

A Conversation with FRED BARNES

Executive Editor of *The Weekly Standard*, Fred Barnes is one of America's most respected political commentators. In this conversation, Barnes reflects on key figures and events from his forty years of covering Washington, including Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, Jack Kemp, and George W. Bush. Kristol and Barnes also discuss the rise of cable political commentary and Barnes' contribution to it from *The McLaughlin Group* to *The Beltway Boys* and *Special Report*.

On ranking recent presidents, Barnes says: I'd rank [Reagan] the highest. I look at them as presidents: What's the big thing they achieved? And Reagan of course, basically won the Cold War. He wasn't the only one who contributed to that but he certainly contributed more than anybody else. I'd put George Bush 43 second...for this reason: the surge in Iraq.

On reporting and the Obama White House, Barnes says: There's something that's lost in the shutdown of reporters in the Obama White House. Reporters [used to] develop sources outside the Press Office. Reporters haven't been able to develop any sources in the Obama White House. Stories that look like they have are what's known as "official leaks"—handed to reporters by White House officials.

On *The McLaughlin Group*, Barnes says: It was a great show. It was helpful that Ronald Reagan watched it when he was President, and much of political Washington paid attention to it. John McLaughlin, a former Jesuit priest who had worked in the Nixon White House, was very outspoken. McLaughlin really understood television: you could be outlandish and emotional...and it would be great television.

Chapters in FRED BARNES Conversation

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