
The following is a transcript of an oral history interview conducted by Timothy Naftali with Lamar Alexander on June 27, 2007.

Naftali: I'm Tim Naftali, Director Designate of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. I'm very fortunate to be here today with Lamar Alexander, Senator from Tennessee. It's June 27, 2007. Thank you very much for meeting with us today.

Alexander: Thank you for coming.

Naftali: Well, let's just start. How is it that you ended up working for Bryce Harlow in the Richard Nixon White House?

Alexander: In the 1968 Nixon campaign, I worked in the Willard Hotel for United Citizens for Nixon- Agnew, which was a big collection of people that John Mitchell really didn't want in the campaign. So he put us all over there. It was reminiscent of the Eisenhower campaign, which had a big citizens' organization. And Charlie Ryan chaired it. John Warner, my colleague now in the Senate, was the number two person, eventually the number one. And I met -- and among the people there was Bud Wilkinson. He had gotten involved working with celebrities for Nixon. And his son, Jay, who was an all-American punter at Duke University, was there, and we got to be friends. Bud Wilkinson was an extraordinary guy. I didn't know him very well. He owed me nothing. You know, I was from Tennessee; he was from Oklahoma. And after the election, I didn't have a job, and I was getting married. And so, I said to Bud Wilkinson that I'd like to work in the Nixon administration. He said, "Well, let me call Bryce." And, of course, Bryce Harlow was also from Oklahoma. So he called Bryce, and I interviewed with Mr. Harlow. And he hired me to be his -- "executive assistant" would be the high-sounding title, but I was just his aide. And so when Mr. Harlow became the first appointee of the Nixon administration, or the first announced appointee, he was working in the Pierre Hotel.

But when he came back and took his office in the West Wing of the White House, which is now where the Vice President's office is, I went to work there in January of 1969. And for the first several months, he had nowhere to put me. Sally Studebaker, his longtime secretary, later his wife, sat outside to be his secretary or assistant. So he put me in the big office with him. He just put a big desk in there not far from his desk. And I would answer his phone and help him return his calls and do whatever he wanted to do. And he was smoking dual filtered Terratins, or some awful sort of cigarette, and I was smoking Lucky Strikes. And I got a Ph.D. in politics and government from sitting there for four, or five, or six months,

listening to all the conversations that Bryce Harlow had with the whole world, and learning from him as he helped President Nixon.

Naftali: Please describe Bryce Harlow because you're talking to people who -- unfortunately, we can't interview him -- who don't know him. But he's important to this administration. Please describe him.

Alexander: Oh, he's tremendously important to the administration. The first two things I think about him are his physical stature, which was very small. I mean, my wife is 5'1", and he's her size. He was little, maybe five feet tall. And the second is how he engaged you if you met him. I mean, he had more calls coming in than anybody else in the Nixon White House, except the President. Everybody in town knew and loved Bryce Harlow. And the reason they knew and loved him was because if you got his attention, you had his complete attention. The only modern person I know who does that quite that way is Bill Clinton. But Bryce could have 50 slips of return calls on his desk, calls he hadn't returned, and if he took a telephone call, though, it would be as if he had all the time in the world, and you were the only person in the world. And it was for that reason, his relationships with people, I think that was what was most special about him. In addition to that, he was very bright, very clever, good with words. He was President Eisenhower's favorite speechwriter when he was in the Eisenhower administration, very respectful of the military because of his background, I believe it was with General Marshall and the House Armed Services Committee. He had relationships all over town with Democrats, as well as Republicans. And I can tell you many stories about that. And he was wise. And because he had all that experience, people who were less experienced would come to him, just a steady stream of people, and, "Bryce, I'm about to do this. What do you think about that?" For example, Peter Flanigan was a Dillon Read executive from New York, who was a Nixon advance man in '60. And so he was appointed to the White House staff as assistant to the President in 1969. And he was in charge of independent regulatory agencies. And I remember once he came in to see Bryce, and he said, "Bryce, I'm about to make a telephone call to the Federal Communications Commission, and I just wanted to check with you first." And Bryce said, "Sit down, Peter." And so, Peter sat down. And he said, "Tell me more about it." He said, "Well, we're a pro- business administration, and they've delayed making a decision on this license matter for," I think it was in Miami, "for more than a year-and-a-half. That's outrageous; we were elected to put a stop to that."

And he said, "I'm going to call them over there at the FCC, and I'm going to, of course, I'm going to say that, 'I don't want to interfere with how you make the decision. We just want a speedy decision,' and I'll just ask about the status of the case." And it may have been at that point that Bryce said,

"Peter, have a seat." And he said, "Do you remember Sherman Adams?" And Peter said, "Of course." He said, "He was the governor of New Hampshire who was Eisenhower's chief of staff and had to resign in disgrace." And Bryce said, "Do you remember why he had to resign?" And Peter said, "It was a scandal." And he said, "Do you know what he did?" He said, "I'm not sure I remember." He said, "He made a telephone call to an independent regulatory agency to inquire about the status of a case on behalf of a friend of the President's who had given him a Christmas present." And Peter said, "Thank you, Bryce," and he didn't make the call. So there were countless -- another example would be the entire super-efficient Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Nixon White House was always getting in trouble for being efficient. Bryce wasn't "efficient." He was having these kinds of conversations with people. And as a result of all the efficiency, the relations very quickly with the United States Senate went straight down the tube at some point in 1969. And so, finally, they came to Bryce, who was in charge of congressional relations, and said, "Bryce, they won't even return our calls." And so, "The only person they'll talk with is you." And so Mr. Harlow went up to the Senate; I wasn't with him. But, apparently, he found Jim Eastland, and John Stennis, and Allen Ellender, and Russell Long, and four or five of the old southern Democrats who had been there a long, long time, in the backroom having a bourbon and smoking a cigar, in a very bad mood toward the President. And Bryce went in, so the story goes, little diminutive person went into their chamber, went down on one knee in a bow, and said, "I'm in the presence of 175 years of accumulated wisdom and experience." And the whole room burst into laughter. And the ice was broken, and he was able to do whatever President Nixon had sent him to get done. So he was that kind of person.

Naftali: I'm going to ask you about a few legislative challenges in that early period, see if that [unintelligible] --

Alexander: There's one other thing I should say because I don't want to forget it. He was such a wonderful writer and good storyteller. And he had been so involved in our government from the late '30s, on. I once asked him why he got along so well with the generals during World War II. And he said, "Well, if you're the only stenographer in a room full of generals, you become indispensable pretty quickly." He actually took shorthand. And so, he had all these experiences on both sides of the aisle: Eisenhower, Nixon, later Ford. He had seen so much. And I asked him, I said, "Mr. Harlow, are you ever going to write a book? You should: you've seen so much; you write so well. You tell so many good stories. It'd be important for the country." So he said, "No, I never would; that would be unethical." So he felt that for him to have written what he saw would be a breach of the confidence that his superiors, the generals, the presidents, the others

placed in him. And he wouldn't do it, compared today to members of White House staff start taking notes the day they arrive for the book they're going to write.

Naftali: You were working for him in the last two months of General Eisenhower's life.

Alexander: Yes.

Naftali: Did he talk to you about the general?

Alexander: Not very much. He told me some stories about him. He told me the story of the Cabinet meeting, and I've repeated this to young people very often, where everyone was in disarray about a decision. And the secretary of state said, "Well from a foreign policy point of view, we should do this." And the secretary of defense said, "Well, we can't do that because from a national security point of view, it would have this implication." And the secretary of treasury said, "Oh, we'll have to do something else because of this implication." And the secretary of commerce said that it would affect business in this way. And the political advisor said it would have these political impacts. And it went all around the Cabinet room, and Eisenhower listened. And he finally asked the question, "Well, what would be the right thing to do?" And the secretary of state, according to Bryce, said, "Oh, well the right thing to do would be X." And the secretary of defense said, "That would be right." And they went all around the room, and they all agreed. And he said, "Then that's what we'll do." And he told Jim Haggerty to go out and tell the press that that's what they would do. Bryce said that was a true story. And I've told it to young people many times because here you have this sophisticated general who commanded the whole World War II enterprise, who had been president of the university and now President of the United States, in an almost textbook sort of lesson about how to make a decision in public life, and what to do when presented with a tough problem, just try your best to understand what the right thing to do is. And sometimes that's the clearest course of action. What I especially remember is when Eisenhower was about to die, and I was young, and I didn't think about death much, and I was 29 years old, but I could tell that was weighing heavily on -- maybe I was 30 -- weighing heavily on Bryce. And I remember when he went out to see him for his last visit, and then he came back, and he was very sad, he was very sad that day, he said something like, "I may never see the general again."

Naftali: In those months, did he serve somewhat as a link between the general and President Nixon?

Alexander: Oh, I believe he did, I believe he did. I know of one story. In the Pierre Hotel in between Mr. Nixon's election and his inauguration in January of 1969, Bryce was up there. And you can just imagine, he was sitting at a desk, Sally Studebaker over here, stack of unreturned phone calls. He was the first appointee. And so, he was there fielding all these phone calls. And Bob Haldeman was already there as sort of the administrative assistant. And Larry Higby was there working for Bob Haldeman. And Mr. Nixon had said something about foreign policy, producing an eruption from President Johnson, who knew Bryce and trusted him very well. And so, he, Johnson, called Bryce in the Pierre Hotel, and in language that I'm not -- I don't know exactly what he said, but in purple language said, "Doesn't Nixon know that there's only one President at a time, and I'm still the President?" So this was going on, Mr. Harlow talking to President Johnson, and Sally Studebaker came in and said, "Mr. Harlow, President Eisenhower is calling for you." And so, Bryce said, "Sally, well, please put President Eisenhower on hold for a moment. Tell him I'm talking to President Johnson. And as soon as he's off, I'll be right on," whereupon within about two minutes later, Larry Higby runs in and says, "Mr. Harlow, Mr. Harlow, President-Elect Nixon wants to see you immediately." So there he had the current President of the United States hollering at him on the phone, the former President on hold, and the new President demanding to see him instantly.

Naftali: Not many people who find themselves in the middle of three Presidents.

Alexander: No, but the details of his liaison between Eisenhower and Nixon, I don't know anything about. But I can't imagine that he wasn't called on for that. He was called on for difficult and important missions such as he had to go over to the Republican National Committee and tell Ray Bliss he was fired, which he hated to do because he'd known him for a long time. But the White House had decided they wanted a different chairman. On the other hand, he went over to the Congress in 1969 and persuaded a very attractive young congressman from Illinois named Don Rumsfeld to resign his seat and come run the Office of Economic Opportunity. And Rumsfeld, of course, brought with him his administrative assistant, Dick Cheney.

Naftali: Let's talk a little bit about Mr. Harlow's strategy in Congress. First of all, it seems that he wanted to reduce the size of the congressional liaison operation from the size it had been in the LBJ and JFK periods.

Alexander: Mm-hmm.

Naftali: Apparently, one member of his staff said, "We want to wean Congress off the teat of the White House." But the White House wasn't sure it wanted to

reduce the size of the Congressional Liaison Office. Did you find a tension between the way the White House wanted to run congressional affairs and the way that Mr. Harlow felt it should be run?

Alexander:

Well, yes, but there's always that. And he had a very aggressive congressional liaison operation, much more so than today. Larry O'Brien had run the Johnson and Kennedy operations, but Bryce had run the Eisenhower operation. And the Nixon operation was a lot like the Eisenhower operation. So I wasn't really aware that there was this argument about the size of the staff because it was aggressive. Ted Stevens, now Senator, was on the Eisenhower's congressional relations operation in the Department of Interior. And Bob Bennett, now Senator, was doing that job in the Transportation Department during Nixon. And we all remember Bryce's Saturday meetings. We would start on Thursdays to prepare for a Tuesday congressional leadership meeting between the Republicans of the Senate and the House, the leadership, and the President, that I believe every week, at least every other week. It was regular as clockwork, occasionally bipartisan meetings, but always Republican meetings for about an hour, like 8:00 to 9:00, or 7:00, 7:30 to 8:30. And it was the process that mattered so much because we would come up to the hill, under Ken Belieu who had the Senate, and Bill Timmons had the House, run the traps [phonetic sp], as Bryce used to say, with the Republican leadership and the Democratic leadership, about what was coming up. And our job was, we're saying, we're preparing the agenda for Tuesday morning's Republican leadership meeting. That we'd do on Thursday and Friday. Then on Saturday, Bryce would have a meeting of all the departmental liaisons, like Bob Bennett was in the Department of Transportation. And they would feed in what they had heard from the Congress. And so, by Monday, Bryce would have prepared a little memorandum for the President, of two or three pages, about what the Tuesday morning Republican leadership meeting would be like. And the President used that.

He sometime extemporized. I can remember one time he got off on the environment in 1970, at a time when most of the Republican leaders were, you know, "What's he talking about?" You know, but this was the time of Earth Day, and President Nixon was tuned in to that. But whether the President followed the agenda or not, it set the agenda. And by bringing the Republican leaders together, they could then go out of the White House and say, "Well, the Republican position is thus and so, and the President's position is thus and so." So it may have been a smaller staff than Nixon and Kennedy. I didn't realize that. But it was a more aggressive staff with the Congress than I think I see today from President Bush's operation.

Naftali: Let's talk about an aggressive lobbying effort, the ABM Treaty, do you -- the [unintelligible] --

Alexander: Well, for example, apparently, President Bush just nominated former Congressman Nussle to be the head of the Office of Management and Budget without any prior discussion with the chairman of the Budget Committee, who happens to be a Democrat. If I'd done that once in a Bryce Harlow operation, I would learn never to do it twice because that would never have happened. We would always have known before we sent up a major appointee what the President could expect in terms of a reaction to a nomination.

Naftali: What happened in 30 years?

Alexander: In 30 years?

Naftali: Yeah, how --

Alexander: I don't know.

Naftali: -- wasn't this lesson learned by now?

Alexander: Well, I mean, and, course, I guess, Nixon didn't always do it perfectly either because Haynesworth and Carswell were nominated to the Supreme Court, and that didn't work. But our mode of operation was to run the traps as best we could, and consult, and find out what the lay of the land is before the President goes forward with a major nomination. And we tried to do that.

Naftali: Let's talk about the Haynesworth nomination, what you recall of that, Clement Haynesworth, it's October 1969. Your shop had a tough time.

Alexander: Yeah, and, you know, my details of that won't be as good as Ken BeLieu's or Bill Timmons' would be because I was in the office more of an administrative assistant. And I didn't know as much about -- I was listening, and I was participating, but I wasn't up on the Hill much of the time, talking to people. I was meeting people in the White House and trying to make the trains run on time. My sense is, and I could be wrong about this, is that in those cases, the President may not have followed his own congressional consulting procedure. And it may be that perhaps John Mitchell or others decided that he needed strict constructionist judges, and here were a couple of them that sounded good, and that's who we're going to nominate, and that the Congressional Relations Team didn't have much of a chance to check it out. Haynesworth was considered to be a superior jurist, a well-respected person. He just ran into philosophical problems.

Carswell was not up to the task, as it turned out, in terms of being the caliber of a Justice Roberts or a Justice Alito, and that made it difficult for him.

Naftali: Well, there is evidence that Mr. Harlow recommended to the White House that they pull the Haynesworth nomination, and the White House did not follow [unintelligible]

Alexander: Yeah, that may be; I don't remember.

Naftali: Do you remember the lobbying over the ABM?

Alexander: I remember that we did that, but I don't remember the details of it.

Naftali: Tell us a little bit about Ken BeLieu, because he was the point person on ABM.

Alexander: Well, Ken was selected because of his strong relationship with the senior Democrats who ran the Senate. And they really ran it then. I mean, Richard Russell, Jim Eastland, John Stennis, Allen Ellender, these were chairmen of all the major committees. They'd been there a long time. They had a strong, pro-defense background. And Ken BeLieu was a wounded veteran with a bad leg, as a result of that: well-respected, good friend of theirs. And he was selected because of his relationship with those Senators.

Naftali: Let's talk a little --

Alexander: He was a grownup.

Naftali: He was a grownup.

Alexander: He was mature and respected. And he wasn't some, you know, campaign worker, a 30-year-old kid running up and trying to tell a 75-year-old chairman of the Appropriations Committee, who'd been in the Senate for six terms, what to do.

Naftali: In November of '69, Mr. Harlow's job changes a little bit. He is no longer responsible for the day-to-day congressional liaison operation. Bill Timmons takes over that, also, I think, from Tennessee.

Alexander: Yep.

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- Naftali: [Unintelligible]. And is it at this time that Mr. Harlow starts to travel with Vice President Agnew?
- Alexander: I think that was later. My sense is that he was put on the Agnew campaign plane in 1970 in June or July to keep him under control. Bill Safire was writing the speeches. Like, I remember Agnew went to Memphis to campaign against Albert Gore, Sr. And he had a great phrase there where he called Gore "the Southern regional chairman of the Eastern liberal establishment." And that was a Bill Safire line. So Bryce was good with the reporters. And he understood politics, unlike most of the others in the White House. I mean, you had a combination of -- I mean, Haldeman had been an ad man. Ehrlichman was a bond lawyer. A lot of us were young. We were efficient. But Harlow was broad-gauged. And so, when they needed real- world big issues dealt with, he got in the way because of his lack of efficiency. But he was desperately needed when they had a big problem. So that's what he did for Agnew. And I remember Agnew's chief of staff, C.D. Ward, would often come to see Bryce to get advice about the Vice President's role in action. So that would have been going on the first six months of 1970.
- Naftali: Did you ever sense -- I know you were a young aide, but in the Haldeman diaries, as '69 becomes '70, Bryce Harlow feels that he's not being listened to by the White House.
- Alexander: Yes, I certainly had that feeling. And I felt he was gradually getting squeezed out. I mean, what happened? I mean, the President started out with these extraordinary individuals who -- you know, experienced and broad-gauged, I mean, Arthur Burns, Pat Moynihan, Henry Kissinger, Bryce Harlow. I mean, rarely has a President brought in such a broad-gauged group of people. But, gradually, over time, Haldeman was in charge of all of the flow of paper, and Ehrlichman was in charge of the policy on the domestic side. Now, Kissinger was shrewd enough to stay in charge of everything that had to do with foreign affairs, but that was it. And so, Bryce was beginning to get squeezed out. And he encouraged me to go back to Tennessee by about the middle of 1970. One reason he said he did it was because he told me the story of how he came here from Oklahoma intending to go back, and never went home. And he was sort of wistful in thinking about that. He came and worked with General Marshall, and then with the House, and then with the President. And so, you could see why he never went home. And he, basically, said to me, "If you're ever going to go back home, you need to do it now." But the other thing, especially, looking back, that I realize is that he probably thought it was good for me to get out of there because I don't think he liked what he saw coming. And his antennae were too sensitive to know that for a young person who might have a career in politics, that being in the Nixon White
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House after 1970 might not be the best thing to do. And I think he may have been looking after me a little bit, and saying, "Go on home, not just because it's home, but because you've had a wonderful experience here, but I don't really like the way things are moving, and maybe you should go on" -- [in audio]

Naftali: Okay.

Alexander: -- that he wouldn't have to stay there too long. You know, Rumsfeld was at NATO when Watergate went on. So he was out of the line of fire, so to speak.

Naftali: He had a very good, very sensitive antennae, too.

Alexander: Yeah.

Naftali: I don't know if you'll remember this, I mean, it's --

Alexander: I want to give you my theory about what happened at Watergate.

Naftali: Okay, go ahead.

Alexander: I mean, it builds on what I said a little earlier, just in my year and a half of watching, I mean, I saw these two groups of people in the Nixon White House. You had this broad-gauged group, wise people, wise in the sense that Bryce -- let me go back to this point. You asked me about a smaller congressional relations staff. Bryce was always telling us that only -- everything that comes to the White House is important, almost everything, but only a handful of things are truly Presidential. And our job is to push the merely important out of the White House, so that the President can devote his time to the truly Presidential. So that may have been part of his thinking. But you had these two movements going on. You had Arthur Burns, Pat Moynihan, Bryce Harlow, Henry Kissinger. I mean, these were big, broad-gauged, widely experienced people. They knew the world. They knew life. I mean, Kissinger had landed at Normandy. Bryce had grown up in Oklahoma. Burns knew the world of finance. Moynihan, you know, Catholic kid from New York, writing about Democratic politics and on the Harvard faculty -- I mean, this is a Republican President bringing these kinds of people into the White House, and then Haldeman, the ad man, Ehrlichman, the bond lawyer, and a lot of us young guys, all of whom were smart. But the truth is, we didn't know much. So I think what happened in the White House over the first couple of years was, the efficient people, who were smart but didn't know much, took control. And the wise and worldly people, who knew a lot, including to take time with people and may not have been the most efficient, were pushed to the side.

And I think that's how Mr. Nixon got into trouble because he didn't have around him, when big decisions were being made, the Bryce Harlows, and the Moynihans, and the Arthur Burns of the world. He did have Kissinger. But he had Ehrlichman, and Haldeman, and a bunch of young people who didn't know better.

They didn't -- it's the same; it's that little story about Peter Flanigan before he makes a call to the Federal Communications Commission. Now, 99 of 100 Americans would make that call because they wouldn't think about the fact that merely calling from the White House to an independent regulatory agency to say, "We'd like to bring a termination to a case," without saying, "we want you to do it one way or the other," that sounds innocent enough, but in Washington, you know, that's a criminal matter if you do that. And you can get fired for that. So I think what happened was the efficient, the Haldeman, Ehrlichman crowd pushed Harlow and his type more, and more, and more out of the flow of things in the White House. Bryce became counselor, which meant detached from the operational part of congressional relations, and I think, increasingly, remote from other day-to-day decisions, and sent on special missions, and brought in when his advice was needed. And I think that's why -- I sensed that, and that's why I think that he encouraged me to go home. But I don't think Haldeman and Ehrlichman were evil men. I think they were narrow-gauged men who didn't know better. And they never should've been in those kinds of positions in the White House.

Naftali: Did Mr. --

Alexander: Presidents need broad-gauged, experienced men and women around them who know the world and know what they're seeing because they're not, in Mr. Harlow's words, "dealing with what's merely important," they're dealing with issues that are truly Presidential. And the more history they know, the more of the world they know, I mean, it helps if they've made a living, landed at Normandy, seen the world, lived a while. Those are the kinds of men and women a President needs around him. And the President gradually had those men and women squeezed out of his regular contact.

Naftali: Mr. Senator, you've seen a number of Presidential administrations. Was this a problem, again, any other time?

Alexander: Well, it gets to be a problem. One other thing that -- and I'll answer that, but let me -- another tactic that Harlow had was he had a view that -- and this would -- I mean, a rookie in Washington would never think of this as very important -- he said he thought all assistant secretaries should be rotated among the departments every two years, so they don't get captured by their constituencies. So the assistant secretary of commerce should

become the assistant secretary of the treasury. And the assistant secretary of treasury, go over here. That way the appointees would be responsive to the President instead of being captured, and in Thomas Jefferson's words, instead of going native to the constituencies that they then work in. Yeah sure, other administrations have the same problem. President Carter had a very talented but inexperienced staff to begin with, but he ended his term by bringing in some of the most experienced people in Washington. President Reagan avoided the problem, for the most part, by bringing in people like Jim Baker, highly talented, who knew their way around Washington. And then when he got in trouble in 1987 with Iran-contra, he brought in Howard Baker -- who, like Bryce Harlow, isn't the most efficient person in the world, but who has lived a long time, seen a lot, has relationships all over town, wide respect, and helped Reagan end his Presidency with flying colors. Instead of the Howard Bakers or the Jim Bakers of the world in charge of Nixon, you had Haldeman and Ehrlichman as he went down.

Naftali: Let me ask you about a few other issues. School desegregation: do you remember, did you work on this? There was the Stennis Amendment, which tried to expand the purview of government intervention into the North so that Northern schools where there was some segregation would also be desegregated if they were to receive Federal funds, as well as Southern schools.

Alexander: I should remember more about that, but I really don't.

Naftali: The extension --

Alexander: I remember the Philadelphia Plan that George Shultz worked on, which was --

Naftali: Please tell us.

Alexander: -- which was, Mr. Nixon was committed to civil rights early on. He had been in the Eisenhower days. And he came in with that predisposition. And so when George Shultz, Secretary of Labor, came up with the idea of the Philadelphia Plan, that was a shocker, really, to the labor unions and to many other people. And it was, basically, affirmative action for the labor unions in the big cities, is what it was. And Mr. Nixon pushed it seriously. And Bryce worked on that with him. I do remember that.

Naftali: You brought up -- a lot of moderate Republicans voted for the plan in the House, and I think one of them was George Bush.

Alexander: Is that right?

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- Naftali: Yeah.
- Alexander: You had, sort of, two views running through the administration. You had Mr. Nixon's traditional support for civil rights, which was pronounced during the Eisenhower administration when he and Bill Rogers and others were for that. I was a law clerk to Judge John Minor Wisdom of New Orleans --
- Naftali: Oh.
- Alexander: -- in 1965 and '6. And, which is the first time I met Mr. Nixon because he came by there with Charlie McWhorter, I think, to just pay a visit on Judge Wisdom. At the time, Mr. Nixon was rehabilitating himself in the 1966 campaign, and they spent about 30 minutes in the back parlor with Judge Wisdom. And I've always thought that in that meeting they talked about the possibility of Judge Wisdom being a member of the Supreme Court if Nixon became President. But what happened later is, once Nixon became President, that the Southern strategy of John Mitchell and Kevin Phillips was so important in the '68 campaign that instead of the John Wisdoms, I think, John Mitchell served up the Haynesworth and the Carswells. And so you had, on the one hand, the President, Nixon, working on the Philadelphia Plan, which was really way out front on civil rights, but, on the other hand, you had judges like John Wisdom who, along with Judge Tuttle and Judge John Brown of Texas, were three Eisenhower Republican judges who'd presided over the desegregation of the South and ordered James Meredith, for example, to be admitted to Ole Miss. They wouldn't be considered for the Nixon Supreme Court because they were too liberal on civil rights.
- Naftali: Let me ask you about the extension of voting to 18-year-olds. Do you remember Bryce Harlow's -- that happens in 1970. Tell me about Bryce Harlow's relationship with Senator Thurman.
- Alexander: I don't know much about that.
- Naftali: In 1970 --
- Alexander: He had a good one with Mel Laird, and you've already talked to Mel.
- Naftali: Well, that's really important. And I'll ask you as we wind down, 1973, you're gone, you've gone back --
- Alexander: Yeah, I left in July of '70.
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Naftali: Did you stay in touch with Mr. Harlow?

Alexander: Yes, I tried to talk with him every year or so, but we didn't have big substantive discussions. I'll give you -- he called me, and I ran for governor in 1974, got the Republican nomination, and lost in the Watergate sweep. And in 1975, in the fall -- [buzzer] Howard Baker used to say that meant one of them had escaped. [laughter] In 1975, in October, Bryce called me and asked me to come meet with President Ford. He was, then, working for Ford. And he had always said to me that you have a responsibility, always to do. If a President of the United States asks you to do something, he personally asks you to do something, you should always do it, unless you have a personal reason that you cannot. So he said, "The President has something he'd like for you to do." And I said, "Well, Bryce, I just got back here." I've got three kids. I've got a job. You know, I just lost my race for governor, and I don't have any money. And, you know, I can't think of anything that could entice me to come back to Washington, or to go into government. But following what you've always taught me, I'll come there."

So he took me in to see President Ford, right into the Oval Office. I went into Bryce's office, wherever it was then, and took me right into the Oval Office. And there was -- I think it was Rumsfeld and Cheney were the chiefs of staff, vice chief of staff at the time. There was the President, couple of others, and President Ford said -- this was October, November '75; the Iowa Caucus would be in February. He said, "We'd like for you to be our executive director of our Presidential campaign, our campaign manager." And I said, "I thought you had one. I thought Bo Callaway was chairman of the campaign." He said, "Well, we need someone else to, sort of, run it on a day-to-day basis." I said, "Mr. President, the Iowa Caucus is only three months away." This was when Reagan was getting ready to challenge him. And he had made Rockefeller his vice President, and all hell was breaking loose. And I said, "Mr. President, now, you know, I've got a young wife, three young children. I just went home. I have to think about that." And I was afraid to tell him, "No," right to his face. And so I went back, and talked to my wife, and I declined. And he asked Jim Baker, and he did it.

Naftali: Wow, he asked you first.

Alexander: Yeah, but that was Bryce's recommendation. So you asked me if I stayed in touch with Bryce. I stayed at least as in touch with him enough that he called me in October of '75. And then every year I would, you know, I'd talk to him.

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- Naftali: Did he ever tell you his role in helping to make Gerald Ford Vice President and then President?
- Alexander: I don't think he did. No, he didn't.
- Naftali: Did he ever talk to you about his impressions of President Nixon?
- Alexander: No, not really. I don't remember. I'm trying to think. I mean, my first reaction to your question is, he would never have been disrespectful to the President in front of me, who worked for the President and worked for him. That's just not his nature. I do remember I came in one time, and I was very impatient with progress on some issue. And he looked at me, and he said, "Lamar," he said, "Just remember that just a little nudge here in the White House creates great big earthquakes out there in the country." So he was trying to slow down my youthful impatience and remind me that those little bitty decisions at the Presidential level can have a huge effect on the whole United States of America.
- Naftali: This has been a very helpful interview. Is there any other anecdote you'd like to preserve for the record of the Nixon Library?
- Alexander: Well, I guess I'll preserve this one. I could think of two. One is, in July of 1970, Bryce had encouraged me to go home, and -- actually, it was August of 1970, August of 1970 -- and Winfield Dunn had won the Republican primary for governor in Tennessee. We hadn't had a Republican governor since 1920. And Winfield was a dentist; nobody expected him to be nominated. And so he had called me, his campaign manager had called me, and asked me to come home, and run the campaign. And Bryce had been encouraging me to go. And so, I was getting ready to go. So Bryce, thoughtful as always, took me into the Oval Office for a five-minute meeting with the President. It was what they called a "standup" because the rule of thumb was that if anybody sits down in the Oval Office, they stay too long. If the President stands up, why, you know, they can get you out in five minutes. In all that year and a half, I never had much contact with Mr. Nixon: I would sit on the sidelines in the Republican leadership meetings, but as time goes on, you know, particularly fewer and fewer people were involved in regular daily meetings. And there wasn't any really reason I should be. I mean, I didn't know much. I was 28, '9 years old, and he didn't need my advice. So, but Bryce was thoughtful enough to take me in. So we were standing there talking. I had a couple of pictures made. And I can remember he asked me what I was going to do. And I told him I was going to go down and run the Republican campaign for governor. He knew all about Tennessee politics. He said, "Yep, Tennessee." He said, "Tough politics down there." He said, "Tennessee and Indiana are the two states with the nut-cuttingest politics in the United
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States." So that was Richard Nixon's political analysis of rough and tumble politics in Tennessee. I think it's about right, based on what I've been through in the last 30 years.

Another time was, after I was governor, I wrote him a letter. Our family moved to Australia to live for six months. And it was 1987, and I just wrote him and thanked him for, you know, his service, and wondered how he was doing. He wrote me back a great letter. And when I decided to run for President in 1995, '4 -- when did he die?

Naftali: April '94.

Alexander: April '94. A few months before that, I had asked to see him. And he had said that he would see me and that he would see me for lunch. And Bill Safire later told me that that was sort of the highest level of a meeting with Richard Nixon, that he only would have a one-on-one lunch with very few people. And I have always regretted never having had a chance to have that lunch because he died before it could be scheduled. And I went to the funeral after that.

Naftali: Senator Alexander, thank you for your time.

Alexander: Thank you.

Naftali: This has been very helpful.