

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
Sec. WILLIAM J. "BILL" BENNETT
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Interviewer
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Morton Kondracke: This is a Jack Kemp Oral History Project interview with William Bennett, former Education secretary and Jack Kemp's partner at Empower America. We're doing this at the Jack Kemp Foundation in Washington, DC. Today is December 11, 2012, and I'm Morton Kondracke. Thanks so much for doing this.

Bill Bennett: Sure.

Kondracke: So when you think about Jack Kemp, what immediately comes to mind?

Bennett: Well, I miss him, particularly now. Jack had the kind of lift and reach and enthusiasm that we don't associate with a lot of Republicans right now. I miss him too in personal terms. He was a close friend, one of the closest friends I had. And he was a wonderful opposite to me in a lot of ways. We were kind of like a marriage where we're compatible by being different, you know? He taught me a lot. He taught me a lot about economics, but he also taught me a lot about optimism. I am probably chronically, constitutionally pessimistic, Catholic original sin, darkness and man's soul, work to get out the light. Jack was not that. If you read [K.P.] Reinhold Niebuhr's *Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, I was child of darkness; Jack was child of light. So I needed him. He maybe needed me a little bit.

Kondracke: So where do you think that optimism came from?

Bennett: California. Quarterback, sunlight. I said we had a dinner once, some football function, and he was throwing balls around, and

he introduced me very generously and said, "Bill and I played the same game." Well, first of all, you know, I played college football at Williams [College]. He was a professional football player for Pete's sakes. That's not the same game.

Kondracke: Were you a quarterback?

Bennett: No, [unclear] I was a tackle and an interior lineman. For Jack it was all sunshine, California, cheerleaders, touchdowns; for me it was a guy named '*Kuslowski*,' in the mud. That's not the same game. And that in some ways is emblematic of our differences. But he was always very generous with me, he even threw the ball at me and let me throw a few balls around. We had a touch football game, he came out too, and brought [James P.] Jimmy [Kemp] and [Jeffrey A.] Jeff [Kemp] and we all played. I got a lesson.

Kondracke: This was just one football game, or was it a regular thing?

Bennett: We had a regular touch football game on Sundays where the Kemp boys, when they were in town, would come, but Jack graced us with his presence once, which was great.

Kondracke: Besides optimism and lift, what would you say are his major character strengths?

Bennett: Optimism and lift, I'd say them again, and 'no problem can't be addressed and solved.' Belief that we could work together—I'm going to use football here a lot, because it was a very important part of his life and a metaphor, and a part of my life too. When I was

Secretary of Education I was the first person asked to name the most influential teacher in my life, and I named my high school football coach, so this was a very important common ground for me and Jack. But what I'm getting to is that Jack believed in the huddle. If you all got together, we could work it out and you could score, you could win, you can solve the problem, and although he would make sounds and noises when you were giving him some bad news, he'd have the telltale Kemp [demonstrates repeated grunts]. He'd then say, "All right, now what do we do? How can we make this work?" and he went to work on it. He had a great mind, an analytical mind, he studied hard. I first met Jack through Irving Kristol. You would think a couple jocks would meet at a, you know, the forty yard line. I met him through Irving Kristol, and Irving said, "Here's one of your fans." And Jack said, "Oh, you follow Congress." I said, "No, I follow football." And then I heard the story, Kristol told me that Jack had asked him for a reading list, I'm sure you've heard this story. He read all the books that Irving gave him. He saw Irving about eight weeks later and said, "Give me another reading list." He said, "I already gave you one." Jack said, "I already read all those books." And so Irving gave him another one. He was a good student, a very good student. He would say he was a late student, he came to it late, but all the passion and conviction of the autodidact, and loved to quote. As he quoted speeches, he loved to quote books. He was infectious, alive, infectious, intellectually serious, curious and optimistic, important.

Kondracke: What was Irving Kristol's book list, do you know?

Bennett: I don't remember. It was, I'm sure, classics. I'm sure *The Federalists*, I'm sure [Harry V.] Jaffa and [Arthur F.] Burns and all that

stuff, you know, the battle, the neo-cons and the cons, [Leo Strauss] Straussian stuff, and also, I'm sure, economics books.

Kondracke: So if he had flaws, what were they?

Bennett: Optimism and lift. I told him once, I said, "If you believed in original sin you'd be the president of the United States." It's not just optimism and lift, it was that extended hand. He believed everyone was a potential friend. He had no enemies, he just didn't. And he'd say, "[Charles B.] Charlie Rangel, great guy." And I'd say, "I don't know about Charlie Rangel being a great guy." He was my chairman. I knew Charlie pretty well. Everybody was a great guy, because Jack got along with everybody. It led him to believe that people would act in reliable ways, that they would keep their word, that they could be trusted, and that he often got burned. So I think that was a problem for him. But one of the worst hours of my life was the debate with [Albert A.] Al Gore [Jr.], where he didn't engage Gore, he didn't take Gore on. He wanted to be friends with Gore, he wanted to have a friendly debate in the best spirit of congeniality, and what's the word we use, "comity." But he needed to hit him a little bit, but Jack wasn't one to hit. He'd get hit, like he got hit in football, and he'd get up. But he wasn't one to throw a punch, and politics ain't bean bag. Is that a weakness? Probably, because, you know I'm thinking of someone else you're probably talking to in this, [Newton L.] Newt Gingrich. When Newt hit his high point during the primaries, I'm not saying this was the greatest moment of the primaries, but it was when people said, "I want Newt in there, because Newt will take him on, Newt will throw a punch." And I would say to my radio audience, "Is that what you want? Is that what you want in the president?" "Yes,

actually it is, it's what we want." Jack wouldn't throw a punch. I never saw him throw a punch, I don't think.

Kondracke: What prevented him from throwing a punch? I mean he'd seen lots of punches thrown in football, and—

Bennett: And received plenty. I don't know. His mother, goodness, a kind of gentleness, the belief that we could all get in a huddle, all 11 of us, and no matter what our views and our convictions and our backgrounds, we could all work it out together. There was that just indomitable optimism and pragmatism.

Kondracke: Did you ever talk to him about quarterbacking and life, quarterbacking and leadership?

Bennett: I don't think explicitly. He was a natural, an obvious leader. As a quarterback a lot of these guys are. No. My advice to him was always—I kind of got tired of my advice to him—was always to look on the dark side, the down side. I got tired of listening to myself. I'd say, "Jack, there's trouble here. There are people here we can't be sure of. There are downsides to this proposal." But he woke me up to so many things and led me on so many things and educated me on a lot of things.

Kondracke: Such as?

Bennett: You know what I was thinking of lately, on the way over, Prop[osition] 187 [1994]. You know about that, California. And he called me up and said we got to do this, we have to lead on this.

Kondracke: Just explain what it is.

Bennett: It was a state initiative on immigration, very similar to the issues we're talking about now, and it was whether, I can't remember exactly, but it was about providing services to immigrants and the children of immigrants, and California wanted to deny those services—schools, hospital care and so on. And Jack and I talked about it. We wrote an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, a big op ed. It was big because it got a lot of attention, a lot of negative attention, and there was a lot of heat. We were both at Empower America at the time. I wasn't sure I wanted to sign onto it, and then he talked me into it. He talked me into it by making the arguments for it. And I still hear about it. When I get engaged in the immigration debate now on the radio people say, "You're not going back to your 187 thing," that sort of business. But we were right in what we said, and still right. Jack talked me into that, he talked me into joining Empower America. He said there would be no fundraising, very little travel. Total lies. [laughs] And not too many nights out. And there won't be a problem. We'll raise the money. But there were plenty of problems. He also educated me about NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], which, that's not my area. We used to joke at Empower America that people came in to the sunny end, Jack's end, and then they'd come down to my end. They'd say, "What's going on down here?" And I'd say, "Sex, drugs and rock and roll," and they'd stay a while just to see what was going on. They were curious. But I didn't know a lot about other issues than the issues I knew about. He educated me about NAFTA, and my reward there was, it wasn't a bad thing, it was [William J.] Bill Clinton gave a speech and thanked a number of people

for NAFTA, and thanked Jack Kemp and Bill Bennett for their leadership. We also wouldn't want to forget this, talked during the time of the Clinton troubles, about the President needing to resign, and I think I led Jack in that conversation. And we decided—I don't know which of us did—but we decided to go see [Joseph I.] Joe Lieberman, and it was one of the most memorable conversations in Washington. We went to see Lieberman and we told him that he was Nathan to Clinton's David, and that he, Lieberman, had the moral credibility and standing to go to Clinton and tell him that he had to step down. And Lieberman was embarrassed. "Guys, whoa, that's a big job." And he wouldn't do it. "He wouldn't do it even if I tell him." But Jack was eloquent and persuasive and gutsy.

Kondracke: What did Jack say to Lieberman about that?

Bennett: I wish I could remember exactly. I just remember that I thought I was going to be doing most of the talking when we got there. As usual, Jack did most of the talking, because he was good at it.

Kondracke: Was it that it was a disgrace to the presidency, demeaning of the presidency?

Bennett: Yes. Disgrace to the country. You got to put this behind us. When we watched Lieberman's speech on the floor—you'll probably remember that—he came, I thought, that close [demonstrates], because it was a very, very tough speech, and we were wondering whether he was going to pull the trigger. He didn't, for whatever reasons he had, but it was for lack of our trying.

Kondracke: You and Kemp both came out publicly for Clinton's resignation?

Bennett: I did. I don't remember if Jack did. I wrote a book, *Death of Outrage*, and it was the number one Best Seller. [C. James] Carville [Jr.]'s was number two. It was a defense for Clinton. Remember that? These are the things you remember.

Kondracke: So what other all-time favorite memories do you have of Jack?

Bennett: Well, the social ones. Sundays, going over to the holy sepulcher, watching football, several games at once. The knocks on the door, just bursting into my office, being on the phone, being in a meeting. He'd be there with three people in tow, the head of some corporation, some former NFL star. "This is 'Joe Smith,' this is Bill Bennett. This is a great guy, this is a great guy, you're a great guy, you're a great guy." Our laughing about the fact that he gave out footballs, signed footballs, and I gave out signed books. And I confessed to him I really would like to switch, and he confessed to me that he'd really like to switch. That was very funny. Closeness with the family. I got to know that family very well, and Jack, mine, and for all the sporting events that Jack went to as a father and a grandfather, he ended up going to sporting events of my kids. That was a big deal, and it wasn't even a football game. It was a national championship high school lacrosse game.

Kondracke: At least it wasn't soccer, right?

Bennett: No, it wasn't soccer. That's correct. We shared that. Other things I remember were just so many meetings of intermediaries, people coming to me saying, "You've got to talk to Jack." Jeane [J.] Kirkpatrick, "Can you talk Jack into this?" Or [John V.] Vin Weber. Now, poor Vin. Vin is the guy who was always the intermediary, always the guy who would give Jack the bad news, or explain to Jack you couldn't do this. But he was well practiced, because he had to do this for Newt Gingrich for several years, right? But there was always that, "Can you get to Jack, can you talk to Jack? Can you explain to Jack?" Board members, "Can you hold Jack back on this, can you control Jack?" "No, I can't. I can't control Jack."

Kondracke: What kind of trouble did Jack get into?

Bennett: Over-reaching, over-promising, "Sure we can do that. Empower America can do this, that and everything else." I can't remember specifics. We were supposed to have a pretty narrow charter. We were going to do this kind of stuff with Jeane Kirkpatrick and school choice with Bill Bennett, and Jack, enterprise zones, and it was just the latest enthusiasm, you know? A person would walk through the door and Jack would entertain him, because he had that capacity to enjoy an idea in its presentation as much as the person presenting enjoyed that idea. It's a great empathetic gift.

Kondracke: So when did you first become aware of him?

Bennett: Football. Game against the [New York] Jets, Jets won and won the Super Bowl. New York, I think the game was in New York.

Kondracke: He played in Buffalo.

Bennett: Yes, but this was a championship game, playoff game in, I think, in Jet's Stadium in New York. The Jets were at home because I think they had a better record. You can check the record on that, but—

Kondracke: You were there?

Bennett: No. But I watched him. I was an AFL fan, an original American Football League fan, so I knew all those guys. I thought those guys were being very badly treated and should have been allowed equality, but the powers that be in the NFL [National Football League] wouldn't let them. So when I met Jack—

Kondracke: Why is that?

Bennett: Well, it was [Alvin R. "Pete"] Rozelle, it was the monopoly, it was not let these guys in, these are upstarts, not sharing the wealth. So when I met Jack I remember he was impressed that I knew the names of all these guys, all these obscure guys, these Buffalo Bills football players. And gradually they all made their way through the Empower America offices. And we had a big poster up in our kids' room with, my kids were Buffalo Bills fans, and it had Jack Kemp and [Orenthal J.] O.J. Simpson. We took the poster down later, but, anyway. So that's how I first knew him. I didn't know anything about the Congressional stuff.

Kondracke: What did you think about him when you just knew him as a football player?

Bennett: Great, I mean he held records. He used to kind of do the light touch on his football career, but he held the record for rushing touchdowns for a quarterback until what's his name from the [San Francisco] 49ers? The Mormon. [Jon S.] Steve Young broke it. Jack will tell you he owned the rushing title because he didn't have any protection so he had to scramble and run. But, no, no, I was impressed. He was a big time ball player, great quarterback. Sorry. I've been up too long.

Kondracke: That's okay. So politically, he runs for Congress, he gets involved in Kemp-Roth [Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981] and stuff like that. You were a Democrat, right?

Bennett: What year was Kemp-Roth?

Kondracke: Kemp-Roth, he introduced it in first in '76 and then, of course, it became the basis of Reaganomics in '81.

Bennett: Right.

Kondracke: So did you follow his—

Bennett: Yes, I was here, I was aware of it, but I was a [Ronald W.] Reagan appointee. I was chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities [NEH], so I was paying only tangential attention to it. I

was in my own little academic thing there, but, yes, I was aware of Jack Kemp and of the significance of that.

Kondracke: How did Irving Kristol bring you together?

Bennett: That was before that. That was, I think, late seventies when Kristol introduced us, in New York. But then Jack and I were in the Cabinet together, or sort of. Kemp and me being in the Cabinet. Whether the drug czar was in the cabinet.

Kondracke: This was [George H.W.] Bush.

Bennett: Yes, and we got in a lot of trouble, because we were the bad boys in the Cabinet. You know about Jack's fight with James [A.] Baker and all that. Jack and I—

Kondracke: Tell us about that.

Bennett: Well, I don't know the details of it, but I know they had a lot of bad words between them, and I had big disagreements with Baker too, on policy.

Kondracke: What were your disagreements? You were drug czar then.

Bennett: I've got to be sure this is fine. Yes, I think it is. It's in my book. I had some plans for things I wanted to do in Colombia, and I had most of the Cabinet's support. I had the Vice President's support, but I had to persuade the President, and Baker stood in my way. We

could in one night take out all the cocaine processing plants in Colombia. There were only about 17 of them at the time, if my memory's right. And the Colombian government was in favor of it. And we could do it with helicopters and our guys, and it could be one night's work, and it would stop, essentially, the flow of cocaine for maybe nine months, 12 months, assuming they could then go back and build them up again. And I wanted to get this plan through. I got it through sub-Cabinet level with smart people like [Francis A.] Frank Keating, you know, those people knew a lot. And then Baker and [Nicholas F.] Nick Brady blocked it, and they had Bush's ear, of course.

Kondracke: Because it was war?

Bennett: Yes, they worried about war, Viet Nam, stuff like that. I said, "Hey, they want us to come. Well, so did the South Vietnamese. Send the troops, one night, we're out of there." Lots of arguments. But they were different from Jack's arguments. But we would often plot before a Cabinet meeting how we would do a one-two. And there was one we did with the taxes, when Bush was going to go raise the taxes, and Jack was crazy. I said, "Well, I don't know the arguments." So he, "Just follow my lead." And it was kind of comical, because—

Kondracke: What happened?

Bennett: We were at the Cabinet meeting. Jack is over, let's see, here's the table. The President's here [gestures] and Jack is over here.

Kondracke: Across?

Bennett: Yes, across. It's the President's left, and I'm over here on his right on the other side of the table, the President's side. And Jack is talking. We had rehearsed this. And he's making his case. The President's nodding. Jack keeps going; goes too long, and I start going [gestures] and Jack is not picking up, and Jack goes [gestures] and the President turns [gestures], it's really ridiculous. "Bill?" "Fine, sir."

Kondracke: Did you ever intervene?

Bennett: Yes, I had like three sentences. I remember what I said, because it's the same thing I said when they asked me to be RNC [Republican National Committee] chairman. I said, "This wasn't a campaign promise. This was your campaign, this was the heart of it, and this is not a matter of just policy. This is a matter of commitment." Jack went on and had a lot more to say, and, of course argued policy, and we lost, but there was then a cartoon, I think it was *Business Week*, and it had Bush leading a symphony, and everybody was there in their tuxedos, and over on the side there's a guy playing the piano with a cigar, and another guy pulling on a saxophone. That ain't Kemp. You know, we had our own music, which I think was a little overdone, but we would speak out, I'd say, more often than others on things, and make our views known very loudly. Jack and I and the David [E.] Duke thing. You know, the President wanted to take a neutral position.

Kondracke: David Duke was running for Senate in Louisiana.

Bennett: Yes, Senate or governor.

Kondracke: He was a Ku Klux Klansman.

Bennett: Well, yes, sympathetic to it, but he was a Republican, so you don't speak ill. "You've just got to, Mr. President, you've just got to." Jack called the President on that, and I saw the President. We were doing some drug thing, and I said, "You've just got to, you've just got to speak out on this. You can't have any ambiguity about this".

Kondracke: Did Jack bring that up in a Cabinet meeting?

Bennett: I don't remember, but I know he brought it up, felt very strongly. That was the sort of thing, things that hit our buttons, you know.

Kondracke: So did you become close when you were both Bush Cabinet members, or before that?

Bennett: I guess that's when we became close, yes. One of the reasons we were close is kind of the adoption of Elayne Bennett by Joanne [Kemp]. Joanne had been here longer and invited Elayne to her Friday [prayer] Group, you know about Friday Group? Big deal. Huge effect on Elayne. Elayne wasn't sure, you know—

Kondracke: When was that?

Bennett: I think early eighties. I don't know how long it's been going. It's been going a long time. I think early eighties. But I remember

how grateful Elayne was for Joanne kind of taking her under her wing and introducing her to other women who saw the world in a similar way. So that led to us becoming friends with the Kemps, going out to the house and doing things like that.

Kondracke: This is while you were Education secretary or NEH?

Bennett: Yes, more Education secretary, yes. I might have my years off here, but yes, certainly when Education secretary.

Kondracke: Did he get involved in education policy at all?

Bennett: He was very interested in it. Obviously he would often say, "School choice is the enterprise zone for the kid." I mean the analogies were great, and we borrowed from each other's stuff on that, and he was always available to speak on that.

Kondracke: More about the dynamics of the Bush administration. So he supposedly intervened a lot in Cabinet meetings on issues that had nothing to do with HUD. Do you remember any of those?

Bennett: I don't ever remember him intervening on HUD. [laughter] Yes, and he taught me that you could too, you know. He'd say, "You have a great, what you said today was really smart. You said it's a very bad lesson for our children." He said, "You can say that about anything."

Kondracke: What's a bad lesson for your children?

Bennett: Not to help the Contras [Nicaraguan rebel fighters], okay? So I said, "Right, right, right." There was always an opportunity for me to say what I wanted to say about a particular issue. Yes, no—

Kondracke: I'm sorry. I don't quite understand that.

Bennett: I had this cover as the Education Secretary, I could take any issue as long as I framed it in, "Well Mr. President, I really think you should help the Contras." "Why?" "Well it's a bad lesson to our children if you don't." I was the Secretary of Education; therefore I was teaching here. But I didn't do it as much as he did. Because another word, Jack, you've heard before, 'irrepressible.' He was a bit like, you know, the kid, who, thoughts in the head, it comes out.

Kondracke: Do you remember any specific interventions besides the ones you mentioned?

Bennett: No. I could probably think of some. I could probably think of some. But it was rare that there was a Cabinet meeting that Jack didn't speak.

Kondracke: Did he get dressed down, ever?

Bennett: Not by the President, but you could see the looks from some of the senior Cabinet people, the Bakers, the Bradys, yes.

Kondracke: He must have been into Brady's business a lot, Treasury Secretary.

Bennett: Sure. Sure he was. And he was into foreign policy. He educated me there, a lot.

Kondracke: Were you there when Baker said something to the effect that Jews didn't vote for us?

Bennett: No. I may have been at the meeting, but it happened after a Cabinet meeting, didn't it? Or just before?

Kondracke: Well, I'm not sure.

Bennett: It was in the White House. It was in the Cabinet Room, I think, but I think it was after the Cabinet meeting. That was the sharp exchange, yes. Heard about it.

Kondracke: Supposedly Baker once said "You're not Treasury Secretary, you're not Commerce Secretary, you're Housing Secretary. You're not blankety blank Secretary of State," or something like that. Did you—

Bennett: I don't think I was there, but I remember hearing that. No, that was always edgy.

Kondracke: How did Jack feel about Baker?

Bennett: Jack liked everybody, liked Baker, but he just thought Baker was wrong on stuff. With Jack it was never a bad feeling, it was just he doesn't understand, he doesn't see. So if he had a disagreement—I had the feeling that Baker was always, you know, there was always an

element of he's smarter and knows better and also territorial, you know. Jurisdiction, this is mine, not yours.

Kondracke: Going back a little earlier when you were Education Secretary, Kemp is the leader on Capitol Hill, and he is supporting Reagan basically on foreign policy, but there were occasions, on tax policy, on foreign policy and stuff like that that he got off the reservation even then. Do you recall any of that?

Bennett: No.

Kondracke: What did you do in the '88 campaign?

Bennett: Eighty-eight is New Orleans?

Kondracke: Yes, '88 is Kemp is running, Bush is running, [Robert J. "Bob"] Dole Dole was running.

Bennett: I was for Kemp. I can't remember what I did, what events I did. I was for Kemp, and thought he had a great debate with Bush.

Kondracke: That was Houston?

Bennett: Yes. He did, that was a good one, right? I think so, I remember. But we wanted Jack. We thought it'd be great. He'd be a great charismatic leader, great president. Actually, what I remember more was really working hard to get him on the ticket in New Orleans, before the announcement came.

Kondracke: What did you do?

Bennett: Just called a lot of people, everybody I could think of. Lobbied. I remember Elayne was working on it, I was working on it, and it was very disappointing that he didn't get it. And we had a dinner that night, about two dozen people, at Commander's Palace, maybe, and we were all waiting for Jack, and Jack came in late. It was, I think, the day [James Danforth "Dan"] Quayle was announced, and we were all kind of deflated. Before Jack came to see us he went into the kitchen, [laughs] and talked to everybody in the kitchen [unclear], and shook hands with everybody, and then he joined us. That was a big disappointment. I thought he'd be a great candidate. I was then asked to do one of the nominating speeches for Quayle, I did, and then later with Dole and Kemp, I was asked to give one of the nominating speeches for Kemp. Do you know the Dole story with me?

Kondracke: No.

Bennett: Dole wanted to do a speech.

Kondracke: This is what year?

Bennett: This is for '96. Dole wanted to give a speech, somebody persuaded Dole to give a speech on the culture. So he gave one at [20th Century] Fox Studios, and I wrote it, and a few other people worked on it, speechwriters.

Kondracke: Fox Studios in—

Bennett: In L.A. [Los Angeles]. But we had an idea that before that we should go to a movie, and the movie was *Independence Day*. Do you remember the movie?

Kondracke: I remember it well.

Bennett: So, we took Bob Dole to the movies. It was a little tension, because it was [Mary Elizabeth] Liddy [Dole]'s birthday, and she'd hoped they were going to have the day, but we said, "Nope, we're going to go to the movies." So I sat with candidate Dole and Elizabeth at the movie theater, and it was over, this is summer time, summer of '96. Huge crowd of journalists outside. Before we went out, Dole's campaign guy, Scott [W.] Reed, maybe, said, "Secretary, before we go out, you're the culture guy, what do we recommend the Senator should say?" I said, "Well, it's a great movie about America." I said, "Everybody's working together. We got a black guy and we got a Jewish guy, whatever, and we all come together, work together, and defeat the common enemy." He said, "Got it. Got it, Senator?" "Yes." The senator comes out and is asked, "What did you think of the movie?" He said, "Black, white, Jew, America." No conjunctions, no verbs, it was hilarious. Classic Bob Dole. So he says, "How about breakfast?" So we had breakfast. Then he said, "Who do you think I should have as my running mate?" I said, "Oh, I've been thinking of names. Somebody said [Donald L.] Don Nickles the other day," but I said, "But I think you should have Kemp." "Ah, I'm not going with Kemp." I said, "Why?" He said, "Ah, his ideas. I don't agree with his ideas. He's a great guy, but I don't agree with his ideas." I said, "What do you think?" He said, "What about you?" I said, "Me? And he said, "Yes, you." I said, "Why me?" He said, "Eastern, Catholic,

intellectual." I remember I said, "I'm so touched, I'm so moved. It's so personal." I said, "No, I'm not your guy." I said, "I can't do it." And I came back and told Jack, and I said, "What do you think?" And he said, "Oh, man, you're crazy. You ought to do it." I said, "No, I can't. I don't believe in it and I don't, you know, it's not my cup of tea. I'm not that excited about it. I don't think I'm the right guy. Besides, I wrote *The Book of Virtues*. And I remember we had that conversation. He said, "What's wrong with having written *The Book of Virtues*? I said, "Well, if you did everything I did in my life and you ran for president or vice president, and you hadn't written *The Book of Virtues* it would be fine, but if you'd done everything I'd done in my life, and write *The Book of Virtues*, you got a problem, because people think you're holding yourself out, and so any chink in the armor is going to look worse for the guy who seems to be preaching to the whole country." Jack says, "I still think you ought to do it." And then when Jack got the nod, I remember I said, "This is great, this is just great." He said, "Well," he said, "you should have gotten his first choice." Typical Jack.

Kondracke: How did you find out that he'd gotten the nomination?

Bennett: It was at the office, and I got a call from, who? Somebody. Jack, [William] Bill Dal Col, somebody, but it was the day of the announcement. It was a big deal, it was a big deal. By the way, I don't want to overstate it. I think Dole was asking about my interest, he wasn't offering it to me. I think he was fishing. But I wasn't interested. But it was typical of Jack.

Kondracke: Going back to the Cabinet days, what do you think Jack achieved as HUD secretary?

Bennett: Raised the profile of the office, obviously, to a degree that's never been there before, became a spokesman for enterprise zones, and ownership, and added dimension to public policy and for the Republican Party that is a place that has not been taken by anybody else since, of which we are now acutely aware after this election.

Kondracke: Did you work together with him on driving drug dealers out of public housing?

Bennett: Yes.

Kondracke: How did that go?

Bennett: We met with Camy [phonetic] in Chicago, and various people. I wasn't central to it, I'd say, but he would always invite me. He'd go off to Cabrini Green, or wherever he was going, and he'd invite me, and went on some visits, some trips, and then we compared notes, and we were very—we loved doing that, it was great. And he encouraged me on my visits, when I was Secretary of Education and went to schools, I remember this, I went to 120 schools. When I became drug czar, I decided to do the same thing. And it was Jack who said, "You need to go to public housing if you want to see the drug problem. You need to go to public housing." "Why?" I'll never forget he said, "There are no men there. That's where these guys go. It's all women and children. These guys can go and take advantage and just beat the crap out of people." And he said, "Good place for

you to go. Good place for you to go. You care about this problem, that's where you should go." So that was part of my education, thanks to Jack.

Kondracke: So he was frustrated in a lot of ways with the Bush administration. Did he share that with you?

Bennett: He was frustrated. He was also frustrating. Yes, he was. I mean the tax pledge was a big deal, and other things, other policy things. You know it was the guy who always had the better idea, and often was the better idea, about how to do it and how to present. You know he could be just brilliant, just dazzling. I give a good speech, but the best speeches I've seen in my lifetime by living people, two or three of them were given by Jack.

Kondracke: Which do you remember?

Bennett: I don't know. I don't know. Wrote them down. I have notes somewhere I can maybe find. I've also heard Jack give bad speeches. I've heard Jack give speeches that were nothing but naming everybody in the room, for God sakes, and he'd do that and Vin and I would say, "Stop, stop." There were many Jack Kemp moments like that. We had that—Empower America met in Chicago. You should get Vin to tell you this story. I can't remember the guy's name. I think it was [a relative of H. Wayne] Huizenga, and this guy said something about immigrants, and we need to close the borders, and Jack said, "What's your opinion?" I said, "Huizenga." And Jack said "Huizenga, Huizenga," and I'm not sure it's the right name, he just said it about nine times. Vin and I were up there on the panel,

and Vin said, "Shut up, Jack, get off it." And this was often a refrain of ours.

Kondracke: Was this in public, or—

Bennett: Sotto voce to me, Vin—

Kondracke: Oh, I see. But I mean was he saying it to the audience?

Bennett: Oh, yes, it's a dinner thing. "Huizenga, what are you? You're not Smith. You're Huizenga. You came from somewhere. Your family came from somewhere." And he was just berating this potential million-dollar donor to Empower. We never got the money, I don't think. But that was Jack. You know, never gave it a thought. I remember Vin afterwards, "We can only do these events if we can keep Jack under control. But since we can't keep Jack Kemp under control, maybe we shouldn't do these events."

Kondracke: To finish up on the Cabinet days, Dick Darman. He wrote in his book that the two conservatives in the Cabinet, you and Kemp, were the ones who were always asking for money. And so Jack seems to have had a lot of run-ins with—in fact Darman banned the word 'empowerment' from administration documents, which was a direct rebuttal to you guys, I think. So do you remember any of Jack's specific run-ins with Darman?

Bennett: I remember my run-ins with Darman, but I don't remember Jack's run-ins with Darman, but I'm not surprised, because Darman

was the architect, and he wanted his way, and he had a very clear and concise view of what he should do. I was—

Kondracke: It was all about money?

Bennett: At the end of the day it was, yes. Yes, I wanted more money for various things, but, I thought, you know, I'm a conservative, but this, I regarded the drug effort in those days as kind of an adjunct to the Defense Department, this a legitimate function of government, particularly the stuff we were doing in Latin America, which was having some great effect. So, no, I was locking horns with Darman all the time, and Jack and I would often sympathize with each other about what a tough-minded son-of-a-bitch he was. His son [William T.E. "Will" Darman] now works at Carlyle Group, and my son was there this summer. And his son was saying "My dad used to talk about his arguments with your dad and Jack Kemp and how much he enjoyed them." I didn't know he enjoyed them. Didn't know he enjoyed them. Good.

Kondracke: Okay, Empower America. How does it get hatched?

Bennett: I don't know. Jack called me up and asked if I wanted to be one of the principals, and he said Vin Weber's involved, and I'll get Jeane Kirkpatrick, and you do your thing, we'll do our thing, and it will be great. We'll be the counter-weight to what's going on, and important things for us to do in policy.

Kondracke: This is when?

Bennett: Ninety-three? Does that sound right? I think so.

Kondracke: Right after Clinton's inauguration.

Bennett: Right after Clinton, yes. And we'll be there, respectful disagreement, policy issues. There we were, you know, 1700 Pennsylvania Avenue. That's where we were in 9/11 [terrorist attacks]. He said it will be fun, be good, and I told you he said won't be much travel, won't be much fundraising, won't be many nights out, all of which were untrue, but it was good, and we had a good board, and we had smart people, and we had a lot of arguments, because these were argumentative people, [Malcolm S.] Steve Forbes [Jr.] and [Theodore J.] Ted Forstmann, people like that. I always regarded myself as a junior member, even though I was a full partner, because I didn't do, I didn't raise the money Jack raised. [E.] Floyd Kvamme raised the money; Ted Forstmann raised the money. But I felt I had a place there, certainly. We had great people there. We had great staff, young people, [Peter] Pete Wehner, Paul [D.] Ryan, lots of good people.

Kondracke: It was his idea?

Bennett: I think so. I think so. It might have been Vin's. You've done Vin, right? Vin would know. Vin would also be modest. But I think it was Jack's idea, yes. He was just very, very good at that, because if you're going to be in opposition, and you want to be listened to, and you want a hearing and you want to be able to get a hearing, even at the opposition White House, then you want to go about it the way Jack Kemp went about it. And I learned that from

him. And so we were able to contribute to the debate on things like NAFTA, and immigration policy and other things, where we were sometimes castigated by conservatives. But then again we were the conservatives in the Bush Cabinet, so it's funny roles.

Kondracke: What other issues did you take on?

Bennett: I took on, well, I did drug policy, I did mostly education policy, and that's where there was a fair amount of overlap with Jack, and then we got into what you might call cultural policy. There was a fairly famous visit we made to New York. I went with Joe Lieberman and [C.] Delores Tucker, and we went to see the guys at Time Warner about gangster rap and some of that stuff, and that became fairly high profile, criticisms of some of the music and some of the stuff that was coming out, and we gave out the Silver Sewer Award, contributions which brought down American culture. We gave it to "60 Minutes" for showing [Jacob] Jack Kevorkian killing somebody on television, and other things, and got a lot of attention because it was cultural stuff and it was Hollywood, and Hollywood vs. Washington, and became pretty big stuff around—

Kondracke: This is the era of the *Index of Leading Cultural Indicators* too?

Bennett: That's correct, I did that, thank you. I wrote that there, first time, and published it at—Empower didn't publish it; Heritage [Foundation] actually published it. It was a joint Heritage/Empower. But then Rush [H. Limbaugh III] read from it for weeks, and so it just, you know, three million copies of it. And people became very

interested in that. That's when I make the joke about drugs, sex, rock and roll, but these were big issues, and still are big issues.

Kondracke: And so what was Jack's output?

Bennett: Jack's?

Kondracke: Output.

Bennett: Oh, enterprise zones, economics, economic policy, the HUD stuff, but I think it was mostly economics—tax policy, growth, the pie, I mean it was classic Jack. That's what he did, that's what he did great.

Kondracke: But did he put out reports and products and stuff like that?

Bennett: Yes, he and [Lawrence A.] Larry Hunter and Ryan, later, lots of speeches, I think reports. Then Jack did a fair amount of stuff on the [Capitol] Hill. He was always Jack. He was still the Jack of Kemp-Roth.

Kondracke: Was the idea of this that you were going to be a think tank, or you were going to be a—

Bennett: No, we were a 501(c)4. We were an action tank, or something like that, policy, we can make policy recommendations, not endorse candidates, but come out strongly for policy. We weren't a

think tank so much as a recommendation of policy tank, which we did, all the time, on everything.

Kondracke: And what was your budget?

Bennett: Wasn't much. I was supposed to be paid, but I think most years I wasn't paid. I don't think Jack was paid. Staff was paid. I don't think Vin took anything, or Jeane took anything. Jeane shared time with AEI [American Enterprise Institute], I shared time with Heritage.

Kondracke: Was she ever there? Did she have an office?

Bennett: Rarely, rarely. But she was involved. She wasn't there during the days, but she came to evening events and functions and fundraisers, and she was present. And then we took fairly high profile on things like, oh, what's it called? Permanent normal trade relations [PNTR], where I dissented from the group. Had my own reasons.

Kondracke: Jack was for—

Bennett: Yes. Big letter that was signed by Jack, Vin, Jeane, board members, [Donald H.] Don Rumsfeld, I mean it was a real illustrious board, and others, and that was a very typical kind of Empower America thing to do.

Kondracke: This was a free trade thing?

Bennett: Right, and it was big names and high profile, and here's where we are, here's where we're with the Clinton Administration, here's where we're not. It was actually, in retrospect, when it was started I did it for friendship. I thought Jack asked me. I'll do it. Elayne said, "Do it." But it was actually a good idea, not a bad thing. We weren't knee jerk opposed to everything that came out of the White House, the other party. You measured it and evaluated it, and we were treated pretty nice and respectfully by that White House. And I also remember the days of—you'll remember this, being Morton Kondracke—this was the days of the DLC [Democratic Leadership Council]. There was a DLC, and if you took the difference between the DLC and Empower America on issues, often there wasn't a lot of light.

Kondracke: Did the organization work that you would agree on what you were going to do and then put out a press release, somebody would—

Bennett: Yes, somebody had to lead, and then they'd pass it around. I remember Jack would have a paper. Maybe I couldn't understand it, but he'd want my signature on it so I'd have Ryan or Pete Wahner or somebody explain it, and then if it was important for me to say yes and I understood it and was comfortable enough, I would. If I didn't I'd pass. But on the big things, you know, when the big things were things like that, normal trade relations, Prop 187, NAFTA, you know, we had a lot of discussion and debate.

Kondracke: And how long did it last? How long did it go?

Bennett: It sort of morphed into that Freedom Works thing, right? I want to say five years. Is that right? I think so.

Kondracke: Through Clinton, or not all the way through Clinton? Where was Jack, in '96, so Clinton's inaugurated in '93, Jack runs for vice president in '96. Was he still in Empower America after that?

Bennett: Yes, I think so.

Kondracke: You said that you were there in 9/11.

Bennett: Yes.

Kondracke: 2011.

Bennett: 2001.

Kondracke: I mean 2001.

Bennett: Right. Yes, I was.

Kondracke: And was he?

Bennett: Yes, I guess so. Sure, so sure it lasted.

Kondracke: Were you actually in the office when the planes hit?

Bennett: No, I was down the street, two blocks away doing a videotape on something else, and then I came back to the office, and it was when the Pentagon was being hit.

Kondracke: Jack was there?

Bennett: I don't think so. It was just chaos. I remember getting to 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, seeing the White House just emptying, so it was late morning. Then there were rumors the State Department's been bombed, everything's been bombed. Capitol's been bombed, people panicking. Yes, you're absolutely right, 2001. So I guess I was there until probably 2002 or 2003. I guess it lasted longer than eight years.

Kondracke: And Jack was there the whole way?

Bennett: But it became—sometimes it was a more fulltime affiliation than other times. If we had the money or if you had to go get your money by giving speeches, which I was doing, or being at Heritage. Then you spent more time there and you just dropped in once a week.

Kondracke: I take it that you were sort of independent operators, you basically paid your way by making speeches and writing your books, and Jack did his by making speeches, Washington Speakers Bureau or something like that.

Bennett: That's right. There wasn't much reason after Bush was elected for Empower America, because it was established to be a responsible voice of opposition.

Kondracke: Do you remember any fights with Clinton?

Bennett: Well, no.

Kondracke: So who raised the money?

Bennett: Jack and the board.

Kondracke: And who put the board together?

Bennett: Jack. Floyd Kvamme was our chairman, Forstmann was chairman.

Kondracke: Who's Floyd Kvamme?

Bennett: Floyd Kvamme's one of the founding chairmen of Kleiner-Perkins [Caufield & Byers venture capital firm]. And the famous partner is the Democrat [L.] John Dorr, and Floyd is the Republican. He gave lots of money to Empower. [Nicholas C.] Nick Forstmann gave a lot of money to Empower, and he and Jack were constantly arguing, fighting.

Kondracke: Over?

Bennett: Everything. Everything. I don't know.

Kondracke: Organizational?

Bennett: Organizational, policy, everything. Forstmann just liked to argue. And he'd have these dinners in New York. We'd go up to where he'd have Julian [H.] Robertson [Jr.] and some of these other huge investor venture fund, what's the word I'm looking for?

Kondracke: Private equity, hedge funds

Bennett: Yes, big guys, that's right. Hedge funds, right. Dinners and we would sing our song, try to get support. Jack was always the lead.

Kondracke: Because he wasn't a great fundraiser when he was trying to raise money for his own political campaign.

Bennett: No.

Kondracke: Was he better at Empower America?

Bennett: Yes, he was better working to pay the staff and other people. He was pretty good. But the chairmen, when they took the job, knew that was a big part of their job.

Kondracke: This was Vin.

Bennett: The various chairman of the board, Forbes, Forstmann, Kvamme.

Kondracke: And what was Vin's role?

Bennett: Peace keeper, intermediary. I think I quit three or four times, and Vin talked me back off the ledge. Jack would call me. I don't know why I quit. Just some reason or other. But Jack was forever inviting people to be fellows, to be partners, to be on the board and to this, and you can work with Bill Bennett. No, I don't want to work with him. But that was Jack.

Kondracke: Who else was around? Everybody knows about Pete Wahner, who was your assistant, right? Your chief assistant.

Bennett: Yes, he was kind of to me what Paul was to Jack, yes.

Kondracke: For how long? For how long was Paul Ryan there?

Bennett: I want to say two years, we overlapped for two years, maybe three. But then Paul and I became pretty good friends afterwards because of some common interests. Pete was there a long time, until he went to the Bush White House with Karl [C.] Rove and [Michael J.] Gerson. He went in 2000. And Dal Col, [J.] David Kuo, who wrote that book about Bush and the religion, which damned him with the conservatives forever. Who else was there? I can't remember.

Kondracke: You were referring to the people of light and the people of darkness. Supposedly your big debate with Jack intellectually was over poverty, supposedly, this is what I've heard. In other words he was kind of an economic determinist and you were more a culture person and so his notion was if you gave the right incentives, they would do right in their lives, and you said no, that's too simple?

Bennett: That's pretty close, that's pretty close. I thought—

Kondracke: Do you remember any specific or was this ongoing?

Bennett: It was ongoing. It was ongoing. I mean Jack would say that ownership itself will transform, and I said it can't transform character. He said when a guy has never had anything, and he gets something, he has a chance then. I'd say he has a chance, but if the right values haven't in some ways been inculcated in him, it could happen, but it's miraculous. And why can't we just agree that you give people opportunity, but you also need instruction, habits, Aristotle. He'd say fine, but you can't wait. So this was the argument that went on and on with us. I thought he was a bit, and I used to say, "You're just a Marxist. You're a Marxist, a good guy Marxist. You just think it's all about opportunity and enterprise and giving people a chance, and I'm for that, but if people have the chance but don't have the wherewithal to take full advantage of the chance, they're going to blow it. They'll default on their loans—I wasn't that smart—they'll blow it, they'll wreck their property. So that was the ongoing debate. And Jack was prepared to concede that but always wanted to say it was complicated, but that you could never find out what was in people unless you gave them that opportunity. Fair enough. Look, I said, school choice was a very good place for us to meet, because if you're for school choice, in some ways you're more Kempian than Bennettian, I don't know if I can say that. You're for everybody having it. And that means some people won't make the right choice.

Kondracke: And you agreed on school choice.

Bennett: Yes, yes.

Kondracke: Was he active on school choice?

Bennett: Yes, he was. Certainly totally, fully supportive. He said, "You know, by your thesis people aren't smart enough to do the right thing." I remember I had the hearing when I was Secretary of Education with [Augustus F.] Gus Hawkins, (Remember Augustus Hawkins who was chairman of the committee [House Education and Labor Committee])? "You know, the people in your L.A. district should have the opportunity to choose their schools." And he said, "A lot of the people in my district aren't smart enough to make that choice." I said, "They're smart enough to choose you." Funny moment. Jack loved that story, and he said, "See, that's your view, they're not smart enough." And I said "No. They are. This is about their kids, and they will listen to other people who inform themselves and follow them, and this is the choice you should give people. Certainly better than the current position. There's no reason we can't try to educate people about what choices are the best choices to make too." You know Jack always talked about the fish, and teaching a man how to fish. Give a man a fish. Teach a man how to fish. I said, "Teaching him how to fish is more than teaching him how to fish. It's teaching him to be patient and to tie things right, and to sit in the boat all day and have perseverance, the virtues." And I think Jack was somewhat persuaded, but never fully. And I was never fully persuaded of the transformation that takes place just with opportunity. I said I've seen too many people have the opportunity and blow it. So that was our ongoing debate.

Kondracke: So were these bull sessions, or were these around specific issues?

Bennett: They were both. They were bull sessions, they were constant, they were during football games, when we were traveling together, and they were on panels on policy debates, on everything we did. And Jack would talk and say, "I know Bill Bennett is going to jump me know, but here's what I believe." And I'd say, "I know Kemp is going to object here." We did the same thing publicly that we did privately.

Kondracke: What were his work habits like when he was there?

Bennett: I don't know. Multitasking. I remember being in Philadelphia with him at the convention and we went out to dinner, and a phone started ringing, and he didn't know, he had four of them. The whole person was ringing. And he'd be carrying on a conversation. I marveled at that because I can't do that. And people would come out and say, "You've got to meet my friend Bill Bennett." I don't know, I don't know how he worked, but he worked, he was always working. I mean I know he worked on planes, and he'd just have stacks of stuff and he'd just go through it and make notes, longhand writing notes.

Kondracke: Did you do any foreign travel together?

Bennett: Nope. Nope. I did a lot of foreign travel in the drug czar job, but not with Jack. That was one difference in the jobs.

Kondracke: So tell me about you and Joanne and Elayne and Jack did stuff together. What did you do besides watch football?

Bennett: Pretty much it. His house on Sunday, always his house. Sit around the pool. Well, Jack did bring a formative moment in my kids' development. Jeff played for the [Philadelphia] Eagles. Then they played the [Washington] Redskins here, and Jeff got off the bench and played in the game and got sacked about 15 times. We watched the game on TV. Two hours later the doorbell rang and it was Jack and Jeff at the door, and my boys then, perfect age, like fourteen and nine, and there was Jack Kemp and Jeff Kemp who we just say on TV, and it was just very generous of him to do that. Typical, typical kind of thing. But it was his house, it was his castle, and we were almost always there. If he came to our house he was in and out fast. He wanted to get to his house, his chair, his TV, his controls.

Kondracke: Did you go to Vail?

Bennett: Yes. Yes, a couple times. We had Empower stuff there. We didn't go to ski, we're not skiers, but we went to Vail for Empower stuff, because we did the same show out there.

Kondracke: Okay. So where in conservatism, in the history of American conservatism does Jack Kemp fit?

Bennett: Well, very much in the Reagan tradition, if we can say that's a tradition. The sunny brand of conservatism. Optimistic, forward-looking, which we've never been in more need than now. We never

needed Jack Kemp than we do now and that spirit. Forward-looking, what did he called us, 'progressive conservatives,' something like that.

Kondracke: Bleeding heart too.

Bennett: Bleeding heart conservatives, progressive conservatives.

Kondracke: Big government conservatives.

Bennett: No.

Kondracke: No?

Bennett: Did he say that? Not from me.

Kondracke: No, but he believed in a big HUD.

Bennett: Yes, he did believe in a big HUD. I believed in a big office of national gun control policy. But good-hearted, capacious, optimistic, encouraging, enabling, empowering. That's where he is.

Kondracke: So this is Reagan. It's not Goldwater, it's not Russell [A.] Kirk, it's not—

Bennett: Right.

Kondracke: Was he a neo-conservative do you think?

Bennett: Sympathetic to neo-conservatism.

Kondracke: Irving Kristol was one of his mentors.

Bennett: Oh, one of his godfathers, but again, didn't have that fundamental view of man's flawed nature. I just always said, "Jack, you're just this short of utopianism, the kind of stuff the left does, which gets us in so much trouble." He said "No, no, no, no, no. I'll never get there, don't believe in that."

Kondracke: Did you ever talk to him about Christian Science and the influence that that had?

Bennett: No. Did it have an influence on him?

Kondracke: He was a Christian Scientist as a kid.

Bennett: As a kid.

Kondracke: And some people think that he never stopped being.

Bennett: Yes, well, maybe.

Kondracke: So you regard him as an intellectual.

Bennett: Yes. First rate. Not the normal type, but he could parse an idea, fast. He'd come in and say, "What is this, what does this mean?" And I'd explain it as best I could. He was fast. Once he got it he wanted to move on to something else. He was impatient, and you know, certain definitions of intellectual require a certain scholarly

disposition or temperament, which he did not have. He had the temperament of an activist and a doer. But yes, I regard him as an intellectual, sure. Very little he couldn't grasp. Except the fundamental nature of man. [laughter]

Kondracke: And obviously you think he was smart.

Bennett: Yes, you bet. And so good and so generous. First call I got when that gambling story hit on me was Jack. And it was just a call of friendship. "Come on out, we'll have dinner." That was very sweet, very Jack.

Kondracke: What was your relationship with him post-Empower America?

Bennett: Oh, we were still close friends. More the house and visits, and saw him less frequently. But probably as much through Elayne and Joanne. She still goes. She'll be going this Friday, the Friday Group. And some relationship with the kids. I developed I think a pretty good friendship with Jeff and went out there to speak for his group a couple times. In some ways Jeff's work was closer to my work, you know? About the culture front, the values. And then with Jimmy, somewhere.

Kondracke: Some people describe Joanne as the ground of Jack's, that she grounded him.

Bennett: I think that's right.

Kondracke: What does that mean?

Bennett: Diogenes [of Sinope], the philosopher who was looking for an honest man. They say he was always looking this way. There were a lot of potholes. He had a guy around with a lantern who was making sure he didn't step in them. Joanne. "Jack, you can't do that because you're going to be in Philadelphia, Jack." "Jack, do you want to say goodbye to the guests who are leaving?" She looked out for him in all those ways, and grounded him, yes. His anchor.

Kondracke: What do you think that his example should teach the contemporary political operators, both Democrats and Republicans, but Republicans especially.

Bennett: I think it's the Republicans especially. I think his moment is now. He had a moment, of course, with Kemp-Roth and other things. But I think his moment is now and the Party very much needs to rediscover Jack Kemp and the spirit of Jack Kemp. There've been things written about Paul, that he's the natural heir to Jack. Personality's very different, very different. But there are certainly some similarities. There's a sunniness, there's an optimism there. But never has the Party needed what Jack is, stood for, more than it does now. But I think that even though it's hard to evaluate a person through the present in terms of what they'll be in the future, I think that stature, he will maintain that stature. Perhaps he will be needed less, perhaps, I hope, in the future, because we have other people to step up. But I think he'll be regarded as one of the major conservative figures of the twentieth century.

Kondracke: What was his opinion of George W. Bush as president?

Bennett: I don't know.

Kondracke: I've heard that he was against the Iraq war, second Iraq war.

Bennett: Yes, I think he probably was. I think he probably was, yes.

Kondracke: Why?

Bennett: He was not a war guy, you know? For all the reasons we've talked about.

Kondracke: He was a hawk in the Cold War days, and—

Bennett: Evil Empire. Believed that. I don't know. I think that's right though. My memory is that's right.

Kondracke: How should he be remembered in history? Final question. If I've forgotten anything that you think people ought to know, tell me.

Bennett: Great, smart, capacious, optimistic, optimistic about the future, deeply in love with the country, and saw America as just one big promise and opportunity for everybody, and a naturally inclusive guy. There's a great, I should put a note up on it. One of my favorite quotes is from [Jeremy] Bentham. And we have it at the house and I brought it to the office. Elayne wants it back at the house. Bentham says, "The way to put people at ease is to make them comfortable.

The best way to make them comfortable is to appear to like them. The best way to appear to like them is actually to like them.” And I struggle with that because sometimes I don’t. [laughs] That’s the bad side of my view of the world. Jack actually liked them, actually liked them. When he broke into my office with somebody I wasn’t expecting to see, I wasn’t usually particularly pleased because I was doing something. Turned out to be a super ballplayer, I overcame it, it was okay. When I’d burst into his office with anybody, everybody, he was thrilled to see them. And that’s a gift, that’s a human gift, and great.

Kondracke: Thank you.

Bennett: Thank you.