JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

PETER M. DAWKINS

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Interviewer

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Jack Kemp Foundation
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Williams: This is a Kemp Oral History Project interview for the Jack Kemp Foundation with General Peter M., Pete, Dawkins. We are in the offices of Flintlock Capital in New York City. Today is Wednesday August 10, 2011, and I'm Brien Williams.

We've been starting these interviews by asking people what first comes to mind when you think of Jack Kemp.

Dawkins: Enthusiasm, passion, curiosity, a very curious man, a quality I admire enormously, and warmth. Those are the adjectives that come off my mind.

Williams: What are the parameters of the curiosity, would you say?

Dawkins: Jack never saw a debate he didn't like. Didn't matter what the issue was or the topic was or the subject was, he would engage you on it, sometimes confirming that you're the brightest person on Earth because you believed the same thing he believed, or that you're nuts because you missed the whole point. But he loved to wrestle with ideas, and it was both serious and thoughtful, on the one hand, and there was entertainment at the same time. It seemed to me it was a hobby to debate and argue. Not argue in an angry way, but to

kick ideas back and forth and see where they led. I enjoyed that about him.

Williams: Did the entertainment veer towards humor or not necessarily?

Dawkins: Yes, it was a healthy marbling of jocular humor. Jack was a happy man, was a happy guy. Now, I've got to qualify that in the sense that most of the time I've spent in my life with Jack was in Vail, Colorado, so it was in the context of being away from the office with his family. He put several houses together and had limitless family members around a good deal of the time. Saw him mostly in the wintertime. He was an avid skier, as am I. So I think he was particularly buoyant during those periods of time by the fact that he was out of doors. He was an active, physical, vigorous person, loved the mountains, was relaxed most of the time, and thoroughly enjoyed having his family there be a part of it. These were very positive settings in which I had the opportunity to spend time together with Jack and Joanne [Kemp] and [James] Jimmy [Kemp] and the gang.

Williams: You used the word "engagement" a few minutes ago. What was his engagement style?

Dawkins: Well, Jack could talk. He could definitely talk about anything for any length of time, and I would say on the balance side of engagement was he was doctrinaire in some things, supply-side issues and whatnot. There was truth and wisdom and correctness, and he knew what it was and he was going to share it with you. So on certain topics you almost had the feeling sometimes that he was using you as a sounding board to reassure himself that the things he believed in were right, but other times, particularly if you got off the set piece topics on which he had very fixed views, then was where he would really engage and think about it and think aloud. There are many people who are like this, I've found; I don't know about you. They think by discussion. I'm not as much that way. I tend to muse about things where I think I'm more inclined to fashion my views. Jack, I've had the sense, fashioned his views by hearing what he said, as well as what other people said and whatnot, but it was a kind of public or open interlocutory process by which he fashioned or refined or developed ideas.

Williams: Was he as good a listener as a talker?

Dawkins: No. No, I don't think so. I think he loved to talk, but I don't mean that negatively. He could meet anybody, make anyone feel comfortable, was endearing in that sense. This may be contradictory to other parts of his personality—I guess consistency is the hobgoblin of a small mind—but if it was a topic that either he had a fully fashioned view of or one he wasn't terribly interested in, he was not a good listener. Perhaps most of us aren't in that regard. But if you brought up something that was new or he hadn't thought of and he became intrigued by it, he would listen very carefully, and he was a good interrogator. That's probably not the right word, but I mean investigator.

We had long conversations where he would just pick away at it, clearly trying to get his fix on it. Was this right or was it wrong or did it make sense or was it kind of a new way of thinking about it or whatever. I'm giving an internally contradictory set of characterizations, but I think, from my perspective, all of them are accurate. He was a combination of some contradictions and differences.

Williams: Do any topics pop out in your memory bank of discussions that you had with him on one of these new topics?

Dawkins: That's a fair question. Let me think about that as we continue to talk. I may be able to come up with a good example. I don't have one that pops out right at this instant.

Williams: A couple of other questions. A moment ago you said that he was a happy man except when he wasn't. Explain that clarification.

Dawkins: Well, he was passionate, and so if the world wasn't behaving the way he thought it ought to be, he was unhappy about that. He wanted things to be as they were supposed to be. But it was more passion than it was being unhappy.

He had this wonderful, fresh, energetic, likeable exuberance about him, and, by and large, it didn't matter if you disagreed with him; you still liked him. I suspect you've picked that up from many other people. I'm trying to explain it to myself, I think. Also the fact that he had a real interest in other people. You know how sometimes you meet someone and you're having a conversation but they really aren't interested in you? There may be key words that come out in the conversation and they react to those. I've known a number of people in my life who have this quality—and I admire it greatly—where he really was interested. If he liked you, if he cared about you, he was really interested in you. As I said, he wasn't a good listener, and

many times he wasn't, but he could be a very good listener and a very good friend.

Williams: That is probably a testimony to what you had to offer him too.

Dawkins: We were very good friends and genuinely enjoyed one another's company.

Williams: I have a slightly off-the-wall question here. Just a minor point, but in a one-on-one conversation without anyone else around and whatnot, what was his speaking volume like? Could he go quiet?

Dawkins: Yes, yes, but he loved to be in a group, in which case he was not quiet.

The other thing I should mention is many of the conversations we had was with the television on, the football game going on. I'd mentioned earlier that we didn't talk a lot about football in the sense of reminiscing, what were our experiences in playing ball and whatnot, but seemed like half of the time I spent with Jack was Jack and me and the television set.

Williams: With the sound on?

Dawkins: With the sound down, usually low. It was kind of a funny experience in the sense that he was very focused and whatnot and could carry on a very cogent and interested conversation with half or some piece of his consciousness watching the ballgame. Then an interception or a fumble or somebody ran for a touchdown, he'd leap up and slap the table or whatever. So he was animated. He was a very animated person, not droll, but that was part of the fun of being around him.

Williams: When did you first become aware of Jack Kemp?

Dawkins: It's an interesting question. I was aware of him when I was in the military because of our shared football experience. I didn't meet him until I was out of the Army. Never met him until sometime in the middle eighties, because Judi [Dawkins] and I had been going to Vail for thirty-nine years, so we had been going there for a long time. So the first time I met him was at, I think, a cocktail party in Vail given by Rod Slifer and Beth [Slifer]. I don't know if those names mean anything to you. Rod at the time wasn't, but became the mayor of Vail for several terms.

We immediately hit it off, partly because he knew my background and I knew his, so it wasn't we were total strangers in that sense. But he sort of engulfed you in his arm around your shoulder, and what did you think about such and such, and we were off and running. So it took about four nanoseconds for us to become acquainted.

Williams: At that first meeting, do you imagine you were seeing him as more a football player or a member of the House of Representatives?

Dawkins: Well, I don't know if you can separate them. Both. Both.

Williams: And he was looking at you more as an athlete or as a military . . .?

Dawkins: Oh, man. Jack knew who I was and knew my background, knew I'd been in the military and played ball, I guess maybe through mutual friends or something, so he was kind of cognizant of the bold-print entries of my background and I, likewise, of him. We did talk about military things both at that first meeting and for the years afterwards. He was interested in the military, I think had a tiny little

military experience when he was playing ball, but nothing of any significance. I don't know if he was on any Armed Services Committee positions or whatever. I don't think so. But we would talk, now that I look back on it, with some frequency about, and he seemed to, warrantedly or not, wanted to get my opinion on things about what was going on with the military or whatever engagement we were in the midst of at those times and whatnot. But there were no boundaries on what we talked about.

[Pause.]

Williams: So in broad general terms characterize your relationship with Jack Kemp over the years.

Dawkins: Instant connection when we met. I'm not good at my specific memories, but I think we got together again within days of when we had met. Skied a good deal together. He skied at top speed, not always in Olympic form, but everything was a race, and he loved it, absolutely loved it, and was happiest when there would be a clutch of people who he knew and were friends and skied with, which he would lead down the mountain. It was a very important part of our relationship, because in a way it kind of purified things, the complexity

of politics, and particularly at the levels that he operated in, the agendas and the contradictions and the ways you had to fashion alliances. All of what his life as a politician was about was complex. Skiing was simple. It was, in a way, kind of pure, and I think even kind of metaphorically he enjoyed it as refreshing and a kind of a release and a cleansing. Maybe I'm attributing too much to it, but it was fun.

As we got to know one and other and spend time together and our wives, Judi and Joanne, became very friendly, we met all the family and so we would seek one another out. If we were going to ski, we'd always check in and find out if they were going to be there, and if so, we would get together for dinner or ski or all of the above or whatever.

Then, of course, when I ran for the Senate, then I became more involved with the Washington Jack Kemp. So I saw him in Washington and we would do things there and whatnot. So there were a variety of venues and contexts in which we were together, but the one that had the lasting memory and the most significance were the ones that came out of our time together in Colorado.

Williams: Would you lose track with each other during the year then?

Dawkins: I think I seldom saw Jack and Joanne during the summers because—I can't remember whether they came out. Well, a little bit of history. I don't think it's material to anything, but the conventional wisdom is people come to Vail for the skiing and they stay for the summers. They come for the winters, stay for the summers, and we were certainly that case. We were very enthusiastic skiers. Our kids ski, now our grandchildren ski. We've had a place in Vail for years. And only ten years ago did we discover golf and began going out in the summers, and even then, that was complicated because we had a home on the water in New Jersey, and July, August, September are the prime times to be there and July, August, and September are the prime times to be in Vail. So we never quite worked it out correctly, but we still ski thirty or forty days a year, but we're a member of two golf clubs in the Vail Valley and we ski out there. But I don't remember seeing Jack in the summertime. It would have been an unusual circumstance to have been together with him in the summer.

Williams: So looking back over the many years of sharing time with the Kemp family in Vail—and you've shared one vivid memory of Jack leading the pack down the slope—what other memories stand out or occasions?

Dawkins: You know, the funny thing is they kind of all fuse together. Maybe this is my age, but at the time they're distinct and vivid, and then they just kind of fold together. I sort of associate Cathie Black and Jack and Joanne because we would always see them over the Christmas holidays, and we would all be out there and we became mutual friends. So that was another kind of set of relationships that developed.

Jack would periodically speak at gatherings in Vail. There's, of course, a big New York contingent in Vail, so there were people of stature in the financial, and Mayor [Michael R.] Bloomberg used to go to Vail all the time before he became mayor. I don't think he does now. But there would be dinners or gatherings or lunch things, and Jack was sought after and would regularly speak at those sorts of things. Again I'm repeating, but the main part was personal and family and vacation.

Williams: Did you share Christmases or New Year's together, the two families, or not?

Dawkins: Yes, now that I think of it, we had Christmas dinner with them—my memory's so terrible—four or five times, actually, in the last ten years of his life. They would have these gigantic family dinners,

and so our kids and then our grandkids would come along and join in. Those were frolicsome and good fun. Jack had a birthday party that Joanne gave for him five years ago or something like that. Has this come up? I remember sitting out on the back deck of his house. What month is Jack's birthday?

Williams: I've got the year, but I've forgotten the month.

Dawkins: It's not important. So, yes, the answer is yes, we did share several Christmas dinners together and a birthday party. I mean, there are just a lot of occasions.

Williams: How would you describe the workings of the Kemp family as you observed it?

Dawkins: I don't know that I have any very distinctive features about it. One thing was funny was that when Jack and Joanne bought the house next door, because they had so many family, and put them together, you had to walk through the garage. It was not architecturally elegant combination of these two properties, and it always seemed a little curious to me that you had this constant traffic through the garage where the cars were parked, going from the one to

the other. I mention that, it's not directly in response to your question except that everybody seemed very comfortable. I don't remember fights. I'm sure all families have squabbles and things, but my memory of them is that there was great fondness among all the kids and their children. If you asked me for a family collection, it was with everybody smiling.

Williams: And not because Jack told them to.

Dawkins: And not because Jack told them to, although he was capable of that, but no.

Williams: What about their religious life in Vail?

Dawkins: The faith was very strong. It was an important part of their lives, not something they wore on their sleeve, by the way, but more a source of inner comfort and strength. You admired that, I think; at least I did.

I should talk for a minute about Joanne, because they were a team. Jack was not a simple person to live with. He was action-biased, impatient, strong-willed, could be aggressive. I don't mean physically aggressive, but I mean by temperament. Joanne helped

bring a humanity to them as a couple. She's very smart, very self-confident, a person in her own right, but she seemed to relish the role of being Jack's wife. She didn't feel it necessary to compete with him, didn't compete with him, but people, Judi and I included, had a fondness for Joanne, as well as for Jack and Joanne. She was a person who you just liked. She was thoughtful and alert, not funny but fun, and she took it as her role to support Jack. If you were in a room with thirty or forty people and Jack was working the room, Joanne wasn't working the room, but she was aware of where he was, and she would periodically wander over and extract him from a conversation that seemed to be going on too long or bring him a plate from the buffet because he hadn't had time to go get dinner or whatever.

It was really a very delightful way, it seems to me, that they—I'm being too intellectual about this, but they clearly loved one another, they liked one another, had been together enough that they knew how to make it all work. It worked comfortably. You had the sense that Joanne Kemp really admired her husband, loved him and liked him and all of that, but she also admired him in a very attractive way, very genuine, in a natural way. Does that make any sense?

Williams: How would you characterize his feelings towards her?

Dawkins: He wasn't demonstrative, but you just knew that there was an unbreakable bond there.

Williams: Did she ever put herself in the position of protecting other people from his aggressiveness, from his loudness, whatever?

Dawkins: I'm trying to think. My answer to that is I'm sure she did. I can't give you an illustrative example of it, but you just knew that had you been there, there would have been times when she did. But she was a leavening. I mean Jack could get very almost bombastic, and Joanne was sort of, "There, there." Would that we all would have that kind of assistance.

Williams: Recalling times that you were around a dinner table with them, would she speak up?

Dawkins: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. In fact, one reason I think my wife and Joanne got to be such good friends is that both of them are quite prepared to assert themselves and become a part of it, not to compete. Again, there's a very different—if he was arguing supply-side doctrine, Joanne would not enter into that, but in a more wide-

ranging conversation, sure. She was perfectly prepared and did assert herself, share her views, had views.

Williams: In Vail did they have domestic help?

Dawkins: I don't think so.

Williams: So she ran the household.

Dawkins: Yes.

Williams: I'm speculating now. Having attended an exhibit at the Smithsonian a few years back on the polio experiences, particularly the fifties with the iron lungs and so on and so forth, and knowing that you contracted polio—

Dawkins: I did.

Williams: —at an early age, but then how did you recover to be such an athlete?

Dawkins: Well, I was very fortunate. It was probably in 1948 or 1949, so back in the Neanderthal Age, I had scoliosis of the spine, quite severe S-shaped deformity of the spine. The conventional treatment was to put you in a body cast, and there was a young woman doctor—gosh, this is awful; I'll remember her name in a moment—who had concluded that this was the wrong way to treat this disease, particularly in children who are rapidly growing. So her thought was that rather than put them in a body cast, which made it permanent, but if you had a spine with a curve in it, what you did is you built up the muscles on this side of the spine and you let these deteriorate and it would grow itself straight.

So my mother somehow found this doctor, so I went into what was about two and a half years of therapy, exercise, where every day for an hour or an hour and a half, my parents would put me through these very exertive set of exercises in order to use the asymmetry of the muscular development to grow the spine straight. I still have something of a curvature.

What it did was it got me very involved in physical activity. I was small. I was a runt, a little bitty kid, but I loved sports and I wanted to play sports. So I wrote off in *Popular Mechanics* to Charles Atlas. There was a Charles Atlas thing called dynamic tension, I think. It was isometric exercise before they had the word. I made barbells

out of a piece of pipe and some cement-filled coffee cans and began working out in conjunction with this therapy, because I realized I had to get bigger and stronger if I was going to play competitive sports. So in a way all of this was aiding me. Then I still, when I went off to college, I only weighed 185 pounds by then.

This is a long digression. I'll stop it here shortly. We'll talk about Jack. There was a thought, which seems so naïve now, that you got muscle-bound. You didn't want to lift weights too much because you'd get muscle-bound, whatever the heck muscle-bound meant, so they wouldn't permit you to use weights at West Point. But I knew I had to get bigger if I wanted to be able to play competitive football, so I had my parents sneak a set of barbells up to my room, and I took the plates and put them between my mattress and the springs, and the bar I used belts to hold behind the back rung of my bunk. So I hid them from the inspecting officers, and then every night after "Taps," in the dark I would work out. All of that comes back to this polio and being introduced to physical exercise as a therapy for that.

Williams: The reason I started you down this tangent is because I'm curious whether that experience—and I think, as you've described it, this is probably true—became the kind of driving force in your life, and

your distinguished career at West Point was sort of born at that stage. Is that correct?

Dawkins: Yes, I think that's right. I think that's right.

Williams: What about Jack Kemp? Have you ever speculated where the driving force came for him? Because, like you, he distinguished himself in so many areas.

Dawkins: I don't know. I'm not sure I'm adding much to the portrait that we've already gotten, but he was a man of deep conviction, an instinctive competitor. Jack Kemp wanted to win. The only question was what was it that he was going to win, but he was going to win at it. I have no idea why, and I was a fierce competitor. From as early as I can remember, I just loved to compete and I loved to win. It's a good question. In the readings that I've done, I've never heard anybody give a very satisfying explanation of why some people are made that way and others aren't, but Jack was. Maybe that was part of what brought us together, was kind of a sense of sharing this outlook, this attribute.

Williams: So when Jack left the Buffalo Bills and ran for Congress and won and went to the House, that probably wasn't on your radar at all. So it wasn't until you met him, really, in Vail that you began to see—and did you track, then, his political life at all or not?

Dawkins: Track sounds like too formal a thing. When somebody becomes a friend and they're in politics, you pay attention, yes.

Williams: Did you occasionally write him on issues that were—

Dawkins: No. Never did. Never did.

Williams: Did you get any letters or correspondence from him at all that you recall?

Dawkins: Got lots of them when he had left the House, in his organizations that he was involved, more sometimes than I was particularly interested in getting. [laughs] I say that tongue-in-cheek. But, no, we didn't have a correspondence where we debated issues. Did he do that with other people?

Williams: Not many, no, but he was a prodigious writer. The Christmas cards people all talk about and so forth, and the files at the Library of Congress are full of notes that he's written people over the years.

Dawkins: One thing I would mention to you because it may be relevant. Judy and I spent the Fourth of July with Alan M. Simpson out in Cody, Wyoming. I, in fact, was the Grand Marshal of the Cody Stampede, a life-altering experience. Alan and [Susan] Ann [Simpson] had had a luncheon, and afterwards Judi and I went to his study and he was showing us stuff and pictures and whatnot, and he pulled out these volumes by year. He has them for seemingly innumerable years, and they're letters that he's gotten. Of course, with emails now you don't have that. But he'd pull out 1992 and here were all these marvelous letters from the King of Saudi Arabia or whatever it was. He or his staff had—they were in chronological order, and he was going to give those to the Library of Congress or something. Jack was a writer. I don't know if anybody has compilations of the correspondence that he got back.

Williams: Most of it's in the Library, I think.

Dawkins: It would be interesting.

Williams: He had abysmal handwriting. I can assure you of that. [laughs]

How did yours and his views on economics—did they parallel one and other?

Dawkins: Well, I'm a fiscal conservative, as was he. I never was a doctrinaire supply-sider, but I think my general economic view is quite consistent with his and with Ronald Reagan's and whatnot. So we were very harmonious in our general outlook of controlling and limiting taxation, but I never got into what I think of as doctrinaire supply side as formal supply-side doctrine. It wasn't anything that I was smitten by.

Williams: So would you sometimes try to talk him out of the doctrinaireness of it all?

Dawkins: No. No, I don't think so. Quite honestly, Jack was not a guy who you talked out of a position that he had firmly come to embrace, and so I'm now speculating on myself. I didn't consciously think this, but I think subconsciously I thought that's a ground I don't

want to go because all I'm going to do is get beat up. [laughs] But I admired him for that, by the way. I admired him for having taken the time to really understand it and then embrace it and then be a proponent of it. It's terrific.

Williams: When you look back on the Reagan years in terms of economics and in terms of the economic wellbeing of the country, was Reagan really a success and his policies a success, or was there more problems to it than a supply-sider would admit to?

Dawkins: That's a very cleverly leading question. [laughs] The answer is yes. [laughs]

Williams: Oh, okay.

Dawkins: I became a big fan of Ronald Reagan. Didn't start out necessarily as such, but the reason that I had such fondness and respect and regard for him really pertains to what seems to be a problem with our president today, and this is well known, this is a blinding flash of the obvious, but Ronald Reagan believed in things, really believed in them, and he had this knack. I don't know why he wasn't a more successful actor, which he wasn't particularly, but

people trusted him and they believed that when he said something, that he meant it and it made sense. The Soviet Union, he took on the Soviet Union in a way that none of the intellectuals would ever have accepted or supported or tolerated or advocated. He took them on, and, lo and behold, they were an empty shirt. Nobody knew that.

So my admiration for Ronald Reagan is very high, but not because of the cleverness of his economic doctrine, although I think it was the right thing for the right time, but, rather, because of the fact that he was able to lead this country through a very precarious period and did it very effectively. You have to remember he wasn't all that popular at the end of his first term, hadn't been all that successful at the end of his first term. It was only in the second term that it all came together, and he's got his detractors too.

Williams: Talk a little bit about Jack Kemp on military matters.

Dawkins: He certainly was a hawk. I'm trying to recall whether we had talked much about—when we met was during the Cold War, and I had been working for the deputy secretary of Defense for a while and had been very involved in strategic nuclear matters, and he seemed to be intrigued by that. So we spent a number of conversations I can recall talking about strategic nuclear issues and the basis on which

that thinking rested. You wanted an example of something where he would get interested in something. Here would be an example. He knew nothing about, or as far as I could tell at the outset, nothing about nuclear deterrence theory or any of the technical features of strategic nuclear matters. I had been involved in the Defense secretariat when we did a strategic retargeting of the Soviet targets. The Soviets hated uncertainty, and one of the things they couldn't tolerate was uncertainty, and they went absolutely crazy when we had—

[telephone interruption]

Dawkins: Just to finish that, I was just trying to think of one. Earlier on in the conversation you had asked, because I was talking about he would get very interested and engaged in something, particularly where it was something he didn't have a deep background in, and I was just giving the example that because of the fact that I had been quite involved in that, strategic nuclear matters, we spent quite a bit of time. He was very curious about how do you think about it and what are the parts of it.

The example I was giving was when we retargeted, the Soviets found it very, very, very troubling to deal with uncertainty. I mean

their spies had integrated. They knew exactly what our targeting thing was. They'd spent, I don't know, six or eight years infiltrating and getting all that, and suddenly we just completely redid it, and it was really almost comical to watch how they were flopping around and desperately trying to figure out what this was all about. They were just so, so, so uncomfortable with uncertainty.

Williams: But just to clarify, that was our targeting places in—

Dawkins: Them.

Williams: Them, okay. Did Jack Kemp have a particular reputation at the Pentagon? I mean was he a kind of go-to guy?

Dawkins: No, he wasn't a go-to guy. No.

Williams: Let's move then to your run for the Senate in 1988.

Dawkins: And how this pertains to Jack Kemp?

Williams: That's right. That's right. But I was curious because I had read somewhere that Virginia Democrats had tried to get you to run

for the Senate in Virginia, but you were really a committed Republican for all of your life.

Dawkins: Yes.

Williams: Right. So that was not going to be a temptation.

Dawkins: That was not going to happen.

Williams: So how did you come to run in New Jersey?

Dawkins: Well, first of all, it was a terrible mistake. A Republican running for statewide office in New Jersey is almost an oxymoron. I'll tell you exactly how it happened. A friend of mine, who will go unnamed but who I had a lot of confidence in, told me, when I was thinking of it, engendered this idea of running, he said, "Here's one piece of advice I have. Run from a state where if you don't win, you'll be happy to live in." And I took that advice, and that's what led to my going to New Jersey because we had a home in New Jersey.

It's one of the really, really big mistakes I've ever made in my life, and I learned from it, and that was I've always gone flat-out, I think, at least I've believed I've gone without qualification to win, to

succeed at whatever I've undertaken. I should have run for Michigan. I would have been a favorite son from Michigan. Michigan's much more tolerant, despite Detroit's Democratic bias, much more tolerant of Republicans and the history of Republicans than New Jersey. My wife wasn't interested in living in Michigan. But it was one of the few times in life where—and I regret it—that I flinched. It was a long shot going as a novice to run for the Senate to begin with, but it was almost a fool's errand in New Jersey, given that, and so I like to believe I learn from mistakes, and I've tried to be more true to my basic belief if you're going to go after something, you go after it without qualification. You don't plan on what happens if you don't succeed.

Williams: When you surprised many people when you retired from the Army, were you looking at politics as something?

Dawkins: No.

Williams: You were not steering yourself in that direction?

Williams: No. It's a very simple thing. I had had a bad parachute accident, which I recovered from, but my spine was already challenged

from my early childhood and then it got badly compressed. Ultimately, I had just become a young brigadier and I had an attack. I went to Walter Reed and they had to do a spinal surgery on me, as a result of which they told me I could never parachute again. Well, I'd always been a parachutist. I'd been in the 101st Airborne and the 82nd Airborne, and I wanted to command an Airborne Division. And they said, "Well, you're not going to be able to do that."

I mistakenly, I think again, made the conclusion that I didn't want to become a headquarters general. So I was whatever, forty-three, forty-four years old and decided that if I'm not going to be able to do what I really wanted to do, this is a good age to get out and do something else. And so it was as simple as that.

Williams: Did Jack Kemp encourage you to run for office? Was he part of your decision?

Dawkins: He wasn't one who spontaneously said, "Gee, Pete, you ought to run for office," but when I got serious about it, I went to see Jack, as I did to kindred folk to get their counsel and whatnot, and Jack, of course, was unqualifiedly exuberant. Not only did he encourage, he said he demanded that I had a responsibility, a religious

obligation to do it. So he was pretty emphatic about encouraging me to do it.

Williams: And he thought New Jersey would be okay?

Dawkins: You know Jack. Sure, whatever.

Williams: Did he participate at all in your campaign?

Dawkins: Yes. Again, this is my failing in my memory, but yes, he did. I'm sure he did fundraisers for me. It gets to be kind of a blur. All of this was compressed. I hadn't done any of the proper preparation before. I just suddenly leapt in, "Let's do it." I think we raised money in eighteen states. In fact, one of the awful bits of torture of running for statewide office there is you couldn't raise enough money in New Jersey to take out a rich incumbent [Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg] , so I had to raise money in Texas and California and Michigan and Connecticut and Florida and everyplace. So who did what and where, it's all in kind of a confused mass, but yes, Jack was encouraging, supportive, involved, and I was very appreciative of his help.

Williams: Did you run in a primary, and were you opposed?

Dawkins: No, I was not opposed, which was probably a bad thing, by the way, but that's a whole other story.

Williams: He was running for president in '88, so he really didn't probably have much time until he dropped out.

Dawkins: I can't remember if it was him or another. One of the problems I had was I had been trying to get [Margaret E.] Peggy Noonan to work on my campaign and had met with her, and she seemed very responsive to it. Then she was stolen off a week later by one of the presidential campaigns. I don't remember if it was Jack's campaign or not or who she went with.

But one of the problems I had was—how many presidential contenders were there in '88? Six Republicans? Something like that. And every one of them, just about the time I would line up somebody to be on my staff, they would get an offer to one of the presidential things, and so I ended up with a rookie staff. I was a rookie with a rookie staff, where my vision had been that I needed help, so I needed to have a really set of grizzled veterans on my staff, and then eventually all got bled away to the presidential campaigns.

Williams: So other than the question about Noonan, Jack didn't supply any support for you in terms of staffing that you recall.

Dawkins: No.

Williams: I was surprised at how nasty that campaign was. I read a couple of things about that.

Dawkins: Yes. It was Jim Carville's warm-up and he got it. He understood. It wasn't until the last week of the campaign that it finally dawned on me what this was all about. And then I've gotten to know Jim, James, since then, and, yes, he said, "The only way we're going to beat you was to corrode your reputation, and so we just put everything in." Roger [E.] Ailes was helping me. Then he also went to the presidential side, and Roger immediately said, "Look, they've gone negative. You can't not go negative."

I said, "I don't want to go negative. That's not the whole basis on which I want to run for public office. That's not what I am."

He said, "Well, you're going to lose."

Then once we got locked in that battle, it was literally a foredrawn conclusion, but it was very complicated because—I want to

get back to Jack, but the reason that they say you have to negative is if he puts out a negative campaign, normally they're TV things, and you go positive and you say, "That's not right, that's a lie, that's inaccurate," and you do it really well, and let's say you persuade 95 percent of the people that you're right, well, you've lost 5 percent, and you never get 100 percent. So you're doomed. The only thing you can do, it's different now, but at that stage, was you've got to lob the mortar shells back. And then once that, then I'm off my theme. It's just a couple of bitchy guys spitting at one and other, and nobody wants to do that.

Williams: Did economics play a big role in your campaign and your issues or not?

Dawkins: Not really, not in New Jersey. No, that was not a leading piece of it.

Williams: In the interest of time we'll move right along here. I noticed that in '89 you were a defeated candidate for the Senate and Jack Kemp was a defeated candidate for the presidency, and Pete Rozelle resigned from the NFL. Did either of you at all lure—

Dawkins: Cause Pete to resign? [laughs]

Williams: No, no, no, no, no. Wanted to succeed him?

Dawkins: I knew Pete very well, by the way. He was a good friend. No. Frankly, I was broke again. I'd made some money on Wall Street and then spent it all and then borrowed a million dollars, and so I was a million dollars in the hole and so I had to go back to work. [laughs] I was at one point asked to head the U.S. Olympic Committee, which I was very interested in, but it's a mess and they wouldn't give me the authority to do the things that I said I had to have, so I didn't do that. But I don't know whether Jack was contacted in regard to the NFL position. I don't know.

Williams: I don't believe he was, but some people have thought that he may have aspired to the position, and I'd read somewhere that you had too.

Dawkins: No, never aspired to it. If somebody had come breathlessly to my door wanting me to be the commissioner, I probably would have thrown my hat in the ring for sure.

Williams: In later years, then, from ’89 forward, I guess we pretty well covered your contacts with Jack. You mentioned the letters you received. Were those mainly funding letters?

Dawkins: Periodically he would send one out on some kind of a broadside on some policy issue, more likely than not a supply-side, the proclamation thing.

Williams: But you didn’t sign on to Empower America? Did you do much of anything with his projects?

Dawkins: No, no, I really didn’t. He wasn’t after me, and I was living a very intense life at that stage and I had 110 percent of my energies absorbed.

Williams: Were you at all involved in his last days?

Dawkins: Not a whole lot. He was very private about it, as you may know. We kept in very close touch with Joanne and I think were alert to what was going on. He’d had a very tough time, as you know. A couple times we had asked—we thought we’d like to come by and see him and we were encouraged not to.

Williams: This was in Vail?

Dawkins: This was in Washington.

Williams: Because he was not diagnosed until December of ’08, so had he been at Vail that winter, do you imagine, or not?

Dawkins: No, he wouldn’t have been that year. No.

Williams: So your last contact with him was—

Dawkins: Was ’07.

Williams: What was the nature of—that was at Vail?

Dawkins: It was at Vail, yes.

Williams: A few summation questions here now. In your view, do athletes make good politicians?

Dawkins: Well, I'm uncomfortable with a generalization at that level. Some do, some don't. But I do think that what makes some people excel in athletics are a set of skills that are transferable, some of them simplistically: the importance of fundamentals, that you have to be master of the specifics and the techniques. Preparation is key. Hard work, competitiveness, teamwork, something that seems to be markedly absent in our legislative bodies right now. Commitment to a goal beyond your personal. There's a whole set of things that may sound corny to some people, but I don't think they are. I think they're very much translatable, but to generalize that athletes make good elected representatives I think goes a bit too far.

Williams: I'm going to rephrase that question the next time I use it. [laughs]

How do you think Jack Kemp should be remembered?

Dawkins: As a patriot most of all; as a man of principle and integrity; a family man, a person to whom his family meant a great deal. His is a very American story, in many respects self-made, beloved by the vast majority of people who knew him, and someone who left a legacy to be very proud of.

Williams: Are we leaving anything unsaid today?

Dawkins: I'm sure we are, but I don't know what it is.

Williams: You didn't come with any particular point you wanted to make we haven't covered?

Dawkins: No.

Williams: Good.

Dawkins: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

Williams: Thank you very much.

[End of interview]