

# “New Book About Reagan and Presidency”

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**By Star Parker**

RESTON, Va.—Coincident with the new movie, *Reagan*, is the release of an important new book about the Reagan presidency.

Ken Khachigian, chief speechwriter for Ronald Reagan from his presidential campaign in 1980 to the conclusion of his second term in 1988, has just published his memoirs from those years. The book, *Behind Closed Doors: In the Room with Reagan and Nixon*, also includes, as noted in the title, time Khachigian worked with President Richard Nixon.

The book starts with his time in the White House at the end of the Nixon presidency and then includes the four years he worked with Nixon after his resignation.

However, most of the book, 19 of 25 chapters, is about his work with Reagan.

Nixon recommended the young man to the newly launched Reagan campaign, and, soon after, Khachigian was sitting one on one with the candidate on LeaderShip 80, the airborne headquarters of the Reagan campaign, word-smithing text for sound bites, press releases and speeches.

It was then, in Reagan’s campaign against incumbent President Jimmy Carter, that Khachigian produced the now immortal campaign phrase, appearing in its original form, “Are you really better off than you were in 1976.”

The book is in the form of diary entries, interspersed with commentary, that provide an invaluable personal snapshot of whom many see as one of America’s greatest presidents, and of a presidency of great historic consequence.

Six months before Reagan took office in January 1981, the so-called misery index—the unemployment rate plus the inflation rate—was 21.98 percent. By December 1986, it stood at 7.7 percent. And, by the end of his presidency, the path was paved to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Over this period, campaign speeches, inaugural addresses and State of the Union addresses flowed out of Ken Khachigian’s IBM Selectric typewriter, producing the words and imagery helping Reagan convey his love of our coun-

try and its people and his commitment to limited government and individual freedom.

Reagan's landslide reelection in 1984, winning 49 of 50 states, is something inconceivable today.

Khachigian's book is also important for its honesty about the human reality constituting the enterprise we know as the American presidency.

While many working Americans see government as public service, for many, it is a matter of getting high on the fumes of power and career advancement, no different from any other job. In a chapter entitled "The Power Seekers," Khachigian relays a conversation with political columnist Robert Novak, who shared that then-White House Chief of Staff James Baker told him, "Remember, Bob, it's important what you write about the president; but it's even more important what you write about me."

In a book with many moving details and moments, particularly arresting is how a personal crisis for Reagan was salvaged with a very great speech.

Early into Reagan's second term, a visit was planned to Germany for ceremonies noting the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II. Staff scheduled him to speak at a German military cemetery, only to discover that present there were graves of the German Nazi Waffen-SS. Many Jewish leaders, and others, including first lady Nancy Reagan, implored the president to cancel. But the invitation came from German chancellor Helmut Kohl, and Reagan did not want to back out.

The salve would be another speech, in which Reagan would address the Holocaust at the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The "Fireman" Ken Khachigian was called in to write the speech and stamp out the flames.

Khachigian notes that some say it was Reagan's greatest speech ever. He talks about life and death, good and evil, and Jews being slaughtered for no other reason than their being Jews. It is a speech with moral clarity the world badly needs to hear today.

For those who care about our nation, and what it can be, Khachigian's book is an important read.