Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Donald Rumsfeld
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: First of all, thanks so much for doing this. You have a unique position in the Ford story because you're one of a dwindling band who can talk with authority about Ford's years in Congress, and indeed, were instrumental in his becoming Minority Leader.

You came in in '62...

Rumsfeld: Right. I worked in the House of Representatives from 1957 to 1960. One of the Congressmen I worked for was Bob Griffin of Michigan. So there was an earlier connection.

Smith: So you had contact with Ford earlier.

Rumsfeld: Slightly. Gerald Ford was way up there and I was staff assistant to a couple of Republican Congressmen. I did, however, have an interesting connection though to Congressman Ford; one of the pilots with me in the Navy, Jim Dean, who was shot down by the Chinese, was from Grand Rapids. His wife went to Representative Ford when I was working on the Hill and came to see me. So I had an awareness of Gerald Ford back then. Some years later, 1974, Henry Kissinger and I were going into the Peoples' Republic of China after we left Vladivostok, where President Ford had met with General Secretary Brezhnev. I was going through some papers and there was my friend Jim Dean's name. Kissinger had been asked by the government to raise the question as to whether Dean's body was found or whether he was in prison and if so, if they would release him.

Smith: You were part of a pretty impressive group of Young Turks, who arrived on the Hill in '60, '62, '64, many of whom went on to great things in the party and nationally. Tell us about those people. You had people like John Lindsay and Charlie Goodell and, of course, Mel Laird had been there a bit by then. Bob Dole came on in '64.

Rumsfeld: No, Dole came in ’60. He was two years before me.

Smith: ’60 – okay.

Rumsfeld: Our offices were next to each other.

Smith: Were they really?

Rumsfeld: We’d walk back and forth to votes when they’d ring the bells.

Smith: Is it safe to say he was more of a rock-ribbed conservative in those days?

Rumsfeld: Dole was a reasonable conservative. He had a wonderful sense of humor that never really showed in his presidential campaign. The American people never really got to know him, I don’t think. Candidate Dole for President was a different Dole than I knew as my friend next door when we were in Congress.

Smith: The point is, the Republican Party, and for that matter the Democratic Party, fifty years ago, unlike today, each party had a left and a right wing. There are obviously different portions, but the Republican Party in the early ‘60s – the center of gravity was in the Midwest. You were just beginning to make some inroads in the South.

Rumsfeld: And the ’64 election, when we lost so many people in the North, and we picked up four or five seats in Alabama and several other places. I think one in Mississippi.

Smith: How difficult was Goldwater in your district to sell?

Rumsfeld: Difficult. My district was heavily Jewish. It was in the northern part of Chicago: Rogers Park, Evanston, Wilmette, Glencoe and Skokie, where the Nazis used to demonstrate against the Jewish community. Barry Goldwater, despite his name, was a concern to the Jewish community in the United States. A wonderful man, personally. I enjoyed working with Barry Goldwater. I supported him. Of course, when it was over, I won, but not by a lot and we ended up with only 140 Republican members in the House of Representatives in January, 1965, after that election. And there were so many Democrats, as I recall, some of them had to sit on our side of the aisle in the House. It was a reverse landslide from a Republican perspective.

Smith: So, you were thinking about making some changes in terms of the leadership?

Rumsfeld: Well, it actually started before then. Bob Griffin came to me after I'd been elected in 1962, even before I'd even been sworn in, and told me there was going to be a Republican caucus. He said "We're going to run my friend Jerry Ford for GOP Conference Chairman against Charles Hoeven of Iowa." He asked me to help round up votes for Ford among freshmen Congressmen. So I became a rabble rousing bomb thrower before I was even sworn in. I went out and tried to recruit, and did, recruit some votes for Gerald Ford. Of course, it did not make my delegation chairman very happy – Les Arends, who was the number two under Charles Halleck, Hoeven being number three after Arends in the Republican leadership hierarchy.

Smith: How do you win a race like that?

Rumsfeld: Those leadership races are tough; they all know each other well. I was the vote counter for Ford. Goodell, Griffin, and I were organizing for Ford. I kept the vote count on members of the House – the 140 Republicans. I either had them recorded as being for Ford, leaning Ford, unknown, undecided, leaning Halleck, or for Halleck. We checked the members regularly. I gave the report I kept to the Ford Library. Have you ever seen this document? It's in my handwriting. It's interesting. In fact, I had the book copies. I sent Ford the original.

Rumsfeld: It went to the Ford Library, because President Ford asked me repeatedly for it. It shows our conclusion as 40 each member.

Smith: And did people lie?

Rumsfeld: Oh, my goodness – yes! And of course, we triangulated, we'd have three or four different people check on each one of them to find out where they were.

Smith: What do you promise?

Rumsfeld: I think we were in the committee room – a big room. Back in those days they had kind of a condescending attitude about women members of Congress, so they had three women Representatives be the vote counters. The three female members of Congress sat at the front with the ballot box. Every member

walked up and dropped his or her vote in. There were 140 Republican members elected. As I recall there were 139 in attendance, but when they counted, there were 141 votes. Not a good thing. It was awkward. They had to have a complete new vote and very carefully watch as people were putting their ballots in the box.

Smith: No hanging chads.

Rumsfeld: That's right. Ford was elected by a one, two or three vote margin. Very close.

Smith: Why?

Rumsfeld: Why? Because when you suffer a defeat like that in '64…First, a lot of people don't want to serve if it is that one-sided. If you are in a very small minority, you don't have much voice; your votes don't make much difference. The goal was to try to put in office somebody who would be comfortable and hospitable to Republican members offering constructive alternative proposals that would be generally incorporated in motions to recommit, to give Republicans an opportunity to put forward Republican positions. And the feeling was that the Halleck hierarchy was not interested in that. Charlie was a decent man. He was intelligent and had been effective in his own way. But, the Congress had Everett Dirksen, the senior member of the Illinois delegation in the Senate, and Halleck in the House. They had the Dirksen-Halleck press conferences every week. We thought that Gerald Ford would present a face for the Republican Party that would give us a better chance of increasing our numbers. Why be in Congress unless you are striving to be the majority party? Why would you not want to accomplish that? We felt we would have a much better chance with Gerald Ford.

Smith: It has been suggested to us by more than one individual that at least a subliminal factor was, Dirksen was a kind of guy who almost got along too well with LBJ. That Dirksen from time to time was perceived to perhaps be in the president's pocket – or at least a little bit too friendly, or too willing to make concessions.

Rumsfeld: I've heard that. He was a master legislator. He even managed to help me get a bill passed in the overwhelming Democratic Congress. It was legislation to

celebrate Youth Christian Temperance Week. I had the Women's Christian Temperance Union in my district and they wanted to have this done. I put in the legislation and Everett Dirksen was the only Republican who was chairman of a Senate committee when they were in the minority. Every other committee except for the one that decided what would be celebrated in our country. He was a master. His saying was, "The oil can is mightier than the sword."

Smith: Woodrow Wilson had a wonderful expression. He found it very annoying, that there was Better Homes Week and Gardens Weeks, and Be Kind to Your Animal Week, and Wilson suggested they ought to pass a Mind Your Own Business Week.

What was it about Ford that inspired – because I assume this was not an ideological contest, per se – more generational?

Rumsfeld: It was clearly generational, and presentational. But Gerald Ford was the member we could find who we believed could win, who had the chance of beating Congressman Halleck.

Smith: Were there others? For example, over the years it has been suggested Mel Laird might have seen himself as a candidate.

Rumsfeld: No. Mel ran for conference chairman to replace Ford, and, as I recall, defeated Peter Frelinghuysen for conference chairman when Jerry Ford gave up the conference chairmanship to run for minority leader. Everyone liked Ford. He was respected. He was a serious person. He didn't spend a lot of time on the floor of the House of Representatives and we had some trouble because some members didn't know him. He'd been around a while, but he spent a lot of his time on the Appropriations Committee and the Defense Appropriations Committee particularly.

Smith: And I assume those feelings basically existed on the other side of aisle, as well, toward Ford?

Rumsfeld: Sure.

Smith: I mean, friendship, respect.

Rumsfeld: Yes. Of course, it was a different time. I had as many friends on the other side of the aisle as I did on the Republican side. We all did. I'd go down and play paddle ball with Tiger Teague of Texas and Albert Thomas of Texas and John Dingle of Michigan, all Democrats.

Smith: It's interesting to hear Alan Greenspan talk about some of the factors that led to the change. He said one of them, he thinks, is the jet plane. Because now members from the West Coast, instead of bringing their families to live in D.C. – that's something that you hear over and over again – that, in fact, families were brought to the District.

Rumsfeld: And much less so now. You try to have a gathering for an evening celebration for some purpose and to include members of the House or Senate on a Thursday or Friday or Saturday or Sunday, you don't get anybody. They're not here, the overwhelming majority. Unless they live in Virginia or Maryland, they're not here. That's one thing. The jet aircraft.

Another thing, I think, is the gerrymandering that has been developed to a fine art in our country. Today there are relatively few Congressional districts that are considered contestable. The threats that members feel tend to be in the Democratic Party from the left, and in the Republican Party the threat comes from the right. That tends to polarize the situation, and you don't have this pressure, or natural political process that led people to work things out in the middle and to try to fashion compromises that would make sense for the country. So you end up electing people who tend to be most representative of their political party as opposed to their district. That's, I think, maybe as or even possibly more important than the jet aircraft.

Smith: One senses that for Ford, pragmatism was not a dirty word. Consensus was not surrender. That at the end of the day, and I've heard him say this countless times - at the end of the day, people sent you here to get things done. And you worked as hard as you could to advocate your position, but you were willing to cut a deal most of the time. And that does seem to be largely absent today.

Rumsfeld: There is certainly much less of it today.

Smith: The amount of time you spend raising money clearly is different from…

Rumsfeld: Oh my goodness, I should have added that. These members, they have to raise millions of dollars now. And every day, or so, they have to dedicate a portion of their day to raising money. I never had to do that. You only run every other year, but these people are campaigning twenty-four months in every term. It is a different environment. And, of course, Congressman Ford developed very close friendships with people like George Mahon. When people criticized George Mahon, who Jerry Ford sat next to hour after hour on the Appropriations Sub-committee, Ford was uncomfortable. He didn't like it.

Smith: There are wonderful stories. He and Hale Boggs would debate each other at the National Press Club and they would ride down together, decide on the way, "What are we going to debate today?" They'd have their debate, and then they'd go and have lunch and go back to the Hill.

Rumsfeld: Hugh Scott and I co-chaired the Republican Truth Squad in the 1968 election. Hubert Humphrey was running against Richard Nixon. We had a plane and followed Hubert Humphrey everywhere he went. He would make a statement and then he would get ready to go to his airplane, but he'd always stop by and say hello. We had nice visits, and then we'd have a press conference and we'd beat up on Humphrey. But it was always in a gentlemanly, but substantive way – where we would disagree with each other, but we were not disagreeable.

Smith: I think two weeks before the '76 election, President Ford visited Humphrey in the hospital and was told, "You're going to get some votes out of the Humphrey household."

Rumsfeld: Is that right?

Smith: Yes.

Rumsfeld: He was a wonderful man, Hubert Humphrey. He was a happy warrior. He really was. He had an excellent sense of humor.

Smith: What was the emerging Republican position, if there was such a thing, on Vietnam during the mid to latter part of the pre-Nixon presidency? How did you grapple with that?

Rumsfeld: In the House?

Smith: In the House.

Rumsfeld: It was ambivalence and a mixed feeling. It was a feeling that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution that President Johnson carried around in his pocket and waved under people's noses as having given him the authority to do that which he was doing, was a stretch. It was a feeling that he was unfair in the 1964 campaign against Goldwater. He had the ad where a little girl was picking petals off the daisy with a mushroom cloud behind her, implying that there would be a nuclear holocaust if Barry Goldwater were elected. Those of us on the Republican side felt that was unfair, and over the edge. I don't remember the precise words, and I don't want to be unfair, but he clearly left the impression that if he were elected, he would not increase the troops in Vietnam and that Barry Goldwater, if he were elected, would.

I remember going over to Cam Ranh Bay, as a member of Government Operations Sub-committee on military operations, and talking to the people who were building this port in Cam Ranh Bay. We asked them, "What's the port going to accommodate?" They said, "It will accommodate 500,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam." And there was Johnson saying just the opposite. I don't know what we had then, I think we had less than a hundred thousand troops there in that election period.

The feeling was that President Johnson was not being straightforward with the American people, and that is something that many were uncomfortable with. I was uncomfortable. We did not want to be unsupportive of our country or the men and women serving over there, and for the most part we were supportive. But there was clearly discomfort with the president.

Smith: Do you have a sense of what his relationship with Ford was?

Rumsfeld: No. Except that he made some quite negative, derogatory remarks about Gerald Ford playing football without a helmet, and that type of thing.

Smith: What about Ford's intelligence?

Rumsfeld: Well, that is interesting. I'm seventy-six years old now, so I've lived a long time and most, if not all, of the Republican presidents in my adult lifetime have been criticized as being not very swift. Think of Dwight Eisenhower – I don't know how people got away with it, but they complained about his syntax and played too much golf, and wasn't a clever Eastern elite. Here's a man – think what Eisenhower did for this country. Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford, they made fun of him not being smart. Gerald Ford went to University of Michigan and Yale law school and was an accomplished, knowledgeable person about the things that he paid attention to – like the budget. He probably knew more about the federal budget than any president in the history of the country.

Smith: Do you think there is a bias, a cultural bias – sometimes when I was in Michigan, I came to the conclusion that people make the mistake of thinking that because some people, say in Michigan, talk slow, they think slow. That there is that – some of it is Eastern elitism – no doubt about it.

Rumsfeld: Of course. I'm from the Midwest, so I would not think that way.

Smith: No, I'm saying outsiders looking at Midwesterners.

Rumsfeld: Yes, I hear what you're saying. But think of Ronald Reagan. His letters came out and people saw in his hand writing what a fine, thoughtful, insightful person he was. It was Clark Clifford who called Reagan an amiable dunce. And George W. Bush went to Yale and then to Harvard Business School – obviously an intelligent person.

Smith: We now know that Reagan made a career out of being underestimated. I'm wondering if there was anything of that in Ford as well.

Rumsfeld: No. He was straightforward. There wasn't guile there. He was what he was. He was a wonderful human being.

Smith: Did it hurt him – the Chevy Chase and all of this? It's one thing to have a thick hide, but did you sense that it hurt him?

Rumsfeld: Sure it hurt him. I was with him in Salzburg when he got to the top of the stairway in the rain, going down from the airplane, going to see President Sadat of Egypt. Always a gentleman, the President took Betty by the arm. Then an Air Force sergeant handed him an umbrella. He ended up going down a long slippery set of stairs, holding onto an umbrella and Betty instead of the rail. And here is this man who is a graceful athlete - I played tennis with him, I skied with him, I knew his capabilities. He didn't get mad at me, as chief of staff of the White House. He didn't get mad at the Air Force sergeant. When we got to the house and went inside he said "Rummy, I am so mad at myself." That was typical of Jerry Ford. He didn't take it out on others. He knew it would be the dominant story of his meeting with Sadat.

Smith: In fact, I think Kennerly tells the story because he was there. Needless to say, a number of people pointed a finger at the photographers and the president said, "Well, of course they took the picture. If they hadn't, they would have lost their jobs."

Rumsfeld: Exactly.

Smith: Can you imagine Lyndon Johnson reacting in that way? He always wanted to be Speaker of the House.

Rumsfeld: Yes, he said that and it made sense for a person who had served there that long. On the other hand, I don't think he thought twice about accepting the vice presidency. His horizon, until he was asked to be vice president, was to be Speaker of the House. Fair enough. When he was asked to be vice president, he didn't say no, I want to be Speaker of the House. He said yes.

Smith: Can you think of a moment, post Watergate break in, obviously, pre-August 8th, when you concluded, if you did, the Nixon presidency was unlikely to survive?

Rumsfeld: Oh, I know precisely when it was. I was living in Belgium. I was U.S. Ambassador to NATO. I didn't understand French or Flemish, and therefore

the local television went over my head, and papers in English arrived late. I was off with my family someplace and my wife got a *Herald Tribune*, and started reading it. She didn't want to read it in the car because our children were there and we had a young son, and he'd met President Nixon, and she didn't want to stir up the youngsters. She said to me, "You've got to stop and read this." I said, "Fine, in a while," and we kept driving. We were heading towards the house of the Belgium Ambassador to NATO, Andre de Staercke, in the South of France. Finally we stopped. I read the paper and I knew. It was before any announcement had been made. I think it was the day before Nixon resigned. That night the paper indicated to the country he was going to resign the next day and that Vice President Ford would become president the next day at noon.

Smith: So the smoking gun tape had been released.

Rumsfeld: Apparently. I missed those tapes and hearings being overseas. I didn't follow much of it.

Smith: One of the things we found in doing these interviews, is how many roads lead back to Fred Buzhardt. Mel Laird told us, because he'd been Buzhardt's counsel at the Pentagon. And when Laird came back in the Nixon White House.

Rumsfeld: Buzhardt had been Laird's counsel.

Smith: Yeah. But when Laird came back into the Nixon White House, somewhat reluctantly, he hadn't been there a month when Buzhardt saw him and said to him, "I've been listening to these tapes. The president is into it up to his neck."

Rumsfeld: Is that right?

Smith: And then we asked Al Haig, because I've always assumed Haig listened to some of the tapes. I've assumed that Haig listened to the smoking gun tape. Haig said no. He said, "Fred Buzhardt gave me some expert advice. He said don't ever get caught alone in a room with a tape." Haig insists that the initiative, "on the pardon," that Haig's document with all of the options, was

something drafted, not at his instigation, and he claimed not at the president's instigation, but something that Fred Buzhardt on his own crafted…

Rumsfeld: Interesting. See, I missed that whole chapter of our history.

Smith: You were summoned back, when?

Rumsfeld: I was. Well, I read the paper and then we drove to Ambassador de Staercke's house, who was the dean of the North Atlantic Council. My secretary had called and said that Vice President Ford's office called and wants you to return to Washington, D.C. fast. So now, it would have been probably five or six o'clock at night, European time. So I had my office at NATO in Belgium make arrangements for me to fly back. They ended up sending a military plane to the Nice airport early the next morning which took me to London. Then I took a commercial flight to Dulles and landed at 1:05 PM, one hour after Ford had become president. I was met by someone from Ford's office with an envelope and a note saying I was to be chairman of this transition team - Ford's transition to the presidency.

Smith: Let me go back with one question. Given your long standing and very close relationship, during Ford's brief vice presidency, those eight or nine months, did you ever have a discussion with him about the possibility of his becoming president?

Rumsfeld: No, not that I recall. It was such a wild thought that a president of the United States would resign. It had never happened. I would go back to the U.S. every six weeks or so from Belgium to work with Secretary Schlesinger and Secretary Kissinger and occasionally see Vice President Ford, see people on the Hill and figure out what I needed to do at NATO to fit in with U.S. policy. Occasionally, I'd go see Howard Baker, who was a good friend, or Bryce Harlow. They were the two people I might touch base with.

Smith: The Wise Man.

Rumsfeld: Yes. Occasionally, I remember seeing George Schultz, who was a very close friend. I remember being with him one night and Clark McGregor was there. We were having a dinner with Milton Friedman who was a friend. Every time

the subject came up you could see it progressing from not much to something, and then to something quite significant. But I don't remember ever discussing it with Vice President Ford. I can remember distinctly talking to Bryce Harlow and Howard Baker.

Smith: So you came back on the 9th – did you see the president on the 9th?

Rumsfeld: I did. I was ushered into the White House and told that he wanted me to manage his transition to the presidency. He told me who would be the participants. They were, as I recall, Bill Scranton, who served in the House with President Ford. Rogers Morton, who served with both of us in the House. Jack Marsh, who also served with both of us in the House, and who had served on Ford's vice presidential staff, and whose office had been just down the hall from me. He was a Democrat – dear friend, and fine man. President Ford asked me to get going.

Smith: Let me ask you because there is this extraordinary scene when the swearing in took place – Leon Parma was one of the people who was sort of shoehorned into the room with some of the Congressional folks and he noticed, he told us, and other people have confirmed it - once the ceremony ended, there was a receiving line and then there was a reception in the state dining room. And he said you could watch the Nixon people just peel away and go back to their offices.

Rumsfeld: Interesting.

Smith: And it raises the larger question of how you were going to integrate the existing White House staff with whatever newcomers there were going to be. One senses that the president wanted to be fair to people who shouldn't be tarred indiscriminately with the brush of Watergate. And yet, there was political pressure to make changes.

Rumsfeld: He felt strongly, that he did not want people to be unfairly treated, or to be rushed out under a cloud or a taint or an impression of possible wrongdoing. It was a very complex, multidimensional set of problems he faced. The whole time there was a special prosecutor that was active. He had a large staff and was busy trying to find out who'd done something wrong. Everyone in the

place, including the vice president, who'd been selected by Richard Nixon, and the vice president's staff, and the White House staff, all had been there. And the question was, as Howard Baker said, "What did they know? And when did they know it?" And nobody knew for sure.

By then, of course, Erlichman, Haldeman, Colson, and Mitchell were gone. It was a tainted White House. It was a discredited White House and the Gerald Ford was suddenly the president, but the tainted White House was still there and he was sitting on top of it. He felt, and I think rightly, like he had stepped into a flying airplane and he didn't know the crew. The ones he knew he liked, he'd been around them in the House. He had no inclination to think badly of people, generally. And he felt a dilemma. He felt the need for continuity and reassurance in the country, so he took a series of steps that emphasized his clear desire to reassure the world and reassure the country.

And he felt, at least a lot of people were telling him he should feel, a need for change. So continuity and change were tugging him in different directions, and that he needed to reassure the country, but also a need to undertake the kinds of changes that would move the White House, the presidency – the institution – from an illegitimate, tainted on, to a legitimate, untainted presidency. If he did not make sufficient changes that people could see and feel, it hurt him and, in my view, it also hurt the people who stayed because there was still a cloud. They were still in a tainted White House and the only thing to make it and everyone still there untainted would be to have sufficient change for the people to see it as a Ford Presidency, and I felt, he had to do it soon, and do it decisively. I'm not talking about fifty percent, or anything like that, but to do it in a way that no one who left would be seen as leaving because he or she had done something wrong but leaving because we had a new president and he wanted a new team.

He needed to bring in his own team. But, for whatever reason, Jerry Ford being Jerry Ford, tilted way over to continuity as opposed to change, and did not make the kind of changes he needed to make to reassure the country that he was presiding over a legitimate Ford presidency, not a continuation of a Nixon-Ford presidency. He was sworn in and said he was going to keep

Henry Kissinger. Henry is an enormous talent, but the way it was done was almost a sign of weakness to do it before he was ever sworn in as president. He announced he was going to keep Al Haig before I was back in the country.

As a result he had the two most visible symbols of the Nixon administration since Erlichman and Haldeman had gone, as Ford's first two decisions. Then he announced he was going to keep the Nixon Cabinet. He did a series of things favoring continuity instead of change that I think were quite harmful to him. Our transition team tried to urge him to recognize that he needed to get better balance between continuity and change. Bill Simon, as I recall, came in and recommended that the whole Nixon Cabinet resign as a way of ensuring nobody went out under a cloud, so there would be a new president and a new team, and they could be off running on the country's business.

But President Ford wouldn't do it. He had an open door policy. A staff member could walk in, someone the president had known for ten years, and say "I don't want to leave right now. I'd like to stay for three months, but I've got to leave after that." As a result there was no impression of change.. It was unfortunate.

Smith: And that doesn't even begin – it hints of this spokes of the wheel concept.

Rumsfeld: I haven't gotten to that. He announced that.

Smith: There is this notion that it took him most of his presidency to outgrow the Congressional mindset.

Rumsfeld: Yes.

Smith: Which has many admirable things. The personal qualities that people were drawn to, that they found trustworthy is a wonderful story. The first day they had left the house in Alexandria and were finally moving into the White House. And the president's first day on the job, he walks up to the West Wing, to the door, and there's a Marine there standing, saluting and opening the door. The president walks over and sticks out his hand and says, "Hi, I'm Jerry Ford, I'm going to be living here. What's your name?"

Rumsfeld: Yes.

Smith: Now, that's Congressional, in some ways. But that's also Gerald Ford, I guess.

Rumsfeld: It was.

Smith: But, we've been told, for example, that when you were invited to come in and sort of put things in order, that one condition of that was that the spokes of the wheel were going to be replaced.

Rumsfeld: Oh, I had to. It was a terrible concept. I knew it wouldn't work. It worked fine for a minority leader. It works fine running a Congressional office.

Smith: And basically, what was it?

Rumsfeld: It was the theory that he would have the Cabinet and the senior staff all have an open door policy, and be able to come in individually and deal with him directly as he did as minority leader. So in walks some cabinet officer and says to the President, with no one else in the room, "I'm thinking about endorsing this piece of legislation," And Ford would say," that sounds fine to me," and the Secretary would go off and do that. And then a month later I find out about it or the general counsel finds out about it, then the decision gets considered within the White House staff and they find out there are many reasons why he can't do that, but he's already done it. Then when the President finds he needs to reverse the decision the Secretary feels he has to resign, because he had the rug pulled out from under him. The president said he could do it, and it was embarrassing, when the decision had to be revoked because it hadn't been properly staffed out beforehand.

The President became a better executive every day he was there. And by the time he left office he was a very good executive. But he had begun by announcing he was going to be the anti-Nixon. He was not going to have a Haldeman or an Erlichman. He was not going to have the palace guard.

Smith: Which appeared to be change.

Rumsfeld: Yes. He had appeared to have all spokes of the wheel approach him, where the spokes all come to him. I said to him, "Well, that's just fine. You know what happens in the center where all the spokes come in? The grease gets

overheated and has to be changed. If you have someone doing it for you, that's one thing, you can change him. If it's you, you can't change yourself and it's just going to burn you up." I told him it wouldn't work. So I went back to Belgium.

When my father died, and I came back for the funeral, President Ford asked me to come to the White House and talk. He said, "I've got to change Haig." The hostility between Ford's vice presidential staff and Haig were a serious problem. I wasn't in the country, so I didn't know. But he said, I've got to change Haig. You've got to do it." I told him I wouldn't think of doing it with anything approximating spokes of the wheel arrangement. There's no way for it to be successful. He said he'd get off it but he needed a little time to turn it around.

Smith: So he was willing to, even at that point, sort of acknowledge mistakes?

Rumsfeld: Exactly.

Smith: And move on.

Rumsfeld: Yes.

Smith: What was it about Bob Hartmann that was so polarizing? Because, clearly he and Haig were put on the planet to annoy each other. That's putting it mildly.

Rumsfeld: Yes.

Smith: If you hear Haig today, he's still hot under the collar.

Rumsfeld: Well, you know, no one likes to have people leaking things to the press and damaging you in those jobs. Those jobs are tough enough, but if you have insiders working against you, they are impossible.

Smith: And was that perception, at least, there?

Rumsfeld: That was the perception. I wasn't around during that period. But that is what Al felt, and I think that's what probably the president felt. He felt it was volatile. He couldn't have it like it was.

Smith: In retrospect it's so easy to say this, but it's not dissimilar to the selection of Nelson Rockefeller. If you thought for five minutes, of the temperament of these people. Al Haig couldn't stay. For Al Haig's sake, he couldn't stay. And certainly for Gerald Ford's sake, which is not to minimize the heroic service that Al Haig rendered during those critical days.

Rumsfeld: He did a terrific job for the country. Oh my goodness, yes.

Smith: And likewise, Rockefeller was never cut out to be number two. He should not have been told that, "You're going to have domestic policy," that you're going to be the domestic Henry Kissinger, which I think, in part was, because Kissinger wanted to make sure he wasn't poaching on his terrain. And Rockefeller wasn't totally honest with himself as to why it took it. Someone close to him tried to talk him out of it. Because I think he asked for a day or so to think it over and he called this person, very close advisor, who went over all the reasons why it would be a disaster…

Smith: And Rockefeller acceded to all these, and then at the end he said, "But, Bill, you don't understand. This is my last chance." And when you get down to all that was said and done, that's why he took it.

Rumsfeld: Well, it was a shame for the president to pick somebody and then not be able to nominate him a year later because the convention wouldn't accept him.

Smith: You know, Rockefeller went to his grave believing that you were responsible.

Rumsfeld: I know, but he was paranoid about things like that. He imagined things. I had nothing to do with it. Absolutely nothing. The president didn't tell me who he was going to decide to select, but it became very clear that he couldn't get Rockefeller nominated.

Smith: Plus, I'm also told from some people in this project and in my other research, you recall at one point, I guess fairly early in '75, the announcement was made that there was going to be at least a halt in new domestic programs. In a sense, get the country…

Rumsfeld: Yes, the President was vetoing bills right and left.

Smith: Yeah, and of course, Rockefeller was taken aback. And at least one person said one contributing factor to that was, every Thursday at their lunch, Rockefeller would come in with a new program, usually with a large price tag attached.

Rumsfeld: But as you point out, Rockefeller was not designed to be a vice president. He'd been governor of New York. He was a Rockefeller. He was used to having people work for him. He was used to paying people to work for him. And he was used to getting his way. And if he didn't get his way, he didn't like the people who had disagreed with him. I don't think he was used to having people disagree with him.

Smith: Did he get personal in that sense?

Rumsfeld: Oh, yes, very.

Smith: By the way, I don't think he aged well. There are lots of folks who say that Rockefeller in the mid Seventies, was not the Rockefeller of the Sixties.

Rumsfeld: I didn't know him then. I knew David Rockefeller and liked him. I knew Laurance and served on a board with him and liked him. But I never did know Nelson until he became Vice President. But I started out trying to figure out a way to be helpful to him and to try to how to make it work. It is a tough job being vice president. It takes a certain acceptance that you're vice president and not president. I'm told by Lou Cannon that his staff would be dumbfounded at his inflated idea that he was really going to be the president for domestic and non-national security affairs. And he would say this. And they would shake their heads and think, no way. There can only be one President.

Smith: And the irony is, someone who had spent as much time in D.C. as Nelson had – he'd worked with presidents, he'd been in the White House, he knew how it worked.

Rumsfeld: He didn't. He had no idea how the modern White House worked. He didn't. He went and told people that I had designed the spokes of the wheel arrangement that Gerald Ford had adopted.

Smith: Really?

Rumsfeld: Yes, he didn't understand anything about what was going on. And it was too bad. He was tough on people.

Smith: For example, any idea, I assume, has to be staffed out.

Rumsfeld: If you want to protect the president and have a coherent administration, ideas need to be staffed out.

Smith: And was that a source of controversy?

Rumsfeld: Oh, my Lord, sure. He walked in to see the president. Apparently the president, of course, was not a seasoned executive at that time, and I wasn't in the room. I said fine, they could meet, I don't need to be in their meetings and I felt it would be good for them to have that relationship. But the problem was he would either suggest to the president that he ought to have an energy proposal…

Smith: The Energy Independence Corporation.

Rumsfeld: Or, the president said to him, "Why don't you tell me what you think about energy." And Rockefeller would go off and come back in with a package that was his energy proposal.

Smith: A hundred billion dollars.

Rumsfeld: A hundred billion dollars. He showed it to the president. The president says, "Gee, Nelson, thanks, that's nice." And I come into the office half an hour later. Ford gives it to me. I said, "What do you want me to do with it?" He said, "Well, let's staff it out." So I staff it out. Well, my goodness, you'd think I'd committed a crime. Nelson Rockefeller said, "If you staff that out, you're sandbagging me. I've already staffed it out. The staff's already for it. " So I started checking with people around the White House to see if they were for it and, of course, I don't think any of them had told Nelson directly they were against it. Because no one told Nelson they were against something of his, they just didn't do it or they would be bullied and punished. Except me.

Smith: Why?

Rumsfeld: They were afraid of him. He hires peoples and he dispenses largesse. He's Vice President of the United States. And he talks right over you. He was animated, energetic, enthusiastic and forceful.

Smith: He was an intimidating guy.

Rumsfeld: He was. And people were intimidated. So the president said, "Well, I think he's talked to these folks," So I'd check with those folks and they'd say, "We think it's a terrible idea. It's going to sink out of sight like an anchor up on Capitol Hill." And I'd finally go back and tell the president the truth and the president would say "Well, here's where we are. I'm going to have to send it up to Congress." It was more his relationship with Nelson at that point even though he knew it was not going to pass. And Nelson was out to the press saying I was sandbagging him. So I said, "Mr. President you do what you have to do, but you're going to look silly sending this thing up there because nothing is going to happen. It's going to just die." And it did. And it should have.

Smith: Brent Scowcroft tells the story about how you could say no, very politely, and he would come back over and over.

And Brent liked him. He found him kind of a character, but he got this idea - because he was paranoid about a number of things. He was convinced that Bill Colby, for example, was a Soviet agent.

Rumsfeld: Yes.

Smith: When the Metro was being dug, he came up with this idea that if they just created a spur, it would be secret, no one would know about it, under the White House. Brent sort of listened to him, and humored him. And he explained very gently why that was probably impractical, why you probably couldn't keep that a secret. Rockefeller kept coming back.

Rumsfeld: Well, you know, he probably knew that when they built the pyramids, they'd kill everyone who did the construction and knew the secrets.

Smith: Were you late in awakening either to the likelihood that Reagan would run, or the formidable candidacy that he would wage?

Rumsfeld: First of all, I, for whatever reason, I suppose because I'd been ambassador to NATO, and I was sitting in on the NSC meetings at the president's request, I did not pay close attention to the political side. Dick Cheney did. And he was good at it, he understood it, and he liked it. But, no, my interaction with the president was that he was concerned about that, and asked me to go over and I think, suggest to President Reagan - I met with him in the Madison Hotel, inviting him to become secretary of commerce. Ford had meetings with him from time to time. No, the president was clearly concerned about it, and sensitive to it, and I'm sure his political people were, as well.

Smith: The whole Alexander Solzhenitsyn flap – it's still confusing, but apparently at some point the president evidently did, in fact, invite him?

Rumsfeld: I think I was out of the city or someplace. I was not engaged with it. I believe Dick Cheney was, I recall the NSC advised that Ford not meet with him. It was probably because of their interaction with the Soviets at the time, on détente, and whatever else they were dealing with. And so, a regret went out. It obviously ignited a firestorm. I believe he was speaking to a labor union group or getting an award. The next thing you know, the people in the White House start trying to overcome the National Security Council's recommendation that the president not meet with Solzhenitsyn. I wasn't in any of these meetings that I recall, but at some point the president or Dick Cheney or somebody in the White House, invited Solzhenitsyn in, I think, and he declined.

Smith: Yeah, I think that's it.

Rumsfeld: Does that sound about right?

Smith: The whole relationship between the president and Secretary Schlesinger, was that just bad chemistry? It's been suggested that Gerald Ford knew a lot about defense. He'd spent many years immersing himself in the subject, and perhaps there is a certain professorial quality, about the secretary and it just didn't quite mesh.

Rumsfeld: Yes. He never told me, he, being the president. He never told me precisely what his problem was. But if the two key players on the National Security

Council, after the president, are the secretary of state and the secretary of defense. It was clear that President Ford had a very close relationship with Henry Kissinger. He developed an excellent working relationship with him.

Henry had two positions. He had the National Security Council staff and he had the secretary of state's staff. So, of the three players, Henry was two of them. So Henry, as the National Security half, would decide who would go to meetings. And I would attend frequently at the President's request. I don't know whether it was the president or Henry decided they wanted to have a separate meeting on a subject that clearly deserved something that would be engaged by the Department of Defense with statutory responsibility. It could have been the president because he wasn't comfortable with Jim, or it could have been Henry because he wanted to further his positions and could do so much more easily in a limited audience. I don't know the answer to that question.

All I know is, that when I would go in and try to get Jim into the meetings and see that the Department of Defense was represented, that the president was stiff about it, often.

Smith: I assume that was very unusual.

Rumsfeld: It was, but he (Ford) simply didn't enjoy being with Jim. And I don't know what caused it, whether it was something that had happened between the two of them when he was in the Congress, or when he was vice president. But the only time I saw a real spike in Gerald Ford on the subject was when – well, a couple of times. One time was when apparently Jim Schlesinger made some remarks about George Mahon, Gerald Ford's friend. And he (Ford) had a minimum of high regard for that. There was also a situation that came up, I think, during the *Mayaguez* – no it was maybe during the…

Smith: The fall of Saigon?

Rumsfeld: Maybe the fall of Saigon, when he felt Jim was responsible – I did not think Jim was responsible for whatever went wrong – I've forgotten what the detail was. But there was some miscommunication, and I felt it was not Jim's fault, but the president took it to be Jim's fault. That was the only other time I ever

heard any specifics. But it had to be something deeper than that; that had happened.

Smith: You know what is interesting – the fact he didn't tell you the source of the problem, because there is something I noticed in the later years – but I've asked some other people who tend to confirm this: lots of politicians love to gossip, and my sense was he actively discouraged it, didn't engage in it.

Rumsfeld: Correct.

Smith: Would change the subject politely if it came up.

Rumsfeld: That's right.

Smith: And, indeed, Bob Barrett said, "None of us will ever know what things he took with him to the grave."

Rumsfeld: Yes, that's true. But, it was too bad because Jim is, of course, a talented guy and a valuable contributor in government, and could have benefited the administration, had he been able to play a traditional role in the NSC process.

Smith: Let me go back, because when you came back - were you in town at the time of the pardon?

Rumsfeld: No, I was back in Belgium.

Smith: You were? It will come as no surprise to you that Mel Laird thinks he could have solved that, too. Mel's got a plan for everything. And his plan was, he told Jerry, "Don't do this, don't rush into this…"

Rumsfeld: So he knew? Mel did?

Smith: Like the day before.

Rumsfeld: Is that right?

Smith: Yes. And Laird's plan was, he was going to get together a bipartisan delegation from both Houses. They were going to go to the White House and they were going to *ask* the president to do this. The problem with that is, unless you put yourself inside that supercharged atmosphere, it seems to me, I

don't know how any trial balloon could have survived. I mean, I don't know how the president could have "prepared" the country for the pardon, because the first sign that it was coming, there would have been the uproar that, in fact, ensued. Was there an alternative?

Rumsfeld: I don't have any idea.

Smith: Did you ever discuss it with him?

Rumsfeld: No, no, no. It was all done. It was history by the time I came back. My view of it is that Mel might be right. That it is conceivable that if – you're right, it would leak – but we know it was a terribly damaging thing to him the way he did it. So let's just accept that.

Smith: Right.

Rumsfeld: Now, let's muse as to what might have happened. Is it conceivable that he could have gone to the special prosecutor and acclimated him to the idea? Is it conceivable he could have talked to some members of the Supreme Court? Is it conceivable he could have talked to the Democratic leadership, and let it leak? And let it go out there. He hadn't done it, therefore, you're not going to have the firestorm and the volcanic eruption that occurred and the resignation of your press secretary, who you'd appointed five minutes earlier.

His staff – he didn't have anyone on his staff who could support him on it because he didn't tell anyone on his staff, except for three or four people, as I understand it. Benton Becker and I don't know about Bob – probably Bob Hartmann, he probably wrote something. You're saying Mel, I didn't know, but he told relatively few people. And since we know that the way it was done turned out to be quite damaging to the president, one has to at least be willing to explore the possibility that there might have been a way – it may have taken longer, it may have been harder on Richard Nixon, which he did not want to be hard on Richard Nixon.

He issued instructions to his staff – he didn't want people saying negative things about Richard Nixon. He wanted to treat him in a dignified, respectful way. He felt he'd been a colleague and someone he'd worked with and he

didn't want to see him badly treated by his administration. And letting it get out for a week or two or three or four, would have been very uncomfortable for Richard Nixon.

Smith: The irony, of course is, if he had waited a couple of months, when Nixon was at death's door, maybe there would have been a different climate.

Rumsfeld: Conceivably.

Smith: Needless to say, he was advised not to visit Nixon in the hospital.

Rumsfeld: By me.

Smith: Tell us about that.

Rumsfeld: He wanted to call him from time to time. He wanted to visit him, he had a very admirable, human, desire to not see a person he considered a friend, down, hurt, wounded. And I said, "I agree. That's nice. And I don't disagree with your natural human emotions, but the fact of the matter is, you've got to become President of the United States on your own feet, standing on your own ground, and not have this be seen as the Nixon-Ford administration. Or you're not going to be a successful president and that's not good for the country, and you've got a higher purpose. And you can do it without in any way being negative or harmful to the former president. But he did things which caused great damage to himself, great damage to his administration, great damage to the people associated with him. That has taken this ship of state off course, and it's your job to put it back on course. And to the extent you diminish your ability to do that, you're harming him, and you're harming yourself, and you're harming the country."

Smith: Is that part of the process of learning to be president? In other words, the difference between a Congressman who could act on your own, sort of heartfelt instincts, and a president who, in some ways, has to be ruthless?

Rumsfeld: Not ruthless. He has to recognize what the priorities have to be for the country.

Smith: It's an indulgence for him to go visit a friend, if it results in the consequences that you described?

Rumsfeld: In that case, yes, if it diminishes your ability to govern, at a time that you have to be able to govern.

Smith: Had he heard from the family? What was the sort of mechanism by which he learned that Nixon was in bad shape?

Rumsfeld: I don't remember. I know that there were constant phone calls. The whole staff was Nixon staff. The relationships between Ron Zeigler and the people that had transferred out to San Clemente with President Nixon were all friends of ours and friends of the people in the White House, and so it was constantly coming in. And there were request after request after request, one type of thing and another.

But, I mean, the same thing happened with Tip O'Neill. Tip O'Neill, a good guy, a friend of mine, a friend of the president's. He liked him. I walked into the Oval Office one day and the president said, "Here, Rummy, I'm going to go to Tip O'Neill's birthday party on Thursday." And I said, "Fine, I'll staff it out and figure out how we do that." So, the next day I come back in and I said to the president, "I'm awful sorry to tell you this, but you're not going to be able to go to that party. That party is being paid for by some folks you do not want to go to a party paid for by them." And, "Damn it, Rummy, I'm going to go! Tip's my friend, I'm going to go!" I said, "That's just fine, but you're not going to go to the party. You are the President of the United States. This thing is being paid for, it's fine for Tip to do it, he's a politician, he's a local politician and he can do what he wants. But you cannot go to that party, given the fact that this party is being paid for by people who you do not want to be associated with, and we will not let you be associated with. If you want to go to that party, you're going to have to walk up there, but I'm damned if I'm going to let you go to that party."

And he just was determined to go to that party. He just – Tip's his friend – and he's darn well going to go. He didn't go.

Smith: Tell us about his stubbornness.

Rumsfeld: Oh, it's kind of appealing. He'd get a little red dot on his cheek, and he was stubborn. Oh, the worst example of stubborn was the Max Frankel question in the debate, where he just would not, could not, back off and accept – I mean, here's Scowcroft – I wasn't there – but Scowcroft and Cheney are just looking him in the eye and saying, Holy Mackerel. And Frankel looked him in the eye and said, "You're not really saying this, are you?"

Smith: He gave him a chance to back off the limb.

Rumsfeld: He gave him a fair chance, you bet. And instead, he grabbed the nettle and beat him with it. "You bet your life I think they're not subjugated," or whatever he said.

Smith: And then it took days to get him to…

Rumsfeld: Oh days, days. And finally he heaved a pencil at the door, and Cheney said or Scowcroft said, somebody, that he heaved the pencil and then laughed, and said, "Alright, we'll clean it up." It was too bad, but that's a perfect example. I guess we're all like that in one way or another. We get something in our mind. I was stunned to listen to it again the other day for some reason – the Max Frankel question. I forget why. And it was so clear, and he gave such a chance, and then the comments he made the second time around were just so far off base.

Smith: And all he had to do was say, "I've been to Poland. I looked into their eyes. They don't think they're dominated by the Soviet Union."

Rumsfeld: Yes, but I know why he said what he said, because all of the Congressmen from ethnic districts like I was and he was, every year on Captive Nations Weeks, we'd get up there and say, "We do not concede that the Poles are permanently subjugated…" He just kept leaving out the word permanently. He had it in his mind. I've said all those things, but I always knew they were subjugated, but I never conceded that they were permanently subjugated and that we would throw them up to the Soviets for the rest of their histories.

Smith: The fall of Saigon. It will come as no surprise that Mel has some history about that, too. Mel loved Ford, but he still, to some degree, blames him. Mel

believes that it would have been possible, in the spring of 1975, to have persuaded Congress to appropriate several hundred million dollars for the South Vietnamese.

Rumsfeld: Boy, he sure wanted to – President Ford. He didn't persuade them, and they didn't do it.

Smith: But not for lack of effort on the president's part.

Rumsfeld: I can't say that, I wasn't involved in it that much, but I know that the president wanted to, and he went up and asked. And I think there were those who suggested he not ask because he would be defeated. And he said, no, we want to do that, and I think he did go up and make the request. Is that right?

Smith: I think it is right.

Rumsfeld: I think so, isn't it?

Smith: And he certainly was outspoken himself, sort of denouncing the Congress for not doing it.

Rumsfeld: I think the funds that he asked for were not funds to continue, they were funds to be used to assist the people who were helpful to us while we were there, and were kind of a closeout fund. I don't know what Mel's position that he thought he could get the funds and win the war.

Smith: I think he thought, even at that point, that somehow the fall of Saigon could have been avoided militarily. You are right, that after the fall Congress pulled the plug and wants to forget that we were ever there. That, I think, is my candidate for Ford's finest hour - when the president reminds the country that we have a tradition of providing asylum to victims of oppression, and he puts together this crazy quilt coalition – you've got the American Jewish Congress, and George Meany, and I think some state governors. Anyway, they campaigned and, in effect, shamed the Congress into restoring funds to bring out a substantial number of Vietnamese.

Rumsfeld: Yes.

Smith: I take it there was a debate inside the White House – there was the famous speech at Tulane where the president, in effect, says, "The war is over," and the kids, of course, all go wild. And there apparently had been a real back and forth. Kissinger didn't want him to say that and Hartmann wanted him to say that, and, it was being played out on that level. At what point did it become clear to you that this was, at this point, a rescue operation, or likely to be? How rapidly did this situation develop?

Rumsfeld: Once the signal is out, that it looks like it might be the end, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and you kind of hit a slope and then it accelerates and compounds. And people behave rationally, fearfully. Iin the case of people who are helpful to us, they'd fear what's going to happen to them. In the case of people who are against us, they behave rationally, and they seek opportunities to have it be a disaster and accelerate. It was a terribly sad time for any American to see the people being pulled off the top of the building by helicopters. It was heartbreaking.

Smith: What was it like for him?

Rumsfeld: Oh, it had to be just heartbreaking.

Smith: Were you going through daily meetings and everything?

Rumsfeld: Oh, my goodness, several meetings a day. Yeah. And then there was confusion at the end. As you may recall, where it was announced that the Americans were all out, and I got a call or somebody did from Schlesinger saying that they weren't out. We still had some X number of Marines who were the ones on the ground guarding the embassy to keep it from getting ripped apart and people trying to pull themselves into the last helicopter. And finally the president agreed that we should go down and say they're not all out, in case something happened to those folks. But it was a terribly tough time for me and I know for him. And I think for everybody.

Smith: Few presidents have ever walked into the Oval Office with as much hanging over their heads, including things not of their own making. He had to clean up Watergate, restore trust that had been shattered, he had an economy that was going into the dumper, and…

Rumsfeld: Right now, you read the papers today and they frequently refer to the '74-'75 economic situation. In the papers about what's going on now, it was a tough economic time.

Smith: Plus you have this whipsaw, because apparently, at first, inflation was defined as the enemy. And then almost overnight, it turned out well, no, recession is looming.

Rumsfeld: Stagflation.

Smith: How would you describe his command of economics?

Rumsfeld: He was comfortable meeting with the economists. I'd been deeply involved in it in the Nixon administration when I was director of the Economic Stabilization Program, and so, I was close to Alan Greenspan and all of the economic people that he would be dealing with, and therefore, in some of those meetings, and [he] was comfortable with them. He had dealt with them before and knew some of them.

He had Bill Seidman as his economic advisor, and of course, Bill Simon was secretary of treasury and was the principal economic spokesman. We were fortunate that Alan Greenspan had been nominated by Nixon was confirmed after President Ford came in, at our recommendation. I had talked to the president about it and said Alan Greenspan's nomination was pending as the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors and we want to encourage the Senate to promote that and put it forward, which they did.

But, it was a funny time. You had these summit meetings that were hastily put together and when the economists get together and agree, watch out. These people came from around the country and the next thing I knew, there was this speech being done by Bob Hartmann and it had not been washed with Greenspan and the other people in the administration. The people in the administration, there was Simon – the people that had statutory responsibility for these areas – it had not been sufficiently washed with them, and the president, unfortunately, was faced finally with this awkward situation of having to deal with a speech that had been written but not staffed out. And it

was unfortunate. I, at the last minute, urged him not to do it, not to give that speech.

Smith: Was that the Whip Inflation Now?

Rumsfeld: Yes, and to say that this was so important you were going to take more time and think it through and put it off until we had a package that we could be proud of. Unfortunately, he went ahead and it was almost ridiculed, which is tough. Few things are more harmful than ridicule for a politician.

Smith: I tell you, though, remember the '75 State of the Union address – he did something no president before or since has done, and probably never will – when he started out by saying, "The state of the Union is not good."

Rumsfeld: Hartmann wrote some very good speeches with him – the two of them as collaborators. There is no question that the president gave some excellent speeches. And to the extent they were that type – directional as opposed to substantive – Hartmann could do an excellent job with them. They worked well together.

Smith: Was part of the problem simply that Hartmann saw himself, not without reason, as kind of the ultimate loyalist, and it's a very, very, short step to becoming possessive and to maybe thinking that you've got, if not a monopoly, then at least a patent pending on knowing what's best for the guy you're so devoted to?

Rumsfeld: Well, I'm no psychiatrist or psychologist, and I don't venture into those areas really, but, he, with good reason, felt a very strong loyalty to President Ford. He'd worked with him in House, he'd worked with him as vice president. He saw with a good, clear former journalist's eye, that the staff that existed in the White House was not Ford's staff, it was Nixon's staff. And he, as the guardian of the vice president, and the guardian of the new president, distrusted most of the people – not for any good reason, but on principle.

He distrusted them with respect to the extent of their loyalty to Gerald Ford as opposed to their loyalty to Nixon and the Nixon White House. And I think the effect of that on Bob was to cause him to maybe feel kind of like you've

described, and also maybe to find ways to try to make the president look good at the expense of some people that the president was working with. But it never works that way. It doesn't make the president look good. It makes it look it's a disorderly house.

Smith: And the ultimate irony is that that White House was so determined not to have another Haldeman, that Hartmann, in some ways, reproduced a little bit of the Haldeman, for lack of a better word, paranoia about people.

Rumsfeld: See, my impression is a little different. My impression is that Hartmann was the ultimate loyalist to Ford, and Ford tolerated it.

Smith: Yeah.

Rumsfeld: That Haldeman, while he was a loyalist to Nixon, he was doing Nixon's bidding. And I do not think that Hartmann was doing Ford's bidding.

Smith: Okay. That's an important distinction.

Rumsfeld: And I think that is a distinction. And I give Haldeman credit for trying to be true to what his president wanted – not that it was a good thing to want, necessarily.

Smith: The speech process – I've talked to a number of people – the whole business surrounding the New York City fiscal crisis, there was clearly a tug of war going on. Ideological and, my sense is, you had Hartmann and Bill Seidman and by implication, the vice president in one camp. And folks like Bill Simon and Alan Greenspan, who wanted to take a much tougher approach toward the city. Now, I'll preface this; years later Hugh Cary said to me, "You know, Jerry Ford has never gotten the credit he deserved, because in fact, it was his tough love approach that ultimately drove New York to do the very difficult things that it wanted to avoid." Is that your characterization?

Rumsfeld: I agree.

Smith: But how intense was that debate?

Rumsfeld: Well that article that said "Drop Dead, New York, Gerald Ford," which he never said, which he never would have thought of saying, was harmful. Now,

he didn't lose New York by much, I don't think. I've forgotten. But it left an impression that wasn't true to what he'd said.

Smith: But it was the speech that he delivered at the Press Club, over which there had been this, sort of ideological and policy tug of war. Do you recall that?

Rumsfeld: I don't. I know you're right – that the vice president wanted New York to receive some largesse and that Bill Simon was very strong on the other side. I don't remember how others sorted out on it. Do you?

Smith: So then, finally, there comes the shuffle at the end of 1975. I think you indicated you were very reluctant to go to the Pentagon.

Rumsfeld: I was.

Smith: And, presumably, going back on what you said earlier, you really would have preferred, your own part notwithstanding, that this had taken place much earlier.

Rumsfeld: The president should have made the changes he wanted early. And it would have left the impression of a Ford presidency instead of a Nixon-Ford presidency.

Smith: And yet, I think you would concede, in time he put together a stellar Cabinet.

Rumsfeld: A good group. Absolutely. I thought that the timing of it was awkward for the people he was naming. He had a Democratic Congress – they'd have to get confirmed. From my standpoint, I agreed philosophically more with Schlesinger than I did with Henry on détente. And the Strategic Arms (SALT) negotiations. And I told the president, I said, "Look, I'm clearly not going to make recommendations that are going to be notably different from Jim Schlesinger's. I agree that the budget has to go up. I think he's done a good job."

And when I talked to Paul Nitze about it, with the president's permission, Nitze said, "Look, you don't have any choice," and he said, "The president doesn't have any choice." I said, "Why?" I said, "He could wait, he could get through this period." And he said, "No, no, the President of the United States

has to have a secretary of defense in whom he has total confidence." And Nitze was a friend of Jim's. And he said, "They don't get along, it's obvious. And Kissinger and Schlesinger don't get along." And he said, "The president has to have someone he has confidence in. It has to be someone who can do the job, and it has to be someone who can get confirmed. Tell me two other people that fit that template." And, you can't.

It just happened that I happened to be there and knew the president well from Congress, and had been involved with those issues pretty steadily for a period of years. And liked Henry Kissinger and was perfectly willing to work with him, but to not necessarily agree with him on everything.

Smith: Was Kissinger upset about, in effect, losing one of his hats?

Rumsfeld: Sure. He was understandably concerned that it would diminish his ability to conduct the foreign policy of the country on behalf of the president. If you've seen us losing something, one post, and that's why he was adamant that it be Brent Scowcroft who succeed him. And so people would see it as him really still being there.

Smith: It put Scowcroft in a somewhat awkward position.

Rumsfeld: I suppose.

Smith: Or at least potentially. Tell me something, because here it's almost like you're riding two horses. You've got détente, whether people want to call it détente or not, but you've got this pursuit of détente, and at the same time, you've got these proxy wars going on, particularly in Africa.

Rumsfeld: Right.

Smith: How do you ride those two horses? How do you have a coherent foreign policy called détente when the Cubans are doing what they are doing and Angola and…

Rumsfeld: It's hard. I was more in the Reagan side of those issues. I felt the word détente was harmful. Not because it was French, but because it left an impression of a relationship that was admittedly not normal with the Soviet Union, by a darn

sight. But acceptable. It was a relaxation of tensions, and you do that with somebody that you find at least moderately acceptable. And here they, the Soviets, were engaged in mischief around the globe, subjugating Eastern Europe, and the Russian Republic. But worse than that, what bothered me, was that I knew that the Soviet Union was investing an enormous fraction of its gross national product in defense, and producing increasing numbers of things – ships, guns, tanks, planes – and that we were doing the opposite. That we'd come down and had been declining in terms of our investment. And that we were still suffering from the denials that occurred during the Vietnam war when the Johnson budget was not increased sufficiently to take up the slack for all the money that was going into Vietnam, as opposed to going into defense investment and capabilities that would enable us to deter and dissuade the Soviet Union from mischief in the world.

And I felt that we had to increase the defense budget, and we had to reverse the trends which I saw as adverse to the United States. Henry felt that it was important that we be able to say, and the president tended to side with him, that we were the strongest nation on the face of the earth, and that enabled us to do more in foreign policy, and it also, with the increasing drum beat coming from the right with Reagan, it was a counter to Reagan.

The truth was, we were in kind of a band of rough equivalence, as Schlesinger characterized it, and I did. But the trend lines were wrong. They were coming up and we were coming down. And while we were in this band of rough equivalence, our circumstance was adverse, and I felt that unless we were willing to face that, we would not be able to persuade the Congress to raise the funds, invest in the funds, appropriate the funds that we would need to avoid sliding into an inferior position. I felt that détente, the concept of détente, took the edge off of the need to invest and reverse those adverse trends.

Smith: Sure. It is a little bit of cognitive dissonance.

Rumsfeld: It is. And while you can say that it was a perfectly rational position if we'd been clearly superior, and then when you're in that position, you can operate and say, "Well, let's have a relaxation of tension." We can afford it, and we'll

try to work out things with them. But if you're sliding down and they're coming up and you start saying, "Let's relax tensions," it's from a position of relative weakness, and weakness is provocative, and so I was concerned about it. And obviously, it put me in a very difficult - in my confirmation hearing and in my remarks - because Reagan increasingly picked up what I was saying and took it to a position that was adverse to the president, which I didn't. And it was a complicated time for all of us.

Smith: And in the end, in some ways the president almost backed out of détente.

Rumsfeld: He stopped saying détente completely. And he also agreed to increase the defense budget.

Smith: Now, that's interesting, because I've heard Colin Powell say that a number of weapons systems that came online, that were actually used during the first Gulf War, either were initiated, or preserved in the Ford years

Rumsfeld: Oh, they were. Absolutely. He did a good job. The stealth airplanes were in their early stages. The M1 tank, the main battle tank that was so successful in the Gulf War was something that I approved, with a turbine engine and a 120 mm cannon as opposed to a 105 mm.

Smith: And wasn't one of the sticking points at Vladivostok…?

Rumsfeld: Cruise missiles.

Smith: Cruise missiles. What was the background?

Rumsfeld: Well, that was an awkward situation for me, also. The cruise missile, I, for several reasons, felt was a very interesting weapons system. You could put a nuclear weapon on it or a conventional weapon. You could launch it from the air, an air launch cruise missile, you could launch it from the ground, a ground launch cruise missile, you could launch it from the sea, and you could launch it from under the sea. So that flexibility was very attractive and they had good precision.

Now, the problem with it was, if you are trying to limit weapons, and you're in negotiations, that thing that makes the cruise missile so attractive, its

versatility, its flexibility – conventional, nuclear, land, sea or air – makes trying to control it almost impossible. So what you have to do is give it all up. So if you were engaging in a negotiation on deployed nuclear weapons, you have to include all cruise missiles because they have the potential to be nuclear weapons. I was unwilling to have cruise missiles barred, and a new weapon is never something that the military is terribly interested in. It's funny, they like what they have and they want more of them, but there was not a strong basis for it. And the U.S. came close to agreeing to give them up.

Smith: At Vladivostok?

Rumsfeld: Yes, or in negotiations subsequent. I was uncomfortable with that, and President Ford was terrific. He came to see me after he was out of the presidency. I was chief executive of a company in Chicago. He brought me one of his [dog] Liberty's puppies. He brought me a copy of his book, *A Time to Heal*. We got in the car and he said, "Rummy, here's my book. You're not going to like it." I said, "Why's that?" I said, "I bet I do." He said, "Well, I kind of hold you and Brezhnev responsible for our not getting a SALT deal." And I looked at him and I said, "Mr. President, I can live with that." And he laughed. He was such a wonderful, warm person.

I was in that awkward position of representing what I believed to be the situation that was most logical from the Department of Defense, and he, the president, had to make a decision, and he did not feel that he wanted to overrule that, and therefore there was no SALT deal.

Smith: We're in the home stretch. Were you at the '76 convention?

Rumsfeld: It's another one of those Rockefeller myths that I was trying to become vice president that he promoted actively with the press. He was a busy little beaver when he wasn't working on energy.

Smith: Was he a big leaker?

Rumsfeld: Oh, my goodness gracious! He was. But in any event, I had been told that when I was young, I had tonsillitis, and the therapy of choice in Chicago was to zap you with radiation. And that people who had that ended up getting

tumors in their thyroids. I noticed that my thyroid had a tumor, I could see it. So I had voluntary surgery, I think a week before the convention or something like that. I was apparently under consideration for VP, but I purposely decided to have that done then, and I ended up going to the convention, I think, for one day at the request of the president. He wanted his whole Cabinet there, and I went there.

Smith: How did he deal with the Cabinet? Because you've obviously seen different presidents, different styles. We've been told stories about how he'd have meetings in the Roosevelt Room and have Jim Lynn there and Cabinet officers, who would basically make a pitch for the program, and the president, like Solomon, would decide.

Rumsfeld: Sure he would. Yes. But most Cabinet meetings were in the Cabinet Room, not the Roosevelt Room. But the smaller meetings were sometimes in the Roosevelt Room or in the Oval Office and I'd go in and plead budget needs and meet with him. But he was comfortable dealing with people. An awful lot of the things were budget matters that he dealt with, with people. And generally, you'd try to have the relevant people in the room with you so that things didn't backwash like they did on the Rockefeller energy program. And you'd have them right there and they could hear the president and see the interaction and hear the arguments. I liked Lynn in meetings when he was running the budget. I liked Henry in meetings when we were discussing something that was of a national security nature.

Smith: Justice Stevens' nomination, which really stands out thirty years later as almost the last time that a president – I'm not suggesting that he had no concern for his ideological persuasion – but you got a sense that it was his brilliance, his intellect, his raw legal talent, that led to his nomination.

Rumsfeld: I have *no* recollection of it. Excuse me, do you know when he was nominated – Stevens?

Smith: Unintelligible.

Rumsfeld: When did I become secretary? November or December? November 20th?

Smith: So you would not have been…

Rumsfeld: And when was he nominated – after that? I have no recollection of any discussions about Stevens, but I do know that Ed Levy was the president's attorney general, and Ed Levy was from Chicago. And, as I recall, Stevens was from Chicago. And my guess is that Ed Levy knew him well and was undoubtedly the principle player, along with Phil Buchen, as to who would make these decisions. And I'm sure the president received a recommendation from Ed Levy.

Smith: He never interviewed him.

Rumsfeld: Is that right?

Smith: He never interviewed him and you know, the Justice told us that in his confirmation hearings, no one asked about abortion. And, of course, this was three years after Roe v Wade, which – it's a different planet. We're about out of time. I want to ask you because you had what must have been one of the last meetings with the president. You saw him and you had some very important business to transact. Tell us about that. It was about a month before he died.

Rumsfeld: I'm trying to think. Joyce and I were in Taos, New Mexico with all of our family – children and grandchildren – and I had talked to the president and I don't remember why, a month or two before. I remember he called me asking me to do a eulogy when he passed away, as I suspect he did to you. But for some reason I talked to him. It may have been about the *USS Gerald Ford*. But in any event, I was sitting there Thanksgiving and we were in New Mexico, and I said to Joyce, "Let's fly over and see him." I think it was the Friday or Saturday of that weekend, and I had some *USS Gerald Ford* hats and a picture of what the ship might look like, that I'd brought from Washington, and we just flew over and spent half a day with him.

I remember walking in, he was in a chair, one of those chairs that had different angles and reclines and could go kind of sit up. He heard my voice at the door and he yelled, "Rummy!" (loud) like that. And he kept needing someone to lift him and move him in the chair because he couldn't manage it

- to get comfortable. He was uncomfortable. But he was wonderful. We talked about the *USS Monterrey*, which he had served on, and the difference between that and the *USS Gerald Ford*.

Of course, I, when I carrier qualified in the Navy, the carrier I landed on for my first six carrier landings was the *USS Monterrey*. It was the ship they had at Pensacola for student aviators to land on to qualify to become Naval aviators. But we had a wonderful talk, Joyce and I did, with Betty and the president, and I think Steve was there. We talked about old times and talked about the ship. We talked about his service on the *Monterrey*, and I guess the typhoon that he went through – and had a wonderful time.

Smith: Was there any talk about current events – did he talk about Iraq?

Rumsfeld: No.

Smith: Reminiscing more than…

Rumsfeld: Just reminiscing.

Smith: Did you think it was probably going to be the last time you saw him?

Rumsfeld: You know, it turned out he died a short time thereafter, and I felt so fortunate that we'd gone. He was a dear friend.

Smith: How should he be remembered?

Rumsfeld: Oh, I think probably as an official who served his country in the military and the legislature and in the executive branch with what I think anyone who dealt with him would have to say was a basic human decency, and integrity that is admirable, and not always found in public service. That he was not about Gerald Ford, he was much more about the country, much more about the ideas that he was interested in. That he had a tolerance level for criticism and understood and had a respect for the dynamics of the political process in our country. And was not uncomfortable living with that. It didn't mean you liked all aspects of it. It didn't mean you respected all aspects of it, but he was a person who had experienced a great deal, and understood our country and loved it.

I think he'll be remembered as somebody who came in at just a terribly difficult time and managed to help right the ship of state, and put us on a steady course at a time when we had gone through a wrenching experience of Vietnam, a wrenching experience of Watergate. The first president to have to resign in our history, and I guess maybe the second vice president who had to resign in our history, and he did it with good humor and he did it with courage. And he did it every day that he was there and with an increasingly skillful deft hand.

Smith: Terry O'Donnell said, and it's apropos of what you said, leading up to this. He said, "Gerald Ford would have been a great second term president."

Rumsfeld: Oh, absolutely. No question about it. Absolutely.

Smith: He'd mastered the job?

Rumsfeld: He had. He'd gotten very good at it and he enjoyed it. He was comfortable in it. And he almost won it.

Smith: Bob Barrett said, "The thing afterwards, was he'd go around the White House and said, 'I can't believe I lost to a peanut farmer!'"

Rumsfeld: Is that right?

Smith: Yeah. But, in time they became friends, too.

Rumsfeld: Sure.

Smith: I can't thank you enough.

INDEX