

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Fred Barnes
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: How did your paths first cross with Ford?

Barnes: You know, I'd heard about him a great deal, obviously, the Republican leader in the House, but it was thanks to Jack Germond at *The Evening Star* newspaper. When Ford became vice president, I'd just moved to the national staff. I had covered transportation at *The Star*, which was actually a pretty good subject. We were building the subway, the Metro, and so on. But he wanted somebody to cover Ford full-time because there was such a great chance that Ford was going to become president.

Smith: Was there a real sense?

Barnes: Yeah, there was. So, in 1975, I started covering Ford a lot

Smith: '74.

Barnes: No, I didn't start covering Ford until '75. He came in in '74. No, this was before that. This wasn't '74, because Ford became president in '74. This would've been '73. And so I started covering it and that was the first time I'd had any encounter with Ford. Very likeable guy. I mean, he was so different from what we see now in presidents or in Washington. Ford, you know, had come to the House of Representatives at a time when the members of the House and Senate got along with reporters. There's so much mingling up there in the pressrooms. The Senators and House members come by all the time and you sit in those cushy chairs that you could actually go to sleep in. So, when Ford got to the White House, unlike the people who'd been governor and had found the press to be adversarial in most of the states, he liked reporters, he got along with them. He was cheerful around them. And he was happy to meet with them. So, he's the last guy who actually I thought had maybe even some friends in the press, but certainly was the last guy who had a cheerful attitude toward them.

Smith: I was involved with the group that planned the funeral, and it was no accident that a journalist spoke at the Cathedral. Originally it was to have been Hugh Sidey. And then, of course, when he passed away, Tom Brokaw. But it illuminates the point.

Barnes: Well, he was unique in that, I think. Certainly afterwards there's been nobody like that.

Smith: Another thing - perhaps the other side of that coin; Ford has his first press conference on the 28th of August (1974). Here's a guy that's spent 25 years on Capitol Hill and he really believes in that climate that people are going to want to ask him about inflation and Turkey and Cypress and all of those things as opposed to Richard Nixon's tapes, Richard Nixon's papers, and a pardon. And he goes in and doesn't do very well and afterward he's angry with himself. And I've often thought that was the tipping point that led to the pardon ten days later.

Barnes: In what sense?

Smith: Well, because it dramatized for him that the fact people were obsessed with Nixon. How obsessed were they?

Barnes: Well, that was the right reaction on the part of Gerald Ford, for sure.

Smith: Was he naïve to believe anything else?

Barnes: Of course he was naïve, but if I thought about it, I'm sure I could come up with other ways that he was kind of naïve. I think he was naïve in one way that occurred to a lot of us at the time in his almost heroic view of Henry Kissinger and Kissinger's ability to do just about anything. In American history, George Washington is regarded as the indispensable man. Well, for Jerry Ford, Henry Kissinger was the indispensable man. But that's another story. You know, Washington, at least, and the press corps in Washington, was obsessed with Nixon and obsessed with Watergate. People have talked a lot about this. People could tell you exactly where they were in Washington or what time of night it was when they heard about the Saturday Night

Massacre and when Elliot Richardson was fired. And so there was total obsession in Washington and, 'What's he going to do about Richard Nixon?' I mean, that book was still open. So he shouldn't have been surprised. I certainly wasn't surprised as I recall. And he was a little naïve about that, maybe a lot naïve. And I've always thought he wound up doing exactly the right thing. I think history has come to the conclusion that he did do the right thing. It would've been wrong to have Nixon eating off a tin tray in some prison somewhere.

Smith: Could it also be argued that for all the people who say, "Well, it may have been a deciding factor in his loss in '76"...that if you had spent two years going through all of the trials, might it not have been even worse politically for him?

Barnes: Oh, it would've been worse for the country, it would've been worse for Gerald Ford, it would've been worse for all institutions in America except for journalism. It would've been great for journalism. The press would've loved it, all that extra time to pound Nixon and so on. You know, I never covered the White House until August 9th, 1974 and I was set up for that because Jack Germond assigned me to cover Ford as vice president. Well, of course, Ford was pretty accessible as president. As vice president, he was incredibly accessible, if you went on trips with him.

Smith: Tell us about the plane.

Barnes: Oh, the plane was great. He'd wander up and down the plane sometimes. He's had maybe just a little bit more to drink than he should've and he'd be walking down and talking to people and reporters and he'd be spilling some. He was just such a genial guy who really wanted to like people. And if you want to like people, you're going to find a way to like them. And he liked even the grumpy guys in the press. The guy that used to try to ask him tough questions on everything was Phil Jones of CBS. You probably interviewed him. But he'd ask Ford some question and Ford would say, "Oh, Phil!" and give it back. He was fun to be around. My view of Ford wasn't that he was a

great president, but he was a pretty good president. He was really kind of underrated and did some bold things, at least personnel wise, and in the pardon, that really amounted to something.

Smith: Is it safe to say that everyone drank more than today?

Barnes: Oh yeah. I don't drink now, but I did then. And particularly at the press parties where somebody else was paying for it, then you drank a lot, yes. Drinking wise, it was a completely different world.

Smith: In Tom DeFrank's book, he makes a big deal out of this kind of verbal slip of the tongue where Ford says there's some appointment that Nixon had made and Ford didn't approve of it. And he said something to the effect that, "Well, when I'm there," and then he took it back. Did he ever say anything that you can recall that touched upon the likelihood of his becoming president?

Barnes: You know, we talked about this all the time. Tom DeFrank and I got to be friends and have been friends ever since then. Of course, he kept up with Ford after that. I didn't and I'm not sure anybody else did either the way he did, so he knew Ford the best. We'd comment on the lengths that Ford would have to go to pretend like he wasn't going to be president and that there was no chance of that. There would never be a hint of any criticism of Nixon. There would never be any talk that might create a gap and a conflict with the Nixon White House. Part of that was just pretending that he was just there to be vice president and there was nothing dramatic that was going to happen as a result of that. The reporters would try, you know. They want conflict and one of the hearty perennials in Washington is the great conflict between the vice president and the president. And sure enough everybody tried, I probably did, too, though I don't remember that exactly.

Smith: It comes as no surprise there are people in the Nixon White House who bitched that he wasn't defending the president - that he was getting out of town.

Barnes: You know, I heard that, but that was pretty trivial stuff to say that. On the other hand, I think it is generic. But, look, Ford went out of his way to not let any daylight exist between himself and the Nixon White House, whether he traveled around too much or didn't. A presidential staff is never going to think that a vice president is touting the president enough; even when they don't even get there. If you remember the 2000 campaign, John Edwards wasn't saying enough wonderful things about John Kerry. If the job was to not create any conflict at all between the vice president and the president, he did a pretty darned good job of achieving that.

Smith: He clearly was walking a tightrope.

Barnes: Yeah, he was and he walked it pretty well, I have to say, to the great frustration of everybody in the press corps that traveled with him, including me.

Smith: How would you characterize his intelligence?

Barnes: You know, there are different kinds of intelligence. Ford was not a reader, he was not a book reader as most politicians aren't. And the ones that have been book readers, the two I think of are Jimmy Carter and Gary Hart, things didn't turn out very well for them. Hubert Humphrey was not a book reader. Most of them were not. And so he wasn't. Actually the guy that read a lot of books in his past, not when he was president, was Ronald Reagan. He'd been a reader. So, there's that. I would say this. At the end of the day, he was a lot smarter than he appeared. He wasn't good at press conferences. The two presidents, maybe three, I think, that reporters have been most dazzled with are guys that can throw around a lot of details. You ask them about a subject and they give you six details about it. Obama's pretty good at this, I think, though when you get to know those details, there's not much there. Jimmy Carter was great at it. Richard Nixon was good at it. Ronald Reagan wasn't very good at it. Actually, neither of the Bushs were particularly good at it. But reporters love it when you can really dazzle them with details. And Nixon was good at it. One of his speechwriters, I'll think of his name in a

minute, or advisors, that I ran into at Harvard when I had a Neiman fellowship a few years later, told me when he'd have some policy that he'd put out, they'd have a certain impressive number of points, bullet points, whether it be 45 of them or something just to impress reporters. "Look at that! This must really be a substantial policy!" And, of course, the press always fell for that stuff.

Smith: Remember, in '75, he [Ford] introduced the federal budget. And at the press conference he stayed and he answered every question they threw at him. All those years in the Appropriations Committee gave him that kind of knowledge of the government.

Barnes: Yeah, I went to that press conference. He was pretty good at it. That's true. But in an impromptu press conference, he was just not good at summoning that stuff. And, look, some people are. Bill Clinton was good at it. Jimmy Carter was actually pretty good at it. It's no mark of your leadership at all, so far as I'm concerned, and probably at the time he thought differently.

Smith: Well, to the extent that the modern presidency is about communicating, as much as anything, persuasion whatever. Ford himself said, if he did one thing over, he would've spent a lot more time on communications. He understood that shortcoming. Didn't he suffer in a sense from a cultural change? *Saturday Night Live* goes on the air in '75 and irony becomes, sometimes, cruelty. Satire finds its way into the mainstream.

Barnes: And Chevy Chase made his name as a comic by imitating Ford as being a physical stumbler, which of course he really wasn't, although there were a couple of incidents where he did - when he went down the stairs in Salzburg or Vienna or wherever it was on the trip.

Smith: He was holding an umbrella over Mrs. Ford and he had the football knee that went out. Anyway, he stumbles and of course everyone around him was trying to blame the photographers. And, classic Ford, he says, "Well, of course, they took the pictures. They would've lost their jobs if they hadn't."

Barnes: Well, yeah, no question about it. That's what's different about Ford. Can you imagine Ford blaming other people for things all the time the way others have done it? Obama seems to specialize in it. I mean, that's just not his disposition. That was not his personality. He had a couple little WIN buttons which were harmless enough and that famous 4H speech in North Carolina that was such a disaster. Reporters thought Ford would do some ridiculous things, but they had a generally favorable attitude toward him, not that he was a great president, but that he was certainly adequate for the job and was a good guy to have in there after Nixon.

The other thing that I thought of before that I wanted to mention was that Ford brought in very good people. He was not afraid to have people who were more knowledgeable and smarter than he was. You think of Rumsfeld and Cheney. You think of the role that Jim Baker played in the campaign. I forget who discovered him, but what was he, an Assistant Secretary of Commerce or something like that. And pretty soon he's the main man in the campaign. He brought in Stu Spencer. I mean, you can think about it. I think he overrated Henry Kissinger.

Smith: People like Ed Levi and Carla Hills. I mean, clearly first rate people.

Barnes: He did and he brought in a lot of them and was comfortable with them. People who he must've known at least in their fields were smarter than he was. I don't think he's gotten much credit for that. He starts out with Rumsfeld as his chief of staff and then goes to Cheney, which he didn't have to do. The people he brought in, some people who'd obviously been with him in the House.

Smith: How much of the Ford presidency is a trajectory - of not necessarily unlearning congressional skills, but meshing the best of those with the very different skill set that an executive and particularly a president has to have?

Barnes: It was a little hard for him, but staff wise, he changed pretty quickly. Tom DeFrank always told me that Ford joked with him that after lunch, you

couldn't really deal with Hartmann. After lunch, he'd be a little tipsy. Ford realized that he needed better people once he got there.

Smith: Classic case. I mean, here's Ford, who eventually has dueling speech operations.

Barnes: Oh, I remember that very well. And I remember it painfully because I'd written a piece. I mean, my first real chance was at journalism in covering Ford and then covering the Ford White House and so I'd gotten the speechwriting operation to –

You know, I did a tech talk on all that they were doing leading up to the speech. Was it the State of the Union in '75?

Smith: Where he says the state of the union is not good.

Barnes: Right.

Smith: The last president to ever say that.

Barnes: Of course. And then my story came out the day of the speech or something. Then there was the Dave Gergen operation. It was a completely separate operation where the real speech was produced. So, for me, it was a huge embarrassment and I'm not sure at what point the nominal speech writing operation people found out about it, about the real operation.

Smith: It raises the question of can a president be too nice?

Barnes: Yeah, he didn't have to have it. He could've said, "Hey, we're going to give this to Gergen and his guys and they'll do it." In that case, he was too nice, but you know, it worked out all right. And that was a good speech, actually, the one he wanted. Again, Ford had some pretty good speeches. His speech at the convention in '76 was a wonderful speech, even well-delivered. It's hard to go off against Reagan because Reagan's was very good, too.

Smith: We talked to Stan Anderson, who organized the convention. And as soon as the speech was done, Ford handed him the draft and said, "This is for you."

He said, "I want you to go up and get Governor Reagan and bring him down on the platform." Unplanned as far as Anderson knew. So, he couldn't go down on the floor. Instead he went down into the bowels of the building, went up to the skybox where the Reagans were and he said, "Governor, President Ford would really like to have you join him..." and before he could finish the sentence... "Don't do it, Ronnie!" from Nancy.

Barnes: Was that right?

Smith: That was immediately and profanely seconded by Lynn Nofziger and less profanely by Mike Deaver. But, Reagan, to his credit, said, "No, I think I'll go." And he went and the rest is history.

Barnes: Well, Reagan, I think, realized that that's what you do. Unlike almost anybody in the political community except the folks that were in his room that night, he realized he had a future. The conventional wisdom among everybody in journalism other than myself, I'll have to say, I've realized that all along, was that he'd run twice. Ronald Reagan always thought it was just once. He didn't count '68. And he was old and it was over for him and so on and so he realized that that was an opportunity. I always thought, though I've been told differently, that the speech that Reagan gave there was the speech he was going to give - sort of, parts of it - if he'd won the nomination. But it was a pretty dazzling speech, you know, coming out against nuclear weapons.

Smith: Two questions about that convention. We were talking the other day to Peter McPherson, who was Jim Baker's deputy on the delegate count. And I asked him if the White House was slow to anticipate the Reagan challenge, or to take it seriously. And Pete says something really interesting. He said, "I always thought that what gave it oxygen were two things. One was the refusal to meet Solzhenitsyn and the other was the Common Situs Picketing act." He thought those two really fed in during '75.

Barnes: Well, they defeated Common Situs Picketing as I recall.

Smith: Yeah, I mean, he lost John Dunlop, his Secretary of Labor, over the issue, but they were both hot button issues.

Barnes: Well, I remember Solzhenitsyn better than I remember Common Situs Picketing as being a hot button issue. The truth is Reagan wanted to run. His time had come and he figured he was going to run.

Smith: How did he reconcile it with the 11th Commandment?

Barnes: I don't know that he ever did. And certainly Ford ran tough commercials against him. I mean, remember 'Governor Reagan couldn't start a war, but President Reagan could'? They ran that one in California. It didn't help much, but they ran a pretty tough campaign against him. Well, they were slow to realize that Reagan was going to run. They were slow to react when he actually started running, but they caught up awfully quickly. They really did. And did pretty well. Remember, you didn't have primaries in as many states as you ultimately did. There were a lot of caucuses. I remember going up to North Dakota for their caucus. It was one that Reagan should've won, but the Ford people got there early. And I talked to some of them the night before and he wound up winning at least half the delegates, maybe more.

I mean, look, I've always thought, and I've covered all the presidential campaigns since then, that Ford ran an awfully good campaign in the primaries and in the fall campaign as well when everything was stacked against him. I mean, Reagan was vulnerable. A majority of delegates, a lot of them were pledged to Ford at the convention, but they preferred Reagan. So, to get them to go with Ford took a real effort and it was an awfully good campaign, I'll have to say, in both campaigns. Among the best I've ever seen.

Smith: Stu Spencer tells a great story, and again, it's so revealing of Ford because I guess Stu was going through a divorce and life wasn't very good and he didn't want to be in Washington, and it was the end of a long tough week and it was a Friday, and it was raining. Anyway, he found himself in the Oval Office along with the President and Dick Cheney, and he had all this polling data which showed that whenever Ford went out on the road and gave the

speeches, his numbers would go down. So he's trying to think of a euphemism to stop the President who loves to go out and campaign. And Ford's not getting it or he's pretending not to get it. So, Stu finally says, "Mr. President, you're a great President, but you're a fucking lousy campaigner." Now, the sequel is what makes the story, because, the story then appeared in Germond and Witcomer's book.

Barnes: I heard about it from Tom DeFrank who had better sources than I did, but maybe he got it on some basis that he couldn't use on the campaign.

Smith: The way Stu tells it is that he was embarrassed, he was angry, and he called Cheney to chew him out for telling the story. Cheney lets him go on and on and on and eventually he rumbles down and he says, "Stu, there was another person in the room." Ford told the story on himself, which is what's really revealing. Can you imagine Lyndon Johnson taking that from anyone?

How bitter was that convention?

Barnes: How bitter was it?

Smith: Yeah. You think of the dueling First Lady entrances.

Barnes: I was not the main guy covering the convention and leading up to it. You had Jack and Jules with *The Star* and others. I covered the Mississippi delegation. I went down to Mississippi a few times.

Smith: Tell us about Clarke Reed.

Barnes: Well, you know, Clarke Reed didn't know what he wanted. I mean, Clarke Reed obviously preferred Reagan and wound up going with Ford. Remember who was the executive director of the Republican Party? A young man named Haley Barber, who was this young ED for the Republican Party there. And, you know, it was so painful for Clarke Reed, who I've run into many, many times since.

Smith: We heard he basically went into a fetal position at one point.

- Barnes: It was the toughest decision I think he'd ever made in his life and I think he preferred Reagan, but he couldn't bring himself to go for Reagan against a sitting Republican president.
- Smith: And did the Schweiker selection provide him with the rationale for not going with Reagan?
- Barnes: Partly, but I think he was going to go with Ford anyway, myself. I talked to him a lot and that was used partly as a rationale. But he just couldn't bring himself to go with Reagan. I think he ultimately regretted it, but he was _____ and, you know, Ford had better people dealing with him, I think, than Reagan did, because Reagan should've gotten him and he would've brought a lot of people with him because there was a lot of sympathy for Reagan in that delegation. I mean, Mike Ratzler and other people there. Who was that guy's name? Who was so _____? I'll tell you in a minute. I ran into him in Mississippi a few months ago. He's written a book. I mean, it created permanent alienation between Clarke Reed and this guy. It was something like Sonny. He was some very successful business man who Clarke really alienated.
- Smith: I've often wondered when people, in looking back, draw this mythical Reagan. And I often say, "Now, which Reagan are you talking about? Are you talking about the Reagan that was willing to put Richard Schweiker on his ticket in '76 or Gerald Ford four years later? Are we talking about that Reagan?"
- Barnes: Well, Reagan did pull the plug on it on 1980.
- Smith: Was it a real thing, because some people think it was a head trip to send a signal to people that Reagan was open to moderates?
- Barnes: I didn't think so. I thought it was for real and I reported on it as such. By that time, I was with *The Baltimore Sun* and I did a huge, long tech talk on how it came about and then didn't.

- Smith: There are those who believe that it really originated with Greenspan and Kissinger who saw it as their entre back.
- Barnes: Yeah, they did and they wouldn't admit that at the time, but they certainly did. And so they figured Ford was a pretty good horse to run and it almost happened, you know, until they overreached. Things like he'd pick the defense secretary and he'd have foreign defense (?) was going to be part of the presidency. But it made for a great convention.
- Smith: Yeah, but it also overlooks the fact that I don't think Mrs. Ford would've stood for it.
- Barnes: I don't think she would've either. And some of the other Ford people realized that it was going and as I recall Jack Marsh did. And maybe I'm wrong about that, but I think some realized that thing was getting way out of hand. And some of the Reagan people did, but I know I reported it at the time and I had no reason to think otherwise. It was a real deal. It wasn't just a gambit.
- Smith: Imagine when conventions were spontaneous.
- Barnes: Yeah, I know. Geez.
- Smith: Let me ask you. Did Sears make a critical error? Spencer argues that as close as the race was and given the fact that emotionally there probably was a majority for Reagan, if you're going to try to shake up the status quo, you pick a really intense, emotional issue. You don't go with a rules change to force Ford to name his vice presidential candidate.
- Barnes: In hindsight, you look back and I don't know that it hurt Reagan. It certainly didn't help him. I don't think he got a single vote on that. You know, I mean, Ford had a hundred plus more votes and he had a hundred plus more votes on the rules vote and on the nomination, so it didn't do him any good. I don't think the Schweiker thing did him any good either.
- Smith: Did they think that they could flip Drew Lewis?

Barnes: Well, that's what it was aimed at. It was all aimed at Drew Lewis. I mean, I was told in no uncertain terms by, I forget who, at the campaign or the White House that that's who it was aimed at and they really thought they could do it. Drew Lewis obviously became a Reaganite, was his transportation secretary. Very nice man, I always liked him. Like others, he wanted to be president himself and he probably needed to be elected governor of Pennsylvania first. Remember who he lost to? Milton Shapp. It was '74 and Milton Shapp made a terrible governor. But, yeah, that's what it was. Pennsylvania had a large delegation. They had to pry it open and it was fairly miserable. The ironic thing, of course, was Schweiker who'd been sort of a liberal Republican, after that, turned to veer off in a conservative direction. A friend of mine invited me to a group of a people that meet every three or four weeks in Arlington and I may be the youngest person in it, but it's people like Andy Miller from Virginia and some Democrats, some Republicans, some businessmen, and Richard Schweiker's in this. He's still kicking.

Smith: Then there's the interesting decision by the Ford campaign to basically concede the foreign policy plank, which could've been that emotional issue.

Barnes: That was smart on their part, because nobody remembered anything that happened after that. It had no effect on the campaign. It was a smart thing to do and there was really only one person for whom it was a kick in the ass and that, of course, was Kissinger.

Smith: You know the Tom Korologos story?

Barnes: No.

Smith: Well, Tom tells it better than me and he was there. But you can see him...Kissinger, of course, was ranting and raving and I think Rockefeller joined in. Kissinger was talking about resigning, not for the first time. And Korologos is there and he said, "Well, Henry, if you're going to do it, do it fast because we need the votes."

Barnes: That's great. That's when you really knew it was over, when they threw that out. Because that was the big Reagan difference. It was foreign policy. Hard to believe that now, but it really was. It wasn't as big of a deal as the Solzhenitsyn thing was. I mean, Kissinger was a real flashpoint for conservatives back in those days because he *was* détente. I always thought that ultimately Reagan was right and Nixon and Kissinger were wrong. They favored detente, and when Kissinger was denied the "We're Athens, they're Sparta"—

Smith: It's interesting, talking with Brent Scowcroft even today, it was actually a very subtle foreign policy. Because, on the one hand, as they explain it, we're looking for any weaknesses we can find. We're looking for any areas of cooperation that are mutually beneficial. But at the same time, we realize the Cubans were in Angola. And, how do you sell that in a primary campaign?

Barnes: It was very hard and he couldn't sell it. It's so much easier when you're not accountable for any of this foreign policy that has to be nuanced to some extent. So Reagan had a field day. And it was stupid not to meet with Solzhenitsyn. I've talked to him a few times afterwards and Roger Stone used to arrange these dinners up at Nixon's when he was at New Jersey. I'd never met Nixon before that, but Ford had been invited to a couple of them and he could've met Solzhenitsyn. I mean, Nixon's belief was you don't do anything that's going to anger the Soviets. It'll be counterproductive. The rhetoric only can be harmful to relations in getting anything out of them. And so the Solzhenitsyn thing was a part of that and I think that was a mistake on his part. And it was a political mistake for sure, but I thought it was a substantive mistake.

Smith: Did Nixon comment specifically on Ford's refusal to meet Solzhenitsyn? That he thought it was diplomatically necessary for him to not meet with Solzhenitsyn or did he think it was a mistake for him not to?

Barnes: You know, I don't remember exactly. It's been a long time.

Smith: Did he talk about Ford at all? Because, remember the week of the New Hampshire primary, Nixon goes to China. The people at the Ford White House were a bit incensed. It's still hard to nail down exactly what that relationship was.

Barnes: I guess I kind of forgot. As it turned out, Ford would've helped himself a lot.

Smith: Speculation: is there anything Ford could've done to prevent the Reagan challenge?

Barnes: Yeah, he could've offered him a job better than secretary of transportation. Reagan took that as an insult and it was. And this is where I never understood. You've talked to Stu Spencer. Why'd he gotten so down on Reagan? I mean, he had a lot to do and had been a critical figure in electing him in the first place, but I just remember talking to him and he would do that during that campaign. I always liked him. Stu Spencer's a great guy, always fun to talk to, and a terrific guy. But, you know, he would just crap on Reagan like crazy. And I don't know what happened that he felt so alienated from Reagan. There must have been some explanation for it.

Smith: Then again, it tells you a lot about Reagan that, later on, he was willing to overlook that.

Barnes: Yeah, and brought him in and the Spencer help. No question about it.

Smith: Can you explain to people today who find it incredible, a political climate that, when John Paul Stevens was nominated to the Supreme Court, nobody asked him about abortion.

Barnes: Really?

Smith: Yeah.

Barnes: I've forgotten that.

Smith: Isn't that amazing?

Barnes: I remember that nomination. Ford just wanted somebody who could get confirmed. I mean, he wasn't necessarily looking for a conservative. And John Paul Stevens, who, in my understanding, was always regarded as a self-absorbed Republican. He didn't know him. Ed Levi knew him. And maybe Rumsfeld did, too. I'm not sure. But Ed Levi became attorney general and I'm sure Ford had never met him either, but I guess Rumsfeld knew him. And that's how they finally got to Stevens.

Smith: Someone in the counsel's office told us that Ford, just off the top of his head, said, "You know who'd make a great justice? Barbara Jordan."

Barnes: I remember hearing that story.

Smith: But I guess that's the House speaking, isn't it?

Barnes: Sure. Oh yeah, what a likeable person she is, she's so smart, and she'll bring us all together. I have to say, in Texas once, I did what was supposed to be sort of a debate with Barbara Jordan. You know, you're not going to debate Barbara Jordan the way you'd debate some liberal in the same line of work you are in. I said some of the things I wanted to say, but I was extremely respectful and of course so was she. She was a nice person. But that's funny.

That was a real traumatic thing picking a Supreme Court Justice for them because they thought they were really behind the eight ball, but I talked to her a lot during that.

Have you ever talked to a guy named Russ Roark?

Smith: No.

Barnes: I don't know if he was in the counsel's office or what. I think Jack Marsh brought him in. He lived in Annapolis. He's probably not alive any more, but he told me once and I used his quote and I didn't name him in *The Evening Star*, "We're trying to get somebody we can get confirmed. We don't want a Charles Bronson," or "We don't want a this or that," and he threw out all these names like that. The quote was so great, even other

reporters accused me of making it up, which I hadn't. Tom DeFrank knew it perfectly well because he used to talk to Russ Roark all the time, too. The guy would give you fantastic quotes like that. But it was purely defensive on their part, unlike Reagan's picking a nomination.

Smith: Ford never interviewed Stevens, which I find astonishing. He read all of his decisions.

Barnes: I don't think presidents interviewed them. Of course, now they do routinely and now they interview people they don't pick.

Smith: A couple of quick things. Rockefeller went to his grave convinced that Rumsfeld did him in and that he deep-sixed George Bush at the same time. That it was all part of a larger effort to set himself up for at least the possibility of being vice president and eventually running for the presidency.

Barnes: I don't know about the vice president part, but the other part is certainly true. I mean, he'd brought in what's his name, Republican chairman from Georgia...

Smith: Bo Callaway.

Barnes: Yeah, Bo Callaway.

Smith: Bo Callaway was a Rumsfeld person.

Barnes: At least I thought he was then. Had Bo Callaway been in the House?

Smith: Yes.

Barnes: Yeah, so they must've known each other there. But Bo Callaway was not going to go out on his own and run a campaign against Rockefeller who was the sitting vice president without Rumsfeld staying behind it. And Rumsfeld always denied it, but he was certainly a conniver. George Bush, Sr. always blamed Rumsfeld for taking him out of the '76 race because the White House appointment of Rumsfeld(?), as part of his confirmation process, to be the head of the CIA that he would not be a political figure in '76. And Bush

believed, because he personally told me this, that he thought Rumsfeld was responsible for it in order to take him out of the vice presidential picture.

Smith: On the other hand, Bush 41 later on said in retrospect it was the best thing that happened to him.

Barnes: It may have been, but I talked to him about this. He told me about this in, I think, '78, when he was starting to travel around the country with just one aide. I went out on a trip with him and that's when I heard about it. So it was fresh. He really thought Rumsfeld had been the conspiratorial force behind that. Named him specifically. I forgot whether it was on the record or off the record, but, you know, it's on the record now anyway.

Smith: I've been told that because when Rumsfeld wanted to run in '80 he found, first of all, he'd alienated the Rockefellers and he'd alienated the Bush's. I think he found fundraising a bit of a challenge.

Barnes: And at a later time, he was talking about running too. I forget when it was.

Smith: Maybe '88.

Barnes: Yeah, maybe it was '88, but he just got nowhere. You know, Rumsfeld is an extremely able guy and he's a guy you would want in your administration, though there are questions that a lot of people have raised about him and the troop levels in Iraq. But Bush (Ford?) liked him. (Ford?) had known him as one of the rising young guys in the House and obviously thought a lot of him and made him secretary of defense. Some people thought that Rumsfeld made himself secretary of defense in that old Halloween Massacre, which was really a pretty big thing for a president to pull off. He hated Jim Schlesinger, who he thought was just completely condescending toward him, and fired him. And I think Ford would've kept him. Kissinger with both hats would give him his druthers but thought he couldn't do it. And, I don't know, maybe Bill Colby was just collateral damage, but I'm not sure why he had to be bounced.

Smith: It's interesting because Ford offered Colby an ambassadorship or something and Ford said Colby was a total gentleman about the situation. Unlike Schlesinger, who apparently resisted and tried to argue the President out of it.

Barnes: More reason why Ford would want to get rid of him, because Ford really didn't like him.

Smith: Which is unusual.

Barnes: Yeah, because Ford could get along with just about anybody, but not some professorial, condescending, I-know-better type.

Smith: Especially for someone who'd been on the Defense Appropriations Committee for 20 years. Didn't Ford in a sense unknowingly, and again, maybe its part of the House mentality - create a problem with the vice presidency where he basically led Rockefeller to believe that "you're going to be an assistant president for domestic policy?"

Barnes: It wasn't just that, though. I mean, that's another part of it and you're probably right, but it was bad politically, because they really underestimated the rising conservative forces in the Republican Party. There was enough discontent with Ford himself eventually that Rockefeller wasn't the guy to pick. Now, I think he probably picked him for the other reason, that Rockefeller was the most able guy, among other things, and probably was. But politically, it was never going to fly. I don't think that if he hadn't dumped Rockefeller, that Ford would've won the nomination. Reagan would've won. Rockefeller was too much of a liability among conservatives outside the East Coast or outside the Northeast, really.

Smith: He was really a good soldier. Aat one point when Reagan had taken a lead in delegates, Rockefeller turned over the New York and Pennsylvania delegations, which is what spelled the difference. But, behind the scenes it was different. Mac Mathias right after he was dumped offered consoling words and Rockefeller says, "Who wants to hang around with those shits anyway?"

Barnes: I remember going on a trip with Rockefeller when he was vice president and it was a meeting of Republican governors in Wichita or someplace like that. I think there were about twelve of them. But with Rockefeller, when you would travel with him, you had fancier credentials, you had everything. Everything was nice. Even though you were going on the government take, things were extremely well organized and you could tell it was a first class operation. Maybe Ford could've pulled it out with Rockefeller there, but I don't think so.

Barnes: Not really. You know, I guess I didn't cover him enough to know. Was he? I assume he probably was. You know, it's hard when you've always been in charge.

Smith: And he's a Rockefeller.

Barnes: Yeah, he's a Rockefeller and the vice president can be a demeaning job because of the things you do.

Smith: People all forget that Rockefeller's the guy coached by Dick Parsons, whose parliamentary rulings led to the change in the filibuster rule from two-thirds to 60 Senators.

Barnes: Really?

Smith: Yeah. Rockefeller was in the chair and it was dissatisfaction with that change that prompted Tower and Thurmond, among others, to go down to the White House and express real discontent with Rockefeller. And it's a story that's not well-known.

Barnes: Yeah, not to me. Now, which Dick Parsons is this?

Smith: Dick Parsons who ran Time Warner.

Barnes: Yeah, sure. The guy who's still around, sure. I didn't know he was a Rockefeller guy.

Smith: Were you at the Polish gaffe?

Barnes: Yeah, I was there.

Smith: There's some debate over how immediately people recognized that this was a huge mistake.

Barnes: No, I didn't recognize it. I mean, I was there in the room at the debate. You know, what happens is reporters will go back and other people and they'll all start talking about it and at some point afterwards, Ford aides have sort of a press conference and talk about it. And I'm not sure whether it came up there. Did it? Anyway, by later in the night, it had become a gaffe after people started talking about it. But, was I struck by it instantly? No, because knowing Ford, I knew what he meant. See, that's the thing. What he meant was, you know, in their hearts the Polish people, they're not under the domination of the Soviets.

Smith: He'd been there.

Barnes: Sure. Where he could've said, "They may be dominated now in a military sense, but in their hearts, they're an independent people who will never..." I knew what he meant.

Smith: But it took a week.

Barnes: Oh, I remember. I went on a trip with him afterwards and finally I think the motorcade stopped somewhere when he finally said, "Well, maybe I misspoke." But to answer your question, it wasn't obvious to me at the time and I don't think it was to others. And, for some reason, I think at that press conference afterwards, that it might not even have come up, but by later that evening, it certainly did. It was probably an early debate because it was in San Francisco and so maybe it started early at six or something so it'd be on.

Smith: Part of the problem was, as soon as it was over, Kissinger gets on the phone and says, "Oh, you did wonderful, Mr. President." Lathering.

Barnes: And so did everybody else at this press conference afterwards. I remember Mark Duvall saying, "The President was great on everything. He won every

question and every issue” and so on. But I guess Ford didn’t think that he’d said anything. I mean, my interpretation of what he was trying to say was what I guess he thought he said.

Smith: And he was stubborn.

Barnes: He was very stubborn about it, so it became a big story for a number of days.

Smith: I meant to ask you earlier. There’s still a debate on this. Do you think on balance the Reagan challenge made Ford a better candidate, or did it undercut his fall chances?

Barnes: Both can be true. They’re not mutually exclusive. The answer is probably yes and yes. I really hadn’t thought of that, but Ford always blamed Reagan for undercutting him and then not doing much during the campaign to help him.

Smith: Is the latter a fair charge?

Barnes: Yeah, about Reagan not doing? Yeah, I think it’s a fair charge, because I think Reagan had promised to do more and he wound up not doing it and they had great plans for him to do things. They wanted to use him in the useful places in the South and as it turned out, of course, Ford only won Virginia and none of these other southern states. Of course, Carter was from the South. Anyway, they thought Reagan could’ve helped him there. They had specific plans for places for Reagan to go and then Reagan didn’t do it. And I think, look, serious challenges to a nomination fight hurt, just the way Kennedy hurt Carter, though Carter would’ve probably lost anyway. But obviously Kennedy hurt him. And I think Reagan hurt Ford, but did make him a better candidate. You know, coming out of the convention, Ford had a great well-run campaign with good ads.

Smith: “I’m feeling good about America.”

Barnes: “I’m feeling good...” Yeah, Tom DeFrank can still sing the whole song.

Smith: We talked to Doug Bailey.

Barnes: He had great media and Doug Bailey loved jingles, loved songs. Bailey and Deardorf. They really put together great ads for the campaign. I remember there was one that was particularly effective. You remember the man on the street ads?

Smith: It was interesting because the dynamic of the campaign was, if you keep the focus on Ford, we lose. The focus has got to be on Carter.

Barnes: They did a good job on that because people didn't know what to make of Carter. And it turned out that he was a terrible president and I've always thought a terrible person, myself, a petty guy full of grudges and hatreds.

Smith: It did surprise me that he and Ford could become friends.

Barnes: But that tells you a lot more about Ford than it does about Carter. Because Ford wanted to be friends with him and he thought they were members of a unique club.

Smith: After the election, it took Ford a while to bounce back.

Barnes: It did.

Smith: And he would go around the White House privately and say, "I can't believe I lost to a peanut farmer." Did you sense that he was really down?

Barnes: Yes, because Ford was such a resilient guy that he had never let things get to him. I was with him on that trip when it was not the fall of Saigon but when they really cut, no, I'm thinking of when Congress cut off the money.

Smith: For the refugee resettlement?

Barnes: No, when they cut off the money for the military aid to the South Vietnamese government, which was at the end. And Ford did fine on that and other things. But losing - you know - had he ever lost an election?

Smith: No.

Barnes: I guess he never had and especially to a peanut farmer, but it really did. You could tell the difference because he was a guy who was always up, was always cheerful. You could see the difference.

Smith: The fall of Saigon, what was the mood like around the White House?

Barnes: I remember what my mood was.

Smith: Was your sense one of humiliation?

Barnes: Well, it wasn't exactly unexpected. You know, I really don't remember. I remember, myself, it was when I started to become a conservative actually because I knew no good could come of that, particularly in the short run. I don't remember there being a particularly gloomy mood around there. It wasn't a big surprise. It wasn't a big surprise when the funding was cut off for the South Vietnamese government. When in '75 did Saigon fall?

Smith: April 28th, 29th.

Barnes: I think it was in the fall when the funds were cut off, which was a huge mistake, I think, to this day. But I don't remember there being a cloud of gloom settling over the White House.

Smith: How do you think he should be remembered?

Barnes: As a guy who was up to being president, was the right guy for the time, handled the things he had to do well, the pardon of Nixon, the straightening out of the government. The hardest part was driving away the Nixon cloud over the White House and he did an awfully good job of doing that. The pardon was only a part of that. You know, just his personality and style and geniality and likeability and belief in the country and belief in the presidency and so on. The ability to get along with the press in a very happy, cheerful way. You know, I didn't know anybody in the press corps who didn't like him. You didn't feel an adversarial relationship with Ford. I never thought an adversarial relationship was what we ought to have with presidents or political figures anyway. We can save that for Al Qaeda. He can be

skeptical, but adversarial is something else. But all those wonderful traits he had were the right traits at the time, and then, although I can think of things he did that I didn't agree with, I mean, look, there were some things that were Betty's influence, forwarding ERA and abortion and those issues. Although ERA was a pretty big issue, abortion was a Supreme Court decision issued in January '73, so there was no big pro-life movement then at all. It took years to build up. It was sort of a Catholic issue then because all the Protestants hadn't joined. So, I have good feelings about the Ford presidency. He wasn't a great president, unlike Reagan, who approaches that anyway? But, you know, he fit the bill and, you know, what would've Reagan had done? Would Reagan have pardoned Nixon if he'd been in there at that time? I don't know. I'm not so sure. So, I have very good feelings about Ford. I don't know. One of the main complaints about him as president are mainly that he wasn't somebody else. You know.

Smith: A Jack Kennedy.

Barnes: Yeah.

Smith: He wasn't charismatic.

Barnes: Yeah, all the things that were not particularly needed at that time anyway.

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