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'Reagan' star Dennis Quaid on the challenges and 'honor' of bringing 40th president to the screen

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6-7 minutes

Quaid, producer Mark Joseph, and director Sean McNamara preview the Ronald Reagan biopic.

By

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One word sums up [Dennis Quaid](#)'s initial reaction to being offered the role of Ronald Reagan: confusion.

"I didn't understand why they were offering me Ronald Reagan because I just didn't see it," the actor, 66, tells EW. "I admired him so much, and so I had a chill of fear go down my spine when I was offered it. That's usually kind of a sign that maybe I should do it, because it's out of my comfort zone."

Directed by [Sean McNamara](#) (*The Miracle Season*), the longestating biopic *Reagan* was adapted from conservative author Paul Kengor's book *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* by screenwriter Howard Klausner. Producer Mark Joseph also spoke to more than 50 people who knew the 40th

president personally to get stories — many of which he says have never been shared publicly before — to use as additional inspiration for the sprawling film, which follows Reagan as a child, as a young man coming up in Hollywood (played by *Wizards of Waverly Place* alum [David Henrie](#)), and eventually as president, into the later years of his life. Reagan's role as Screen Actors Guild president and the fight he led against Communism in the industry will also feature in the movie.

The wide sweep of the film presented a unique challenge for McNamara, who says he researched makeup techniques to get the aging right. "The challenge was me doing the research and finding out how to make it look right and not look cheesy," he says. To do that, he turned to some of the artists — or "geniuses," as he calls them — behind *The Irishman*, and made sure they relied mostly on makeup and prosthetics, although some light de-aging digital technology will also be used.

Even so, as illustrated in the first-look image above, Quaid's overall appearance wasn't altered much for the role. "He already has the look, and then he just had that smile and that optimism, the kind of things you can't make up for with hair and makeup," Joseph says of his star. "Honestly, if you had magically told me you could have any actor you want in Hollywood or Dennis Quaid, I literally would have chosen Dennis Quaid."

Despite the obvious politics of a film about a politician, the team behind *Reagan* doesn't view the project as partisan. "The way the film is set up, it's not Democrats-are-good, Republicans-are-bad or vice versa," Joseph says. "It's more about: There was totalitarianism in the world and Americans together helped to end that. My hope is that it's a movie that doesn't divide, but unifies."

Instead, the guiding principle of *Reagan* came from *Rocky* director John G. Avildsen, who was originally slated to direct the film before his death in 2017. "He told me, 'When I did *Rocky*, it's not really about boxing. It just happened that boxing was the backdrop for the story about the guy.' And so that really guided me for *Reagan*," Joseph says. "It's really about a man and the challenges he faces, the people that helped him become who he becomes, the good and the bad. A story about a perfect person isn't very interesting, but a story about a man who's flawed, just like all of us, is always interesting."

For his part, McNamara says he tried to achieve that by "picking story beats that people would not find on YouTube or in other movies." And when the film, which is targeting an early 2022 release, finally hits theaters, the director says he hopes people are moved by it. "I want them to walk through the theater and go, 'I learned something about Ronald Reagan. I laughed, I cried, I saw some things that maybe he didn't do so well, and I saw some things that only he could have done.'"

Quaid, who says the actor-turned-politician is his favorite president, echoes that sentiment, calling this the most interesting role he's ever done — despite his initial concern. "I tried to share some of that human frailty, because none of us are perfect," he says. "It was an honor to play him."

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