JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

JOHN V. "VIN" WEBER

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Interviewer

Morton Kondracke

JACK KEMP FOUNDATION
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Morton Kondracke: This is a Jack Kemp Oral History Project interview with former Congressman Vin Weber. Today is December 3, 20012. We're at his offices at the law firm [sic] of Clark and Weinstock [Inc.] in Washington, DC and I'm Morton Kondracke. Thanks so much for doing this, Vin.

Vin Weber: Nice to be with you.

Kondracke: When did you first meet Jack Kemp?

Weber: I think that I invited Jack Kemp to an event in Minnesota in winter of 1979. There's an outside chance I met him in the campaign of 1978, but the first thing I remember is '79. In 1978, I managed [Rudolph E.] Rudy Boschwitz's campaign for the United States Senate in Minnesota. Seventy-eight was a particularly great year in Minnesota because we had both Senate seats up owing to the death of Hubert [H.] Humphrey, as well as the governorship. In what had been at that time a strongly Democratic state, we won all three—two Senators and a governor. So I organized along with a small group of other folks a conference which led to the formation of an organization called the New Majority Leadership Project, and we put together an event at a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] camp outside the Twin Cities, Camp Ihduhapi [phonetic], which turned out to be really kind of interesting in terms of the people that we had there. Our objective was to get the—we were foolish enough to say—'under-35.' We figured out later that was not the right way to phrase it, but we did at the time. We said under-35 Republican thinkers of the future, and to introduce them to Republican intellectual leadership. And we had really a great conference. I'll go broader than your question. We had

Jude [T.] Wanniski to come and talk about economic policy, we had Michael Novak to talk about social policy, we had John [F.] Lehman [Jr.] to come talk about national security policy, we had [Richard B.] Dick Wirthlin to come and talk about public opinion. All of these people, of course, were pretty prominent in the [Ronald W.] Reagan Administration and the coming up, but our headliner, our main thing, was Jack Kemp as the main speaker.

Kondracke: I'm sorry, this is '78 now?

Weber: Seventy-nine. It was after the election we came together. It could have been in December of '78; it might have been, I think it was January of '79. I think that's when I first met Jack. Again, it's possible that he came in and campaigned for Rudy or something in 1978, and I shook his hand, but I think the first time I actually spent any time with him was when he came to speak to our newly emerging leadership group in Minnesota in 1979.

Kondracke: And what was your interaction with him there?

Weber: He spent the whole evening with us, and I was the organizer of the event and chairman of the event, so that's why I introduced him and moderated the discussion. But he spoke, he gave the usual Jack Kemp speech, and then took questions as long as the audience would ask questions, and we recorded it all, and that was my interaction with him. The most important thing for me was, this kind of became a line that I used in introducing him later on, we recorded all this, so the next year, about a year later, I started running for Congress myself, and I had a big rural district so I had a lot of time to spend driving

around that district. And in those days, of course, we had cassette tapes. There was nothing more sophisticated than that, but I had a tape of Jack's speech, and I would play it, repeatedly, as I'd drive around the district, the Q and A and everything like that, to sort of help me think through my talking points. And I did the same thing with some of the other speakers, but mainly with Jack. So for many years after that, when I'd introduce Jack, which I did, as you can imagine, countless times, particularly when I was the chairman of his presidential campaign, and I'd always say, "In 1979-1980, I ran around my district listening to tapes of a Jack Kemp speech, and by the end of the process, I couldn't speak for less than 45 minutes." [laughter] And he always liked that joke. But it was serious, only to the extent that I think I was an example of what Jack did for a whole generation of young politicians. I really did run around the district listening to tapes of Jack's speech. It really was formative to me. And you know, you listen to it and then, "Okay, that's good. I've got to go off and read *The Way the World Works*, by Jude Wanniski. Oh, that's interesting. I've got to out and find out who this Jean-Baptiste Say guy is, and [Robert] Mundell, who is this Mundell character?" And you know, if you pay a lot of attention to Jack over time, he led you down so many paths intellectually that you really actually learned a lot of things. And that's what Jack did for me, certainly, in those days.

Kondracke: So you have many, many, many memories of Jack Kemp, but what are your all-time favorite?

Weber: Oh, boy, I'm not good at anecdotes. Let's do something else. I'll see if I think of something else.

Kondracke: So what do you think were his major character strengths?

Weber: I think that it's a combination of optimism, relentless optimism, good will, lack of mean spiritedness, if that's the right way to phrase it, and, in a phrase that became prominent in the [George H.W.] Bush administration, 'intellectual curiosity.' I think those are probably the main things that commend him to anybody. And it's something the Party has needed since then, certainly needs now. Think about it. He was, well, I used to talk to him about always being so optimistic, and he said, "That's because I'm a quarterback." He said, "If you're not optimistic as a quarterback, you need to get off the field." And that's kind of the way he was. Every battle was an opportunity to accomplish something. Every crisis was an opportunity to improve things. And I think that permeated his approach to politics and was tremendously important. But I also think it's just hugely important for people to understand, there was no ill will in Jack Kemp. I mean, it's not that he was a flawless human being. He had flaws, of course, but I never ever heard him demean anybody else, I never heard him speak with anything that might have approached what we would call hateful feelings. I mean Jack was a good heart toward other people. He genuinely liked other people, loved other people. I guess I appreciated it more in the last few years, that that's not always the case with people, than I did at the time. And I think that's tremendously important. And then I would add the intellectual curiosity part. Jack always had a little bit of an inferiority complex about his own intellectual achievements, because he would say, "I was just a phys ed [physical education] major at Occidental College," things like that. And the truth is, you know, he was about as well educated as most members of Congress are, but he really was self-

educated. I mean there was no—as you well know if you're doing what you're doing right now, you've seen this far better than I can describe it—but it wasn't just that Jack wanted to appear to be intellectual, because there are a lot of people like that in politics. He read the books. He would probe the authors on their views. He wanted to really understand what Robert Mundell was saying about taxes, what Irving Kristol was saying about social policy. He educated himself to a very, very high level, higher than most people that I've experienced in politics, and I've experienced a lot of very good people in politics. But very few of them have the depth of knowledge of public policy that Jack Kemp had through self-education.

Kondracke: Did you ever witness any of these either author interviews or expert interviews that he conducted, questioning?

Weber: Michael Novak and Irving Kristol. He'd have people up to his house and he'd invite a bunch of junior members of Congress usually to come up and listen to Irving Kristol and question him, and so I saw Jack around folks like that quite often, and he would push and probe and try to know the answers to the questions and try to figure it all out.

Kondracke: Did he ever talk to you about quarterbacking and what quarterbacking had done—

Weber: Yes, a lot. He would throw that into the discussion quite a bit, sometimes facetiously, sometimes more seriously, but I think that that was a big part of the definition of who he really was. It wasn't just that he was a football player, although he loved football, obviously,

but he was a quarterback, and that's why you'd ask him why wasn't he a baseball fan or a basketball fan. He'd say immediately, "Because there's no quarterback." That's what he saw as a leadership principle, that you had to, a quarterback first of all has to be optimistic, second of all, has to have a vision, has to be able to see this is where things are, has to be able to see the whole picture. Everybody else on the field has their own little narrow job to do, important job, but narrower. The quarterback has to be able to see the entire playing field and in another context you might say see around corners, although there's not corners, obviously, on a football field, but see where people are going to go, what the field is going to look like in five seconds, 10 seconds, 30 seconds, and he's got to be able to execute on an operation, and repeatedly, do it again and again and again. There's no room for self-doubt, there's no room for hesitation. There's only optimism and moving forward, and the ultimate responsibility, which is leadership. The rest of the team, you may have tremendously valuable players, but even the tremendously valuable players, when you get into a play, the quarterback calls the play. And that's the analogy to political leadership that Jack Kemp saw. It isn't the only model of leadership, but it is a model of leadership, and I think that a lot of us didn't quite fully appreciate that about him at the time. It was a very distinct leadership model, and it's not certainly this president's, it wasn't his predecessor's. But it was Jack Kemp.

Kondracke: How did that translate into the way he led politically, besides optimism? In terms of the interaction with the members of the team?

Weber: The main thing I would say is no hesitation about taking a position and getting ready to lead with that position, and expecting people to follow him. Didn't always work, because everybody else in politics is to some extent an independent actor too, and has their own model of leadership, which sometimes puts themselves at the center. And that's how Jack could rub people a little bit the wrong way. But in any fight that came up, any fight that mattered, you could count on Kemp being ready to lead and expecting people to follow, and there was a band of us that almost always did follow, and there were some that almost reflexively did not, because they weren't going to be followers of Jack Kemp. They were going to be followers of themselves or somebody else. But it was a leadership model that gave a lot of us direction, and those of us who were looking for direction, that was the thing we appreciated the most from Jack. Other people just didn't want to follow, they wanted to do their own thing, and they weren't interested in action, and they didn't follow Jack. But that kind of helps define, I think, how people sorted out around Jack, at least to the Republican Conference and the House of Representatives, and probably more broadly in politics too.

Kondracke: The people who followed him, did they follow him because it was him, or did they follow him because the ideas were appealing, or both?

Weber: A little bit of both. I think that to a substantial extent we might underestimate, we might, in retrospect, overestimate the degree to which they followed the ideas. Jack was insistent that people understand the ideas, and he did everything, more than you could have imagined, to try to instill an understanding of the ideas in

the people that followed him. But most of the people in politics, in elected office, are not intellectual leaders. The phrase that I used to use, I remember back in 19—I guess it was '84—when Gary [W.] Hart was running against [Walter F.] Fritz Mondale, remember his phrase was "new ideas," and I kind of put him down. I said, "Most politicians are not originators of ideas. They are at best brokers of ideas." And that's not an ignoble calling. But you take ideas from people who spend their whole lives developing them, and your job as a politician is to figure out how to inject them into the political process, and move them forward in the political process, and make the judgments about how you compromise those ideas out against other ideas that somebody else has injected into the political process. I think that Jack really thought in those terms, and he wanted everybody else to understand where the ideas that he was devoted to came from, but an awful lot of it at the end of the day, even among his most devoted supporters, was from people who simply saw a leader, and they knew that he was anchored in thinking and had some confidence that this was not going to be a crackpot idea, although there were those that thought it was, and were ready to follow him, because of him. Depending on the idea you want to talk about, the most prominent, probably the most discussed, is Jack's devotion to supply-side economics, which I believe in and it attracted me to Jack, and I helped advance that as much as I could. But the notion that deficits really didn't matter, which was pretty much what Jack believed, was really not something that very many of his devoted followers believed. They believed that Jack had a firm view of where to take the economy and that his objectives were growth and that he had a vision of how to bring growth to the whole economy, not just small segments of it that traditionally vote Republican. But most conservative Republicans that

backed Jack Kemp thought deficits did matter, and he never quite won that argument, but it didn't matter. They were still ready to support him, because he was the leader.

Kondracke: Just on that point, he seems to not have been very much in favor of cutting spending, or at least he didn't spend very much time, even though he was on Approps [House Committee on Appropriations].

Weber: Jack in my view—we're getting into a little bit different area—Jack, you have to understand, as I'm sure you do, Jack had a set of people that he listened to and studied who were policy intellectuals, if you will. But he also had a model in his mind of how that succeeds politically, and cutting spending just didn't fit. It wasn't so much that Jack was in favor of more spending, it wasn't that he believed in a Keynesian approach, certainly, to economics that says spending is good, and it wasn't really that he had any model that says I want to reward constituencies by spending money on them. It was just that in his model you weren't going to offer somebody something painful. You were going to offer him something positive. That sort of goes back to the quarterback thing too. You're going to pass the ball with the anticipation that somebody's going to catch it and carry it across the finish line and score a touchdown. You don't pass it with the intention that it's going to get intercepted or that they're going to get tackled as soon as they get it and suffer a concussion and things like that. [laughs] I always thought that if some of Jack's opponents had been quarterbacks that's what they would have said in the huddle, "I'm going to throw the ball to you. Now you're probably going to get tackled, you'll have a concussion, knee injuries for the rest of your life,

but catch the ball and do the best you can with it." Okay, Jack wasn't going to have that discussion. Jack wanted a discussion with the electorate that says "We're going to reduce your taxes, we're going to encourage trade, and sell your products and goods and services at an international marketplace. And we're going to make you richer and the country richer and your neighbors richer and your community richer, and everybody's going to better off." And so when people came back and said, "You know, we've got to cut spending," it just wasn't in his mindset or his political approach to these things. It wasn't so much that he really disagreed with it, and I think if you look at his record, he very rarely voted against spending cuts. It was just that he wasn't going to be the guy to propose spending cuts, he didn't really think Republicans should be leading with that, and it was because of his approach to politics. A lot of which, by the way, was brought to him by Jude Wanniski.

Kondracke: Just to follow that, what was your impression of Jude Wanniski? Paint me a word picture of Jude Wanniski.

Weber: Well, I had a very mixed view of Jude. I was close to him for a long time in Congress, and then we became quite alienated the last several years of his life, and I don't know why, which is about as good a word picture as you can have of Jude Wanniski. I think that he had many brilliant insights about political economics, if you will, and he certainly taught me a lot, and I read his book and spent a lot of time with him when I was in Congress. But he wanted to have a [Grigori Y.] Rasputin-like relationship with Jack, and with other people in politics too. But he never came close with anybody really except Jack, at that level certainly.

Kondracke: Did he have a Rasputin-like relationship with Jack?

Weber: Yes, yes, not completely, but to an unfortunate extent I think that he did.

Kondracke: In what was he as Rasputin?

Weber: You know, Jack would listen to all the arguments and formulate an approach, and most of us knew at the end of the day there was going to be a call to Jude, and that discussion, which no one else would be privy to could override almost everything else that went on. Now, a lot of times we would see things that we didn't understand why Jack's doing them, and we'd say, "He must have been talking to Jude." We don't know that. I mean, I suspect that, and most of his supporters think that there was at least an influence like that, but we don't know it for sure.

Kondracke: Was there any time that you can remember that Jude led him astray?

Weber: Well, I think in the approach to the debates. You remember the debate with [Albert A. "Al"] Gore [Jr.]—how could we forget that?—which went very very badly. And he did not stick to what we had talked about, he did not approach it the way that we thought he would approach it. And as I remember, without remembering all the details, one of the big arguments was about, we got into military intervention and things like that and Jack had this phrase, "Do not bomb before breakfast," which didn't make much sense to any of us,

but he was arguing against some kind of military intervention, maybe it was Bosnia, I don't remember exactly what the context of it, but most of us did not understand where he was going on that, and we thought, I thought, many of us thought, "This has to be Jude." Because Jude was very much a non-interventionist, almost a pacifist in his approach to international affairs. You know Jack had one time flirted a little bit with Jude's notion, which was a premonition, almost, presaging of Obama, that we should reach out to all the rogue leaders of the time and try to tear down the barriers between us, which Obama basically said about Hugo [R.] Chávez and North Korea and Iran and things like that. Well that's Jude Wanniski really, and Jude pretty much tried to convince Jack of that kind of an approach, that there should be no such thing as a rogue state.

Kondracke: Right. So how much of the House Republican Conference would you say were on the Kemp team, and how many were not. Proportionately?

Weber: That's a tough one. We never got a majority that were actually on the team, which is not to say that on any given issue a majority wouldn't have followed Jack, but we had 30, 40 percent, something like that of the members that really were ready to follow Jack almost regardless. Yet on most issues he could get much more than that, because people do follow a leader, even if they're reluctant. But if you're actually talking about the Kemp team, people ready to go and argue Jack's position, then it was never a majority, I didn't think. There were a lot of people that followed because there was no other leader and no other action, but there were many of them that were very skeptical, and you saw it when he ran for president. We did not

do as well with House members as any of us had thought we would, or as the public had a right to expect we would.

Kondracke: This is a question I was going to ask you later, but how many House members did you have?

Weber: I don't remember exactly.

Kondracke: So of those who didn't follow Kemp, why didn't they? Why didn't they respond to his leadership, and why and who were they?

Weber: I think it's a combination of things. First of all, there was a cautious minority party mindset, which permeated other relationships. If we were talking today about [Newton L. "Newt"] Gingrich, we'd talk largely about the minority party mindset of House Republicans at a time when Newt was coming up. But it also affected Jack. There was a mindset, I don't want to continue the sports analogy, we can't score. The best we can do is make a few yards, that's all we can do. And the notion that we're going to try to score a touchdown and win the game was a little too much for a lot of these people who are sort of locked into the minority party mindset of the House of Representatives, and to an extent, of the Republican Party, even though we'd won the presidency quite often. So I think there was a natural caution about a too-ambitious, ambitious not in personal terms, but too ambitious in terms of his goals leader. And then there's also personal jealousies. I mean, Jack was the quarterback, and he was a celebrity, and he did want people to follow him. He was not self-effacing in the way that some political leaders are. When I advise people running for

leadership positions in the Congress, which I frequently do because they'll call me up and they'll say, "I'm thinking of running for Conference chairman or secretary of the Conference" or something like that, I said, "Well, the first thing you need to remember, whenever you talk to a member and ask for their vote, the best you can do is be their second choice. Because they get up every morning and look in the mirror at their first choice." [laughs] Most members understand that when they try to lead on the Capitol. They're a little cautious about it, they understand that everybody there has got an ego, and everybody there has a right to have an ego. They've been independently elected. Our system is not a parliamentary system. You have to kind of do it on your own out there. But Jack was not sensitive to those sensibilities, if you will. Jack was the leader. He wanted to be the leader. He wanted people to follow him. And there's a lot of members up there, and people beyond the Congress that just were not going to follow somebody who was so unapologetically ready to lead.

Kondracke: So, I asked you about what his character strengths were. What were his flaws?

Weber: We've touched on some of them a little bit, but I guess his flaws were an unwillingness, he was so dedicated to his model of politics, and it was an idealistic model in a sense of that word, he didn't make a lot of the practical political compromises along the way that you might have to make. This was often a strength, but it was also often, I think, a weakness. I remember when he ran for president, Jack actually ran his campaign the way I wish people today were running their campaigns, which was he ran on the basis of the

things he believed in, and you weren't going to have a pollster telling him what it was he should be talking about. I have to digress a lot to tell you a story that sort of shapes my feeling. When we formed Empower America, it was [William J.] Bill Bennett and Jack Kemp, two big, athletic, masculine macho major egos and me, sort of in between them. And the third co-leader was going to be Jeane [J.] Kirkpatrick. I remember the day that Bill and Jack let me know they didn't want to go and recruit Jeanne. I had to go. I always thought that was kind of funny. They were just a little bit intimidated by Jeane Kirkpatrick. So I went to recruit Jeane. Anyway, this is a long story but it gets back to this point. And I grew to really love Jeane. And I'd sit in her office, probably in Georgetown, might be at AEI [American Enterprise Institute], I can't remember. Anyway, and I said, "This is going to be a political organization, Jeane. I think of you as a scholar and a diplomat. Are you ready for the rough and tumble of politics?" And she said, "Oh, my husband [Evron M.] Kirk [Kirkpatrick] and I did all of the research, including polling and strategy for Hubert Humphrey's presidential campaign in 1968." Because her husband had been a professor at the University of Minnesota. I said, "Gee, I didn't know that." And I said, "Who was your pollster?" And she gave me that Jeane Kirkpatrick look. "Well, we would never have done it the way you do it now. We determined what Hubert Humphrey wanted to say to the American people, and then we would contract with the pollster to help us formulate the best way to say it. The way you do it is now you hire a pollster and he tells you what you're going to say in your campaign." That has stuck with me since that conversation in December of 1992. And every time I'm involved in a presidential campaign, which has been to say all of them since then, that's what I've seen. Increasingly it's consultant-driven, and Jack is the last guy

I was involved with that didn't do that. He was like Hubert Humphrey was in 1968. He knew what he wanted to say, and he was not a political Luddite. He was ready to hire pollsters and consultants, but their job was to figure out how he won based on that message. That was always very appealing to me, but it also caused him to not make even some minor political calculations that might have been helpful to him from time to time. He had the model in his mind; he was going to move ahead with it, and nobody was going to tell him otherwise. He also, just in terms of a weakness, I guess I would say, and this was, I think, harmful to him in his presidential campaign. He didn't want anybody to control him. It's related to what I just said but it's not the same. And he would play people a little bit against each other for the purpose of making sure that nobody really at the end of the day was directing Jack Kemp. And I get that. I understand. That's true with a lot of people in politics. I saw that, as I mentioned to you, my first real effort in politics was managing Rudy Boschwitz's campaign. Rudy hadn't been a quarterback, but he built his own business very successfully from the ground up, Plywood Minnesota. Sixty-some warehouses in a half a dozen states. He got into politics and I was only, I guess, 26 years old when I managed his campaign, so this was all kind of new to me, and I'm trying to figure out why it was that he was so difficult for me to manage, even though he became and has always been and remains today one of my very closest friends, and one of the really under-appreciated people in American politics, certainly in Minnesota politics. Anyway, but I realized at the end of the day, when you controlled things your whole lives, whether you're a businessman, or in Jack's case, a professional athlete, it's very difficult to give over control, and people deal with that in different ways. And

in Jack's case he would play people against each other for the purpose of making sure he didn't lose control.

Kondracke: Who did he play against who?

Weber: Me, [Charles R.] Charlie Black [Jr.], [Edward J.] Ed Rollins, I remember when he brought his brother, the late [Thomas P.] Tom Kemp in, moved from California to Washington, and Tom Kemp was really one of the finest guys I've ever known, and I wasn't quite sure why he was coming in. Over time I realized what the reason was. He needed one more person in there so that he could play off, a little bit, all of which was aimed at making sure that Jack Kemp at the end of the day was not subject to anybody else's direction. That degree of independence is somewhat admirable, but it's also a flaw, particularly in politics.

Kondracke: Is that because he didn't trust other people, or—

Weber: You know, I don't know. I can only theorize about that. It's totally just my armchair theory. Jack came up in professional sports at a time when the top athletes in the country did not make a lot of money. And he was one of the top athletes. He was one of the top quarterbacks in the AFL [American Football League]. And he didn't get rich on that, because people exploited athletes. And that's changed now. Athletes make huge amounts of money. But I always kind of thought, I talked to him about, he was head of the [American Football League] Players' Union [Association], remember, which was advantageous to him in a lot of ways in politics, but also said something about Jack, that he identified more with labor than with

management in a lot of ways. And I always kind of got this feeling that Jack had come up being in his own mind, even though he admired all these people and became friends with the owners, he was a little bit exploited. He never made it financially the way athletes of a later generation did. And it just always occurred to me, he wasn't going to let anybody control him again. That experience when he was younger, even though it got him a lot in the long run, at the time it did not enrich him. And it did enrich a lot of other people, the owners and the teams and things like that. I was stringing together various conversations I'd had and come to my own conclusion, which is probably a dangerous thing to do unless you're professionally credentialed, but that was kind of my thought.

Kondracke: So what is the relationship, I mean he was a quarterback at the time when the quarterbacks called their own plays. But the coach selected who was going to be the quarterback, and he got played off against Daryle [P.] Lamonica. So what was his attitude toward coaching? Or taking advice from other people, or having an expert tell him how to get something done?

Weber: I don't know exactly the answer to that. That's a good question. I do remember, and I wish I'd paid more attention to them now, conversations with he and I and Gingrich that would get into manager-coach-quarterback, and who had the role here. I'm a much bigger football fan than I was in those days. I wasn't much of an athlete when I was a kid. I had asthma and I just couldn't do much sports, so I did speech and debate and drama and things like that, things that Jack would have sneered at. [laughs] So I didn't understand all these arguments. But I do remember listening to him

quite a bit, these endless discussions about who's the manager and who's the coach and who's the quarterback and what do those responsibilities entail, and it's kind of lost me after a while, to tell you the truth.

Kondracke: Let's go back to do a little history here. The '78 election, you were helping Boschwitz in '78?

Weber: I was his campaign manager.

Kondracke: The whole House Republican Conference signed on to Kemp-Roth [Economic Recovery Act of 1981], and ran on Kemp-Roth, as I get it, yet they only picked up six seats in a year

Weber: In '78.

Kondracke: In a year when they won a lot of governorships, they won a lot of Senate seats, and Prop 13 [Proposition 13, California, 1978, 'People's Initiative to Limit Property Taxation'] passed in—

Weber: Didn't they do much better in the Senate?

Kondracke: They did do much better, well, I can't remember what they did in the Senate, actually.

Weber: I thought we had a pretty good year.

Kondracke: I think they did. But the governorships, Senate, Prop 13, [Jeffrey L.] Jeff Bell, Kemp-Roth. Why didn't they do better in the House?

Weber: In the House?

Kondracke: In the House, yes.

Weber: Well that's a good question. I don't know the answer to the question in the short run. What I would say is I'm going to have to skip over to another part of my political background. That's the question that Gingrich and I and our group asked repeatedly for about 10 years. How come we can win the presidency, how come we can win Senators, how come the polls show that the public is with us, and we can't win the House of Representatives? We concluded it was just harder to punch through with the notion that there was a real difference in who you voted for in the House. That those elections needed to be nationalized to a certain extent. They weren't. They were local. You know [Thomas P.] Tip O'Neill [Jr.] famously said all politics was local. I never thought that that was quite as brilliant a statement as his admirers think it was, but it was true because that's the way they wanted it to be. The Democrats could elect, you know, a union flack in a blue-collar, inner-city district, they could elect a black Congressman from a black area, they could elect a virtual segregationist from the South, because all politics were local. Well, that enabled them in our view, and I'm oversimplifying it substantially, but that enabled them in our view to maintain control of the House of Representatives even when elections at every other level were showing the country wanted to move in a more conservative direction

in the late seventies and throughout the 1980s. And that's about the only answer I can give to why in '78 the issues that Kemp helped frame and articulate nationally did not achieve big success in the House in which he served.

Kondracke: And you said in the [Kemp Foundation] Congressional symposium [3/06/12] that Dick Wirthlin, who was advising the Boschwitz campaign, said that in fact tax cuts were a winning issue.

Weber: Right. Did I say that?

Kondracke: Yes, you did.

Weber: In a previous interview. I didn't say that this morning did I?

Kondracke: No, not this morning. In the Congressional symposium.

Weber: Yes, right. Yes, Wirthlin in that year decided, I got very lucky, because Dick, I got lucky twice on polling. Dick Wirthlin decided that he was going to do a select number of races personally, in anticipation of running Reagan's polling operation in 1980. And one of them he picked was Minnesota. So he personally did all of the polling work in our campaign, because he was trying out new techniques and new messages, and so to the extent that I learned polling I learned it directly from Dick Wirthlin, which was really helpful. My second good piece of luck there was [Robert M.] Bob Teeter became the pollster for the Congressional committee, and continued my education in polling in my years on the Congressional committee, leading up to Bush's campaign in '88. So those were the two guys that I learned the most

from. But Dick said, yes, I remember the discussion. Because the polling had shown that inflation was still the biggest issue, and I assumed that we would run on a basis of how to fight inflation. And of course inflation was woven into your message all the time. But I've always thought it's a little bit like—now I'm getting afield—a little bit like the focus on jobs today, but let's put that aside for a second. I said, "We're going to run on inflation, right?" And Dick said no. He said, "We're going to run on taxes." "Why is that? Because the polls show inflation's the biggest issue, overwhelmingly." He says, "It's almost too big an issue, and the key point is people don't think that you can do anything about it. So you can talk to them about inflation all you want, and they'll appreciate that you think it's a big problem, but at the end of the day if they don't think that you can do anything about it, they're not going to vote for you based on it." He said, "That's the problem with inflation as an issue. No one thinks that politicians can do anything about it." As it turned out that was not true, but that's what people thought. He said, "Taxes is different. People think that politicians vote on taxes, they can vote to raise them, they can vote to lower them. And if we run a campaign both in Minnesota and nationally based on the tax issue, we can convince people that they should vote for us based on taxes." Convincing people that their vote actually could make a difference was a big part of the '78 campaign as well as the '80 campaign. That's why we did the House, the Capitol Steps event in the '80 election, which is more Gingrich's idea than anybody's, but we all got together on the steps of the House of Representatives with Candidate Reagan. I flew to Washington, my only visit to Washington, I think one of two visits in my campaign year, and we all stood up there and pledged to cut taxes across the board, 30 percent. And the purpose was, and we could all

have made that pledge back in our districts, but the purpose was to do everything we could to convince people that their vote would actually matter, that they would actually do something. And the issue on which we could actually convince them that we could do something was taxes.

Kondracke: Did Wirthlin have Kemp-Roth in mind when he was saying that, or was it just generically cut taxes?

Weber: We endorsed Kemp-Roth, but I don't think that Dick talked a lot about Kemp-Roth. It was more cutting taxes. By the way, I do think that jobs in these last couple of campaigns is the same kind of issue. People look at the polls and say what do people care about? They care about jobs. And yet I don't think it translates very easily to people that politicians can create jobs. But that's just my own personal theory.

Kondracke: At what stage would you say that you were a supply-sider?

Weber: Well, it was before the 1978 campaign, because I remember in '78 Rudy Boschwitz was talking about we wanted to do some things, Rudy was a businessman, but we wanted to do some things to sort of claim the intellectual high ground in the campaign. We talked about bringing in some economists to talk about the economy, and he wanted to bring in Alan Greenspan, which we did, and I said, "You should bring in [Arthur B.] Art Laffer." So you're asking me a question that I'm not quite sure I can answer, but in 1978 I was aware of Art

Laffer and had read his stuff, and that's probably the closest I can get to telling you when I became a supply-sider.

Kondracke: How did you come to be acquainted with Art Laffer?

Weber: You know, I don't know, it's a long time ago, Mort. And we did bring Art in. We brought him in at an event in Minneapolis. He became a good friend of mine too.

Kondracke: In the '78 campaign there was a fly-around that [William E.] Bill Brock arranged with [William E.] Bill Simon and people like that. Did they come to Minnesota?

Weber: In '78?

Kondracke: '78.

Weber: I think I remember Bill Simon coming to Minnesota, but I can't remember for sure.

Kondracke: Okay. So did Kemp help with your '80 campaign?

Weber: Yes. Wait. You know, I don't think that I brought him in. No.

Kondracke: Why not? Who did you bring in?

Weber: The only person I brought in, Henry [J.] Hyde. I represented the St. Cloud area of Minnesota, the big, which at the time they called the Papal States, a big Catholic area right in the center of Minnesota,

and the abortion issue was a big issue at that time, and I brought in Henry Hyde and [Gerald R.] Jerry Ford [Jr.]. I just, who's available to raise—I wasn't big on. I mean Henry I brought in for a specific reason, to highlight a specific issue. Other than that it was just who can you bring in to help you raise money? At least in my mind.

Kondracke: Did you go to the '80 Republican convention?

Weber: No.

Kondracke: You'd been on Capital Hill. Obviously you knew your way around.

Weber: A little bit, a little bit. I was only there for a year.

Kondracke: Okay. How did your relationship with Kemp develop when you got to Congress?

Weber: Well he remembered me from this Camp Ihduhapi event, and he was, as I remember it, one of the very first events for House freshmen, he identified me, and he called me out of the audience, he was up at the dais, and I came up and talked to him

Kondracke: This is what kind of an event?

Weber: Just some event honoring the newly-elected freshmen members, and Jack was a speaker, and he asked me, he just saw me in the audience at one of the tables, and said, "Hey, Vin. Come up." And so we talked and he sort of re-recruited me at that point, which

was not necessary. I was already on board. But that's the first that I can remember, as a newly-elected member.

Kondracke: Recruited you in what sense?

Weber: Into the Kemp world.

Kondracke: So the Kemp world included who? Or who were the main figures in the Kemp world?

Weber: That's a good question. [Robert W.] Bob Kasten [Jr.] in the Senate, [John P.] Jack Hiler among the newly-elected members, from South Bend, Indiana, Newt was in Kemp world, for sure, David [A.] Stockman, who went off to the OMB [Office of Management and Budget] to undermine everything we believed in, [Daniel R.] Dan Coats, among the newly-elected members; [Robert D.] Bob McEwen [phonetic]. It's hard for me to remember exactly who I would have identified at that point, and who came on. Remember, the first thing we really did in the Congress in 1981 was to fight for the tax cut. Well that was a great organizing moment, and people kind of picked their sides. It's easier to say after that was all over, to go through the list and say, "Yes, those were Kemp guys." It's a little hard for me to say exactly who was. But he was running for leadership, remember.

Kondracke: Right.

Weber: And he had serious opposition for Republican Conference chairman. One of the most serious that I remember was John [H.] Rousselot, and Rousselot was very well, well liked, and had a lot of

people supporting him, like David [T.] Drier for instance, who in every other regard would have been a Jack Kemp guy. But Rousselot was a solid conservative, he had California backing, and at the time we had a substantial delegation, of course, from California. We don't anymore, but—Jack had to fight and win the Conference chairmanship, so it was not a small win.

Kondracke: What was that contest like?

Weber: It was fairly hard-fought. I seem to remember there was another candidate in that race, but I can't remember who that was. I just remember Rousselot because I liked Rousselot. I was not torn in terms of who I was going to vote for, but I thought it was too bad that we weren't going to be able to elect him to something as well. But it was, you know, Rousselot was one-on-one, and colleagues working for him, very conventional in a sense, whereas Jack was the leader. You know are you going to get behind the quarterback, or are you going to sign up with this guy, who sat down and probably-- I probably had more conversations with John Rousselot about his candidacy than I did with Jack about his candidacy. It didn't matter, because I was going to be for Kemp. But they approached things differently. Jack won, but it was not overwhelming, I don't think.

Kondracke: So who were the 'bulls' in favor of?

Weber: I wish I could remember who the other candidates were. The bulls, I think, were not for Jack, but I'm not sure. John also had some resistance, because he had a far right background, you know, at one time in his history he'd been a member, allegedly, of a John Birch

Society. But he got along very well. At a personal level Rousselot was such a nice guy that he kind of disarmed people who might have thought that his background was a little too far to the right. So I just don't know who the bulls largely were for.

Kondracke: In terms of passing the Reagan economic program, how much credit did Kemp get among his colleagues as the original author of the Reagan—

Weber: Well, I think among the newer members he got most of the credit. Among the more senior members, somewhat less. I mean, remember, the bill that came to the floor was Conable-Hance [Substitute Tax Bill of 1981], not Kemp-Roth, and I think that the senior members all sort of gave more credit to the committee process. But the younger members all knew this was Kemp, and without him it would never have come up for a vote. I remember listening to Barber [B.] Conable [Jr.] speak on behalf of it prior to final passage, and he made a speech, and then he got up and he said "And now I would like to introduce my partner-in-crime in this endeavor, Kent [R.] Hance," and I thought, "You know, I'll bet part of Barber really literally means partner-in-crime," because he was an old time Ways and Mean guy, and I always thought "He doesn't really buy all this stuff, and he's doing it because he's got a president that wants him to do it, and he's a loyal Republican." I thought much the same thing about [Robert H.] Bob Michel, that left to their own devices they would never have pushed this, but also left to their own devices they were going to be loyal to the President.

Kondracke: I mean, it is very curious, because you had people like Howard [H.] Baker [Jr.] saying that this is a riverboat gamble, and—

Weber: Riverboat gamble, voodoo economics—

Kondracke: Yes, voodoo economics and all that, and yet, back as far as ’78, every Republican including Conable and all the old bulls signed on to Kemp-Roth. So you had this cognitive dissonance going on among a lot of Republicans. Was it about whether this adds up, whether this works? You had the whole, [Robert J.] Bob Dole didn’t believe it for years.

Weber: You know, I wasn’t there. I don’t know how they came to, I assume it was a political decision that led them to back it in ’78. I assume that the success of the Steiger Amendment [of 1978 to reduce capital gains tax] helped make it a little easier for them to think that this is actually doable, but you know I wasn’t there, I really don’t know. I know the arguments against it were that it was going to swell the deficit and lead to more inflation, which is a fairly conventional view, but it was a view held, certainly by Democrats, but also by a lot of conventional Republicans.

Kondracke: During the ’81 tax fight, the tax bill got loaded up with all kinds of extraneous tax breaks for safe harbor leasing and all that stuff.

Weber: 10:5:3

Kondracke: 10:5:3, yes, a lot of business tax cuts. What was Jack's attitude toward all of that?

Weber: His attitude was we needed to get the cut in marginal rates, and anything else was okay, didn't matter. We'd do it, not do it, the main thing was to cut those marginal rates, the main thing.

Kondracke: Which obviously was the essence of it, but it was also phased in.

Weber: That the part, the only part of the compromise that we ended up making that I can remember, that I remember Jack objecting to vigorously, and ultimately accepting, was the phase-in. And it was on economic grounds. I mean he argued, I think what most of us now would believe, which is this is all about incentives, and if you phase in a tax cut over time you are distorting the incentives within that time period, and you're encouraging people, to the extent that they can, to defer income for a few years, to put off investments for a few years, that there's no reason to defer this. That's the only part of it that I remember he really objected to. Coming down from 30 to 25 was not a big deal. All the business stuff, that was kind of okay.

Kondracke: So when you say, "Objected to it," in what venues?

Weber: In the Conference. Arguing that we should not phase it in, that we should do it immediately. And I think in view of what we, I think that would have been a better thing to do. I mean we would have maybe minimized the 1981-82 recession.

Kondracke: Now, speaking of that, in ’82, ’83, ’84, when Reagan starts raising taxes, not tax rates, but raising taxes of various kinds, Kemp was against them, against all of those tax increases. Was that because he thought that those tax cuts were necessary to keep growth going during, and avoid the recession, or because he was in favor of all those tax breaks?

Weber: No, I think it was more of a political decision. I think it was, remember, at that time, as apropos of what we’ve been talking about here, Republicans as the tax cutting party was a new thing. Prior to ’78, you know, Republicans weren’t tax cutters. They were deficit hawks. And winning that argument about green eyeshade economics versus growth economics, was a huge success for Jack and for the rest of us. I opposed those tax increases too, and I don’t remember really looking at any of them terribly closely in terms of the substance of the tax increase. I remember just agreeing, thinking, “We’ve won the argument as a party that we’re the party of tax cutting and economic growth, and we shouldn’t start undoing that.” That was a lot of the reason that we, that Gingrich and I and the rest of us opposed Bush’s tax increase in 1990. 1990, Andrews Air Force Base?

Kondracke: Yes.

Weber: It was only partially based on the economics of it. An awful lot of it was we want to cement the idea of the Republican Party as the party of lower taxes and economic growth, and that that was not a sure thing. It’s a little hard for people today to understand that the Republicans would have any problem with that, but we had not been the party of tax cutting and economic growth. We had been the party

of balanced budgets and Herbert [C.] Hoover. And to have changed that was a huge, huge thing. We actually, of course, enacted the tax cuts, but the economy then took off, validating our theory, and the polls showed that the Republicans owned the economic issue, which was an incredible thing for the party of Herbert Hoover. So to turn around and start giving that away, in our view, with tax increases, was just tossing away one of the largest political and political/economic accomplishments of our lifetimes. And that more than an objection to any of the individual tax increases is what drove Jack at that time, and I certainly know it's what drove many of us to oppose the Bush tax increase.

Kondracke: Was Jack your leader in that, even though he was also a leader of the Conference?

Weber: I wouldn't say he was the leader on it. He was a leader, but I don't remember him leading the fight against the tax increases. By this time there were enough of us that were basically, we got what was going on, we understood it, we'd been through the fight. We'd had the campaign on tax cuts, we'd had to implement tax cuts, and we'd been through the recession of 1982 and defended the tax cuts, and we didn't need to be led on that fight.

Kondracke: So he is opposing the White House on stuff like this—

Weber: Oh, yes.

Kondracke: —and you are opposing the White House on stuff like this. What were the consequences of defying your president?

Weber: Not a lot. I mean I suppose for some of us the consequences internally were a little greater, because Bob Michel and the leadership, by and large, looked upon those of us that didn't back the tax increase as people you couldn't count on. It cost, I know I didn't get put on the Appropriations Committee as quickly as I wanted to, and I think others probably paid that price. But I didn't see a lot of consequences, no.

Kondracke: And what about Jack? Did he get static from the other leaders? As I remember, [C.] Trent Lott got turned around, actually, down at the White House, because he was the whip, and Reagan talked him into backing down on that, but Jack didn't back down. So I just wonder whether you remember any consequences that Jack might have endured.

Weber: No, not immediately. I think over time that he was in the House, Jack's hold on his leadership position eroded little by little, and that was probably one of the examples of that. More senior members, more conventional members, thought you ought to fall in line, and Reagan's our leader, not Jack Kemp. By the time he left the Congress to run for president, it wasn't assured that he was going to remain in Republican leadership. The challenger to him would have almost surely been [Richard B.] Dick Cheney. And I think that was a good deal of it. People after the victory of the 1978 and '80 election, people elected Jack Kemp. We'd surged into power on the tax-cutting message, and they rewarded Jack with the Conference chairmanship, but little by little over time, this notion that he's the leader and we're the follower, and he's not quite the team player that a conventional leadership model would indicate he should be, I think it took its toll on

him. And by the time he ran for president, it was kind of up or out for Jack.

Kondracke: He did get out.

Weber: Right. But I don't think that he had a choice.

Kondracke: I see.

Weber: I think it he had stayed in, then he would have been contested as a leader in the House.

Kondracke: I see. The Conservative Opportunity Society [C.O.S.] gets formed how and when?

Weber: Gingrich came up to me on the floor of the House in the special session after the 1982 elections, and said to me, "What are you doing for the next 10 years?" And I laughed, and I said, "I don't know." And we sat down and started to talk about, and quickly pulled in [Robert S.] Bob Walker, and we talked about putting together a movement to make Republicans a majority in the House of Representatives. And that really was how it started. The three of us, and then the first thing we did was figure out, "Who else do we want in this group?" And I can't remember all the original members, but you know we had [Daniel E.] Dan Lungren, and we recruited Dan Coats and Judd [A.] Gregg, both of whom left after a couple of years, mainly because they were not comfortable with Gingrich's leadership style. And others. We recruited others into the group. But that's how it started out.

Kondracke: Where in Jack Kemp's priority list was making a Republican majority in the House?

Weber: That's a very good question. I don't think it was terribly high. I think he was focused on getting policies implemented, he wanted the models to succeed. I don't think it, I mean he wanted us to be the majority, but I don't think that that was a huge priority for him. I think that he always saw the president as more important. The president is more important, I guess. He was never really a part of the Conservative Opportunity Society. He was kind of an intellectual leader and an inspiration to all of us, and most of us in C.O.S. thought of ourselves as Kemp Republicans. But he never joined the group. Part of it probably is because the goal of achieving House majority was too small for Jack. Jack wanted to transform the country, and the presidency mattered in that context, but the battle of ideas mattered even more, and who actually controlled the House just was not that—I don't remember him being involved much in those discussions.

Kondracke: Did most of the C.O.S. back him for president in '88?

Weber: I think so. I think so.

Kondracke: He was a leader, and you guys were challenging, basically challenging the leadership of Bob Michel—

Weber: But there were two of the leaders, Jack Kemp and Trent Lott, that were constantly sort of dancing on the razor's edge. They were sympathetic to us. We all backed both of them. But they were, at the

end of the day, in the leadership. And they'd sit down in the leadership meetings and listen to their fellow leaders talk about what a pain in the ass these C.O.S. people were. And I think that they weren't quite sure which way the wind was ultimately going to blow, and neither one of those guys, who remain, in Jack's case, my close friend until he died, and in Trent's case, my close friend to this day, but neither one of them ever really jumped into our camp. They wanted to be as supportive as they could be, they wanted to run interference for us as much as they possibly could, but they didn't want to be really identified with us. And you know, at the end of the day, every now and then we would have frustrated discussions about Kemp ought to be more forthcoming, Lott ought to be more forthcoming. I remember talking with Gingrich after a while, and saying, "You know, it's not all bad that members of the leadership are not formally identified with us. We are an insurrection within the House Republican Conference, and to the extent that specific leaders identify with us, it undermines us a little bit." So, you know, there was occasional frustration, but at the end of the day it was the right relationship.

Kondracke: Were your energies mainly directed at Tip O'Neill and [James C.] Jim Wright [Jr.], or were they directed at Bob Michel as well?

Weber: We all loved Bob Michel. I mean nobody disliked him. I don't remember anybody ever saying we've got to get rid of him. Well, I can't say that.

Kondracke: Newt.

Weber: I do remember people saying that, we've got to get rid of Bob Michel. But most of us weren't any part of anything like that.

Kondracke: Isn't that what Newt had in mind, from the beginning?

Weber: No. I don't think he had that in mind. He did get rid of John [J.] Rhodes [Jr.], I mean at least in his telling of it. This is before I came there, obviously, but he actually got the leadership to allow him to survey the members on their attitudes toward leadership, and whatever the result of that that was it came back and convinced Rhodes, the re-elected John Rhodes, not to run again. And he didn't run again for leader. So Newt did have in his mind getting Rhodes out as leader, but I don't remember him ever saying we have to get rid of Michel. Now, who knows? If they had both stayed in those positions for a long time, maybe that's eventually where Newt would have gone. But I don't remember those discussions. We kind of knew who Bob Michel was, and there were times the strategies we wanted to employ we knew he didn't like, and we just had to maneuver to somehow make it happen over his objections. But we didn't really want to dump Bob Michel. Michel used to give a speech at the beginning of the Conference where he talked about the Conference as being an orchestra, and that was appropriate, because he was a music major at his college in Illinois. And I just remember once we had a discussion with Bob about something we'd done, I have no idea what it was, but I remember Newt said, "You always give the speech about wanting to lead a band." He says, "I don't want to stop that, Bob. I just want to be the guy that bangs the drum." There's a little bit of that in our relationship with Michel. Yeah, we needed to disrupt him, we needed

to challenge him, we needed to push him, but people liked him, they understood where he was. As we got a little older, we understood, we don't want to decapitate our leadership. We've got a lot of members that are not comfortable with our style, and he holds them together pretty well.

Kondracke: Various people have said that Kemp was not comfortable with C.O.S. activities and stuff like that. Why was he not comfortable?

Weber: I think the notion of creating a House Republican majority was not paramount in his mind, but more than that, I think he thought it got nasty and personal, and Jack just was not comfortable with nasty, personal, or confrontational politics. And we did get confrontational, and probably at times went over the edge. I don't know. Some of our members probably went over the edge on personal—

Kondracke: Was there ever a specific incidence where Jack objected to what you were doing?

Weber: No, just a general sense that he was not comfortable with these tactics. I don't think he ever would have wanted to take on Jim Wright. That's too personal. You know "Wright"—Jack: "Wright's not the problem. Bad ideas are the problem." And I think that that made him uncomfortable. Newt did have a different philosophy on that. Newt believed you had to personalize some of these fights and that you had to show the country the face of what they didn't believe in, and, you know, if you had to break a few eggs, that's how you make an omelet.

Kondracke: Various people think that the polarization of American politics started with Newt, and that Jack somehow represents an alternative to that kind of polarization. How would you historically analyze that?

Weber: Well, since I was a part of both of those movements, I can't quite agree with that way of looking at it. I understand both points of view. Remember that Newt never hesitated in support of Jack Kemp for president. He didn't need to be courted, he didn't need to be persuaded, he didn't flirt with other candidates. If Jack wanted to run for president, Newt was right there. And obviously so was I. So we could see that Jack was the kind of guy that could potentially lead the national movement. Remember, when we formed C.O.S. I remember talking about strategy. There's paper on all this, reams of it, because Newt did memos on everything. And he said our strategy has to be to have wedge issues and magnet issues, and we went through endless discussions about what that meant. And at the end of the day we became known for the wedge issues, where we'd try to create a wedge on an issue where the country was 60-80 percent on the conservative side, and the House Democrats were not permitting a vote, whether it's a balanced budget amendment, which Jack thought was a horrible idea, or school prayer, whatever it might have been. But Newt always from the beginning also emphasized there needed to be magnet issues. And if you look at Newt's life, what he gets all the attention for is things that you might call wedge statements. And yes, they drive me crazy too, and I do think he goes over the line in referring to people as corrupt and all these other things. But there's also a side of him that has always pursued magnet-type issues, whether it's educational reform, he worked years ago on health care reform with

Hillary [Rodham] Clinton, when she was in the Senate. I remember getting a memo from him about Hurricane Katrina, right after the hurricane, two pages of bullet point suggestions on how we can help the rebuilding of the New Orleans area, in the wake of Katrina, some of the most interesting stuff that I ever saw on it. I remember the first one was, "We've destroyed the entire power grid of the New Orleans area. This is an opportunity to build the power grid of the 21st century," stuff like that. Newt always, there is a positive magnet side to Newt. I think he understood that that's who ought to be president, not withstanding how he ran himself, he looked at Kemp and saw that's what we need. We need a positive, optimistic, unifying figure to become president of the United States. In the House of Representatives, we've got to drive a wedge, because these people are going to be there forever. They withstood the Reagan landslide. They'll withstand anything else we throw at them unless we blow up a stick of dynamite in the House of Representatives. And I look back and I say, given the polarization of today, I have only slightly mixed feelings about what we did. I think we went too far on specific individual occasions maybe, but by and large, Newt was right.

Kondracke: What was the Kemp-Newt relationship like over time? They were obviously allies way back then, and what was there continuing relationship like?

Weber: At what time are you talking about?

Kondracke: Well, all the way through. Was there ever a time when they had a rift?

Weber: Oh, not a permanent rift. I mean they would argue about different things of the type we're talking about. Jack would really argue we were getting too much into the personal weeds, and have to focus on the big picture issues. That would lead occasionally to arguments, but usually it was arguments about tactics, which Jack didn't like. Jack's not a tactical person. In fact, that's a lot of my perception of the differences, the arguments between Newt and Jack, were simply that Jack was not comfortable with tactical arguments, and Newt was in a tactical mode a lot of the time in trying to figure out strategies that would dislodge the Democratic majority of the House.

Kondracke: Tell me about the '88 campaign. When did it get organized, how did you become chairman and so on?

Weber: I just signed up immediately. It was one of those things where there wasn't an official recruitment meeting. We just talked about, I assumed that I was going to be for him, and he asked me if I would take on the role of chairman and I didn't particularly know what that meant at that time, but I said sure. Never any doubt in my mind. I probably told you this story once before, maybe over at the Library [of Congress], but did I tell you the story about getting off the elevator when I was a staffer, did I tell you about it? Okay, well, I came to Washington for the first time as a staffer in 1975. I'd worked for [Thomas M.] Tom Hagedorn on his campaign in 1974, it was my first job out of college. And in '74 he was one of the very few newly-elected Republicans. So we got there, and the conservatives were sort of all huddling together as a threatened tribe, but in a positive way too. It's when you got the Heritage Foundation formed, and Paul [M.] Weyrich formed his whole group, the conservative movement was

getting its act together in the wake of horrible defeat. Well, I remember coming there, and I'd gotten interested in politics in junior high school when Barry [M.] Goldwater ran for president, and I knew all about that stuff, and I was a Reagan guy. And this is probably when I got interested in Kemp. I remember standing in the Cannon [House Office] Building with two or three Congressional staffers, including a guy who worked for [Steven D.] Steve Symms at the time, who was in his second term, I think. Anyway, this young guy had been around longer than me, which might have meant one year, but we were all sitting around huddling, and the elevator over in that corner opens up. And out comes this gaggle of people, and I didn't know who any of them were. They were all abuzz, and all talking around some central figure, and I said to this guy, who'd been there longer, and I said, "Who's that?" He said, "You don't know who that is?" I said, "No." "That's the next Reagan." "Who's that?" "It's Jack Kemp. He's the next Reagan." I remember that from 1975. Keep in mind, we're five years before Reagan gets elected and we're already talking about who the next Reagan is going to be. So that's kind of—

Kondracke: The people in the crowd were a bunch of kids?

Weber: Yes. Young, conservative staffers, who were all Reaganites. But that's the *next* Reagan. After Reagan, that's our leader. So—

[pause]

Kondracke: So when you started in on the 1988 campaign, what was your notion about Jack's chances?

Weber: Well, I was unrealistically optimistic. I understood that an incumbent vice president would be difficult, but I really believed that the movement that had carried Reagan to the White House was still in full force, and that Jack was the logical recipient of that movement's support. I didn't have anything particular against the Vice President, in fact I liked Vice President Bush, but I really thought that he was not going to be able to capture the imagination of conservatives, and that Jack was the logical heir to Ronald Reagan, and that he was going to win. So, as I said, I was unrealistically optimistic.

Kondracke: How did the campaign proceed, from your vantage point? What did you do, and what did you see?

Weber: There was a little cadre at the top that made decisions, and my job was not a fulltime job, which meant that I could be in and out as I wanted to be, but it also meant that they could pull me in and out as they wanted me to. You know, Charlie Black was fulltime and Ed Rollins was fulltime, or Charlie was more fulltime. I don't think that they ever resolved the mix of personalities, actually who was going to run the campaign, who was going to make the decisions.

Kondracke: So that sounds like it was a badly organized campaign.

Weber: Yes, I think it probably was. At the organizational level it didn't quite come together. There were a lot of things they did right, but I don't think it came together. And it's also hard to overstate the degree to which [Marion G.] Pat Robertson caused Jack a problem. I mean, that should have been a part of the Kemp constituency, the

evangelical movement, which was in full flower at that moment within the Republican Party. That's after all why Robertson ran, is because the movement that he had helped to lead was in sort of full flower. But it caused Jack a lot of problems, and Robertson didn't like him, and let it be known.

Kondracke: And it caught you all by surprise?

Weber: Yes. The strength of it caught me by surprised. Well, kind of unprecedented, a preacher with no previous political experience running for president of the United States? Your first reaction, if you're at all a conventional politician, is, "Well that's not a serious candidacy." It didn't take us long to find out that it was a serious candidacy, but, yes, the first reaction was that's not really going to go anyplace.

Kondracke: Did you have any kind of counter-strategy? You had the LaHayes [Timothy F. and Beverly], right? as backing Kemp, but did you have any other—

Weber: No. We had a certain number. Jack was never too comfortable courting the evangelical community, and we spent a lot of time having to talk to him about how to do that. I mean his positions on the issues were all fine, and I think they were all sincere. I don't think Jack compromised himself to appeal to evangelical Christians on abortion or anything like that. I think those were his sincere beliefs. But I think that it was uncomfortable for him for a long time, appealing to people who were primarily motivated by religious conviction. That just didn't quite sit with him. He could do it, but he was never

completely comfortable with it, and partially it was because the issues that motivate that constituency, for better or worse, are very divisive issues. And as we've talked about, that's not Jack Kemp's political mindset. I mean his mindset as you go in with a unifying theme, that everybody ought to rally around. Now, everybody won't rally around it, but in his mind they really ought to. And so I always thought he saw the appeal to evangelicals as something that was difficult, because it forced discussion of issues that divided people. Remember also the Jewish community was a very strong component, the Republican Jewish community, which is not a large number, but influential, were very strongly Kemp supporters. I mean Jack had been a champion of Israel, he was the champion of that community, the real motivated pro-Israel Republicans were Kemp people, suspicious of Bush, suspicious of Dole, but very much Kemp people. And he knew that those, abortion and school prayer and things like that just caused a lot of difficulty, and it wasn't going to change his position on those issues, but it made it a little harder for him to actually formulate a strategy that would go after the evangelical voters.

Kondracke: I take it there was only a positive strategy against Robertson, that is to appeal to those people. There was no negative strategy.

Weber: No, never. Never a negative strategy. Negative strategies were not part of Jack Kemp's mindset.

Kondracke: So, as chairman, were you chairman in the sense that you presided at meetings, or did you raise money, or what was your duty?

Weber: Presided at meetings. We'd go over and spend time, and a lot of it was Jack would talk to me about things that he thought we should be doing or not doing, and I'd try to work those out through the people in the campaign. I'd spend a lot of time trying to court members of Congress. I didn't raise much money. I did some, but not much. I'm not a great fundraiser. But I spent a lot of time talking to members of Congress, liaisoning with leadership so that they were comfortable with it, trying to recruit as best we could, members to be supportive of Jack.

Kondracke: But running against an incumbent vice president was tough.

Weber: Was difficult. And in the House, an incumbent vice president who had served there, albeit quite a while ago, but he had served there, and he'd been a party chairman. A lot of people had loyalties to George Bush. George Bush was an excellent personal politician. He knew how to maintain individual relationships with people and he did it really, really well.

Kondracke: So, were you in New Orleans when the word came down that it was going to be [James Danforth "Dan"] Quayle and not—

Weber: No, no, no.

Kondracke: How is that? Why, everybody else who was close in to the '88 campaign seems to have been there. Why weren't you?

Weber: I didn't travel a lot. I'm just kind of resistant to that.

Kondracke: So then he becomes HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] secretary. Were you surprised when he decided to become HUD secretary? Were you involved in the decision?

Weber: Yes, a little bit. I remember talking to him about it. I guess not totally surprised. I didn't think it was a huge job. After all, George [W.] Romney had taken it. And it was, you know, it did give him a chance to talk about the constituencies he cared about. Unfortunately it wasn't necessarily such constituencies that the President cared about. So there's a limited amount that he could do there. But, you know, it gave him a chance to talk about issues that mattered to him, and to speak to constituencies that nobody else in the Party was speaking to. It wasn't a bad thing for him to do.

Kondracke: This was the era of the "Amigos," right?

Weber: Yes.

Kondracke: Who are the Amigos, where did you meet? How often did you meet?

Weber: Me and [Cornelius H. M.] Connie Mack [III] and Jack, I guess was it Walker? and Newt, right? Five of us. And we met in a Mexican restaurant somewhere over on the Senate side. I don't remember the name of it anymore. I think we met there.

Kondracke: And how often did you meet?

Weber: Irregularly. About monthly.

Kondracke: What happened? What transpired?

Weber: Boy. We'd talk about the issues of the day, and Jack got a chance to reconnect with his friends on the Hill, which is what he was really interested in. It was not a huge decision-making group, but it was a friendly group.

Kondracke: Did he talk about his frustrations?

Weber: Sure. That there was not a serious attempt at putting together an urban agenda, and of course always not enough resources to do things that he wanted to do, not an aggressive enough commitment on the part of the President. But you know, not frustration in the sense that, "I'm going to resign if they don't"—you know. He thought the Party should be something more than it was, and that meant the administration should be something more than it was when it came to, as you know, appeal to inner-city audiences and minorities and unions and all the folks that Jack thought the Republicans should be appealing to, and that his department was kind of well-positioned to forge an appeal to. And he just didn't think that we were getting much of that out of the folks in the White House. The biggest argument I can remember, though, was his argument with [James A.] Jim Baker about whether or not he should see—

Kondracke: Ariel Sharon.

Weber: Ariel Sharon, yes.

Kondracke: And did he describe that in detail?

Weber: He said that he was instructed by the Secretary of State not to meet with him, and he just went ahead and did it. He thought he was on good ground because they were in equivalent positions, although we all know that they really weren't. But at least on paper they were two housing administrators. And he agonized over it, because although he liked to be the maverick and didn't mind being an independent voice, actually kind of defying the leader was not where he wanted to be. And so to actually do the meeting was a very big deal for Jack. It was kind of a step beyond where he would go. He was okay publicly challenging them in ways that other Cabinet secretaries wouldn't have, but to actually have a meeting that the Secretary of State had basically told him not to have was a big move for Jack. You know we kind of all encouraged this. [laughs]

Kondracke: Tell me about the whole buildup to this thing. Ariel Sharon is coming to town—

Weber: Coming to town, he requested a meeting with his counterpart. So to begin with it was all very straightforward. You know, the housing minister of Israel is coming to Washington and wants to have a meeting with the housing minister of the United States, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and—

Kondracke: Who was also a great friend of Israel's.

Weber: Jack's delighted to do it. He's a great friend of Israel, he's probably the closest thing to an ally that Sharon would have thought he had in this country at that time, but you know, in government he wasn't prime minister yet, so he was both nettlesome to his own government and a real problem for this government, because his views were quite different than George Bush and Jim Baker and people running the relationship.

Kondracke: So anyway, when did you guys get involved in hearing about this and advising him? I'm just trying to get the tick tock of this.

Weber: You know I don't remember exactly. I remember talking to him about it, and we all thought it was a good idea for him to do it. And I do remember thinking at the time, it's an example of how administrations can create problems for themselves. If they'd said nothing about this, and the answer simply was, well, it's traditional for equivalent ministers to meet with each other, and just let it go at that, it would not have been a big deal, it really wouldn't have. Instead, everybody knew it was a big deal, and the Secretary of State didn't want to meet with Sharon, blah, blah, blah, and Kemp defies the Secretary of State. All of a sudden it became a really big deal. Nobody, I mean Jack Kemp did not suffer from this. The administration might have just a little bit. Sharon was certainly advantaged. But I thought sometimes it's better to just let something happen, as opposed to turning it into a bigger defeat than you need to suffer.

Kondracke: Did Kemp tell you anything about various other Cabinet meetings, where—

Weber: You know, yes, but I don't remember much about those discussions.

Kondracke: What did he say about [Richard D.] Dick Darman?

Weber: He didn't dislike Dick. Of course he didn't dislike much of anybody. But he really thought Darman was the problem on formulating a response to the economic downturn of what, 1990, 1991, in the wake of the first Gulf War, when oil prices spiked, and we had a what? An 11 month recession following that. Anyway, he thought that Dick was the big problem in formulating a response to that. He kept saying we needed to get inside the black box, which meant he wanted Darman to explain how he scored certain activities, the dynamic scoring issue. I mean he was convinced that if we could see more clearly what Darman was doing, that we could contest him. And argue that cutting the capital gains tax, something like that, would not have the deficit-enhancing effect that Darman thought it would have. He didn't dislike Dick, and that's important to say. Never vilified him, never called him an evil genius, or anything like that, but he thought Darman was the problem, and we needed to get inside the black box and find out how he's making his judgments, and if we did, he was confident that we could win the argument that we could have a growth-oriented agenda. Darman sought me out a little bit at that time too, and I remember going up and having lunch with him, just the two of us. Clearly the only reason was he was trying to figure out how to get along with House Republicans and how to combat this

growing image that he was getting as the negative guy, the problem. And, of course, you remember, in the 1992 campaign, or 1996, everybody promised never to have Darman in their administration. I think that that's what Dick wanted to avoid. I'm not saying he was desperate to get back into government, because he probably wasn't. I mean he could see himself becoming radioactive, and he didn't want that to happen, but I don't think that's the main reason we didn't get a quote, growth-oriented package approved. I remember sitting down with [Nicholas F.] Nick Brady and making the argument for a supply-side tax cut centered around capital gains, and Brady said to me, he said, I'll never forget, he said "Ronald Reagan could argue for that, because he was a poor kid from Dixon, Illinois. George Bush is the son of a United States Senator from Connecticut. He can never argue for a reduction in the capital gains tax." So I think that that political calculation, much more than Dick Darman's black box, was the reason that we did not get any kind of a growth agenda out of the Bush administration, running into the 1992 campaign.

Kondracke: So when George Bush violated his no new taxes pledge, what was Jack's reaction?

Weber: He was quiet. He didn't go big public. That would have been a level of disloyalty that would have been hard for—

Kondracke: I mean there were so voices on the outside that said he ought to quit, he ought to run for, you know run against Bush and stuff like that.

Weber: Yeah, I don't think there was anything like that. But internally he always, he was distraught about this, giving up. What Bush did that we didn't like, and I remember having this discussion too, as you remember, the Democrats insisted not just that he acquiesce to a tax increase, but that he very publicly announce that we had to have a tax increase. And that was part of the problem we faced. It was not just a tax increase but it was as if the president was repudiating what Republicans had believed for these last 12 years or 11 years. And that's what really caused Jack and the rest of us enormous anxiety, was that the president—I remember talking to Brady again, and Brady said, "How come President Reagan could raise taxes six times in the course of his term?" And I said to him, "Because he never admitted it." A little bit flippant, but not far off. I mean Reagan never allowed himself to be identified with the tax increase. Yes, it happened, more than once. TEFRA [Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982], DEFRA [Deficit Reduction Act of 1984], Social Security tax increase [of 1983]. But Reagan managed to handle it in such a way that he maintained his posture as the anti-tax guy and the anti-tax party, even while we were raising taxes to accommodate the deficit reduction crowd. And what Bush had not been able to do, maybe because the Democrats were just too skillful, was manage that act. We probably could have had yet another round of deficit reduction, including revenues, if Bush had not agreed that he was going to very publicly argue that we needed to have a tax increase, which amounted to a repudiation of what Kemp and the rest of us had believed and what we thought was Reaganomics.

Kondracke: Okay. Empower America. How was it organized?

Weber: Well it was Jack's idea. I wasn't sure what I was going to do, but probably not something like that. And I think he correctly said, "You know, we're going to go into a period of opposition, and we need to have a center of intellectual opposition to [William J. "Bill"] Clinton." I think we were all, particularly Jack, really sensitive to the fact that Clinton had come up and made himself, even though we don't necessarily think of it this way, by his leadership of the Democratic Leadership Council, he was an intellectual leader in his party as well, or at least he had a whole intellectual contingent around him of thinkers that wanted to find a centrist approach for the Democrats. And Jack talked about the fact that we could lose intellectual leadership on the right if we didn't have a place for conservatives to look for sound thinking and intellectually-rooted thinking on national security, economics, and social issues. And those are the three legs of the Reaganite stool that we all focused on. He and I talked about it. He immediately thought Bill Bennett was the right guy but he wanted to be sure about that. He and Bennett became great friends, but there was a rivalry between those two at first, although it didn't last too long—

Kondracke: What was the rivalry about?

Weber: I think more than anything, I think two things: first of all, I think they are two strong personalities. But more than anything, it's sort of almost the Pat Robertson thing, with Jack. Is Bill Bennett going to insist on talking all sorts of divisive social issues that I, Jack Kemp, don't really care about? On the other hand, if you don't have a social issue component to Empower America, the whole Pat Robertson world is going to assume you're opposed to them. So that was a difficult line

for us to walk a little bit in primary, partially because some of the funders who came forward also didn't want us to be involved in divisive social issues. Well, the truth is Bill Bennett didn't want to talk about abortion. I mean he wanted to talk about welfare and education and a whole set of social pathologies that were manifesting themselves mainly in poor communities, which is exactly what Jack was concerned about too. But the perception was, okay, this is where we're going to talk about school prayer and abortion, I guess the gay agenda was not a big issue at that time, but that kind of issue.

Kondracke: Speaking of that, Jack was a big tent guy in every way, but what was his attitude toward gays?

Weber: I don't remember a discussion about it. I certainly don't think he was homophobic in any way. He'd had to deal with rumors about his own life, as you well know, going back to California. But I don't remember him ever talking about it. I don't remember him ever discussing the issue. I also don't remember him saying anything about anybody that might have been gay or—

Kondracke: How about AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]?

Weber: I just don't remember a discussion about that.

Kondracke: So who were your big funders?

Weber: Well, [Theodore J.] Ted Forstmann was the guy, and Ted Forsman attracted—Ted was fine. Teddy attracted Julian [H.]

Robertson [Jr.], who was one of his best friends, and [Herbert J.] Herb Siegel. Do you know these guys?

Kondracke: I know Ted Forsman.

Weber: Well you know Ted. Julian was Tiger Management Corporation. He's from North Carolina, it was a big buyout, he's a billionaire now. I don't know if he was at the time. Might have been. But he's a very big finance guy. I don't know exactly what Tiger does, but Julian's probably retired. I don't think he's dead, but I think he's long retired. And then Herb Siegel's corporation was Chris Craft. Now Chris Craft was no longer the boat manufacturer by this time. They maintained that name, but they were a broadcast property, and he'd made a huge amount of money on partial sale of Warner Brothers and things like that. When they formed the United Paramount Network, he was the United part of the United Paramount Network. He was a big media guy, and they'd owned TV stations around the country. One of his sons ran the TV station in San Francisco, UPN stations. So he was a big media guy. I was actually quite close to Herb Siegel. And his son [William D.] Bill [Siegel] is, I think, still engaged to Monica Crowley. Bill's a great friend of mine. I know Monica little bit too, but I know Bill much better. So those were the guys that put in the most money. And then there was a whole group underneath them, but they were mainly venture capitalists. Oh, and [E.] Floyd Kvamme came on and became the chairman of Empower America a little bit later. He was not one of the original founding funders, but he quickly became one of the major funders. He was a partner, a partner of [L.] John Doerr, at Kleiner Perkins [Caufield & Byers]. It became a lot of venture capitalists, a lot of high-tech guys, but it started out, I was

only there for the first couple years. It was Ted Forsman, Julian Robertson, Herb Siegel that provided most of the start-up money, and then a group of other people. [Frederic V.] Fred Malek was involved, and [Gilbert L.] Gil and Judy Shelton were involved and a lot of folks like that.

Kondracke: So how much money did you have?

Weber: Boy, I don't know. I think that Ted and Julian and Herb each put in about a million dollars the first year, which was at that time a very substantial amount of money. Today we see a lot of people writing seven-figure checks. You didn't see many back then.

Kondracke: The people who were in residence were Jack and Bill Bennett, plus aides of theirs. Jeane Kirkpatrick wasn't really there, was she?

Weber: No. Jeane did not want to be there. As I said, I did the recruitment of Jeane, and she was ready to affiliate, but she did not want another office. I think she already had both offices in Georgetown and at the American Enterprise Institute. The other thing about Jeane at that time, which caused me to really admire her and become quite close to her, her husband was very ill. I'm not sure exactly what it was. I think he'd had a series of strokes. And she was very devoted to him, and I talked to her about what she could do for us and things, and I always anticipated that the problem with Jeane Kirkpatrick was going to be that she really was an academic, and she really was a diplomat and she really was into politics. I never got any arguments about that with her. But what I got was, "I can't leave the

house that day. I've got to take care of Kirk. I've got to be there in the morning to get him dressed and fed." "It will take me this much time to line up help to take care of Kirk when I'm gone." She was just very, very devoted to him. And that's part of why she didn't want another office to manage. And she didn't want a salary or anything like that. She just wanted to affiliate as she could.

Kondracke: And so what actually did Empower America do?

Weber: Well, we tried to organize people at the grass roots around this set of ideas: economic policy, social policy and a strong foreign policy. We went around the country and we did forums, and I can remember we went to Milwaukee and did a big thing and Tommy [G.] Thompson came, and we did something in Chicago, and we did something in Dallas, things on the West Coast, to try to attract and build an activist base in support of conservative ideas.

Kondracke: Was the model the DLC? The Democratic Leadership Council?

Weber: A little bit, to the extent that there was a model, that was probably it.

Kondracke: But you only had three senior fellows, as opposed to DLC, had a whole network of fellows.

Weber: Yes, we didn't, remember, we didn't attempt to build a think tank, which would have been a problem, because Heritage existed, and one of my first jobs also was to sit down with [Edwin J.] Ed

Feulner [Jr.] and make sure Ed was our ally and did not see this as competitive. And he became our great ally, and a huge friend of Jack's, as you know, and a friend of mine too. But, he also had an institution he had built from the ground up, and I assured him we were not creating a competitor to Heritage, and we didn't try to do that. We wanted to have specific areas of activism around specific issue concerns, and really built around the main individuals involved. We weren't going to try to install all sorts of scholars here and there and create a long-term institutional presence. It was supposed to be an activist organization.

Kondracke: Can you claim any signal successes for Empower America?

Weber: Well, I could claim that we took over the Congress in 1994. That would probably be a little bit disingenuous, I don't know.

Kondracke: Did Jack campaign a lot for members of Congress?

Weber: Yes, in 1994, yes, he did very extensive campaigning. He was high maintenance.

Kondracke: Really? In what way?

Weber: The arrangements to get Jack into a Congressional district, he demanded a lot in terms of—preferred to travel on a private jet. We managed to get that from the Congressional Campaign Committee for him. Was very specific about the kind of accommodations he wanted;

he did not want to go Holiday Inn. But he was a huge draw on the road.

Kondracke: So he raised a lot of money?

Weber: He raised a lot of money for a lot of candidates.

Kondracke: And was there any thought that he was going to run for president in '96? It was sort of in the air, but—

Weber: Yes, it was in the air, and we had some young people that came attaching themselves to Empower America, including most notably Paul [D.] Ryan, and Marc [A.] Thiessen, who I think both were there because they assumed that they were in the forerunner of the Kemp for President campaign. Marc Thiessen was much more explicit about this than was Paul Ryan. Paul, I think, certainly thought Kemp was going to run for president, he was going to be for him, but Marc was very explicit about it. I talked to him. Every time we'd talk—and he became a great friend of mine, he and his wife—but we'd sit down, we'd have a beer, and we'd talk about the Kemp for President campaign. I remember saying to him once "Marc, what do you do if Jack doesn't run for president in 1996?" And he just stopped, and he said, "I can't imagine such a thing." Literally.

Kondracke: What was Marc Thiessen in the—

Weber: He was just a research writer.

Kondracke: For Jack? Because Paul Ryan was—

Weber: Assigned more to Jack. Marc was more broadly—I hired Marc, I think, more than, more than Jack. Marc did not come attached. Paul came attached to Bob Kasten, who was attached to Kemp, so he was kind of in Kemp World and supply-side world. We didn't know who Marc Thiessen was. I think he came right out of, I think Tufts was his college, but wherever he went to school, he came right out of that and went down here and just came to apply for a job. But he was here.

Kondracke: Did you have an office here too?

Weber: Yes. That's the only office I had. That was my fulltime job, for two years.

Kondracke: So your fulltime job was to direct the place, or—

Weber: Yes. I was the president, I was supposed to run the place, which was no easy task with Bill Bennett on one side of me and Jack Kemp on the other.

Kondracke: Why?

Weber: Because each one of them thought the place was made in their own image, or at least should be. They were great, don't misunderstand. I enjoyed it and those were great guys. But it was not easy directing those two great guys.

Kondracke: They were using it as a base for their own activities, their own speech-making and stuff like that, or did they have a unified purpose?

Weber: They used it as a base for their own activities. We had a unified purpose as well. I was never uncomfortable with them using it as a base for their own activities. I thought that's how we could achieve things. These were two large, large figures in the conservative movement.

[interruption]

Kondracke: I guess we better go to the '96 campaign. What was your role in the '96 campaign?

Weber: Well, my role was not through Jack. Bob Dole recruited me to be the co-chairman of his policy development process. My co-chairman was one [Donald H.] Don Rumsfeld, who was also, by the way on the board of Empower America. And I was down in Dole campaign headquarters almost on a daily basis in 1995 and into 1996, but it was through Dole, and it was on the policy development side, it wasn't really on the Kemp side at all. I was not involved in the decision to choose Jack. I was involved with Jack after he was chosen, somewhat, but my main role was with Dole.

Kondracke: What was the Kemp-Dole dynamic over time?

Weber: It was surprising to me when Dole picked him. I remember talking to people that were in the room, Scott and others, and they

said that every time that they'd come up with another name, they'd go through the list of names, and Dole would say to them after they'd finished going through those names, "What about the quarterback?" And finally Scott [W. Reed] and others said they realized after having this discussion several times and Dole winding up saying, "What about the quarterback?" that they realized he wanted the quarterback. Why Dole wanted Jack is still a very interesting thing to me. I'm glad of it, but I don't quite understand it, because we had been so at odds with him over taxes and supply-side economics and things like that for a long, long period of time.

Kondracke: And were all these jokes that they told in public about, you know, busses going off cliffs and libraries burning down and all that kind of stuff. There was hostility, wasn't there?

Weber: Yes, quite a bit.

Kondracke: To the extent that Jack was hostile toward anybody, it must have been toward Dole. Was it a Herbert [C.] Hoover—

Weber: Yes, not angry hostile. He really thought that Dole was on the other side of the issues that he cared most about.

Kondracke: So that raises the question, what were you doing there at the Dole campaign, since you were a Kempite?

Weber: I'm a Republican. We ended up with a pretty good platform for Bob Dole, and I just wanted to help. He asked me to help and I, I thought Dole was a good man, I didn't think that he, and I supported

him for the nomination, not [William P. "Phil"] Gramm, who was the other alternative. But that's who I backed.

Kondracke: So were you there for the debate?

Weber: Yes.

Kondracke: Tell me.

Weber: The Kemp debate.

Kondracke: The Kemp debate.

Weber: Well, first of all I remember in the debate preparation process, Jack was not good at debate preparation. He didn't like to spend time on it, he didn't want to do the formal rehearsal, which is always a little bit awkward. I've been through this with other candidates. I was not through it with [Willard "Mitt"] Romney this time. I was four years ago. But it's awkward, and candidates don't like to pretend they're debating somebody else, and Jack just didn't want to go through, so he didn't do a good job of prep.

Kondracke: You were there when Judd Gregg was playing Gore?

Weber: Yes, through some of that.

Kondracke: And what exactly happened in the prep?

Weber: Well, I don't remember exactly. I just know he didn't do a good job on the prep side of it. In the debate itself, and I don't remember what city we were in. What city was it?

Kondracke: St. Petersburg [Florida].

Weber: Okay. They had all of us who were spinners go into a little auditorium. We didn't actually sit in the auditorium. This is an argument I had. Can I be off the record for a minute?

[pause]

Weber: They put those of us that were going to be spinning it afterwards in this little theater, I'd call it, and we kind of watched on a big screen. And the reason they wanted to do that is because John [W.] Buckley, who was in charge of the press and communications operation for the Kemp vice presidential candidacy, was feeding us throughout the course of the debate talking points. And I remember throughout the course of the discussion, you know, we went into it with high hopes, and it kept getting lower and lower and lower until at one point in the debate I remember someone sitting a few rows in front of me, who I thought I remembered to be Connie Mack, turned around and looked at me and said, "Is it just me, or is this going really badly?" And of course we all knew it was just going really badly. And John had kept giving us talking points on this is what this debate means. One by one we would lose all these arguments until the very end, we're getting ready to go out, and John said, "Nice guy versus an automaton." Because we had really lost the argument. And that's what we all went out onto the floor to try to, but we knew that we lost

the debate and it was particularly bad, because people had built Jack up as the likely winner of the debate, which serves as a lesson. The best speaker to a large audience is not always the best debater.

Kondracke: So he lost it in what sense? Why do you think he lost it?

Weber: I don't remember all this. He appeared to be struggling on a whole bunch of fronts, and he didn't appear to be addressing the issues exactly as they should have been, but Gore just appeared to be more in mastery of the situation than Jack did, I think. I'm going to have to go.

Kondracke: Okay. What haven't I asked you about that I should have?

Weber: You've asked me about everything.

Kondracke: Good. Thanks.

[end of interview]