

★ ★ FIRST ★ ★ BARBER

Politicians in search of the right image ought to consult Milton Pitts.
He cuts all the presidents' hair.

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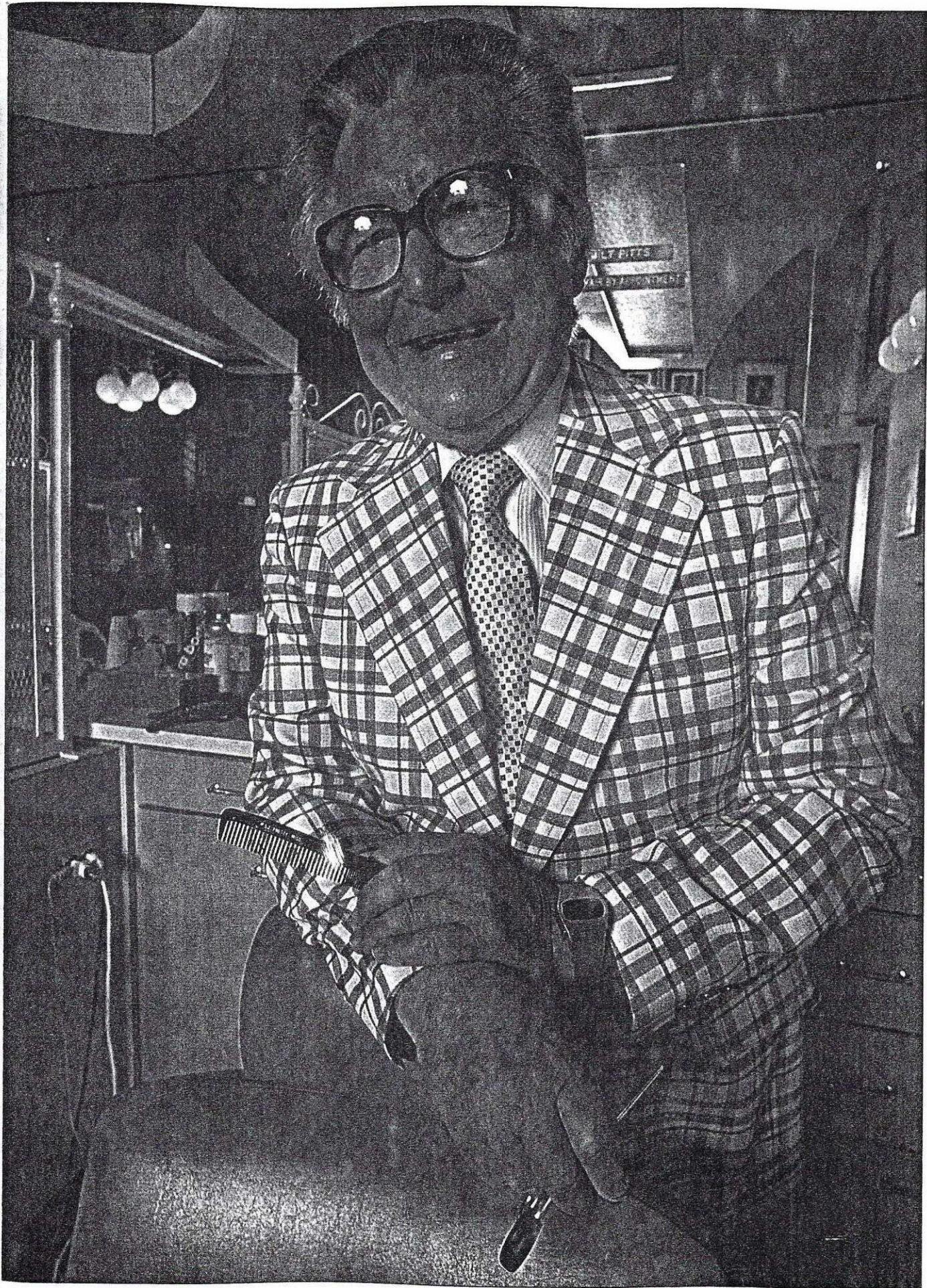
ilton Pitts is one of the few men who can look Ronald Reagan in the eye and say, "Everything you're doing, Mr. President, is wrong." He gets away with it because he's not talking about foreign policy or the economy. He's talking about hair.

"When President Reagan was elected, he looked like a character in a cartoon show," says First Barber Milton Pitts, who credits himself with removing the president's high peak in the front. He now trims the first executive's hair a conservative two-and-a-half inches all over, cutting half the length off the front to give Reagan's face balance.

Just for the record, and to clear up those nasty rumors, Reagan's hair is brown, not black, according to his barber, with about 20 percent gray in it; Pitts insists that the color is natural.

"At one time, I thought the president's hair looked too shiny, so I recommended that he leave it dry," says Pitts. "Today, we don't like to see oils. A natural look is preferred. Now Reagan doesn't put anything on it but water—no oil, no

BY KAREN FELD



PRESIDENTIAL HAIR APPARENT?



GLENN: Order him a hairpiece

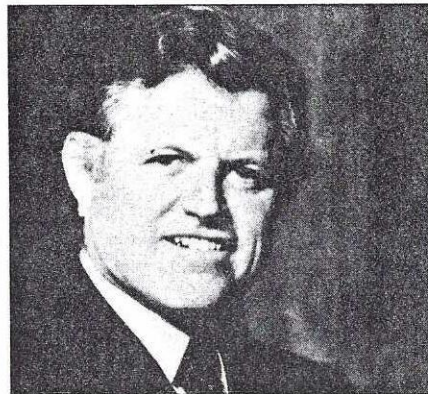
Milton Pitts
appraises the
heads of state.



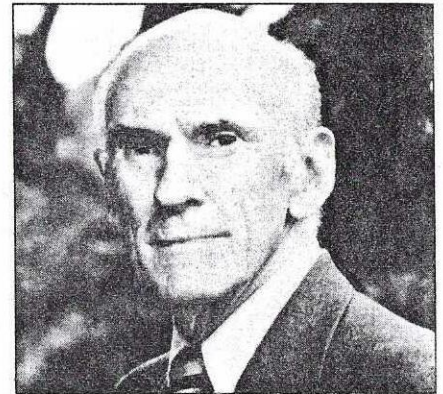
REAGAN: Not a trendsetter



KISSINGER: Most difficult



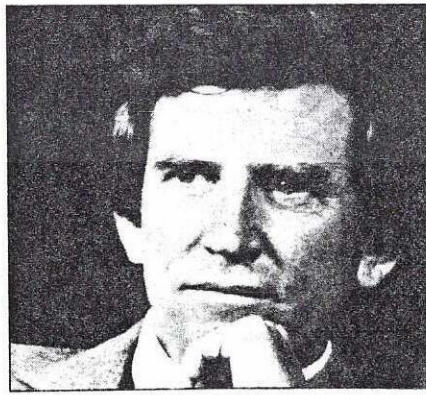
KENNEDY: Too mod



CRANSTON: Nothing you can do



NIXON: No more greasy kid stuff



HART: Good style



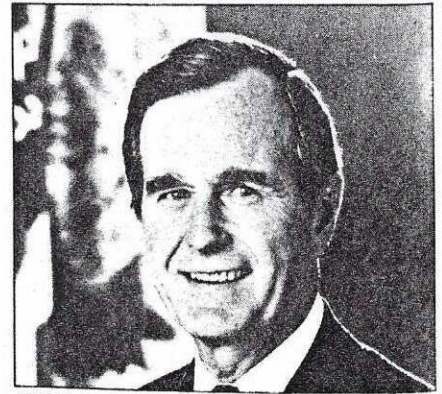
WEINBERGER: Easy to work on



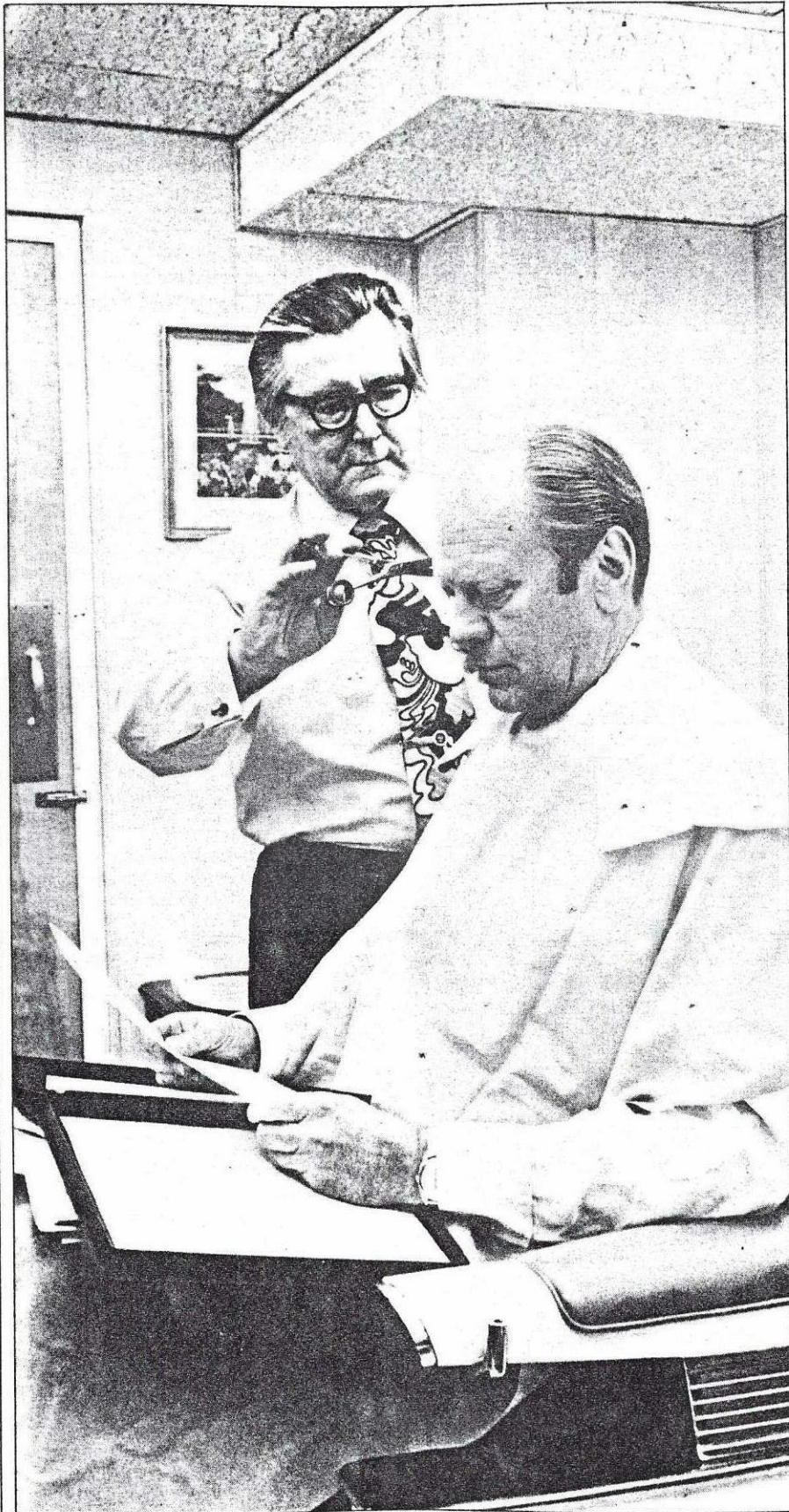
LONG: No more tint



STOCKMAN: Has his wife's vote



BUSH: Good hair



FORD: Accent the sideburns

spray, no color. I wouldn't say he's a trendsetter, but his conservative style fits in."

The jovial and gossipy Milton Pitts, sixty-three, is always on call to the White House. Other clients wait while he washes, clips, combs and blow-dries presidents, vice-presidents and cabinet secretaries. He's not a chic eighties stylist, but rather a traditional men's barber who operated a successful shop on Washington's exclusive Connecticut Avenue for twenty-eight years before opening his current one-seventeen years ago in the basement of the Sheraton-Carlton Hotel—just a five-minute walk from the White House.

His five-operator old-time barber shop, with its matching peacock blue chairs and cabinets on color-coordinated blue walls, is only forty by sixteen feet—not much space to contain some of the biggest men in Washington—but the president and vice-president need not worry, for they have their hair cut in the ten-foot-square shop in the White House that opened during the Eisenhower administration. Pitts began working in the White House barber shop two days a week during the Nixon administration. There he cut the hair of the executive branch, cabinet and senior White House staff. But times are tough all around: now, with the exception of the president and vice-president, Pitts's high-powered clients must walk across Lafayette Park to have their hair done.

In July 1982, a hair-raising crisis threatened to upset the tonsorial traditions of the First Barber. Rivals in the form of unisex hairstylists Yves and Nancy Graux infiltrated the White House. While Pitts clipped presidents, the Grauxes styled all manner of important staff members, including such powerful women as Supreme Court Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and Vice-President Bush's wife, Barbara. Although for a while they alternated days with Pitts in the White House shop, eventually the interlopers were ordered to restore peace and harmony and pack up their blow dryers for the greater good of the West-

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ern world.

To Pitts's further pleasure, plans for a new \$9,000 unisex salon in the Executive Office Building have been scrapped. He didn't like sharing the White House shop. "Why, when I was called to give the president his first haircut in the White House, there was a lady with her hair in curlers. They moved her out into the lobby of the White House, but I still had to wait until they cleaned up the shop."

Pitts claims to have introduced the flattop in this country and boasts that he can do a perfect flattop in ten minutes.

Pitts, whose own blond hair is now graying, began barbering in Greenville, North Carolina, at the age of sixteen. He trained as a barber at Moler Barber College, one of a chain of barbering schools throughout the country, hoping to pay for a medical school education with his earnings. Before long, however, he gave up his dream of medical school, choosing the scissors over the scalpel. After visiting Washington forty-five years ago on a vacation, he caught Potomac Fever. "I was offered a job, and could make more money than in Greenville, so I decided to stay," says Pitts.

Pitts claims to have introduced the flattop in this country and boasts that he can do a perfect flattop in ten minutes. He recalls the day in the early fifties when twenty-eight youngsters waited in line to get a flattop in his four-chair shop. "The line outside looked like a line for a movie theater." He still has an occasional request for that style. ►

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In the fifties, he did six or seven cuts an hour, at a dollar each. Today, he books a client every thirty minutes. All his clients, including presidents and vice-presidents, pay \$15 for a haircut and style. Of course, since presidents, vice-presidents and cabinet secretaries don't handle cash, Pitts bills them monthly, and receives prompt payment by check from each. "I never expect tips, but occasionally I get them. Presidents don't usually tip; they give you other compensation, like Christmas gifts," says Pitts, who once received a glass decanter with the White House Seal and Reagan's signature.

Pitts recommends cutting hair every fifteen days regardless of the kind of hair. A man no longer gets a haircut to get hair cut short; instead he gets his hair styled to improve his appearance. "The presidents I've known have had their hair cut every twelve to fourteen days, never more than fourteen days between cuts," says Pitts, who has a

thirty-minute standing appointment with President Reagan every twelve days. In the case of presidents Nixon and Ford, Pitts would be called to the

Pitts's exclusive clientele includes weatherman Willard Scott, columnist Jack Anderson, singer Tony Bennett and assorted cabinet members.

White House to comb or blow-dry hair for a television appearance, but not with Reagan. Pitts sees President

Reagan only when he wants a haircut. "President Reagan is one of the easiest men I've ever worked with. He always leaves you happy and laughing," says his barber. "With a president, you let him lead the conversation. I start off by saying, 'Good afternoon, Mr. President. How are you today?' He'll say, 'Well, it's been a good day,' or 'It's been a rough day,' but he never lets it bother him." According to Pitts, that's a sharp contrast to former president Richard Nixon. During the Watergate hearings, "Nixon was always kind of sad and troubled," Pitts recalls. Nixon would ask, "Well, what are they saying about us out there today?"

One of the most drastic makeovers that Pitt has made was in Nixon's hairstyle. "Nixon was wearing hair cream. I shortened his hair to about two-and-a-half to three inches long, lowered the nape of the neck and made the hair fuller on the sides. It made him look younger. Now he leaves it natural

with just hair spray without lacquer.”

Pitts recalls the first time he worked on President Ford, a Sunday afternoon in the White House about ten days after he took office. “He looked at me kind of funny and said, ‘Milt, I have light hair, as you can see—reddish blond and no gray. If you cut my hair too short on the sides it looks as though I don’t have any sideburns.’”

“All my life I had an exclusive clientele,” says Pitts, who clips NBC weatherman Willard Scott, syndicated columnist Jack Anderson, for-

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mer CIA Director Stansfield Turner, Treasury Secretary Donald Regan, Secretary of State George Schultz, Attorney General William French Smith and assorted celebrities, including Tony Bennett. “Of course, we don’t discriminate. We work on everybody who comes in, but I enjoy working with politicians.”

Pitts doesn’t split hairs over politics in his shop. Although Jimmy Carter used his wife’s hairdresser, Eivind Bjerke, Pitts works with equanimity on Democrats, including former budget director Bert Lance, former attorney general Griffin Bell and former treasury secretary W. Michael Blumenthal. He also worked on 1980 presidential hopeful John Anderson, an independent.

When he’s not clipping high-level politicians, Pitts teaches hair styling to executives for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. “Many businessmen take a shortcut in the morning,” he explains. “They shower, shampoo their hair and grab a little hair cream or oil, which was popular years ago. Those

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creams clog the pores of the scalp and cause hair loss."

Pitts recommends shampooing daily with a mild product. He won't reveal which products the president uses for fear that it will be interpreted as an endorsement.

Pitts rates Henry Kissinger's hair as the most difficult of his clients. "It was curly and he wanted it straight. I would shampoo his hair with warm water, use a conditioner to make the hair limp and soft, and then blow-dry

Presidents don't usually tip. They give other compensations, like Christmas gifts.

it and use hair spray." Pitts styled Dr. Kissinger's hair at least once or twice a week when he was secretary of state.

OMB Chief David Stockman is another regular customer of Pitts. "He doesn't talk. He's very quiet," says Pitts. "I would like his hair shorter, but he says his wife likes it full. He's a newly married man, so he wants to please his wife.

"Caspar Weinberger is an easy person to work on. I do his hair about every fifteen days," says Pitts, who's cut it "off and on" for a dozen years. "He once fell asleep in the chair, nodded and then threw his head back as I went to cut. I left a little gap about a half-inch in size in the center of his neck." The barber hoped that when the unsuspecting secretary of defense boarded a plane the next day and waved goodbye to the cameras, he wouldn't turn around and reveal Pitts's unfortunate slip of the scissors—on national television.

"Senator Russell Long loves to talk. He laughs a lot. I used to tint his hair until he decided it was just too much trouble," reveals Pitts. "It was gray,

but I'd put a little temporary light brown hair color on it." On Senator Long and other clients, Pitts uses a temporary color that lasts about twenty days and comes in two shades of brown. It fades gradually, so the roots never show and the look is always natural.

Pitts reports that his most drastic styling change was on Alexander Haig. "He used to wear his hair 'military' and comb it back. His hair is very thin on top, so I parted it low and

Pitts uses a roux rinse on Barry Goldwater, John Anderson and other graying clients.

combed the hair over the part to cover up a lot of the recessed areas. Then I put hair spray on it."

Pitts styles Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater's hair and uses a roux rinse on it to remove the yellow, the same rinse he uses on John Anderson, Jack Anderson and other graying clients. Says Pitts, "It gives the hair an even flow of gray."

Pitts has cut Vice-President Bush's hair for a dozen years. Bush brings work to the barber chair and even wears a prescription pince nez so his glasses won't interfere with the scissors while he's reading. "He has good hair, presidential hair," says Pitts.

What is presidential hair? "Hair that is well groomed and not flying all over." Pitts thinks that Senator Ted Kennedy's hair is not presidential. "Ted's hair is a little too mod, too flying. He'd look better with a more conservative style."

Here's how Pitts views the hair of other presidential hopefuls: "There's nothing I could do with John Glenn

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except probably order him a nice hairpiece," says Pitts laughing, "but on second thought, once you create an image in politics, if you change too much from that, it looks funny." He compares Senator Glenn to Eisenhower. "Eisenhower was a good president and he didn't have much hair.

"There's nothing you can do with Senator Alan Cranston's hair at all. Senator Gary Hart's hair is a good style for him. Jack Kemp's hair is a good style for him but he needs it shorter all over. The spray is fine."

Presidents have their hair cut every twelve to fourteen days.

Pitts has cut former vice-president Mondale's hair twice before. "It's as good as he can do. It used to hang in his eyes. Now he keeps it short and layered."

Only the ballot box will tell for sure whether presidential hair is an election indicator, but one thing is certain: in this image-conscious age of multi-million-dollar media extravaganzas and jet-age whistle-stop tours, presidential hair could turn out to be as important to a candidate's image as, well, as kissing babies. ☺
