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Naftali: Hi, I'm Tim Naftali. I'm Director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. We're in Yorba Linda, California. It's February 21, 2008, and I have the honor and privilege to be with Lou Cannon, who has gratefully promised and is going to participate in the Richard Nixon Oral History Program. And I will be joined later on by my colleague, Greg Cumming. Lou, let me start with a question about covering the 1960 campaign. Tell us about -- where were you in 1960, and what kind of work did you do as a journalist?

Cannon: I was editor of the "Contra Costa Times" in Walnut Creek, California, in 1960, and I had this tremendous interest in politics and wrote about congressional candidates and local candidates, but also assigned myself, there was a Kennedy train, JFK took a train trip. I think in '60, train trips still evoked memories of Harry Truman's campaign in '48. I remember, as a boy of -- I would have been 15 -- of '48, of seeing Truman on a train in Reno, Nevada, where I lived, and watching him. And then Kennedy, he was a great phenomenon, you know, he was like -- he was different than any other candidate we'd seen, and there's a sort of aura that clings to him because of the way he was taken from us. But he had a different kind of aura, and it wasn't tragic before that happened. You knew immediately you were in the presence of an unusual and exceptional candidate. But I remember something from the '60 campaign which is going to strike you as odd, and it was -- and I realize now that it was because his back was in such, he was in such physical agony. The train lurched as trains would, and Kennedy fell forward on us and as he touched us -- you know, he touched us, he recoiled. Here's this guy who's so accessible and so open, and he's recoiling from the touch. Well, I realize now that what happened is his back must have hurt him, because I have a bad back. But he was exceptional. He talked in plain language to people. We knew he had this patrician background, but he didn't seem patrician.

I'm Catholic. I had been raised to believe that Al Smith was defeated in 1920 because he was a Catholic. We know now that he probably would have been defeated if he had been, you know, a Hindu, Presbyterian, or Jew or anything, he would have been defeated given the demographics and politics of that year, but I didn't know that. And so the notion that a Catholic could become President was an exciting idea to me, and there was just a sort of -- there was an air of excitement about him. It was a break with politics as we knew it in this country. We're having this interview in 2008, and I, of course, have no idea what's going to happen with Barack Obama, but when you get these comparisons of Obama to Kennedy, that's what I'm thinking, is that here's somebody who is quite different than somebody we've seen before. And I felt that with Reagan to some degree, too. I'm not talking about their policy positions, and I think,

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actually, Richard Nixon proved to be right about -- if you judge by the Bay of Pigs -- that Reagan wasn't, that Kennedy wasn't experienced enough in foreign affairs. But there's very few candidates who come down the pike who create a sense of palpable excitement, who you say, "Hey, this is different, you know, different from the other people who occupy this political universe." I've seen two up close, John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. I may, from a distance, be seeing a third in Barack Obama.

Naftali: Did you cover Richard Nixon in the '60 campaign?

Cannon: Not in a -- I covered a speech of his, one speech. I covered a -- I had an editing responsibility for the "San Jose Mercury" in '62, and I edited several of the stories about him. Not to get ahead of the question, but where I got to know Nixon best was during the period in which he was trying to rehabilitate himself after the '62 campaign, where Howard K. Smith wrote that famous -- or infamous depending on the way you feel about it -- obituary of Nixon. And I remember being on a plane somewhere in the mid-60s, and I didn't even know that Nixon was on the plane, but somebody must have said to him -- I was going, I think, from San Francisco to Denver or something -- I was there, and he came up and came over, and he talked to me about politics and everything. It was like -- he knew a lot, you know. I guess, I remember wondering, "Why didn't he do that before? Why is he -- you know, this guy really is smart. He knows a lot about politics."

Naftali: In the '62 campaign, the gubernatorial campaign, you said you were editing a newspaper.

Cannon: I was assistant news editor at the -- wire editor, assistant wire editor really -- at the "San Jose Mercury News," and, because I was interested in the politics, I think, I wound up often doing the political pages. And I could never quite figure out what Nixon was doing in that campaign. There was an early reference in that campaign to State House. Nixon referred to the state Capitol in Sacramento as the State House. Actually Brown, or one of Brown's people I'm sure, picked up on that, but it fell oddly on my ear because we don't call our state Capitol in California the State House, that's an Eastern reference. It's just not -- I don't remember an awful lot about that campaign except that Nixon seemed to be just sort of like that essentially [unintelligible] story. He didn't have the mot juste. He didn't have the right word, he didn't have the right -- is timing was off. There was a sense which he conveyed to the journalists I knew, that he was running to keep his name in the spotlight, that he was running -- what Nixon wanted to be was President. I mean, that's what he had ran for; that's what he got elected six years later to do. I don't think he really wanted to be governor of California. And in politics, people are always

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smarter than the politicians and the publishers think that they are, and they have a sense of you. They have a sense of who you are and what you want to do. And what Richard Nixon did not convey in '62, which was his worst political defeat. I mean, essentially '60 was a tie, and he lost the tie. And then he won decisively in '68 and by a landslide in '72 in national office. He was badly beaten in '62. He did not convey that he wanted to be governor of California. And Californians have a lot of faults, but they usually would prefer to elect somebody who wants to be governor rather than somebody who doesn't. Pat Brown already was governor, and he clearly wanted to stay as governor, and it was just -- that whole campaign, in contrast to the way Brown would be four years later against Reagan, Pat Brown had perfect pitch, and Nixon was off-tune. He never got the violin tuned quite right.

Naftali: Do you remember an issue of something called CDC in the '60s?

Cannon: California Democratic Council? Oh, sure, I'd been at California Democratic Council gatherings in Fresno. The CDC was an outgrowth of the Stevenson clubs in 1952 and '56, and they were -- essentially, we had a one-party system in California, which was -- weighed on all of us young people, journalists and not. We had an incumbent's party, and we had cross filing, and people were won by -- most of the congressmen and legislators were elected with the votes of both parties, and the Democrats were the permanently agreed-to minority. And the CDC was one of those great volunteer forces that come along once in awhile. You got them eight years later with the Goldwater clubs -- that want to change politics, but they were different. The CDC was important, because California politics at the time was really locked into a stasis. You had -- it was like one of these benevolent dictatorships, as Mexico was for so long. Where the outcome, you knew what the outcome would be. In 1954, I'd just gotten out of the Army, and I was, for one of the few times in my life, an activist politician, and I worked for Dick Graves, who was the Democratic nominee for governor. Most people couldn't tell you in 1954 who the Democratic nominee was for governor. And he gave his major speech -- which was on air pollution, interestingly enough -- in Los Angeles and I think the "L.A. Times," which was, you know, a rigidly controlled right-wing paper then, where the editorial policies and the news coverage were joined at the hip, and Kyle Palmer, the political editor, determined the news coverage. And I think Graves had two paragraphs, two paragraphs in this speech, this major speech. There was no coverage. People who have not lived in California in those times cannot remember what it was like, and Dick Graves was a League of Cities guy. He was no activist; he was not a particular partisan Democrat. They sort of drafted him because nobody was willing to run statewide. I mean, a Republican was supposed to be governor forever. The governor that year was Goodwin Knight who

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actually turned out to be a good governor, who inherited the governorship when Earl Warren was put on the Supreme Court.

So what I'm saying is, in a long-winded way, is that the CDC filled a vacuum that was there to be filled if, you know, if -- what's the old -- "Nature abhors a vacuum." Well, I don't know, there was a political vacuum in California waiting to be filled with people who cared about something, and the CDC filled it. Now the CDC became this lefty, anti-war party within a party that caused Pat Brown and others some embarrassment in the mid-60s, but in the late '50s and through '62, it was a vital force that actually created a two-party system in California. And while I have a lot of regrets about positions I took in earlier days, and changed my opinion on many things, in retrospect, I think that the CDC, for all it's later excesses, was almost wholly good for California, because we are better off with a real two-party system than with a system in which one party is an empty shell, you know, being filled by the other party. That's what we had in California before the CDC came along.

Naftali: In 1962, Richard Nixon actually aimed some of his criticisms at Pat Brown because of CDC support for Pat Brown.

Cannon: Yes, in '62, the CDC had sort of reached its apogee and was beginning to decline. Some of its positions were or sounded more extreme. Pat Brown, himself, was quite cautious. He considered -- he wanted the support of CDC, but he also wanted to keep them at arm's length because he, Pat Brown, was throughout -- first of all, he started as a Republican. He'd been a rather cautious Democrat, and even though, I think, in the first four years of the Brown administration were the sort of the delayed arrival of the New Deal in California, Pat Brown himself was never truly a liberal, and he certainly didn't -- he thought that the embrace of the CDC could be a death grip. On the other hand, Pat Brown -- he gets very little credit for this, deserves more -- Pat Brown, in '58, enabled the Democrats to do something they had been unable to do, really, throughout the century. They'd had one Democratic governor. He'd been a failure. He enabled the Democrats to coalesce around a ticket that included a very conservative nominee for the U.S. Senate, Clair Engle, and other officers who were more liberal, like Alan Cranston, who was the nominee for controller. The Republicans then committed that famous suicide pact, where Brown and Knight changed offices and, you know, where Goodwin Knight was running for the Senate and Bill Knowland was running for governor. It was just something that nobody accepted. Knowland was a right-to-work guy, and the unions poured lots of money into the campaign, and Pat won big, but he also -- the Democrats won.

Had Brown not been there -- Brown was the attorney general -- had there not been a centrist Democrat who could have headed this unlikely looking

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creature that was the Democratic coalition -- I don't think the Democrats could have pulled it off. I don't think that any of these other people could have been elected governor. Cranston was too far left. Engle was too conservative and too little known, you know. There was just nobody else; there was no other Democrat. Pat Brown had really created the modern Democratic Party in California. So in '62, Nixon comes along. The bloom is somewhat off the rose, but not completely. Pat, who had sort of a foot-in-mouth problem most of his career, had had his ups and downs, but he was still the acknowledged leader of what was a young -- in California -- a young political party and a young political coalition that had not quite exhausted its thirst for power, and Nixon didn't really fit in. You know, Nixon was this politician of a national scale who had all these California connections and this California history, and people, you know, intensely liked him or disliked him. He produced very strong feelings. But he wasn't a kind of uniting politician who would have been able to restore a Republican coalition, and the Republicans were all shattered. And even if he had been, there was still the question, what is this guy who just ran for President doing running for governor of California? There was this sense of scale was all wrong. So I think Nixon struggled to find issues in that campaign, probably for the only time in his political career that he really had. I mean, yeah, he tried to wrap the CDC around Pat Brown, and I don't know that very many people really, I don't know that that was a very resonant issue. Now, by '65 and '66, when the CDC is advocating withdrawal, you know, from Vietnam, long before -- when most Americans are supportive of the war, yeah. But not in '62.

Naftali: Did your newspaper catch wind of the Nixon campaign's use of Democratic, so-called Democratic organizations to raise money?

Cannon: I don't know. If it's so, it's lost to my memory. I should just say to you that it's a very old practice in California to create -- that was a product of the cross filing -- it was a rotten borough system. Every year, there would be groups of people who would be Democrats for someone, for whatever the Republican nominee was for any office. And they were Democrats that nobody had ever heard of. They were like -- They were not real people. They would be trotted out. I lived in San Francisco at the time and became close to Phil Burton, who was the Democratic -- who would become one of the rising and important liberal Democrats in the Congress, and, you know, we used to do this, "Who are these guys?" Because nobody, literally, knew who they were. If Nixon did that, he was just simply following along in a not particularly honorable tradition, but whatever Nixon should be blamed for, it certainly isn't that. I mean, that happened all the time.

It was made possible by the fact that you had this nexus -- can you have a nexus between three, I don't know -- you have a nexus between the "Los

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Angeles Times," Kyle Palmer, and the "Oakland Tribune," and the "San Francisco Chronicle," whose political editor was Earl Behrens. I don't remember who the Tribune editor was, but they were all three friends. They drank together. They knew what their bosses wanted, the Knowlands and the Chandlers, and the Thereo [phonetic sp] family in San Francisco. They wrote the news that way. They created these Democratic organizations. It is really a story that needs to be written by somebody who has more perspective than any -- you find pieces of this in lots of different books, including mine, but somebody should really look at it, because it is a political system that was the antithesis of a political democratic system. It existed in California, and it flourished, and it did very well here for -- what, six, seven decades? I mean, that's a long time from the late 1890s to 1958. So Nixon, he's really at the end of an era in California. You know, he's two, three, four years out at the end of an era, and I don't know what any of these guys think. I doubt Nixon, smart man that he was, had any clue about this, what I'm talking about, because Nixon had been away, really. Nixon had been running for President. Nixon wasn't focused on -- you know, he'd been Vice President. He wasn't focused on what was going on in California. The California that he'd grown up in had changed in a short hurry, and he really was not a part of that change. So in '62, I think any Republican would have been defeated by Pat Brown.

Naftali: Did you ever encounter Murray Chotiner?

Cannon: Yeah, I knew Murray. I didn't know him at the time he was doing his things, but I knew him afterward in Washington. He lived out near McLean somewhere. And God, I don't know that I want to be saying this for an oral history, but I rather liked him. I talked to him a little bit. I don't think I ever formally interviewed him. I had a couple of drinks with him on different occasions. I was a kid; I was a young reporter. I was certainly no -- he wasn't worried about anything I might write, because I'm sure he didn't think anybody would read it. But here's something about Chotiner . What he was doing, again, was not different from what was done in California. There's a really wonderful book written by Burke called "Olson's New Deal for California." I love the book. It's the only political book I ever read that David Broder hadn't read, and I told him it's the only book. And he gives a very good account of what happened in the '30s in California between Olson -- it's Colbert Olson, the only Democratic governor to precede Brown, he was governor from '38 to '42 -- and it was routine to denounce one's opponent as a Communist. That was, I mean, Sam Yorty, you know, Sam Yorty, who'd been close to the Communists, had taken political direction apparently from the Communists and then turned on them, you know, did that, and you routinely smeared your opponent.

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I guess, to put this -- as one of my great editors, Dick Harwood of "The Washington Post," used to say, "Put the story down where the goats can get it" -- there was a culture of smear in California, Tim. That's the point. Chotiner came along and refined it. The Nixons came along and got into public office doing it, but they didn't invent it. And part of the Nixon mythology is -- I think Nixon's campaign against Jerry Voorhis was deplorable, but I don't think -- it wasn't unusual, and it wasn't inventive, and it wasn't something that he did, and you can prove this if you look at the flyers that were put out for Republican candidates in 1946, when Richard Nixon was one. I had looked at this historically for my first book. And they said the same thing about all of the candidates. It was the standard pitch. It isn't as if this guy, Nixon, or this guy, Chotiner, did something. Now maybe they were more effective at it, or maybe -- I suspect they were effective, because Nixon was a good campaigner and Chotiner knew what he was doing -- but I think the biggest thing was -- sort of taking this backwards, this history is going to wind up in the 1840s, in the Polk collection the way I'm going. But just as the time was right for Pat Brown in 1958 and it was right for the CDC in the mid-50s, in 1946 when Richard Nixon was elected, the time was right in this country for a campaign of anti-Communism and a campaign in which liberals, and particularly people who were like Voorhis, who were principled and honest but somewhat inept at explaining their points of view, were ripe to be redbaited. And they were ripe to be redbaited because this was the beginning of the Cold War. This was the time when the Soviet Union had switched from being a gallant ally to, you know, a menace to the free world. And anti-Communism and suggesting that your opponent was soft on Communism was the cudgel there that the Republicans picked up and beat the Democrats with.

The 1950 campaign, Nixon famously or notoriously compared Helen Gahagan Douglas' record to that of Vito Marcantonio, the American Labor Party candidate and, really, Communist stooge to put it bluntly. Marcantonio hated Helen Gahagan Douglas. He had told Nixon that he wanted, you know, to beat that woman, and he used a very unprintable word of that woman. But Helen Gahagan Douglas' response was, "No, Nixon voted more with him than I did." So the point is, in this so-called Pink Lady campaign, it's a disgraceful campaign, but she accepted the premise of anti-Communism, of smearing people, of guilt by association, you know. I mean, there's only usually two ways to vote on a bill so, you know, what did this show? It was nothing, it was empty, but it was the culture of the time. Nixon rode the waves; he didn't summon them up.

Naftali: 1968, were you following Reagan around in '68?

Cannon: '68, what was I doing in 1968? In 1968, yes, I was following Reagan around. In 1965, I was working for the "San Jose Mercury," and the great

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political editor of the newspaper, Harry Farrell, who passed away a year or so ago and is truly one of the great political reporters in California history, and his contemporaries realized it. Harry would cover, go up and cover the legislature during legislative session. And Harry's wife was very sick at the -- and the legislature was gradually becoming, it became a de facto full time legislature before it came a de jure full time legislature. And finally, Harry and the editor's paper realized, "We just have to have a full time correspondent up there." This is in '65. And through an improbable series of events, which I will not bore other people who are already bored by this oral history, I wound up as the person up there, and it was perfect for me, I loved it. I filed two or three stories the first day and forgotten. I knew why I had not -- well, I had gone into editing for reporting, but I never wanted to go back. You know, I never did actually. I just loved covering up there. It was wonderful. I mean, John Herbers of "The New York Times," who covered the Mississippi legislature, said once that the legislature's so wonderful that every vice and virtue known to humanity, and a few that haven't been catalogued, are on display there. Boy, that was so true. And I happened to be there when Ronald Reagan came along, and I covered Reagan some in the first campaign. And I'm going to -- there must be some ground rules to this oral history, but while I remember it, I'm going to tell you the first time I met Ronald Reagan and then go up to '68. Is that okay?

Naftali: That's fine, go ahead.

Cannon: Okay, '65, it's Sacramento; it's summer, I think. Press club holds an event. It wasn't even an assignment. I worked their -- the "San Jose Mercury News" was then the "San Jose Mercury" and the "San Jose News." The "News" was the afternoon paper. The "Mercury" was the morning paper. I was supposed to serve them both, but 90 or 85 percent of what I did was for The "Mercury," because the "News" didn't really care that much what was going on in Sacramento. But the city editor of the "News," I think a guy named Art Stokes, called me up. I rarely heard from him, and he said, you know, "This guy Ronald Reagan is speaking and maybe you want to go and hear him." And I said, "Sure." And so I go to this lunch. The audience is reporters, lobbyists, and a few hanger-on types. And what I know then is that -- in '65 Pat Brown is governor, you know, and I know the Brown people. They were a little disdainful of me. I wasn't the "San Francisco Chronicle," you know, and I was a new guy on the block. Oh, and they thought that I had some ties with Jess Unruh, the speaker of the assembly, which I really didn't, but I knew Jess's people. And anybody who know Jess Unruh, you were tainted to the Brown people. So I knew them well enough, though, to know they wanted the Republicans to nominate Reagan. They thought, Brown's people thought, that if the Republicans -- the guy they were afraid of was a guy named George Christopher, who had been the mayor of San Francisco, and Pat's center of

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being was San Francisco. Everything was San Francisco. The world had changed, you know. San Francisco was a tinier and tiny part of the equation. But, you know, San Francisco was still the center of the universe in his eyes. George Christopher, great, lovely man, was probably the worst candidate that was ever produced in the television age. He was swarthy. He had big eyebrows. He leaned over; he had a very menacing look on television, which he didn't particularly have in private. He was perfect. He was the only candidate Pat Brown might have defeated. They worked really hard to defeat Christopher and get Reagan nominated.

And so this is the context in which I'm going to see Reagan. I know that this guy -- you know, actor. Then and now for a lot of these people, it's a synonym for airhead. Well, Reagan was no airhead. So Reagan goes, and this is part of a thing he was doing, where he was going off Broadway, as one of his people put it, and doing these semi-large markets, not the smallest markets. But he was going around the state to -- it had been Stu Spencer's idea, I'm sure -- to show that he was not just an actor reading a script but could answer questions. And Reagan would talk for a few minutes, and then he would take questions. And he talked for a few minutes, and he took questions. And some of his answers seemed then and even now beyond belief. When he was asked about his lack of experience in government -- he had none -- he said he thought it would be good for somebody who had no experience at all in government to come in and take a look at it. Well, it might be a good thing for somebody with no experience in government to take a look at it, but he wasn't talking about taking a look at it. He was going to come in and be governor of the place, you know. And yet, he had a compelling, almost boyish, charm to him, appeal to him. He was really answering the questions. He wasn't afraid to say, "I don't know." He said that a lot. But some of the answers he did give made sense.

But here's what struck me. After the event is over with, all these reporters and lobbyists, they go up. They want Reagan's autograph. Now Reagan -- this is 1965. I mean, if you were what, if you were 40 years old in 1965, you'd seen Reagan's movies. You'd seen all his movies, you knew he was a star, and you'd seen him on television. You'd certainly seen GE Theater, where he was the host, which was a valuable role, because that's a moderator role. And I went up, and I introduced myself to him. I remember that. I remember those steely eyes of his. I thought he had this great face, but his eyes are tough. His eyes are really something. He shook my hand firmly and said -- I just introduced myself, "Oh, Governor Reagan" -- I mean, Mr. Reagan, "I'm Lou Cannon of the 'San Jose Mercury News.'" And I went back. The editor called me. He said, "What did you think of him?" And I said, "Art, I don't know anything, but if I were running this thing, why would anybody want to run against somebody that everybody knows and everybody likes? Why would you

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want him to be your opponent?" Well, over the time, as Mr. Stokes told the story -- he's dead now for many years -- I predicted that Reagan was going to be President, but I didn't have any idea he was going to be governor. I was just so struck by the fact that he didn't -- he impacted on people as, not like he was a politician, but like he was this celebrity, you know, force of nature that people wanted to rub up against. It was like Kennedy, seeing Kennedy again. They wanted the aura, the sun. These people project things; they project things.

There's a photographer, the great Mike Evans, he's another guy who's passed, who used to take pictures of people. And we were talking about Gary Hart, he says, "There's no emanations." I said, "What are you talking about, Mike?" "When you take his picture, there's nothing back there. Nothing bounces off him. There's no emanations from --" so people have some kind of a psychic arc about them. That's not [unintelligible], they're going to think we're all, you know, astrologists or scientologists. We don't go back and write that stuff. But candidates give off an aura; they give off a glow. Reagan gave off a glow, and there was some glow about him that was always there.

By '68, Reagan gets elected, one million votes. I'm up there. I'm covering him; that's what I'm doing. I'm writing about Ronald Reagan, every day I'm writing stories about Ronald Reagan. And I had my problems with some of the Reagan people. And I had my problems with some of the -- Jess Unruh is the speaker then. You know, Pat Brown's gone. Jess Unruh sees his path to governorship. I'd like to think that I had problems as a journalist with the powerful people that I covered because of what I wrote about them. But, you know, maybe -- I let others make that decision. But in any case, I decided to write a book about Reagan and Unruh, because I didn't understand either of them, and I thought that if I wrote a book about them, I'd understand them better. And in the middle of this, I won an award, American Political Science Association in '68, and I'm at Sun Valley. And I meet a man who's an idol of mine, the radical journalist Carey McWilliams, who wrote all these wonderful, wonderful books, "Factories In the Field," "Brothers Under the Skin," "North From Mexico," how he knew, you know, about -- there's a little passage in "North From Mexico" where he tells us about how Quebec is going to be in revolt -- how he knew that living in Southern California 25 years before it happens. Nicest, sweetest, loveliest guy that I think I've ever met and we became good friends. And we actually taught at a class at UCLA together many years ago. And I said this to Carey, I said I'm -- he wouldn't let me call him Mr. McWilliams -- and I said, "Well, I'm writing this book, and I think I'll learn something if I write this book about these people." And he said, "Let me tell you something, Lou." He said, "Every book that I have written, it was because I didn't understand the phenomenon enough, and I thought if I wrote about it, I would learn about it." So after -- my view

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was, if that's good enough for Carey McWilliams, it's certainly good enough for me.

So in '68, I was traveling with Reagan after -- I covered his abortive campaign for the Presidency, which in a phrase that I think I first used in the "San Jose Mercury" and then used in my book, the words of Tom Reed [phonetic sp], who was sort of promoting his campaign, was not so much a Southern strategy as a Southern solicitation. And he went to the South, and I talked -- that's where I met the people that I would later become important to the country, but important to me, Clarke Reed, Harry Dent, Strom Thurmond, these people. And it was quite clear to me -- '68, I'm, you know, was born at night, but not last night. And by this time I'm a good enough reporter, and I've got enough under my belt to realize that Ronald Reagan is the overwhelming personal preference of these Southern audiences he's talking to, and a lot of the kingmakers as well, that they love Ronald Reagan. They didn't love Richard Nixon. I don't think that was because Nixon was so unlovely, although they say that. I think it was because of Reagan. I don't think it was because -- it was because of who Reagan was; it wasn't because of what Nixon was not. Because nobody else was Reagan either, Reagan spoke their language. Reagan was the first conservative who could talk to them and not use racially -- maybe they were racially charged, but it wasn't racially coded. It certainly wasn't consciously racial -- and they were -- by that time George Wallace was an embarrassment to them. You know, the old Southern ways were an embarrassment to them, even if they didn't know how to say it or depart from it. Reagan gave them a comfort zone. But Nixon, who's been at it a lot longer than Reagan, and whose people were smarter and more experienced, I think, you know, had the South pretty well locked up. And I've written about it, and there's all kinds of people who say it was closer than it looked. I'll let history decided that one.

But after Nixon was nominated, nobody pays any attention to what the other defeated candidates are doing. Nobody knows -- nobody could tell you what Nelson Rockefeller or Ronald Reagan were doing in September of 1968, you know, except perhaps their biographers. Well, I know what Ronald Reagan was doing, because I was with him. He was flying around the country campaigning for Republican candidates, and I was interviewing him on the plane. And the reason I was on that plane -- the reason they explained to me was, they said, "He has more time on the plane, so if you can take the time" -- and in those days, I could take the time, and I was able to work it out with the paper. And in a negotiation that made a Kabuki dance seem simple with the Sacramento press corps, I basically had to agree that if anything happened to Reagan, I'd be everybody's pool reporter. But there was no cost to it, because you had no campaign rules or anything. And the newspapers now, you know, now would insist on paying. And, you know, I couldn't have possibly paid for

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all these flights, but it was all donated. And you're sort of traveling around. Well, the whole reason that they wanted me to do it was that Reagan was afraid to fly, as I became aware during these flights, and they liked the idea of somebody taking up his time by interviewing him.

So I interviewed him on these long political flights that he did, and I had a lot of time with him. And I'll tell a story I've told before, you've heard before, just recently, but it might be germane to this. About the second or third day out, I had notes, reams of notes, tape recorders. I was rather inept at the tape recorder. I used a big, bulky tape recorder, and I'd sometimes erase over it. But this one night I'm in the hotel, and I'm listening to what I recorded, the light dawns. Everything in it, every damn word, I had read before. And I'd read it -- I carried with me -- Reagan had one of those "as told to" biographies. It's actually a very revealing, important book that I and others have drawn from, called "Where's the Rest of Me?" by -- it was written in '65 with the help of a ghost, who was an accomplished ghost. He'd done Perry Cuomo and other things. But it's basically a transcription with the "aws" and the "uhs" and, I'm sure, occasional swear words or something taken out. Well, Reagan didn't swear a lot. But I'm listening to this tape, and I'm reading this, looking at this book. He's just said to me word for word what's in this book. What am I going to do? I'm writing a book for God's sakes. So the next day I screw up my courage and I say, "Governor, you know, what you said yesterday was really interesting, but I read it in" whatever chapter it was. And he's quizzical and he screws, and he looks at me and he says, "Oh, you want something new, Lou?" I said, "Yes sir, I'd be really appreciative for something new." And he gave me something new. And every interview I ever did with him for the rest of my life, there was always something new. It was usually surrounded by boilerplate, by speeches, but there was always some nugget. It was like he never, ever, ever forgot that. And I think what happened to me on that trip was -- trips, actually -- I must have unconsciously -- even though I would argue it, and I certainly didn't put it in my writing -- I must have unconsciously accepted some of the notion that he was a boob, or that he was a, you know, that he wasn't very bright or something. And what I realized is, he is bright. He's bright in a different way than these other cats. I mean, I tried to explore in my subsequent books, particularly "President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime," how his mind works. But I think I came back from that trip, and I don't think after that I ever underestimated Ronald Reagan. I wasn't surprised when he ran for President. I told the people at "The Post" that he was running.

I remember in 19 -- it would have been '75 -- I'd been at the "Post" for three and a half years, and I had the chance to go to the Aspen Institute to write what, subsequently, became my reporting book that was published a couple years later, at the invitation of Doug Cater, who was another mentor of mine that I'd met at Sun Valley. And he'd written "The Fourth

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Branch of Government," and he'd worked for Lyndon Johnson, and he was a really bright guy. So I come back, and I go back to the White House, where I'm covering the White House for "The Post," and Ford is President. Dick Cheney, who was a terrific chief of staff and a great source, you know, for me, very straight with me, never ever told me anything that was untrue. Better than that, he guided me off things that I kind of thought were untrue, had led myself into. And Cheney says, "So what, so do you think Reagan is going to run?" And I couldn't believe it. It's the only time, and, you know, this guy's a powerful guy, but he's just so friendly. I said, "Dick, where have you been? He is running. He is running against you. He is running really hard. Can't you see it? What do you mean is he going to run?"

You know, and Ford had spent -- done dumb things like offering secretary of commerce, you know. Why not, you know, a position heading the guards at the White House or some really, really, you talk about stupid things. They had thought they could talk Ronald Reagan out of running for President by giving him a Cabinet post in this unelected Presidency. And for some reason, it was like -- and what Yogi was supposed to have said, I don't know if he did or not, but *déjà vu* all over again. I mean, this is Pat Brown all over again, wanting Ronald Reagan to be the nominee. This is my experience that I have with Carter's people in '76, when George H. W. Bush wins the Iowa primary, and we're having dinner that night in this place where everybody went in Des Moines, I forget the name of it. And one the Carter people thinks that Bush has won the caucuses and he's going to be the nominee, and it's too bad, you know, Reagan would have been easier to beat. This is all of a -- there was some -- it was like he cast a spell on people. He cast this spell. And the spell was, "Hey, you know, I'm a real amiable, easy guy, you know, to beat. And I'm not" -- and Reagan was just as tough as any politician that I've ever covered. He was tough, and he was determined, and you couldn't talk him out of doing what he wanted to do. Nancy couldn't talk him out of what he wanted to do, for God's sakes. And certainly no advisor could or no other candidate. Ronald Reagan wanted to be President of the United States. He always wanted to be President of the United States. He wore his ambition more lightly than anyone ever did, but it came from inside out.

He didn't know the lineups and the different states. He couldn't have told you, you know, how a precinct worked or organized. He didn't know any of those nuts and bolts things. It led John Sears, an admirable man in many respects, to terribly underestimate Reagan when he was his campaign -- Reagan didn't care about all that, but he knew where he was going. Boy, he knew where he was going. It's the Walter Lippman thing about de Gaulle. . Like a near-sighted man, you know, he trips over the furniture up close. He's okay in the middle distance, but he can see across the room. That was Reagan; he could see right across the room. And he always knew

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-- he always had this destination, this outcome; he knew. I mean, he was smarter than all of us. He was certainly smarter than me. But he was also smarter than Pat Brown and Dick Cheney and Jimmy Carter, I think.

Naftali: Wow, we're going to take a few more minutes. Do you want to take a break?

Cannon: Yeah.

Naftali: Let's take a break for a moment, thank you.

Cannon: Is this good?

Naftali: This is great. Greg, can I just go into the --

Cannon: -- wrapping up though. So the next part, and then --

Naftali: And then I want to give Greg a few minutes.

Cannon: Yeah, Greg deserves some time, too. I'll give him time.

Naftali: Pete McCloskey, tell us about Pete McCloskey in 1972. What were his expectations?

Cannon: You know, I wrote once about Pete McCloskey that the Congress couldn't take very many of them, but it damn well better have one or two. Pete McCloskey was -- I guess still is -- a wild man. You know, he is like -- McCloskey was a war hero, a genuine war hero from the Korean War. I interviewed a lot of people who served under him and with him, as it turned out, and he was fearless. And he had decided that the Vietnam War was wrong. He had on his staff a guy named Paul Lafon [phonetic sp] who had been a Marine general in Vietnam, and a lot of other people who had served. And he had decided that Nixon wasn't telling the truth about it and that the war was wrong, the President was a liar, ergo I'm going to run for President against him on the issues of the war and on his truthfulness, and he did.

And I got caught up with McCloskey because McCloskey had been going to Vietnam and then on to Laos where we had bombed on the Plain of Jars, and he wanted a reporter to come with him. And Walter Ritter, I worked for the Ritter publications then, agreed to finance me on the trip. And Walter was an opponent of the war, I think, but Walter was also -- this was in '71 I think -- and Walter was also -- he just thought this might be interesting. And so I went over with McCloskey and was over there for a while and wound up writing something for "Life" magazine, too. And when I came back for a whole variety of reasons, things that I had seen

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and people that I had talked to, I was very caught up in the war. The war became a matter of great interest and personal interest to me. And so I was interested in McCloskey's campaign, and I was, in a sense -- because we talked a lot about it. He was a very passionate, sort of disorganized, passionate guy. And I -- I thought he was sort of a Don Quixote from the first. But I became so interested in him, and I wrote this book about him. It was published the day he withdrew in February of 1972 in the New Hampshire -- he got 20 percent or something in the New Hampshire primary. He always says, "See, you knocked me out of the race." And I says, "Don't give me that kind of credit. You know, you knocked yourself out of the race." And I think we've kept that up for years and years and years. The truth is, I don't think he documented -- he had a good case, and he didn't document it well. And I decided that I'm a book writer, you know. I'm nobody's cheerleader. I'm nobody's spear carrier. And so I had all the arguments against him as well as the arguments for him, and I sort of fell in love with the guy while I was writing about it. But my book sure as hell didn't do him any good, but McCloskey understood that. McCloskey understood that in a way I was like him. I mean, I would never compare myself to him in courage or prowess or anything except that I'm like him in that I was going to do what I thought was right and best and write it. And I wasn't going to be anybody's propagandist any more than he was going to be Nixon's cheerleader because he was a Republican congressman.

And then McCloskey went over various deep ends, you know, over the years. He became, I think, overly one-sided in the Palestinian-Israeli dispute, but he also did some good things. He brought Pat Robertson down. He exposed Pat Robertson, you know, as the guy who was procuring the liquor, I think is the -- you know, not fighting, you know. And then, in the last election, in 2006, he helped -- he runs a seemingly quixotic campaign against Pombo, the Republican congressman whom the environmentalists hated, and he damages him so much that the Democrat beats him in the general election. So maybe Don Quixote wins a few of them. Lovely, tough, sweet, passionate, disorganized -- they never really -- the Nixon White House never knew what to make of him, but then neither did anybody else. I'm absolutely sure that John Ehrlichman had told the Nixon White House that he could defuse this candidacy and stop McCloskey from running. Because Ehrlichman once told me that, as much told me that, almost in so many words. And he couldn't. I mean, Ehrlichman was very close. I think that McCloskey's wife had stayed with him when Pete was off fighting a war in Korea. But I think in retrospect, McCloskey is -- -- like a lot of thoughtful military men. Robert E. Lee said after his terrible, terrible victory that, you know, it is, you know, as well that war is so terrible, else we should love it too much. McCloskey was an embodiment of that. John Ehrlichman once told me that, well, putting McCloskey down, that he was a war lover, I mean, describing him in

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Korea. And I think, yes, but, and the "but" is that because he really was in war and close combat and had seen people die and that he understood how terrible it was, too. So the Vietnam War was never a metaphor for Pete McCloskey. It was a cause. He thought it was wrong. I think -- and I told him this, I mean, at the time, this is not a new thought -- I thought he made a mistake in going after Nixon on the -- that Nixon wasn't truthful and didn't care about the Constitution.

I think that may be true, that he wasn't truthful and he didn't care about the Constitution, but lots of people were saying that, and that was a secondary thing. And Pete had no particular expertise to say that. And John Ashbrook, running against Nixon from the right, was saying that. I thought that Pete had one issue: the war. Gary Wills once wrote a column that he was a kamikaze pilot, and a kamikaze pilot aims his plane right down the smoke stack, you know, of the ship, and Pete didn't do that. Pete didn't do that. He allowed himself to be diverted by these other things because, I think, Nixon really annoyed him or angered him or he felt contempt for him in some way. But I felt that that got in the way of what was unique and kind of wonderful about McCloskey, which is that, when he said the war was wrong, he was thinking of people that he knew. It was just -- he was a very great man. You saw him with soldiers. You saw him out in the field. You saw him do things with people. He was a great man, and he exasperated everybody who ever worked for him. They all had the same feeling about him. They all loved him and deplored him at the same time. He was very good on trade issues. He was very good on the maritime thing. He was a good, good congressman, you know, I mean, he worked his butt off. I mean, I have to say that, in my life, I think my life is richer for having known Pete McCloskey, and I'm really glad we're friends.

Naftali: How do you come to be "The Washington Post" correspondent? Did "The Washington Post" want a journalist to represent it in Washington, a White House correspondent?

Cannon: Oh, I was extraordinarily lucky. Nobody would ever undertake what I did as a probable career path to journalistic stardom, if that's what it was. I was working for the Ritters -- in 1964, I was covering the Republican Convention for "The Pine Bluff Commercial." I was editing the political pages, but the "San Jose Mercury" wouldn't send me to the Republican Convention, so I wanted to go. And I got myself credentialed with this Arkansas paper that had tried to hire me as an editorial page editor. And the guy who took the job won the Pulitzer, by the way. But I had covered this convention, and it was very exciting. Jackie Robinson was back there, you know, my hero, was back there with the Arkansas delegation. Rockefeller's giving this speech, and Jackie Robinson's jumping up and down, an athlete, you know. He's on the balls -- you tell them, Rocky, you tell them. And everybody's booing Rockefeller. But I noticed that near

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Jackie Robinson nobody was booing very much. So I tried to stay close to Jackie Robinson. And I thought this convention was the best theater, the best damn thing I'd ever been at. And I decided, well, I want to go work in Washington.

I talked to the guy who was "The Washington Post" bureau chief there. And David Broder, I think you'd probably -- David Broder was unique among all the political reporters who came to California from the East. They all come with their conclusions in their notebooks, I thought. Broder would come in and he'd interview everybody. He'd go in, and he'd talk to you. He'd talk to the different correspondents. And Dave, for some reason, took a shine to me. And then I wrote that book, my first book, "Ronnie and Jess: A Political Odyssey." And it so happened that my -- a guy named Richard Harwood, another great war hero of World War II, the South Pacific, Marines -- Dick had read that book. And Dick told me later, he said, "Well, Broder," he says, "kept hammering me to hire you." But I think Dick was interested in me for what I'd written. Dick thought that there was too much ideology in reporting, and a lot of it was liberal. I mean, although Dick himself was of that view, he wanted reporters who would go deep and broad and were fair. And either he convinced himself or Broder convinced him or the two of them convinced each other. And so they asked me to work for "The Washington Post." And I said, no, I didn't want to. I was probably scared. But I didn't think of myself as a General Motors sort of guy. I liked the Ritters, and fortunately I worked for Walter Ritter. And Walter Ritter said, "My boy," he said, "Can I talk to you?" And he came back to me and he says, "Can I talk to you as a friend, my boy?" he says. And I said, "Sure, Mr. Ritter, you're my friend." "Take the job," he said. "They won't come to you a third time."

Now most of the bureau chiefs in Washington, they regarded their leading reporters as indentured servants, who would -- I still know to this day people who wouldn't speak after they went to work for "The New York Times" or "The Washington Post" like they came to work for the Dallas paper or the San Jose paper. And they were supposed to work for them for the rest of their lives in gratitude and not ever want to work for "The Post" and "The Times." Well, I didn't want to work for "The Post," and I probably wouldn't have worked for "The Post," except that Walter encouraged me to take the offer and Dick Harwood and Dave Broder wanted me to do it. And I think lots of things in life are chemical. I was over there, it was in April of 1972, and Howard Simons is the managing editor. He came over after a week, he said, "It seems like you've been here forever." And he says, "I hope that's a compliment, Howard." And I said -- well, he meant it one. And I said, "Well, I'm taking it as one." And I just -- it was wonderful for me from the beginning. I mean, in 26 years you have differences, and I had mine, but it was great. "The Post" encouraged me to be better, to do more, to find out things I hadn't known, to -- you worked

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all the time. It was very hard on your personal life, but it was and is my home. I mean, I haven't worked there now for nearly 10 years. I still say "we" when I talk about "The Washington Post." I've written for them from time to time, notably when Reagan died, when Ford died, columns from time to time. They syndicated a column of mine that was syndicated for 10 or 12 years. I don't know how it happened. I'm quite a lucky man, I think.

Naftali: Tell us a bit about, please, the environment in "The Washington Post" newsroom after the Watergate break-in.

Cannon: Well, two or three things. One is, I was on the national staff, which was estranged from the metro staff, the local staff, in ways I didn't understand and don't understand today and for reasons I've never understood. Bob and Carl, Woodward and Bernstein, worked for the metro -- and while we did cooperate on different stories, and I remember Howard telling me, you know, give them all the help you can give them, and I did on different things -- basically there was a lot of tension between the two staffs, I realize now. I don't think I knew then that the national staff wanted the story back after it became a big story, or wanted to be in on the coverage. And I think Ben Bradley said no. But, the crosspollination that came, in which -- at least that I was involved in, was really connecting Nixon and what Nixon was alleged to have done with the historical Nixon and his practices in California. I do remember making the same point that I made to you about Chotiner and Nixon, of -- they were, you know, part of the crowd rather than creating a new form. But as the Watergate story deepened, I think everybody in the staff knew that it was a very important story. And we all -- and there was a nervousness. I think Ben put it well once when he said, "This is such a big story. How come nobody else is covering this story?" So there was a great jubilation in the newsroom when Walter Cronkite did two stories on it in the Fall. They say that, you know, if you're right, you don't need any ratification. But you do need ratification, and I think, for us, that was Cronkite.

Now, I have to say, to shorten this, I don't think that anybody involved in the story, certainly not Ben Bradley -- and I'm not close to Carl, but I'm sure Bob Woodward, as well -- that none of us -- I remember Ben saying this. We didn't think -- we didn't know what was going to happen. We didn't know there was going to be all these hearings and a resignation of the President. We thought we would be vindicated by history, that history would prove what we had done to be right. And I wrote a lot about -- you know, I was sort of covering, writing about the Nixon -- the response to it, particularly after the election. But it was very hard because the White House had frozen all "The Washington Post" people out. But I continued to get stories. There was a strong sense -- I had this strong sense, and I remember discussing this with Woodward, but particularly with Ben -- that Nixon could avert whatever -- no matter what he'd done -- that he

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could avert this if he made a clean breast to the American people and apologized to the American people. And it's quite clear to me that he could've. I mean, I felt that then; I felt that now. And that view was not -- I don't know that everyone shared that view, but there were a lot of other people who shared that view. And it was never quite clear to me, and it isn't still quite clear to me, why Nixon, who saw so many things, didn't see that. I mean, you know, he sort of, I mean, he sort of chose death by water torture, it seems to me. And the one thing, if anybody ever looks at this many years from now, that I would like people to know at "The Washington Post," because I have seen other accounts that I don't think are right, is there was no great sense of jubilation at "The Washington Post" over this.

Now I don't know what, you know, Bob and Carl, who had taken so much heat for this, felt, but I think our -- it wasn't that we were cheering or, you know, I think we did a book on the fall of the President, and I wrote a chapter on Nixon. I remember the chapter was called "Nixon, Whose Trust Was In Himself." And one of the Brits who reviewed it compared it to, you know, Indians doing war whoops around a campfire, and that's fine. It was a good line and all that. But it wasn't the way we felt. We felt sad. I felt happy that "The Post" had been vindicated, but we did not feel great about what had happened to the Presidency. And I remember having this ineffable sense of sadness about it, even though I was pleased that it had happened. And I don't think my feeling was singular.

Naftali: Tell us, please, the story about Ronald Reagan's reaction to Haldeman or Ehrlichman's --

Cannon: Oh, that's good. This is a -- I'd been up in Seattle. Broder and I were out on the road writing about the new federalism. Haldeman and Ehrlichman resigned. Ben Bradley calls us both up. Dave was in Dayton. I had watched the speech with Dan Evans, the governor of Washington state, and he says, "You boys better get your behinds back to Washington." And we did, but I had to go first to Sacramento. I had this thing set up to interview Reagan. And Reagan was impossible to get him to say anything off the record. You know, Reagan knew damn well there's nothing in the world that was off the record. He didn't tell you anything. It was one thing flying around in a plane, but boy, you try to get him in his office to say anything that wasn't -- he'd memorized whatever they were going to say. And I was desperate; I just wanted to know. I said, "I won't use it in the story, Governor." I didn't. I said, "I won't use it in the story, but I got to know, what did you really think?" And he realized, I don't know, maybe he took pity on me or thought I was desperate. And he said, "Okay, you're not going to use it?" "No, I'm not going to use it, Governor." And he says, he does this perfect imitation of Nixon's. Nixon gives this speech in which, typically, he attacks the Democrats, you know, like Democrats

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were somehow responsible for the fact that Haldeman and Ehrlichman were doing something illegal, you know. I mean, it's the other guy's, you know, fault. And he has this ringing thing, phrase in there, "Two rights do not make a wrong." And Reagan does it perfectly like Nixon would do it. And Reagan says, "He doesn't know how to deliver a line like that." He says, "It's a throwaway line," he said. "Two rights don't make a wrong," he says, and he does this perfectly, just as Reagan would have given the line. It's the only time, every once in a while -- I'm going to tell this story right now, because I'm in need of a break and it sort of fits with this --

Naftali: Okay.

Cannon: This is Nixon, and I hope this isn't infringing on, but it seems like the right time to tell it. In 1969, Nixon has just become President. My boss, Walter Ritter, is becoming president of the Gridiron Club, this exclusive group. Now, between becoming President of the United States and becoming president of the Gridiron Club, if you remember the Gridiron Club, it's sort of a tie, you know, I'm not sure that being president of the Gridiron Club isn't the bigger deal, but here this is congruent. We've got a new President of the United States, and we've got a new -- this dinner's in March. So Nixon's been -- what, President for two months. Walter Ritter's being inaugurated that night, and they have what they call the President's Reception, to which the President of the United States, if he's attending the Gridiron dinner, comes. And so Walter has a reception line set up, and he's got my book, my first book, "Ronnie and Jess," has been out for a little bit or is just coming out. And I can't remember when it came out in California and when it came out back there. But in any case, Walter's here, Governor Reagan is here, and I'm next to Governor Reagan. And Nixon comes down this reception line, and Ronald Reagan -- I had known Nixon, but Reagan was good at knowing that people forgot politicians' names. He would forget them, and he had also very good manners. And so he says to Richard Nixon, he says, "Well, Mr. President, this is Lou Cannon. He's just written a book about me." And Nixon glares at both of us. You know, why would somebody be writing a book about Reagan? There's only one reason: he wants to be President. I'm the President. You know, and he glares at Reagan and at me and then he glares back at Reagan and he says, "Well, I'll skim it."

And he goes down the reception line, and I am -- bear in mind, I have been back to this bureau now for three months -- I'm standing in line here with my boss and the governor of California, who I've just written a book about. And I'm trying not to show it, but I'm a little crushed. And as soon as he gets out of earshot, Reagan says to me, "Well, Lou, he just took care of you and me." And it was -- all Reagan was trying to do was trying to make me feel better, and he did. And he did. He realized that it was a crushing thing that Nixon hadn't quite meant to say it, but Nixon had no

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gift at all for small talk. And, you know, probably somewhere in those inner recesses of that odd and wonderful brain of Reagan, he probably thought, "Well I do want to be President, and I will be for all I know." But it was an oddly comforting thing. And I, you know, I dismissed it, and I said, "Thank you, governor." And I don't know what Walter Ritter thought. I never discussed it with anybody. I put it in my book.

Naftali: Let's take a break. You want to take a moment to stand up?

Cannon: Yeah, I do --

Male Speaker

And we're good.

Naftali: Do you remember at all covering the Saturday Night Massacre?

Cannon: I don't. I was involved in it, but I don't have a particularly sharp memory of it. I think I might have talked to Ruckelshaus. I know I talked to Bill about it afterwards, many times. I might have talked to Eliot, too, but I don't know what I did that day. I've reconstructed it with two of them, and I've also talked to Robert Bork. The only thing that strikes me about it in retrospect -- this is particularly true of Ruckelshaus, but it was also true of Eliot, and to some degree of Bork -- was they all took the attitude, what else could we have done? Well, that's silly. You know, Ruckelshaus and Eliot could have agreed to fire Cox, and Bork could have agreed not to. They could have obviously done something differently, because each one of them did something differently. But Bill Ruckelshaus was one of the most cheerful political warriors I ever knew. He didn't -- -- you'd expected him to do what he did. He always did what he did. He wasn't one of these guys -- he did what he thought was right. Bill Ruckelshaus -- remember Bob Teeter, Bob Teeter the pollster? Bob Teeter and Bill were very close friends, and Bob said that he always thought Ruckelshaus would have beaten Birch Bayh, except that Ruckelshaus was amused by what would have outraged other politicians. Those were the days you could take different points of view on issues in different parts of the state. It's hard to do now. And Birch was very much against gun control in southern Indiana and was more for it in the cities, and Ruckelshaus would start laughing when he'd tell a different position instead of driving a point home. They were going around the state debating. And when Reagan was President, Ruckelshaus was in there for some reason. I think they brought him back to EPA or some -- whatever the reason was, they brought him back there. And Reagan, for some reason, keeps calling him Don. He thinks he's Don Rumsfeld, I guess, instead of Bill. And Jim Baker's passing notes, saying he's Bill. And so after they go out of the meeting, so Ruckelshaus asks Baker, "So how did Don do?" meaning himself. He was just a sweet,

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natural, honest, lovely guy. He wasn't going to do anything that he thought was illegal at any time. No President could have made him do something he thought was wrong.

Naftali: What was it like covering sort of the deathwatch for the Nixon White House? Tell us about any interactions you had with Al Haig in that period.

Cannon: Oh, it was a tough, tough period. It was tough for a lot of reasons. It was sad, and it also -- I was really -- our correspondent was a guy named Carroll Kilpatrick, who's a real great gentleman. They were supposed to tell Carroll that I was doing this behind the scenes coverage, and the editors never did, and so it was difficult for Carroll when I should have showed up out in San Clemente, which I felt badly about. But Al Haig, for some reason, either he may have been responding to an interview request, but my memory is he just called me in. And Al Haig had this -- we had this long conversation at his offices out at San Clemente. And it was about the time, I wrote a story beforehand that Theodore White called prescient, about how the White House was really over, how there was this, like it was post-White House, that everybody knew he wasn't going to be President any more. And the Secret Service knew it, and everybody knew it, and I had some good sources. And Haig, Haig talked to me. And what I remember Al Haig saying to me -- I'm not sure that these are the precise words, but the message was, "Don't worry, everything is going to be okay, that the government is going to run normally." And so there were lots of rumors that, you know, there might be some coup or that Nixon might do something extraordinary -- I don't think any of us knew what that meant, I certainly didn't -- to stay in power. And Haig was being the good shepherd. He was calm; he was in control. You know, you think about what happened to Haig afterward, and I remember, if you really fast-forward, when Haig was the secretary of state under Reagan, a colleague of mine and I were interviewing him, and one of the press people, Haig's press person, corrected him on something. It was the number of AWACs. We were talking about AWACs. There were two or it was three or something. And Haig just absolutely had the most mercurial explosion I've ever seen. The guy just went berserk. "You know, if I want to know something -- " he did this and it's like seeing a really bad family argument, you know, right in front of you, and neither of us knew what to say. We would never have -- because Haig misspoke on a point, we would -- the guy shouldn't have interrupted Haig, he should have just told us going out the building, that it was two rather than three. We weren't into playing "gotcha" journalism with the secretary of state on a small point, but Haig was just out of control.

And I did some reporting with doctors and everything when I was writing my book I did on Reagan, a book called "Reagan." It was just called "Reagan." And I came to the conclusion that this open heart surgery, or

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something that he had had caused some medical reaction, you know -- a number of people told me that -- and that he just, he was like two different people. But my recollection of him in the last days of Nixon was that he was a calming, steadying force, and he conveyed that to me. And he was telling me this because he knew I was going to say everything that he said to my editors. And he wanted me to. He wanted to send a message that we're not going to have any coup d'états, that we're going to have an orderly succession.

Naftali: You told one story last night that I want to preserve, which is that you were the pool correspondent, unusually, on the day that Nixon --

Cannon: Oh, yeah. Ziegler -- what had happened was that Nixon was going to New Orleans, but he was going to spend the weekend in Key Biscayne as he often did. And the White House, in those days, we did what you'd now say 24/7 -- not a phrase that was in vogue then -- body coverage of the President. You know, we had somebody with the President every moment of the time. And they were trying to get the White House correspondents to fly directly to New Orleans, and I don't know why -- leave Nixon alone for the weekend, not that you ever saw him down there anyway. And they put some people on the plane going to New Orleans who were briefers who knew something to encourage, and all the newspapers did it except "The New York Times" and "The Washington Post." We put somebody on the plane to New Orleans, I'm sure, but we also said, you're going to Key Biscayne and stay with him. "Fine, sir." And "The Washington Post" had been barred from all the press pools after Nixon was re-elected. Really stupid move, it was supposed to punish "The Washington Post." It instead punished our colleagues who had to do more pool duty. You know, it was no punishment for us.

But for some reason, I think "The New York Times" correspondent either -- either "The New York Times" correspondent had been in the pool on the way down -- I've been thinking about the story as I told it at dinner, and he couldn't be on the successive leg. But for whatever reason was, they had no pool on the leg from Miami to New Orleans. And in those days, the White House -- and I will say the Nixon press office, including Ziegler and everybody else, were scrupulous about the pool coverage. They didn't -- you had an agreement that was one newspaper correspondent, one wire service, and they didn't -- at no time that I was there was that ever violated. And so I was the pool. That's the only time that I was ever the pool in the second -- it was the only time I was ever the pool in the second Nixon administration on anything. And if you only could pick one pool, I guess it was a pretty good pool to be on, because it's a routine thing going from the airport to the auditorium, and all of a sudden, you see Ziegler and Nixon on the steps. And Nixon gave Ziegler a shove. I've forgotten what the controversy, what they were arguing about,

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what Nixon wanted Ziegler to say that he wouldn't say. And he goes down two or three or four stairs and I wrote it up and went into the auditorium, and here we have Diane Sawyer, who was then the number two person in the Nixon press office, trying to convince everybody that Nixon had just embraced Ron Ziegler, that he hadn't shoved him. I didn't -- I mean, hell, she was being paid to do that. I mean, that's what she had to do. I don't fault her, not at all. But it's funny; I can't remember at all what the controversy was. But I know that Nixon was exasperated and -- because Ziegler had misled me so many times, I told people, that's one of the few times in my life I ever identified with Richard Nixon.

Naftali: Jerry Warren was different?

Cannon: Jerry Warren was quite wonderful. Jerry Warren was number two person, and Jerry Warren told me once that, after this was over, that he had realized that he wasn't ever going to be an insider in Watergate, that nobody was ever going to tell him what was going on in Watergate. But then, on the other hand, he had free reign to do a good job on everything else, you know, on any other aspect of the Nixon Presidency. And the Presidency went on, I mean, it wasn't, you know, Watergate was -- -- Watergate was terrible and encompassing, but the business of the country went on, and Jerry Warren was very good. He was very truthful. He tried to tell you information. He stood up there and took the rap for Ziegler on many days. That's a thankless job anyway, and I think it must have been very, very hard on him to do it. I consider him an honorable person. I don't think he -- he certainly never misled me, and I don't know that he ever misled anyone.

Naftali: What did you cover on August 9, 1974, what aspect of it?

Cannon: I was writing about Nixon, who, I think -- what became that chapter in the book, "Nixon, Whose Trust Was in Himself," why Nixon went -- I don't remember what day I wrote it for, but I was writing about -- -- the character flaws of the President that had brought him to his demise. I truly don't remember a word of it.

Greg Cumming: Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan were completely opposites in personality. How would, with them being so different, what was their relationship like?

Cannon: There's a lot of permutations of the Nixon/Reagan relationship. Before you get into relationships -- well, let's do it in three parts: history, policy, and personality. The history, you have to remember that Reagan is a Democrat. He comes to the conservative movement and the Republican Party from -- as a disillusioned Democrat. His view is -- -- "The Democrats left me." I've examined this at length in my book. He left the

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Democrats and the Democrats left him. There are some ways in which it was he changed, and there's other ways in which his party changed. But in the 1940s, when Nixon is elected to the House for two terms, '46 and '48, and then elected to the Senate in 1950, and then elected on the ticket with Eisenhower as Vice President, all this time, Ronald Reagan is a Democrat. He's out there -- somebody asked me on this "The Washington Post" thing about some rumor that Reagan had voted for Clinton, and I said, no way, that Reagan was a party man, whatever party he was in. And when he was a Democrat, he was out there campaigning for all the Democrats. I have a speech somewhere, a wonderful speech he did for Hubert Humphrey, and of course Nixon was the nemesis of the Democrats in the '50s. So his history is as an opponent of Nixon's. I think that's important to keep in mind. Because he's not the lifelong Republican that Richard Nixon is.

Okay, the policies -- Reagan becomes a de facto Republican. He doesn't change registration until '62. He becomes a de facto Republican in 1960, and the candidate that he's for is Nixon. He's a Democrat for Nixon. Reagan made much of afterward, and much of it -- I asked him about it. Reagan did it partly because he'd been in California, where, as I've said in an earlier part of this oral history, there were these professional Democrat organizations that came out in election years that nobody had ever heard of, and then were Democrats or Republican. Reagan said to me he didn't want to become a professional Democrat, you know, for Republican candidates. So he changed his party registration in '62. He changed it during the course of a speech where, as he said, this registrar comes up to him. He's told this story many times. But it's a speech he's giving for Richard Nixon for running for governor for California. So, and then you have the Vietnam War, and largely, Reagan gets into the Vietnam War through the way a lot of Republicans newly minted and otherwise get into it, through criticism of the way Johnson was conducting this war. And Reagan becomes -- he's largely a supporter of Nixon's more controversial moves, the mining of Haiphong Harbor and other controversies. He has a complicated view about Nixon and the Vietnamization of the war and the subsequent withdrawal, which enabled a Communist victory in Vietnam. But -- and he had problems, as a conservative, with Nixon's overture to China, which was not, you know, embraced by all the conservatives. A conservative congressman from this county famously said he didn't mind Nixon going to China; he just didn't want him coming back. So you have a sort of a history of thesis and antithesis, of tension and support of him being aligned, and with and against Nixon. But I think it's fair to say that, when all was said and done, Reagan considered Nixon a master on foreign policy, and that he respected him on foreign policy, and that he looked up to him. And Nixon, during this period of Reagan's Presidency, early -- coincides with the period of Nixon rehabilitation, so Nixon is sending Reagan these letters. I reproduce one letter that he sends, Nixon sends him, when Reagan is newly in the Presidency talking about different

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candidates for office and running down George Schultz among other things. And I don't know how much Reagan paid attention to this and how much that he didn't, but I do know that he, over the years, did talk to Nixon occasionally and on foreign policy. And whenever I talk to one of the Reagan people who were close to it -- see, the Reagan White House was generally very guarded about any conversation Reagan had with Nixon, because they thought, I think Nixon would have liked, at that point, for it to have been more public than it was. But they didn't, Reagan's political people never thought that a conversation with Nixon was helpful to Ronald Reagan, but they always emphasized foreign policy. I think it was foreign policy that -- and if you look at the Reagan diaries, Reagan has a number of -- and the Reagan letters and, you know, the letters in his own hand. Reagan has a number of correspondences with people where he says that he supported Nixon on these foreign policy decisions, although he really didn't on China.

Stylistically, and I think it's more than style; I think as personalities they were utter, utter contrasts. Reagan liked people. I mean, he liked them a little bit maybe in the abstract. You know, there's a song in "Hair" about that. And he wasn't warm and cuddly up close. Martin Anderson once wrote that Reagan could be warmly ruthless. But Reagan loved people as an audience, and he was greatly confident in his own ability to connect with the people, you know? He said to a radio reporter on the eve of his election, when he was asked what do people see in you? "Would you laugh," he said, "If I said that people look at me and they see themselves?" That's the way Reagan thought. And I told this story earlier about how I finally got Reagan to say how much he deplored the way Nixon gave this line in this speech when Haldeman and Ehrlichman resigned. And once or twice, we got Reagan to say something like that. But Reagan was very, very circumspect about criticizing any member of his party. He was particularly circumspect about criticizing the President of the United States, unless Gerald Ford happened to be President and he was in the way. And I think that I know enough about Reagan and the way he thought about Nixon to think that he just didn't have it as a political personality. Reagan connected. He respected people in politics who connected with people, and there was some way, some way in which he -- some way in which Nixon rubbed him wrong, even though he supported him.

And there's a contradiction here, because he supports him all through the Watergate thing. You know, he's one of the last -- he believes him. He really believes Nixon. And I remember asking Bob Teeter, the pollster. He was polling for Ford, and when Reagan said of the Watergate people, defending them, he says, "They're not criminals at heart." I said, "Will that hurt Reagan with the American people?" Bob said, "Oh, no, it will just prove to them that he doesn't know what's going on. It won't hurt him at

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all." And it didn't, but Reagan was very partisan. On one level, he wasn't partisan at all. On one level, the most important level, he could reach out and make a deal with the devil. He could certainly make a deal with Tip O'Neill or he could make a deal with Mikhail Gorbachev, and he was friends with the publisher of "The Washington Post." But on another level, he was quite partisan, and so he assumed -- he's not alone in this, Harry Truman assumed this -- that anybody that was out to get a member of his party was out to get him or that, you know, that people were really out to get Nixon, that there had to be some political angle to Watergate. And I'm trying to remember who it was -- I can't. But somebody in the next, the Reagan staff in Sacramento tried to stop Reagan from -- they wanted Reagan to give the sort of equivalent of "I don't know what's going on, but I'm sure the authorities will find out," you know, answer, and Reagan wouldn't do it. Reagan would say, "Well, I don't think those people are really criminals at heart." And it's not a very satisfactory answer, but it's the best I can do.

Greg Cumming: It hits a couple of points, because there's been critics who have mentioned that Reagan's only reason for supporting Nixon during the Watergate era was political. In other words, maintain Nixon in the White House through '76 and open it up for Reagan to run in '76. Do you place any credence in that?

Cannon: Well, I think that's an interesting point. Reagan expected, as did we all, that Nixon would finish his term in 1976. And I'm quite sure that Reagan was going to run for President. And then, all of a sudden, he isn't President anymore, you know, and -- but do I think that Reagan supported Nixon in some calculated way because he wanted to keep him as President so Gerald Ford wouldn't -- I think that's a nutty idea. In the first place, Reagan didn't think in terms of that kind of calculation, but you can prove that that's wrong. Nobody needs me to prove it's wrong. Nobody expected Nixon to resign. Nobody expected Richard Nixon to resign the office until a few weeks before he did, before there was the smoking gun. There was no expectation, even by Nixon's enemies, you know, real enemies. And while I don't think that those of us at "The Washington Post" were enemies, even though I know he thought we were, nobody at "The Washington Post" expected Nixon to resign. So the notion that Reagan is sitting there plotting, figuring I'm going to keep Nixon in office is ahistorical. Nobody is expecting Nixon to leave office, so you're not, you know, you're not really -- no, Reagan was reflexively defending Nixon. The Republican President is under attack. It's, you know, maybe some fire there, but a lot of it is probably smoke, and I'll defend him.

Now, where Reagan can be faulted, I think, I do fault him, is for his treatment of Ford. You talk about not seeing the speck in your eye and the beam in someone else's, Reagan with Ford, Reagan, who had given Nixon

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the benefit of every doubt didn't give Ford the benefit of any doubt. That's because Reagan wanted to run for President, and Reagan, who is a very charitable, was a very charitable man, was singularly charitable and un-demonic and un-conspiratorial, was terrible in the way he treated Ford. And I was with him when Ford appeared in the campaign appearance in 1976 in Los Angeles. I'll tell you, the body language of Romney endorsing John McCain this year or of Kennedy endorsing Carter in 1980 was warmer and more lovable than the body language of Ronald Reagan toward Gerald Ford. Gerald Ford -- -- forgiving person that he is, completely forgave Reagan, even though, I think at the end of his life he knew, and I interviewed him twice in the end of his life, he knew that Reagan had not helped him in '76 as he should have. And I remember asking President Ford in '80, when he was no longer President Ford, in Michigan, near the end of the campaign, how you can be so enthusiastically campaigning for somebody who didn't campaign for you in this way? And Ford said, and I think that's the way he thought about our country, he said, "Consider the choice." The choice is between Reagan and Jimmy Carter. And Ford had no doubt that Reagan was the better choice. And so he was going to do what was right, which he usually did, the dropping of Rockefeller from his ticket aside.

Greg Cumming: Was there any serious consideration in the Nixon White House that Reagan would be a good Vice Presidential running mate after Agnew leaves and the --

Cannon: No, I covered the Vice Presidential thing. I think Reagan was never considered. And he wouldn't -- first of all, he wouldn't have done it. But Reagan never thought of himself as Vice President of anything. Reagan was too hot and controversial a political commodity. I mean, first of all, I don't think Nixon, who tended to turn to -- he didn't turn to people who he thought outshone him, would not have ever considered Reagan anyway. But secondly, they were dealing with a small universe on the Vice Presidential selection. That is to say, they had to get somebody who could muster approval, who could get congressional -- be approved by Congress. Reagan would never have been approved by a Democratic Congress. And Connally, I think, seemed like the answer. I mean, I don't think -- I think, to Nixon. I don't think that -- you know, Ford was chosen because he was the compromise who could be approved. He could win; he could be confirmed. They had a real problem. I mean, the Nixon people had a real problem. Nixon could be faulted for choosing a weak Vice President in Agnew, but he can't be faulted for choosing a guy who was a crook. Nixon didn't know that. Nixon didn't know anything about Agnew. Nixon's got all these other problems. Then all of a sudden, he's got this problem. It's both a problem and an opportunity to have a new Vice President, but he's very limited. He's very limited because he's got to pick somebody that can get approved by the Congress. And the Democrats I'm sure at this point

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were thinking, whoever gets approved may very well wind up as President, and we don't want somebody who might be tough to beat, you know, as President. So Nixon did not have a lot of running room on replacement for Agnew, and that was not through any fault of his own.

Greg Cumming: One last question for you.

Cannon: Sure.

Greg Cumming: October 29, 1970, in San Jose, there's an event with Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon. You were there. Can you describe that rally? And it's been variously reported at different times.

Cannon: Well, a movie hasn't been made yet of it. The line that I used for something else appropriate -- the bar scene from Star Wars would apply. I had come down. I was covering the campaign, and I was covering the campaign for the Ritter bureau in Washington, but when the campaign was in California, I had special responsibility for the Ritter newspapers, the biggest of which was in San Jose. Now, they had a lot of people that were out there covering it. I was covering; I was with Reagan. I had been traveling with Reagan the few days before the San Jose event, and by pre-arrangement, I was shifting off into the Nixon campaign. It was hard in those days -- I'm sure it's harder now, for a reporter who was not a member of -- if you were a member of the White House Press Corps, it was an easy thing to switch over and cover Reagan. There wasn't any particular security of any amount. But it was hard to switch the other way, because you had to have been vetted by the Secret Service, and you had to pick up your pass and, you know, to do this in an event time table was difficult. And I remember that I did this, and I was switching from Reagan to Nixon.

And I had a suitcase. I have a vivid memory, but this gets a little ahead of the story, but as the bus is leaving, I see this suitcase which was being transferred from one bus to another, the Reagan bus, you know, press bus to the Nixon out on the tarmac, and I think, "Oh, my God." And the guy named Ray Zook who was the travel guy at the White House sees this suitcase out there, and he just figures this. He just figures that I'm yelling from the back, though I'm sure he didn't hear me. Ray just goes and grabs the suitcase and throws it in the bus, not even in the travel thing below the bus. He throws it on the front seat on the bus, which I'm glad he did, otherwise I would have never seen any of that again. I go out because of the fact that I'm transferring from Reagan to Nixon. The arrangement is that I'm to be transferred with the press pool. I don't know what I even knew what the press pool was then, I just knew, go from X to Y, so I exit with Nixon's party. I'm as close to Nixon as almost as I am to you. And we're going past and we're getting on the press bus, and I see this crowd

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and this melee and these things, and I watch and Nixon gets up on this car and says, you know, gives them this "V," you know, for victory sign. Now, he was quoted afterward as saying something to the order of that's what they hate, you know, or they see that and that's what they -- and I didn't hear that. But I didn't hear much of anything. There was just this huge roar of this crowd and this melee, you know? And I'm like in an out of body experience, and I'm watching this, except I'm not, I'm part of it. And Nixon is in it. I said, "What the hell is he doing up there," I'm thinking.

And we get in the press bus, the White House press bus, and it's got on it, conveniently, "White House Press Bus," and we're driving out of there. It's going like a bat out of hell, and rocks are coming and hitting the -- I remember Mary McGrory is sitting at the seat right in front of me. This rock, you know, slams into the thing and it doesn't quite shatter the window, but it really, it really had a waking effect. We were hit with an awful lot of rocks. And then it gets to El Toro, what was then the El Toro Marine Base, and Ziegler gives this briefing -- two minute warning here, so I'm going to try to make this story, wrap this story up real fast. Ziegler gave what was a very good briefing on it, and I'm phoning the story in, and I hear all of these people are saying these things. The White House people are denouncing these demonstrators and violent demonstrators. Poor George Murphy, who didn't have a clue to anything is asked, "Will this help your campaign?" And he said, "It can't hurt." Ronald Reagan is asked about this. Ronald Reagan gives a perfect answer. He says, "I deplore violence at any time, directed against any candidate," or just one of these beautiful civics book, textbook statements that just came out of his mouth, and everybody else got creamed for trying to supposedly exploit this violence, I thought unfairly. I mean, Nixon didn't create this, even if he did give them a signal, and poor Murphy didn't create it. The only guy who got any benefit from this whole thing was Ronald Reagan. And all Ronald Reagan is doing is attending this rally and then saying afterwards some textbook thing that Nixon would have been well advised to say.

Greg Cumming: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your time and your answers.