

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Jim Cannon
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: First of all, thank you for doing this. You have a unique role as Gerald Ford's biographer, but also as someone who worked very closely with him in the White House. And someone who covered his contemporaries in American politics during the period of his rise to national prominence.

What surprised you the most in the course of all your research?

Cannon: I think what surprised me, and in the course of my research, the degree to which Ford reflected on what he was doing, and what he was thinking at the time. I'll give you one example. He was in his nineties the last time I went out to see him. I guess that was when we had our trustees meeting in California. I had asked to see him for a few hours with photographs I had of the highlights of his administration. I thought, I'll ask him to help me do the captions for these photographs.

I showed him the first one and it was a photograph taken not by Kennerly, but by the White House photographer, whoever it was. It shows Ford sitting in the ante room of the president's office. The photograph is shot down the hall looking at him in profile, and Ford is sitting there by himself. Nobody else in the office – just sitting there quietly, waiting to see President Nixon to find out what Nixon was going to do – resign or fight on. I showed him this photograph and he had instant recall of everything he was thinking at that point about the Watergate, about how Nixon had lied to him, about how much sympathy he had for Nixon and his family – all this going through his mind and what a foolhardy thing this was to have done.

He's thinking all of this through, and what really surprised me was his total recall just from looking at that photograph of what he had been thinking at that momentous point, just before he went in. And his thoughts are interrupted by, I've forgotten his name now, saying, "Mr. Vice President, the President will see you now." So he goes in and gets the word, finally. And then I went

through the other photographs with him, and what surprised me was how much he recalled from those photographs.

As you know, Richard, he made available to me the total of his conversations with Trevor Armbrister for his own "autobiography," the extent of his thoughts - which he used very little of in his own book - but the extent of his thoughts about what was going on at the time. I finished not long ago, the section on his meeting with Brezhnev at Vladivostok. And what was fascinating was his detailed description of what he was like. He goes down the stairs and he sees that Brezhnev is kidding around with reporters and so on, and he looks at him and looks at his size first, realizes he is big, he's bulky, he's got big shoulders, he said he would have made a perfect offensive tackle. And he knows he's going to like him.

So they start out talking sports. Ford's briefed, of course, and says, "I understand you played soccer," and Brezhnev says, "You played football," and so they talked back and forth for a few minutes. But what was really interesting, and this is just one case, of Ford's observations and recall about the people he met. This is one thing I am going to try to use in the book.

Smith: There is this notion on the coasts that Midwesterners talk slow, so therefore they must think slow - and I'm wondering, because he wasn't a great communicator, in the formal sense of the office, do you think he got a bum rap on his intelligence, generally?

Cannon: Yeah, I think he got a bum rap. He was a far smarter man than people understood. He was far more interested in policy and the way things worked than, I think, any president we've ever had. He's famous for having briefed on the budget in '76, but that was not accidental. He had been in Congress twenty-five years, much of that on the Appropriations Committee, and he knew how every one of those programs had been formulated, who had supported it, why it was there, and whether it was Lyndon Johnson or somebody else who had initiated it. So he knew the detail. As for his intellect, I don't think many young people in their early twenties could have coached full time at Yale and at the same time carried a full load in the Yale law

school, which was one tough school, I'm told. And he graduated in the top third of his class. He fooled people, really. He was much smarter.

Smith: It is interesting that you say that, because...

Cannon: I think that sometimes it was deliberate.

Smith: Okay, you took the words right out of my mouth. It has been suggested to us by one or two people that he used that reputation, that sometimes he would play the innocent, when, in fact, there were things going on that you didn't know were going on.

Cannon: This was early in life that he had this impression of kind of a slow, a dull person. He was then, I guess, in his early twenties when he met Phyllis Brown. This stunning, attractive, intelligent woman that was the first major girlfriend of his life. She was very smart, a very good observer, and she told me she thought it was, in many cases, deliberate on his part when he sat and listened. But she said he knew everything that was going on. He remembered everything that was said, and when you talked to him about it later he could summarize it better than anybody else in the room.

So, I think he was grossly underrated for the quality of his mind. I became impressed, too, when he came to one meeting of Rockefeller's Commission on Critical Choices. And because I've worked with the House, the governor designated me to be his aide for that meeting, and I was fascinated. He had come briefed, he knew what was going on, he asked good questions, and he told me later how much he had learned from it in the two hour session with all these experts talking about foreign policy, economic policy, and so on. He absorbed things much better, I think, than anybody.

Smith: One way of saying it is, he absorbed things better than he articulated them.

Cannon: Yeah.

Smith: Post-JFK, the country became so accustomed to and demanding of, perhaps, a kind of style and verbal facility. Television, obviously, drew upon that.

Cannon: Ford was dull by comparison. He appeared before the cameras with Everett Dirksen. Well, Everett Dirksen was a major performer up there, and all Jerry Ford could do was kind of stand by and admire his performance.

Smith: He played straight man.

Cannon: Well, he wasn't even a good straight man. He was just there, and he looked dull. Of course, Johnson's criticism – in Washington you can survive almost anything except humor - and Johnson's criticism, which cleaned up was: he couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time, was a devastating thing. Johnson said, "Well he played too much without his helmet," and so on. He thought he was a stumble bum. Well, here was the best athlete we ever had being [criticized] by Johnson who couldn't get out of a chair, athletically.

But anyway, I thought Ford was vastly underrated as a man and as a leader. But the people who knew him were the members of the House and Senate. And that, of course, is why he got to be president in the first place. They knew how good he was. They knew how honest he was, how trustworthy he was, how much of a leader he was. And how he was the perfect fit for the job at that time. Because Mansfield and Albert both knew, they told me later, Nixon was gone. And when we had to choose the next president...they said to Nixon, "This is the man you can get confirmed." And once they told Nixon that, Nixon had no choice.

Smith: How much did the criticism hurt? Particularly the implications that either he intellectually wasn't up to the job, or that he was, to use your words, a stumblebum.

Cannon: I think it hurt him with the press, and the press is the entity that portrays the image of the person. I think it hurt him badly with the press. *Saturday Night Live*, for example, the appearance of his stumbling. When he fell down the stairs in Austria, Phil Jones CBS said, "Well, we figured if he can't walk down the stairs, he can't run the country." It hurt, no question about it.

Smith: How much personally, do you think it hurt Ford?

Cannon: I don't think it bothered him very much.

Smith: Really?

Cannon: I think he was so assured, I think he was so aware of who he was, so comfortable with who he was, that it didn't bother him. Hartmann told me that sometimes he would say, "Well, look, you've got to strike back at Johnson." And Ford said, "No, it's not worth the effort. It doesn't bother me that much." And I don't really think it did. This was a man who knew that if you're in politics, you're going to get criticized, and it didn't bother him very much. He was secure in his seat, secure as a person, secure as a human being. I never met anybody more comfortable with who he was.

Smith: That's interesting. Let me ask you, I was going through some boxes of material for my book, and I came upon Rockefeller's interview with Hugh Morrow about the Ford presidency, and I understand more and more why Oscar Reubhausen thought that those interviews should never see the light of day because it was not Rockefeller at his best, at the very end.

Cannon: Right.

Smith: He thought that Don Rumsfeld was blackmailing the president. Which tells you more about *his* frame of mind at that point. I suppose no one ever wants to blame the president.

Cannon: The fact is, and this, I guess it is heresy and disloyal to Rockefeller to say this, but Rumsfeld was right. Rumsfeld was right. Ford, when he first called Rockefeller, and this is a couple of weeks, two or three weeks after he's in office, and asked him to be vice president, and Ford, having disliked the job intensely – and we'll talk about it a little later – but having disliked it, knew Rockefeller, knew he was a man of action and experience and so forth, wanted to tell him that he wouldn't just have to go to funerals and so forth.

So he told him, on the phone, in that first conversation, I'll put you in charge of domestic policy. And then it took Rockefeller four months, a little over four months, to get confirmed. Once he was confirmed, Rockefeller and Ann Whitman and Bob Douglas and I came down on a rainy Saturday morning just before Christmas in December, '74 and then Ford told Rockefeller what assignments he would give him, and he ticked them off, whatever they were.

One of them was, he would put him in charge of domestic policy, and Rumsfeld was at that meeting, and Jack Marsh and a couple of others, probably Hartmann.

We didn't know exactly what the domestic council did, but we knew it was involved, obviously, in domestic policy. So, going back to New York we talked about that and Douglas and I agreed that if pushed to govern this, if you're in charge of domestic policy, you must have your man in charge of the domestic council. So that in turn came around to whether it was going to be me. Well, Rumsfeld resisted this adamantly. He wanted to have his own guy and he didn't want this dude, so the internal battle went on for better than, I guess, a month. Maybe a little longer. And finally Ford sided with Rockefeller and said, "We'll have your man in charge of the domestic council."

Well, Rockefeller's first instruction to me was to get rid of everybody there. Well, I went in and I thought, well, I had no idea what this domestic council did, and I kept one guy which Rockefeller was opposed to. He said, "You should have got rid of everybody." But he also said, "The first thing you have to do is get the best staff in the White House and I'm going to help you do that," and he gave me a great gift of Dick Dunham to be my deputy, who had been director of budget in New York and was a very smart and able executive. And Art Quern who had been a program associate – what we called them in New York – a superior man. And Dick Parsons was to be my lawyer.

So with those three I had the nucleus of a really wonderful staff. We had a good start. Dunham, I gave him the responsibility to build the staff and he did. We had a really superior staff. Not generally really well known, but the budget for the domestic council is about fifty people. About half of them are senior associates, MBAs, lawyers, economists, and so on, and the rest secretarial. So we had good staff and we had our own budget. I asked the president if he wanted me to clear the appointments with him or the personnel office, and he said, "No, those are yours. You and Nelson do it your way. Whatever you want to do is fine with me." So we had the freedom to do that.

We were also – this group was under the Hatch Act, except for Dunham and me – they couldn't do any political work. This had been put through by

somebody on the Hill, thinking that Nixon would use all these people for his campaign. So we had this great staff and we had a good start, but we realized Rockefeller had thought he would be in charge of initiating a lot of new domestic policies. Well, I guess three or four weeks into the job, I got a call one Sunday night from Jim Lynn saying there had been a meeting at the White House...

Smith: Now, he's head of OMB?

Cannon: Yes. Jim Lynn was the head of OMB, the senior staff had been there except for me. They had decided, and Ford had approved it, there would be no new initiatives that year. So that meant we didn't have anything to initiate. We could not initiate anything. Well, I was so concerned about this because I knew Rockefeller would want to have initiatives and we were planning to have initiatives, that I called up the military officer and said, "What time is his plane going up to get him on Monday morning?" I don't know – it was two or three o'clock in the morning. So I got on that plane and went up and met him at Westchester, and he looked at me and said, "It must be something going on or you wouldn't be here." I told him what had happened, and [he] just kind of shook his head and he said, "Well, it doesn't give us any room to do anything." I said, "Well, do you think it would be wise, at this point, for us to just get out of the job?" He said, "No, I think you ought to stay there and keep me abreast of what's going on." So, we decided to do that.

But the fact is, that we did initiate a few things. Parsons in particular initiated the first government-wide examination of what everyone was doing in battling illegal drugs. Nobody had ever pulled it together before, but I think it was some twenty agencies that were involved in this. And Parsons, on his own, with our approval – and Rockefeller and the president's approval – set out to do this. It took two or three months and we had a really good summary. Parsons presented the findings to the Cabinet and so forth and we sent something to the Hill, but nothing ever happened on it. So fairly early on Rockefeller became very unhappy with the limited scope of what we were doing. And I think he just kind of opted out of it. I would try to keep him informed and he would just nod his head and not be very interested in it.

Smith: Someone told us, I wish I could tell you right now, I don't think it was Rumsfeld, but someone told us the reason that they took that initiative and informed you that that decision had been made grew directly out of the first meetings that the president had had with the vice president, their weekly lunches where Nelson had the habit of coming in bubbling over with ideas and costly new programs. And it was a tactic, in effect, to kind of put the vice president in a box.

Cannon: I didn't know that. But that's perfectly reasonable. And that would be why I was not invited to attend the meeting on Sunday night, because they were going to do it and then tell me, as I said. Jim Lynn was designated to tell me this has been done. At any rate, about the time I got in there was when Ford was really beginning to learn how to run the White House. Rumsfeld had been there in September or October. He had come in and taken charge, and he was really managing the White House. And Rumsfeld, in my opinion, did a remarkable job of coaching Ford in how to run a White House.

Ford had always been responsive to good coaching, from the time he was a Boy Scout and a high school football player and so on. And Rumsfeld really in effect, became his coach. Rumsfeld then and now is a hell of a good organizer. Whatever else you may say of him, he knows organization.

Smith: Why is he such a polarizing figure, seen as Machiavellian and always with an agenda, and maybe an agenda behind the agenda.

Cannon: I suspect he is Machiavellian. But he rarely leaves any fingerprints. Why is he? Because he's powerful, he is good, he is effective, and he rubs a lot of people the wrong way.

Smith: Dorothy Dowton tells us he tried to get her fired.

Cannon: I didn't know that.

Smith: He had a candidate of his own to replace her as the president's personal secretary.

Cannon: Well, as I say, he had his own guy and he wanted to work – but I will say that once I showed Rumsfeld I could do this stuff, I could manage these issues, I

could get it done, instead of kind of easing up, he poured more and more on me. And he would schedule me to do something I hate to do which is talk before the Cabinet. We'd go out on the boat and he'd have me make a presentation on something or other, and I don't like to do that, and I'm not very good at it. But I think he realized that.

As a matter of fact, the first meeting after I became appointed to domestic council, at a senior staff meeting at eight o'clock, you go around the room and kind of show and tell. I had not gone in well prepared, very frankly. And so when it got to be my turn, I stumbled and hesitated and really did a very poor performance. And Rumsfeld - I'm sitting two or three down the table from him - turned on me and really excoriated me and said, "I thought Nelson Rockefeller was supposed to bring good staff people in here and you're not briefed," and you're not that and so forth, and really laid me out in front of the whole full senior staff. The meeting broke up and I sat there in kind of a daze. Jim Lynn walked around the table and came over and whispered in my ear, "Welcome to the NFL."

Smith: It must have put you in a very awkward position, though.

Cannon: It did.

Smith: Because of divided loyalties, in some ways.

Cannon: And I suspected it was deliberate – the first issue that I had to deal with was whether there should be a science adviser to the president. And it turns out that President Ford had asked Rockefeller to make a recommendation on this. So Rockefeller, being Rockefeller, assembled Edward Teller and ten other Nobel Prize winners, or whatever, and they had a session or two, and then Rockefeller made a recommendation, which he gave to the president. The president gives it to Rumsfeld and Rumsfeld gives it to me. And I take a look at this and I see what it is, and I say, "Okay, the first thing I've got to do, is go over and tell the vice president that I've been given this to staff out, to get everybody's opinion on it."

So I took it over to him, and said, "Governor, this is what's happened here, and before I take any step further you should know that I've been assigned to

do this.” And he took a look at it and shook his head and said, “Well, if he didn’t want me to make a recommendation, if he didn’t want to listen to what I wanted to recommend, why did he ask me to do it?” And I said, “Governor, all I can do is staff this out.” He said, “Well, go ahead,” and so on.

Smith: The rejoinder to that is: he wanted him to make a recommendation, he valued his recommendation, but he wasn’t the only voice that he was going to listen to.

Cannon: But he didn’t know this. He didn’t understand this. I’ve talked at length with Parsons and Mary Kresky and others about this. He had been the one who, for fifteen years as governor, was the one who made the judgments. He didn’t make the recommendation, he made the final judgment. He listened to the recommendations and made the decision. And he just couldn’t get accustomed to the fact that he was no longer the guy who made the decisions.

Smith: That makes sense; that makes perfect sense.

Cannon: I think it’s as simple as that.

Smith: Over the years people sort of obsessed about whether he was pushed; the manner in which he was disinvited from the ticket. And it overlooks something really interesting. It may have been a rationalization on Ford’s part, or it may just have been this quality of thinking and observing at a deeper level than most people gave him credit for. But I remember finding in all my research, some interview in which Ford said something really very intuitive. He stepped back and looked at the bigger picture. He said, “You know, I don’t think Nelson would have been happy being vice president for another four years.” And then he sort of explained why he thought he was unhappy in the role. It isn’t simply a question of asking him to run again - again, there may have been elements of rationalization involved.

Cannon: I think the politics was the operative element there. And let me just add one thing about this first assignment, the science adviser to the president. I thought, well, this is my first thing to do for the president, and I said go down there and ask him how he likes papers done. What he would like to know and so forth. Well, this was a very instructive thing to me. I went down to see him

and I said, “Mr. President, how would you like your papers written?” He said, “Well, I don’t want any fancy writing. Just good, clear English, simple and keep it fairly brief.”

He said, “But I want to know what everyone thinks about him. I want everybody’s opinion to be included with this brief summary paper that you provide, which will be what the issue is, what the background is, who’s for what and so on. That’s for a summary paper. But give me everybody’s opinion, I want to know everybody’s opinion.” He said, “Now, on this issue,” he said, “I want you to do two things. I want you to get in touch with every science adviser to every president and ask him what he thought he accomplished for the president and the country. And secondly, I want you to find some outside observer who is qualified to tell me what he thought each one advised.” He said, “I really would like to know that – what each one accomplished for the president and the country.”

So I did that and it was a very, very interesting experience because here at the White House you can get anyone on the phone. Jerome Wiesner, Kennedy’s science adviser said, “Well, I don’t think I really did much science advising, because every time I showed the president, he’d say, ‘Now, tell me again, how does a radio work? How does it get from over there to over here so I hear it? How does it work?’” I talked to Nixon’s, he said, “Well, after I took a stand against Vietnam I never saw him again.”

So I talked to all of these guys, Vannar, Bush, and everybody else gave me a good rundown on what he had done. We gave that to the president and he had a meeting so that everybody could voice their opinion, and then he went back in the office and he called me in and said, “Now, Jim, I’m going to sign this. I want to do this, but I think we should have Congress authorize the science adviser to the president because they will pay more attention to this if they have passed the bill, so let’s do that.”

That was very interesting to me - the way his mind worked, what he wanted to know, and what his decision was. He told me once that he liked to write it down – what his decision was – because he’d found long ago that when you have a meeting with people, everybody hears what they want to hear, if you

don't tell them otherwise. So he said, "I write it down, I write these decisions down, and you're to tell them you're to read exactly what their decision is and then tell them to carry it out."

Smith: How difficult was it to integrate the Nixon people with the Ford people. How much of an issue was that early on? Was it a continuing...?

Cannon: It didn't bother us. We got rid of them fairly quickly and I just told them. "Look," Dunham and I said, "we're making some changes," and so forth. But we kept two or three on. Todd Hullin, but I think two or three we realized that they had done such a good job, even after we told them your time is up, but stay here while we find a replacement, they'd done such a good job that we said, "Dick, why don't we just keep them on?" He said, "Well, if you don't have any problem in turning around, why not?" So we did it. But we really had an outstanding staff, and so those two or three people that had been Nixon people presented no problem whatsoever because they were our people very quickly.

Smith: How about the broader White House culture? Did you sense divisions or frictions between the old crowd, if you will, and...

Cannon: By the time I got there they were pretty much gone.

Smith: Really?

Cannon: Because I didn't become a domestic council guy until I think it was February of '75. So by that time Rumsfeld had eased and pushed them out. There were very few people still there. We had maybe two or three. One was a troublesome guy, he'd been a Nixon advance man, and I let him go. But he managed to get a job somewhere else in the White House. But I didn't have anything else to do with him. Friction in the domestic council staff? I didn't have any. Most of these guys were professional. When Haig left he asked Rockefeller to take care of a senior secretary he had, Pat McKee. Rockefeller said, "See if you like her," and so on.

So I did and she was older than the younger people I'd had around. Pat McKee. She had an astonishing record. I don't know if this is relevant, but I'll

just tell you this, anyway. Here's this senior secretary, a private secretary who's trustworthy. She had worked in the Veterans Administration, I think, and Johnson told Marvin Watson, "I want ten secretaries in here who are good looking, who can take dictation, who can type and don't mind working late. They won't be afraid to go home if they have to work late." So she was one on trial. He liked her and she stayed there.

Now she was so trusted that she was entrusted to type Johnson's speech when he said, "I'm not going to run again." She stayed on with Nixon, she typed Agnew's statement of resignation, she typed Nixon's statement of resignation, and when Ford issued the pardon, she was so trustworthy that she typed the pardon statement and the pardon itself. She had been there through that many administrations. How many secretaries would have that opportunity today?

Smith: That's amazing. In retrospect, should Ford have thought of someone else for vice president?

Cannon: Yes. Rockefeller should have taken Ronan's advice and not done it, and turned it down. He could have done it, but the circumstances – the anguish over Watergate and so forth was such and the uncertainty with this new guy coming in was such that he could not honestly, given his sense of duty to the country, Rockefeller could not turn it down. He called me - I was up at our little farm in New York - and said, "Look, Jim, I'm going to do this. I'm doing it for Gerald Ford and the country." It was different, and in his testimony for confirmation, they asked him, the Senate committee asked him, "Why did you change your mind?" He said, "Well, I'm older. Yes, I turned it down in '60 and '68, but I feel that now the circumstance is such that if I can help this president in this situation, I have no choice but to do it."

Ford would have been better off to pick somebody else, as it turned out. But it was useful for that first few months and setting the standards and establishing the standards by which he would chose his administration because there was no question but that was a popular thing for him to have done in terms of the country. It was widely, widely applauded, and I think it was the right thing for Ford at that moment, but not the right thing six months later.

- Smith: Right. Replacing the Nixon Cabinet and bringing in his own people. is interesting, Rumsfeld told us that his advice to the president was that you should make changes early.
- Cannon: That's right. No question, immediate.
- Smith: He put it in the context of, again, unlike what Rockefeller believed, Rumsfeld claims that he was reluctant to go to the Pentagon. That in terms of policy, he was probably more sympathetic to Schlesinger's viewpoint, more – for lack of a better word – hawkish viewpoint, so that Ford wouldn't be getting a new viewpoint, persae. And he put it in the context of urging Ford to make wholesale changes early. He thought when he did it, it was a mistake.
- Cannon: That's right. I think he's right. Rumsfeld accepted the fact – by the time he got there, the afternoon after Ford had been confirmed, got there from Europe, Ford had already told Haig to stay and told the Cabinet to stay. And so Rumsfeld didn't like that but he said, "Well, I have no choice but to accept it. The president has made this decision, he's the president." But when he came back in September, I think it was late September or October, to be chief of staff when he was formally made chief of staff, he persuaded Ford this must be done now. And Ford said that Rumsfeld had given him a timetable. These are going this date, this date, this date – right to the end of the year. And they carried it out.
- Smith: Haig, in our discussion, was vehement in his insistence that he went to the president and told him he had to get rid of Hartmann and went on all of these alleged personal failings that Haig claimed the Secret Service had told him about. And he said, "Mr. President, I've seen another president fail because he wouldn't get rid of people who were not serving him well." And Ford's response was, "Al, you have to let me handle this myself." To which Haig said he then responded, "Well, then I have your answer to my question; you don't want me to stay on."
- Cannon: I think that is more explicit than it happened, according to Ford, anyway. I talked to him about it a lot. It was a Saturday morning, day after he had taken the oath of office. Haig is waiting for him at eight o'clock in the morning with

a big piece of paper which we can't find, unfortunately. It was ten to twelve pages that Jerry Jones had written on how the White House is run. And Haig had told Jones to write this paper because we'll have to educate Ford on how to run this place. The degree of arrogance in Haig is, I guess, not astonishing, but it's there. But at any rate, he gave Ford this paper and said, "This is how you run the White House, and if you want me to stay on I have to have all rights of hiring and firing everybody, and the first one to go will be Hartmann."

And Ford, taken aback, still thinks he needs Haig for the time being – he was really taken aback, he was astonished, he told me, that Haig would show this effrontery. So he just simply said, "Well, I'll be the one to handle Bob Hartmann myself." By Ford's account, Haig said, "Well, think it over and I'll take a few days off." And he came back in a few days. But Ford said, "At that moment," told me, "at that moment, I knew he had to go as soon as I could get things organized around here."

Smith: Why was Hartmann such a polarizing figure?

Cannon: Hartmann in the House had been chief of staff, which really doesn't amount to much in the Minority Leader's office. I know because I was chief of staff in the Minority Leader's office in the Senate. Doesn't amount to much, really. There is no real responsibility – you've got a few people to work with and so on and you try to hire good people. So Hartmann had been nominally chief of staff and senior adviser to Ford in the House and so forth.

So when Ford became vice president, Hartmann assumed he would continue in that role, and in fact, he thought he did. But very soon Ford realized Hartmann couldn't organize a two car funeral, so he brought Bill Seidman in to organize the vice president's office, which Bill effectively did. Hartmann wrote the speeches that Ford delivered around the country. Hartmann was a good speechwriter, not a great speechwriter, but a good speechwriter on several occasions. He knew what words Ford could pronounce, and would have difficulty with and he was very conscious of that. He wrote well in that way. When he got to the White House, Hartmann assumed he would be chief of staff over there, too. He clearly thought he was chief of staff; he never told

himself otherwise. It just wasn't going to work over there and it was chaos as Rumsfeld and Cheney found when they came in to take over.

Hartmann is an interesting guy, but he's a reporter, he's a newspaper man. He's not an executive, he's a newspaper man. And he also has a kind of a bristly pride in himself and thought these guys are out to get me and so forth. Well, they were out to get him out of the way, get him over to what he did best, which is write speeches.

Smith: Was it safe to say he was both protective and possessive?

Cannon: No, I don't think he was possessive of Ford. I think he was just vanity himself. He couldn't stand not being promoted when the boss was promoted was what it amounted to. I think that was it, it was vanity more than anything else.

Smith: One last Rockefeller thing – he told Ford that Hartmann was the best political mind he had at the White House.

Cannon: Well, I agree he probably was.

Smith: Really?

Cannon: He was very astute in terms of the press and Ford was – how best to say it? – less astute in terms of the press than any other president we've ever had. He simply did not understand how the press worked.

Smith: That's funny, because on a personal level...

Cannon: On a personal note - he had this great little cadre of people who rode with him on the vice presidential plane. He was loyal to them, they were loyal to him. Personally they liked him, they kidded him, but they didn't write very good stories about him on the road. He could not translate that personal friendship into good publications, into good writing about what he was doing.

Smith: What didn't he understand about the press?

Cannon: He didn't understand how it worked. Well, a good example is the fact that when he's having his first press conference and Hartmann and the others,

Hartmann in particular, is trying to say, well, now they're going to ask about Nixon, the papers, etc., and so forth. And he listened for a few minutes and said, "Well, I'm not going to say anything about that." And he kept persisting: well, how are you going to answer this and so forth? And he [Ford] said, "Look, the press is not going to ask me about Nixon. They're going to want to know what my plans are to change the Cabinet; what my policies are going to be; what my foreign policy will be; what I'm going to do about Russia. Those are the questions they are going to ask. They aren't going to ask me about Nixon. So I don't want to hear any more questions about that."

Now that is a good example of how he just was – there was just a density to his understanding about the press. He had never had a good press in the House. I talked to several reporters who covered the House when he was Minority Leader, and they said, "Well, if you wanted any news you went to Mel Laird. All you got from Ford was a kind of platitudes and no news." He didn't know how to make news.

Smith: You know probably more than anyone else - my sense is that Ford, I don't know how to put it – that that news conference on the 28th of August is a turning point on the road to the pardon.

Cannon: Oh, there is no question about that. It is *the* turning point of that. No question about it.

Smith: He came away shocked.

Cannon: He was shocked. I talked to him at great length. I've talked to him more about the pardon than I think probably anybody else. He said, "I came back to the office and I said, 'Goddamn it, I'm not going put up with this! They're going to ask me about this and this and this.'" And then he read the transcript. Buchen brought in the transcript – you know they do it very quickly – and he read it and he got even madder. He realized how really bad he had been.

Smith: Mad at himself?

Cannon: Yeah, angry, furious with himself that he had screwed it up so royally, which he had done.

Smith: But is that the frame of mind in which you want to be making the most important decision of your presidency?

Cannon: This is a man who responds to something that happens, in my opinion. He was never, never, so far as I can tell or read, a person of his own initiative, except in his first campaign for the House. It was his initiative to challenge the incumbent and run for that office. But in the House you would never see, at least I could never find, a single initiative. There is no bill with his name on it, there's no record of him giving a new idea on the floor. It's a response. It's in response on Douglas, Justice Douglas, for example. It is in response to what he felt was an unseemly article in a paper that somebody had showed him. He is a responder, not an initiator.

And so I think that it was a response to his own mistake that provoked this pardon. And the realization that something had to be done to get it off his plate. I have no doubt that he felt, not only that he had to get it off his plate, but the country has got to stop bothering about this. And the only way to do this is to sweep it off the table. I had the impression and Hartmann had the same impression, that this is the linebacker. This is the linebacker, just going in and charging against the interference, trying to wipe it out and getting it to the runner.

Smith: I was listening to Benton Becker yesterday, [talk about] the conversation in the Oval Office before the pardon, in which Hartmann points out, quite accurately, that this would be political disaster for the mid-term elections.

Cannon: Well, the four of them were in there when Ford told them. He said, "Now, if you have any ideas different, come in and tell me. I might change my mind." So three of the four came in and said, "You sure you want to do this?" Buchen, Marsh, Hartmann – each one of them. And Marsh, most significantly, comes in and says, "Now, I don't want to make you mad, Mr. President, but if you pardon him this is going to inevitably be connected to the incident of August." Marsh was very careful to say this. And Ford interrupted him. He said, "Jack, I know exactly what you're talking about. I've thought it through. They are not connected, not in any way. I'm going to go ahead with

it.” And Marsh said, “I knew at that moment that there was no connection in his mind about it.”

Smith: By the way, is Al Haig blowing smoke when he presents himself as an almost passive transmitter of Fred Buzhardt’s...

Cannon: Bull****.

Smith: ...initiative?

Cannon: I am convinced in my mind that Haig was the prime advocate in that meeting because, when four people were in there, Buchen comes in first. Ford summons the four of them, but Buchen comes in and Haig is already there talking to Ford and Buchen has the impression they’ve been talking about the pardon.

Smith: This was in August?

Cannon: This is a few days after the press conference.

Smith: Oh, September.

Cannon: This is the meeting at which Ford tells the four, “I am thinking about pardon.” But Buchen goes in and Haig is already there and somehow he has the impression, he can’t be explicit about it, but he has the impression they are already talking about the pardon.

Smith: Go back a month – the famous August 1st, or whatever when Haig, in effect, informs the vice president that there was a smoking gun tape. Can you kind of walk us through that sequence of events because it is the heart of the case of - was there a deal?

Cannon: Well, it is. Haig comes over, and let me see, Nixon calls Haig in early and by Haig’s account and Nixon’s account, Nixon says, “I think I’m going to have to resign,” and that is what he said. “Tell Ford, but just warn him that he must get ready. Don’t tell him anymore.” So he goes over there. This is on the record. And then Haig goes over, but Hartmann is there and Haig won’t talk much. And so Ford goes to the Hill and Haig calls him up and says, “I want to

meet, I must meet you alone.” Hartmann objects, but Ford says, “Don’t worry, Bob. I’ll brief you on what happens.”

So they meet alone, maybe three o’clock or whatever it is. I’ve got it down in my notes somewhere. And Haig then is more explicit. By this time he says, “I have seen the tape that means he must resign. So he probably can’t hold onto the office.” He didn’t say must resign. But here are the options that are being discussed in the White House. And so he goes through: Nixon could pardon himself, he could do this, he could step back temporarily, under the Twenty-fifth Amendment he could do this, but the sixth option is that he could resign and Ford would pardon him. Now, this is characterized as six options, I think, after the fact, before Ford testifies, six options. And Haig gives Ford two pieces of paper. This is what was really significant to me. One is handwritten on a yellow legal pad, the explanation of a president’s power to pardon, and the other is a draft of a pardon statement. All you’ve got to do is fill in the name, hand it to a typist, and you’ve got a pardon.

So he hands these two things to Ford. Ford puts them in his pocket and Haig leaves and he tells Hartmann, “I swear you to secrecy on this,” and so forth, “but this is what he proposed.” Hartmann is outraged. He says, “For God’s sake. In effect, you let him do that?” And Ford said, “Well, I didn’t give him any answer. I just told I’d think about it.” And Hartmann said, “That’s probably the worst thing you could have done. Outrageous...you’ve got to do something about this. You talk to Marsh if you don’t believe me,” and Ford says, “Well, I’ll have to talk to him later,” because he was going out to the vice president’s residence with Betty and so forth. And he thought it would be cause for many questions if he didn’t go. So, he doesn’t talk to Marsh until the next morning. But Marsh asks to see the piece of paper. He looks at it and it’s handwritten. He recognizes the handwriting, it’s the lawyer...

Smith: Buzhardt.

Cannon: Fred Buzhardt, that’s right. Marsh had served over at the Pentagon with Fred Buzhardt and had a high regard for him as a lawyer and recognized the handwriting as Fred Buzhardt’s. So what Marsh figured out is probably exactly what happened. Nixon says, “I can’t talk to Haig about this, I have to

be in denial on this,” so he tells Buzhardt to draft it, to propose this, and Buzhardt gives it to Haig. I ask Haig why do you do this, he said, “I had no choice, I was told to.” Well, the only person who could tell him to do that was Nixon or Buzhardt for Nixon.

So late that night, this is what was really dangerous, Ford talks to Betty about it and says, “I’m going to tell them to do whatever they want to do.” And he calls Haig and tells him this. And this so shocked Hartmann and Marsh, they say, “Well, what was discussed?” Well, Ford can’t remember exactly. He said, “Well, not much, he didn’t say much.” But they call at one or two o’clock in the morning, they realize it’s going to be recorded and there’s a record of it somewhere and it’s going to be subject to subpoena at some point and so on. So they are terrified.

But Marsh can’t persuade him either it’s a bad thing to have done. And Ford – this is the best clue in my mind to Ford’s thinking – it is very complex for him, he’s conflicted. He doesn’t want to be president, but he is ready to do so if necessary. He doesn’t want to see Nixon forced out of office, but he realizes that it may be inevitable. He knows that Nixon can no longer govern and it would be best if he leaves office, but he has sworn to himself that he is not going to do one single thing to put him out of office. At the same time he thinks it would be in the national interest if Nixon would go. And so he is really ready to sacrifice his own life’s career if it means getting Nixon out of office instead of going through the process of six weeks to three months, if they impeach and convict.

So he has all of this and he explained this to me in some detail when I was talking to him in California. That he had all of this going through his mind, the national interest may be to get him out of office. And his personal interest is diminished. His personal interest is not “Man, I want to be president.” His personal interest is what is the best thing for the country? So all this going through his mind and that’s why he’s not convinced that he should turn this down out of hand.

But then they get Harlow in and fortunately Hartmann made notes on what was said and it’s in his book. Harlow was very eloquent about how he can’t

do this. And Ford believes Harlow and he hasn't believed Hartmann, hasn't believed Marsh, but he believes Harlow.

Smith: What was it about Harlow that made him so credible?

Cannon: Because he had served so many presidents, so well, and was so highly respected. He was a wise, wise man whose judgment was impeccable. And so, Ford had the greatest respect for him, as did so many other people, going back to, I guess, Eisenhower. So he thought, well, this is a man I believe and if he tells that it's going to tank my presidency – he's telling right. So, what can I do?

They write out what he is to say, and so he calls up Haig and says, "Whatever we discussed is personal and not to be used in any way, etc." They wrote it out and I have it in the book. And Haig says, "I figured the staff got to him and he turned him down." But I believe profoundly that Haig was finally the key person in getting Nixon out - he promising, "I'll get you your papers, documents and tapes, and I'll see that you'll never go to jail." And I think with that promise, Nixon agreed to resign.

Smith: Let me just nail down one thing in this timeline because the call that night before – the late night call to Haig, after he talked to Mrs. Ford - does one have a sense of what she may have said to him, or what her role was? Would she have been a reinforcing effect of the Hartmann...

Cannon: Betty? She read the papers. Betty read the two documents.

Smith: She did?

Cannon: She did. In fact, that's in Armbrister's report. That's how I knew about it. And she read the papers and said, "Jerry, you can't do this." So they talked back and forth, and he explains what's in the best interest of the country and so forth. They talked a couple of hours. And it's an indirect conversation. At the end of that, she says what she always says - as she always does, "Jerry, I'll back you up, whatever you do. I'll support you in whatever you do." And she did, of course. I think Betty was opposed, but listened to his reasoning. Ford would never let me talk to Betty about it.

Smith: Really?

Cannon: Really.

Smith: What does that tell you?

Cannon: If I said I wanted to talk to Betty for a few minutes, he would sit in and be very alert to whatever I was saying. He wouldn't let me talk to her.

Smith: How do you interpret that?

Cannon: He didn't want me to talk to her. He didn't want me ask her a question because she was frank and forthright and might spill something. Ford didn't want to talk to me about the pardon at first. But I said, "Mr. President, you're never going to have a more friendly examination of what really happened. No more friendly account of what happened. And it would be best for you to just get it all out there and so forth. Well, he said, "I don't want to talk about it." And I said, "Well, tell me what you did with the two papers." He realized I knew more than he thought. He said, "I destroyed them. I didn't want them around." And then he realized I knew more than...and I told him I talked to Haig, and Hartmann and Marsh and so forth. So then he opened up about it.

Smith: Is it logical to assume, given what we know about Mrs. Ford's reaction on reading those papers, and the fact that it was after that conversation that he called Haig back, that it would have been to, if not put brakes absolutely on Haig's initiative, at least to try to correct any misimpression that might have been left?

Cannon: No, I don't think the late-night call was to correct it at all. I think it was ambivalent. I think it was continued ambivalence, in my opinion. Because he said, "Well, I can't remember exactly what we said."

Smith: Is it possible that he didn't want to remember what he said?

Cannon: I think it's probably true. He realized it had been a mistake when Hartmann and Marsh said, "My God, what did you talk about?" "Not much (mumbling)." I think he was very conscious of the fact that he shouldn't have

made the call and probably – my guess is – that it was ambivalence all the way through and Haig would continue to think, well he didn't say no.

Smith: That raises a large question because the popular view, restated so many times at the time of the funeral, was this was a man without guile.

Cannon: That's right.

Smith: Guile is a pejorative, but shrewdness? The fact that – for example – in this conversation, if for whatever reason, he didn't really want to be fully forthcoming, is that guile?

Cannon: No, I think it is embarrassment that he did it. I don't think it's guile. I don't think he would hesitate to tell Hartmann and Marsh what had happened if he thought it was significant. But I think he felt, well, we just talked a little bit. We didn't... And probably they did talk about nothing. Haig said nothing has changed and Ford thought, well, he's still thinking it over, whatever he said. We have no decision yet, or whatever he said, but the net of it would be that Haig would say, he hasn't said no. He hadn't said no the previous afternoon, and he hadn't said no in the early hours, and not until the following Friday afternoon did he call him up and say no. I don't think it was guile, I think it was uncertainty about what he had done, and should do.

Smith: Yeah. Makes sense. Would he on balance, on hindsight, would he have been served better as president had he had a little bit more guile?

Cannon: Yes.

Smith: I mean, the Boy Scout influence which made him the perfect person for this period.

Cannon: Right, but to get the job, to replace Nixon.

Smith: In some ways is a detriment.

Cannon: Yeah. Well, there was an extraordinary naiveté about Ford. In so many ways it just didn't register to him that people would take advantage of him.

Smith: Is that the price you pay for believing that I don't have any enemies?

Cannon: I think it is simply a factor of his being. In high school he told me he decided on this when he was fifteen or sixteen years old, he decided that there was something good in everybody. And he would look for the good in everybody. And he accepted that there were bad people, dishonest people and so forth. Some of them were up in the House of Representatives. But he didn't dwell on them. He thought, well, I'm looking for the good in people. I think there was a goodness about him that became naiveté.

Smith: It's interesting that you say that. Most pols love gossip, and I always sensed – political gossip is one thing – but I always sensed that he was almost put off by it. That he would find a way to change the subject. It wouldn't be in your face, but he was not a gossip.

Cannon: He was not a gossip. He would not talk bad about people. He did not believe bad about people. He thought, let's look at the good side of things. The one thing that struck me about Ford that you haven't mentioned, and I think this was a reflection of his strenuous daily schedule, was his use of time. He was absolutely adamant about not wasting any time. I know once or twice I was delayed for a few minutes. He was really angry for being late and would not have his time wasted.

Smith: And yet he had a wife who was famously late.

Cannon: That he had to put up with. But with subordinates – no. He absolutely would not tolerate any waste of his time. You know, some people would try to Bull**** in the office or so forth, he'd just wave it off – “No, let's finish this.”

Smith: Very disciplined man.

Cannon: Very disciplined. Extremely well disciplined. And conscious of what he was doing. He told me once, for example, that if he was trying to deliberate on something at a meeting, he would deliberately take his pipe out and put some tobacco in it and light it. Because he said, “I used that time for thinking about what I wanted to say and how I should say it and so forth.” So he was of a very much more deliberate nature than you think of him.

Smith: Do you think he grew into the office?

Cannon: Oh, yes. Frankly, he grew tremendously under Rumsfeld's coaching. Because Rumsfeld said, "You've got to delegate, you've got to do this. You can't do everything yourself. You've got to change the people." And so he gave him a schedule to change the people. You've got to do this – you've got to do this. And he did. And Ford changed.

By the time I got there, which was February, he had mastered the job, there's no question about it. I was generally aware of the confusion because I spent a fair amount of time in the White House during the Rockefeller confirmation which lasted until December. And spent a lot of time with Jack Marsh, who was in charge of that. There was a lot of confusion and helter skelter in the '74 White House, but not in '75. It was working, it was functioning.

Smith: Before I forget, was Rockefeller under any pressure from members of his family during the confirmation period?

Cannon: Evidently not. I just finished a rewriting of that, Richard, and evidently not. But there was an astonishing series – it was almost all about money – not about issues – a little bit here and there about his belief in this and NATO and about what he would do about this or that. But ninety percent of the confirmation in the Senate and House was how much money he had.

Smith: Someone referred to it in one of our interviews as "financial voyeurism".

Cannon: Oh, yeah. Exactly. Everybody wanted to know just how much money the guy had.

Smith: You may know the story – I may have told you the story. Tom Korologos told me the morning in the Oval Office, when the announcement was made, he introduced himself to the governor and what his role –

Cannon: Korologos – I've got that in the book.

Smith: ...where Rockefeller is concerned that...

Cannon: I may not be as rich as they think I am. And he was right. They kept padding his assets. In effect, they made him list, for example – he started out at \$133

million. That was a conservative estimate, which did not include the art, which he had pledged to museums. So they made him include that, and update these things, so that doubled just about. Then they made him include the value of the trust that John D. had set up for him - \$116 million, but he had no control over that. And, in fact, from time to time, when he needed some money out of it - he got a good income from it – but from time to time he would have to go to, I think it was William McChesney Martin and beg for a couple of million bucks out of the trust because he had to pay for this or that or whatever.

But they finally got it up to two hundred and something million dollars, but that was excessively padded. And then in the House they demanded – the House I think really wanted to stop him – two-thirds of that House Judiciary Committee was rabid liberal, I mean way far left. They wanted a detailed account of how much every member of the family, every asset, and every investment and so forth. Well, I think there were 84 members in the family, the cousins and all and so forth. And Rockefeller said, “I can’t do that.” “Why not?” He said it would destroy the family. So he said, “Part of the reason is that my brothers and I have given different amounts to our children. It will come out and it will provoke all kind of resentment and lasting bitterness among the family. I can’t do that.”

Smith: Did he ever consider withdrawing?

Cannon: Yes, at that point. And he said, “Well, I’ll have to withdraw over that.” And Bob Douglas said, “Well, governor, this extreme invasion of privacy is a valid enough reason to withdraw, if you want to do that.” And he thought it over and said, “No, Bob. I’m going to fight it out.” And Bob Douglas managed with an artful bit of political work to persuade Rodino that he would send Richardson Dilworth down to give him an aggregate of what all 84 members had, but not person by person. And they did, and all that showed that they didn’t have any control. This was a myth. Rockefeller kept saying, “This is a myth.” They had less than one percent of ownership, the total family did, less than one percent in any corporation except Chase Bank, and that was about 1.3 percent.

Smith: Was Shirley Chisholm helpful?

Cannon: Well, she was. As a matter of fact, I've got the transcript of her talk. She made a really quite memorable speech about this. He was opposed by blacks, Jews, a lot of other people, and she took the floor and stood up there and faced a Jewish group and said, "Where were you when Nelson Rockefeller was persuading the government to send Golda Meir some airplanes?" And she took blacks and said, "Where were you when the Rockefellers were founding black colleges," and so forth. It was really a good speech written by an odd little guy named Thad Garrett.

Smith: Who later worked for Rockefeller?

Cannon: A month or so later after that, I got a call from Shirley one day and she said, "Why haven't you hired Thad?" I said, "I didn't know we were supposed to." She said, "That was part of the deal." I said, "He's on the staff."

Smith: Well, there's an urban legend that the deal included more than that. She supposedly had some estate in Jamaica. They referred to it as the Black Berchtesgaden.

Cannon: I didn't know that.

Smith: Supposedly Rockefeller paid her...

Cannon: Well, I doubt that. Shirley, I knew her fairly well, I knew all the House members fairly well because I was sort of Rockefeller's personal ambassador. We had a New York office, but I was a personal ambassador. And after '70 and the reapportionment, we lost one seat upstate and one seat in the city. So I had to negotiate with all thirty-four, I think it was, for their district. So, I was the most popular guy in the New York delegation while we were reapportioning because everybody wanted to protect his seat.

Smith: And of course, Charlie Rangel tells the story about Rockefeller, in effect, drawing the districts to his specifications.

Cannon: Yeah, he did. He drew the districts so Charlie Rangel wouldn't lose Mead Esposito. He was the Brooklyn leader then, and we gave him what he wanted for his district. I think he had six Congressmen in Brooklyn at that time.

Smith: And as I recall, you would liked to have gotten rid of Otis Pike, but the geography just wouldn't work.

Cannon: We couldn't. He was out at the tip end of Long Island. There is no way you could change the geography to rule him out.

Smith: Was the White House naive and/or unprepared for the Reagan challenge?

Cannon: Yes.

Smith: Did they wait too long?

Cannon: Both. They waited too long. In fact, in May, I think it was in May of '75, by then I'd been there a couple of months and I couldn't see anything happening. And I told Rumsfeld one day, "Look, we've got to get going here. We can't let this drift like this." And Rumsfeld said, "Well, I'm not going to be the manager." So I said, "I want to go see the president and tell him you've got to get going." He said, "You go right ahead. You can see the president and tell him this." So I did. I talked to the president and I said, "Mr. President, we ought to really get started on this campaign." And he said, and this is a rough quote, "Well, Jim, I figured this: that if the party wants to nominate me, if it feels I've done a good job, they'll nominate me. And if the country feels I've done a good job, they'll elect me." He said, "That's the way I've always done it in my district, and that's the way I plan to do it now." I said, "Mr. President, it doesn't work that way. You've got to go out and get these delegates," and so on.

But I didn't budge him at all. It was only a few months later that Stu Spencer, I think, came in and said, "Hell, he's running. Reagan's not talking about running, he's running." And finally we got off the dime and got to work on it. But it was mid-summer, I think, of '75 before we got started at all. And then it didn't start well. Bo Calloway was a nice guy, but probably – Rumsfeld says Ford picked Bo. I guess he's right, I don't know. But Ford liked Bo and

thought he had been a good Congressman and so on. And was a Southerner, and maybe could get some delegates out of the South. Ford was absolutely, totally, innocent about how to run a national campaign. It had never happened, and curiously, although he had traveled all over the country for House members, he had no concept of how to win a presidential nomination. It had to be taught him, basically, by Stu Spencer.

Smith: On balance, do you buy the argument that Reagan made him a better candidate?

Cannon: No. Well I think he gave us a lot of practice. No question about that. But the fact is, that what Reagan did was convince that conservative sub group of the Republican Party that they should wait for him and not support Ford. And they didn't. And there is no question about it, I think the pardon was...Stu told me once that a poll showed that seven percent of the Republicans were not going to vote for him because of the pardon. You lose seven percent of your base and you're in trouble. You're not going to make it.

Smith: In retrospect, has too much been made of the Polish gaffe?

Cannon: No. I think that was a critical thing because he was going upward and that just turned it back down. It was a stupid mistake.

Smith: And he was stubborn.

Cannon: About two days of stubbornness – and Ford could be stubborn. He really could be stubborn. Not often, but when he was stubborn, I mean, he was really stubborn. This was something, apparently, out of his childhood.

Smith: In the Reagan White House, when you had that situation occur, you could go to Nancy Reagan and she would try. Did anyone ever think of trying to enlist Mrs. Ford to convince him?

Cannon: I don't think so. My impression was that she was always supportive of him. And she was the conscience to him. Not that he didn't have a strong conscience himself, but when he would waiver to get something done, she would correct it. She was a very strong element of conscience in his decisions. But in the end she always supported him.

Smith: Tell me, when the famous *Sixty Minutes* interview occurred, were people appalled in the White House? In the immediate aftermath of that?

Cannon: I'm not sure, I wasn't there yet.

Smith: Well, it was in '75...

Cannon: Early '75, I think. I think it was about January of '75. I'm not sure, but anyway, I don't recall being there at that time.

Smith: Was there tension? Were there people who saw her as a political loose cannon?

Cannon: No, I think people saw her as a tremendous political asset because of her candor, her frankness. And people just liked her. They often like the First Lady better than they like the president. But he was certainly true in his case. She had a lot of verve and spirit. She was kind of a free spirit, and everybody liked that about her. She had also been a good mother, raising four good children. I never thought she was anything but a major asset to him.

Smith: Was there an awareness that she had a problem?

Cannon: Yes. Internally there was. I know, because Maria Downs – have you talked to her?

Smith: I talk to her next week.

Cannon: Okay, good. Maria Downs used to invite us to all the dinners, the White House dinners, and Cherie, my wife, asked, "Why do we get invited?" And she said, "Well, two reasons. One, you don't ask, and the other is, that it's always good to have you around to organize a table or two in case we have a problem with Mrs. Ford." Because sometimes she would come into the dinners looking – I don't know if she was or not – but looking kind of zonked and out of it. But she liked being in the White House, very much, because she saw him more than she'd ever seen him before.

Smith: Do you think he felt guilt about the earlier years when he was away as much as he was?

- Cannon: I never saw any evidence of it. I never saw any evidence of it whatsoever. He had set out in his first term, I believe, to be Speaker. It is what he wanted to be and he aimed for that. Not with all deliberation, but when an opportunity would come. He didn't initiate any of his races for leadership. They all came to him, people came to him and said, we think you can beat Charlie Halleck.
- Smith: When you stop to think about it, it actually explains what he said to you about his attitude, well if the country wants to re-elect.
- Cannon: Yeah, that's right.
- Smith: There is an element of passivity here.
- Cannon: That's right. Personal passivity.
- Smith: He would not, on his own, have written the OpEd piece calling for rebuke (of Clinton; here confused with second Ford Op-Ed on affirmative action).
- Cannon: No, but that was a wonderful thing to have done. And it provoked me to go see Lee Bolinger, and Lee told me what the problem was, and gave me the idea of an amicus brief that, by all accounts...
- Smith: Which we now know Sandra Day O'Connor referred to.
- Cannon: Exactly.
- Smith: It's on affirmative action.
- Cannon: That's right, exactly. I initiated the brief, and I started trying to get it organized, but then a guy at the Army, a former Army counsel, took it over and got all these generals and so forth. He really made it happen, but I just kind of got it started.
- Smith: But that also suggested Ford, more than many politicians, in some ways, was dependent on a staff.
- Cannon: No question. He was dependent on ideas. Have you talked to Mel?
- Smith: Yeah.

Cannon: Well, Mel was the one who kept pushing him. "Come out with some ideas, come out with some ideas." But Ford, when he would try to have an alternative to a Democratic program in the House, he didn't initiate it, he had somebody else do it. It was, in many respects, a passive thing.

You asked about the Polish question. I have no doubt in my mind that the real reason President Ford was not a more effective president and the reason he didn't elected president, was because he was not a good performer. The White House has become such a stage. It is the number one stage in the whole world. And half of the president's job is performing. Half of it may be managing, but the more visible half is performing. He just was not a very good performer.

Cannon: And it's funny, the first month, all he had to be was not Richard Nixon.

Smith: That's right. Exactly.

Cannon: And the very qualities that were perfect for a month. The press in its infatuation with irrelevant detail, made much of him cooking his own muffin and whatever the hell it was. It was insignificant, but that boosted him way up here because he was a man of the people, or whatever he was. And he was very popular...

Smith: And the truth was, probably Mrs. Ford didn't want to get up and make his breakfast.

Cannon: That's right. She was probably sleeping late. But he simply was not very good on television. He'd never been very good on television. Look at him in the House, and Mel Laird saying, "Get out there and do this, Jerry." Or being shadowed by Everett Dirksen, or whatever it was. He had never been very good on television. He did learn how to campaign. My firm belief, Richard, is that this guy turned out to be a hell of a manager. He really managed the White House better than almost any other president we can think of, but he simply couldn't portray the idea of a first citizen on television. He just couldn't do it.

Smith: That's why I say, going back certainly to Kennedy, the popular view of what a president does had been transformed. And Ford, in another era, might have

been seen as a much more successful president. In his last years, we'll wrap up with this, in his later years they'd go to the convention, and they were part of this diminishing band. This guy who was the most conservative president since Calvin Coolidge, came to be seen as...

Cannon: Right, that's right. He was the real conservative. He was the acting conservative. Reagan and others are talking conservatives; Ford was a really acting conservative.

Smith: It is expressed, among other things through his vetoes.

Cannon: Yeah.

Smith: He was fiscally conservative. He was tight.

Cannon: Oh, yeah. He was stingy, he was tight, he was careful with his money and with everybody else's money. We would sit in these budget sessions when they'd do their appeals and O'Neill and Lynn and the OMB guy, and I was in there as a kind of a foil so that they didn't carry all the verbiage and so forth. Because every now and then they'd say, well we ought to cut this, that and so forth. And I'd say, "Well, Mr. President, that art budget item is very close to Betty Ford. I think you ought to think again about that." He'd say, "You're right," and so on. But anyway, people would come in with appeals and they'd start to appeal and he would know more about it than they would, and in about five minutes they'd say, "Well, Mr. President, I understand. You're right, we'll take the cut." But he was just one hell of a manager. With Rumsfeld's coaching to show him how to delegate and so on, he was a splendid manager. Probably the best manager of any presidency since maybe Truman or somebody. Truman was a good manager.

Smith: I think he's the only president to sign his name to a petition supporting gay rights. That represented change. He wouldn't do that in the White House.

Cannon: That's right.

Smith: How did he change? And was it exacerbated by the fact that the party was moving far to the right?

- Cannon: No, I think the changes I observed were really changes that occurred as much because of Mrs. Ford as anything else. The changes that I recognized he made were influenced by Betty Ford, in my opinion. He simply was adamant about not doing anything, not making presidential decisions that would improve his chances to be elected. In fact, he was almost stubborn about that – that he would do it out of defiance. “Well, you tell me it’s going to help me politically, but I’m not going to do it.” He did not want to hear any of that.
- Smith: But in their retirement years - I don’t want to just throw a label on it and say he became more liberal – but certainly his views seemed to have broadened.
- Cannon: I think he moderated a lot of his views. Now that you mention it, I think he became more broadly minded in terms of understanding the world beyond the House, beyond the Congress. I think that was a tremendous change in his life.
- Smith: He was still learning.
- Cannon: Yeah. In the House he was a House man. He really looked at it like you do in the House and the Senate. You’re in a little world up there and you see that little world. But once he got out, I thought he expanded his knowledge and his beliefs.
- Smith: Do you think his kids had any role in that?
- Cannon: Yes, I think they did here and there. Yes, I do. I think they did. I think specifically they had a lot to do with his granting, not what he called amnesty, but conditional amnesty, earned amnesty, I believe he called it. I think they had, Michael and Jack, had roles in that because neither one of them was subject to Vietnam or had been drafted for Vietnam, but they had a lot of friends who were.
- Smith: Did he ever tell you how he’d like to be remembered? Did he think about that?
- Cannon: Yes. And I have it written down somewhere, but I can’t quote it exactly. But as a man who had served his country in a time of crisis with the best of his ability. Words to that effect – that’s about it.

What were his last words, do you know? Did you ever ask Betty or anybody?

Smith: No, and it's all very sort of – I don't know why there is such a veil thrown over a perfectly natural process. They were deeply resentful when he would go to the hospital and somebody in the hospital would tip off the press. He was deeply resentful. People would try to suggest this interest is understandable, and he would come back, stubbornly, I'm not president anymore. I'm a private citizen. I'm entitled to my privacy. That sort of thing. I suspect it had to have been very difficult for someone of his pride, meticulous in his appearance and everything else, to die by inches in public. And he'd seen Bob Hope, which had to have been a cautionary – he didn't want to use a cane. There were all the indignities of growing old – he found distasteful.

Cannon: He was devoted to Betty, and they'd had a wonderful long marriage. But he still had a great respect for his early romance in Phyllis Brown. In my first set of interviews with him, I guess in mid-interview one day, he said, "You ought to go see Phyllis, she's right up here in Las Vegas," or whatever it was. And so I said, "Well, alright. I'll go tomorrow and I'll come back, if that's alright." He said, "Sure, go up and see her. I'd like to know what you think of her." I called her. Penny gave me her number. I called her and said I wanted to come up and see her.

I flew up there and took a taxi out to her condo and thought how in the hell am I going to break the ice here. So the taxi had stopped in front of a florist shop. I said, "Wait here." I went in and got her a dozen red roses and brought them back. When she opened the door, I handed her the roses, and said, "President Ford sent you these." She said, "Oh, no. He never sent me a flower in all his life. But come on in."

And we had a wonderful conversation. Her memory was not detailed enough for me to reconstruct it. But the summary of it was that they had met and taken an instant liking to each other. Had fallen deeply in love and they had the most wonderful time for two or three or four years. They went skiing together; they went to play tennis; they went sailing; they did everything. She was a brilliant woman. She made her living as one of these experts in bridge

playing – whatever you call them. She'd had three husbands and a son by one of them.

Smith: You know, at the end she wanted to come see him.

Cannon: Oh, yeah. And did come to see him.

Smith: And was turned away.

Cannon: And turned away, I know. I think that is unfortunate because – but anyway. She was not bitter about it, but she had the greatest regard for him and affection, and she said, "I would have been lucky if I could have married him, but it wouldn't have worked out because I was just too much of a flirt." And he understood this. He perceived very early that she liked too many boyfriends and this was not going to work if he was going to be in political life. It was going to be very awkward for him if he had a wife who wandered around and so on. So he prudently decided that was not for him.

Smith: Perfect.

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