Smith: Thanks so much for doing this. I appreciate it.

Buchanan: I’m delighted.

Smith: Let me ask you. First of all, what was the attitude in the Nixon White House toward the Republican Congressional leadership, and Ford in particular, during that first term?

Buchanan: Well, for the first couple of years, Nixon had one of his speechwriters at all the cabinet meetings, congressional leadership and others, and I was in all the congressional leadership meetings. I think the attitude was very respectful, but I don’t think there was a sense that this was a very powerful, competent, and really able force that we had on Capitol Hill. Nixon was the first time since Zachary Taylor that we had a president with both Houses of the Congress in opposition to him and I don’t think that Nixon felt that these fellows were up to his level of the game.

Smith: Would you distinguish at all, not necessarily in terms of competence, but in terms of loyalty, between a Jerry Ford and a Hugh Scott?

Buchanan: I know what you’re going to say. Everybody in the White House distinguished between the two. Jerry Ford was a friend of Richard Nixon. Nixon liked him. I’d been out with Nixon for Jerry Ford in Michigan and Romney in Michigan, out there in 1996. Jerry Ford was a friend and a buddy of Nixon’s and I think they genuinely liked each other. I think Hugh Scott was looked upon as on the other side of the party. He was certainly looked upon by me and the other conservatives as that. Hugh Scott is the one who famously said, “Don’t worry. They get the rhetoric and we get the action.” That meant ‘They’ were conservatives and ‘we’ are the liberals.

Smith: I don’t know about Ford, but you hear stories about Scott constantly leaking to his advantage and not necessarily to the White House’s.
Buchanan: I think that was the feeling, that Scott was in business for himself and that Gerald Ford was part of the team and he was the leader of the team in the House, and Hugh Scott probably would not have been Richard Nixon’s choice for a Senate Minority Leader.

Smith: Correct me if I’m wrong, but I think Scott voted against both Haynesworth and Carswell. I know he voted against Carswell.

Buchanan: Carswell got about forty-five votes.

Smith: Forty-five votes, that’s right.

Buchanan: And, you know, I worked on the Carswell account, if you will, when he was nominated and I kept calling the judge. I’d done this for Burger, I’d gotten materials on Burger and we wanted to get them out early to the press room. First impression, right to the press, they’d have to run with it. Burger had written this wonderful piece on law and order for *U.S. News & World Report* in ’67 and we put it out. So, I called Judge Carswell and I said, “Judge, are there any law review articles you’ve written you’re particularly proud of and you’d like to have represent your point of view?” “No, I haven’t written much of that.” “Are there any articles that you’ve written that represent your views?” “No, I can’t think of any of that.” And I said, “Well, Judge, tell me a little more about your war record.” And so we went to talking about his war record in the Pacific. But the Judge had no real academic credentials and I guess you have to fault John Mitchell for that.

Smith: Presumably, there’s a real qualitative difference between Haynesworth and Carswell.

Buchanan: Oh, Haynesworth was Chief Judge of the 4th Circuit and should’ve been confirmed. It was an appalling atrocity. I think he had a speech defect, Judge Haynesworth did, but he was just vilified and viciously attacked as some kind of racist. It was all a pack of lies. But, I will say this: when Carswell was rejected, I’m sure it was Carswell; I was called by Haldeman and told to write a statement on that which I assumed would be for Ziegler to deliver and I was told he wanted it very tough. So, I wrote this statement that said this was an act of regional discrimination against the South and was really rough. I went
over and went into the Oval Office and I gave it to Nixon and Nixon looked at it and then he walked past me straight for the pressroom where he delivered it. It was a very powerful, effective statement, but I had no idea it was for the President of the United States.

Smith: And there was no filter.

Buchanan: No filter.

Smith: Were you surprised by what happened to Spiro Agnew? Let me preface that. One of the people we talked with is Jerry Jones. He had been reorganizing the personnel office for Haldeman. He got a call, so it had to be before April of ’73, Haldeman was still there. And Haldeman wanted to know how many people worked for the vice president. Jones came up with a number and Haldeman said, “Fine. I want undated letters of resignation from all of them.” Now, it raises a couple of possibilities.

Buchanan: Now, wait a minute. See, he got the undated letters of resignation from all of us as I recall the day after the election.

Smith: And that’s the first thing that it raises. Is it possible that this was belated, that in fact they didn’t have letters from the vice president’s staff?

Buchanan: It’d be hard for me to believe, because I think the vice president’s chief of staff sat in the senior staff meeting, and I’m sure he had people in the meeting where Haldeman came in where Nixon came in and spoke - the exhaustible volcanoes speech, as everybody remembers it. And everybody’s to go back and say what you’ve done, what you would like to do in the second administration, and send in your letter of resignation, which cast a bit of a pall over our victory party. Sweet Old Bob, as he called himself, the initials fit. So, what I’m saying is that I’m sure that the chief of staff to the vice president - became a federal judge and he’s since died - I’m sure he was in the meeting and it would’ve applied to him as well.

Smith: It certainly would not have been an effort by the vice president to resist that.

Buchanan: Oh, no, I don’t think so. Well, that’s an excellent question. I don’t know. I don’t think at that point the vice president would’ve defied an order for all the
senior staff, of whom the vice president’s chief of staff was considered one, to send in their letters of resignation. But you raise a very interesting point. These were the vice president’s hires, they weren’t the president’s.

Smith: It raises the larger question. Would the Oval Office have known about the Maryland investigation? Remember, the Wall Street Journal, I think it was in August, went public with their story. This would be several months before that. Is it reasonable to believe that the Justice Department and through the Justice Department the Oval Office would’ve known that there was at least something afoot in Maryland?

Buchanan: Yes. Now, I came in on this fairly late, I will admit. I went to the press conference that Agnew had, and this was fairly late on where he talked about, I believe, “damn lies,” and was really defiant. James Reston was there and wrote a terrific column saying Agnew denied everything. I went back to my office and I either called or memo’d over there and said, “Why are we not standing behind the vice president? And Al Haig said, “Come on over.” And I came on over and he said, “The vice president’s been taking envelopes in the basement.” And I was just jolted completely by that. I had not known it, but the sense I got of all of this and even of the Saturday Night Massacre was that Elliot Richardson was communicating much more closely with the White House than folks were led to believe.

Smith: Speaking of the Saturday Night Massacre, to this day, it’s unclear. We talked to Judge Bork, we talked to other people who were in the Justice Department, and one senses that the President believed he had an understanding with Richardson.

Buchanan: He did.

Smith: And Richardson, for lack of a better word, double crossed him.

Buchanan: That’s exactly right. I was called and I’m not sure by whom, maybe it was Haig, but this was during the week and I was called and they said they wanted to get rid of Cox. And I said, “Is Richardson aboard?” And they said, “Yeah.” So I said, “Do it.” And apparently, Richardson reneged on the back course, backed off and so Ruckelshaus and Bork had to do it. I wrote Nixon a
memo, I think, to this effect because I was in the Oval Office with Nixon and he was talking about Brezhnev and he was talking about the Middle East and all that time - basically around the time of that war - we were talking for a long period of time. I had recommended, I think, that he had to fire Richardson, to get rid of him. And Richardson was coming in. And I said, “Well, I’ll go out the other door.” And I went out the door that I didn’t think they were coming in and they were coming in. And here was Richardson with sort of a strange grin on his face and Al Haig was grimacing. But Richardson was walking in to get fired. This was Saturday.

Smith: So, the signal had been sent to the Oval Office that, in effect, the deal was off.

Buchanan: Oh, yeah, Nixon told me basically, “Look, I don’t have any choice.” There were no tapes running then. But basically he was saying, “You’ve got Brezhnev and the Russians are pushing me on the Middle East. If I’ve got my own attorney general backing me down and I can’t do anything about it, who’s going to believe you in the world?” And he very much saw it in those terms, that, look, it was them or him. So, he went ahead and did it. But he felt very much that it had an effect on foreign policy. That’s what we’re talking about. So, as I say of Richardson, I’ll never forget his expression. It looked like one of these fellows who’s taken to be hanged but somehow didn’t realize it. It was a funny expression on his face.

Smith: Bork is not the only one in that department who has expressed the view that Richardson was very ambitious, politically. That Richardson saw himself as a future president.

Buchanan: Oh, sure, Elliot did. Later in life, I talked to Elliot and, you know, I liked Elliot and I talked to him. He’d had four cabinet seats. I think he had four chairs or four of those plaques.

Smith: Apparently, he did not want to be attorney general.

Buchanan: Well, it was a ________, but right. I talked to him and I said, I forget which election it was, but I said, “Why don’t you go up there? Walk in there and be governor of Massachusetts?” And he said, “Pat, I’ve got things I care about in my life and it’s towards the end of my life and I don’t want to be deciding
sewer contracts. What I care about is the Law of the Sea Treaty.” He was a globalist and he believed in this. He wanted to focus on that and I respected that. He was a nice fellow. He used to come over on Crossfire. He’d come over late at night and I had this lovely gal there and she said, “Elliot Richardson? The famous Elliot Richardson?” And I said, “Yeah, he’ll be here.” And she came out into my office with this panicked look on her face and I said, “Don’t worry. He’ll do just fine when the camera goes on.” A lot of those fellows came at 11:30 at night that way.

Smith: When Agnew resigned, I believe I read you wrote the President a memo suggesting that he pick Ford for vice president.

Buchanan: Yeah, it was not only that I wrote him a memo - there is a memo in the Ford files and I wrote it to the President - but it was very, very close to the date of selection, very close. And I gave the reasons, the arguments for and against, and I said, “Overall, I think Ford is your best choice.” I think George H.W. Bush was being pushed by a lot of congressmen and I said Ford is most acceptable to both parties and all these things he could do for you. And I sent it over there and I got a phone call from Al. He said, “The old man wants Connally.” I said, “Well, if the old man wants Connally, take Connally. But I’m sending you a memo with the reasons why I think Ford would be the better choice. But if the old man wants him, take him.”

Smith: Was confirmability the dominant factor?

Buchanan: I have to think that was it because the old man wanted Connally. He really did. He loved John Connally. He thought Connally was phenomenal.

Smith: I don’t know if you heard Robert Byrd told Tom Korologos, who told us, when he went up there and [Byrd] pointed down and he said, “If you send down Connally’s name, there’ll be blood on that floor.”

Buchanan: Well, I think that was what convinced the president that he couldn’t get it through. And Ford would get through and only had a little problem with the $200 in cash, I guess, for the year, whatever he’d taken out in checks and stuff. If you read the testimony, I think there was a problem there.
Smith: Would you call it a reluctant choice on Nixon’s part?

Buchanan: No, Connally was his preferred choice. Clearly, if he wasn’t going to get his preferred choice, Jerry Ford’s the one he would’ve liked to have taken. He was Chowder & Marching, he was a friend, and he would be consistent with Nixon’s foreign policy. What was it that Nixon said to Rockefeller? Did he talk about Bush?

Smith: Now, there’s a famous scene and I believe it’s true because I’ve had reason to check into it.

Buchanan: “Can you imagine seeing Jerry Ford in this chair?”

Smith: Yeah.

Buchanan: No, wait a minute now. You say Jerry Ford.

Smith: Yeah, that’s the story and it got back to Ford.

Buchanan: Now, I heard that story, but it might’ve been that I heard it about Bush. I’m not sure because I didn’t get it firsthand, but I’ve heard this story. You might be right. It might’ve been “Can you imagine Jerry Ford sitting in this chair?”

Smith: To me, that’s just Nixon stroking Nelson’s ego.

Buchanan: Right. Nixon stroking Nixon’s, too.

Smith: Yeah.

Buchanan: That you and I are big players.

Smith: Well, remember when he said, “There are three or four people who understand the use of power - me, John Connally, and, I guess, Nelson.”

Buchanan: Right. What did he call Connally? He used the term ‘big’, of course he mentioned the ‘big play’, and he always mentioned that. But there was another term about Connally was these people were larger than these other people.

Smith: Someone was directed to go to the Treasury Department with a personal message that there’s some meeting the next day and the president would
really like to have the secretary there. And they thought it was pretty nice that he was sending a personal invitation. And Connally says, “You’re very nice gentleman and it’s nice to meet you, but you just tell the president when he wants me to attend a meeting, he can call me.” I wonder if that kind of brass plated self-assurance was one of the things that really appealed to Nixon.

Buchanan: It really is. It’s undeniable. John Connally was the ‘Big Man’. Connally had delivered Texas for Humphrey. He’d been Secretary of the Navy and Governor of Texas for three terms and he was a big, independent tough man. And this is one thing I really admired about Nixon. Nixon constantly looked for people who were bigger than him in the areas they knew. He once told me, “Pat, I want a national security advisor who can teach me something. Not one I have to teach something.” And I think that was why Henry Kissinger was picked. He had no problems bringing in Pat Moynihan. Irving Kristol was a terrific fellow and he had him in for dinner. And Connally was a big player. He wanted all those big people around him which was the sign of a strong man, I think. And it was said of John Connally that he not only surrounded himself with smaller people, but little people, physically. My friend, Mickey Gardiner, I grew up with, was about five feet high. He didn’t have the big folks around him.

Smith: Let me ask you. There’s always friction between presidents and vice presidents or more specifically between their staffs. There is built in resentment. And Ford is put in this unique position; in many ways, he’s walking a tightrope. And he spends a lot of time out of town. What were the views that people held inside the White House, particularly as it became more and more embattled, toward the vice president and his defense of the president?

Buchanan: I think they felt Ford was loyal and Ford was supportive of the president and he was out there defending the president, quite frankly, when it was getting tougher and tougher to be out there and to be credibly defending the president. So, I didn’t get that. I got that Ford was a loyal soldier up until the final days when it was impossible to go out and say certain things and where their
interests clearly parted. But I’ve always thought Ford was a loyal guy. I mean, his staff was something else.

Smith: Are we talking about Hartmann in particular?

Buchanan: Hartmann in particular.

Smith: What was it about Hartmann that was so polarizing?

Buchanan: Well, Hartmann was considered a leaker. He was considered someone who had lines to the press. And he was someone who was considered a well-poisoner.

Smith: At what point does the line between being protective of your boss cross over into being possessive of your boss, because that became a real issue?

Buchanan: I don’t know about his relationship with Ford. But Bill Moyers interviewed me and he asked me on the show what did I think of Gerald Ford as a potential president. I said, “Well, Gerald Ford’s a good man, solid man” stuff like that, “but nobody can match Richard Nixon for his knowledge of foreign policy.” So that was taken and Brokaw used it and [it was] taken as dumping on Ford. And it was all up in the networks and I felt badly because I liked Ford. So it was at that point I said, “You know, Mr. Vice President, I want to send you a copy of the memo I sent to the president” which was the memo recommending Ford for V.P. So, to heal the breach that was inadvertent - I was just trying to praise the old man in saying the old man was indispensible, not that Ford wasn’t. But I’ve always looked upon Hartmann as a well-poisoner.

Smith: Can you pinpoint a moment when you concluded that it was over?

Buchanan: Sure. I was at Camp David that Sunday. I went up there, was called up there, and it’s in the Woodward-Bernstein second book.

Smith: Had the Supreme Court ruled on the tapes?

Buchanan: Oh, the tapes had gone, as a matter of fact, the House had been voting. What that was, the last week, the beginning of the final week when you knew it was over. I’d assumed we were going to go down the road to the Senate vote and
we would lose, quite frankly. I assumed it. But, the certain sign of death was when(?) went up to Camp David with Al Haig and Pat Buchanan and Jim St. Clair and Ray Price and Ron Ziegler and Steve Bull was back in the White House. It had to do with tapes, we wanted Bull to check a tape and it was the tape of June 23rd. Nixon had asked for it and heard it and then sent the tape back and said, “We’re not giving up any more tapes.” And, we got the tape of the 23rd. That was the one where it looked like Nixon had knowledge early on, and we knew when that hit that would be fatal.

So, we had to decide what to do and the decision was taken up there and something I sort of urged was, “Look, this tape, we don’t want the old man resigning right now. What to do is you just drop the tape. Boom. And the tape will blow a hole in the bottom of the ship and we’ll be gone by the end of the week.” And that’s what we did. On Monday, we dropped the tape. I remember, Al Haig asked me to brief him, he sent me around to brief and talk to a lot of people. And I went into Dean Burch’s office and Timmons was there and a couple other guys and I related what I’m relaying to you at much greater length and when I finished, Dean Burch looked at me and said, “Jesus Christ. Get the scotch.”

Smith: What other response can he give?

Buchanan: And we started drinking.

Smith: But, presumably - to back up - when the Court ruled on the tapes, that set in motion this irreversible—

Buchanan: This is why the firing of Archie Cox, and what I urged him to do was basically fire Archibald Cox, burn the tapes, get rid of all the tapes except the subpoenaed tapes, the seven of them at the time, whatever it is, those tapes, get rid of all those except your Brezhnev tapes and all your national security tapes that are important for your memoirs and all that and for the foreign policy. Get rid of that - in effect, cut your arm off, let it go and then get up and away from this whole thing. Then let them go and do what they want to do, but don’t give them any more. And this is what has always, always bothered me and bothers me to this day. The old man could be so
decisive…that he was not decisive there to just do it. And, I think if he’d have done it, sure we would’ve taken a hit, but at least it might’ve been the last firestorm. Instead, you had one after another after another and you kept bleeding and bleeding and bleeding. So, that’s what we took eighteen months.

Smith: It’s incredible. Can you imagine in today’s media climate Watergate going on for two years?

Buchanan: No, you can’t. Because all you had were the networks then. But I will say there were a lot of White House limos outside the Mayflower Hotel at 10:30 getting a Washington Post.

Smith: You may be in a better position to answer this question than anyone else, because one of the things we’ve come back to over and over again in this series is the transition and how difficult it was on both sides. Frankly, for the Nixon White House folks who stayed around to be meshed - first of all, to go through this experience. After the Ford swearing in, there’s a receiving line and a reception down in the State Dining Room and people say that you could see the Nixon people just kind of peel off. Again, it’s perfectly understandable.

Buchanan: I don’t even remember going to it.

Smith: Okay.

Buchanan: I wasn’t there.

Smith: You were obviously at the President’s farewell.

Buchanan: I was at the farewell, but I didn’t go in and get a chair. Everybody went in early. I was standing, I think, right behind the cameras focused on Nixon, but I saw the whole thing. And I went outside and saw him go off in the helicopter. And a nice lady from the Washington Star as I was walking back to my office said, “How do you feel?” But it was very tough. I don’t recall going to the function. I might’ve been there, but I just don’t recall it.
Smith: I assume there were lots of people wondering “Am I going to have a job next week?”

Buchanan: Well, I went to Al Haig and said, “I want to leave.” I said, “You know, look. I’m tired. I’ve had eight and a half years with the old man and it’s time for me to go.” And he said, “Stick around for awhile.”

Smith: Did Al Haig intend to stick around for awhile?

Buchanan: Well, I think he did. He did say we can teach the Ford people a few things and I was amenable to that.

Smith: What did you want to teach them?

Buchanan: Well, frankly, I was not fond of the staff, in particular, Hartmann. So, I stayed around. I did a briefing book for him and a briefing book or two for Ford. They’ve probably got them up at the Library. One of them, I think, I wrote about he should take a hard line on New York City on the Bailout which didn’t work out that well.

Smith: It did initially.

Buchanan: And we sort of knew the pardon was coming. You know, let me tell you a story. I didn’t have it hard, but I was over talking to Jerry terHorst and I said, “Look, this amnesty thing for the Vietnam thing,” I said, “is a terrible mistake the President’s making.” It’d divide the country and the whole thing and heck, the war wasn’t even over, I mean, for the Vietnamese. And terHorst said something which tends to undercut his stance later where he resigned. He said to me in almost direct terms, “Well, we’ve got to do this one before we do the other one.” I took that to mean they were going to do the amnesty before we pardoned Nixon, but this was in late August, because I was up in Canada when the pardon came down. I was on one of these American Council of Young Political Leaders meetings, you know, with Canadian parliamentarians and all of that. So, that told me that it was in the works.

Smith: Mel Laird—

Buchanan: Right. He’s still with us, isn’t he?
Smith: Mel Laird, of course, loves Ford, but Mel had his own way of taking care of the pardon. He was going to get a bipartisan congressional delegation to go down to the White House and, in effect, petition the president to do this. Now, the question I have is—

Buchanan: To do what?

Smith: To pardon Nixon.

Buchanan: Oh, he was? Okay.

Smith: The question I have is, in the supercharged political climate at that point, wouldn’t any trial balloon have been shot down before it got above the trees? I mean, was there any way to prepare the country for this?

Buchanan: I don’t think so. You could’ve had a big discussion of it over a long period of time, but I think the president did it the right way. I remember telling him as I was leaving that, “History’s going to vindicate the decision you’ve made in pardoning the old man.”

Smith: Really?

Buchanan: I did. I told him that right there. And by that time, of course, he wanted me and he wanted us all out after the pardon. It was a free fire zone on the Nixon people in there, you know, because he really wanted them out. Haig was moved out. Hartmann was moved in and then Hartmann was gone and Rumsfeld came in. And we laughed, we said, “We’ve got to keep McLaughlin here because after him, us.”

Smith: That’s interesting because, Rumsfeld, before he actually took the job, right at the transition, he came back from Belgium or wherever he was. His advice to Ford was “clean house,” that you have to establish a break and so on. Ford was reluctant to do that for a number of reasons, including the fact that you needed some continuity; there were a lot of very talented people in the Nixon White House. And he thought it was unfair to tar everyone with the Watergate brush.

Buchanan: Right.
Smith: Which raises the question, can you be too nice to be president?

Buchanan: Well, Richard Nixon said, and he quoted Asquith’s famous quote, “A Prime Minister’s got to be a good butcher.” Asquith told Churchill this when Churchill became the First Lord of the Admiralty. And he said, “There are several who must be pole axed now” and Asquith went and did it. I think Nixon attributed it to Disraeli or someone. It may have been Disraeli first, but it was certainly Asquith. I agree with that, but let me say - this is not because Nixon had the most competent White House staff I’ve ever seen, especially a lot of guys in the first term who were out of there. But even in the second term, it was far more – I mean, we’d gone through national campaigns. We’d run the White House. We’d had national experience. Ford’s guys were basically Hill staff; they weren’t national staff. So, his decision was probably right, but there were some good people he should’ve kept on. Other people were too visibly connected with Nixon like me, and, by then, probably Al Haig, and so that would’ve been the wise thing.

But to transition, a fairly rapid transition, but not a butchering. I think a butchery would be a terrible mistake because, you’re right, a lot of us would’ve felt, “Look, he didn’t win this presidency. We did. We won it twice and who are these guys that are here and saying, ‘Get out of your offices’?” And there was a feeling of that. I remember that Korologos came in the day after the pardon. The pardon was on a Sunday, I believe, and on Monday, Ford had been at 75% with what was called ‘the toasted English muffin’ phase of his presidency. All of a sudden, this gigantic firestorm - all over the country, every reporter, columnist, and journalist. “This is unprecedented. This is a ‘deal’.” And Korologos came into the senior staff meeting and said, “Hey, you Ford people, welcome to the NFL!”

Smith: I can hear him say it. Can’t you also hear Rumsfeld telling him to fire everyone?

Buchanan: Let me tell you a story about Rumsfeld. I went over there. Rumsfeld and I had been buddies and friends. I was one guy that got along with him, had no rivalry, no competition or competitiveness which he had with a lot of other people. I went over to him and told him, “Look, I don’t’ want to stay here. I
really don’t. I’ve worked for the old man. I’ve been working every weekend. I’m really beat. So, I’ll tell you what. What about me going off the premises November 15th and off the payroll December 15th?” In other words, I’d have four weeks of vacation. And he said, “What about off the premises October 15th and off the payroll November 15th?” I said, “Okay.”

Smith: Where you going to be the ambassador to South Africa?

Buchanan: Well, let me tell you about that. Haig called me over. And, again, as I say, I was willing to work with Al because Al was a buddy of mine and we’d been together. I’d worked with him and “Look, whatever you want to do, Al. Okay. But I’m not long-term here.” And so, he called me over then and I said, “I’m going.” And he said, “Would you like an embassy?” I said, “An embassy?” I’d always wanted to be an ambassador to NATO. Never got it in my life, even under Reagan. But I said, “Gee, that sounds interesting.” And I think he had three embassies. He said, “Okay, what about Vienna?” I said, “Al, Vienna’s a fairly expensive place. I’d been a newspaperman and I’d been a staff guy and I can’t afford Vienna. I can’t do it.” And he said, “What about South Africa?” And I’d been studying South Africa, writing about it in St. Louis, the whole apartheid thing. That was exciting and interesting and I knew the South Africans. So, I said, “I’ll take South Africa.” And what he did was, Haig took it in and ran it through and Ford signed off. Alright? So, we’re up in Canada and the pardon hits on Sunday. And Monday morning, Spencer Oliver, who’s a friend of mine, who’s the guy who was wiretapped in Watergate, a guy I grew up with, a Democrat, you know, head of the Democratic Governor’s Conference Association. Spencer comes to me on a bus because it’s a joint thing. He and I were co-chairs of this little delegation. He says, “Hey, I understand you’re going to be ambassador to South Africa.” I said, “What?” He said, “It’s in Evans and Novak.” This is the day after the pardon. Shelley was with me and so, I say, “Shelley, get off the bus and get to the airport and get back home.” And Novak had a column in there that said something like “bloody-nosed, gut-fighter Buchanan to get embassy,” “diplomats appalled” and all this stuff. And it had been dumped out by Hartmann. He put it out there right in the firestorm of the pardon. It was just abolished, the whole idea. And I was glad it was because some of them like
Peter Flanagan had been made ambassador to Spain, I think. You can check that out. And some of the others had sort of gone forward, but this finished it off. The pardon finished it off and it was after that, you could see that the Ford people’s whole idea was ‘get rid of all of them’. After the pardon, they were under fire for the pardon, the Nixon connection, the press were after him. “Why is he still here?” And I think the Ford people were in something of a panic then to get us out.

Smith: Haig told us he had a confrontation with the President. He’d gone to the President to tell him the Secret Service had told him about Hartmann and misbehavior. We’ll leave it at that.

Buchanan: Holy smokes.

Smith: What’s that?

Buchanan: Holy smokes. I hadn’t heard that.

Smith: Yeah. Clearly, Al Haig and Robert Hartmann were put on the planet to piss each other off. I mean, to just annoy the hell out of each other.

Buchanan: Right. Let me tell you a story I’d forgot. After I think the Novak column hit and it blamed it all on Haig doing this, Novak said that he was home and Haig called him. Haig said, “I’m going to sue you for five million dollars.” And Novak said, “Al, I’m sorry. I don’t have five million dollars.”

Smith: Novak blamed Haig for the story?

Buchanan: No, Haig blamed Novak, but I knew in a second that Hartmann was behind it. But Haig called Novak. That would ensure that Haig knows exactly where this was coming from.

Smith: And, basically, Haig told us that these agents had come to him with complaints about Hartmann’s drinking and more.

Buchanan: Right. Hartmann was a heavy drinker.

Smith: And he goes to the President and he says, “Look, I’ve seen how a president can be brought down by staff.” Almost a sort of ‘it’s you or me’. And I can
see Ford saying, “Al, you have to let me handle this.” And the way Haig constructs the conversation, he then said, “Well, I know now. That’s an answer. I know you don’t want me to stay.”

Buchanan: Al said that?

Smith: Yeah.

Buchanan: In other words, it was the choice between the two of them?

Smith: In effect.

Buchanan: Yeah. Well, you know, let me go back. Hartmann was one of the individuals when I went to work with Nixon up there in ’66, ’67, and ’68, he would tell me to go see people in Washington and meet with them. Hartmann lived, didn’t he, off Massachusetts Avenue just down the hill inside Maryland? Because, I think I went to his house and spent several hours with him. A sort of caustic, rough character and he drank and we were drinking in the afternoon, I think, on a Sunday or something. But, clearly, Nixon then had respect for him and, you know, I didn’t feel any hostility to him. He was another one of these characters that Nixon told me I really ought to get to know.

Smith: That’s fascinating.

Buchanan: Yeah, but when he got in there, I don’t know what it was about Hartmann, but it clearly was a mistake on my part in that Moyers interview. Moyers fed it to Brokaw to make it look like I’m trashing the vice president of the United States.

Smith: Hartmann saw enemies everywhere. I think Hartmann felt he had to compensate for a boss who saw no enemies anywhere. Again, it fed into that protective possessiveness.

Buchanan: Right.

Smith: Do you think Haig had it as a goal before leaving - whenever he left - to secure a pardon?
Buchanan: You know, it wouldn’t be based on hard information, but I would certainly say yeah.

Smith: I’ve often wondered if the real story of the pardon is not what anyone said, but what they didn’t say, that kind of non-verbal language that politicians have.

Buchanan: I’m sure it’s not certitude based on fact, or that I’ve got a piece of paper, but I am sure that Al Haig wanted to make sure Richard Nixon was pardoned and he would do what he could to bring that about and he would work assiduously to bring it about.

Smith: Beyond that, it’d be sheer speculation as to whether that originated with the President himself.

Buchanan: Richard Nixon?

Smith: Right or whether it was something that was done by Haig on his own.

Buchanan: I think Haig would certainly do it on his own and my guess is he and the old man were in touch, too. But I don’t know any knowledge of that at all.

Smith: It’s very interesting. Haig told us he never listened to the smoking gun tape or the other tapes.

Buchanan: No, we heard them. Well, we got word from Steve Bull. We were at Camp David and we said, “Bull, what does it say?” and things like that. We had enough to conclude. And what the conclusion was that a) Nixon had heard the tape, b) he had shot down sending the tape on to Jaworski after having heard the tape, and c) for months after that, all of us were stating what we were told was the truth, which was that Nixon had no knowledge of this thing before a certain period, whereas the tape suggested he did, which was destructive of the President’s credibility. And that’s what happened when you dropped the tape. Everybody said he lied. And that was the thing that dropped the bottom out of his 30% support or 25 or whatever he had.

Smith: It seems like all roads lead back to Fred Buzhardt. Laird said Buzhardt, who’d been his counsel at the Pentagon—
Buchanan: Fred Buzhardt was at West Point with Haig in ’46.

Smith: Laird somewhat reluctantly comes back into the White House as part of this larger defense effort. He’s there about a month, and he gets a call from Buzhardt who’s been listening to the tapes. And, basically, warns Laird, “Be careful what you say because the president’s in it up to his neck.” That’s Laird’s version. Laird wrestled with his conscience and decided to stay on. Subsequently, when we talked to Haig he says, “Oh, no, I never listened to any tapes.” He said, “Fred Buzhardt gave me some very good advice, which was ‘Don’t ever be alone in the room with a tape’.” Presumably, that’s the throwback to the missing 18 ½ minutes. Do you have a theory about the missing 18 ½ tapes?

Buchanan: Well, you know, I have theories, but I shouldn’t use them. I’ve joked around with Bernstein about it in a bar and I was kidding around about it and he put it in the book and it probably hurt Rose Mary Woods, the joke did. And I had no knowledge of it and it’s one of the things I really regret because she was a great buddy of mine and a great loyalist of the old man’s. So, no, I really don’t know how it happened. I don’t.

Smith: You left the White House when?

Buchanan: I was off the premises, I think, November 15th. Oh, no, I was off the premises October 15th. I’m sorry.

Smith: October 15th.

Buchanan: Right.

Smith: Per Rumsfeld’s suggestion.

Buchanan: Right. And I told the story when I was talking to Cheney and he said, “Yeah, that would be Don.”

Smith: Rockefeller went to his grave convinced that it was Rumsfeld that did him in. Remember who deep-sixed George Bush at the CIA at the same time that the vice president was replaced and all of that?
Buchanan: But didn’t Rumsfeld get rid of Schlesinger and then get himself in Defense and all of that?

Smith: Rumsfeld insists that he didn’t want to go to the Defense Department at all. I remember asking Cheney, “Did Ford find it difficult to fire people?” and he said, “Not Schlesinger.” Colby came in and Colby was a gentleman about the whole thing. Ford offered him an embassy and he thanked the president very profusely. Didn’t take it, but he took it in a classy way.

Buchanan: Can I tell you a quick interrupting story?

Smith: Yeah.

Buchanan: I left the White House and I was going to write a book that was about conservative votes, liberal victories. I got a little contract of fifteen grand for it. And I was going to start writing a column. So, I went out to this store. It was a store in Bethesda where you bought supplies. You know, you get all these supplies like you’re going to school. You get all your papers and things where you’re going to be working on your own. And in there was Bill Colby and he was doing the same thing. He went out at the same time from the CIA.

Smith: I’ll tell you a footnote. There was a real streak of paranoia in Rockefeller. He literally believed that Bill Colby was a Soviet agent.

Buchanan: _______ the guy was some CIA cadre thing. They took care of my friend Angleton.

Smith: In the Reagan challenge in ’76, Nixon goes to China the week of the New Hampshire primary.

Buchanan: Right.

Smith: Do you have any sense of what the Nixon-Ford relationship was after the pardon?

Buchanan: When I went to see Nixon around Labor Day, it probably would’ve been after. What day was the pardon?

Smith: September 8th.
Buchanan: Okay, I wonder if it was before then, but sometime around then, I went out there to talk to Nixon and he was in terrible, terrible shape.

Smith: Both physically and emotionally?

Buchanan: Not physically then. That’s before the phlebitis. But emotionally he was. We had dinner with him and the Mrs. and Shelley and I were up there in that room of his, but he was in terrible shape. I don’t recall him saying anything derogatory about Gerald Ford then. This might’ve been before the pardon. But, anyhow, Nixon wanted me to get involved writing his book and stuff and I didn’t want to do it. So, no, but I want to get this in about the break with Ford. I went to see Ford and he told me something like, “I think you ought to go out to the private sector.” It wasn’t a fight, but it was quite clear that he felt I should be moving along that path. I’d intended to, so it didn’t make any difference to me and I think that’s the time that I told him that he’d done a great thing with the pardon and that history would vindicate him. But, he called me back in, I guess it was a year later. I was a journalist, a columnist and it was right after John Paul Stevens had been nominated and Stevens got a unanimous vote, I think.

Smith: He was never asked about abortion.

Buchanan: Yes. And he got a unanimous vote and Ford had a meeting with columnists and I was one of them then. I came in and we each got to ask him one question. And I’m sure there’s a transcription of it, but he said there that John Paul Stevens was the kind of appointee that he would be making if he ran again and were president again. And I said to myself, “Did we come all the way up the Hill for this?” And, at that point, I went out of the meeting and I called Sears and said, basically, “I’m with your guy. I’m with Reagan.” Even though I liked Reagan, admired him, and conservatively much closer to him naturally. I was not with him because I liked Ford.(?) Ford was a good guy. He was a good man. I thought he was doing a good job as best he could, but I’ll never forget when he had that statement, “I don’t want a honeymoon, I want a long, happy marriage with the Congress.” And the Congress of the United States is ripping everything apart, and he wants a good, long marriage.
Smith: In some ways you can trace the trajectory of the Ford presidency as two and a half years of unlearning some of his congressional instincts or, at least, learning the difference between Congress and being an executive - above all, occupying the Oval Office. He said what really hurt about the ’76 election was he felt he’d just mastered the job when he lost it.

Buchanan: Right.

Smith: Did Reagan make him a better candidate on balance?

Buchanan: Sure. Sure. The Reagan challenge really woke them up. I mean, I think Reagan made some big mistakes. They oversold New Hampshire. They’re going to win it. For Heaven’s sakes, they should’ve said, “We’re going to do the best we can coming in to New Hampshire against the sitting president.” But Reagan ran a dead heat. It was considered a loss and he collapsed in Florida, but that’s another story. That was a good campaign. Eventually, it was, but I think there’s no doubt that Gerald Ford was a better candidate. I was at the convention with the Reagan folks. I was up there. They didn’t pay my way or anything, but I was sitting up there pretty much in front of Reagan. And I do think when Ford waved him down and Reagan came down there and stole that convention, a lot of folks said, “We nominated the wrong guy.” And, of course, Reagan would not take that VP.

Smith: To this day, you hear all these versions, but I am convinced because Cheney has said it, a number of other people have said it, people close to Reagan have said it, they’ve quoted William French Smith as saying it at the time - “Make it crystal clear we will meet afterwards, but the precondition for that meeting is that the vice presidency not be raised.”

Buchanan: This is what I’ve heard. I’ve heard that Reagan said, “I don’t want to meet with him, because he’ll offer me the vice presidency and I’ll probably take it.” And he didn’t want to meet with him and he didn’t want the vice presidency. And you almost had to have Reagan on that ticket. I mean, given the way Reagan ran, the closeness of it, it was a natural. It was almost like an Obama-Hillary ticket.
Smith: There are Reagan people, to this day, who say, “Well, if Ford had only offered him the vice presidency…” Other Reagan people say he made it clear he didn’t want the vice presidency.

Buchanan: Reagan didn’t want it. He did not want it. Everything I’ve heard, he did not want it. He was just afraid he was such a pushover that he would take it. Ronald Reagan is a very nice guy. That’s one of his problems - if you asked him, “Can you do this for the cause?”

Smith: During the Reagan years, did you hear from the president anything about Ford? Derogatory or otherwise?

Buchanan: I shouldn’t say. It was pretty funny. Ford had the reputation from falling down the stairs. We were at Geneva for the first summit. We were at an early breakfast with the President and the staff were talking to him and saying, “Here’s what you do, sir.” But he just wanted to be with the boys before he headed over there. He, of course, did magnificently with no coat in zero degrees - Gorbachev with this 1950’s fedora on and overcoat. And we were in a house and when you went to go down the stairs, the second floor was awfully low in terms of the stairs. You’d have to duck your head coming down from the second floor to the first floor. So, we had a sign right on the overhang that said, ‘Watch your head, Jerry Ford’.

Smith: The funny thing is, Ford probably would’ve laughed at that.

Buchanan: He would’ve laughed at it. But I don’t think Reagan bore any animosity toward Gerald Ford. He certainly didn’t by the time I got there. I think there was contention, I think, between the First Lady and Betty. I think that was there. But, by the time I got there, it was Reagan’s second term. Basically when I went into the White House, no, they bore no animosity. I wouldn’t hear anything. I would be surprised to hear it. Gerald Ford had been a pretty good guy, a pretty good president. He beat Reagan fair and square. There were unforced errors on Reagan’s part. Otherwise, he would’ve won the nomination. Reagan was probably better off not having won the nomination. Carter set him up and I think the country was ready to change and Carter had a good strong hold in the south. He beat Ford in ten out of eleven states there.
didn’t he, except in Virginia. So, by then, I bet Reagan would say, “I’m glad I lost that and I’m glad I lost ’68, too!”
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