

✘ News of the recent death of Warren Christopher prompted memories of a meeting I attended in 1987 — several years before Christopher was appointed Secretary of State by Bill Clinton. A major California utility had hired Christopher’s Los Angeles law firm to take its side in a regulatory proceeding with several billion dollars at risk. The utility’s lawyers agreed to a meeting to consider the potential for settlement negotiations, and the meeting took place in the firm’s L.A. office.

Upon arrival, we were ushered into a conference room where every seat was available – but for the one at the head of the table, neatly reserved by the placement of a pen and a blank pad of paper on the table in front of it. With everyone else in place, and after the passage of a couple of minutes beyond the scheduled meeting time, Mr. Christopher walked into the room. We all rose to greet him and he received us graciously. He was a slight man, who spoke in gentle tones. He was dressed in an expensive suit, with a handkerchief in the coat’s breast pocket.

The meeting did not officially belong to Mr. Christopher in any way, but he gently and politely steered the process from beginning to end. He had “taken the liberty” of preparing a “draft” agenda, about which no one thought to object. Although everyone had a chance to contribute to the conversation, it only touched on subjects he was offering for consideration. The meeting remained cordial at all times — despite bitter differences between the parties, and the enormous sums at stake – and ended with his departure, after everyone agreed that there was a basis for further negotiations.

It is hard to separate the influence of the man (his personality and demeanor) from the reputation. By the time that this meeting had occurred, Mr. Christopher was already famous for negotiating the release of 52 American hostages in Iran and receiving the Medal of Freedom – the nation’s highest civilian award. One way or another, everything fell into place at the meeting – just as he had planned it. And later, when others stepped in to negotiate a final deal with him, he delivered for his client an exceptionally favorable result.

Hilary Clinton is [quoted](#) as calling Warren Christopher a diplomat’s diplomat. That sounds plausible to me.