The Iran-Contra Affair
IRAN

- Hostages were being held in Lebanon by Hezbollah
  - Americans and western Europeans
- Illegal to sell weapons to Iran
  - Arms embargo since 1979
- Iran used influence with Hezbollah to get hostages released
- In exchange, U.S. agreed to sell the weapons to Iran
- Happened in 1985 and 1986
CONTRA

- Communists had overthrown Somoza government in Nicaragua
- Contras were Nicaraguans training in El Salvador
  - Goal: overthrow communists
- Reagan wanted to financially and militarily support Contras
- The Boland Amendment (1983) prohibited support of Contras
- Money diverted to Contras from 1984 to 1986
The Scandal breaks . . .

- October 5, 1986
  - Nicaraguan soldiers shoot down American cargo plane
  - Eugene Hasenfus sole survivor of crash
  - Tells captors he works for the CIA
The Scandal breaks . . .

- November 3, 1986
  - Lebanese magazine, *Al Shiraa*, reports arms for hostages deal
  - American hostage David Jacobsen is first released
  - Attorney General Edwin Meese makes information public, November 25th
The initial fallout . . .

- National Security Advisor John Poindexter is blamed by Reagan
- Reagan also blames staff member Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North
- Poindexter resigns and North is fired
The Iran-Contra Hearings

- Late 1986 through summer of 1987
- Objective: who authorized arms sales?
- What did President Reagan and Vice-President Bush know?
The Iran-Contra Hearings

- Key witness: CIA director William Casey
- Casey was diagnosed with and died from brain tumor in 1987
- Does that damage his credibility as a witness?
The Iran-Contra Hearings

- Oliver North claims he met with Reagan and Poindexter – and that Reagan authorized deal
- Reagan claimed “he didn’t remember”
- Is he telling the truth??
The Iran-Contra Conclusions

- North and Poindexter are sentenced to prison
  - Sentences overturned on a technicality – they made immunity deals with Congress
- Congress claims not enough evidence to find Reagan guilty
- Congress said Reagan should have known
The Iran-Contra Conclusions

- Vice-President Bush claimed he didn’t know
- Congress concluded Bush did know, but didn’t authorize sales
- Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger was scheduled to testify in 1993
- President Bush pardoned Weinberger on December 24, 1992
What do you think should happen with the Iran-Contra Affair?
What do you think the political effects of the Iran-Contra Scandal will be?
Ronald Reagan

- 1981: Survives assassination attempt over Walter Mondale
- 1982: Economy begins to recover from recession
- 1984: Is elected to a second term
- 1986: White House confirms arms sale to Iran
- 1987: Accepts responsibility for actions in Iran-Contra affair
George H.W. Bush

• Wants to run for president in 1988
• Why isn’t Reagan running?
• Will pardon of Weinberger hurt him politically?
Election of 1988

Vice-President
George H.W. Bush

Massachusetts Governor
Michael Dukakis
RESULTS OF THE ELECTION OF 1988

- BUSH
  - 48.9 million popular votes
  - 53.4% of the popular vote
  - 426 Electoral votes

- DUKAKIS
  - 41.8 million popular votes
  - 45.6% of the popular vote
  - 111 Electoral votes

- WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT BUSH AND IRAN-CONTRA?
Will Bush's pardon of Caspar Weinberger hurt him politically?

Bush pardons Weinberger on December 24, 1992
Bill Clinton defeats George Bush for re-election on November 3, 1992
Why do Americans seem to not care?
How does the Iran-Contra Affair compare to the Watergate Scandal?