JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

JOHN W. BUCKLEY

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Interviewer

Morton Kondracke

JACK KEMP FOUNDATION
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[This transcript audit-edited by Brien R. Williams.]

Morton Kondracke: This is a Jack Kemp oral history project interview with John Buckley who was Jack Kemp's press secretary from 1985 to 1988, and later communications director for the [Robert J.] Bob Dole for President campaign, where Jack Kemp was the vice presidential candidate. Today is April 24, 2012, we're at John Buckley's office at the Harbour Group in Washington, DC and I'm Morton Kondracke. John, thank you very much for doing this.

John Buckley: Thank you, Mort.

Kondracke: When you think about Jack Kamp, what immediately comes to mind?

Buckley: From his personality, an exuberant, expansive, tolerant, engaging, fun guy. In terms of his accomplishments, he was someone who used the Archimedean metaphor of 'give me a place to stand and I can move the world,' and from a little tiny Congressional district in Buffalo, New York he was able to change tax policy in the United States, have an enormous impact on the [Ronald W.] Reagan administration. He was someone who had an enormous impact unfortunately long since overtaken by events, but an enormous impact on the Republican Party that I'm very sad is not the guiding spirit for the Party today.

Kondracke: In what way has the Republican Party moved away from Jack Kemp?

Buckley: I think Jack was a big tent Republican. He was a tolerant Republican who believed that it really was as important to have in the Party voices from a broad spectrum as it was to have a strong conservative core. He also was someone who reached out to African-Americans and Latinos and others, which is something that the Republican Party in my view pays lip service to but doesn't actually do today.

Kondracke: I know that you had many standout personal experiences with him, but what are among the most outstanding, and if you can think of any you didn't bring up in that staff symposium that would be good.

Buckley: My single favorite memory of Jack was in, I believe, 1986, when [C.] Trent Lott had Jack down to Jackson, Mississippi for a Trent Lott fundraiser. Jack was kind of the star attraction to get some of Trent's biggest donors in Mississippi to appear at a fundraising event and write checks, and on the way to the event Trent leaned over to Jack and said, "Now Jack, remember this is Mississippi and it's wonderful that in Iowa you talk about broadening the Party and being a party that black folks join, and that's all great for Iowa but just remember you're in Mississippi here and maybe you should go soft on that." And Jack listened to him as Jack would do, and you could see mischief in Jack's eyes, and of course he went into the event and talked for 45 minutes about, "This has got to be the party that fulfills Mr. [Abraham] Lincoln's beliefs on reaching out to African-Americans, and we've got to be [the] inclusive civil rights party, and you could see Trent just going, his face just was ashen as Jack did that, and it was so great, because there was a perversity to Jack that was a wonderful

character trait of his, that if people told him "This is what you have to do," he in some cases like would do the exact opposite, just because that's what he believed in. So, I have many happy memories of Jack. The campaign between '85 and 88 was just one set of tableaux of incredible events, but the highlights for me were when Jack stood up and did things that were unexpected.

Kondracke: Any other examples?

Buckley: I think that Jack going against the Reagan administration at certain key moments was an example of him doing what he really believed in, and he was not a go along to get along type of guy. There was no way to silence Jack on issues that he wanted to speak up on. So it may have been from a historical standpoint a mistake for Jack to have been opposed to what Ronald Reagan was doing in Reykjavík in negotiating with [Mikhail S.] Gorbachev on the reduction in strategic arms and things like that, but the fact that he actually did that, not for political advantage, because in many ways it was a mistake to have gone against Ronald Reagan. The fact that he stood up to do that was Jack at his absolute best. It's what he believed in.

Kondracke: You told another story at the symposium about Bob Jones University. What was that?

Buckley: That was an example where Jack was warned when he arrived at Bob Jones University, I can't remember the precise set of circumstances of Pope John Paul [II]'s visit to the United States and how arriving at Bob Jones University whether the pope had just been in the United States or whether the pope was going to the United

States, but it was once again it was a situation where Jack was warned, "Whatever you do, don't say nice things about Catholics." And Jack spoke at Bob Jones University about how great it was that Pope John Paul II either was coming to the United States or had just been in the United States, and again, there was like a perversity to if you tell him don't do that and he thinks it's something that he ought to do he'll do it.

Kondracke: So besides perversity, what do you think were his outstanding character traits?

Buckley: Jack had a huge heart and he was an empathetic human being. I think that a lot of the influence in Jack's life came from his mother, and the description that he always gave of his mother was of someone who was empathetic to others. It was why growing up, even though Jack was a Christian, growing up in a Jewish neighborhood in Los Angeles had a profound effect on him, and why he was so comfortable with people who were not like him. The only people he was not empathetic towards were the people who didn't like football, as far as I could tell. So he had a tremendous heart, which, when you consider what the flaws are in the Republican Party today, you could use more people like Jack Kemp in the Republican Party. He also was someone who had a deep intellectual curiosity. The fact that Jack dove into the books that he dove into as a football player so that he could be an intellectual leader of the Republican Party in his Congressional days is a pretty extraordinary thing. The Republican Party was at the time that Jack was engaged in running for office, was still a party that had a representation of the East Coast elite. There were a lot of people who were much better educated than Jack, and

yet it was Jack who was an intellectual leader. So head and heart were really important for him.

Kondracke: Did you talk to him about books?

Buckley: I talked to him about books all the time. Now I was often intimidated by Jack's knowledge of things. He was so much better read than I was in some of the seminal texts of the Conservative Movement, and I came out of an intellectual family. I'm a very well read person, but Jack was a font of knowledge of things I hadn't read. So we talked about books all the time. And of course nothing got Jack more interested than abstract ideas that emanated from seminal texts that he'd read.

Kondracke: Any particular?

Buckley: [Friedrich] Hayek and [Ludwig] von Mises and even Jacques Rueff and others of the leaders of the gold standard movement were really important to him. He loved talking about William F. Buckley [Jr.] and Barry [M.] Goldwater and the books that I had read, but in terms of his intellect and the things he had dug deeply into, he'd gone places that my reading had never taken me.

Kondracke: Did you go there?

Buckley: Yes, to a limited extent. We found common ground on history, because Jack had read all of the biographies of [Winston] Churchill, and he had read deeply about the United States in the period leading up to World War II and had gleaned great lessons from

it, so there was a lot that we had in common there that we could talk about. On economic theory, less so, but I caught up to the extent that I could, and of course I'd worked for [Lewis E.] Lew Lehrman for two important years prior to coming to Washington and working for the Reagan/Bush campaign. So the books that Jack invoked and cited were not unfamiliar to me. It's just that my reading was less focused on the economic policy and more focused on history.

Kondracke: Reading Kemp's speeches, you do not see a lot of quotes from—

Buckley: Hayek or—

Kondracke: Or actually from anybody. You had references and surely "the party of Lincoln" and all that, but specific references, and I don't know whether in most cases they're put in by speechwriters, but for somebody who was as well read as he was, there doesn't seem to be a lot of reference to them.

Buckley: No, he was much more likely to invoke Lincoln, religious figures. Surely the only person who's ever campaigned in New Hampshire and quoted Moses Maimonides, you know, but that's true. The thing about Jack's speeches though, even though there were speechwriters involved, for the most part speechwriters were quoting back to Jack things that Jack had formulated. I assume that that's something relatively in common with Ronald Reagan, where speechwriters were quoting back things that Ronald Reagan had scrawled on cards 15 years before, which was why the speeches were often so authentic. Jack was hard to write speeches for because he

was a natural speaker, and you know Dennis [E.] Teti and others, John [D.] Mueller, who wrote speeches for Jack, often the starting point was what Jack had already said.

Kondracke: Did you when you were talking about his family ever have a discussion with him about Christian Science, because he was brought up a Christian Scientist.

Buckley: Christian Science was a sensitive topic for Jack, and it was something where I think he saw it as a political vulnerability. His core religious beliefs emanated from Christian Science but they were filtered through his public practice of Presbyterianism, which of course was the Kemp family religion. Jack and Joanne and the kids were Presbyterians, or practiced Presbyterianism. But Jack's Christian Science was something that I think he felt was vulnerability and he needed to suppress. I'll give you a perennial Kemp staff concern. Jack had skin issues. His face often broke out in sort of blotches that peeled, and it was the kind of thing where virtually anybody, especially somebody in the public eye as much as he was, would have gone to a dermatologist and just dealt with, and we could never get him to deal with it. And at a certain point Sharon Zelaska and Mary Brunett [Cannon] and I just figured out he's not going to go, because at his core he's a Christian Scientist, and he's not going to go to a doctor for something as trivial as the fact that his forehead was breaking out. And so I think it was like a tension within Jack, his Christian Science background. Mary Brunett once—I may be garbling this but I think it's right—completely by accident, saw Jack going into a Christian Science reading room in Washington, on 16th Street, just by accident. She drove by and saw him there, and it was like, wow, he's going to a

Christian Science reading room, but it's not something you could ever really get him to talk about. There was a *New York Times* reporter named Kit Seeley, Katharine Q. Seeley was her byline, and she was a great-niece, or great-granddaughter of Mary Baker Eddy, and she thought that this was something that would be interesting for Jack to talk about and so she brought it up on the campaign plane, and he just like clammed up. He wouldn't talk about it. I think he very much was a Christian Scientist and he saw it as a vulnerability that he needed to just stay away from.

Kondracke: Because it would turn off Evangelical Christians, or—

Buckley: Because it was viewed as a, probably not dissimilar from [Willard] Mitt Romney today not wanting to be drawn in on a discussion of Mormonism, because even though Mormons view it as a Christian religion, there are enough conservative Christian voters who see it in other terms.

Kondracke: One last question about Christian Science. There is an eternal positive aspect to Christian Science, so I wonder, and everyone describes him as an optimist—

Buckley: As an optimist and a perennial optimist, yes. Again, I don't really have a clear picture in my mind of Jack's father. I've got a pretty clear picture in my mind of Jack's mother and her influence on him, and I think there was an aspect of the optimism tied up with Christian Science, tied up with faith, tied up with a belief in, if not predestination, a belief that your life was fated to bringing you to positive outcomes if you let them happen. So Jack's most oft-cited

reference to his mother publicly was "No door closes but another one opens." You know, that whatever happens, people would talk to him about what happens if you don't get elected president, and most politicians would completely stay away from that and stay on, "I don't tend on losing," and "I'm not talking about—" But Jack would actually engage on that, and "If I don't get elected president, something good will happen," something else will happen, and that was something he took from his mother and I think is tied into her Christian Science philosophy.

Kondracke: His mother was a very well educated woman, and yet he was a physical education major, and I wonder if he sort of felt bad about that.

Buckley: You know, Jack was seldom defensive, seldom intimidated. I can tell you about I think literally the one time I ever saw Jack intimidated. I'll tell you that in just a second. But he was a little defensive about his physical education major, and he would make clear that a P.E. degree from Occidental, which is a terrific college that President [Barack H.] Obama went to for some time, and is a first-rate private college, Jack would always say, "A P.E. major at Occidental was like a biology major. It was scientific, it wasn't just teaching you how to be a coach, it was teaching you actually a lot about the human body," but he'd say it kind of defensively. He wasn't terribly defensive, he was charming about the fact that he was a football player who was an intellectual. He wasn't defensive about that. But he was a little defensive about his P.E. degree.

Kondracke: His mother?

Buckley: I don't think—

Kondracke: You were going to tell a story about what he said about—

Buckley: I was going to tell you a story about his being intimidated. I went with Jack to Number 10 Downing Street, and we met with Margaret [H.] Thatcher. I went with him to visit Prime Minister [Yasuhiro] Nakasone. He met with Helmut [J.H.] Kohl. He was never intimidated by other politicians or power. The one time I ever saw him intimidated was when my uncle Bill invited him to speak over at dinner, to the editors of *National Review*, and it was at Bill's apartment in New York, and nothing could have been set up better for Jack to succeed in than that, because everybody was rooting for him and the people who were there loved him. But he was intimidated, I think, to be in close quarters in a social setting by people he viewed as intellectual as the editors of *National Review*. It was weird, it was like one of those situations where he should have just, to use a baseball metaphor, hit it out of the park, and it was like the only time I ever saw him intimidated.

Kondracke: What triggered that?

Buckley: I think it was that he was intimidated a little bit being in Bill Buckley's apartment, intimidated a little bit by [Patricia T.] Pat Buckley and her sort of being the hostess of the event, but then having the array of editors, who were no more impressive than the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board, right? And he was never intimidated by them. As you know, he was not really intimidated by journalists, but there it

was just a combination of factors that I saw him kind of physically shrink a little bit, and it was odd.

Kondracke: So he clammed up?

Buckley: He had to be drawn out, as opposed to just, you know normally with Jack you wound him up and he went.

Kondracke: So what memories do you have, since you were referring to it, of his engagement with Margaret Thatcher or any of these world leaders?

Buckley: Jack would never put it in these terms, because he was a remarkably psychologically healthy politician who really did not have either an ego or the messianic sensibility that a lot of guys who run for president ultimately have and have to have. But he was a world historical figure and he knew it, you know, he knew it. And so he could go as a former football player and a representative of a little tiny district in western New York, and sit down with Margaret Thatcher, and they could exist on the level of the fomentation of conservative ideas in a way that he was completely comfortable. So with Nakasone there was a language issue and translators, and they would talk more about trade policy and things like that. In Korea, I didn't go in with him when he met with the president of Korea, but that was more of a discussion on a narrow subset of issues. Going in to meet, if I recall correctly he didn't get to meet with [François M.A.M.] Mitterrand, but he met with Jacques Attali, his chief of staff. He could go in and be intellectually combative with a socialist politician from France without any sense of intimidation, because everything was waged on the plain

of ideas, and he was really comfortable with that in a way that was remarkable given that he was a P.E. major and a professional football player before he was a politician.

Kondracke: So what specifically do you remember about his conversation with Margaret Thatcher?

Buckley: With Thatcher, the on-the-record part, I was not allowed to take notes. I was told ahead of time by one of her aides, it was okay to be there but I could not take notes. But there was clearly an on-the-record and off-the-record part of the conversation, and the on-the-record part of the conversation with her was a celebration of what conservative ideas were doing in both countries, and a celebration of Reaganism and Thatcherism as related principles. And then the off-the-record part was Margaret Thatcher being incredibly well informed on how things were going in the United States with, even at that stage, in '86, the belief that George [H.W.] Bush was the likely nominee and her being somewhat despairing of the notion that Bush would be the heir to Reagan, would be the nominee. So she was very pro-Jack. "By God you've got to win because our ideas depend on your winning." And she was very dismissive of the idea of George Bush being the nominee. Sort of, "You have to stop him from being the nominee." So she was very positive on Jack, but also pretty realistic that he was a long-shot candidate.

Kondracke: Any other memories of foreign leader encounters?

Buckley: Interactions? No, not that comes to mind.

Kondracke: Okay, back to the subject here, or the train of thought. When did you first meet Jack Kemp?

Buckley: I first met Jack when I worked for Lew Lehrman, and the Lehrman campaign was very well telegraphed and signaled that Lew was going to run for governor of New York, but Jack had a problem in that the comptroller of the State of New York, whose name I just lost—

Kondracke: [Edward V. "Ned"] Regan.

Buckley: Ned Regan, was a Buffalo politician, he was an Erie County politician. So Jack had to stay neutral in the period leading up to '82. Then Ned Regan got out of the race mostly because he was intimidated by Lehrman's money, that he couldn't win the nomination. So he got of the race in January of '82 and it took a couple of months for Jack to endorse. He didn't endorse right away, but then it was a big deal when Jack was going to endorse Lew, and so we went up to Buffalo where Jack endorsed Lew, and I met him then, and it was viewed that Jack's not endorsing Lew early was like either a betrayal on the one hand or not a profile in courage. That it took so long for him to do it. On the other hand, realistically speaking Jack's base was his Congressional district, and for him to have gone against an Erie County politician like Ned Regan would have been silly, so there were sort of unrealistic expectations on the Lehrman side. But Jack was a dominating figure in Republican politics in New York. And I remember meeting him and liking him, but noticing right off the bat that his attention span was very short, so he could sort of be prepared for what he had to say about Lew, we briefed him on "This would be most helpful for you to say," but the whole thing was just sort of a quick

surface connection. I then ran into Jack several times on the campaign trail, but it was a situation where there was tension between Lew and Jack for who was the dominant politician at any given time. At the Republican Convention that summer, on the campaign trail in the fall, but still Jack was doing everything he could to get Lew elected. Then I went to work for Ronald Reagan in late '83 through the election, and when the election was over, I was in a fortunate position having been the chief spokesman for the Reagan/Bush campaign in '84, [James] Jim Lake was the press secretary, but the guy was like on the phone all day long speaking on behalf of the campaign was me, and there was actually a competition for my services between the vice president's staff and the people trying to gear up for Jack. For me it was like a really easy call. I wanted to work for Jack because he was from New York State, I viewed him as the real conservative, and I really liked the idea of going to work for the plucky upstart, not for the guy who was the natural frontrunner. I just never took to George Bush. As it turns out, my father died on December 1, 1984, right after the election, and I was told "Jack has a window in his calendar to meet with you," like two days later, and so literally I went from my father's funeral, rushed to get to a train, took the train down to Washington to meet with Jack, and I was like kind of not at my best, but had a great interview with Jack and with Dave Hoppe, and like a day later was told by Charlie Black, "He's going to hire you." It was fantastic. So I had a commitment to the Reagan inaugural campaign to Jim Lake, to helping staff the inaugural campaign, so I didn't actually go to work for Jack until two or three days after the inauguration at the State of the Union address was my first day. And it was instant bonding with Jack. We hit the road, I got my Congressional pass and immediately was flying with Jack to New

Hampshire, and our relationship was based more on the fact that I was the staff aide who was sitting next to him on airplanes and in car rides in New Hampshire and Iowa and every place else and we just hit it off.

Kondracke: So what was the conversation like in December of '84 in your first interview? Was it a campaign discussion?

Buckley: Yes. It was very much a what do I need to do to run for president from my position that I'm in? So he was publicly coy about whether he was going to run for president, but he was privately all in. I had people who would say to me, "He's never going to run for president. He could have run in '80 and he didn't do it. Jack doesn't run for the big offices." He didn't run for the Senate against Jacob [K.] Javits, he didn't run for governor, he didn't run for president in '80, and it was hard for me to convey how determined to me he was that he was going to run for president. Everything was being set up to build a presidential campaign staff and hire the right people, and my being brought in was because I was a campaign press secretary. I had sort of the double advantage I think in Jack's view of I came out of New York politics, so I understood New York politics, although I didn't understand the geography of his Congressional district as well I should, but I certainly understood New York politics, and then I'd just come fresh off the Reagan/Bush campaign, so I was current with the reporters who were covering national politics and current with all of the issues from the presidential campaign. But Jack in that first conversation was all in. No question in my mind. He was running for president, he needed somebody who could help him do that, but he also needed somebody who could be his Congressional press secretary, but he was very clear to me that he saw Mary Brunett and

me as a one-two tandem team that could handle both Buffalo and the district and could handle the campaign.

Kondracke: Did you actually ever get offered a job by the Bush people?

Buckley: No. I went through this sort of Kabuki dance where at the last week of the campaign I was taken on the plane on Air Force II with the vice president. I was given one-on-one face time with the vice president, not in the context of a job, but [Peter B.] Pete Teeley was making it clear to me he wasn't going to be there. He was not going to be the press secretary for very much longer. Then when the campaign was over I was to go and sit down with Larry [M.] Speakes, because Larry was going to have a role in sort of helping the vice president choose who would work inside the White House with presidential and vice presidential communications operations. So all these things were in play. And then I met with Jack on, I'm going to say December 5, I was offered the job by Jack, and I took it. So I took myself out of that before it ever got there.

Kondracke: I read someplace that Roger Stone had something to do with your—

Buckley: You know Roger and Charlie, who, I'd worked with them both in the Reagan/Bush campaign. [Harvey L.] Lee Atwater had declared himself. Lee had declared himself that he was going with the vice president, but Roger and Charlie, you know the first primary was the Black, Manafort, and Stone and Atwater primary, and so Roger and Charlie were going with Jack and Roger was a big advocate in my

behalf and also trying to persuade me, "This is what you ought to do. You don't want to work for Bush. Bush is a weenie. Come to work with Charlie and me in this campaign.

Kondracke: So at that time you were a dyed-in-the-wool conservative and a supply-sider and all that?

Buckley: Absolutely, yes. I was excited to work for Jack because Jack was the intellectual leader of the movement I believed in, especially as the rightful heir to Ronald Reagan.

Kondracke: So you were a Reaganite?

Buckley: I was a Reaganite.

Kondracke: Did you talk about campaign strategy right away?

Buckley: Yes. There was a broader conversation about campaign strategy and what Jack needed to do. My immediate engagement with Jack was, 'how do you, Jack, pivot from being a Congressional personality into being able to connect with people and make news in Iowa, New Hampshire and other places.' So literally my first trip with Jack, I'm going to say the last week of January 1985, he spoke at a private club someplace on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, the Colony Club or the Harmony Club or some club, it's not like the Union League Club that has higher name ID. It was like a little tiny club of New York Wall Street wealthy people. I remember watching him that first night, it was the first time I ever spent time watching him give a speech like that, be delightful but give the same speech three times.

Come to an end, keep going. And so I remember being in the car driving with him from this club to a plane that was going to take us up to New Hampshire or someplace, because he had an event the next morning, and I remember saying to him, "You realize, when you get into the campaign, you're going to have to give shorter speeches. Jack Kennedy never gave a speech on the campaign trail that was longer than 18 minutes. His stump speech was like 12 minutes. You're going to have to give 18-minute speeches, and you're going to have to be prepared to give speeches that have written text, because you're going to need to deliver that paragraph that the sound bite for the news the next day is in." And I remember him looking at me like, "Really? I'm going have to give 18-minute speeches?" And I was like, "Yes, you're going to have to do that." You could see him processing the change that he would have to make but being skeptical that he could do it. And of course as it turned out he had difficulty doing either of those things. There were broader strategy conversations, especially when Charlie would be around, or when Roger and Charlie would be around. My engagement with him was more tactical and functional on how do you make news, how do you deliver a speech that gives the local reporters what they need? From I would say January of '85 until July of '86, basically the road crew for Jack was me, Jack and me, me carrying his bags. To the extent possible I was the advance person. We'd land on the ground, there'd be somebody there, part of the local Kemp operation, but they're usually volunteers, so it was like a solid 14 or 15 months that it was just Jack and me traveling everywhere, and I grew to love him and grew to love the experience of just being with him. We had a great teasing, joshing relationship where people from the outside would listen to it and think

that we hated each other in reality. It was just the way Jack was, because he was a big teaser and a big—

Kondracke: What did he tease about?

Buckley: Everything from my clothes to the fact that I knew more about rock and roll than economics to the fact that I was a Jets fan. He would pick on everything, everything, with everybody.

Kondracke: Did you ever persuade him to make shorter speeches?

Buckley: You could persuade him to make the next speech short; you could not persuade him to do it as part of the regular order. He just couldn't do it, wouldn't do it. A flash forward to '87 when the campaign was in trouble because Jack hadn't caught on sufficiently, he wasn't leading in Iowa, he wasn't leading in New Hampshire, and my recollection was that it was a combination of, I'm now outing two reporters giving campaign advice, but it was a combination of Walter [V.] Robinson and [Jonathan] Jon Margolis, who were on the plane with us. They said to me "We want to go talk to Jack. Not an interview. We want to go talk to him. We want to have an off the record conversation." I brought them up, knocked on the door in Jack's room and said, "Hey, Jon and Walter want to talk to you. Can you give them 10 minutes?" And he was like, "Yes, sure, no problem." We were in a hotel someplace in New Hampshire, and they came in and they sat down and they basically said, "What the fuck? What do you think you're doing? You cannot keep doing this. If you want to get elected president you're going to have to be disciplined and give short speeches that entertain people and then get the hell out of

there." They were blunt and aggressive in the message they were delivery to him, and you could see Jack going, because at this point I was staff and he tuned me out on these daily corrections. Nobody on the campaign staff could really get him to do what he needed to do. This was part of the Kemp perversity in his personality that was harmful not helpful, because he wouldn't listen to some of the advice that was very helpful. But I remember the next day Jack gave three consecutive speeches around the state with Walter Robinson, this incredibly tough reporter sitting in the back of the room, tapping on his watch [demonstrates] as Jack would go into minute 17 of the speech, and Jack would panic and quickly get off the stage. But you couldn't get him to correct those behaviors for long.

Kondracke: So reporters really liked him? They were rooting for him, sounds like.

Buckley: Reporters were rooting for him, Democrats were rooting for him, everybody was rooting for him except the other campaigns and unfortunately in most places, Republican primary voters. And it was because he was unique and different, and what he represented was so positive. He was such a likeable human being and he was so real. So reporters had access to Jack that they didn't have to Vice President Bush. Reporters who got access to Vice President Bush found something hollow about him. But if you went through his opponents, reporters liked aspects of Bob Dole but never thought he should be president. They didn't take [Pierre S.] Pete du Pont [IV] seriously, they didn't take [Alexander M.] Al Haig [Jr.] seriously, [Marion G.] Pat Robertson they recoiled from for a lot of reasons, but Jack was real and nice and his message was positive, and there was something

doomed about his candidacy for all those reasons that brought out in reporters a desire to help him. It didn't necessarily translate into the stories they wrote, but it definitely translated into the interactions that they had with him.

Kondracke: Did he have any favorite reporters?

Buckley: He had reporters who he was closer to, including you. There were reporters who he was friends with and close to. [Robert D.S.] Bob Novak was a reporter that Jack was friends with and close to who was clearly not a favorite reporter, because Bob did as much damage to Jack as anybody. Because Bob wrote from the frustrated standpoint of he's not catching on, he should be doing x but he's doing y, he's not following Jude [T.] Wanniski's advice. There was a lot of that. I don't think he had favorite reporters. He didn't necessarily like conservative reporters versus more liberal reporters. The reporters who were on the campaign plane with us, though, he had a wonderful relationship with, the ones who paid close attention to him, he had a great bantering, teasing relationship with. They would give him shit and he would give them shit, it would be that type of a relationship.

Kondracke: And yet they probably didn't agree with him politically.

Buckley: On anything, no. But Jack was the kind of person who, even if you disagreed with him politically, it was so clear that the policies that he was espousing, he had arrived at on the one hand on an intellectual path that was impressive, because he'd done his homework, and on the other hand what he was espousing was so positive that he'd arrived there, his heart was so clearly good. There

was nothing negative or mean about Jack, and in fact, reporters were frustrated with Jack by the absence of meanness, like why can't he attack George Bush, Bob Dole, Pat Robertson, the way he ought to, the way he'll need to? The dynamic of the race by autumn of 1987 was, I was the attack dog for Jack, and I was the one who was coming up with the one-liners and the attacks, especially on Bush, and there were some funny but not so funny stories. Clifford [D.] May of the *New York Times* wrote a story in the fall about the Kemp campaign trying to get Jack to attack and him not attacking, and there was this quote from me in which I basically said, "Yes, tonight he's really, really going to take the wood to the Vice President," or something that made it clear that Jack was going to attack tonight. And then he quoted Jack's speech from that night in which there was not the slightest iota of him attacking George Bush, and it made me look ridiculous, but the dynamic for a reporter was kind of fun, because here it was Jack just won't do what's expected of him by his campaign.

Kondracke: Were there any celebrated press flaps?

Buckley: By him? Jack made very few mistakes as a candidate. He would not deliver the attack. I would hand out a press release that would have a paragraph in it, "In remarks today in New Hampshire, Jack Kemp said that x," and he would not read that, which would be so impossible to make progress with. But in terms of him actually saying things, he was not gaff-prone. There were lots of flaps about things that I said that went too far.

Kondracke: Like what?

Buckley: You know I can't even remember any of the specific attacks on George Bush, but I was often controversial on what I would say about the Vice President, and I got very good at needling the Vice President. There was a famous quote that Jack had no problem with because it wasn't mean-spirited, but the Vice President had tried to explain away why in the Iowa straw poll in Ames in August of 1987, he'd come in, I think, at a distant third, maybe, to Pat Robertson and to Dole, and he said, "Well, my voters weren't there because they were at country clubs, or they were dealing with their daughter's coming-out party." And Mary McGrory said to me, "What do you think of that?" And I said, "Well, Jack would have done better too, but his supporters were flipping cheeseburgers at bowling alleys and cleaning their guns." And it was a great sort of class attack on Kemp supporters versus Bush, and so I got into the habit of doing those sorts of one-liners which of course made it so that, as [Max] Marlin Fitzwater later told me, he would bring some story to the Vice President in the morning to look at and Bush said, "So what did the little shit say about me today?" which did not endear me to the Vice President. But unfortunately Jack was not delivering those one-liners, which were necessary. If you look at the Republican debates in 2012, and how personal and direct it was from the outset, Mitt Romney going against [James R.] Rick Perry; Rick Perry going against Newt Gingrich. I mean, these were absolutely direct attacks, and Jack would have, put Jack up there on that stage, he would have been the guy over on the side, delivering his message as if he were in a completely different campaign than these guys, and that's the way he was.

Kondracke: Did he ever get negative at all?

Buckley: Virtually never. He could get negative about Bob Dole, because he saw Bob Dole's ideas, austerity versus the politics of growth, he saw his ideas as being inimical to what he stood for, and occasionally he would give some one-liners about Dole, some jokes about Bob Dole's library burned down and both volumes were found charred, things like that, making a little bit [of] fun of him, but he never would sustain an actual attack on any of the three of his principal opponents.

Kondracke: In those days was his attitude toward Dole personal, I mean his personal attitude negative?

Buckley: Yes. He saw Bob Dole as representing a kind of politics that Kemp and Reagan had defeated and supplanted, so he saw him as an old-fashioned Republican. Newt Gingrich's line of Bob Dole as the tax collector for the welfare state resonated with Jack. He would never say a line like that, but it resonated with him. He never really said anything negative about George Bush, 1) because I think he always believed that if he were not the nominee, Bush would be the nominee, and so you shouldn't do that him, but 2) also I think he saw him as not being irredeemable, that there was a chance, that since he'd been a loyal carrier of the Reagan message at times, there was a chance that maybe he could be persuaded to believe this. I remember having a conversation with him near the end, this would be post-New Hampshire, pre-Super Tuesday in '88, in which he said privately, "I don't have any choice here, right? I've got to be for Bush and help Bush." And I was like, "Yes, even if Dole ends up being the nominee, the right positioning for you is to endorse Bush, because he's closer to

you than Dole is." Dole's ideology was what Reaganism had supplanted.

Kondracke: But was his attitude toward Dole one of not only distaste for his policies but also for him, because there had been a lot of back and forth.

Buckley: I think distaste is probably the right word. It wasn't stronger than that. He didn't dislike Bob Dole, because Jack really didn't dislike a lot of people. He was one of these people who genuinely understood that hatred was an emotion that was poisonous to the carrier, and ineffective as well. But he thought that Bob Dole's sourness and negativeness and his acerbicness was something that he just didn't think he wanted anything to do with.

Kondracke: Before we leave the press, tell me about his relationship with Bob Novak and Wanniski and what they were trying to get him to do.

Buckley: So Jude was the resident ideologist of supply-side economics, and he and Bob were very, very close. They could collaborate with one another, and I'm guessing that Bob and Jude talked on the phone several times a week, just guessing. Jack was a project of Bob Novak's. Bob Novak wanted Jack to be president. He wanted to do everything he could to get Jack to be president, but he had so much integrity as an old-school reporter that he would never give Jack a break if Jack screwed up. So he was more likely to cause trouble, pile on, make mischief, poke at ideological fault lines, he was much more likely to do all of those things than he was to just say

something positive about Jack for the sake of saying something positive about Jack. Jack liked Bob and respected Bob and feared what Bob could do, but Jack didn't really want to play that game of having the ideological battle with Jude over what he ought to do be played out through Bob's columns. So there was a natural holding back by Jack when it came to Bob. And in a way, the more important Bob was, the more Jack held back because he didn't want to get caught up in confiding in Bob and getting burned. He knew that ultimately Bob's instincts as a reporter and columnist had a nanosecond's lead over his instincts as an ideologist, so he understood that. During the '88 campaign, Jude's wackiness, which in my opinion came out later, was still somewhat in check, and there were natural checks and balances on Jude's influence on Jack, which were a lot of the things Jude believed in politically, were not practical.

Kondracke: Like what?

Buckley: The gold standard was something that Jude believed in strongly, but it was just not smart for Jack to go out and run a campaign on the gold standard. A two second aside, I remember being at a party in '86 when Jack was still viewed as the principal rival to George Bush. It was a party at [Martin] Marty Plissner's house, a holiday party or something like that. I found myself standing next to Jim Baker, who was just brutal, like going, "Wow, the gold standard. That's really a great issue. Boy, Jack's really going to ride the gold standard all the way to the White House, isn't he, John? That's good. He needs to just keep on the gold standard." Practical politicians, Charlie Black, Vin Weber, even people like Newt Gingrich, would say to Jack, "Don't go there. You can signal, but don't run the campaign on

the gold standard." Whereas Jude would be like, "This is what the campaign was about." And Jack believed that, and Bob believed that too. Bob was very smart about politics but he was a little bit of a sucker in believing that some of the more ideological positions would get Jack points.

Kondracke: At the beginning, in '86, actually, there was a [Arthur J.] Finkelstein poll that had Bush 40, Dole 8.5, Howard [H.] Baker [Jr.] at 8.1 and Kemp at 6.6, so he was behind the curve at the get go.

Buckley: Absolutely. So that would have been a poll taken of Republicans, not Republican primary voters in State X or State Y, so it was always clear that Jack's name ID was low, he was well-known in Washington, well-known in conservative circles, well-known in sort of Party-elite circles, but not known to the public as a whole. That gave rise then to a strategy that said, in essence, from the very beginning your road to the White House goes through New Hampshire, because New Hampshire is a state that take people who are at six percent in the polls in '86 and you can compete on even terms there. Then a few things happened along the way. One was there was a belief that Jack really needed to compete in Iowa to set up New Hampshire, and then a strategically disastrous thing occurred, which was Michigan decided that it wanted to play in a very weird way in the primaries, and it wanted to play by having an August 1986 semi-primary, a delegate selection process where it would create a set of delegates that later on would compete in a party convention—I can't remember exactly how ultimately it was going to work—but it moved up the timeline well in advance of the winter of '88 for those first votes to get cast, and then

it moved it to a state that was a big state, and Jack, unfortunately took the bait. We all took the bait that he could do well in Michigan.

Kondracke: How did that happen?

Buckley: Party because of the persuasiveness of a fellow named Clark Durant, who was a Michigan conservative leader who basically said, "I can organize the state for you." And there were enough people in Michigan, enough conservative activist who said Michigan is all about Reagan Democrats, and Michigan is on a certainly level like a big Erie County, a post-industrial conservative battleground, and "we can wire it for you Jack if you participate here." So we took the bait and jumped in.

Kondracke: Jumped in—

Buckley: Jumped in to actually not only decide to compete in Michigan, but to let it be known that we were going to compete in Michigan relatively early on by our schedule, by going in there, by Clark Durant saying, "Jack can win Michigan." Instead of the steady drumbeat that would build up the campaign so that you could go and surprise the Vice President in New Hampshire, which was a state that really was in many ways had a good political profile for Jack, what ended up happening was we committed to what was a large delegate selection process through caucuses in Michigan that both had a natural advantage to a candidate who could outspend you and out-organize you, the Vice President, and a natural advantage to a candidate who could tap into the grassroots conservative Christian base, and that ended up becoming Pat Robertson. So we helped create Michigan as a

battleground, and we were not in any kind of a position to be able to fulfill the expectations we set.

Kondracke: Do you remember the meetings and the discussion about Michigan?

Buckley: Michigan was one where it was more about Jack being told there's some potential in Michigan in '85, being told there's some potential in Michigan. "You ought to go out there and see for yourself." And going out and finding that there were some real Kemp fans and enthusiasts with Clark as the leader, and us being sort of sucked in to the reception that Jack got. And then in the fall of '85, in like October of '85, there was a Republican Party event in Michigan that was in Grand Rapids, and it was one of these regional Republican National Committee events. All the candidates came and spoke, making Michigan real at that point, and at that point we were committed to Michigan, so Jack was then playing basically a three-state race from early on in the process, Iowa, Michigan, New Hampshire. It proved too much early on in terms of resources, in terms of message, his message for Iowa wasn't really working, and then any of the potential that he might have had to win Michigan. Even a tie with Bush would have been a victory in '86, but the moment Pat Robertson jumped into the race it created a schism where voters that might naturally have been Jack's went to Pat Robertson, and Pat Robertson started competing for the mantle of the true conservative alternative to Bush. Bob Dole wasn't even a factor in the early go-rounds. He was kind of a joke. But Jack was never able to have that steady race where you go from six to 12 to 14 to winning the New Hampshire primary and breaking out.

Kondracke: Was there any polling in Michigan ahead of time to see whether it was fertile ground?

Buckley: The belief was that polling didn't matter in '85 because it would all be just about name ID. So my recollection was that polling in Michigan showed what we all expected, which was that George Bush had a big, big lead, but we were going to out-organize them on the ground, and tap into a conservative organization and we would beat them in this caucus setup. The fact that Jack never caught fire in the early polling created the sort of dynamic where he was expected to d o something he couldn't really do, but because he wasn't doing it, he wasn't creating all these other things that needed to happen in order to upend the conventional wisdom about whether a congressman from Buffalo, New York could beat a sitting vice president.

[break]

Kondracke: You were his Congressional press secretary, yet you seemed to be traveling a lot on the road, so how did that work legally?

Buckley: I was paid in two pieces. I was Jack's Congressional press secretary from January of '85 until, I'm going to say but I may be a month or two off, until December of '86. But I also was partly paid for by Jack's PAC [Political Action Committee]. And so the legal structure was that if I flew with Jack to Buffalo, New York, I was on the taxpayers' dime, but if I flew with Jack to New Hampshire I was on the Campaign for America's Promise dime. And then just to add further complications, Jack made two foreign trips in '86, one to Asia, one to

Europe, and both of those were paid for by the Foundation [Fund for an American Renaissance], so there were two outside entities to pay for things.

Kondracke: I guess the biggest thing that Jack did while you were his Congressional press secretary was tax reform, in '86. What was your role in that?

Buckley: I arrived in his office with Kemp-Kasten having been written, with Bradley-Gephardt having been written, both bills having been introduced in the prior Congress—I can't remember when both were introduced, but in any event they were known entities. And what ended up happening was the White House signaled, through the President's State of the Union address in '85 that tax reform was a major priority of the president. And you had the whole Jim Baker-[Donald T.] Don Regan swap between White House chief of staff and Treasury secretary, which was articulated as "this is all about getting things in the right alignment, because the President's priority is tax reform." You had Jack's top issue becoming the priority of the president of the United States, and really importantly, with Bradley and Gephardt, you had Democrats saying "we view this as a game we want to be in on." So it was very, very difficult as a press secretary to force Jack into all of the stories because you had the unfortunate reality that he wasn't on the Ways and Means Committee, and once there was an engagement between the White House and [Daniel D.] Danny Rostenkowski, and then Rostenkowski and [Robert W. "Bob"] Packwood, Bradley-Gephardt and Kemp-Kasten kind of fell by the wayside as the vehicles, but Jack still was the embodiment of the right kind of conservative tax reform. But it was a big battle for coverage

because you had a reporter like the late David [E.] Rosenbaum of the New York Times, who just steadfastly refused to mention that Bradley-Gephardt or Kemp-Kasten were even in the game, reflected in the game. He was focusing in on three personalities, Reagan-Baker and Packwood and Rostenkowski, so as a press secretary it was a huge challenge. We got more than our fair share of coverage, though, by Jack making speeches at the right moment on here's what's going wrong, by Jack issuing statements on the White House is getting out-maneuvered, these things have to be in there, and so we were able to play the game. And this was a situation where the relationship with Bob Novak was incredibly helpful, because Novak had a three-times-a-week ability to get things in play. Our battle, Jack's battle, was more how do you influence the White House than anything else. He had no ability really to influence Packwood, zero ability to influence Danny Rostenkowski, but he did have an ability to make trouble for the White House, so he knew how to play that really well. It helped to have somebody as substantively brilliant as John Mueller on the legislative side and on the economic side. But we fought way above our weight to help steer that in the right direction.

Kondracke: He played a really crucial role besides being the author of Kemp-Kasten. Remember December '85, when the Rostenkowski bill gets voted down on a rule and tax reform almost died, and Jack Kemp saved it.

Buckley: Well, Republicans brought it back to life in part because Jack was able to, he was in the leadership, and his argument to fellow Republicans was "we've got to keep this alive in order to be able to fix it at the right moment." Republicans were very distrustful of whether

or not you could trust Reagan and Baker to do the right thing, because they were so much more willing to play with Danny Rostenkowski than they were to play with the House Republicans. That was an ongoing tension and dynamic, the White House refusing to basically believe the House Republicans were good for anything. That was not where they were going to—but enough House Republicans carried it into '86 that they were actually able to get it going.

Kondracke: Well Jack also got Reagan to come up to talk to the House Republican Conference

Buckley: That's right. Actually Baker and Darman came up to meet with Jack, if I recall correctly. Baker and Darman came to him, and Jack then persuaded them to get the president up there. To say that Baker and Darman came to visit with Jack, that was like a huge deal. Jim Baker was the de facto head of George Bush's reelection campaign from his position, they were both very contemptuous and dismissive of Jack on many, many levels, but he had the power to keep the President's priority alive uniquely, and it was from that meeting that Reagan was invited to come up and speak to the Republican Conference, and I can't remember what the vote was but it was just enough Democrats sided with a pretty solid Republican Conference in order to keep it alive.

Kondracke: Did Jack get enough credit for that in the presidential contest?

Buckley: You know, he got credit for it in certain news stories, but it still, to the average Republican voter, not conservative activist but

Republican voter in Iowa and New Hampshire, tax reform was still Ronald Reagan's thing. And then by the time you had the dynamic of Reagan and Rostenkowski addressing the nation, April or May of that year, if I recall correctly, you have this incredible dynamic where it was [Thomas P.] Tip O'Neill [Jr.] and Danny Rostenkowski and all these other players who were actually driving the legislation, not Jack, and he did get squeezed out. He was at the signing ceremony but not a prominent enough role.

Kondracke: Talk about the contemptuous attitude of Baker and Darman and company, and Bush toward Kemp.

Buckley: Bush was just kind of annoyed by Kemp because he saw him as someone who unfairly was positioning himself as the heir to Ronald Reagan when George Bush was the vice president, so he saw him as an annoyance. He saw me as like this gnat he couldn't quite get away from his face. It really pissed him off, I'll tell this very quickly, it really pissed him off when early on there was a quote from me in the *National Journal* in which they said why did you go with Kemp, not with Bush, and I said, "I come out of the conservative movement and I see Jack Kemp as the true heir to Reagan," and Bush just went nuts at that, just thought that—

Kondracke: How did you get the word of that?

Buckley: I got the word from Peter Teeley, "You really pissed him off." And then later on, later on, Jack Kemp was getting an award— how did this work? Jack Kemp was getting an award from the Conservative Party of New York, at a dinner that the Vice President was the keynote

speaker at, and Jack couldn't make it for some reason, some legitimate reason, and so I went up to represent him, and I had to sit on the dais, right next to the vice president. This was like spring of '85, and I remember saying to the vice president, "I heard you were unhappy with that remark, and I said it in all innocence, and I really hope that nothing that I say pisses you off." And he said, "Too late for that." And I was like, "Oh, okay." And I said, "I really hope that over the course of this campaign, Mr. Vice President, that we can stay on good terms." "I doubt it." And I'm amazed by this, that he was that petty and shitty, and it would have been so easy for him to say, and of course I'm standing up at the Conservative Party of New York event, an event that my family created the antecedents for, representing Jack Kemp, and it would have been so easy for him to be gracious but he wasn't. Anyway, Darman and Baker had the reputation for rolling people, for cynically playing power politics to an extent that they could just force people to do what they needed to get done. It was clear that Darman and Baker on the one hand respected Jack, but just figured that they could and should and needed to roll him. So they came up to the Congressional office with sheepish grins, just like regular guys, to meet with Jack, but were immediately sucking up to him, to roll him. But at the end of the day maybe they rolled Jack by getting him to do what they needed to get done, but Jack got them to do what he needed to get done, because keeping tax reform alive was on a policy prescription basis the most important thing for Jack. Keeping tax reform alive from a political standpoint was the most important thing for Baker and Darman. I don't mean to say that they didn't believe in tax reform, but it was not the plane on which they were operating, and so they may have thought that they rolled Jack. As far as Jack was concerned, he rolled them.

Kondracke: Before you arrived, when Jack, for example, opposed TEFRA [Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982] and DEFRA [Deficit Reduction Act of 1984] and all that various stuff, there was a lot of leaking from the White House that he was—

Buckley: That he didn't matter

Kondracke: —that he was ambitious, that he was not following the President's line and so on. All of that presumably came from Baker and Darman.

Buckley: Actually I would bet that the physical act of the leak came from [David R.] Gergen, because Gergen was the official leaker at the White House. David was not ideological, but David was an instrument of Baker and Darman I would imagine. Darman didn't talk a lot to the reporters. Baker talked to reporters more through other people than directly. So I don't imagine that Margaret [D.] Tutwiler in those early days was telling Ann [M.] Devroy this. I think that came a little bit later in the process. My sense was that most of the anti-Kemp stuff coming out of the White House in the first term were really coming out of Gergen as communications director, and then probably also coming out of Ed Rollins' and Lee Atwater's and [Franklyn C.] Lyn Nofsinger's political office. But I have no doubt that the strategists behind it were them. People forget, a momentary aside, people forget that in 1983 there was an enormous amount of frustration among conservatives with Ronald Reagan, so that Movement conservatives, like the Howard Phillipses and the Richard [A.] Vigueries and the Paul [M.] Weyrichs were saying to Lew Lehrman, "You ought to challenge Ronald Reagan

in the New Hampshire primary." They were that disillusioned with what they thought of as the liberal cabal in the White House, Baker, Darman, Gergen and those guys.

Kondracke: So at the beginning when you started out, were there efforts to tee up issues that Jack was going to propose as a member of Congress or on the campaign trail that would distinguish him from Bush?

Buckley: There were, but they probably aren't what someone would expect. They related more to foreign policy and arms control and relations with Israel and a whole host of issues that were sort of more on the Michelle Van Cleave side of the Congressional office than on the John Mueller side of the Congressional office. Because on the economic issues, Reagan and Kemp were aligned, and I think Jack wanted to nudge and force and kibbutz and do things to keep the economic side of the administration doing the right thing. But there weren't a lot of things that Jack, in my recollection, wanted to do that were all that different from what the administration was proposing. But there were a lot of things that George Shultz was doing as secretary of State that Jack disagreed with and viscerally disagreed with, and people forget that Jack was in a better committee position to be able to make news from Foreign Ops than he actually was in a committee position to make news from the Budget Committee. You know Jack's committee was the Budget Committee. He was opposed to things like Gramm-Rudman-Hollings [Balanced Budget Act of 1985], because he thought once again that gets you into the austerity trap. But he was not making mischief for the White House on that. They weren't for Gramm-Rudman-Hollings either. It was forced on them.

Kondracke: He did eventually at a CPAC convention in ’87 call for Shultz’s resignation.

Buckley: Yes.

Kondracke: Now was that a big deal in the office? That’s a major kind of speech, a major kind of statement. He’d been critical of Shultz and—

Buckley: It was building to that, it was building to that. I will admit that I thought that just from purely tactical standpoint, that was a great thing to do, because calling for a cabinet officer’s resignation makes news, and by that point, this was post-Reykjavík, there were a lot of things from a foreign policy standpoint that Ronald Reagan was doing that of course now are a part of the legacy of Ronald Reagan and his greatness, that at the time from a conservative, tactical standpoint were outrageous, and we could make political hay against them. Many of them, though, the things that got Jack’s gorge, it wasn’t so much things like support for family planning in China that were excuses for infanticide and coercive abortion, he was opposed to that but those weren’t the things that viscerally moved him in my recollection. The things that viscerally moved him were anything that put the U.S. in the position of selling out Israel, that put the U.S. in a position of not forcing the issue to get Natan Sharansky out of the Soviet Union. There were those things that really just viscerally bothered him. And then he had a visceral reaction to anything that undermined the argument for, as it was called in those days, Star Wars, missile defense [Strategic Defense Initiative, SDI], and anything

that made the U.S. give up its technological advantage in nuclear weapons.

Kondracke: But was that CPAC speech a big deal as far as the office was concerned and the campaign were concerned?

Buckley: CPAC was viewed as a big opportunity every year. We were having to fight for attention from other conservatives. CPAC could have been and should have been and in many ways was a natural place for Jack to excel, but in a way we were forced to be more and more tactically desperate in order to make news, and so calling for Shultz to go was the kind of red meat that you just needed to throw. But I shouldn't say it was this big deal like there was this big debate. It was a big deal like this is the bomb we're going to throw. But at that point we were all ready to throw bombs. Now I by that time was no longer in the Congressional office, so all of my discussions with Jack about that would have been flying here or flying there, but the way it would have worked would have been the message coming from Dave Hoppe and Michelle Van Cleave, "This is what we want to do," and me on the road saying, "Yes, let's to it. Please have Dennis write a tough speech that way."

Kondracke: How did Kemp pick his '88 team? You said that the Black, Manafort, Stone primary was the first one. Why were they so important, by the way? Why was that firm so important?

Buckley: In the early 1980s, the group of Black, Manafort, Stone and Atwater were considered to be the smartest political strategists and tacticians. So to back up for just a second, every time the White

House changes hands from one party to the other, there are a group of people who are part of the successful campaign who are viewed as having upgraded the mechanics and the technology of elections. Just like Karl [C.] Rove when George W. Bush got elected was viewed as sort of a guru who had modernized elections, and David [M.] Axelrod and folks like that did the same thing for Barak Obama, in 1980 the people who were given the credit for being the smartest operatives were Charlie, Roger, Lee Atwater and Paul [J.] Manafort, so the fact that they were supporting Jack, three of the four were supporting Jack, was a big deal. Lee was considered the most talented of the four of them, Lee was a very big deal and deserved the reputation that he had, but it was a big opportunity for Jack to have Charlie Black basically putting his campaign together. So Charlie knew that we needed some kind of a presence in Iowa and also needed someone to run the PAC, so he recruited a guy named John Maxwell, who was an Iowa political aide, and ensconced him in the PAC. And as it turned out John did not have the Iowa organizational skills that we thought that he had. But there was an upgrade of the Congressional staff to match the needs for the campaign, so Dave Smick was an absolutely brilliant and fantastic chief of staff for Jack in the Congressional office, but it was viewed that you needed a different approach than Dave for the presidential campaign. You needed somebody who could basically wire all the other House Republicans, and that was Dave Hoppe, who was Trent Lott's guy. I was considered a political person to come in and so [Merrick] Mac Carey kind of got pushed out and I got pushed in. Mack was an excellent press secretary, but he was an excellent press secretary in a slightly more limited field than somebody who came out of the campaign. But these were the people who were stage-managing the campaign.

Kondracke: It was Charlie Black who was stage-managing the staff changes.

Buckley: Yes, everything. It was Charlie and Jack together, Roger less so. Roger was more how do you organize New Hampshire? What do you do on the ground? Charlie was more big picture. And then recruiting Jeff Bell was important because Jeff was a natural Kemp ally, and Jeff was someone who was viewed as sort of being ideologically akin to Jack but also having a good sense of politics, and so Jeff became sort of a power figure in the campaign. And then the next most important recruit was recruiting a guy named [Rodney A.] Rod Smith, in as the finance director. Rod had been the Senate Congressional Campaign Committee's finance director, so it was a big deal to bring in someone who understood the technology of raising money circa '83, circa '84, as he was able to do. We put together a pretty good campaign team pretty quickly. Now having said that, the Bush campaign was layering on, for every person we hired, the Bush campaign hired 10. Not an exaggeration. They had a full-scale presidential campaign with 200 people in it, when we were basically still operating with like me in the Congressional office and a little tiny handful of people.

Kondracke: Did Charlie go with Kemp before Atwater went with Bush?

Buckley: Yes. Charlie committed to be with Jack before the end of the '84 election. So the dynamic was Lee was the deputy press secretary of Reagan-Bush '84, Charlie had some role in Reagan-Bush, some official role in Reagan-Bush '84, Roger was assigned virtually fulltime

as the Northeastern regional field operative for the Reagan-Bush campaign, and Roger's deputy was a guy named Scott [W.] Reed, who later became Bob Dole's campaign manager. But Charlie was like all in for Jack. It was clear Charlie was going with Jack. Lee didn't join Black, Manafort, Stone until right after the election, but it was one of these things where Lee joins in November-December of '84, he moves in physically into their office, but he's starting to organize the Bush campaign from one end of the hall and Charlie and Roger are organizing the Kemp campaign from the other end of the hall, and Manafort's keeping the business alive and also making that critical pivot where Black, Manafort, and Stone were not just campaign operatives, they were also lobbyists. And so Paul's running that operation. I'm going to guess it wasn't until about May or so that Lee left Black, Manafort, and Stone to go run the Fund for America's Future which became the Bush campaign. For four or five months there, there was one firm but with different campaigns.

Kondracke: So Charlie and Jack were old friends?

Buckley: Charlie and Jack were friends from the '80 period. Charlie was a Movement conservative and was on the same ramp in joining conservative politics that Roger Stone and Karl Rove and others were on, which was College Republicans to Young Republicans to whatever it was. So Charlie had official Republican Party bona fides but he was also a campaign operative. And then Charlie also had an important base, which was North Carolina and Jesse Helms and the Congressional Club down there. So Charlie's big breakthrough as an operative was when Ronald Reagan in 1980, basically following a bad early run, won the North Carolina primary and was off to the races as

the nominee. Charlie played a huge role in that, so the utility to Kemp of Charlie Black was he knew the entire national Republican apparatus. He had North Carolina as a base as well.

Kondracke: So what role did Vin Weber play?

Buckley: Vin was a member of Congress and an adviser, and he was sort of Jack's closest ally and adviser inside the Congress. Jack was friends with Newt Gingrich, they worked together. Trent was like the senior protective figure for Jack, and helping Jack, but Vin was very much the younger guy, an operative, and also a member of Congress, and so it was Vin who was helping Jack also think through Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota.

Kondracke: How did Ed Rollins come to join the gang?

Buckley: Ed came late. He came late in part because I think he would have expected that having been the campaign manager for Ronald Reagan's 49-state victory in '84, he would have been invited into the Bush campaign. I don't know this for a fact. I think Ed was a free agent, and at a certain point in '85 it was like "The Bush campaign hasn't called me." There was a reason the Bush campaign hadn't called him. It was because Lee was tired of being in Ed's shadow, Lee wanted to be the principal. So Lee was the campaign manager for George Bush, that didn't leave a lot of room for Ed, and so Ed came in as campaign chairman. So Charlie, I forget who had what title, but Ed was the campaign chairman for Jack.

Kondracke: Was he a full-time operative like Charlie was?

Buckley: No. Ed came out of ’84, he’d never made any real money. I think he created his own business so that he could make some money. He signed up some clients, he had a number of clients who would pay him, Japanese industrial companies who would pay him a lot of money just to say what was going on in American politics. He cashed in at that point, but I think he still also felt “I should play a role in the ’88 campaign,” and the place that welcomed him was the Kemp campaign. No, he also liked Jack, and he played an important role in terms of adding credibility and viability to Jack, and at a critical moment when he came in, helped reach out for some of the early ads that we were going to make and things like that. Still, the day to day guy who was running things was Charlie.

Kondracke: There were a lot of stories that I read where Rollins was always saying “Jack’s got to do this, Jack’s got to do that,” it seems not helpful, frankly.

Buckley: Yes. Well I love Ed, and Ed over time has been very, very good to me, and the records show that after the ’88 campaign was over and the Bush team, including the First Lady of the United States basically signaled to everybody in the Republican Party, John Buckley is Public Enemy #1, he should never work in this town again. Guy [A.] Vander Jagt went to Ed Rollins and said, “Would you run the National Republican Congressional Committee?” And Ed say “Yes, but I need to bring in John Buckley as my communications director.” So Ed, at a moment when I was in the wilderness, Ed brought me in. So I love Ed and am grateful. But Ed is the opposite of a spin doctor. It’s like Ed has had a permanent shot of sodium pentothal. So that if you look at

his entire career, one of the things that he's always doing is if the spin is Michele [M.] Bachman's doing fine and she's going to do better, Ed says, "Boy, if she doesn't win this straw poll she's dead." So he was always very honest in what he would say, but to a fault. And he was unhelpful to us in the campaign, because he was always saying publicly what, of course, we were saying privately, which was, "Yes, Jack's got to quit going on about the gold standard and give an 18-minute speech and woo people and get out with everybody happy."

Kondracke: Ben [T.] Elliot, was that a coup?

Buckley: That was a really big coup, because Ben was more associated with the words that Ronald Reagan spoke than any other individual. You know, [Anthony R.] Tony Dolan was a very important speechwriter, and over time [Margaret E.] Peggy Noonan and Peter [M.] Robinson and others have become famous, but the person who the cognoscenti in the Republican Party knew was the soul of Ronald Reagan, the person who could channel Ronald Reagan through the words that were given to him was Ben. And so Ben came to Jack for all the right reasons. He saw him as the leader. I think Michele Van Cleave and Ben had been close and I think she worked him, but he did what we thought was an incredibly brave thing to do. He left being chief White House speechwriter or whatever the title, yes, he was the chief. He left being chief White House speechwriter to come into the campaign and write Jack's speeches, and of course was instantly frustrated, because Jack would not read the speeches that Ben would give him. Now Jack's declaration of candidacy in March of '87, that was a Ben Elliot speech, and Jack would read that. That was something where he understood you can't ad lib this one. But for

every sentence that Jack delivered from what Ben had written, there were 48-minute speeches that were delivered that had nothing in them from what Ben had given him.

Kondracke: Did Ben stay through to the end?

Buckley: Yes.

Kondracke: Frustrated though he was.

Buckley: Yes, but he has this delightful personality where some speechwriters understand that speechwriting is an unnatural act, to put words in somebody else's mouth, and that ultimately they have got to decide what they're going to say, so Ben had a thicker skin, even as he suffered.

Kondracke: And Frank Cannon?

Buckley: Frank Cannon, I believe, was a Jeff Bell recruit, or Bob Heckman, who'd come out of Movement conservative circles, I think it's possible that [Robert C.] Bob Heckman and Frank Cannon came in together, but Frank proved to be an excellent administrator, so Frank moved into a role of helping to make the trains run on time.

Kondracke: One fascinating thing that I noticed in that first speech, in that announcement speech, is that Jack Kemp refers to the Democratic Party as the Democratic Party, not the Democrat Party. Was that common?

Buckley: No, it wasn't common.

Kondracke: It wasn't common for Republicans, but was it common for Jack?

Buckley: Yes. You have to remember, Jack came from Erie County, New York, a machine Democratic county. He couldn't get elected if he was taking these little cheap shots at Democrats. And so to refer to the "Democrat Party" when that's not the way Democrats referred to themselves, to Jack would have been, you know, you just don't do that. There were a lot of things that Jack did—

Kondracke: Did you ever talk to him about that?

Buckley: I don't think I had to. I think this is just one of the things that was important to Jack, to treat everybody with respect.

Kondracke: Now in that CPAC speech—actually it was January of '86 when he called for Shultz to be replaced—he said that either Jeanne Kirkpatrick or [Donald H.] Don Rumsfeld should take his place. Then Jeane [J.] Kirkpatrick doesn't endorse him. Was that a big disappointment to the campaign?

Buckley: It was, yes. It was viewed as just, it was viewed as her, as a self-interested person who didn't respond the way she should have responded. There was personal ire directed towards her. She showed up at a fundraiser, she was like a draw at a public fundraiser, but she would not go the full way and endorse Jack.

Kondracke: But they patched it up and formed Empower America together.

Buckley: Yes, but there was a lot of rolling of eyes by Kemp people, because she was not there when he needed her.

Kondracke: And she ultimately endorsed Bob Dole, for heaven sakes, even though he wasn't going to win.

Buckley: Right. It was ridiculous. The time she finally decided to play politics she bet on the wrong horse.

Kondracke: Were there any other disappointments of people who presumably should have endorsed Jack who didn't?

Buckley: I don't really think so. I think there was an understanding by Jack and Joanne that it took guts for people to not endorse the sitting vice president of the United States, for professional politicians and others. It was like a victory if Senator X was neutral as opposed to endorsing Bush. I think Jack had 35 House members who endorsed him. That was pretty good, considering he was an upstart.

Kondracke: Not the New York delegation.

Buckley: Not the New York delegation, no. But the New York delegation were all either liberal Republicans, [Sherwood L.] Sherry Boehlert, or Republican establishment, the [Amory] Amo Houghton [Jr.]s and the like. They all love Jack, you know, "Love you Jack," but "I went to Yale with George Bush," you know.

Kondracke: Now there're some weird people who were Movement people, but did create the impression that there was something kooky about the Kemp campaign.

Buckley: Yes.

Kondracke: Richard Viguerie, [Timothey F.] Tim LaHaye, Phyllis [M.S.] Schlafly, and how did you manage them, or were they just attracted to Jack-

Buckley: Don't forget Beverly LaHaye. You know, what that was was the people who—people came in for different reasons—but there were a group of evangelicals who wanted to endorse Jack because they couldn't stand Pat Robertson, so Tim and Beverly LaHaye, that was as much against Pat Robertson as it was pro-Jack. Schlafly—Viguerie was, the parallel hierarchical sensibility to the Republican hierarchical sensibility. As far as Richard Viguerie was concerned, the next person in line was Jack, right? Not George Bush. Jack. And so God bless them all for having done what they did. The only people who ever really influenced Jack to take certain positions were the LaHayes, really, because Jack viewed Beverly, and Tim as well, as having her finger on the pulse of the evangelical troops, and it was more like what do I need to do in order to signal to people that I can win but Pat Robertson can't win, what do I need to do? Jack was kind of forced into that position. But I'm guessing that if Pat Robertson hadn't run for president, there would have been a whole slew of even kookier people who would have been with us, because they wouldn't have been with Dole or with Bush.

Kondracke: Let me just ask a few questions about money. So November 1985, there's an event at the Waldorf Astoria where he makes a million dollars, which was regarded as some sort of record. Then all the stories that you read about money after that are he's in debt, he's—

Buckley: Right. We have this terrible situation where we actually took out a loan from a bank waiting for our federal matching funds, and I denied that we'd taken out a loan, and it turned out we had. So for me personally it couldn't have been worse. The real issue was that Jack, like a lot of politicians, wouldn't sit down and dial his list of people he needed to talk to, that was one problem. Second problem was that some of the fundraisers, Dick Fox and others, [Norman-editor] Herb Braman, a huge Miami auto dealer who at one point maybe was a part owner of the [Philadelphia Eagles-editor] Miami Dolphins, these guys didn't come through for him. A lot of them, now give credit where it's due, the Bush campaign was relentless, and Bush would call any list put in front of him, he would write thank-you notes to everybody, he did what you needed to do in order to raise money. And Jack simply wouldn't and couldn't. We started out with, you know the first million is always easy, we started out with a good fundraising apparatus. Rod Smith was a really good fundraiser, but—there were guys who were helpful. [William D.] Bill Smithburg who was the president of Quaker Oats—there were other people who came in and they raised money, but they could raise only so much at $1000 a check. It was hard.

Kondracke: What was [Thomas P.] Tom Kemp's role?

Buckley: Tom then came in as sort of uber fundraiser to find out why it wasn't working right. Jack wanted somebody he could trust to get it on track. Tom, a lovely guy, not a political guy, very smart at business but fundraising's one of the dark arts of politics and you either know how to do it or you don't. I think Tom was as good as somebody who didn't know how to do it could be. But the problem wasn't Tom, the problem was Jack. The problem was that Jack wouldn't do what you needed to do.

Kondracke: What did he say when people tried to get him to do it?

Buckley: "Yes, I'll do it. Okay, give me the list. Get him on the phone. Oh, he's not there? Okay." He wasn't systematic about it the way I presume the vice president was.

Kondracke: Somebody told us that [Richard D.] Dick Kemp and Dick Fox thought that the campaign was too lavish in the beginning, that the headquarters in Rosslyn [Virginia] was too big, that there was too much paid staff, the money was going out too fast.

Buckley: You know, if that was their take it was sort of symbolic of just how little they really understood. I found Dick Fox to be a fairly ridiculous force on the campaign, so let's take it in a couple of little pieces. One, the office in Rosslyn was like a pit. It was a building that soon thereafter was condemned and it's a hole right now. I think they've finally built a building on that spot where it was, but every time you got into the elevators you wondered if you were going to survive. It was an absolute pit, and people were quintupled up. An

office the size of the office we're sitting in now would have had 12 people in it. It was horrifying. There was a lavish expense, and it was at a certain point Jack insisted on flying private, just for wear and tear on his body. All happy campaigns are happy in their own way, all unhappy campaigns are unhappy in the same way. The candidate wants to fly private, and money goes that way. Dick Fox was to me kind of a ridiculous figure. He was the person who after the Michigan debacle in the summer of '86 where Pat Robertson basically out-organized everybody and won the Michigan delegate selection process in that caucus setup, and the Bush campaign brilliantly spun it that they'd won it, because nobody could prove whose delegate was whom. But the Bush campaign put on this elaborate show of having 300 people in a ballroom in Lansing on the phone with clipboards and stuff like that so that they could say, "Hey, we won." Because you couldn't prove that they hadn't won. Nobody knew. You'd have to go and find every single delegate. Dick Fox's position was that the Kemp campaign had won in Iowa but nobody knew it, and that it was my fault that I hadn't spun it that we actually won. I went to this meeting that Dick organized at the O'Hare Hilton [Hotel] in late August, early September of '86 that had Kemp finance people from all around the country all flying in to be in this O'Hare ballroom, and I remember sitting there in the back of the room listening as Dick said, "Our problem is that we haven't gotten the message out. The campaign is doing great, but nobody knows the campaign is doing great, and we've got to do a better job." At one point he said, "Maybe we need to get someone who's worked in corporate communications to come in, who understands how you basically sell a product, because we clearly were losing the communications battles." I like, "Let me out of here." So I said to Charlie, "I'm going to just pass on the next several hours." I

was supposed to meet Jack in California the next morning and so I took an earlier flight. Screw this. And it was just that sort of level of political naïveté about how the world works, the reason why Jack didn't get credit for winning in Michigan is that he didn't win in Michigan, and we didn't even have the ability to basically spin it that we did win. So tensions in the campaign really began to surface after Michigan. There were factions. Poor Tom Kemp was in this role of having to be sort of Jack's eyes and ears on the campaign, and who was right and who could he trust and who was telling the truth and who was doing their job. From my standpoint I was working seven days a week month after month after month flying hither and yon with Jack, and I sort of tried to just concentrate on how do we win the spin battle of the day.

Kondracke: What were the factions then, after Michigan?

Buckley: I'm rusty on the timing of when John Maxwell and his little group got pushed out, but they were pushed out I think, I'm going to say by the beginning of '87, they were out. There were some factions among the fundraisers that I didn't really have a window into, but there was an effort for there to be an Ed versus Charlie battle, with the argument by Dick Fox—because Ed would listen to anybody and talk to anybody. He would suffer fools, whereas Charlie wouldn't so much. There was an effort basically to squeeze Charlie out, as Charlie, "Things aren't going right so therefore it must be Charlie's problem." My recollection is that no matter what Ed said publicly that was unhelpful, privately he was incredibly helpful and he wouldn't allow there to be sufficient daylight between him and Charlie. There may

have been tensions between them but ultimate Ed and Charlie were sufficiently aligned that things didn't break down.

[pause]

Kondracke: So you said in the staff debate that after Michigan you thought that Kemp was not really running to be president, he was running to get his message across. Did he ever say that, or how could you tell?

Buckley: No. Jack would never have been a bad enough leader to have signaled to people, it's not worth it. He was always signaling. But he did things that made it clear that he wasn't going to do quote whatever it takes to get elected president. He was going to run a campaign the way he wanted to run it. Now the principal grounds on which that played out was not being willing to attack George Bush. He was willing to attack George Shultz, he was willing to attack ideas, but he was not willing to say George Bush will be a terrible nominee for our party because he's not the real heir to Ronald Reagan. He wouldn't do it.

Kondracke: Were you at the '88 convention?

Buckley: I was at the '88 convention as an employee of CBS News.

Kondracke: So were you witness to the Jack Kemp for veep goings-on?

Buckley: I was witness as an observer but I was also in more of a journalistic role. My counterpart at CBS, my Democratic counterpart from the Biden campaign, Tom Donlan [phonetic], fled to the Dukakis campaign the moment he got invited, so I knew if Jack had become the veep I would have left CBS like that to go help him, and in fact the first day of the convention, or before the convention actually began, maybe that Saturday or Sunday, I ran into [Stuart K.] Stu Spencer, who said, "I need to talk to you." I said, "Sure." He said, "I think Jack's going to be the veep, and if Jack's the veep they've asked me to run the vice presidential operation. Can I count on you?" And I said, "In a heartbeat. Here's my pager number" or whatever it was that people used in 1988, I said "Just track me down and I'm there." But my recollection was that Quayle was announced like Monday of the convention week, they took the drama out of it pretty early, yes, yes, Bush arrived with Quayle. That's how he got there.

Kondracke: Right. What was your relationship like after '88, in the HUD days, for example? You were at Fannie Mae [Federal National Mortgage Association] for part of it anyway.

Buckley: Yes, I was persona non grata, so that even if Jack had wanted to bring me into HUD and even if I'd wanted to go, it couldn't have happened. The person who actually wanted to hire me in the late winter of '88 was Dick Darman, and I met with Darman and Darman, "I need somebody to be my head of communications at OMB [Office of Management and Budget]." And so I was told by him basically "I'm going to get you in there." And I got a phone call from John Rogers, who was a Baker aide then and is the senior partner for external activities for Goldman Sachs [investment firm] today, I got

this phone call from John [F.W.] Rogers saying, "Dick Darman was taken aside at a White House Christmas party by the First Lady, who said to him "I hear you're playing footsie with John Buckley, and you should just know that your position is not so solid with the President or with me that you should make that kind of mistake." And just to finish that thought, I got a phone call from my Aunt Ann [C. Buckley], who was the wife of former Senator James [L.] Buckley, who had grown up in Rye, New York, with Barbara Pierce [Bush], and she was a little younger than Barbara Bush but they were good friends, and she'd gone to the same Christmas party, and Barbara Pierce had said to her, "You know, Ann, we love your nephew Christopher Buckley but we hate your nephew John Buckley." So I got these back-to-back phone calls. It was like, "Oooh, I think I may be unemployed in Washington for a while." I went to work for Ed at the NRCC, I worked at the NRCC, I had cordial relations with Jack but not a lot of contact with him, and then in October of 1990, being incredibly disillusioned with Republican politics and the White House and having had a situation in which we helped Newt Gingrich become the whip, and Newt turned around and leaked to *National Review* a story of what a disaster Ed Rollins and the NRCC were, I just thought, "I'm not going to work here and get stabbed in the back." I was asked by [James] Jim Lake to come work for his firm, so I jumped in and worked for Robinson, Lake, Lerer, Montgomery, and then in the fall of '91 went to work at Fannie Mae. So I had very little contact with Jack between March of '88 and October of '91, and then when I went to work in Fannie Mae, obviously I was back in that sphere, and I went to visit him. I went to have lunch with him once in that interim period at HUD. We had a lovely lunch, it was very, very nice, but you know he was busy and I was not germane to what he was interested in at that time. I'm not saying he

was anything less than gracious, but there was nothing I could do for him.

Kondracke: In 1996 you're communications director for the Dole Campaign. How did Dole, given the history with Jack Kemp, come to pick Jack Kemp as his vice president?

Buckley: It was an amazing thing. He would always tease Scott Reed and say, [imitates] "Talk to the quarterback lately?" "What's the quarterback thinking?" Jack was always on Dole's radar. But the people who were being checked out more seriously we thought were people like [Christine Todd] Christy Whitman, at one point [Francis A.] Frank Keating, the governor of Oklahoma, some other senators, but no matter whose trial balloon was being floated, no matter who John King at the AP was saying "They're looking at so and so—"

Kondracke: But weren't you leaking those stories?

Buckley: No. There were two things that I was told would absolutely piss Dole off would be if I leaned into any vice presidential story. I knocked down one. There was a story that I think Bob Novak was working on or broke or something, I can't remember, that Dole was looking at [Mary E.A.H.] Elizabeth Dole, was testing whether or not he could run constitutionally with Elizabeth Dole as the vice presidential nominee, and in fact there was a poll to see what would happen if he did that that Dole asked for. But I jumped into knocking that story down and squelching it because the poll came back and said it would be a disaster. No, I wasn't engaged in that. John was working the peripheries. And all these stories were broken by King. King was

working the lawyers, the vetters, the Senate people, who's been talked to on this. But Jack was always alive throughout that. There was never a point where he wasn't alive. It was bizarre to Scott and to me that at the end of the day maybe 10 days out, Dole said to Scott, "Go find out if I asked the quarterback if he'd take it." So Scott talked to Jack and Jack said "If he asked me, I would take it."

Kondracke: Phone call?

Buckley: A phone call from Scott to Jack. And then the assignment came to Scott from Dole, "I've had the vetters talk to Jack about anything that might be problematic in his past but that's not good enough for me. You and Buckley need to go and sit down with Jack and look him in the eye and say to him 'Is there anything that's going to blow up if I choose you as the nominee?'" So at this point we were in veep craziness with cameras around our crappy headquarters up near the CNN [Cable News Network] offices on Capitol Hill and Scott and I had to get into a Suburban [automobile]. He lay down in the backseat and I lay down in the far back and the Suburban door went up in the garage, and we went past all the cameras trying to look in, and we had this secret meeting with Jack in the garage of the Key Bridge Marriott [Roslyn, Virginia] in a camper. It was like a camping van or something like that, and we sat down with him in it and talked and looked him in the eye and said, "Is there anything, anything that would be problematical to Bob Dole if you were on the ticket," and Jack looked us in the eye and said no. So once we passed that word back to Dole, Dole moved quickly to choose him.

Kondracke: Did Dole have any doubts about anything in particular?

Buckley: There had always been rumors about Jack having had girlfriends. This was something that had come up in different news stories, and so Bob Dole as a smart Washingtonian was right to ask, and the answer that we were able to deliver back to Bob Dole was that there is nothing there that will be a problem, and it turned out to be the case.

Kondracke: There was never any oppo[sition] research done by the other side that turned up anything that you ever heard of?

Buckley: There was never anything, remember that this is a story that the Clinton campaign might not have been the first to want to get going for a lot of reasons, but there was never anything that broke. In fact the most serious thing that we had to deal with on that front, the most serious was a [Robert U.] Bob Woodward story about Bob Dole having had an affair prior to when he was granted his divorce, like 20 years earlier. And that took like Nelson Warfield, the campaign press secretary, going and sitting down with [Leonard] Len Downey [Jr.] and people and saying basically, "Come on, this is ridiculous. You're going after Bob Dole for something that might or might not have happened 20 years ago?" But there was nothing that ever came up with Kemp. I met Jack and Joanne at a hotel in a little tiny town near Russell, Kansas, before it was announced. We flew them in secretly and sat down with them at the hotel, and went through how to handle any questions if they were asked, if they were uncomfortable with, what were the ways to get yourself out of it, and they—

Kondracke: Like what?

Buckley: For each of them to say there are no secrets in the Kemp campaign. Jack and I, Joanne and I have a strong marriage and there are no questions about our marriage that we're going to answer except just to tell you we have a strong and abiding marriage, and love each other very much and it's a marriage with no secrets. And they never had to use it. They never actually had to use it.

Kondracke: You said in the staff briefing that Scott Reed and Jack Kemp were your only friends in the campaign. Why did you say that?

Buckley: Because I was, the Dole campaign was a campaign that had layers of people who had different relationships with Dole from different times. I was never viewed as Dole's person, I was always viewed as Scott's person. That was a little bit of an exaggeration. There were people on the speechwriting team who were my friends and stuff like that, but the reality was I never felt particularly comfortable in the Dole campaign because Dole never signaled that he liked me all that much. I worked with him quite closely, especially on his convention speech and things like that, but there was a feeling there that everybody was out for themselves in the Dole campaign, and once that it became clear that Dole wasn't going to win, it was really sharp elbows and everybody out for themselves. The only people I actually genuinely liked and wanted to be with and help were Jack and Scott, and poor Jack was in this miserable position on the campaign trail where he was continually being asked to do exactly the one thing that he isn't any good at, which was attack. Part of it, now, is that's the role of the vice president, but it was one of these things

where they were asking him every single day, "Go do the one thing that you're bad at."

Kondracke: And he didn't do it?

Buckley: Couldn't do it. He could attack policy positions, more on foreign policy than anything else, but it was a painful disaster for him, I think, all the way through.

Kondracke: So what was he being asked to do, exactly, and who was transmitting the command?

Buckley: Some of it was directly from Dole, Dole saying to Scott, "Get the quarterback to go attack Clinton on x." And we would convey it, and it would be conveyed, and it would go in through Scott to Jack, me to Jack, always with us saying "We've been asked to ask you to." But then there were other people like Wayne [L.] Berman, who was on the Kemp plane, who were delivery people of these kinds of messages as well.

Kondracke: Berman was the Dole appointee to mind Jack.

Buckley: Yes, and then Jack got [Edwin J.] Ed Feulner [Jr.] recuited sort of as a counterweight. "I want Ed there." The only thing that everybody was unified on except Jack was we wanted to keep Jude away from him, because Jude was considered to be too, by this point, '96, too unstable a personality, but I'm sure they still talked by phone.

Kondracke: Ed Fuelner said that they had to keep a cell phone away from Jack because Wanniski would call.

Buckley: Right.

Kondracke: So what about the debate now? Where were you during the vice presidential debate?

Buckley: Physically I was down in the staff room, and I was sort of the lead spinner going out to defend Jack afterwards, and the best I could do was, "Well, the Vice President's a very impressive debater, but would you really want to have a beer with him? Among these two guys who would you actually really want to be with?" It was the best I could do because it was such a disastrous debate. Scott and I flew down with [Robert Wood] Woody Johnson, now the owner of the [New York] Jets, to St. Petersburg. We'd had reports that Jack was not doing what he needed to do on debate prep. I had another report, because one of the people who was recruited to help him was my uncle, [F.] Reid Buckley, who's like a speech coach. And Reid had the assignment of a lifetime—got to spend two minutes with Jack, because Jack just wasn't going to do what the campaign was asking him to do. This is where his perversity in doing what he wanted to do and not what others wanted him to do worked against him.

Kondracke: Did you ever develop a diagnosis for why did Jack not do what he needed to do for that debate?

Buckley: I think it was that Jack believed that he was going to be asked to play a role that he fundamentally couldn't play, which was to

be the attack dog against Al Gore. And I think he rationalized his position as "Gore may attack me and may attack Dole, but he's going to look worse, and I'm going to be the statesman and I'm going to get my positions across." As it turned out, Gore was an excellent debater and was relentless in his attacks on Dole, and the thing that Dole was pissed off at Jack about was that he didn't defend Dole. That's all Dole cared about. If Jack had not attacked Clinton that would have been fine, but when Al Gore attacked Bob Dole and said Dole stands for this, Dole stands for that, Dole believes this, and Jack would say "I'm so glad you asked me about economic growth in the Third World." It was a disaster.

Kondracke: What happened after the debate? Did Dole ever dress Kemp down?

Buckley: What happened was we'd set it up so that the Kemp plane was to fly out of St. Petersburg, Florida and the Dole plane would fly from wherever he was to Cincinnati, Ohio, and they were going to meet and do a big meeting at the airport and then a big rally in Cincinnati. I may misremember this a little bit, but I think that Dole didn't even wait for Jack at the airport. I think that, like, Kemp's plane landed in and Dole maybe waved to Jack, or maybe they spoke for two seconds, but Dole was so furious that they went off in their separate motorcades into Cincinnati and they had their rally together, but the body language between the two of them was Dole was turning away from Kemp, and I literally don't think they spoke for the rest of the campaign. I may be wrong. Also by that point my position with Dole was poisoned, because when he saw me all he saw was Kemp. [laughs]

Kondracke: What kind of recriminations were there against Scott Reed?

Buckley: Scott was in the position of taking it from Dole.

Kondracke: What had Scott Reed done during the ’88 campaign?

Buckley: He was our Northeastern guy—no, right? he did Iowa.

Kondracke: Did he do Iowa?

Buckley: He did Iowa. That’s what it was. He was our Iowa guy. That’s right.

Kondracke: And so that was a disaster too. But nonetheless Scott Reed ended up being chief of staff at HUD, so they must have bonded.

Buckley: The problem in Iowa was not Scott. The problem in Iowa was Pat Robertson on the one hand, Bob Dole on the other hand, John Maxwell, and Jack’s message.

Kondracke: So post-’96 what kind of contact did you have with Jack?

Buckley: We would stay in touch. We were periodically in touch. We had lunch once a year, and then maybe once every two years. Not a lot of contact with him. It was always cordial and always nice.

Kondracke: But you’d been his sidekick.

Buckley: I know. Yes.

Kondracke: Did he have an intimacy problem or a friendship problem or was it your problem?

Buckley: He was, like a lot of politicians, he did with staff view you only in the context of staff, and so after ’96 there was nothing I could do for him, so there was no real effort on his part for us to be friends, which I completely understand. Also I was pretty busy ’96 on with Fannie Mae and then with AOL [America Online], so we stayed in touch, but I didn’t really make an effort, he didn’t really make an effort, which I obviously regret, because who knew he would die young?

Kondracke: Did he have any really, really good friends?

Buckley: Yes, he did.

Kondracke: Who were his really, really good friends?

Buckley: Vin Weber I would put in the category of being a really good friend, there was a guy named Barney [J.] Skladany [Jr.], who was a tennis partner of his. Barney was like a lobbyist for Exxon Mobile or something, but his relationship with Jack was his tennis partner. But tennis was pretty important to Jack, while his knees were good, so that was an important friendship. And then he had sort of a slew of intellectual friends, Michael Novak, and people like that. So he didn’t have a problem with friendship, what he did have a problem with was

concentration. Empower America was a situation where I think he just bounced around so much. If he didn't have a task at hand, he would just bounce around and do a thousand different things.

Kondracke: Anything that you haven't said that you desperately want to say?

Buckley: No, no, I've talked way too much. I hope this was helpful.

Kondracke: It was enormously helpful. Thank you very much, John.

Buckley: You're welcome, you're welcome.