ambassador, thank you so much for joining us today on "All the Best."

Ambassador Gray: Okay. Thank you.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond, reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All the Best" on Apple podcasts, Spotify, and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate All the Best.

Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house. Every house, all over America.

George: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor. Courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America. The greatest country on the face of the Earth.

