Vice Presidents of the United States
Walter F. Mondale (1977-1981)

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Introduction by Mark O. Hatfield.

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We understood each other's needs. We respected each other's opinions. We kept each other's confidence. Our relationship in the White House held up under the searing pressure of that place because we entered our offices understanding—perhaps for the first time in the history of those offices—that each of us could do a better job if we maintained the trust of the other. And for four years, that trust endured.

—Walter F. Mondale

The wisest decision Walter Mondale ever made was not to run for president in 1976. For two years, the Minnesota senator tested the waters for a presidential campaign, conducting an extensive fund-raising and public relations tour of the country. Concluding that he had neglected both his family and his senatorial responsibilities, that he had little taste for mass media image making, and that his standing in the polls had not risen, he dropped out of the race in November 1974. At the time, he explained that he lacked "the overwhelming desire to be President" and dreaded spending another year "sleeping in Holiday Inns." A number of Democratic senators announced for president in 1976, but the candidate who won the nomination was the little-known former governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter, who showed the determination to conduct precisely the kind of campaigning that Mondale had rejected. Carter then bypassed the senators who had run against him and tapped Mondale for his running mate. Although he would never become president, Walter Mondale proved himself one of the more successful vice presidents in American history, in terms of shaping administration policies and exercising influence over cabinet appointments.[1]

Being selected by Carter for the vice-presidential nomination followed a familiar pattern for Mondale, in which he was admired, trusted, and promoted by other politicians. His career progressed as much by selection as by election. As a college student in the 1940s he organized a

"Diaper Brigade" of student volunteers to help Hubert Humphrey, Orville Freeman, and Karl Rolvaag take control of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor party, and each of those leaders later fostered his career. Mondale was twenty-one when he first went to Washington as a protégé of Senator Humphrey; at thirty-two Governor Freeman appointed him state attorney general; and at thirty-six Governor Rolvaag appointed him to fill Humphrey's vacant seat in the United States Senate. Despite his youth when he entered the Senate, Mondale held values closer to those of the older generation of Democrats—forged by the Great Depression and the New Deal and influenced by the liberalism of Franklin D. Roosevelt—than they were to the new generation of postwar politicians of the era of John F. Kennedy. As a senator, vice president, and presidential candidate, Mondale played a transitional role in the Democratic party, seeking to bridge the generational and ideological divisions that racked the party during and after the 1960s.[2]

"Crazy Legs" from Elmore

A small-town, midwestern preacher's son, Walter Frederick "Fritz" Mondale was born in Ceylon, Minnesota, on January 5, 1928. His father Theodore Sigvaard Mondale was a Methodist minister and his mother Claribel Hope Mondale taught music. The family's Norwegian surname originally had been Mundal. As a child, Fritz moved with his family when his father was reassigned to a church in Elmore, Minnesota, in 1937. A strong believer in the social gospel of helping the poor and needy, who feared the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, Mondale's father regularly talked politics with his family at mealtimes. The family's heroes were Franklin Roosevelt and Minnesota's radical governor Floyd Olson.[3]

Fritz was an ambitious youth, eager to make a name for himself. Showing more interest in sports than religion, Mondale excelled at basketball and track in high school, and won the nickname "Crazy Legs" as a star football player. He also showed an interest in politics, founding the "Republicrats," a student political organization and winning election as president of the junior class (although he lost his race for senior class president). Once, on a summer job, his wisecracks caused a fellow worker to lose his temper. "I'm sorry, George, I didn't mean any harm," Mondale apologized. "But I'm planning to go into politics someday, and I've gotta learn how to get people's hackles up." In 1946 he enrolled in Macalester College in St. Paul, working at odd jobs to pay his way.[4]

As a college freshman in the days of the cold war, Mondale encountered political science professors who warned against the extremes of both the right and left and called for liberals to seek the middle ground. In October 1946, Mondale heard the left-leaning former Vice President Henry Wallace speak at the campus. A few months later he was more impressed when he heard Minneapolis Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey. A political science professor had taken Mondale to a rally that aimed at merging the Democratic party with the Farmer-Labor party to support Humphrey's reelection as mayor. Captivated by the thirty-five-year-old mayor's energy and rhetoric, Mondale volunteered his services to Humphrey's campaign. Campaign manager Orville Freeman enlisted him to put up signs and hand out leaflets. Humphrey and other liberal Democrats were attempting to steer the leadership of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party away from the Communists and other radical groups of the type that had coalesced around Wallace. In 1948, Mondale again volunteered to help Humphrey win first the Democratic nomination for the

U.S. Senate against the radical Elmer Benson and then the Senate seat from the Republican incumbent Joseph Ball.[5]

Humphrey had helped organize the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), and Mondale became active in its campus offshoot, Students for Democratic Action (SDA). After his father died in 1948, Mondale dropped out of college. Too excited by politics to sit passively in college lectures, he followed Humphrey to Washington to become national secretary of the SDA. Writing to his mother, he described the post as placing him "in an excellent position to meet and know national figures in the liberal movement" and that he was "exploiting this advantage to its fullest." Labor unions, however, withheld funding from the ADA, which they dismissed as comprised of college professors and visionaries. Mondale therefore spent his time raising money and shuffling paperwork rather than pursuing politics, which left him disillusioned. An SDA colleague, Norma Dinnerstein, to whom he was briefly engaged, diagnosed his discontent: "because you were moving so very fast and seeking so very much, you found corruption and a certain defeat in every victory," she wrote. "And worst of all, you figured out that `Crazy Legs' from Elmore wasn't worth so very much in the big wide world."[6]

A Rising Young Politician

In January 1950, Mondale returned to college at the less-expensive University of Minnesota, graduating in the summer of 1951, *cum laude*. With the United States fighting a war against Communist North Korea, Mondale enlisted in the army. Stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky, he was a corporal in education programs at the time of his discharge in 1952. Armed with the GI Bill, he entered the University of Minnesota Law School and received his law degree in 1956. He then practiced law in Minneapolis until 1960. A blind date during the summer of 1955 introduced him to Macalester student Joan Adams. He did not know her, but she had heard of him, since "he was well known on campus." Although more interested in art than politics, she, too, was the child of a small-town minister, and the two found they had much in common. They married on December 27, 1955.[7]

In 1958, Mondale managed Orville Freeman's gubernatorial race and became the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party's finance director, as well as a special assistant to the state attorney general on interstate trade matters. The next year, the Mondales moved into a house located in a newly created state senate district, because he planned to run for office. Before he could announce, however, he received an appointment from Governor Freeman to be state attorney general—making him the youngest state attorney general in the nation.[8]

Mondale catapulted to national attention by investigating the celebrated Sister Elizabeth Kenny Foundation, a Minneapolis-based charity that advertised nationally in its crusade to help the handicapped. When allegations arose that the Foundation's directors had been diverting millions of dollars from the donations to their private use, Mondale investigated and found that only 1.5 percent of the money raised actually supported medical services. The resulting press attention kept him on the front pages and assured his election to the attorney general post. Mondale won by 246,000 votes, while Freeman lost his bid for reelection as governor. In office, Mondale solidified his reputation as an active "people's lawyer," pursuing consumer protection and civil

rights cases. Rather than running for governor in 1962, as many had expected, Mondale deferred to Lieutenant Governor Karl Rolvaag, who defeated the incumbent Republican Governor Elmer Anderson by only ninety-one votes. Meanwhile, Mondale won reelection as attorney general with more votes than any other candidate on the ballot. In 1963 he persuaded twenty-three other state attorney generals to sign a brief in favor of the indigent prisoner Clarence Earl Gideon, who was urging the U.S. Supreme Court to establish the right to free counsel for those charged with major crimes but unable to hire their own attorneys.[9]

The Great Society and the Vietnam War

In the presidential election of 1964, Lyndon Johnson chose Hubert Humphrey as his running mate. With their landslide victory, Humphrey's Senate seat became available. Governor Rolvaag appointed Mondale to the vacancy over several more senior Democrats—because he considered Mondale the most likely to win reelection. The appointment sent Fritz Mondale to Washington at an auspicious moment for Democratic liberals. Following the Johnson landslide, the Senate of the Eighty-ninth Congress opened with 68 Democrats facing 32 Republicans and a similarly lopsided margin in the House. So many Democrats crowded the Senate chamber, in fact, that an extra fifth row of desks was set up to accommodate Mondale, Robert Kennedy of New York, Joseph Tydings of Maryland, and Fred Harris of Oklahoma. The younger, more liberal senators were eager to help Johnson build his "Great Society." In 1966 Mondale sponsored the Fair Warning Act, requiring automotive manufacturers to notify owners of any defects in their cars. He then surprised everyone by forging the legislative compromise that led to the enactment of an open housing amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Mondale steadfastly endorsed Lyndon Johnson's handling of both domestic and foreign policy issues and stuck with the president even when the Democratic party began to divide over the Vietnam War.[10]

As a senator, Mondale labored long hours and demanded similar stamina from his staff. He revealed little of Hubert Humphrey's passionate political style. Cool, deliberate, and rarely emotional, Mondale wore a coat and tie even to the most informal gatherings, refused to be photographed smoking the cigars he loved, sported bad haircuts, and tended to look wooden and formal. Although he attracted respectful notice from the press, he was uncomfortable speaking on television, unable to adopt the more relaxed and natural style that medium favored. Balancing these shortcomings were Mondale's natural decency and seriousness. "The thing that is most evident about Mondale," Hubert Humphrey once observed, "is that he's nonabrasive. He is not a polarizer." These were not attributes that drew public attention or acclaim. Mondale could walk through any airport in the country, he joked, "and not a head will turn." Nevertheless, when he stood for election to his Senate seat in 1966, a year that favored Republican candidates, he won by a comfortable margin.[11]

When Johnson withdrew from the presidential campaign of 1968, Mondale cochaired Hubert Humphrey's bid for the Democratic nomination. That tragic campaign year was marred by the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and by riots at the Democratic convention in Chicago. Humphrey gained the nomination but also a badly tattered party. "I didn't leave Chicago," Mondale later recalled, "I escaped it." During the campaign, he urged Humphrey to support a bombing halt over North Vietnam, a position that Humphrey finally embraced in late

September. The Democratic ticket then gained in the polls and in the end lost the election to the Republican candidate Richard Nixon by less than one percent of the popular vote.[12]

Nixon's entrance into the White House gave Walter Mondale and other liberal Democrats an opportunity to reevaluate their views about the war and the "imperial presidency." In a speech at Macalester College in October 1969, Mondale reversed his position on the Vietnam War. He called the war "a military, a political and a moral disaster" and declared that the United States government could not impose a solution on Vietnam's essentially internal conflict. As a liberal, Mondale also feared that the war was draining financial resources that should be applied to domestic problems. In 1971 he voted for the McGovern-Hatfield Amendment to stop American military actions in Cambodia and to set a timetable for withdrawing American troops from Vietnam. In 1973 he cosponsored the War Powers Resolution. Mondale had come to the Senate sharing the conventional view that "we had to rely greatly on the President of the United States." But the events had showed him "the consequences of having a President who is largely unaccountable to Congress, to the law or to the American people."[13]

The Nixon administration provided a natural foil for Mondale's liberalism. As chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity, Mondale fought Nixon's proposed antibusing legislation. He similarly opposed the administration's plans to build costly antiballistic missile systems and supersonic transport aircraft. But, facing reelection in 1972, Mondale was careful to avoid unpopular causes that might alienate him from his middle-class constituency. "I don't like wasting my time slaying windmills," he insisted. When Senator George McGovern emerged as the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination that year, he sent his campaign manager Gary Hart and the Hollywood actor Warren Beatty to ask whether Mondale would be a vice-presidential candidate. The Minnesotan declined to give up his Senate seat to join a losing campaign, headed by a candidate with whom he often disagreed. Although Mondale's opponent in his Senate race tried to paint him as a "McGovern liberal," Mondale won by an even greater margin than in his previous race.[14]

Running for President—and for Vice President

After 1972 the Watergate scandal inverted the political landscape. Democratic chances looked brighter with Nixon crippled by a string of devastating revelations about illegal activities, combined with public concerns over a weakened economy. Early in 1973, Mondale began constructing a campaign for the next presidential nomination. To gain more depth in foreign policy issues, he toured foreign capitals from London to Jerusalem. In order to raise both funds and his public visibility, he logged some 200,000 miles, visiting thirty states, campaigning for Democratic candidates for Congress, meeting with local party organizers, and engaging in as many radio and television interviews as possible. Mondale and his legislative assistant, Roger Colloff, also wrote a book, *The Accountability of Power: Toward a Responsible Presidency*, discussing ways to keep the presidency strong and yet fully accountable to the Congress and the people. But before the book was published in 1975, Mondale had already dropped out of the race.[15]

Mondale found the road to the nomination tortuous and unendurable. "It is a process which involves assembling an experienced and qualified core staff, raising funds in staggering quantities, and traveling to every corner of the nation in preparation for a series of delegate selections each of which is unique." The time required to campaign kept a candidate away from his family, his job, and his rest. For all the agony, Mondale's standing in the polls never rose. On November 21, 1974, he surprised everyone by announcing his withdrawal from the race. Many lamented his decision as a sign that only someone "single-mindedly obsessed" with pursuing the presidency could achieve it.[16]

Free of the campaign, Mondale returned to his Senate duties. With civil rights legislation primarily in mind, he led a movement in 1975 to change the Senate cloture rule in order to make ending a filibuster easier, by reducing the votes needed from two-thirds to three-fifths of the senators. He also won recognition for his diligent work as a member of the select committee, chaired by Senator Frank Church, that investigated the covert activities of the CIA and FBI. Having done the necessary background research to ask incisive questions, Mondale regularly upstaged Church, who was still actively campaigning for president. Church, Henry Jackson, Birch Bayh, and other senators appeared to be the leading contenders for the nomination until a surprise candidate claimed victory in the Iowa caucuses. Former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter campaigned as an "outsider," removed from the Washington political scene that had produced the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal and other policies that dismayed and disillusioned American voters. Carter's freshness, down-to-earth style, and promise of a government that would be honest, fair, and compassionate seemed a welcome antidote to the "imperial presidency." By June, Carter had the nomination sufficiently locked up and could take time to interview potential vice-presidential candidates.[17]

The pundits predicted that Frank Church would be tapped to provide balance as an experienced senator with strong liberal credentials. Church promoted himself, persuading friends to intervene with Carter in his behalf. If a quick choice had been required as in past conventions, Carter later recalled, he would probably have chosen Church. But the longer period for deliberation gave Carter time to worry about his compatibility with the publicity-seeking Church, who had a tendency to be long-winded. Instead, Carter invited Senators Edmund Muskie, John Glenn, and Walter Mondale to visit his home in Plains, Georgia, for personal interviews, while Church, Henry Jackson, and Adlai Stevenson III would be interviewed at the convention in New York.[18] When Mondale arrived in Plains, it was evident that he had studied for the interview. He had researched Carter's positions on every issue to identify their similarities and differences. He read Carter's book, *Why Not the Best?* and talked to those who knew the Georgia governor. Carter found him "extremely well prepared" and was also impressed by Mondale's assertion that he would not trade in his Senate seat for a purely ceremonial office. He was only interested in being vice president if the position became "a useful instrument of government." There were many similarities in the two men's lives, both having grown up in small towns with strong religious influences. Of all the potential candidates, Carter found Mondale the most compatible. When reporters asked why the Minnesotan wanted to get back into a race he had already dropped out of and spend more nights in Holiday Inns, he replied wryly, "I've checked and found out they've all been redecorated."[19]

Mondale's longtime mentor Hubert Humphrey strongly advised him to accept the second spot. "My vice presidential years were tough years but I am a better man for it and I would have made a better President," he counseled. "I learned more about the world and the presidency than I could have ever learned in the Senate." To provide some suspense for the convention, Carter waited until the last moment to announce his choice. When the offer finally came, Mondale accepted instantly. The press dubbed the ticket "Fritz and Grits." After the convention, Mondale set off on a rigorous campaign that emphasized economic issues. The high point of the campaign for him came during his televised debate with the Republican vice-presidential candidate, Senator Robert Dole. Carter's advisers felt so certain that Mondale had won the debate that they featured it in televised advertisements, asking, "When you know that four of the last six vice presidents have wound up as president, who would you like to see a heartbeat away from the presidency?"[20]

Teamwork in the Carter White House

A close election put Carter in the White House and made the Mondales the first family to settle into the vice-presidential mansion on Massachusetts Avenue. That twenty-room Victorian house, previously occupied by the chief of Naval Operations, was, Mondale observed, "the best house we've ever had." No longer did American vice presidents have to provide their own lodging. Joan Mondale won the nickname "Joan of Art" for her elaborate presentations of artworks in the vice president's mansion and her promotion of American artists. She also expanded the role of "second lady" by reviving, and serving as honorary chair of, the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities.[21]

Carter and Mondale formed a remarkably close team. Carter was conscious that previous "forced marriages" of presidents and vice presidents had not worked, that White House staff had shut out vice presidents, and that strong men like Hubert Humphrey and Nelson Rockefeller had been frustrated in the job. Determined to make Mondale more of a partner, Carter directed that Mondale be given an office inside the West Wing—the first since Spiro Agnew—and instructed that the presidential and vice-presidential staffs be integrated "as a working team" (Mondale had a vice presidential staff that ranged from fifty-five to sixty members). The office space proved critical, since as one vice-presidential aide commented, "Mondale didn't have to beg anyone to visit him in the West Wing." Not everyone was happy with this arrangement, especially the Georgians who had accompanied Carter to power. Attorney General Griffin Bell thought that moving the vice president into the White House had been a mistake, noting that, even though Carter was a more conservative Democrat than Mondale, the vice president had shaped much of the administration's program to his own liking. "He managed to do this because of his physical location in the West Wing of the White House," Bell concluded, "and because of placing some close aides in crucial posts in the policy-making apparatus."[22]

Famous as a politician who always did his homework, Mondale studied the vice-presidency to determine why so many of his predecessors had failed. He had not paid much attention to the subject previously; his book on the presidency, *Accountability of Power*, had mentioned the vice-presidency only in terms of succession. Mondale identified Nelson Rockefeller's chairing of the Domestic Council as a mistake and observed that vice presidents too often took minor functions "in order to appear that their role was significant." Instead of specific assignments, he preferred

to remain a generalist and a troubleshooter, someone consulted on all issues. At one point he even turned down Carter's suggestion that the vice president become the chief of staff. "If I had taken on that assignment," Mondale reasoned, "it would have consumed vast amounts of my time with staff work." The vice president also planned to avoid being shunted into such ceremonial functions as attending state funerals. The chief exception that he made was to travel to Yugoslav President Tito's funeral in 1980, because high-level diplomatic contact was required.[23]

From the start, Carter invited Mondale to every meeting that he scheduled and gave him the opportunity to pick and choose those he wished to attend. Carter and Mondale also held private luncheons each Monday to discuss any matters that either wanted to bring up. Mondale received the same daily intelligence information that Carter got and met regularly with the senior staff and the National Security Council. Yet the vice president usually kept silent in group meetings, knowing that he would later have an opportunity to talk with Carter alone. Having played junior partner to men like Hubert Humphrey and Orville Freeman, Mondale instinctively understood his role as vice president. In groups of any size he automatically deferred to Carter. The president responded by threatening to fire any staff member who assailed the vice president. Hamilton Jordan, Carter's eventual chief of staff, also made sure that Mondale and his staff were never isolated from current policy discussions. "I consider I work for Mondale," Jordan insisted. "He's my second boss, the way Carter is my first boss." Jordan, whose office was located next to Mondale's, liked the vice president, whom he considered shrewd. "In the White House, he played his cards wisely," Jordan reflected.[24]

"We understood each other's needs," Mondale later said of his relationship with Carter. "We respected each other's opinions. We kept each other's confidence. Our relationship in the White House held up under the searing pressure of that place because we entered our offices understanding—perhaps for the first time in the history of those offices—that each of us could do a better job if we maintained the trust of the other. And for four years, that trust endured." The vice president's free access to the Oval Office gave him considerable leverage over the administration's agenda. Unlike many of his predecessors, he could bring ideas to the table and win recognition for them. When Mondale took a position, Carter usually listened. In 1978, when Congress passed a defense authorization bill that provided $2 billion for a new aircraft carrier that Carter opposed, Mondale advocated a veto. Carter's top aides believed that a veto would surely be overridden, embarrassing the president, but Mondale went to Carter and argued that he had to take a stand against unnecessary spending, saying, "If you don't do it now, you'll never get control." Carter vetoed the bill, and Congress upheld his veto.[25]

A Crisis of Confidence

At the same time, Mondale cringed at Carter's inept handling of Congress and tried unsuccessfully to stop actions that might alienate the administration from its erstwhile supporters on Capitol Hill. Mondale watched Carter squander the initial good will afforded his administration by pursuing a legislative agenda that was much too ambitious and complicated, rather than focusing on a few major issues. In one instance, however, Mondale himself became the object of congressional ire. In 1977 Senate liberals led by Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio and James Abourezk of South Dakota filibustered against Carter's proposal to deregulate natural gas.

Using the recently devised tactics of the "post-cloture filibuster," they filed more than five hundred amendments to the bill. After the Senate debate had dragged on for twelve days, including an all-night session, Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd persuaded Mondale to cooperate in a daring strategy to cut off the filibuster. On the floor, Byrd raised points of order that many of the amendments should be ruled out of order as incorrectly drawn or not germane. As presiding officer, Mondale ruled thirty-three amendments out of order in a matter of minutes. The Senate erupted into angry protest, with even senators who had not filibustered denouncing the tactic. The vice president was lectured by many senators, including some of his longtime friends, for abusing the powers of the presiding officer. In his defense, Senator Byrd pointed out that the vice president was not there to "pull the rug out" from under the Senate. "The Vice President is here to get the ox out of the ditch." Although the strategy worked and the bill was enacted, "the struggle had left some deep wounds," Byrd later concluded.[26]

Repeatedly, Mondale urged President Carter to make clear his goals for the nation and the reasons the public should follow his lead. Neither a New Deal nor a Great Society liberal, nor a traditional conservative, Carter seemed to straddle the issues and avoid choosing sides. Ironically, when Carter finally did attempt to define his presidential identity, he left Mondale in despair. During the summer of 1979, Carter abruptly canceled a planned televised address on energy policy and closeted himself at Camp David with groups of citizen advisers to help him rethink his administration's aims. Pollster Patrick Caddell wanted the president to address the "malaise" that seemed to have settled on America. Mondale thought Caddell's analysis "crazy" and warned that if the president made such a negative speech he would sound like "an old scold and a grouch." Although Carter's other advisers reluctantly came around, Mondale could not reconcile himself to Carter's position. "I thought it would destroy Carter and me with him," Mondale later noted. He felt so strongly about this issue that he contemplated resigning if Carter gave Caddell's speech. The president took Mondale for a long walk at Camp David and tried to calm him down. "I had only partial success," Carter recorded, "convincing him to support my decision even though he could not agree with it." Carter went on to deliver a televised speech warning of a "crisis of confidence" and to charge that Americans were suffering from a national malaise. He followed that speech with a drastic overhaul of his cabinet, giving the impression that his administration was falling to pieces. The negative public reaction proved Mondale's concerns fully justified.[27]

The Carter administration's standing in the public opinion polls slipped steadily. In November 1978, Republicans had made considerable gains in the congressional elections, including winning both Senate seats in Minnesota. The "malaise" speech and cabinet shake-ups further disenchanted the voters. Exhausted staff members, pessimistic about the president's reelection chances, began making plans for themselves after the 1980 election. The Georgians in the president's inner circle grew increasingly protective of him and complained about the lack of loyalty in the cabinet, and some also criticized the vice president. Reporters noted that Mondale no longer attended the White House weekly staff sessions on congressional relations.[28]

One crisis after another eroded public confidence in the president's abilities. The nation sustained gasoline shortages, double-digit inflation, and a serious recession. Carter's decision to impose an austerity budget to cut inflation, rather than stimulating the economy to end the recession,

offended Democratic liberals, who urged Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy to challenge the president for renomination. As matters grew worse, Mondale took a less visible and active role. "I thought there was not much I could do to change things," he later explained, "so why break my health trying." In November 1979, militant Iranians seized the American embassy in Teheran and took sixty-three hostages. In December, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. Initially, these foreign policy crises boosted Carter's popularity and were enough to help Carter and Mondale win renomination. But as the months wore on with no solutions, Carter again slipped in the polls. The Republican candidate, Ronald Reagan, portrayed the Carter administration as weak abroad and in disarray at home. Mondale campaigned vigorously for the Democratic ticket, but as vice president he drew little media attention. "I'd have to set my hair on fire to get on the news," he complained.[29]

Titular Leader and Presidential Candidate

Reagan's election discredited Carter and left Mondale as the titular leader of the Democratic party. Although he returned to private law practice in Minnesota, Mondale had determined, even before he left the vice-presidency, to run for president in 1984. As a private citizen, he traveled abroad to meet with foreign leaders, consulted with leading American economists, and sought to build bridges to reunite the Democratic party. During the 1982 congressional elections, Mondale campaigned far and wide for Democratic candidates. A deep recession swung many voters back to the Democratic party and made Reagan vulnerable as a candidate for reelection, but in 1983 the economy began to revive, for which "Reaganomics" took full credit. Surprise contenders for the Democratic nomination also appeared, among them the Reverend Jesse Jackson and Colorado Senator Gary Hart. Although Mondale had the support of labor and other traditional elements of the Democratic coalition, he was more reserved, less charismatic, and less telegenic than his competitors. Hart campaigned as the candidate of "new ideas," but Mondale countered with a parody of a popular television commercial, asking: "Where's the beef?" He won the nomination but then faced Ronald Reagan in the general election campaign.[30]

The 1984 race between Walter Mondale and Ronald Reagan offered a clear-cut choice between liberal and conservative candidates and philosophies. While running against one of the best-loved presidents, Mondale won credit for being one of the best-informed candidates ever to run for the presidency. He also added some spark to his campaign by selecting the first woman candidate for vice president on a major party ticket, Representative Geraldine Ferraro, a liberal who also appealed to many conservatives in her Queens, New York, district. During the first television debate of the campaign, Reagan seemed to appear distracted and show his age. In a later debate, however, the seasoned performer bounced back by promising not to make an issue of Mondale's "youth and inexperience." With the nation facing huge deficits, Mondale told the voters that a raise in taxes was inevitable. "Mr. Reagan will raise taxes, and so will I," he said. "He won't tell you, I just did." It was a disastrous strategy. Reagan promised prosperity, a strong defense, and balanced budgets without raising taxes. Mondale ended his campaign in Minneapolis, telling the crowd, "You have given me, a small-town boy from Elmore, a chance to shape our country and to shape our times," but on election day, he lost forty-nine states and carried only Minnesota and the District of Columbia. Assessing the results, Mondale commented, "Reagan was promising them `morning in America,' and I was promising a root canal."[31]

In later years, many anticipated that Mondale would challenge Minnesota Republican Rudy Boschwitz for his Senate seat in 1990. Polls showed Mondale running ahead, but at age sixty-two he chose not to reenter politics. "I believe it's time for other candidates to step forward," he said, admitting that it had been a difficult decision to make. When Bill Clinton won the presidency in 1992, he offered Mondale the ambassadorship to Japan, which he accepted. The Mondales had frequently visited that country, and Joan had considerable knowledge of Japanese pottery and art. The Japanese dubbed Fritz Mondale an *Oh-mono*, which roughly translates, "big wheel," or "big cheese." As reporter T.R. Reid commented, "Mondale brings to the Tokyo embassy everything Japan wanted in a U.S. ambassador: political clout, personal access to the president and a genuine appreciation for Japanese culture and traditions." One Japanese newspaper described him as "A man with real power in Congress and the Democratic Party!!" Mondale professed to be "glad to be back in public life" with such "an exciting, challenging undertaking." He was sworn in as ambassador by Vice President Al Gore, who declared that Mondale's experiences as a senator had prepared him for a diplomatic life "full of tribal feuds and strange languages." Responding in kind, Mondale insisted that "Nothing could be more ennobling that to be sworn in by a Democratic vice president."[32]

Notes:
1. Finlay Lewis, *Mondale: Portrait of a Politician* (New York, 1984), pp. 160-61; Paul C. Light, *Vice Presidential Power: Advice and Influence in the White House* (Baltimore, 1984), p. 1.
2. Steven M. Gillon, *The Democrats' Dilemma: Walter F. Mondale and the Liberal Legacy* (New York, 1992), pp. x-xiv.
3. Ibid., pp. 1-15; Lewis, pp. 9-11.
4. Lewis, p. 15.
5. Ibid., pp. 20-34; Gillon, pp. 17-21.
6. Gillon, pp. 21-40.
7. Ibid., pp. 41-52; Lewis, pp. 49-52.
8. Gillon, pp. 51-54.
9. Ibid., pp. 56-66; Lewis, pp. 62-75.
10. Gillon, pp. 69-97; Lewis, pp. 76-84. *Memorial Addresses*, p. 229.
11. Gillon, pp. 99-111, 146-47; Lewis, p. 43.
12. Gillon, pp. 111-22.
13. Ibid., pp. 123-30; Walter F. Mondale, *The Accountability of Power: Toward a Responsible Presidency* (New York, 1975), pp. vii-ix.
14. Gillon, pp. 130-41.
15. Ibid., pp. 143-53; Gillon, p. 152.
16. Mondale, pp. 23-30; Gillon, p. 152.
17. Gillon, pp. 153-62; Loch K. Johnson, *A Season of Inquiry: The Senate Intelligence Investigation* (Lexington, KY, 1985), pp. 105, 153-56.
18. LeRoy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman, WA, 1994), pp. 522-26; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York, 1982), pp. 35-36.
19. gillon, pp. 163-67; Carter, p. 37.
20. Gillon, pp. 163-85.
21. *Washington Post*, August 14, 1993; Lewis, pp. 230-40.
22. Carter, pp. 39-40; Light, pp. 75, 164-65, 207.
23. Mondale, pp. 72-76; Light, pp. 29, 47, 206.
24. Light, pp. 49-50, 141, 146, 208-9, 212-15, 229.
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