



# Whittlesey, Faith Ryan: Papers, 2012-2014

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## **Collection Date**

2012-2014

## **Provenance**

The Faith Ryan Whittlesey material was donated to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum by Ms. Whittlesey.

## **Biography**

Faith Ryan Whittlesey (1939-2018) was a former Republican politician, former American Ambassador to Switzerland, White House senior staff member, consultant and avid rose enthusiast.

Whittlesey was born Faith Ryan in 1939 in Jersey City, New Jersey. She grew up in Williamsville, New York, and graduated with honors from Williamsville Central High School in 1956. In 1955 she was selected to participate in the American Field Service program to Flensburg, Germany. In 1958 she participated in the Experiment in International Living program to Austria. She earned a full-tuition scholarship to Wells College in Aurora, New York, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa and *cum laude* in 1960 with a BA in history. She also earned a full-tuition scholarship to the law school at the University of Pennsylvania and a Ford Foundation grant to attend a program at The Hague Academy of International Law in the Netherlands. Whittlesey was admitted to the bar of Pennsylvania in 1964. Whittlesey was also an accomplished classical pianist and former piano teacher.

In 1963, she married Roger Weaver Whittlesey of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania, a graduate of the William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia and Bowdoin College in Maine. Roger Whittlesey was an advertising executive from an illustrious Pennsylvania family. They had three children and ten grandchildren. Roger Whittlesey suffered from depression and committed suicide in March 1974. Their son, Henry Clark Whittlesey also suffered from depression and committed suicide in 2012 shortly after his 48th birthday.

Because her father was a "Roman Catholic in the Irish tradition" it has been incorrectly assumed that Whittlesey grew up as a Catholic, when, in fact, her mother's family did not approve of her father's Catholicism. "[So] he left the Catholic Church," Whittlesey explained in her *Memoirs*. "He attended the Methodist Church with my mother and brother, Tom, and me. I was thus raised as a Methodist." Her husband's family was Presbyterian. Whittlesey converted to Roman Catholicism in 2000 in Staten Island, New York. Her decision was greatly influenced by her Reagan Administration association with John Cardinal O'Connor of New York.

After her first employment as a substitute teacher from 1963-1964, Whittlesey held a variety of governmental positions: Special Assistant Attorney General in Pennsylvania assigned to the Pennsylvania Banking Code Revision Project (1964-1965), law clerk for Federal District court Judge Francis L. Van Dusen, E.D.P.A. (1965), Special Assistant Attorney General assigned to the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (1967-1970), and Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania (1970-1972). In 1972 she was elected as a Representative in the Pennsylvania Legislature representing the 166th Legislative District in Delaware

County. In 1974 she was reelected to the Legislature. In 1975 she was elected to the Delaware County Board of Commissioners, now known as the Delaware Country Council, and reelected in 1979. She served alternately as Chairman and Vice Chairman. She lost the 1978 Republican primary for Lt. Governor of Pennsylvania.

While serving in the Delaware County government, Whittlesey briefly held her first job in the private sector, taking a part-time job at the law firm of Wolf, Block, Schorr Solis-Cohen LLP in Philadelphia.

Whittlesey had been an early Reagan supporter and active Republican throughout Reagan's two tries at the Republican Presidential nomination. She was elected an alternate delegate from Pennsylvania to the 1976 Republican National Convention and as delegate in 1980 and 1984. At the 1980 Republican National Convention in Detroit, Whittlesey co-chaired with Congressman Jack Kemp, the Subcommittee for Foreign Policy and Defense of the Platform Committee. She delivered Reagan's defense plank to the Convention. Regarded as a "conviction conservative," Whittlesey strongly identified with Reagan's core agenda, which she described as "support for the peaceful defeat of the Soviet Union without commitment of U.S. troops in combat, defense of life, opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment with its hidden agenda of tax-funded abortion and same-sex marriage, decentralized government, lower taxes and reduced government regulation of the private sector, school prayer, defeat of Marxism-Leninism in its various permutations and manifestations, individual Second Amendment rights, the establishment of official diplomatic recognition of the Vatican, and support for tuition tax credits for parochial schooling."

During the 1980s, Whittlesey was appointed by President Ronald Reagan to several posts, including one on the White House senior staff. Firstly, she served as Ambassador to Switzerland from 1981-1983. In her first term as Swiss Ambassador she initiated negotiations in an acrimonious dispute between the U.S. and Switzerland that later led to the signing of a "Memorandum of Understanding on Insider Trading," the first major changing of the strict tradition of Swiss banking secrecy. She was a particularly active Ambassador and traveled often around Switzerland explaining and advocating Reagan's policies and developing contacts with Swiss opinion leaders.

She was asked to be the Assistant to the President for Public Liaison and Director of that Office. This office serves as a line of communication both into and out of the White House for interest, advocacy and opinion leaders and groups. Whittlesey replaced Elizabeth Dole who left the White House to become Secretary of Transportation.

Her tenure was marked by initiatives to improve the access of conservative Christian believers to the American political process and national policy making. She was considered their most "aggressive ally" in the White House. In 1985, she sent the anti-abortion film, *The Silent Scream*, which was a documentary of an ultrasound abortion at three months produced by anti-abortion activist and former NARAL founder Dr. Bernard Nathanson, to every member of Congress. She arranged for a screening at the White House where Dr. Nathanson presented the film. Whittlesey also developed active White House outreach to "Reagan Democrats."

At the direction of White House Chief of Staff, James Baker, Whittlesey also spent a good deal of time organizing communication of information about Reagan's overall policies in Central America, and particularly the anticommunist "Contras" in Nicaragua. In 1983 she established the White House Outreach Working Group on Central America to garner increased private sector understanding of Reagan's policies. This involved working with, among many other individuals and groups, the American Security Council Foundation, to produce anti-Sandinista propaganda (what she would call "truth-telling" ) films, and the Council for National Policy to produce materials that revealed the Marxist -Leninist orientation of the Sandinista movement.

Whittlesey stated the Outreach Group was shut down in 1985 when Donald Regan took over as Chief of Staff and the White House "started the brown bag operation with Ollie North. What we were doing was completely open and above board. It was an honest effort to change minds and hearts and provide a forum for truth telling."

Later, when asked about Iran-Contra she said, "I had no knowledge of the Iran-Contra connection. I had no involvement in it, nor was I asked to be a part of it." the final House report on Iran-Contra concluded that Whittlesey unsuccessfully attempted to help Oliver North obtain a U.S. passport for a fake Saudi prince who claimed to have knowledge of the locations of hostages being held in Lebanon. Whittlesey repeatedly and emphatically denied this charge. She maintained no proof

was produced and saw this as a politically motivated attempt to discredit her White House Outreach Group initiative, which had been "a legitimate and in every respect legal attempt to communicate Reagan's anti-communist policy in Central America"

During her tenure at Public Liaison, Whittlesey clashed with some other members of the Reagan White House staff whom she regarded as "largely Washington permanent government party functionaries not very committed to advocating the President's policies in a serious or consistent way." She believed she was carrying a torch as a "true Reaganite." This was a common complaint from staff members in the first Reagan Administration pitting the "Reaganites" against the more practical politicians on the senior staff, in particular, Reagan's Chief of Staff Jams A. Baker III and Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver.

During this conflict, Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter and others urged her to take a federal judgeship on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. Whittlesey declined the nomination. A judicial appointment would have effectively removed her from the public policy and political arena, which she did not wish. She took the job of Public Liaison because of "a profound sense of obligation to the grassroots voters who had elected Reagan believing him to be a man of deep principle and traditional faith."

Whittlesey left the White House several months after Reagan became the Chief of Staff. Whittlesey resumed her duties representing the U.S. in Switzerland for a second term in 1985. She was the first to greet President Reagan as he stepped off the plane in Geneva for this meeting Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in November 1985. After Democrats took control of the Senate in 1986, allegations were made about Ambassador Whittlesey's misuse of some funds at the embassy. After investigations, she was exonerated. Whatever the motives of the accusations, Whittlesey resigned in 1988 after the uncomfortable situation of the past few years. She was widely regarded by political admirers and detractors alike as a most effective U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland.

After completing her second tour as United States Ambassador to Switzerland, and her time serving President Reagan, Whittlesey was named as Chairman and President of the American Swiss Foundation in New York. For 19 years, Whittlesey served as President and Chairman of the Board of the American Swiss Foundation; beginning in February 2008, she became Chairman Emeritus. For more than two decades, she worked "to protect and strengthen the friendship between the United

States and Switzerland," which in 2010 was the largest direct foreign investor in the U.S. Whittlesey established a bipartisan young leaders' program. For 22 years this program brought together young opinion leaders and professionals from Switzerland and the United States for an intensive, week-long conference in Switzerland. Participants met senior public and private sector officials, engaged in discussions on issues of the day, and built friendships. There are now over 900 alumni of this program.

After leaving Switzerland, Whittlesey joined the New York-based law firm of Myerson & Kuhn until its 1990 bankruptcy filing. In 1998 she started her own consulting firm, Maybrook Associates. She also served on several corporate boards over the years, including the U.S. Advisory Board for Nestle. In 1989, she became a board member of Schindler Elevator Corporation USA, headquartered in Morristown, New Jersey. She also served as a board member of Valassis Communications, Inc, headquartered in Livonia, Michigan.

Whittlesey's diplomatic career resumed very briefly in 2001 when she was named by President George W. Bush to be an At-Large Member of the U.S. Delegation to the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. She continued in this position as needed throughout the Bush Presidency. A strong supporter of the Second Amendment, she was quoted as saying about the treaty, "This document by the U.N. freezes the last coup. It favors established governments, while taking away rights from individuals. It does not recognize any value higher than peace, such as liberty."

In addition to serving on corporate boards, Whittlesey continued her involvement with political and religious groups. She was a member of the Board of Directors (and former Chairman for three years) of Christian Freedom International, an organization dedicated to assisting persecuted Christians around the world. She was a member of the Council of American Ambassadors and also a member of the Board of Advisers of the Reagan Alumni Association. She also served as a member - and for six years as Chairman - of the Board of the Institute of World Politics in Washington, DC. In 2012 she joined the Board of the Rockford Institute in Rockford, Illinois, and, in 2013 the Advisory Board of the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity in Washington, D.C. She was a longtime member of the University Club of Washington, D.C., and for several years served on the Newsmax International Advisory Board.

Whittlesey had been the recipient of numerous awards and honors over the past 50 years. On October 4, 2012 she was given a Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by the U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. At the time of the award presentation, a new study of her life and career, *Backwards in High Heels, Faith Whittlesey, Reagan's Madam Ambassador in Switzerland and the White House*, by Professor Thomas Carty of Springfield College (Massachusetts) was published.

Whittlesey was also a long-time member of the American Rose Society. Her personal collection currently consists of two copies of *American Rose* magazine with mentions of her Lifetime Achievement Award and covering her named rose, "Faith Whittlesey." In 2006, Whittlesey was honored by the American Rose Society with an off-white rose bearing her name. In 2010, she was presented with the International Friend of the Rose Award for helping establish a relationship between gardening communities in the U.S. and the People's Republic of China.

Faith Whittlesey died in Washington, DC on May 21, 2018, aged 79, of cancer.

### **Last Modified Date**

2024-03-21

### **Box 1**

<b>Status</b>	<b>Title</b>
OPEN	<i>American Rose: The Magazine of the American Rose Society</i> , September/October 2012
OPEN	<i>American Rose: The Magazine of the American Rose Society</i> , January/February 2013
OPEN	<i>Recalling Henry Clark Whittlesey: December 18, 1965- December 21, 2012</i> , by Faith Whittlesey