

Timothy Naftali

Hi, I'm Timothy Naftali. I'm director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum in Yorba Linda, California, and today I have the honor and privilege to be interviewing Senator Bob Dole for the Richard Nixon Oral History Program. Senator Dole, thank you for participating. When did you first meet Richard Nixon?

Robert Dole

You know, I knew you were going to ask me that and I was trying to think yesterday or last night. I met him but I think I first got to know him in 1964 when he came to Kansas to bail me out of a very tight congressional race. As I recall, he was on his way to Herbert Hoover's funeral in New York and he stopped in Pratt, Kansas, standing there on a bunch of bales of hay, saying why they ought to send this young guy back to Congress. Of course, that was Barry Goldwater year, and we got wiped out. I barely won the race but I'd met Nixon before then. I remember being on the plane going to Pratt -- I can't remember where I joined up with him -- but he was saying to me, he said, "You know, you're a bright young guy. Have you ever thought about running for the Senate?" He already had me moving out of the House up to the Senate and I said, "Oh, well, you never know how that happens, you know" dah, dah, dah. I don't know. We just always hit it off, always. I never had a problem with Nixon. If I wanted to see Nixon when I was Chairman of the Party, if I'd see him in a reception, I wouldn't go through Haldeman or anybody or Kehrl, I'd say, "Mr. President, can I come down and talk to you?" Next I'd get a call, "Come down and talk to me." It was the little things you remember in your lifetime. Because I don't use my right arm and he knew that and he'd always extend his left to my left. Didn't mean a thing to anybody else but me, so, you know, it's the little things in life that count.

Timothy Naftali

You get elected to the Senate in 1968. You come to Washington.

Robert Dole

I'd already been there in the House.

Timothy Naftali

Well, that's right. Tell us about the Nixon administration's congressional liaison operation. Tell us about your relationship with Bryce Harlow, please.

Robert Dole

Well, let's see, I got elected first. You know, I got elected, then I was on the escort committee in Miami when they trotted out the President and I was one of eight. I thought, "Boy, this is big time stuff. Here I am, up here with, you know, and with all these important people." But Bryce Harlow, you know, was the master and as I -- not only a word master but he had Democrats, Republicans, people trusted him. And he was an all around good guy. Years later, when Nixon asked me to be chairman of

the party and then later I get a call from the White House saying, "We don't want you to be chairman of the party," it was Bryce Harlow who sat up half the night with me to work it out. I mean, I'd never followed Nixon; I followed people around him who said, "Bob Dole is too irreverent, he's too independent." I threatened to leave the Senate, because I'd been asked and I'd told people it would happen. So that's kind of guy Bryce Harlow was. He came in in the rain and I remember it rained hard. We sat up with Rogers Morton who was then chairman of the party all night in the RNC trying to figure out something that would make it all work.

Timothy Naftali

There was a hard fight over the ABM Treaty within the first few months of you going to the Senate. After that fight, you take a group of senators to the White House to talk to them about improving relations between the White House and Senate Republicans. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Robert Dole

Well, I remember in those Nixon years, I was described as sort of the sheriff of the Senate. I mean, I was sort of Nixon's -- I don't say point man -- but I was there to defend anybody that took him on or took programs on. I'm just trying to remember if I recall directly that particular visit.

Timothy Naftali

Why don't you think about it? How did you become the sheriff of the Senate? How did that happen that you became the point man for the administration?

Robert Dole

I think it just happened. There was a void out there nobody was filling, and Hugh Scott was our Republican leader, very fine man, who was very upset when I became chairman of the party because that, in effect, put him sort of in the second place. But, you know, I was young and eager and I believed in Nixon and I didn't see anybody up there doing what they should do to defend their party and their President. And Barry Goldwater said later, "I like Bob Dole because he'd just grab you by the hair and drag you down the middle of the aisles." So, it was that, you know, and we debated these Vietnam withdrawal resolutions forever -- Cooper, Church, McGovern, Hatfield -- and somehow, I always got in the middle of the debate. And when it came to judges, where Nixon lost Clement Haynsworth, which I think in retrospect he probably should have lost, but the other judge --

Timothy Naftali

Carswell?

Robert Dole

-- Carswell was an outstanding judge, never should have been defeated -- some little petty thing -- and I remember working with Senator Hollings on that, but we lost both of them by 55-45. Senator Birch Bayh was leading the opposition. So, I don't know, I just sort of -- I didn't intend to be sort of a quasi-leader, but I didn't see anybody else offering very much, so -- and I used to go to the White House,

particularly on the judgeships, we'd have a briefing every morning and I wasn't trying to usurp the leadership. I was just doing what I was asked. The leadership was there, too.

Timothy Naftali

They put you on this team to defend -- Carswell was the second, he was the one that, I think it was Hruska, Senator Hruska said that mediocrity has --

Robert Dole

-- Mediocrity.

Timothy Naftali

Yes. The White House put you on a team to defend him and you got the recommital vote, but you actually, you didn't get the nomination vote, the nominating vote. I know it's a long time, sir, but did he have a chance? Did Carswell actually have a chance to be confirmed or were you really just pushing a rock up the hill?

Robert Dole

I think, without going back and looking at my records, I'd say probably pushing a rock up a hill and later he certified that we were pushing a rock up a hill, so -- [laughs] but, you know, how does Nixon know all this stuff? I know he got a background check, but it was really unfortunate on Carswell. I mean, Senator Hollings was my friend for the next 25 years because he knew this man and never should have happened to him. He didn't deserve it, a prominent judge, a prominent family. Something like a six, seven, \$800, some little --

Timothy Naftali

I'm wondering if that wasn't Haynsworth --

Robert Dole

Haynsworth, excuse me, yeah.

Timothy Naftali

I thought it was Haynsworth, who was the South Carolinian. Carswell was the one they picked in Florida when they --

Robert Dole

Carswell was in Florida. No, I don't have it mixed up. I just went off on Haynsworth. Yeah, that was a terrible disaster, the Haynsworth. It never should have gotten to Carswell. It never should have happened.

Timothy Naftali

Let's talk about Cambodia, 1970. Tough, tough experience.

Robert Dole

The incursion?

Timothy Naftali

Yes, the incursion. What kind of warning did you get that -- do you remember when the President told you that he had made this decision?

Robert Dole

I think it was probably afterwards. I don't recall, but -- you know, I was just a junior senator. I didn't have any -- I didn't run down to all the big briefings and nobody said, "We have to have Senator Dole down here to fill him in on this." But, again, I believed in what he was doing there and I thought he was doing the right thing in Cambodia and we didn't stay that long and, I mean, you know, it wasn't invasion; incursion was the word. Then I made TV spots, I did everything. Lyn Nofziger, you remember Lyn? He was helping on the PR part and we'd known each other for a long time. So, I don't know, it was a -- I think that's why when Nixon was picking a party chairman I think he recognized, at least I'd have been -- tried to be helpful in certain areas. But then I think Senator Saxbe of Ohio and Senator Scott decided my appointment would not be a good idea, and it started to unravel. That's all history so, I did become the Chairman.

Timothy Naftali

You did in the end. How did you come to -- you were the one, I believe, who introduced the amendment to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

Robert Dole

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

Can you tell us what you remember of that, doing that?

Robert Dole

I remember Fulbright said, "You're stealing my amendment." I said, "No, I'm just --" He said, "It's like stealing a man's cow." So I said, "No, I'm just milking it a little bit." Again, we were getting -- you know, they were blaming -- it was really Johnson who asked for it. It wasn't President Nixon, but you know how things work around this town. It was Nixon on a thin reed, you know, this terrible thing, so we decided we didn't need it anyway, and I just jumped up and offered an amendment, and it passed. Now Fulbright, later on, went through the motions and passed something else, but we never had a close relationship after that, I don't think.

Timothy Naftali

With Fulbright?

Robert Dole

Yeah, I don't think.

Timothy Naftali

That really spoiled the relationship?

Robert Dole

Yeah, he was always very nice to me but -- and maybe I was just being a smart ass or something, you know? I didn't think of that at the time. I was just so involved in the Vietnam thing and defending America's position, which happened to be the President's position, and maybe the fact that, at that time, a lot of us had been in the service and were World War II veterans, you know, we had a little different attitude. You go up there now, you've got about 18 World War II vets left and, I don't know. Maybe I was doing the wrong thing, you know, 50-some-thousand killed and a lot of young men wounded, but Nixon got us out. He didn't get us in and neither did Eisenhower. Kennedy got us in, and Nixon got us out and, to me, that was -- he kept his word. That's what he said he would do.

Timothy Naftali

Well, I've read in interviews at one point you've said that you developed a bit of ambivalence about Vietnam as you looked at it.

Robert Dole

Yeah, I even ended up voting for one of the Cooper-Church Amendments. You know, after you've debated so many days, about this far apart, and I don't know whether I ever voted for Hatfield-McGovern, but I don't think -- I'm trying to remember the Church --

Timothy Naftali

That was to limit the United States' ability to fund a war in Cambodia.

Robert Dole

Yeah, see, it was a different proposition because of that. But I never voted to cut off funding in Vietnam.

Timothy Naftali

Was there a point, though, because it did take five years -- it took until '73 -- was there a point when you got a little bit impatient about pulling out of Vietnam, or you just assumed it would happen?

Robert Dole

Well, you didn't like to see the body counts and that was the big deal those days, the body count every day in the paper. You know, there were young men from Kansas almost on a daily basis or weekly basis and you go home and you meet with the parents so you begin to feel, jiminy, can't we get out of there? And then you have some question about the government itself, Vietnamese commitment, and I remember one thing. I wore John McCain's POW bracelet for a couple years when he was a guest of the Hanoi Hilton. Then I remember also starting the League of Families. These women had a meeting one day, on a Saturday, and they were going to get organized. I think only about a hundred people showed up and three members of Congress and I promised them that day that within 90 days, we would fill Constitution Hall and Vice President Agnew would speak, and we did it. I mean, there's just a lot of things happening and a lot of people wanted support, you know, they wanted somebody to... The Vietnam War was very unpopular, even much more unpopular than the war in Iraq.

Timothy Naftali

Do you remember the Eagleton-Dole plan to reform the Electoral College?

Robert Dole

Was it Bayh or Eagleton?

Timothy Naftali

It was Eagleton, and I only bring it up because of the 2000 election. People who are watching this will know about the 2000 election. In May of 1970, you and Tom Eagleton co-sponsored a bill to change the Electoral College to make our electoral system more democratic.

Robert Dole

More direct.

Timothy Naftali

More direct.

Robert Dole

More direct voting. I remember that -- I remember, but I thought it was Birch Bayh but maybe it was Eagleton, maybe Birch had some role on it. But, yeah, it made a lot of sense to me, you know, direct voting, everybody's vote counts the same. It was after the Tennessee decision, you know, one man, one vote decision, and -- it's been a while -- I think that's the only thing I ever co-sponsored with Tom. We were good friends but we just had different views.

Timothy Naftali

Tell me, how is it that you became RNC Chief? To what extent did you have to lobby for the job? Did you have to lobby for the job?

Robert Dole

I don't remember lobbying for it. I think Nixon, I think there was a really good chemistry between the two of us, and I think he saw me as maybe a kind of a, you know, some guy with some potential in the Senate, some leadership qualities that he liked and the fact that I was a veteran and he was a World War II Navy guy and that he'd helped me in '64. As I remember, then he calls me and tells me -- or somebody calls me and tells me, "You're going to be the RNC Chair." I don't know that I lobbied for it. I think there was a petition in the Senate, circulated by Senator Bellman that I remember, saying this Bob Dole would be a great chairman, so maybe there was some. But when that got started, then there was a countermove by Bill Saxbe that said I couldn't sell beer on a troop ship and from Ohio and he was fronting for Hugh Scott.

Timothy Naftali

Oh, that was what was happening?

Robert Dole

Yeah, and they were sort of seen as moderates and I was seen as sort of this young whippersnapper, you know. It was not so much philosophical, but I was dry behind the ears as far as they were concerned.

Timothy Naftali

Well, they called you a conservative in those days. What was a conservative?

Robert Dole

Well, it's changed, you know. When I was -- I remember my hero was sort of Eisenhower. In those days, it was cut taxes and cut spending, that was it. We didn't have same sex marriage, don't think the death penalty was an issue, prayer in school I don't think was an issue, abortion wasn't an issue until '74 in my Senate race, and I was a traditional, old time, cut the budget, cut taxes Republican. To me, that was a conservative, except for farm subsidies. But it's changed over the years, you know. Even in the Reagan years, well, you know, it's supply side. Don't worry about spending cuts, you get all this tax money. Then in '74, abortion started popping up and prayer in school and busing, you know, everything changes. I think I was a mainstream conservative. I wasn't on the far right. I did a lot of things in my career that I thought were right, like people with disabilities and humane treatment of animals. Just a lot of things that dealt with people, but I think I'm probably conservative. I think Nixon would have the problem today because, you know, he backed the EPA, people don't like that very much these days and was it FAP? Yeah, welfare reform which he was way ahead of his time and, of course, he had the great help of Senator Moynihan who was in the White House for a while and there were some other progressive -- well, maybe progressive is the wrong word -- but ideas, moderate ideas

that Nixon had. ERA, Equal Rights Amendment -- he'd probably given me eight or ten of them -- but I think his strength was foreign policy, that's sort of my view.

Timothy Naftali

You think his strength was -- but in this early period, the first couple years, I mean, were you supporting him on the Family Assistance Plan, the program? Did you support environmental legislation during this period?

Robert Dole

Well, I think so, yeah. I don't know what my Presidential support score was. Not sure about the EPA, but probably. I don't know, I had a view at that time that we had a Republican President and I was a Republican senator and he reflected the views of the party and unless there was some good reason, I should follow his leadership. That might seem unusual today, but that's the way it worked. It's like any -- well, it's not quite like a business -- but loyalty is very important. You've got to be able to count on people if you're going to get things to happen in the political world.

Timothy Naftali

Once --

Robert Dole

I know Nixon used to fret about senator A, and say, "Oh, you can't count on them." He was probably right, too.

Timothy Naftali

How were your relations with John Mitchell when you were RNC?

Robert Dole

Good.

Timothy Naftali

Were they good?

Robert Dole

I remember, you know, there was a divorce happening during that time. I was chairman of the party, and it was probably my fault. When you get into politics, you're never home. I was on a plane every weekend and my poor wife, wonderful lady -- so I went up to see Mitchell, and I said, you know, I probably should resign because I saw it as a flaw in my character. I mean, you don't get divorced; this is not a Kansas thing. And he said, "No, no, forget about it." And I remember Nixon sending me a book about Disraeli, about your public life and your private life and he said, "Forget about leaving,

just go read this book." So Nixon took an interest in that, you know. In my view, I was a failure and I should leave because it would be a stain on the party, but he didn't think so.

Timothy Naftali

In July of 1971, you said publicly that it would be a mistake for the U.S. government to try to prosecute Daniel Ellsberg.

Robert Dole

I did?

Timothy Naftali

Yes.

Robert Dole

I just saw him the other night on TV. I wondered why he wasn't in jail. [laughter] Well, there might have been more to it than that. Maybe there's -- well, but he leaked -- you're talking about the leak of the papers.

Timothy Naftali

Yes, yes.

Robert Dole

He was just on three nights ago. I wonder what else I said?

Timothy Naftali

Oh, it's okay, let me move to something else. You had a really interesting challenge when Nixon announced he was going to China. How did you manage the reaction from the right wing in the Republican Party?

Robert Dole

Well, as I look back on it, I think it was one of the great things that happened, you know, in the Nixon Presidency, but I can't believe I was too toasty about it when it happened because of where I came from again. But, again, our -- some of our farmers saw an opportunity here for markets, you know, we like to sell things, to other people, not the government. I don't know what I may have said publicly. You probably know.

Timothy Naftali

Well, I was interested in the behind the scenes stuff. I mean, you had people like William F. Buckley and you had Ronald Reagan and John Ashbrook who were quite public in their disapproval and you

needed to keep the Party together. I was just wondering if you remember any anecdotes, any stories from that period. It must have been a real challenge. That was a real turn-around for the party.

Robert Dole

I think I remember the longer view. I don't remember what happened at the time, but it wasn't long before people were talking about, "This would be like Nixon's trip to China," that's how they would say somebody did something very difficult and how it opened up the doors and started a new relationship and how it was kept undercover all that time. It's pretty hard to believe. Now you look at China today, and they're sending us all these lead-painted toys and guzzle up all the energy and the prices are going out of the -- but I still think you have to -- you can't ignore what, 1.2 billion people?

Timothy Naftali

Can you recall interacting, when you were RNC Chairman, interacting with Ronald Reagan, because it was a real challenge for Richard Nixon to be sure Ronald Reagan would support him in California. And Reagan, of course, had his Presidential aspirations even then. Do you remember working with Ronald Reagan at that point to try to keep him on board?

Robert Dole

Now, my first really contact with Reagan was when the Ford-Dole ticket and Reagan was willing to talk to me. And I met with him four or five times around the country, not that he wasn't unwilling to meet with Ford, but he'd be happy to talk to me and, in fact, before I was named, I think Ford ran my name by Reagan to be sure it was okay.

Timothy Naftali

Because Ford would later say he felt that Reagan hadn't campaigned hard enough for him.

Robert Dole

I think that's probably accurate and I think there was that feeling that when you lose a country by a combination of -- what, 11,000 votes? -- Hawai'i and Ohio, and let's face it. There were some Reagan people rather openly looking four years down the road, and they didn't do a lot.

Timothy Naftali

Another challenge for you, wages and price controls.

Robert Dole

Oh, when Nixon -- I was in California when Nixon announced that. I almost fell off the podium, you know. I'm sure I took issue with that.

Timothy Naftali

But --

Robert Dole

Was I Chairman then?

Timothy Naftali

Yeah, that's what I'm asking you. You're RNC chair. How do you deal with it? I mean -- sorry -- what do you remember of it? What a challenge.

Robert Dole

I thought I'd try to make it seem as least worst as possible. I remember where I was. I was in California, it was about noon or, I don't know what, some time, and somebody said, "Have you heard what President Nixon did?" I said, "No, I haven't." "He's going to impose wage and price controls." Of course that upset the Milton Friedmans of the world and "The worst President we've ever had," and I don't know what I said --

Timothy Naftali

Tell --

Robert Dole

You know, a lot of things happened there. I think one thing I learned is that in the Nixon White House, they didn't expect the chairman to comment very often. I brought up Watergate in the White House and I used to be invited to White House meetings and I brought it up one meeting and the next meeting I was there and that was the last time I was there. I didn't go to any more White House meetings.

Timothy Naftali

This was before the election in November of '72?

Robert Dole

Because I raised the Watergate. This was after it happened.

Timothy Naftali

You were saying you remember the "Whip Inflation Now" buttons.

Robert Dole

Oh, yeah, I remember Ford coming to Kansas City, Missouri, a big rally and everybody whipped out these buttons and put them on and like, boy, this is going to end inflation, just wearing these buttons around. But I don't worry, somebody gave him bad advice. But I think -- you know, I remember Nixon when we tried, sort of started the rehab process and he came to Congress and he liked -- and it made

him feel good, people lined up from my office, way down the hall, to get a picture with Richard Nixon. This is the guy that people say they hated and he ought to be impeached or executed or worse, and I remember when Senator Byrd had a meeting with just Democrats and Nixon. Nixon once mentioned Senator Byrd maybe being on the Court, the Supreme Court. And these are Nixon-haters, senators, and as I learned after that meeting, they left that meeting with their mouths open because Nixon had taken them on a foreign policy tour around the world without a note. And I remember a meeting we had where we invited Democrats, Republicans, House members, senators, another meeting where Nixon spoke, and the same results. I remember taking some senators up to New Jersey to visit Nixon, and he knew their fathers' names and their fathers' birth dates. You know, this guy was smart and it just seems so -- to kind of see that just thrown away because I don't know where we'd have been as a party today. I mean, he was pretty popular and -- but then Watergate.

Timothy Naftali

Do you think Ronald Reagan would have been President were it not for Watergate?

Robert Dole

Probably, there wouldn't have been any Gerald Ford in the picture. I think -- again, I didn't know Ronald Reagan that well, but I think, obviously, his people had their eye on the prize.

Timothy Naftali

In the Fall of 1971, Chuck Colson starts to criticize you for not being partisan enough.

Robert Dole

Oh, yeah, he gave me a speech. You know, they send you this stuff up. And you're not supposed to question it and ask if it's, you know -- "Can you verify this?" Probably what he -- it was an attack on Katharine Graham, a personal attack on Katharine Graham, that I was supposed to deliver that night in Baltimore, and I wouldn't do it. I said, "Unless you can tell me these are facts, I'm not going to do it." And, you know, I can -- as I look back on it, they didn't draw me into their little web, you know, these people around that I think did a great disservice to the Presidency and to the President himself. Now maybe he encouraged them to do it but I just -- you know, Colson was tough. I mean, well he expected blood. You know, take no prisoners. And I was supposed to be the guy doing it because I was the party chairman. I think there's -- at least I felt at the time, there's got to be some limit. You just don't go out and destroy somebody or say something personal about somebody unless you know it's a fact.

Timothy Naftali

Ken Clawson, who used to be in the administration, put a column out in November of '71, basically saying that the White House thought you were not partisan enough.

Robert Dole

Boy, I need to show that to Dr. Dobson.

Timothy Naftali

I think he attacked you for a different reason, right? Dr. Dobson?

Robert Dole

I wonder what they were after me for on the --

Timothy Naftali

I don't know but it was pretty -- it was -- they actually basically surfaced this in a column, in "The Washington Post" of all places.

Robert Dole

Yeah, well, Ken Clawson I thought was a pretty good guy. I -- you know, partisan is one thing but joining their little cabal was something else. I think my view is if you don't want to be partisan, then you shouldn't try to carry the flag for the party, because there are a lot of people willing to do it. Whether you're Democrat or Republican, they don't elect non-partisan leaders. They want somebody, if you're in the Senate or the party chairman, to be out there carrying the flag and representing the President. That doesn't mean you've got to get in bed with a bunch of people who've got something else on their mind.

Timothy Naftali

Did the President ever talk to you about the southern strategy?

Robert Dole

I think only in passing. You know, who is the author now, who's turned Democrat now?

Timothy Naftali

Kevin Phillips?

Robert Dole

Yeah, with the emerging southern strategy. His wife used to work for the Ways and Means Committee, a Republican. He went completely ape a few years ago. It was working, you know. Maybe it would have worked anyway, but did I know the details? No. Was I asked to do things in the South? No, not that I remember.

Timothy Naftali

Well, I wanted to ask you one thing that's very important. You authored something called an anti-busing amendment in March of 1972, after, I guess it was, was it Robert Griffin, Senator Griffin, had

one amendment that had failed, and you offered one. I wondered if the White House had wanted you to author this amendment. This was a big deal for the White House at that point.

Robert Dole

Let's see, was Jesse around then, Helms?

Timothy Naftali

No, I don't think so.

Robert Dole

He was the anti-busing, abortion amendment guy. We used to vote on abortion every couple of weeks, it seemed like, but he probably wasn't there. I don't -- I mean, I think there were times when the White House called, maybe want me to say something on the Senate floor, or defend somebody, or they'd look at the headlines in the "Post" and the "Times" and want somebody to get up and refute that piece. Legislation -- it might have happened. I don't remember.

Timothy Naftali

The concern was that George Wallace, George Wallace was making -- at that point, he was still running, of course, he hadn't been shot -- and he was using the busing issue as a wedge issue and the administration wanted the Democrats to be viewed as supporters of busing, so it became an important issue in that campaign.

Robert Dole

What year was that?

Timothy Naftali

'72

Robert Dole

Yeah, '72. You know, I might have offered it for them. Did it pass?

Timothy Naftali

No.

Robert Dole

Yeah, that's what I thought. Didn't have the vote.

Timothy Naftali

How did you manage GOP dissatisfaction with Spiro Agnew, because there were some people who wanted him off the ticket in '72 in the Party. Did you remember having to calm those waters?

Robert Dole

Let's see, who was his aide --

Timothy Naftali

It was Vic Gold, was one of them.

Robert Dole

Vic was one but there's another guy I think. I didn't have many dealings with Agnew. I always wondered how he got on the ticket but I figured they went alphabetically and A-G is pretty high up. I remember he came to Wichita once for me for a party function and he did a good job, but you couldn't get close to the guy. "Don't touch his suit." "Don't do this." "Don't touch him." What the hell is going on here? These are my friends. It was all the staff he had around him, but I don't know whether Vic Gold -- the other guy you'd know if I could think of his name. Wasn't him, because he was a nice guy. Again, the White House was into all this stuff. They never shared anything with, you know -- that's why I was sort of happy that there was a Committee to Re-elect the President. We called it CREEP, and the RNC was on its own. Senator Sam Ervin and chairman of the Watergate committee, Democrat, made a finding that Senator Robert Dole had nothing to do with Watergate. It's right in the record. But, you know, I knew there were some people who didn't think much of Agnew. They went out, where was it in Iowa, and made that speech and his stock kind of went up. Negative nabobs of negativism or something.

Timothy Naftali

Well, actually that, and it's clear from your own campaigning records, sir, but the Committee to Re-elect the President did not involve you in its practices, did it?

Robert Dole

No, except I knew the congressman from Minnesota was sort of chairman of CREEP.

Timothy Naftali

Clark MacGregor.

Robert Dole

Yeah, Clark MacGregor. In fact, I beat him for our class leadership post. We were friends but he's a very bright guy. I never had a formal meeting with him. We talked back and forth, but -- and we used to think, you know, they don't have any confidence in the party or me or the leadership and so they go

out and organize this, but after a while, I thought, you know, this happens all the time, you know, the President has his own team. Turned out I was lucky not to be on the team.

Timothy Naftali

Do you remember talking to the President before the election about your not being on the team? Weren't you disappointed?

Robert Dole

Yeah, I think when I started -- well, when I stopped being invited to the White House briefings -- and the party and the leadership and the chairman generally, you wouldn't be at the table, but you'd be in, you know, one of the back seats. But again, I never changed my view of President Nixon. I never blamed Nixon. Maybe I -- there was something wrong with me. Even at his funeral, I didn't blame Nixon. I understood that he had flaws. I think the thing that upset me most about Nixon was all the four-letter words he used because we didn't do that in our house. If we did, the soap comes out and you get your mouth -- And just little things like that, I can't believe Nixon did that, I can't believe he said that. I knew he was kind of an insecure person but, you know, to me he was always fine, not that I saw him that often.

Timothy Naftali

Do you remember having to explain to the party why the convention was going to be in San Diego?

Robert Dole

Is that the IT & T matter?

Timothy Naftali

Well, it became the IT & T --

Robert Dole

Yeah, what's her name? What's the gal's name?

Timothy Naftali

Dita Beard.

Robert Dole

Dita Beard, oh boy, was she a piece of work. I probably explained why it was going to be in San Diego. How much money was involved?

Timothy Naftali

\$400,000.

Robert Dole

Nothing, I mean, Obama raised that in a lunch hour -- forty-five million last month. Anyway, yeah, I don't know what we said but I can't believe for \$400 grand, course that was a lot of money in those days.

A lot of money these days for some of us. I can't remember what I said but I probably said something with my fingers crossed, very important. Of course, I like San Diego. I went there in '96.

Timothy Naftali

Right, well, that was a special place for you.

Robert Dole

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

Where were you, sir, when you first heard about the break-in at the Watergate?

Robert Dole

Well, I lived in Watergate South, and then I think I heard it on a morning talk show, radio or something -- paper -- and later on, you know, because of a reporter named Joe Lasterlick [phonetic sp], the "Kansas City Star," some of my, quote, Democrat friends were saying, "Bob Dole must be involved in this, he lives right there." The rumor started that burglary tools were hidden in my apartment. So Joe Lasterlick -- a good guy, probably a Democrat -- had to interview me and ask me, "Were the burglary tools hidden in your apartment?" And my answer was, "No, Joe, that was my night off. I was on a job in Chicago." You know, some foolish thing. So it got pretty close to home. I mean, they were trying to nail me quietly behind my -- everybody's back. That's why Senator Ervin, without any coaching, did me a great favor, but --

Timothy Naftali

How did you react to that news? I mean, in a sense it was your opposite number's place was burglarized. Do you remember what your reaction was?

Robert Dole

I think it was disbelief. I mean, it wasn't going to be a contest anyway, you know, it was going to be a wipeout. McGovern was my friend. We do work together now on an international school lunch program. And I don't know, there's something -- the mentality of the whole thing, it was just hard to get your hand around. For a while you could deny it happened and then pretty soon you knew it happened.

Timothy Naftali

Who did you talk to at the White House about it?

Robert Dole

Well, I did raise it at this meeting. I said, "Mr. President," because you had to, you know, address the President -- I was not at the table, but behind him -- "Mr. President," I said, "I've been traveling the country a lot as a chairman and these Watergate stories are starting to percolate and I just want to mention that because I'm certain everybody's aware of it and was there anything we could or should do?" And that was pretty much what I said. And shortly thereafter I was no longer there to say it. I assume that's Haldeman, be my guess.

Timothy Naftali

There was an article in October '72, Evans and Novak, that said that privately you were calling the -- that you were critical of the White House's handling of the Watergate situation.

Robert Dole

Probably was.

Timothy Naftali

Was this your one effort to get them to do something, I mean, to come out in front of it that you recall?

Robert Dole

Yeah... I mean, you know, Richard Nixon is going to say, "I'm not a crook." When did he say that? That was made later on.

Timothy Naftali

'73.

Robert Dole

'73, but you could see the thing was cooking and it wasn't going to go away because the media wasn't going to let it go away. They didn't like Nixon anyway and probably shouldn't -- probably a real story -- they shouldn't let it go. My own view is that there's no reason he couldn't have burned the tapes and it wasn't anybody's information. I mean, Johnson had tapes. President before Johnson, Kennedy had tapes. And these are, I guess you could say government property, but they're also the President's property. They were to be used for historical purposes, not to spy on anybody. What's worried me ever since this all happened is they keep releasing excerpts of when you're sitting there having a meeting with the President and I think, "Well, whew, I got by this time." Maybe next installment I'll be in the papers, "Bob Dole said this in 1973." I don't think so, but, because you know, when you're sitting there

with the President of the United States and you're a lowly senator, you're not really going to disagree with him too often. Maybe that's a sign of immaturity or lack of courage but I didn't want to -- I didn't like some of the people around Nixon -- but I didn't want to make myself believe Nixon did this, that he actually participated. I kept trying to figure out, "Well, that's some staffer, that's Chuck Colson, or that's Haldeman, or maybe, well, Ehrlichman." I wasn't ever sure what he was doing. But it was a tragic chapter in political history.

Timothy Naftali

When they released the smoking gun tape how did that affect your sense of Nixon's role?

Robert Dole

It was over. Then it got down to about what, twelve senators who called on him and I wasn't in that group. I mean, I was never part of the Jim Eastland, Senator Stennis and others. So it wasn't that I had that -- and these people were never close, I think I had a personal relationship with Nixon but not close -- he knew me and I think he appreciated some things I did, and I thought he had great ideas. The thing I liked about Nixon was the way he picked his Cabinet. And I remember being in the hotel -- I can't remember which hotel -- the night he kind of unveiled the Cabinet publicly the first time. I mean, Nixon picked very bright, honorable, high class people. He wasn't afraid to pick somebody who was smarter than he was and that impressed me. I mean, you know, you can -- he didn't bring in a bunch of political hacks. So I don't know, I had a struggle in sort of giving up on him and I never really did because I brought him back to the Capitol years later saying, "You know, you ought to come and visit." And he'd come down and check into Circle One Hotel and he would get his little yellow pad out and he would sit there all day and probably half the night and come up to the Hill with no notes and dazzle them.

Timothy Naftali

Let me ask you about the selection of Gerald Ford as Vice President. Did you play a role at all in that?

Robert Dole

No, the role I played was getting Gerald Ford into a leadership role in the House. The three Kansas -- three of us in Kansas voted for Ford, and he won by three votes against Charlie Halleck. But certainly I didn't have any -- I assume if I were asked, I would have said he'd be a great choice.

Timothy Naftali

Tell us about when they asked you to leave the RNC chair -- chairmanship.

Robert Dole

Oh, that was terrible. I remember going to the Pentagon, getting on the chopper, and who was on there with me? He was the attorney general then, from Arizona.

Timothy Naftali

Kleindienst.

Robert Dole

Kleindienst. I made some smart crack like, "It looks like we're going over the cliff together," or something like this. So I go up to Camp David and the President is very nice, and he invites me in and we sit down and have a nice visit and Haldeman's there and I don't know who else. Next thing I know he's presenting me a jacket, which I still have in my closet, never tried it on, and then he gave me a map of all the thousands of miles that I'd traveled for the party and then he said, "You know, you've done such a great job, and maybe you ought to sort of step aside and enjoy it." I said, "Well, I'd like to sort of stay there a while and enjoy it." Then I learned that there was another guy who they were trying to find a place for and this guy didn't want to be number two anywhere and his name is George Herbert Walker Bush. And so I played the game. I went up to New York and met him at the U.N. and I'm sure it was all a set up, that's how smart I was. I go in and we have a visit and said, "You know, George," -- he was George to me -- "do you think you'd be willing to take on the chairmanship?" I think he'd already said yes and I reported back to Mitchell, I think, that I've seen Bush and he seemed receptive and then Bush took over [unintelligible]

Timothy Naftali

[inaudible]

Robert Dole

No, that's alright. [unintelligible] It's just a habit.

Timothy Naftali

Stop for a second? [unintelligible] Go ahead.

Robert Dole

I remember the first night they brought in Bush to succeed me at the RNC at a big meeting and I said, "They're dragging him in right now, here he comes with both feet. He didn't want to be -- he wanted to be number one, but that wasn't the number one he had in mind. And he did a good job. He got a little upset with the Nixon Watergate stuff, too. But in fact, I think, didn't he write a letter to his sons?"

Timothy Naftali

He wrote a letter to Nixon, Richard Nixon.

Robert Dole

To Nixon, that's right.

Timothy Naftali

No, he got very upset with Colson because the White House wanted the RNC to send -- to participate in sending these letters, and newsletters, pretending they were independent newsletters but, in fact, they were bought and paid for by the White House.

Robert Dole

Well, Chuck Colson's gone on and turned his life over to Christ and done a lot of good in prisons. But in those days, he was a negative, negative force. He brought down a President. I mean, I think he's a key player -- he had people doing things --and I probably did things I shouldn't have done, but I finally got it up to here and I said, "I won't do it." And I was just on the periphery, I wasn't a day-to-day player, I was some guy who dropped in and out. I was out making speeches, defending Nixon, dah-dah-dah. Somewhere I've got a copy of that speech that I didn't give. I don't know where it is. Of course the "Post" was after -- you know, they were really after the President and so they wanted me to go after "The Washington Post." I can't remember but I think there's some kind of personal things in there about Mrs. Graham, not infidelity or stuff like that, but other things that I said, "I can't do that."

Timothy Naftali

This is after Watergate, this is after the Watergate story begins?

Robert Dole

Yeah, this was when the "Post" was digging and kicking.

Timothy Naftali

Did Colson ask you, want you to do campaign stuff that you were uncomfortable with?

Robert Dole

No, I think his primary objective was to bat down every ball, you know, to be on the offense, you know, don't say -- don't take this stuff. You got to be out there, you've got to be slugging away, so -- I never talked to Colson since. My wife sees him occasionally. She used to work with some of the Fellowship stuff.

Timothy Naftali

In February of 1973 -- I'm sorry to ask such a pointed question, but it's interesting -- why did you propose a Congressional investigation into the origins of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam?

Robert Dole

Well, I was trying to pin it on the Kennedys. I mean, they kept == it was always a Republican war, and I knew Eisenhower had sent a few hundred people over there as observers, but he hadn't sent any combat troops. I didn't have any quarrel with JFK but I thought, why not -- get it out on the record. I

mean, who did what, because you know, we got blamed for Vietnam, you know, we got blamed even though Nixon got us out, and I thought it was unfair. I don't think it ever went anywhere.

Timothy Naftali

No, it went to the House Senate Committee.

Robert Dole

Yeah, why not? Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

Well, I wondered if it was part of the way just to protect the President, to distract people from Watergate.

Robert Dole

That may have been part of it. I think that -- I've always had a feeling that we got short shrift on the war. You know, the Republicans get blamed for everything and I think it even came up in my debate with Mondale.

Timothy Naftali

I think a Democrat.

Robert Dole

We're the party of peace, you know? They're the party of... And that was in my briefing book, and I was briefed by high-powered people like Henry K. and others. Boy, did the press take me apart on that. It's the kind of thing Nixon would have loved, though, you know?

Timothy Naftali

And the people of Kansas were comfortable with it because you really were the point guy, the poobah.

Robert Dole

Oh, the "Evening Star," I remember the headline, "The Sheriff of the Senate." And I think a lot of it was encouraged by the White House. And, you know, there wasn't anybody up there defending the President, or not enough, and it was tepid, you know, "Well, we've got to do this, I'm the leader on this." I had a little different view. My view was we didn't start the war, we were trying to end it, and all these other people were jumping on us, even my good friend from Kentucky, Senator Cooper. So I felt very comfortable, though I did end up voting for, I think, one of the Church-Cooper, one of them. We had some -- we really had real debates in those days, and I looked around and there was nobody there, so I kept on talking. So, you know, "Give me the ball, George." Nobody wanted the ball, "Hey, George." "No, I don't want the ball, no."

Timothy Naftali

It must have been hard for you, defending the administration's farm policies, particularly when Earl Butz was Secretary of Agriculture. Didn't that cause you some heartburn?

Robert Dole

He was pretty popular. No, the Farm Bureau loved him, and in my state, the Farm Bureau was strong, wheat growers were strong, farmer's union not too strong, but Butz was sort of market-oriented programs. You know, we had a safety net but most of it was -- you know, we got this, I can't remember the technical name, loan program -- cyclical loans where it was kind of a safe -- you know, you could make it through and if the price went up you could redeem your loan and make some more money. But Butz was popular. I remember being on the campaign, I had to tell him, the day it was going to be over for him, he made some kind of a racial remark, or at least construed as a racial remark. This was in the Ford campaign, and he just passed here recently, you know. But he always had -- the guy could stand up and he could tell jokes; he was a comedian, and my farmers liked him. Now he had some tough, tough opponents in the Senate, but he was tough himself. Nobody ever chased him off the stage.

Timothy Naftali

I thought maybe it was because he was skeptical about farm subsidies, that that would be a problem in Kansas.

Robert Dole

Yeah, I think there probably was a problem but he had kind of a personality that kind of overrode some of that stuff, you know. You can get a guy with his arm way out, like a lot of people do -- want government this, government that, government this -- but still they listened to this guy make sense, a guy named Butz makes sense. Maybe I can -- so I thought he was an asset. It's unfortunate he made that joke, but he knew -- the thing about it is that he had been a professor at Purdue. He knew this stuff. This wasn't some -- and he was a farmer, you know, he had a farm. This wasn't some academic Type who was telling some guy in overalls out in Russell, Kansas, "This was good for you." I think I took him to Kansas a couple times. He agreed to go speak to my farmers.

Timothy Naftali

Tell us about -- in early 1973 you describe people on the White House staff as gutless wonders.

Robert Dole

I did?

Timothy Naftali

Yeah.

Robert Dole

I probably meant it too. I wonder what the issue was. Was it Watergate or --

Timothy Naftali

Yes, it was Watergate.

Robert Dole

I just didn't say that. I probably -- there's probably got to be some context.

Timothy Naftali

You said they were more interested in the attack mode, didn't use the term then in those days, but than anything else.

Robert Dole

Well that's true. I mean, I've been saying it all morning, you know. Don't be defensive. Get on the offense. Get out there and knock them down and dah dah dah. So, they didn't want to do it. They wanted me to do it. That's what I'd thought the gutless wonders; get somebody to do the dirty work. You know and I'm -- I had a reputation too, and I didn't mind doing the heavy lifting but I don't think I did more than one or two or three people.

Timothy Naftali

I've seen in a couple of books this conversation described, and I don't know if it really happened. I'm enough of an historian to know that a lot of what you get in a history book isn't true. But I've heard described -- you had a conversation with President Nixon where you said to him, "Sir, you are bound to be misunderstood." And President Nixon said, "I know, I'm complicated." Do you remember talking to him about that? I know that's one conversation out of a few, but --

Robert Dole

I don't remember but, you know we could -- the thing I didn't like about Nixon visits is there was always a third person in the room taking notes. And it was Bill Timmons or somebody. I don't remember who it was. And I guess it was necessary because somebody could come in, let's say -- well say Bob Dole who's supposed to be a friend of the President but he suddenly decides this is my day to make a big headline and go out on the tarmac and say a lot of things that never happened," you know, because of course I didn't know he had the tape machine running too. But they -- I might have said that but I, you know, you've got somebody sitting there kind of taking notes on what you are saying, it kind of limits your freedom. But he was a complex man. I mean you go up there and he'd say, "Here give this to your secretary or dah dah dah." You know, some little souvenir he'd get out of the desk and -- but I never, I can't remember ever being -- wanting to say mistreated -- or ever being anything, being treated fairly by Nixon himself. Now I don't know what he may have said when I wasn't there, or what he may have told other people.

Timothy Naftali

Where were you when he resigned?

Robert Dole

I was there at the White House when he gave his speech. Yeah, I think I was in the second row.

Timothy Naftali

What do you remember of that day?

Robert Dole

Just totally somber; I mean, disbelief. I mean I think a lot of people in the audience they were all Nixonites, Cabinet officers, other people, friends. It's a hard, hard pill to swallow. He just sort of got on that chopper, and that was it. And he -- I don't think he had any sleep that night, any the night before. And there were all kind of rumors that he'd been drinking and staring at pictures and things of this kind. I mean I don't know if that's true. But he looked -- the whole family looked exhausted.

Timothy Naftali

Did you talk to him at all in that period before he resigned?

Robert Dole

No, no I wasn't on that little team that sort of served as backup, you know the people who were going to stand with him if there was impeachment in the Senate. When you get down to about half a dozen, that won't do it. Let's see, was Goldwater still on that team? Because he said some pretty harsh things about Nixon.

Timothy Naftali

In 1969 and 1970 there was no senator that said more things in favor of the administration than you, or if there was somebody else it was very close to you. Why weren't you on that -- you weren't on that team in 74. When did you leave the team?

Robert Dole

I don't know how the team ever, how they ever got together. I mean these are the old hands, you know, I was still a young buck. And these were the John Eastlands, and I think the John Stennis, and you've probably got the list of who they are. I don't think Hugh Scott was on that list, was he?

Timothy Naftali

I don't think so. I'm not sure, actually.

Robert Dole

I can't remember. I'd have to go back and look. But I think -- I think the White House knew that I was going to be supportive unless -- well until the smoking gun. Then you couldn't defend Nixon. At that point, you couldn't defend him. And then you had all these people being fired and attorney generals. What's the judge's name that --

Timothy Naftali

Bork, the attorney? The judge?

Robert Dole

Let's see the --

Timothy Naftali

Well, you mean when Archibald Cox was fired?

Robert Dole

Now what's the Texas lawyer?

Timothy Naftali

You mean after Cox was fired?

Robert Dole

Yeah, anyway, he was -- -- I mean, it happened, and I think the one positive thing is that --

Timothy Naftali

Jaworski, Leon Jaworski.

Robert Dole

That's it, Jaworski, yeah. He was out for blood, you know? No question about it. Yeah, he was a Texan. But, you know, if there's anything good come from Watergate is that, you know, we live in a democracy, we had a transition. A President resigned for the first time. We lost the election in '76 because of it. Eighty percent of the people at the time thought the pardon was a mistake. And when President Ford died 80 percent thought he did the right thing. So history judges all these things, like Nixon's trip to China. Has already judged it to be a big, big, big, big plus. But it's a stain on the party and the country, and it just all seems so silly. I mean it's ludicrous and there's no reason for it, I mean, the Plumbers and all these people our enemies list. I'm not certain anybody in this town in politics, I don't say they have an enemies list, but they've got a little thing in their head up here where they probably think of some newspapers. They don't call it an enemies list but they know who's out there to get them all the time or give them bad press, or whatever it is. But Nixon had his in writing, right?

Timothy Naftali

Well it -- the administration did.

Robert Dole

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

I think the concern was that there was an order to use the IRS against people.

Robert Dole

Yeah, that's what I mean. I mean, it was -- and Nixon had such great -- see Nixon always was -- again I'm talking to somebody who knows more about it than I do, but Nixon, I think he always felt -- he had an inferiority complex. He wasn't a Kennedy, you know, he was a very bright lawyer, but he wasn't from the east coast and didn't quite have that pizzazz and I remember when the incident happened with Mary Jo Kopechne. They were trying to stir things up in the White House to get people like me to say -- to go after Ted Kennedy. What year was that?

Timothy Naftali

Chappaquiddick?

Robert Dole

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

Wasn't that '69?

Robert Dole

I think they were looking at him as a potential opponent down the road and the best way to do it with your opponent is to destroy him early. So I -- and I don't say this has never happened before. I think you can probably look at any White House, when you put together an administration of thousands of people, most of them you don't know, there are going to be some in any administration who are going to do things they shouldn't do. I don't care how careful you are. And there are some who come, like Haldemann, Erlichman, with no knowledge of Congress, no appreciation of Congress. Sort of the imperial Presidency, the stupid uniforms they wore, the guards -- I mean things, I think of hocus pocus land and they didn't -- they were this, you know, arrogance is how they described it in those days. And again, I don't think Nixon was that way, because he served in Congress. He understood Congress. He loved the Senate. He loved being Vice President. I mean he really respected the institution. I remember when Senator Byrd, after this meeting they had with all these democrats, I joined Senator Byrd and he took Nixon in on the Senate floor and then went over to see where Nixon used to be seated and

whether his name was carved in the desk. And then they walked up to see where he used to preside as Vice President and Byrd was just having a ball. I mean he really had respect for Nixon because of his intellect. And all that just disappeared.

Timothy Naftali

Why do you think it happened?

Robert Dole

Somebody, somewhere, I don't know, thought this was really clever. "Why take a chance?" "We'll destroy this guy." You know, I don't know -- But it really set back the southern strategy, the emerging majority for a decade at least. I'm not sure it still has much of an impact on the party. Because Nixon had a lot of good ideas, you know, he was an idea guy. And as I said he had good -- I don't know about the White House staff, but the Cabinet level staff.

Timothy Naftali

Could Nixon have done something to prevent this mess?

Robert Dole

Yeah, I think he could have. I mean early on, he could have said, "This is a mistake," and dismissed whoever was responsible and let the Justice Department determine if any law was violated. I think that would have been it. I mean he could have been, if he was guiltless, you know, if he actually didn't pull the trigger or give the signal go. American people are pretty forgiving and they respect their President, you know, they may not agree with -- they respect the Presidency, put it that way. And I don't know it's -- never happened again in my lifetime, but I wish it hadn't happened when it did.

Timothy Naftali

Do you remember talking to your fellow senators about how you wished that the White House would just get --

Robert Dole

Hell, yeah. I mean, everyday, you know? Clean it out -- clean out the White House. Get rid of these guys, you know? And then what have they got? Maybe they've got something on Nixon? Maybe he can't do it, you know? Maybe there's some complicity. Oh, you know, you go to our policy luncheons on Tuesdays, I mean, we were suffering as a party because of what happened in the White House. So there weren't many kind remarks made about anybody, including the President, so -- because we thought we were kind of on a roll between all of this, we're going to be around awhile, and so it's surprising that Ford came as close as he did in '76. I used to see these signs in the audience, and I [unintelligible] "Senator Dole, pardon me." You know, these little signs that pop everywhere.

Timothy Naftali

When did you -- did you visit Richard Nixon after he left Washington?

Robert Dole

Yeah, I went to New Jersey to visit with him. At least once, and I think twice. I think I went once alone, maybe it was Tom Korologos, I'm not certain. I asked him if I could bring up some senators just to visit with him, people like Senator Bennett. He served -- Nixon had served with his father. I can't remember all the others but knowing Nixon, he did his homework. He studied about who they were, what committees they were on, what -- you know, phenomenal. He was always prepared. I don't think Nixon -- I think he could do off the cuff stuff but he liked -- he wanted to be prepared.

Timothy Naftali

What role did he play at all in your preparation for the 1988 campaign?

Robert Dole

Well, I remember he sent me a seven-page letter in the '96 campaign, saying, "Don't worry about your age, your voice is strong -- "

Timothy Naftali

Not in the '96 campaign. Which campaign? When did he send you a seven page --

Robert Dole

That's the '96. '88 he kind of stayed out of it.

Timothy Naftali

In '96 he was gone, though.

Robert Dole

Oh, wait a minute, I mean, was it -- no it wouldn't have been '88.

Timothy Naftali

'88 he was alive, but '88 he met with you.

Robert Dole

When did he pass?

Timothy Naftali

'94.

Robert Dole

Well it was '94, but it was about '96, excuse me, yeah. And it was five or seven pages, and the last paragraph is, "If the economy is good, you can't beat Clinton." But he talked about maybe Pete Wilson getting in, and if I had a strong voice, not to worry about it. And he thought that I'd do a good job, and he liked to give opinions, you know. He liked to call Coach Allen, Redskins, and say, "You ought to call this play," or whatever, you know. But he knew his politics, and I remember going to New Jersey, and in fact, I met with more than once or twice, must have been three or four times. But I'd fly up there and go meet him, and I remember him taking me to the airport the day he gave up Secret Service. He said, "This is my last ride." And I think he still had his own guy but as far as Federal, how he used to fly down on the shuttle, without any bodyguards, if there's one guy he paid himself.

Timothy Naftali

So in '88 he wasn't helpful, because I've seen -- he had this notepad, you know, his yellow notepad where he put your strengths --

Robert Dole

Oh, really?

Timothy Naftali

-- and Bush's strengths. And he noted the fact that you had a hard -- you had come up the hard way and Bush had not. But he didn't talk to you about this before the '88?

Robert Dole

I think he kind of hid out in '88. And he had some Bush ties too, you know. He kind of helped Bush up the ladder there, the chairmanship and then whatever else followed.

Timothy Naftali

But you had some Nixon people on here. I saw a list of your foreign policy advisors, one of them was Dmitri Simes, who was pretty close to Nixon.

Robert Dole

Oh yeah -- we had a lot of, I don't remember all of them, we had a lot of -- I think the thing that killed me in '88 was the snowstorm on Sunday before. Because I -- they showed the evening news, here was George Bush driving these big machines, shoveling snow, and here's Bob Dole walking around the grocery store. Because I couldn't do any of those things. And I thought it was just sort of the contrast there. And plus some pretty nasty ads. But anyway, Bush and I became good friends.

Timothy Naftali

Since I had --

Robert Dole

Have you talked to him about Nixon yet?

Timothy Naftali

Well I've tried to arrange an interview. I haven't been able to.

Robert Dole

Because they would have -- they had a good relationship for quite awhile in the '60s and -- but Bush was headed for the White House too, of course. You know, the old joke is you go in the cloakroom, and you yell, "Mr. President!" Everybody turns around, you know. "Yeah, here I am, here."

Timothy Naftali

I have to say -- from '87, I have to say having read about this that your effort to deal with deficit reduction was really admirable. Because you knew that you'd have to deal with deficit reduction and you'd wanted to set up that national commission with, I think, with Alan Greenspan.

Robert Dole

Yeah, we did that on Social Security in 1983. But -- and we did pass in the senate by one vote a deficit reduction package and it was killed by Jack Kemp and Trent Lott and Newt Gingrich and the House and Don Regan. So, so much for Republican -- you know, we dealt with Social Security. We didn't cut, we just froze benefits for six months or a year, but we lost a couple of senate seats that year. But that's what we thought was conservatism. You try to control spending as well as cut taxes.

Timothy Naftali

Well, I think that George Bush's "read my lips" -- the first time he did that was in New Hampshire to get the nomination in '88.

Robert Dole

He did at the convention too. He really did it. Yeah, he really got the attention. And the poor guy couldn't help himself because the Democrats -- and I was finance committee chairman -- the Democrats controlled the House and Rostenkowski wasn't going to let him do it. So he gets nothing or he gets a tax increase. So the moral of the story is don't say those things. Now they get to sign a tax pledge, "I won't raise taxes," which I refused to sign. In '88, because you couldn't even close loopholes. Everybody's got their own little business in politics.

Timothy Naftali

Tell us please how you came to be asked to do the eulogy for Pat Nixon, and of course the eulogy for President Nixon.

Robert Dole

I don't know who made the call but it might have been Richard Norton Smith. See, when was he at Nixon Library?

Timothy Naftali

He wasn't the – he was at many libraries.

Robert Dole

Yeah, I know, but didn't he make a stop there? Never, never at the Nixon?

Timothy Naftali

No.

Robert Dole

Somebody, I don't know who it was, if it was John Taylor or somebody, I don't think it was Nixon himself. And I never got to know Pat Nixon all that well. I remember one thing at the convention. Some lady had knitted this wonderful sweater with an elephant on it. So we went and had a little presentation and Mrs. Nixon was very nice, but she said, "You know, we've got to get Democrats too." That was the end of the story. And I don't remember when President Nixon died. I remember I took -- asked Senator McGovern to go along on that trip. And that's when he made what I thought was the statement, "You can't campaign forever." You know, why are you here? This guy called you this or this or this, so...

Timothy Naftali

You did play a role in President Nixon's rehabilitation of sorts after what happened. Why did you feel it important to do so?

Robert Dole

Well I still had that, you know, I kept trying to excuse him on everything and even though I knew he had flaws and I knew things disappointed me, you know, he's a human being, and I thought he paid a pretty high price, you know. Some people wanted him in jail, but he was pretty much in jail. He was ostracized and isolated, and so after I think his first public outing was a "Newsweek" conference, right?

Timothy Naftali

Mm-hmm.

Robert Dole

Where he got rave reviews, rave reviews. And I think it was after that some time or other that I

thought about asking him to come to visit the Senate. You know, just come down and visit and get some senators together. And I remember getting a group together, Republicans, and we sat around and talked about foreign policy. The next thing I knew people were lining up in the hallway when they heard he was there, "Can we get a picture? Can we get a picture?" And Korologos was, you know Tom, he would always sort of make the arrangements for Nixon to come and all that stuff. Yeah we had, let's see, at least five meetings in the Capitol.

Timothy Naftali

Did you feel some empathy for him because --

Robert Dole

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

-- you had both come up the hard way? I mean he --

Robert Dole

I don't know if it was that, I just felt, you know, this business we're in is rough and tough and some people like to see other people get hurt, you know, if he's a Democrat, "Who cares?" Or a Republican, "Who cares? Let him have it." And you kind of go through that period and then you kind of grow up and I always thought the guy that got the rawest deal in town was Jimmy Carter's chief of staff in the White House on drugs -- he's from Georgia.

Timothy Naftali

Hamilton Jordan, no?

Robert Dole

Yeah, Ham Jordan.

Timothy Naftali

Ham Jordan.

Robert Dole

He got a raw deal in the press and had to live with that. So you kind of get, you know, you're in the same business, and it's easy to throw out some charge in this town and as Ray Donovan said, "Where do I go to get my reputation back?" after he was found not guilty -- secretary of --

Timothy Naftali

Labor.

Robert Dole

-- Labor. So, but Nixon had, you know, he was a resigned President. I mean I think he, as he said in one those stories, "You can call me anything" or whatever, remember when his granddaughter asked him, "What shall I call you?" He said, "I've been called everything." So --

Timothy Naftali

I'll show you the -- are you ready? You were saying? Senator Dole, you were talking about history. We were talking about Nixon, and you were saying that history is judgment.

Robert Dole

Yeah, well, I think that's even though it's been quite a while since he left -- resigned from office, another 10, 15 years people take a look. I think he's going to have it very favorable, except for that footnote. It'll be like when they write the history about Bill Clinton. The first thing you read in the footnote is Monica Lewinsky, but that doesn't wipe out his whole Presidency. And Watergate may be more severe, but I think it's too bad it happened. A lot of things were done after Watergate, reform this, reform that, contributions. Look what shape we're in now with contributions, worse than ever. And we were going to change all that stuff so there wouldn't be too much money in campaigns. [Chuckles] So he had -- never anything bad about the Nixon family, nor about the President running around with anybody. There wasn't any of that kind of stuff. He had two nice daughters and a great wife and --

Timothy Naftali

From a congressional standpoint, did we learn anything about the imperial Presidency from this experience?

Robert Dole

Yeah, I've always thought the people that come in, of course the Nixon's case, again, I didn't think it applied. I thought it -- because that's why I blamed his staff. And maybe Nixon should have told them, "Before you start rummaging around this place, I want you to sit down with the leadership in both parties, not for a photo op but for a frank discussion of where we can reach some agreements." And they wouldn't sit down with the members; they'd sit down with their key staff and then he would bring in the members. But see I don't know whether -- again I don't want to blame anybody, Haldeman or anybody. But I'm not sure they understood that. They didn't know anything about congress. And then I look at Clinton, and I think the same thing happened. He'd been governor, but that's different. I look at George Bush, 43. We better bring people together. Well, that's what Clinton said, and it never happened, and it never happened, so...

Timothy Naftali

Is there more partisanship now than when you --

Robert Dole

I think so.

Timothy Naftali

What happened? Was it Watergate that did this? What did this?

Robert Dole

Well, we kind of got, you know, we sort of went through it after Watergate. We kind of cleansed ourselves. Say, well the system has been cleansed, and we're back on track. And there are a lot of good things that happened, don't misunderstand, bipartisan things happened. I know some people think bipartisanship's a bad word. To the real conservatives that's party building. That means you're letting liberals in and on the left is something else sinister, but I've always believed that neither party had all the good ideas and maybe work out a deal with somebody on the other side. So I think it's gotten more personal, you know. It's kind of in your face. It's always been rough and tumble but I think it's -- but somebody -- it will change. The American people will -- not sure the answer's out there with Obama who just sort of waves a wand and says, "Everything's going to be okay." The new pied piper of politics.

Timothy Naftali

Well, with McCain as the presumptive nominee for the Republican Party, I think he is maybe -- he's older than you were when you ran in '96.

Robert Dole

Yeah, if it's Obama it's going to be a problem with 25 years. If it's Hilary it's only 10 years, 10 or 11. But I guess tomorrow afternoon at this time, if we do this tomorrow, we'd be -- might know what the future holds.

Timothy Naftali

It's Tuesday tomorrow.

Robert Dole

I really think '88 was the year I should have been elected. I have often thought maybe '96 I shouldn't have been there. We sort of have this primogeniture rule in the Republican Party, you're getting in line and Romney's already getting in line for the next. And if you'd live long enough you might make it, you know? And if you die suddenly, well too bad, somebody will take your place. But '88 was the year I should have -- I thought that's when Nixon should have pushed me a little.

Timothy Naftali

Did he consult with you on foreign policy issues in those last few years before he died? Because he became very interested in Russian policy. Did you talk to him about those issues?

Robert Dole

No, we used to meet with Henry -- you know, he'd meet not just me, but a group of -- we had lots of briefings, but, okay.

Timothy Naftali

Thank you very much, Senator Dole.

Robert Dole

Thanks, fellows.

Timothy Naftali

Thank you very much.