

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Jerry Jones
January 26, 2009
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith

Smith: First of all, thank you for doing this.

Before your paths crossed with Gerald Ford - you'd been in the Nixon White House.

Jones: I was.

Smith: And before that, what was your background?

Jones: My background is, I was brought up in a small town out in West Texas. My dad was a rancher out there and his parents were ranchers and my mother's parents were ranchers. My mother had a fortuitous experience in her life - her mother was determined that she would be an educated person. So she and her sister would trade off, working, teaching school out there, and send the other one to college. They went through two years at the University of Texas and then two years with their degrees at the University of Chicago. Then they both went on for Master's degrees. My mother missed hers by a few hours, her sister got hers. And so it was always, "You've got to be an educated person."

So, I wanted to be a football player (West Texas generates them). I got injured first game my junior year in high school. I decided I'd better get smart because I'm not going to be able to go play football at the University of Texas. I happened to know of, through fortuitous circumstances, a school named Phillips Exeter Academy and I wrote them a letter and said, "Hey, I'd like to come to your school." I was diversity at that time, coming from a little town in Texas. I took their test and didn't do very well, but they said, "Come to summer school." I did. They said, "Hey, you did well enough to stay. We want you to go back a year." I said, "No, let me try." So I went from a junior in this little small high school to a senior at Exeter and made it. By the skin of my teeth, I made it.

Back then, most of the people went to three schools from Exeter. Ninety-four of us went to Harvard, 45 or so to Yale, 25-30 to Princeton. Seventy-five, eighty percent of the class, three schools. So, I went to Harvard, loved it. It just so happened that the head of the department of government was from my little home town. Maybe the only other guy that ever escaped from the magnetic field.

Smith: What was his name?

Jones: His name was V.O. Key. V.O. wrote one of the classic textbooks of government called *Parties, Politics and Pressure Groups*.

Smith: What year did you graduate from Harvard?

Jones: 1961.

Smith: So you were there with Mr. Pusey.

Jones: Yes, Mr. Pusey.

Smith: And they still called them the "Silent Fifties." On the cusp of the anything but silent Sixties.

Jones: And then went to Harvard Business School. Graduated in 1964. Went to New York City, worked for McKinsey & Company, which was a major - not worldwide in that time, it was sort of in its golden age - major consulting firm. It was basically a Ph.D. in business. I left there, bought a little company out near Chicago in McHenry, Illinois. Then the Nixon downturn hit me, leverage buy-outs were no longer possible. I was in sort of the early leading edge of how you did that. Then a friend of mine who I had gone to business school with and who I'd got a job at McKinsey - I'd been there since summer, they had three summer associates and I was one of them - I recommended a number of people in that class. His name was Fred Malek. Fred's here. Anyway, Fred landed in the White House. He came in with Bob Finch over at HEW. And then Haldeman liked him, brought him over to the White House and Fred asked me to come down for six months to help him reorganize the White House personnel office.

So, I came down and worked on getting that office straight, it'd been the victim of a power struggle between John Mitchell, who had had the personnel operation and was overseeing it, and Haldeman, who took it over from the Attorney General. And as I went along there, I really enjoyed it. Mitchell landed at the campaign and wanted someone to audit the field operations in the campaign and what better than a McKinsey guy to set up a system to make sure the campaign was operating well and effectively in the 50 states. So I went over there and I'd been there about a month and Mitchell was gone. The break-in occurred. Mitchell was gone. The campaign was in turmoil and I was given the job essentially of organizing and running a 50 state campaign, the campaign in the 50 states, which I did. We had a marvelous experience. McGovern was an unfortunate candidate for the other side and we won 49 states.

Smith: Let me just back up a bit because, during the campaign, how much internal concern was there about Watergate?

Jones: My side of the campaign was totally clean. Malek was there. He had the voter blocks, Farmers for Nixon, Veterans for Nixon in the field operation and I was the deputy to Fred running the campaign in the 50 states. Magruder's group organized that break-in. We thought some funny business had probably happened, but were totally untouched. Didn't think much about it. Yeah, well, "Mitchell and Magruder..." Never thought, *never* thought that it would have gone into the White House.

Smith: When you see what has become, what we'll call accepted history, say the Woodward-Bernstein version of events - is there anything with which you take particular exception? Is there an alternate history?

Jones: Let me answer your first question before you ask that one. We knew that there was a guy named Fred LaRue, there was a guy named Bob Mardian, there were Magruder -

Smith: Were they Mitchell people?

Jones: All of those were Mitchell people. We knew they were involved, particularly LaRue and Magruder. Magruder was a weak, sort of too ambitious fellow, not much character. So we knew that those fellows were into skullduggery.

The other thing that everyone asks why in the world would you want to do that? The DNC is not effective, it's not important. And so it was sort of a "Stupid" - "Probably Magruder currying favor" - "Let's don't worry about it. Let's go win this campaign." So, at the time, there was not a lot of fuss about it. It was fairly clear that some of these fellows probably did that. There's no question, you know, the head of security was caught.

So, later, there is some serious question about John Dean's role and whether or not he was instructed to do these things and whether or not he was the intermediary, as he claims, between Nixon and Haldeman and Mitchell, and so on. There's been a book about his interest in this and I talked to the guy years ago, years ago now. You know, I guess I come down to the thought that - Magruder once told me his opinion of what happened and he said that the reason they broke in was that Nixon was concerned that - who was the chairman?

Smith: Larry O'Brien.

Jones: Larry O'Brien, who worked for Howard Hughes, knew something of Nixon's brother's transactions with Hughes and was worried those... And apparently Nixon's mother got some money, too, if you remember, maybe \$100,000 to pay off a mortgage or something. I've forgotten all of the details of it, but there was something there. I guess I've come to the thought that probably Nixon did it, probably instructed it done.

Smith: How will we ever know that? Is it possible there's something on a tape somewhere, or something that was erased on a tape somewhere?

Jones: Well, you may or may not know, I was, after the gap was found, the custodian of the tapes.

Smith: Really?

Jones: Yeah, and I think the tapes have been looked at pretty carefully. My guess is there's nothing on the tapes. Although the only chance, I think, is that the people who might know - Chuck Colson, Jeb Magruder, Dwight Chapin, Larry Higby, who was special assistant to Haldeman - the people who might have known, Fred Fielding, would toward the end of their lives talk about it. That's the only chance, in my view. Now, Haldeman had a diary published and so on, but we don't really have a lot of light on it at this point.

Smith: When you say you were custodian of the tapes, was there at any time to your knowledge any consideration given at the top to destroying those tapes?

Jones: No. I will tell you an interesting story and this begins the Ford administration. Fred Buzhardt, as you know, was formerly general counsel here, was still a Strom Thurmond guy, was the President's -- Nixon's - chief attorney on the tape matters. I mean, there were other attorneys, but Fred was *the* most trusted attorney and did all. The tapes could only be listened to by four people, Nixon himself, Rose Mary, Al Haig, and Fred Buzhardt. I don't ever recall Al listening to one. The president rarely did. He asked that they be delivered to Steve Bull, who was his personal assistant. Rose Mary Woods and Fred Buzhardt were my two major customers.

I had a book that had every tape listed on spreadsheets with dates and a receipting system. If Buzhardt wanted a tape and he would call, actually Haig would call and say, "The president has given permission for Fred to listen to the blank tape." And so I would take it to Fred and he would sign a receipt for it, you know, "On this day, I have received..." And then, when he was through with it or at the end of the day, I would go get it, sign a receipt that I received it in order to have a chain-of-custody. Then I would enter initials and time in and time out on the spreadsheets so I could see at a glance who had heard what tape when.

The interesting thing was, when President Ford came into office, there was sort of a scurrying about. Nixon called and wanted his tapes and President Ford agreed to give them to him, apparently, or someone did. I think Phil Buchen did. Perhaps President Ford, I'm not quite sure. Anyway, Buzhardt then calls me, I think two days, maybe three, after President Ford was sworn

in and said, "Jerry, pack up the tapes, the military fellows who were flying daily flights out to San Clemente will take the tapes out and some of the papers this afternoon. So, please get them boxed up and ready to go."

I had a vault, only key, EPS officer outside, two alarms, the only combination and then five combination safes, fireproof, again, only combinations were with me. So I went in there, hot, hot, hot. It was in August, oh God, it was hot in the basement of the EOB under a stairwell. And I packed the tapes up and then Buzhardt appears knocking on the door. No one ever entered the vault except for me. So Fred comes in and he says, "Jerry, we can't do this. We'll all go to jail. Unpack them." And so we were within probably 45 minutes of loading all of those boxes full of tapes on a dolly, into a military van, delivered to Andrews, and flown to San Clemente.

Smith: Do you know what sequence of events transpired in between those conversations that you had?

Jones: Yes, I do. Phil Buchen, either he himself changed his mind or he got someone else to change their mind and countermand the order. And I do not know whether it was Buchen to Ford, "Mr. President, we shouldn't do this", or whether it was the president having second thoughts, or whether Buchen on his own said 'no.' Now, I don't believe Phil would have said 'no' on his own.

Section Not Released

Smith: Where were you in the last, in the final days? I mean, where were you in the White House?

Jones: Okay, I'll tell you. After the campaign in 1972, I came back to the White House personnel office again, which is the office that recommends to the president who he might consider to appoint to the presidentially-appointed, confirmed by the Senate positions, as well as screening all the other non-career positions for political and other type, legal and FBI vetting. I went back there. President Nixon decided we had a number of "spent volcanoes" in his terminology. We were charged, a group of us who had been there in the past, with sorting through whose resignation should be accepted. As I recall, at the end of the day, beginning of January, there were of the 500, as I

remember, excluding US attorneys and ambassadorial appointees, there were 555 PAS positions then. By about the 10th of January, 355 of those slots were open.

Smith: Really?

Jones: Yeah. Some of the people were resigning and others were asked - their resignations were accepted. But a small team of us, about six or seven people, worked through all of the personnel and the PASs and recommended to the president whose letters he should accept.

Smith: I have to ask you, what kind of factors were weighed? I mean, was ideology...?

Jones: Capability and whether they cooperated with the Nixon agenda. And we had a lot of people that did not cooperate with the Nixon agenda, who basically did their own thing and Nixon was really upset about that. So he had a chance to get them and he got them. So, we did that.

Smith: Did that include members of the cabinet?

Jones: Well, you know a lot of people would debate about these things, but Mel Laird left as did others. So, we did that. Then, oh about the 10th, 15th Malek went to be deputy director of OMB under Ash, and Haldeman called and said, "You're the guy to run the White House liaison office. You're it." So I became the special assistant to President Nixon running the White House personnel office. Haig then comes in a little later. Haig and I get along beautifully. I filled, I think when I left there, ten of those 355 positions were open. You always have a float(?) of open positions. We'd done them, we filled them in the middle of the Watergate. In the middle of it and we, I think, we did a great job. Let me say that.

Haig then called me about, oh, I can't really remember, early 1974. "Come over and see me." Went over and [he] said, "You finished the job in the personnel office. I want you now to become staff secretary. And there's a job, by the way, an extra assignment. You will be the custodian of the tapes." So, I took them over then.

- Smith: Did you have a sense, did he have a sense, was there any kind of collective sense at that point – if you're talking about the beginning of '74, you've got - Agnew's gone, Ford's been confirmed –
- Jones: Oh, the Agnew thing was really interesting. I got a call from Camp David from Haldeman. "Jerry?", "Yes, sir", "Do you know how many positions the vice president has?" "Well, he has a number and I have a book right here on my desk. Let me look here. Ah, about two pages of positions, about 50, I'd guess." He said, "Would you send a list up tonight to Camp David by helicopter?" "Yes, sir, I will." Next day, he calls me, he says, "Prepare letters of resignation for the vice president for all positions except the vice presidency, please." "Yes, sir."
- Smith: Let me get the timing of this right.
- Jones: This is *before* it broke. It was before it broke. In January '73 or even earlier in December '72.
- Smith: Okay, because Haldeman left. I mean, they left, what, in the late spring of '73?
- Jones: Yeah, so this was early. This was before anyone knew that Agnew was on the chopping block and they cleared him out. So I had to do that. It was very interesting. And so, you know, "What's up folks?" Very interesting. Anyway, so, I did that.
- Smith: Wow – I obviously didn't know that. No one else did. So, by early '74, is there anything such as a collective mood or prognosis around Haig in terms of the future?
- Jones: It daily got worse. Every day it was worse. The drip, drip, drip of the Felt leaks, the Saturday Night Massacre –
- Smith: Did you suspect, did people suspect –
- Jones: Yeah, it looked as though it was coming out of the FBI. We didn't know from whom, but it looked as though it was the interview notes from the FBI investigation. That's what we thought at the time.

Smith: And why would someone in the FBI have had – what was the motive?

Jones: Well, who knows what motives are but clearly somebody was sticking it to Nixon for their own reasons, whatever they might have been. In Felt's case it was 'duty, God, and country,' I'm sure, but then because he'd been passed over.

Smith: It's a little more complicated than it seems.

Jones: Yeah. So, the answer is that we were embattled. There was no question about it. Nobody knew how it was going to turn out, however. And, I will tell you my personal view, and I think most of my colleagues' view. Very few people left the White House, only Shultz left the cabinet, *very* few people bailed on Nixon. And the reason for it was, there were two reasons. The first one was, and I remember it vividly - my thought here - Nixon would not be so damned stupid as to have done this. It just can't possibly be true. He is much more clever than this. And the other one was, is that Al Haig was a commanding presence. What a wonderful man. He's an American hero in my opinion. He held that government together. And he negotiated the deal with Jaworski. And he negotiated the deal with a somewhat to, perhaps, majorly incapacitated president. And he kept the train on the tracks. Al Haig, if he never did another thing in the history of the United States, he is absolutely a hero and should have been recognized as the hero he was. He hasn't been, but *tour de force*, absolutely amazing thing. And he kept the cabinet together, he kept the government together, he kept the White House together and he kept Nixon together. It was amazing.

Smith: You talked about every day getting worse and at the same time obviously no one knew how it was going to wind up. At the same time, knowing the tapes were this sort of unknown commodity that presumably at any point something might surface that would lead to exactly what happened –

Jones: Nixon could not possibly have been so stupid as to do this. *Cannot possibly*. He knew the recording system was there, for God sakes.

Smith: Were you surprised when you first heard of the existence of the recording system?

- Jones: Uhm, no. I was not surprised. What did surprise me was the extent of which it was a part. As it turns out, Roosevelt had a crawl space in the Oval Office and he had a secretary crawl in the crawl space and take shorthand notes at the air conditioning vent near the desk. So it had been going on a long time, a long time. But the thing that was strange was the extent to which it was done.
- Smith: Is there a story or anything that illustrates, again for people who weren't around then, the mood as it evolved during that sort of surreal summer? Or is it a sense that you just sort of went along and then you went over the cliff?
- Jones: We were going along and there was a critical date. We did one thing, we published a big book of recordings, expletives deleted. And I had to publish that book.
- Smith: Looking back, the expletives, the language, had as much impact on ordinary Americans as anything in particular that was said.
- Jones: It's about like Blago.
- Smith: Yeah, it's one thing to think about it in the abstract and it's another to hear it.
- Jones: What happened was, was we were on essentially a flat line. The critical decision was: Will executive privilege hold? Can Sirica make the president turn the tapes over or not? And so we were tracking along through that law suit, a lot of leaks and so on, but the presidency was operating, decisions were being made, things were being done...
- Smith: And you assumed you had at least enough votes in the Senate to win a trial.
- Jones: Right. At that time, it looked as though Nixon could survive if he could win the executive privilege argument. Well, the decision came down. The tapes had to be given up and that's when it became a difficult thing. And I will tell you exactly how it happened, I remember it vividly. The decision was made. Nixon was in San Clemente. The decision was not what we expected it to be. I think most of us thought we would win that case. I certainly did. I think he should've won it, frankly, but he didn't. And the case then, I was called by Ken Clawson who was the director of communications who was in San

Clemente, and he said, “Jerry, you think it is possible that the president could stiff the Supreme Court in this decision?”

So that was, then, he’d clearly been told to sound out the people in Washington about what was going on. And Bill Timmons, I was in Timmons’ office when that call came to me, Timmons was counting noses in the Senate and we were leaking votes and I just told Clawson, “If the president does that, he’s done. It’s over. It is totally over. He cannot do it. He must deliver the tapes.” So, I was told to pull the tapes together, but before that, that same afternoon, Haig said, “The president wants Fred to listen to the June 23rd Oval Office tape. Would you please go get it and give it to Fred?” So I took it over to Fred and Fred usually kept the tapes to the end of the day and I’d gather them all up. That day, he called me back in, oh, 30-40 minutes, 45, met me at the door of his office, handed me the tape and he said, “Jerry, it’s all over.” My guess is, I probably knew that even before Haig did and before the president. Interestingly enough, that tape had only been listened to twice before, both times by Nixon. That latest one in May. So he knew. He knew.

Smith: At that point, now, does Haig listen to the tape?

Jones: No, Buzhardt listened. Then I had to gather them up, I’d forgotten how many of them there were, 20? 25? I gave them to a guy named, uh, I’ve forgotten his name [Jim St. Claire], one of the attorneys who took them up to Sirica.

Smith: Okay, so Haig, as far as you know, never listened to the June 23rd tape.

Jones: [shakes head] Buzhardt.

Smith: Okay. What was your sense of the relationship between, for lack of a better word, the Nixon people and the Ford people at this delicate juncture? Was there resentment that Ford was out on the road, not in town defending his boss?

Jones: People weren’t paying much attention to that. I mean, I wasn’t. There were some discussions and some leaks about Ford getting ready to take over the presidency if he had to and so on. Maybe other people were paying attention

to it, but, you know, we had some pretty good incoming fire and that was not a major topic, frankly, not a major topic.

Smith: That makes perfect sense. It has been suggested through the years - everyone knows that Ford wasn't his first choice - but that he [Nixon] looked upon Ford as his insurance against impeachment.

Jones: Well, I've heard that and it could've been his thinking, but it was terribly wrong because the Congress would have far preferred to have Ford there than a damaged Nixon, I think. So, if that was his calculation, it was incorrect.

Smith: What was Haig's role in navigating these incredible rapids? I mean, just in terms of steering Nixon, I mean, at some point Haig had to have come to the conclusion that, for the good of the country, there had to be this outcome.

Jones: Well, the conclusion was inescapable. The headcount slipped away.

Smith: Did that happen immediately once the court decision or the...?

Jones: Once the court decision was made, I believe Timmons that day, and you should talk to Bill, I believe his headcount was death to Nixon. I mean, it was done, I believe that day.

Smith: And was that because the court made this ruling and...because people didn't know yet what was in the tapes, or if Nixon defied the court?

Jones: No, you know, I just think finally there was the tipping point and it went. But you need to talk to Bill on how those headcounts went because I'm not sure, but it seems to me that day we were under water or it was very close.

Smith: Do you remember when the actual "smoking gun" was revealed, do you remember your -

Jones: Done. It was done. Everybody knew it was done. From the time of the decision to the time of the resignation was only four or five days, wasn't it? It was a very short period of time. Frankly, I've forgotten, but it seems to me the decision was early August and Nixon was out by, what, the 9th? What was the date?

- Smith: I think the decision was a little earlier than that. I think it was a little earlier.
- Jones: Could've been.
- Smith: But clearly the death throes were –
- Jones: It was a *very* short time period, I mean, just a blink.
- Smith: What was Haig doing during that interim?
- Jones: Haig was negotiating with Jaworski, he was negotiating with Ford, he was negotiating with Nixon, he was keeping the Cabinet intact, he was...you name it.
- Smith: Over the years countless times, the whole idea of whether there was “a deal” comes back to what Haig said to Ford. And was Haig speaking for Nixon? Can you unravel any of that?
- Jones: I can't. I have no visibility into it at all, nor do I think very many people do.
- Smith: Would Haig have been, is he a free agent in this? Or is Richard Nixon his client?
- Jones: My guess is, you know, I think Haig had a very complex view of what he was trying to do and he was trying to save the president, if he could. If he couldn't save him, he was trying to save the country. He was not trying to disserve President Ford and it required balancing a lot of interests here and I think he did his damndest to do that. And when he finally realized that Nixon could no longer be saved, I think he then tried to put together the deal that would allow Nixon to get out of there, Ford to get in there, without unbelievable constitutional debacle. Now, whether he – my guess is he took some liberty with positions in order to get both sides to agree. That would be my guess. But I have no idea, that's totally un - nobody knows but the guys that were there. And as far as I know, Haig's never talked about it very much.
- Smith: He has been, I think it's safe to say, made out to be the heavy by some - that he was sort of pulling strings to do Nixon's dirty work and taking advantage of Ford's naïveté. Without knowing what was said, I assume you think that's a mischaracterization.

Jones: I do. I do. Here's what I sort of think, and this is total speculation.

Smith: Understood.

Jones: The issue of, one of the things that got Nixon to step down, was that if he was impeached, he would lose his pension. And so, if he resigned, he would keep his pension. That was one part of the deal. Then there was the question of would there be a trial post-resignation and would he be sent to jail. And he was sitting there caught on that one. "Well, God, don't want to do that." So, if I were guessing, what Haig says is, "Hey, there's a deal here if you'll pardon him, he'll leave now so we don't have to go through all this." Now, whether Vice President Ford said 'yes' or 'no', whether Haig said it in those terms or not, my guess is he lead Nixon to believe that Ford would save him. And whether Ford actually said he would do it or whether Haig read from their conversation that he would do it, I think Nixon thought so. Then we began to get the phone calls from San Clemente after Nixon was there and President Ford was in the office about, "Where in the hell's my pardon?"

Smith: Really?

Jones: Yeah. He talked to several, a lot of phone calls, particularly to Haig. Yeah, there were. There were. The man was distressed and frantic.

Smith: So he clearly believed there was a deal.

Jones: If he didn't think, he at least was *strongly* recommending that if you don't do this it's going to absolutely rip everything. You've got to do it. From my view, Haig called me up to his office one day, staff secretary's [office] is down in the basement, and said, "Jerry, what do you think about a pardon?" And I said, "Well, Al, the fact is that we're not able to do the country's business with this boiling. All of these decisions that we've held over for months as we've gone through this have to be made. The president's being pounded to death on the whole Nixon thing, it's distracting. We're not getting the country's business done. I don't see how, without a pardon, without getting this off the agenda, the president is going to get to be president."

My recommendation was *absolutely* pardon. Do it now. The staff secretary sends anywhere from ten to twenty decision memos up to the president every afternoon. And he's got to go through them and decide and send them back to you by in the morning, usually. They almost always came back by in the morning. Heavy, heavy extracurricular, you don't see that, but from sometime in the late afternoon to sometime by 7:00 the next morning, a lot of heavy decisions have to be made. I didn't see how President Ford could operate the presidency under the kind of fire that he was getting over the Nixon thing. I told Haig, "I don't see how he can do it."

Smith: Were you ever in a conversation about the pardon or just a general - the issues that you raise - in which Ford was present?

Jones: No. Absolutely not. Haig asked me my opinion, asked me what I thought. And I told him, point blank, this is what I think.

Smith: Well, it's interesting, because he asked you your opinion. Did you have a sense at that point that Haig thought this was a done deal or was he asking you, I won't say 'going through the motions', but -

Jones: I had the sense that President Ford asked him to find out what people thought.

Smith: Okay.

Jones: I thought, why else would he have done that? He could've on his own gone down there and said, "Mr. President, this is what your staff thinks." And Haig, I think, trusted me as sort of a political seer person. I just don't know what he did. I don't know who all he talked to. I know he talked to me. I don't know who else he talked to.

Smith: Was there any sense, and again this is after the fact - the argument makes perfect sense that we're paralyzed and we're not governing and we don't see how we're going to be able to -

Jones: Well, the other problem was, you could see it was going to get worse, it wasn't going to get better. And so, here we go, show trials for Nixon, Ford's trying to run the presidency and we're having show trials.

Smith: And supposedly Jaworski was saying it might be a couple of years before there was a trial.

Jones: And the other thing is, now, the president said that he didn't intend to run. My view was that he had to run. And I from the early, early on, wanted him to run. And you'll hear later if we have time, I worked very hard on that. I became his scheduler and sort of news manager head later. Cheney asked me to flip with a guy named Jim Connor who then became staff secretary and I took Connor's job. Basically ran an image management effort.

Smith: The Rose Garden Campaign?

Jones: That was part of it. I mean, it was a long, involved series of things that we did, but it was the most interesting thing I did at the White House, frankly.

Smith: Let me back up one moment because I want to ask you something. I'll never forget, when we were talking to Stu Spencer, no, it wasn't Stu Spencer. Leon Parma told this story: on the morning of the 9th, when he was at the last minute kind of pushed in the East Room with some folks from Capitol Hill and the ceremony took place. He said, obviously, it was somber, there's no mood of celebration. But when it was over, there was a receiving line and they invited folks down, I think to the state dining room, for a reception. And he said, "You could watch the Ford people who were sort of outnumbered at that point, but people from the Hill, friends and that sort of thing, they all headed down there. And the Nixon people all sort of peeled away and went off to do their own thing." Now, that may be an exaggeration, it's a very understandable emotional reaction at that point, but it does raise this large question about the problems posed by integrating a Nixon staff with this interloper.

Jones: Well, it depends on your viewpoint. I had a different viewpoint from that. One thing is true, is a number of the Nixon people should have gone and would go.

Smith: Voluntarily or...?

Jones: Well, some went voluntarily. Some didn't. But I had an unusual relationship with President Ford, I don't know why I did. He trusted me for some reason or another. And I remember before he became president saying, "Sir, anything I can do to help you, I want to."

Section Not Released

Now, one of the things that happened is, early on, Haig went in to President Ford and said, "You've got to keep Jones. He's the only guy that knows how the White House works," the decision-making process and so on and so forth. President Ford called me up there, Haig was there, and he said, "Jerry, I want you to stay as staff secretary for me." I said, "Yes, sir. I will." That was within a day or two or three – fairly quickly. Now, on the thing about the Nixon people peeling off, I didn't go to the swearing in. I had an assignment from Haig and the assignment was, "Jerry, the Ford transition group wants to implement a decision making process here called 'spokes of the wheel' and I want you to write, for the president, a paper on how the chief of staff works and why it works and why a 'spokes of the wheel' system will not work." I stayed up all that night and delivered to Haig the next morning to take in to President Ford a paper on how it worked and why and why you had to do it that way.

Smith: Was the "spokes of the wheel" a congressional mindset?

Jones: Yes, oh yeah. Yeah. That ground's been plowed pretty well, but the thought was: here Haldeman and Erlichman and Kissinger kept everybody out and the president didn't know what he had to know. What we need to do is open up the presidency. But it can't work that way. I mean, it's a disaster when you do it that way because you have to be able to ensure that everybody has seen the decision and had commented on it and the president knows what they think. He can decide against these. He can decide knowing what the down sides are, but he's got to know. And what happens when people jump in there, it makes an easy decision, it looks easy. Then suddenly you find, "Oh, my God, we didn't know this" - "We didn't know that" - "We didn't know *that*." And unless you have a staff system that ensures you know those hidden

things, you get killed and you begin to make mistakes and you can't ever, ever get out of the hole.

Smith: Did they learn the hard way?

Jones: Well, the Whip Inflation Now was the great example of that. That never got staffed. It wasn't looked at.

Smith: Did it come out of the speechwriting operation?

Jones: Yeah, it did. Hartman VFR direct to Ford. Nobody ever saw the speech.

Smith: Really?

Jones: Yeah.

Smith: Wow.

Jones: In the meantime, I briefed Cheney, seems to me, right after Ford became president. And then Rumsfeld came over from NATO. Briefed them at length – Cheney several hours, Rumsfeld at least two – on the staff system, how the decision-making process in the White House worked, why you did it that way, why it was so important to do it that way, and so on. Rumsfeld stopped me in the hall on his way back to NATO and said, "Don't let them change a thing until I get back."

Smith: Did he know in advance he was going to have the role that he had?

Jones: He did. I think after those briefings and after his own discussions with others, [he] went to President Ford and said, "I won't take this unless you keep this chief of staff system in place." I think you'll hear from himself if that's what he said. I believe that's what he said. I think he's even told me that's what he said. I'm sure he's told me that's what he said. It had to be. And President Ford said, "Don, can we ease into this? I agree with you, but can we ease into this?" Because it was basically overturning his entire transition team, Seidman and Marsh, Hartmann, Buchen, that whole group got overturned.

Smith: It's funny you mention that, because to give you another example of where a man's personal characteristics defined, not always necessarily for the better,

his presidency. When Rockefeller comes up with the Energy Independence Corporation...he comes up with this hundred billion dollar plan and it's going to be funded by moral obligation bonds just like New York State. And, needless to say, it was not well received, and Bill Simon in particular, was outspoken, but I think everyone really was. The story I've been told, by more than one source, was that there was a Cabinet discussion of this and it was very clear that it didn't have a lot of support. The president indicated that he would go along with it, and of course, as soon as the meeting is over, Simon comes up to him and says, "You can't be serious" and renews all the arguments. And the president says, "Bill, you and I both know Congress will never pass this, but I'm not going to embarrass Nelson."

Jones: I don't know that. Let me tell you what I do know.

Smith: Yeah.

Jones: After that, several of us, Cheney, Greenspan and me – there could've been another one or two – worried about Rockefeller's programmatic initiatives. [We] got the president to say, "There will be no new programs," which undercut Nelson. That was the killer for him. I mean, we worked hard on that and Greenspan lead the charge, but Cheney and others of us supported in helping him, and the president had the courage to make that decision, to make it public.

Smith: Now, that decision may be philosophically and economically consistent with the needs of the time. The way you phrase it sounds though like at least some of the useful ancillary fallout –

Jones: No, it was absolutely designed to stop Rockefeller. Absolutely, it was designed to. And the president had incredible courage to make that decision. Now, it was also required, but he was a conservative on budget matters.

Smith: In talking about Rockefeller's reaction when he learned of this, my understanding was that he was thrown for a loop because, where he came from, you get elected by your programs.

Jones: You buy the governorship every time.

Smith: You come up with new ideas, bigger programs, newer programs –

Jones: Larger buildings, Twin Towers –

Smith: That's how you win in New York.

Jones: Right.

Smith: Which also suggests a certain parochialism in Rockefeller that I think –

Jones: He was a vote-buying, liberal Republican.

Smith: Did Ford lead Rockefeller to believe that he would be in the domestic sphere like Kissinger was in the foreign sphere?

Jones: Yes, I think when they started that was the intention. And then Nelson started coming in with all this stuff that the president couldn't live with for a lot of reasons, some philosophic, some were practical reasons. So people began to look askance, and then really askance, and then, "Hey, we can't do this." And poor Jim Cannon, oh my God, caught in the middle. And he –

Smith: He's at the domestic council.

Jones: Running domestic council where all these programs were coming from.

Smith: Which Rockefeller thought would be his vehicle for implementing these ideas.

Jones: Right. And so Rockefeller got upset with Jim. "You're not serving me, you're serving Ford!" "Yes!" Jim says, "Richard Parsons said, 'You guys better look and see who's signing that paycheck.'" He said that Parsons told him that, which is fascinating. Anyway, it began to be a real problem and the reaction was that we have to stop this and so the anti-bodies began to stop Rockefeller.

Smith: Nobody wants to blame the president, so you blame the people around them – so Rockefeller, it's no news to you, went to his grave convinced that Don Rumsfeld did him in.

- Jones: Yes, he did. And I told Rumsfeld that in a conversation I had with him a couple of months ago about his book. He said, "I didn't do that! I absolutely didn't do that. All I did was to ensure the president had the full story."
- Smith: Okay, but given the fact that there were also some political aspirations –
- Jones: He didn't smile when he said that, but he denied it vehemently because I said, "One of the things that I thought you did that was one of the most important things you did for the country was to get Vice President Rockefeller off the ticket." And Don denied it vehemently and denied that he tried to do him in at all. And that Nelson had misunderstood.
- Smith: Whatever the truth is there, it does seem that Rockefeller was, at the very least, maybe blinded by ambition or just naïve. For someone who'd been around Washington, and who'd been in those bureaucratic fights for *years*...there is also a theory that, at that point in his life, he was not the same man he had been ten years before.
- Jones: It was a strange thing. He'd been governor too long, didn't know how to be a vice president or staffer, didn't talk to people, didn't come sell them. These things just came full blown. And, you know, you can't do that. There are a lot of interests.
- Smith: And, remember also, every weekend, he'd go up to Pocantico, so he was a commuting vice president.
- Jones: Right, so he just didn't do the homework to get his viewpoints sold, if they could have been sold. He just didn't do the homework. He put all that stuff out without proper conversation.
- Smith: When Ford had that conversation with him or conversations, at the very beginning, all of which led Rockefeller to believe he was going to be a kind of domestic czar - here's this notion that Ford came into the White House with a congressional mindset and that it took him a long time to, in some ways, grow out of that. I mean, it strikes me as that's the kind of thing a congressman would say to someone.

Jones: Sure. No, I think there's no question. President Ford was not ready in terms of having had the executive experience to be president. What I believe is true is that he became and I'll explain to you why, he became a superb executive over time. He figured out how to do it. And one of the things I think is true, is, I think Don Rumsfeld helped him a lot on how you work through being president. I think Don was coach. You know, he and the president had a long background together. And Don, in fact, had been the guy that had engineered his elevation into the minority leader's position. It was Don, it wasn't Laird, it was Rumsfeld. They had a very trusting relationship. The president trusted him and I think Don was a really good coach. I would call him a coach. Now, Ford may not have seen him as a coach, but I think they had a lot of, "Here's how you have to think about this" - "Here's how you have to..."

Smith: How did you see that process unfolding?

Jones: Well, you couldn't see it very well because Rumsfeld is extremely tight lipped. But what you began to see, is you began to see Ford emerging as an executive. Let me tell you, this is really terribly important. There are two things that are important here. First thing, back on the personnel matter: there were, in the domestic council, some really very bright guys - as there were in the National Security Council.

Smith: Holdovers?

Jones: Now, before the decisions were made about them, there were some others that were not so important. The Colson staff wasn't so important, but the domestic policy staff was terribly important as was the national security staff. And one of the things that I felt was that we didn't have time to reeducate a domestic council staff. And I've all but forgotten how I did this, but one of the things I did was, I got Cannon to keep the best domestic council guys and he kept them, a lot of them. And the domestic council functioned quite well under Cannon for President Ford. Now, the reason for that was that -

Smith: What was its function?

Jones: Well, what it does is, we want a program on 'x' health. Well, what should the program look like? What are the options? How should we do this? How

much does it cost? What do we include? All of that domestic council staffer on health did working with the relevant cabinet people. And so they would pull a position together. You know, "Here is a plan for the program. Here are the options. Here are the pieces to it," and so on and so forth. And then it would go forward to the staff secretary who would staff it. The staffing process is you send it to the natural enemies of the idea and get their ideas, get their views. And so then you include those in the paper, "Mr. President, the recommended option is option 2C. You need to know that if this is chosen, these people react this way. These people support it."

So he has this and he looks at it and decides, but the key is we didn't have time. If Ford was going to run for the presidency, we did not have time to reconstitute a staff that was good enough to do this programmatic work that is the basis for being able to run for president. So I got him to keep Jim Cavanaugh, who was one of them, but there were a number of guys that we kept who were just excellent. And they did a super job and were very loyal to Ford and became quite close to him. Paul O'Neill at the OMB. There were a number of these people who stayed and they became the backbone of the policy apparatus of the Ford presidency.

The only one that leaked off was to Seidman, the economic front. But Simon was there and so Bill, frankly, was more powerful, Bill Simon than Bill Seidman, in terms of heft on policy matter issues, in my view. That's how I saw it working. But the rest of the apparatus was, Cannon kept Cavanaugh as his deputy, as I recall. You know a number of those people in critical positions were kept and it was critical to the program work of the Ford presidency. Now the thing that you began to see in his decision making, it's very interesting. As staff secretary, I would send ten to twenty blue folders up, those are decision folders. Sometimes a red folder which is a "You've got to look at this now, sir." And he would do an interesting thing. There were two aspects of his decision making that made him, frankly, a far better presidential executive than Nixon was. First thing is that he would read one of these memos and he would say, "I disagree with the option you're recommending. I don't think this will work. If we want this to pass, this is not going to work."

And so I'd get a note back, "Call the guys together, we need to talk about this. Schedule as fast as you can." So he would call them together and would say, "This will not work. They will not pass it, so if we want something like this, we're going to have to do it this way." And they would talk about it and reform it and then go with it. Now that was very creative problem solving from the chief executive's viewpoint. He knew the Congress, he knew what would work, he knew how you had to present it, he knew what could be done and not done and he would say, "This won't work. Call them in. Let's talk. We've got to rework this."

Smith: So at least in that aspect, that flies in the face of conventional wisdom that he was too congressional.

Jones: No, no, no, no. This is as he began to really get on top of the job. And he knew what he knew and he knew what would work and he knew it better than anybody else in the White House, anybody else, and he used his executive capability to shape the programmatic work that we did. It was brilliant.

The other thing that he did is that he knew, because he sat on those budget committees, that budgets were what drove everything else in the executive branch. He spent unbelievable amounts of time on the budget. The OMB would have a budget meeting with the cabinet secretary, then OMB would review the cabinet secretaries and their views of that agency's budget. And then the president would make decisions about what he thought, just with OMB's _____. And then the cabinet secretary would have the opportunity to come appeal the decisions he didn't like in front of the president with OMB there. So he would, for each department, through probably three or four different meetings on their budgets. He knew them better than the cabinet officers most of the time. And he would make the decisions on the budget of the United States that we were recommending. I don't necessarily mean that the Congress did. But he knew the budget process so well that he could do that. As far as I know, he's the only president that has ever spent that kind of time on the budget because he knew that it drove the world, drove the programs. They were the key decisions. He would, because he'd been in the

Congress, but he was also making the decisions on what he wanted to do and not do.

Smith: Unfortunately, that doesn't communicate itself to the general public as "presidential leadership." I mean, that term has been so theatricalized.

Jones: But the way you run the executive branch is you control the budget. You control the programs and you form them to what can be done with them if you agree that they should be done. And he did three things. He kept the people. He was willing to keep the people that were needed. And he did. He was willing to intervene in the decision making process and change it and discuss it. Nixon would *never* call a meeting to discuss a decision, *ever*. He would initial an option and go on. Now, he and Kissinger did the foreign policy stuff that way, but only the two of them. But Ford would have the whole room full, have everybody there. "Let's talk about this." And there was great loyalty. There wasn't leaking, there wasn't anything. The third thing he did was he controlled the budgets. He made the decisions. He approved the recommendations, or disapproved. He turned out to be a superb executive president, far better than Nixon was.

Smith: Fascinating because it perfectly captures the notion that this was someone who after a rocky start grew into the office.

Jones: He did. There's no question that that's true.

Smith: But again, that other whole side, the performance art aspect of the presidency was never his shtick. He probably, out of all of our presidents, has got to be, him and Eisenhower, the least self-dramatizing.

[Break]

Jones: You were just about to talk about image.

Smith: Yeah, because there is the whole administrative side of the job, which we talked about, and how he grew into it. The whole, for lack of a better word, theatrical side of the job, is something one senses he was never comfortable with.

Jones: Well, he loved to go on the road. He loved to be out there. He really did. And he was a hail fellow well met. He loved people and he liked to be with people and he liked to talk to people. So it wasn't that he was a recluse like Nixon was. I mean, Nixon had to force himself to do those things. Got very good at it, but he had to work at it. President Ford was really a wonderfully nice man and really liked his fellow citizens. It's just that he had no sort of ability to project a charisma. He had a very flat voice. Not an exciting, kind of gripping guy. Although I'll tell you, I had to worry about that a lot, that was my job after Cheney asked me to take over the – frankly, it was a message management job.

We pulled together, had a 10:30 meeting every morning, sometimes in addition to that a 4:30 meeting in the afternoon. It was a pretty incredible group of people. It was me, as chairman, then we had Dave Gergen, director of communications. We had Bud McFarlane from the NSC. We had Paul O'Neill from the OMB. We had Jim Cavanaugh from domestic policy. We had Larry Speakes in who was the deputy press secretary. Sometimes Nessen came. We had the press secretary for the First Lady, a woman named Susan Porter. Terry O'Donnell, who was the president's personal aide. Red Cavaney who was the chief advance guy and Bill Nicholson who was the scheduler. I think that's about it. We met at least once a day, sometimes twice a day. And our job was –

Smith: This was during the campaign?

Jones: No, this was before the campaign. It began sometime in 1975. And our job was to think about what the president – I'll use the shorthand – what he should do, where he should go, who he should see, what he should say when he got there. That's what we were trying to think through. And our goal was very simple. We wanted – and this was before the day of the 24/7 news cycle – we wanted to be the lead story in the three major papers every morning, with our picture and our story, and we wanted to be the lead political story on the three major news channels every night with our picture and our story.

That was what our objective was. The president has to be covered, and if you have the president's schedule and can decide what he's going to do, who he's

going to talk to, what he's going to say, where he's going to be, what it looks like, you can control that to an amazing degree. And that's what this group did – tried to do. And, by the way, we were hugely successful. It usually was our story, our picture, our message. Now, it doesn't mean that there weren't counters to that and critics to that and so on, but at least when the president was covered, we could do that, because you can do several things. First of all, you can pick the venue, you can limit the exposure – one event a day – so they have to use that one if they're going to cover him at all, and you can also be sure that it's an attractive story. And so that's what this group did.

Smith: Was there on-going tension with the speechwriting operation?

Section Not Released

Jones: Now, what happened was, there was a guy in the White House who was maybe the wisest man in Washington named Bryce Harlow. Bryce came to town to be George Marshall's speechwriter. Anyway, Bryce was in the White House and I went to him and I said, "Bryce, I think even though the president said he is not going to run for office, we have to get in position to be able to run and I think he's going to have to run. I don't think you step out of the presidency and have any chance to maintain the presence. So he's going to have to run. He may not know it yet but he's going to have to. And this is what we're thinking: I'm thinking he should go in 1975 to all the key states several times so that people know who he is, so that there is a 'Yeah, we know who President Ford is'."

So we put a program together in the scheduling group to get the president in to the key states, California, New York. We had a big board of all the states with pins in it, color coordinated, colored by months, by the cities we went to and we were trying to cover what we believed to be the key states in an election and the key cities and with multiple trips. And I went to Bryce and I said, "This is what we're thinking about doing. What do you think?" He said, "Jerry, this is complex, so let me think about it a day or two." He called me back, he said, "I don't think you should do that." But I was smarter than Bryce and I did it anyway.

Smith: Did you have a sense of what the relationship was between Harlow and Ford?

Jones: I think the president thought that Harlow and Laird were two great, great counselor guys that had seen so much that they just had some great wisdom. Between the two, Harlow was far and away the best. He didn't have the ego, Laird unfortunately did.

Smith: Harlow presumably didn't leak like Laird, who was the original leaker.

Jones: Oh, the worst. And so, anyway, we were going along fine, but two things happened. The first thing was, on all of the trips the president would bump his head on the helicopter and we couldn't fix it. We simply couldn't get him to think about it and he would hit his head almost every time. And so then it suddenly was that he was a Bozo the Clown problem. And then the other problem was, we got him shot at twice. And so the criticism, "What in the hell is he doing in San Francisco and Sacramento? Why in the world is he out there?" Well, we were trying to get the state preconditioned, but after twice, it was... So it backfired.

Smith: Let me ask you, because by that time it's September of '75, the criticism has been made over the years that the White House was very slow to take seriously the possibility of a Reagan challenge. To what extent was that, in fact, hanging over your heads, and was it a fair criticism?

Section Not Released

Jones: There were a couple of these things. Panama Canal was one of them. There were several. And this scheduling group could see it coming. Now, I do remember and you have it in the library out there: Bill Gulley was out in San Clemente. Do you know who Gulley was?

Smith: Was it –

Jones: The gunnery sergeant who wound up running the military assistance office.

Smith: Okay.

Jones: And he came back and he said, "President Nixon wants you to send this in to Mr. Ford," and he told me what Nixon had said: "Reagan is a lightweight.

You don't have to worry about him." And I wrote that, "Gulley reports this from Nixon".

Smith: What was the message? That Reagan...

Jones: ...was a lightweight and he didn't have to worry about him. So I sent it in there. Now, I don't know what Ford thought, but here's Nixon sending in, coaching. But our guys were terribly worried about this and that was one of the reasons that no new spending thing came. That we were trying to do a lot of defense against Reagan. We could see it. And Kissinger was pushing him towards détente; Reagan was on the other side. There were several of these things. So, I think the President was being pulled. I think the Kissingers of the world were pulling him in one direction. We were trying to offset that and we weren't able to, but it wasn't for lack of recognition. It was pretty clear to us that it was going to be a real tough go.

Smith: You know, it's interesting – and this is purely speculative – but that's a fascinating message from Nixon, because we talked to Stu Spencer at length when we were out in California and the other side of that coin is that Stu – of course, remember Nixon went to China right at the height of the New Hampshire primary campaign - Stu said Nixon knew exactly what he was doing. Stu at least interpreted it as almost thumbing his nose at Ford. That it was almost a hostile act.

Jones: I don't think so. No, Nixon was sending back general messages. I know that you'll find that memo out there somewhere.

Smith: Supportive or at least...?

Jones: No, telling him what he thought. There may have been others. But I don't think so. Nixon didn't like Reagan. None of the Nixon people liked Reagan. They would come to me. There was a guy named Waller. I'll think of his last name in a minute. Great guy. His dad had been the chairman of, I think, Union Oil Company. Waller Taylor. Waller was a close in intimate of Nixon's. Nixon joined his law firm after he lost the governor's race in '62. He would come in with just the most hilarious, nasty stories about how stupid Reagan was. And the whole Nixon crowd thought that. They all, *all*, did not

want Reagan to be president. Strongest Ford supporters and so on. I think they would have veered away if Nixon were thinking the other way. I just don't think that was true.

Smith: This whole thing may have answered my question because of what you said, what you sensed the private relationship between Ford and Nixon was during this period. I mean, clearly there was no public relationship.

Jones: It got terrifically strained over that pardon thing, but once that was done and Nixon began to come back – you know, he wrote several pretty good books, I mean, more than pretty good, they were excellent. I never felt that there was rancor there, ever.

Smith: What was the difference in style management, whatever, political acuity say, between a Rumsfeld as chief of staff and a Cheney? Because clearly Ford valued both of them greatly.

Section Not Released

Jones: Let me tell you one of the things that I think is a great story on this message management group. We were sitting in this meeting one morning, I'll never forget it. We'd been working on 'How do we fix this?', 'How do we fix this?' We were working on fixing it, working on fixing it, weren't getting it done. And the press was all over us about his hitting his head on the helicopter every day. Every day. And his flatness on the stump played into it, he sounded like Joe Palooka. "Played too much football without a helmet", "Can't chew gum and walk", you know. All that stuff.

Dave Gergen was down at the end of the conference table apparently reading *Time* and he said, I think this was the spring of 1976 about now, "We should let the president brief the budget." We talked about it. "Hell, yes." He knows it better than anybody in the executive branch including O'Neill and Lynn. And so we put him out there over at the state department auditorium, a two hour briefing on the United States budget. And he turned to Jim Lynn to help him answer one question out of dozens. I don't know how many. A hundred. He absolutely blew the socks off the national press and what they came back saying was, a guy that knows the budget that well, in that detail,

with that sense of how it went together is no klutz and we can't continue this. It finished that story. And he did. I don't know if you have a video of that, but he was a tour de force on the budget. I don't think that a president's ever briefed the budget before or since. And it was brilliantly done and he knew it. He absolutely knew it. And the press guys had to back off. We beat them.

Smith: I know exactly what you're saying, but it didn't translate into the increasingly theatrical nature of presidential campaigning.

Jones: No, he didn't have it. He didn't have that instinct. He simply didn't have it. And so, what happened is we were sending him out on the campaign trail, Bob Teeter was our pollster for the campaign, and we would do campaign events. And we could see his numbers drop, his approval ratings. So Teeter would come over to me and say, "This is really puzzling. We think we're making progress, we're sending him out there and his numbers drop. We'd do better to keep him in." And so I talked about this with that group, we said, "Well, let's see what happens." And so we started the Rose Garden strategy: we'd do an event a day, our event, our picture, our message, in the Rose Garden, in the Oval Office, in the Roosevelt Room, in the Cabinet room, even in town somewhere, but usually in the White House. And when I briefed the president in Vail after the convention, after that terrible convention that we barely won, about the campaign strategy, we were 33 points behind. We lost by half a point [sic].

The night he made that error in the debate in San Francisco, Gallup had a poll that they were going to release the next day that showed us even. Even. He pulled the poll, he didn't release it. When he re-pollled, we were minus seven. We slipped seven on the base strength of that debacle, that question, and we came back to within a half a point. Ten thousand votes, which in Ohio and Hawaii and we would've won the Electoral College.

Smith: Did you know that night that you had a problem?

Jones: Absolutely. The minute he said it, I got Cheney on the phone. Cheney was in the holding room out there, and I said, "Dick you've got to change this, you've got to fix it." He said, "I know, Jerry, I know, I know. You're not

telling me anything. We'll fix it right after this is over." Well, the president refused to fix it. He let it linger for four or five days and it just killed us.

Smith: It was that stubbornness again?

Jones: It was the stubbornness. In spite of the pardon, in spite of the recession, in spite of not being a great campaigner, all of that, we still would've won it if he'd have fixed that. You can make a mistake in a debate. But, if he had been willing to fix it that night, "Hey guys, I didn't mean that they weren't dominated. They obviously are, the Red Army's there. I meant, in *spirit*, they're not dominated."

Smith: If you actually go back and read what he said, he's on the cusp of it. He talked about the countries...If he'd simply said, "I *know*, folks. I've *been* to Poland, I *saw* the look in their faces." He could've hit it out of the park.

Jones: But he missed it and then he wouldn't change it because he thought he was right. And he meant *spiritually* dominated. And he was right.

Smith: Again, Stu Spencer, he said a part of the problem was that he heard that Kissinger had said, "You were brilliant, Mr. President. You were wonderful, Mr. President." I mean, just sort of playing the courtier.

Jones: Here was the deal. The issue in the campaign in the end came down to this: did we know Jimmy Carter enough to trust him as president and is Jerry Ford smart enough to be president? And that mis-answer flew into the face on that one. And if he'd corrected it, if he hadn't made it, we would've won in spite of the pardon, in spite of the recession, in spite of his not being a very good campaigner, and in spite of the close convention. I mean, that was a close call.

Smith: Going in to that convention, were you confident that you had it?

Jones: No. I thought we had it, but I wasn't confident we had it. We should've had it. We thought we had it. The numbers said we had it, but it was close and, you know, close can go away.

Smith: The other side of the Rose Garden strategy, was exploiting to the fullest whatever the incumbency could give you. It was the Bicentennial year and the queen was coming and I'm told there was an astonishing number of Republican convention delegates and their spouses who attended that dinner.

Jones: Damn right. We used everything we could. Yeah, we did. What shame is it?

Smith: What kinds of things did you have that you could use?

Jones: Oh, tickets at the Kennedy Center, rides on Air Force One, I mean, a lot of things, visits to the Oval Office. I used to tour people through there. I was one of the tour guides. My office was just down the hall, right on the other side of the Roosevelt Room, on the inside office is where I operated the scheduling.

Smith: We'd been told by several people - it's sort of symbolic - this all came down, in many ways, to Clarke Reed and the Mississippi delegation. Reed was famous for being bought and then not staying bought, for being very slippery in terms of his allegiance.

Jones: I got to know Clarke pretty well. He was always pal-sy wal-sy, buddy buddy. Always thought he was on our side. How did it turn out? As I remember, he came our way.

Smith: In the end, he brought Mississippi with him.

Jones: Yeah, that's what I thought. And I always thought Clarke was going to do that. Now, my guess is he was trying to keep the wrath of God from falling on him from the conservative side, but I always thought Clarke was with us.

Section Not Released

Jones: Well, that and what wound up happening was that we wrote the campaign strategy in the White House. We had the president and we ran the schedule. Now, [Bo] Callaway made a run at me to run all the scheduling and he lost. So we controlled the key asset in this campaign.

Smith: And that would've been a decision made at the presidential level, who controlled the scheduling?

Jones: Yeah, and Cheney, of course, had an interest there, too, because all of this stuff goes through the chief of staff. Now, he trusted us and let us do what we recommended, by and large, but it was controlled by the White House and we wrote the campaign strategy. What the campaign did is two things, well, more than two things. It did the polling. It also said the issues we should concentrate on coming out of the polling and coming out of our state operations and it did the registration and got out the vote and all the delegate stuff and so on. And they did the advertising, but that was...

Smith: ...which is very highly regarded.

Jones: ...was highly regarded. They were simply hired. They paid the bills on the advertising and we all cooperated on that one. Bailey and Deardorff did a great job on that. And they shop all those over in the White House and we comment on the stuff and so on, so it was sort of a joint thing, but it was the fact that the campaign hired those two guys – it was their creativity, it wasn't the campaign. And so what Spencer wound up doing was doing the delegate stuff. He and Jim Baker doing the delegate stuff and doing the campaign nuts and bolts.

Smith: He said something fascinating, he says the Reagan people *really* miscalculated when it came – one thing Spencer feared was that they would find a hot button issue with the platform. Not a process issue, but something that everyone could get around, you know, Panama Canal or something. And that's why basically Spencer said to the president [re-détente], "Let it happen. Just give in. Kissinger won't be happy about it, but that's how we win or that's how we keep from losing." Is that your recollection?

Jones: I don't particularly remember that battle, but it was clear that we couldn't resist some of those things. I mean, Reagan cleaned our clock from North Carolina on.

Smith: He had the hearts of a lot of delegates, didn't he?

Jones: Yeah, I think he did. I think he did. Here was my case, always my case to all of these people, "Look, you cannot change a sitting president and win. You simply can't. Reagan has to wait. But you cannot change a sitting president

and have a prayer of winning.” And I think that won the day. I think Clarke Reed realized that you couldn’t. And I think that’s true. I don’t think Reagan could’ve won.

Smith: Did you have a sense of the Ford-Reagan relationship?

Jones: No. I will tell you, we were really pissed at Reagan and I think the president was, too. What in the hell is he doing running in a primary against a sitting president with the trouble we’re in here. What is he doing? This is selfish. This is egotistical. This is narcissistic. What is he doing? That’s what we all thought. I mean, it was clear to us that you can’t change a sitting president in the primary operation and then win. Maybe we were wrong. That’s what we thought pretty strongly.

Smith: And the whole thing in Kansas City about offering Reagan the vice presidency or not offering Reagan the vice presidency which is still argued to this day over what –

Jones: Well, Cheney and the guys can talk to you about that. My understanding of it from afar, I was not in the meeting, my understanding was that Reagan refused to consider it and that Ford acceded to that. And that was that.

Smith: The selection of Dole – was Anne Armstrong, for example, at any point seriously considered with idea that “We’re so far behind, we’ve got to – “

Jones: No, it turned on this. What our problem was was that President Ford, as I recall, had vetoed an ag bill and you’ve got to win in the ag states to win. And so, Ford had real weakness in the agricultural settings in mid-America and we were looking for candidates that would help us here because, if we didn’t have our base, we couldn’t possibly win. And so the two guys that looked like they could best help us there were Dole and Howard Baker. And when you looked at them, Dole helped more than Baker. That’s why he was picked. Anne, as far as I know, it was nice to talk about it, but she was never in the mix, because she wasn’t the Midwest, she wasn’t the corn states, the wheat states and so on. She wouldn’t help us there.

Smith: Were you delighted when Reagan announced Schweiker? Was that seen as something that backfired immediately or was it, in fact, a potential act of genius? Apparently, they thought they could flip Drew Lewis.

Jones: I think we saw it more as desperation, that he had to throw the long ball. And it didn't work out.

Smith: Did you think at the end that you'd caught up?

Jones: I thought the morning of the election we had a 50/50 chance of winning it. The exit polls began to show that we were slipping and not winning Ohio. And, actually, we came closer in Ohio than we thought in the exit polls.

Smith: That night, where were you?

Jones: I was in the White House.

Smith: What was the mood?

Jones: Disappointment. Not shock because it was close and we were catching, catching, catching. But huge disappointment. The president was just terribly disappointed. I think he really thought he'd pulled it out and he was crushed. Took him awhile to get over it and he was a little bit angry at us.

Smith: How so?

Jones: Well, I had him out in Lubbock the next year and he was a little cross with me. He came to George Mahon's retirement from the Congress out there. He was nice, but he was still a little edgy towards me. And we'd been great buddies, so he got over it, but he was really ticked that we didn't win that thing. And he really trusted us that we were going to pull it out.

Smith: Did you have that much contact with Mrs. Ford?

Jones: Almost none. Frankly, she was ill in several ways.

Smith: Was that known in the White House?

Jones: It was not known. Rumsfeld knew it. I knew there was something terribly wrong. I happened to overhear a couple of conversations and they were not good. I didn't know what it was.

Smith: In the later years, did you have much contact with him?

Jones: Some earlier, but no, not really. He was always very nice to me when I saw him, very cordial. He remembered me well, I think. Certainly I did, he was a great guy to work for. I think he had a hugely successful presidency. I judge it more on 'Can he really do the job?' Yeah, you're right about the showmanship stuff, but he really ran the presidency beautifully. That was a tour de force. He did a great job. By the way, I was strongly in support, as you know, of the Nixon pardon. I think that was essential and he did it and he still almost won the damn thing.

Smith: You were telling me about Rumsfeld telling him about the ship.

Jones: Well, what Don said was that the president was just so incredibly glad to see him that he just sort of came up out of himself and they had a really great visit.

Smith: That was about a month before he died.

Jones: Yeah, it was. He was very ill, but "Is that Rummy?" he said.

Smith: I can hear it.

This was great. I cannot thank you enough.

INDEX

A

Agnew, Spiro, 8

B

Buzhardt, Fred, 5–6

F

Ford, Gerald R.

1976 election

1976 Republican Convention, 35–37

budget briefing, 32

Polish gaffe, 33–34

presidential style, 23–27

Rose Garden strategy, 33–35

transition to White House, 17–18

H

Haig, Al, 9–10, 11–16

Harlow, Bryce, 28–29

N

Nixon resignation, 13–15

Nixon tapes, 4–6, 10–13

R

Rockefeller, Nelson, 19–22

Rumsfeld, Donald, 18–19, 22

S

Smoking gun tape, 13

W

Watergate, 3–6