



Saving the Reagan Presidency: Trust Is the Coin of the Realm (Joseph V. Hughes Jr. and Holly O. Hughes Series on the Presidency and Leadership)

David M. Abshire

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“. . . required reading for all presidents and White House aides to come . . .”—from the foreword by Richard E. Neustadt

What did the president know, and when did he know it? Once again, only a dozen years after Watergate, the nation faced these troubling questions. Would we see another president forced to resign or be impeached? Could our democracy survive another presidential scandal so soon? As the Iran-Contra affair unfolded, the nation waited tensely for answers.

At this crucial moment, advisors to President Ronald Reagan called home the Ambassador to NATO, David Abshire, to serve in the cabinet as Special Counselor. His charge: to assure that a full investigation of the sale of arms to Iran in exchange for freeing American hostages and the subsequent channeling of those funds to Nicaraguan rebels be conducted expeditiously and transparently, to restore the confidence of the nation in the shaken Reagan presidency.

Two decades later, David Abshire for the first time reveals the full behind-the-scenes story of his private meetings with the president, how he and his team conducted this crucial process, his alliance with Nancy Reagan, the role of the Tower Board, and how the Reagan presidency was saved. Abshire's efforts helped Reagan fill the credibility gap created by revelation of the Iran-Contra scandal and thus restored the president's power to lead the nation and its allies toward the end of the Cold War. His unique recollections show the inner workings of the Reagan White House in this critical period: the conflicts with the powerful Chief of Staff Donald Regan, the politically astute First Lady, the involvement of CIA Director William Casey, and Reagan's triumph of personal character to overcome his indiscretion, a feat unmatched by Clinton or Nixon. Abshire's story casts new light on the episode and draws important lessons about how presidents should respond to unfolding scandals to limit the threat not only to their own reputations but also to national confidence in democratic institutions.

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