



DAN EVANS

Governor Evans revs up the convention crowd with a two-handed victory gesture as he takes the podium in Miami Beach. *Daniel J. Evans collection*

The Keynoter

Editor's note: *This is an excerpt from the upcoming autobiography of former governor and U.S. senator Daniel J. Evans.*

My wife frowned slightly as she squinted at the August 9, 1968, edition of *Time* magazine. “The mouth and chin are all wrong,” Nancy said. The classic red-bordered cover featured the keynote speaker for the Republican National Convention—me. Given a tight deadline, the artist probably did the best he could with my visage. He nailed my nose, eyes and thinning dark hair beginning to gray at the temples, but gave me a curiously fat lower lip. Twelve years earlier I was a relative unknown running for the state Legislature. Now I was Washington’s governor. We were jetting toward Miami Beach and I was on the cover of America’s most influential weekly news magazine, with 10 million readers.

The convention-preview cover story described me as “an idealist of uncommon rectitude” and the prototype of the GOP’s dynamic, yet pragmatic “New Breed.” *Time* also recalled historian Mark Sullivan’s observation that the interminable keynote speeches of yesteryear amounted to “a combination of oratory, grand opera and hog calling.” TV had changed everything. I was determined to limit my address to 25 minutes and avoid the partisan diatribes, breast beating and boasting I’d heard so often from keynoters.

As if I didn’t need more pressure, *Time* set the stage like this, contrasting the “eve-of-execution” atmosphere at the 1964 convention with 1968:



This time the Democrats are in decline, taxes and living costs are up, the cities are seething, and Viet Nam has turned into the nation's longest, least popular war. The heady awareness of opportunity that infects the entire GOP assemblage is a measure of the distance the party has come since the dismal post-Goldwater days. ... Not since 1952 has the party in power been so vulnerable.

Our convention entourage included my parents, chief of staff Jim Dolliver, speechwriter Jim Lane, press secretary Neil McReynolds, State GOP chairman C. Montgomery "Gummie" Johnson and Bill Jacobs, one of my most agile and politically smart aides. Our high spirits at deplaning to the cheers of a mob of Young Republicans—some backing Nixon, others Rockefeller—dimmed a bit as we sped by the massive Fontainebleau Hotel, convention headquarters. Seven miles down the road, we were deposited at a rather shabby hotel that served as headquarters for the Washington State delegation.

On the Sunday evening before opening day of the convention, the Fontainebleau hosted a Republican gala for 1,500 guests in formal dress. The real entertainment was watching clusters of conventioners discussing the latest rumor or working hard to convince uncommitted delegates to back their candidate. I received a lot of back-patting compliments about *Time's* cover story—and some razzing, too. Gummie Johnson had told *Time* my nickname during the 1964 governor's race was "Old Gluefoot" because I was still a shy campaigner. Instead of mingling with crowds, Gummie said, I'd "go off in a corner to talk to some old guy about how to redesign a bridge."

Newsweek's "Nixon and the Veepstakes" article was creating the biggest buzz. I was included in the roster of 12 potential running mates. That was heady stuff, though I harbored no illusions I was an actual contender. The bulk of the article detailed Reagan's whirlwind trip through the South. It claimed he had yanked about 30 votes away from Nixon, who had a "Southern Strategy" of his own. Rockefeller claimed his own efforts, coupled with Reagan's, left Nixon about a hundred votes short of a first-ballot majority. Uncommitted delegates were wined and dined all evening by each camp.

Early Monday afternoon, I was briefed on the Teleprompter system and visited the podium. It was on a huge platform that jugged out into the auditorium. Delegations were generally seated according to their Republican vote history, which put Washington State's delegation well back in the arena.

During the afternoon session I roamed through the hall and found to my dismay that from many areas it was difficult to hear the speaker. That confirmed my decision to speak primarily to the television audience. I wanted to reach the maximum audience back home, so we worked with the convention committee to have the keynote address set for 9 to 10 p.m. Eastern Time, 6 to 7 on the West Coast.

When the evening session got under way it was apparent that the committee had



A Washington delegate hoists a Nixon banner on the convention floor. *Florida State Library*

overloaded the schedule. We heard first from President Eisenhower, speaking from Walter Reed Hospital where he was recuperating from yet another heart attack. Ike received a heartfelt ovation from his fellow Republicans. A raft of pro-forma welcoming speeches by the GOP chairman, assistant chairman and the convention's temporary chairman droned on for 40 minutes.

As Barry Goldwater strode to the podium, the bored auditorium erupted. And when he lit into the Johnson Administration, chopping the air with his right hand, they cheered their lungs out.

Up next was New York Mayor John Lindsay, tall, handsome, unapologetically liberal. Viewed as a vice-presidential contender, Lindsay had been deputized to introduce me. By now it was nearly 11 p.m. I listened with growing frustration as Lindsay spoke for 20 minutes in words that virtually paralleled my keynote address, particularly on the divisiveness of Vietnam.

He finally concluded with a nice introduction of me. As I stepped forward into the spotlight and waited for the applause to subside I had the disconcerting experience of seeing some delegates and spectators leaving the hall. But it was still prime time back home. And I had a lot to say about the sad state of America and our chances in November:

In a very real sense, this is the Republican hour. Today, as never before, the nation demands new leadership; the fresh breeze of new

energy; a full and honest assessment of national goals; a new direction for its government, and a new hope for its citizens.

We are frustrated by the fourth most costly war in our history—a war in which we spend \$1 million every 20 minutes; a war which under the present administration we have not won in Saigon, cannot negotiate in Paris and will not explain to the American people. But if we are frustrated by a war on the mainland of Asia, we are even more burdened by the crisis in the main streets of America—a crisis of violence and stolen hope; a crisis of lawlessness and injustice; an impulsive reckless dissatisfaction with what we are and a desperate outcry for what we could be once again.

Above all, we are now witness to the disintegration of the old order. Our system of welfare, so long promoted as a cure for social ills, has eliminated nothing, with the possible exception of pride and incentive and human dignity. The increasing dominance of the federal government has accomplished little except the destruction of local initiative. The steady erosion of our cities has left us a legacy of physical decay and human misery. Where once they stood as the symbol of progress, they now founder as the graveyard of hope.



Evans at the podium. *Daniel J. Evans collection*

In this process we have robbed the nation of its great resource of individual initiative and public responsibility. We have become creatures of the system

instead of the engineers of progress. We are a nation muscle-bound by its power, frustrated by the indecision of its leadership and fragmented by its great differences.

It is from this point that the Republican Party must now proceed. For it is leadership, not the fundamental strength of this country, that is at issue. We must be where the action is.

There were three Teleprompters in front of the podium—one left, one center and one right. As I spoke, I turned from one to the other but tried to remain focused on a single delegate in the vast crowd. It was obvious to me that many delegates were straining to hear my words. So I kept reminding myself that I needed to reach the millions

watching on TV. Lindsay may have stolen some of my thunder, but I wasn't about to miss my opportunity to italicize the fact that Vietnam was stealing from us the opportunity to create a more just society in America:

We have stood for 20 years in defense of the free world. We have given as no other nation to the securing of world order and the pursuit of human progress. And for that we have paid a heavy price on the ledger of neglect. Not neglect in terms of ignorance but neglect in terms of priorities. This does not mean that the United States should abandon its international commitments. A great power cannot view the world from behind the walls of political isolation nor economic protection.

Nor does it imply that we should withdraw from our obligations and responsibilities to ourselves and to the people of South Vietnam. To have entered the war by the path of error does not mean we can leave through the door of default. But it does mean that the first priority of the United States is the resolution of our own internal conflict—the recognition that if we can't unite our own nation we can't preserve the hope of others.

It is time now to reach inward—to reach down and touch the troubled spirit of America.

That line generated rousing applause. Heartened, I turned to the party's challenge and “a new agenda” focused on minorities, the poor and our youth:

The problems of environment, of congestion, of urban decay and rural stagnation did not suddenly occur. They are the residue of years—even of decades—in which we devoted too much of ourselves to size and quantity and too little to shape and quality.

They are the residue of years in which we believed that welfare was a substitute for pride and that public charity could replace individual opportunity. But black America and poor America are teaching us a new language—the language of participation. They say, “Let us share in your prosperity. Let us have not another generation of servitude but a new generation of opportunity.” And in this process we are being reminded of something we very nearly forgot: the nobility of the American dream. There is no place in that dream for a closed society, for a system that denies opportunity because of race, or the accident of birth or geography or the misfortune of a family.

For each of our youth who has dropped out, there are a hundred more who have stayed in; some radical, some demanding, some searching, some hoping—but all concerned. To break that spirit would be to bankrupt our future. These are not the pleadings of a weak and useless generation; they are the strong voices of a generation, which—given a chance—can lead America to a new unity, a new purpose and a new prosperity.

For our direction and our leadership we must turn, not alone to government, but to a new partnership; a partnership of government, private enterprise, and the individual citizen. ... The problems of urban growth and rural stagnation; the need for low-cost housing, for restoring our central cities, for creating new communities, for retraining the unemployed—these needs are not apart from private enterprise. They are its newest and perhaps most significant challenge. Government can establish a direction, but it can't construct the solutions of the next three decades. Private enterprise and free labor can build, but they can't write and administer the laws that create profit opportunities and business incentives.

The challenge to the Republican Party lies within the problems of America, not outside of them. It lies in the prevention of wars and not their prosecution; in the advancement of man and not the destruction of mankind. It lies in the ghetto just as surely as the suburbs. In the factories just as clearly as on the farms. In the hearts of all our people and their great and growing aspirations.

The protest, the defiance of authority, the violence in the streets are more than isolated attacks upon the established order; they are the symptoms of the need for change and for a redefinition of what this country stands for and where it is going. This opportunity now rests with the Republican Party. ... Let us unite to rally a great party in the cause of a great nation—to seek progress with victories; to find not a way out, but a way forward.

I'm proud of that speech. I think it is the best of my career. Re-reading it today, I am struck by the sad fact that it is still so relevant. I believe that in 1968 I offered a genuine prescription to make America great again instead of the polarizing “hog calling” we Republicans heard a half century later.

The applause at the end of my remarks was generous but muted. It was almost midnight. The delegates had been listening to speech-making for more than six hours.

THE PRESS reaction the next day was decidedly mixed. Many newspapers commented on the inattention of the audience and said I was too soft on the Democrats. Others declared it one of the most important keynotes of recent history. It seemed to me that response to the speech depended on whether the observer was paying attention to the audience or to the speaker.

The Chicago Tribune, house organ for the unreconstructed Taft wing of the Republican Party, dismissed my speech as “flat and without passion” and declared that “everyone” knew I was a “liberal placed in his slot to give balance to the program.” Gummie Johnson reminded us that *The Tribune’s* place in the dubious achievements hall of fame had been cemented 20 years earlier by its “Dewey defeats Truman” headline.

The Miami Herald, covering the convention with a platoon of reporters and photographers, observed, “When Gov. Evans finished at 11:24 p.m. any hopes he might have had for a vice presidential nomination were also finished. Evans had issued a call for the party to look to the future ... and the party faithful ignored him.”

The Washington Post’s editorial writers were more circumspect, saying my speech “afforded a sort of key to the convention—in three distinct respects. For one thing, it was singularly free from the flatulence and the stem-winding rhetoric that has seemed so inescapably a characteristic of this peculiar art form. Second, he wasted little time lambasting the opposition or exalting his fellow Republicans; on the contrary, he dealt with the real and immediate social problems, exhorting his party to ‘rise to the challenge created by the winds of a new direction.’ That kind of talk hasn’t been heard in Republican conventions since Teddy Roosevelt. Third, the delegates seemed almost completely to ignore him.”

Being compared to Teddy Roosevelt, one of my political heroes, was a thrill. And what’s not to like about a review that includes the line “singularly free from flatulence”?

Ralph McGill, the legendary anti-segregationist publisher of the *Atlanta Constitution*, called my speech “a magnificent address, but a majority of the convention’s delegates had ears only for the Nixon mind and strategy. One of the small straws that indicated the direction in which the convention wind would blow came on the day before the first gavel fell. A Nixon emissary showed up at a Southern delegation caucus with the assurance that Mr. Nixon would not select a vice presidential candidate who would, in any sense, offend Southern sensitivities.”

McGill’s political antennae rarely failed him. Yet few of us, perhaps even McGill,



The optics were just right for a Nixon delegate.
Florida State Library

suspected that Nixon's choice—calculated to not offend those sensitivities—would be such a shocker.

James J. Kilpatrick, the nationally known conservative commentator, gave me an even-handed review: "Gov. Evans, from whom much had been feared, proved that much could be delivered. Like the platform, his keynote address, dwelt upon free enterprise and individual opportunity. He bore down, in the old tradition, upon the 'help yourself society' and denounced the 'increasing dominance of the federal government.' It wasn't what you would call pure Goldwater, but it wasn't far from vintage Ike."

"Vintage Ike" suited me just fine. My admiration for Dwight D. Eisenhower has only grown with the passing years.

IT WAS almost 1 a.m. when we finally returned to our hotel, but I met with Dolliver, Jacobs, McReynolds, Johnson and Secretary of State Lud Kramer to discuss reaction to the speech—but more importantly my press conference after a few hours of sleep when I would announce which presidential candidate I was backing. They urged me to endorse Nixon, the candidate supported by most of our fractious state delegation. The first ballot was going to be close, but Nixon was sure to prevail, they all said. Besides, I was in what shaped up as a tight race for re-election. Backing Nixon could help solidify the party. Tired though I was, I listened intently before summing up my feelings: "I didn't ask you who would receive the nomination. *I asked who you thought would be the best president.* I want to support who I think would be the best president." That was Nelson Rockefeller, an outstanding administrator and compelling personality. For all of his "Tricky Dick" dark side, I also admired Nixon's formidable intellect and foreign policy expertise. Moreover, he had been vice president for eight years. Explaining my choice to Shelby Scates, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer's* veteran reporter, I said our nation's first priority ought to be "attaining an internal strength. We must appeal to the alienated segments of the society." My analysis was that Rockefeller was "a little stronger" than the polarizing Nixon on that challenge.

The next morning, to Rocky's delight and the dismay of my advisers, I announced my support for Rockefeller at a press conference that drew more than 800 onlookers. Though I knew Rocky had little chance of being nominated, I wanted to demonstrate my respect for his qualities as a leader. With the clarity of hindsight and history, I think I was right, but the choice created temporary consternation within our state Republican Party organization. Ronald Reagan, the darling of our conservative bloc, had announced his last-minute decision to "actively seek" the nomination, while Governor Agnew—a shrewd finger to the wind—was renouncing his favorite son role to endorse Nixon.

The GOP philosophical schism in Washington State was bound up in my ongoing struggle with doctrinaire conservatives headed by King County GOP Chairman Ken Rogstad. King, Pierce, Spokane and Snohomish, the state's four most populous counties, were in conservative hands when the delegate-choosing process for the 1968 national

convention got under way. Bill Boeing Jr., a Rogstad ally, was Reagan's ex-officio state chairman, hoping that the California governor would make an all-out bid for the nomination. That spring, the King County GOP Convention made its antipathy for me crystal clear by calling for an amendment to the state constitution prohibiting a state income tax.

Gummie Johnson, the state GOP chairman, countered shrewdly, rallying our supporters to rewrite the delegate allocation formula to reduce the strength of the big four counties. Rogstad, realizing he had been out-maneuvered, cried foul. When the state GOP convention convened in Seattle in June, the conservatives claimed we had "stolen control" and threatened to walk out.

With Reagan on the fence and the conservatives thwarted, Nixon was the clear choice of the 24-member state delegation selected for Miami Beach. The real battle was now for the delegation's second choice. If Nixon fell short of a first-ballot majority, all bets might be off. Rogstad and Frances Cooper, the hard-nosed state GOP national committeewoman, wanted a delegation ready to switch to Reagan. They also suspected that if Nixon faltered, I would prod the delegation to back Rockefeller.

Mad as hell at losing the delegate-seating battle in the credentials committee, Rogstad and his allies had considered holding a "rump" convention to elect their own slate of delegates and carry their challenge all the way to Miami. They decided instead not to bolt. "That way they could at least send six Reagan delegates to Miami Beach from the two congressional districts located primarily within King County," historian Gene Kopelson wrote in an analysis of that "Decade of Turmoil" between liberal and conservative Republicans in Washington State.

WHEN THE National Convention balloting began at 1:17 a.m. on August 8, 1968, the three contenders "personified the evolving Republican Party," James Cannon, a veteran reporter and White House aide, wrote: There was Richard Milhous Nixon, "the heir to the old order;" Nelson Rockefeller, "the symbol of the once dominant, almost extinct East Coast Republican establishment," and Ronald Reagan, the once washed up matinee idol who had become "the rising star of the new order—a small but soon-to-proliferate cadre of conservative Republicans."

Daniel J. Evans was a man in the middle with deeply mixed emotions. The "stop Nixon" movement, waged from both the right and the left, faltered because Nixon had "assiduously collected and banked the most delegates" during his comeback from the depths of defeat. The Reaganites unsuccessfully lobbied the convention chairman, Michigan Congressman Jerry Ford, to delay the first ballot until the next day due to the lateness of the hour.

As the roll-call of the states advanced, it was apparent that Nixon's Southern strategy was a winner. Even though most Southerners loved Reagan, they had committed to Nixon. Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and



Happy days for Nixon and Agnew. *David Hume Kennerly photo*

Virginia all voted overwhelmingly for Nixon. California gave Reagan its 86 votes and New York responded with 88 for Rockefeller. But both challengers were way behind. Nixon's total topped 600 with Vermont. When Washington was called, I reported 15 votes for Nixon, six for Reagan and three for Rockefeller, including me. Wisconsin's 30 votes put Nixon over the top, giving him three votes more than the 667 he needed. Rocky finished with 277, Reagan 182.

Nixon's campaign slogan was "Bring Us Together." Instead, he would tear us farther apart, though that hardly seemed possible in the tragic summer of '68. I have often

pondered what Richard Milhous Nixon might have accomplished if his festering childhood resentments and paranoid demons could have been subdued by advisers with the integrity to help him conjure up his better angels. And what if he had picked as his vice president Oregon Governor Mark Hatfield, who understood that Vietnam was a quagmire? Or Jerry Ford, another man of probity blessed with the common touch? The trajectory of national, indeed world history, might have been dramatically different—and surely for the better.

THE MORNING Nixon clinched the nomination, our delegation met in caucus. I was asked if I thought I had been left standing at the station when the train pulled out because of my endorsement of Rockefeller. Laughing, I said, "I ran down to the next city and got on board. We're all going to be in the same place—Washington, D.C.—in January." The delegation applauded, Ken Rogstad smiling thinly. Throughout the day, people kept asking whether I thought my support for Rockefeller had hurt me politically. My reply had the added advantage of being true: "I'm not concerned whether it hurt me or helped me. I just said what I felt. Now I'll get to work and help elect Richard M. Nixon president."

From a glassed-in booth high above the convention floor, I appeared on CBS' highly rated *Capital Cloak Room* the next morning. During the



Nixon-Agnew button.
John Hughes Collection

middle of the interview with Daniel Schorr, Neil McReynolds held a sign against the window: “It’s Agnew.” I was astonished—so was Schorr—since Agnew had not been mentioned prominently as a possible running mate for Nixon. Agnew seemed like an affable, yet opportunistic fellow. He had been governor of Maryland for just over 18 months. It was later that we discovered Ralph McGill’s sources were spot on. Wily old Senator Strom Thurmond, the Dixiecrat candidate for president in 1948, had informed Nixon the litmus test was this: “If we support your candidacy, will you promise us a vice president acceptable to the South?” Agnew was an acceptable mediocrity who would in time prove to be a bombastic, hypocritical “common extortionist,” as Slade Gorton later put it so well.



Evans and Nixon campaigning in Seattle. *Daniel J. Evans collection*

One thing was for sure: Even if I had strongly supported Nixon there was no chance he would have picked me as a running mate. Hatfield, likewise, as another strong supporter of civil rights, knew he would have been anathema to the South. I confess, however, that in the next few years as the Nixon administration crashed and burned, my mind sometimes played its own what-if game. Hatfield did too.

As we left Miami Beach and flew home I reflected on Cinderella, whose sparkling evening ended at the stroke of midnight when her magical horse-drawn coach turned back into a pumpkin. The intensity, excitement and celebrity of my prominent role at the 1968 Republican National Convention were abruptly over. I faced a fierce campaign for re-election.

When the Democrats convened their convention in Chicago three weeks later, fear and loathing erupted on prime-time TV as Mayor Daley allowed his baton-wielding police to savagely attack antiwar protesters. Poor Hubert Humphrey, an honorable man dogged by his obeisance to LBJ and the ghost of Robert F. Kennedy, had bigger problems than I.

Whenever someone asks me to autograph a copy of *Time* featuring my portrait, I also remember that its editors aptly described 1968, as “the year America shuddered, history cracked open and bats came flapping out.”



1968: The Year That Rocked Washington looks back at 1968 and its impact on Washington state through the stories of some remarkable people who lived through it. On college campuses, the campaign trail and evergreen peaks, Washingtonians were spurred to action. It was the year when Vietnam, civil rights, women's liberation and conservation coalesced—the year when tragedy led the 6 o'clock news with numbing regularity. 1968 changed us in ways still rippling through our society a half century later. *1968: The Year That Rocked Washington* features a collection of online stories and an exhibit at the Washington State Capitol in the fall of 2018. Legacy Washington documents the activism and aftershocks of a landmark year in world history. www.sos.wa.gov/legacy/sixty-eight/