

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Red Cavaney
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: First of all, thank you so much for doing this. Would you tell us a little bit about your life before you crossed paths with the Ford White House?

Cavaney: I guess I would say my beginnings of interest in public policy -- and the politics that are necessary to implement it -- started in high school and college. It was then that I got involved in service organizations and the governance of student bodies. I went to the University of Southern California and a lot of my college friends and fraternity brothers were all involved in campus politics.

Smith: Was that Haldeman's group?

Cavaney: Yes, Dwight Chapin directly and, yes, Haldeman's group. I could probably give you a dozen names and they could be recalled by anybody who was familiar with the Nixon administration. And, so when we all graduated, I went off to serve three combat tours in Vietnam to satisfy my NROTC commitment. So, from '64 to '69, I was not a part of this group. Many of them, went into the Nixon gubernatorial race in California, which proved to be a political loss.

Smith: Which was reluctantly undertaken?

Cavaney: Yes. But they were around for the makeover and the campaign drive in '68. When I finally left the Navy and took a civilian job, it was in Orange County, CA. Nixon had bought the Western White House in San Clemente, which was just down the road from where I was working in Orange County. So, my relationship with many of these former colleagues was started anew. I sort of panhandled around and became a volunteer advance person, which I did for four years, while working for Security Pacific Bank.

Smith: Was this for both the first and second terms?

Cavaney: In the first term, yes. And then I went on the White House Staff full-time for the second term, following the 1972 election. And that is where a most interesting thing happened. I got to know Jerry Ford when he replaced Spiro Agnew as Vice President. Jerry Ford never really had to campaign for himself, in the truest sense of the word except his first run for congress. So he didn't have a campaign mechanism, campaign apparatus, or anything like that. The White House got an agreement with the RNC for Dean Burch and Jerry Ford to be referred to us for logistical support in the advance office, which I was in charge of at that time. Their charter was, "Okay, you've got to go on the road and you've got to take care of all the Republicans who are nervous about what's going on." So that was my first exposure to Jerry Ford and it was during that time that I got to see the large differences between the personalities of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. And, I sort of fell in love with Jerry Ford the person and would've walked around the world, if he'd asked me to.

Smith: It's fascinating that you say that because it opens a number of questions. It also reminds me of one thing Rex Scouten said. Rex, of course, had been with the Secret Service and accompanied Vice President Nixon on a number of trips. The family had a room for him out in California. I mean he literally became that close to the Vice President. Rex, who is appropriately discreet given his position, was very candid in drawing a distinction between the Nixon he had known in the 50s and the Nixon he saw in the White House.

He said something that absolutely dumbfounded me. He volunteered the observation, "I can't tell you how many times we'd be on a plane, sometimes just the two of us, and out of the blue this he just sort of pounded his fists and he said, 'I'm not tough enough. I've got to make myself toughen up,'" which is a fascinating window on a surprising side of Nixon. And implicit in what Rex had said was that he had succeeded by the time he'd become President, perhaps to the detriment of his presidency.

Cavaney: His force of will and his self-discipline was extraordinary. An example - I think he always wanted to be one of the boys; that high school and college athlete; the person who was recognized as being part of the "in crowd". His

persona, presumably, wasn't quite that in his younger days. He worked hard and went out of his way to be seen with so and so or wanting to do this or that, which did not necessarily come natural to him. You could almost see him say to himself, "I want to make myself more like this and therefore I'm going to do it," "I want to make myself tougher," or "I'm going to dedicate myself to making sure that nobody out-studies me in terms of things that are really important." And, he was incredible in that regard.

Smith: He famously said, "I'm an introvert in an extrovert's profession," which suggests a degree of self knowledge that you wish in some ways had extended beyond that observation.

Cavaney: And the other thing then that was so interesting from this perspective where I was, is watching Jerry Ford come into play. Nixon enjoyed thoroughly the idea of studying through books and research papers and having materials brought to him as he's evolved before he engaged heavily in discussions.

Smith: He's been called a closet intellectual.

Cavaney: Yes. I think he was. I even heard him say once something to the effect that, "Nobody's going to out study me on things that are important to me." So he took great pride in knowing all the details. And then you see Jerry Ford come in and employ his method of learning; that was totally different. He would look to people who he respected, as experts in certain areas, and have group discussions with them, and he would absorb unbelievable amounts of knowledge, principally through the give and take of discussion and interaction. And then, of course, you see the papers and all, but it's sort of almost the polar opposite of Richard Nixon in terms of how you acquired your knowledge about what you were going to do in leadership. The style suited the man.

Smith: Think what else that reveals, too. One is, basically a loner, inner-directed, solitary in his pursuit of knowledge and as in most things. The other is a much more gregarious "people person."

Cavaney: Extroverted guy.

Smith: Yeah.

Cavaney: Yes, it was quite interesting to see that contrast.

Smith: It's interesting because, this period was so awkward, obviously, for everyone. We've picked up on a number of people who suggested that there were those in the Nixon White House who looked at the Vice President - who was out of town more than he was in town, who was really walking a tightrope - and perhaps resented what they thought was a less than full throated defense of an embattled president. Did you sense those tensions?

Cavaney: There were some. There were clearly people that didn't understand what the strategy was. And the strategy, having sat there through all this - and we made many trips with Dean Burch on the plane - it was to give people a sense of reassurance and confidence that everything was coming along okay. Well, if you are in a purely defense mode, that may not necessarily be the messages you would want to be delivering to people. It's almost by design the reverse side of that. So, as the President would want to do, he would give an order and he was very good at doing that. So it really was not fair for people to criticize unless it was to advance another agenda, or they just clearly didn't understand what was being asked of Jerry Ford at one time and what that role was supposed to be at that period of time.

Smith: We talked to Benton Becker. There's this wonderful little anecdote that I'd never heard before that says volumes about both men. Earl Warren died during that period and Benton, who politically was to the left of both Nixon and Ford - nevertheless, Benton said to the Vice President, "You know, it might be a really nice gesture for you to go up to the court and pay your respects." And Ford sort of mulled that over and said, "It probably wouldn't sit well with the White House, but I'll think about it." And Becker learned later on, that the Vice President on his own had gone up to the court and had placed a wreath at Earl Warren's casket. And sure enough, he was chewed up by Nixon. It was a nether world he was in. We've been told by a number of people he really did not enjoy the vice presidency.

Cavaney: He didn't. I think as we later got to see him in his element, as the very relaxed individual when he was around people; he just loved people, he loved it all and you would see it in him. In that period of time, as I said, it was his duty to do this, and it wasn't a role I think he was fully comfortable in. However, he did it and he did it I think reasonably well given the times. But you're absolutely right, he was not the same person, and he had to feel a little bit awkward about that, and a lot of times he would say, "Glad that's over," kind of thing. In a sense that one would say "duty done."

Smith: And a later consequence of that was that Jerry Ford probably tended to be a little bit more understanding of Vice President Rockefeller's travails in office than a different President would have. During that period of his vice presidency, Tom DeFrank in his book made a great deal out of a slip of the tongue. Putting that aside, did you ever hear him say anything that even by inference – I mean, look, he's a pro and he can read the papers. At some point, he's got to be weighing the possibilities. Was that in the background? Was it ever discussed?

Cavaney: The best thing I can say about that is that other people would mention it in his presence, and he would sometimes give a slight wince or something. Clearly, you could detect his sensitivity was heightened. And then he would try and move off that topic as fast as he could through a joke or something like that. Clearly, thought had been given, clues were there, and he had concluded that there was nothing he could really say that was going to help. And I saw that repeated time and again. It was almost like being able to see into his soul.

Smith: And presumably that would include, when you were out in the field, Republican candidates?

Cavaney: Absolutely, yeah. Because, of course, coming and speaking on behalf of the party, as he was doing in being the vice president, people assumed he knew everything. So people came up, I mean I heard it brought up a number of times, but sort of almost the "Gee, you'd be great!" type of comment.

- Smith: For a guy who was by nature pretty open, that must have been one of the things he didn't like about the job. I mean, having to be artificial, or closed mouth, in that sense.
- Cavaney: He was a man who enjoyed the give and take. You could see, he'd get four or five of his old friends like he used to do up in the House and they'd talk, and you just knew he'd keep going. I can remember when we were doing the trips we went on, you had to pull him out of events because he just relished the give and take and would stay long past the scheduled conclusion.
- Smith: He loved the House, didn't he?
- Cavaney: Absolutely.
- Smith: That was his real home.
- Cavaney: That was so great at his funeral that The House returned that love by letting him have that very special treatment that nobody else had gotten. And I think it was just evident in everything about him. You heard him talk about old friends, he would see somebody who he'd served with but had been out of office for three or four terms or something like that, and we'd go to a town and that person would be there, and about ten minutes after he'd be there giving a speech. And he'd go, "So and so's out there" and "Go get him. I want to talk to him!" Always that embodiment of camaraderie and good will.
- Smith: It really was bipartisan.
- Cavaney: It was, back in those days, no question. That's the shame of what's happening nowadays. It used to be there were as many people in the political middle as there were on the ends, and even more so, and you worked around in the middle, requiring you to be bipartisan. But now our political process has changed so that the extremes, shall we say, the ends of the ideological spectrum, these groups have all the weight, and there's nobody in the center. And now if you try to occupy the center, you tend to get demonized from both directions. So it's really a very challenging political environment.
- Smith: You'd know this better than most. I often think of Ronald Reagan, certainly a principled conservative, yet people forget Reagan was going to put Dick

Schweiker on his ticket in '76. And in the White House, the old union boss always said, "If I get 80%, I call it a victory." I mean, he may have been fixed in his principles, but he was certainly pragmatic in how he went about realizing them.

Cavaney: I think what he learned was that one classic: If you're going to be successful in politics, you've got to have wins. You've got to keep restoring that political capital that you use up, and the only way you can restore it is to use it again and prove it. And I think he had that view up here. I marvel at how certainly in those first two years with him -- watching him, who I didn't know as well as I'd known the other two presidents -- to see what a master he was of being able to understand the geopolitics of what was going on, just like this! It was incredible.

Smith: Yet in many ways still a mysterious figure, an elusive figure.

Cavaney: Very much was his own man, he and Nixon. And think both of them are from California. California always prides itself as sort of hanging out there in public and doing this and I'm from California. And they both kept their own counsel to an extent much greater than any other president we've seen in this modern era, so to speak. And yet they were very different in how they exercised power and the like.

Smith: You're absolutely right. You know a Freudian could have a field day with Reagan's boyhood, and yet there's a security about Reagan and an optimism about Reagan and he just liked people.

Cavaney: He knew who he was. Yeah, and at times, you can see both of those two. They would be against some piece of legislation that was purported to help some disadvantaged folks, and the Administration would be against it because it obviously pragmatically wasn't going to work. But then one of those people from that impacted group would run into him and they'd tell them a story and both of them would tear up and they'd write the check or go back and tell their staff "Let's be sure they're taken care of." So they did have that basic connection with the human condition.

- Smith: I've often thought - and in some ways it was unavoidable, ambition made it unavoidable, a lot of things made it unavoidable -but that Ford and Reagan had more in common than the public ever guessed or even the party pros suspected.
- Cavaney: I think yes. I think its root is in this understanding of the human condition and a simpatico nature towards that. And both of them went through that full circle from starting with not much, having worked hard, been scoffed at on occasion for various kinds of things and finally, they could see if you follow your precepts, both of them could see how you could be successful working in the system. I think that connection was the bind you're talking about and I would agree.
- Smith: It's interesting. We talked to reporters who were on that vice presidential plane and it's funny because, while he may not have been having a whole lot of fun, it sure sounds like they were having a ball. What was the mood like on Slingshot Airlines?
- Cavaney: The Vice President, he was one of those who just loved people and he liked making people feel at ease. I think he probably had difficulty, although I can remember a few occasions of him really coming down strong on somebody. Just because that really wasn't his nature, you would see him later joke with the recipient - with the idea of making them feel at ease and that they have a new chance. Whether it was on the plane or it was in the car or at the hotel, the overnight or whatever it was. I just think that was part of his persona - to create an environment around him where people felt comfortable, would speak their mind, and have fun, even when you're working hard.
- Smith: I'd love to have an example or two. We've asked people about his temper, which was a lifelong thing, and it is to his credit that most of the time he controlled it. One of the gals who worked at the office out in Rancho Mirage said they could tell if it was a two god damn it day or a five god damn it day.
- Cavaney: I've got a Jerry Ford temper story that Dick Cheney tells a lot on the stump, but we actually saw it happen. We happened to be at this event. It was going to be staged as you typically do in smaller towns in a big, huge room, like a

gymnasium. And, the people were in there for 2 hours, in wait for a series of reasons, notably a long motorcade instead of a helo ride. So, all these people are jam-packed to the gills, in this gritty environment. But what happens, of course, is the room just heats up and then the humidity does weird things. So, we arrive finally, he goes into the gym and the people are going nuts and they're yelling and screaming and doing this and that and he was in his element, at his very best – very glad to be out of this motorcade and on to this thing. As he finishes his speech and starts to leave the stage, we did the balloon drop. Well, the humidity and the long time with the heat created static electricity and all the balloons stuck together. So, it's now referred to as the famous balloon "plop" – coming down, huge, all massed together. You can't see the President because all of these are six to eight feet tall and he's fighting his way to the crowd and the exit, where he just ripped Dick Cheney. "That's the last balloon drop we're ever going to have at any event." I can never forget the embarrassment because Dick reminds me often of it when he's out speaking.

Smith: People say it was like a summer thunderstorm; it happened and it would be over.

Cavaney: Absolutely, which is again a very nice attribute, because you can't be nice to everybody all the time and be an effective leader. You've got to set conditions and tell people what the boundaries are and hold them to it.

Smith: What about the people who say he was too nice? I think that's maybe a euphemism for a certain element of naiveté. On the one hand, we admire the fact that in this cynical town he wanted to believe the best of everyone and was inclined to do so. Is that a luxury a president can afford? In some ways that's another parallel with Reagan.

Cavaney: I think that that was the skill set, or the approach, that was very appropriate for the times. If you were a politician, you played in the middle. That's how things were made to happen, by playing in the middle. You, by definition, wanted to be friendly with everyone. You wanted them to feel easy coming to you and being with you. So, I don't find that as a shortcoming or a liability. I think that would be a great frustration in today's political environment,

because it is very hard to go off line, I think, and continue to think the best of everybody when the next moment they're up there delivering their caucus' line, which can be very brutal and over-personal. So, it would've been different if he'd have grown up in one of his sons' or daughter's generation and been playing in that same arena right now.

Smith: That's interesting. Was there a moment when you concluded or you sensed that he concluded that Nixon wasn't going to make it? The so-called smoking gun tape, or the Supreme Court ruling about turning over the tapes - there were obvious kinds of milestones along the way.

Cavaney: I think, for all of us who were there at that time, it began to take a toll on you, these various, as you say, judicial decisions, this sentencing decision, this/that, and it did monopolize you some what. I'll give you an example from an advance office perspective. President Nixon would get really down in the dumps. He'd say, "I've got to get out there and see the people. I've got to get out there. They give me energy." And so the call would come in, "The President wants to go on the road. Let's go do that."

Well, there was only about four or five states where we could guarantee that he would get a hugely receptive crowd and that the demonstrators couldn't overwhelm you. And so the last year we did a fair number of events, but they were always to the same geographical locales where he actually had contact with people. And we went to a lot of fixed forums where the audiences were selected.

Smith: Largely in the South?

Cavaney: Yes, largely in the South. Kentucky was about as far north as he went and one in West Virginia, but down South. And there really wasn't a whole lot of what I thought there should've been of a "tomorrow focus". And, you knew this is just not fully sustainable. This is not going to go on. And I don't think any of us had any idea when or exactly how or when or what or however it was, but [we] definitely had that sense of "this course will not run its full term."

Smith: Were you in the White House on the 9th of August?

Cavaney: I wasn't. As a good advance man, I was on the road, so I missed that.

Smith: We've been told by a number of folks - again it's understandable - after the swearing in, there was a receiving line and then a reception in the State Dining Room. And more than one person has said that you could watch the Nixon people kind of peel away rather than - and again, in the context of the time, it's perfectly understandable. What was your sense in terms of melding these sort of disparate elements together? One senses that the first year of the Ford presidency was overhung by these unaddressed personnel issues.

Cavaney: No question that the people that were not part of the Nixon White House and key administration slots - they came in with President Ford - wanted to put everything they could behind them. And therefore anybody who was a carryover really needed to move on. There was an awful lot of that. And, of course, because many of those folks had never served in these roles in government, the flip side of that is, well, trains have to run on time and somebody's got to manage the process. So that tension, and I was not privy to the President's decisions per se on these things, but that had to be a constant play in those personnel selections about how far we're going to go.

I can remember it was Dick Cheney who called me in and talked to me as they were going through those various personnel considerations. I assumed like so many of those Nixon folks, I was going to be gone. And Dick appropriately asked me a lot of tough questions about things I'd done and where I was and all. And, I think I was helped by the fact that we had President Ford so much in our office and because of the advance and the travel and all that contact, you got a chance for him to know you.

So I was asked to stay and I was very, very grateful. But there were a lot of friends that weren't in a similar situation. And, it's interesting, we actually saw this thing play out. If you fast forward to George Bush 41, when he finally won his own election in his right, you had that same sense of - "Is it all new, or is it some mix of people?" It would be interesting if somebody who was part of that process could write about the perspective of how those people made those decisions, how they selected the mix and how they went about it.

- Smith: Contrary to what people would assume, there's nothing harder I think internally than taking over for a president of your own party, particularly if you're thought of as a protégé with obligations.
- Cavaney: Yeah, that's right. Your future is basically tied to this decision made in your favor.
- Smith: And yet people elected you in part to represent at least a modest course correction - the kinder, gentler business. I'm sure it created problems.
- Cavaney: Yeah, it was always tough and that's some of the funny little things we were joking about before about the ghost speechwriting team. And the little thing about, "Well, don't distribute the seating chart of Air Force One around here until the last minute because then you'll spend all your time deciding who sits next to who and all." It's just all these little manifestations of the fact that the problem didn't really settle in until later in the term.
- Smith: And I assume Ford found that a source of frustration.
- Cavaney: He didn't want to hear about it and appropriately so. He shouldn't be bothered about it. But on occasion, somebody would come up with one of those, "Well, I'm supposed to be going to such and such." "Talk to Dick" or "Talk to Red" or something like that. And I couldn't blame him.
- Smith: Why was Hartmann a polarizing figure? Let me rephrase that. Isn't it possible to look at Hartmann and see a guy who in effect was overly - but also maybe usefully - protective, but also possessive?
- Cavaney: I think if you look at his role that he tried to shape for himself, it was essentially to protect the president and preserve all the best of what made Jerry Ford who he was politically. And Bob Hartmann was the kingpin when Jerry Ford was at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. I think it is just natural, when you try and fit yourself into an extraordinarily complex environment - where you go from an almost bottoms up kind of process, which is Congress - particularly the House, to the White House where it's definitely got to be organized. And I think he just had difficulty understanding why you needed all these systems and all these aides and why you had to talk

to all these people. And the people on the other side just couldn't see why he had to be so free wheeling and why people would do the other. So I think it was a conflict of those two worlds coming together, and I think Bob Hartmann probably was very frustrated. I know he was frustrated by it, but he probably hurt himself like Don Quixote by just tilting a little too often at some windmill and then it became sort of a drag or a problem. But there's no question that it had to be painful. Anybody in that position, I think, would have encountered that same thing.

Smith: You've been in several White Houses. How would you characterize the level, for lack of a better word, of intrigue? I won't say backbiting, but clearly jockeying for position is a polite term. It's just part of the process. But how would you characterize the Ford White House in relation to the others that you've either been in or observed closely?

Cavaney: There's always the transition part. If you take out the sort of mixing bowl that always happens at the beginning of service because it doesn't involve a change from the same party, it isn't clean cut. You're starting anew but the transition takes time. I would say with the Ford White House, if you took anything after the first year, you saw a very, very different environment than you saw before. By then, those that had come new, those from the Hill, everybody understood how the President liked things, and he'd settled into this framework. He and Dick had worked out a methodology for all this stuff. And, then there was the serious policy differences. But in terms of getting along and doing what it does to make the trains run on time and to make people look good and doing all that, I think that the Ford White House's last year and a half, and maybe a little bit more than that, behaved and played with the very best of them.

Smith: Think what was unique about the beginning about the Ford presidency. You had no transition, you had no preparation, you couldn't even acknowledge the possibility that you might need a transition. So you were literally starting cold.

Cavaney: Yep, it hadn't been done before.

Smith: No model at all, yeah. This is not to criticize Rumsfeld, but a number of people have suggested that it was somehow - relaxed is a loaded term - comfortable, maybe, that there was a notable difference between the kinds of environments.

Cavaney: There was, yeah. We oftentimes forget that Don Rumsfeld was a very powerful political figure in his own right and a very close friend of Jerry Ford's and a comrade in arms, shall we say, in many of the battles that took place up on Capitol Hill. So when he was chief of staff, he just had that bravado - his style and his mannerisms of leadership and what he wanted to do - his force of personality. It may have created a bit more friction at the margins than otherwise would've been the case, but the trains ran on time and things got done.

On the other hand, Dick at the time was the able, willing, and a very, very superb #2, if you will, just beginning to sort of make his mark. And he calls them as he sees them. So it's very easy to see Dick, but he doesn't do it in a harsh public way. So I think what happened was, Don was - the transition enabler. I would say he would be about as close to somebody that understood the essence of the presidency, because of his experience, because of his demeanor, and because he'd been battle tested time and again at the polls. All those things. He just managed in a different kind of way, and he instructed in a different kind of way, and he was a masterful leader in getting the "new" up to speed.

Smith: I'll be careful about how I phrase this, but I think Ford would be the first to say this, but he had to learn to be president. I mean, 25 years in the House is one kind of education and it served him well in many ways, but it's not the same as being president. In some ways, Rumsfeld's singular contribution was to be part of that instructional process.

Cavaney: Yes, I think Don was very directive. "We're going to do it this way." "We're going to do it that way." I think that kind of discipline was very helpful in those early years because so few knew what it was going to be like. Dick's style was more the collaborative "This is what I need, and I trust you're going to do it right" kind of thing. And those are two very different styles of

leadership. And I think by then, the President himself had pretty much settled into how he liked it to work. I think that coming together of Dick's style and where the President was, turned out to be an easy effective mesh. It was just different from before, but it worked, likely beyond many's expectations.

Smith: And, let's face it, Congressmen don't manage anything bigger than an office staff. The sort of hidden story about the Ford presidency was that I think he himself said, "Just as I learned how to do the job, I lost it." There's the sense that he was in fact, as Rumsfeld said, "Every day he was becoming a better executive." Could you see that?

Cavaney: Yes, absolutely. And, again, I think Don provided an incredible service to the President in those early times where nobody really had a template on how we were going to manage this. He was forthright and strong and gave guidance, and people took that. And I think that, as you've mentioned, it helped the President because things were getting fixed around him, and he was learning and observing things that worked and didn't work. And I think that was probably one of the President's best decisions, putting Don in that position, because, when I think back on it, who else really could've done that job at that time?

And that's the interesting thing I've learned over my times of watching politics. It's incredible how many times either the voters or people who get elected to office end up putting the right person in the right spot at the right time, even though there may be a lot of critics about such a choice. Don Rumsfeld and then Dick Cheney provide good leadership team regarding the office of the Presidency, as the perfect metaphor. This was needed at that time to get the President to where he needed to be. And the thing I hear from my friends, Democrats and Republicans, enemies and friends, is that there probably is no greater example of love and people hanging together than the Jerry Ford alumni group. We still have a fabulous get together every year; every June. It has to do with the bright strong people that were brought in. They all saw exactly how this all worked, and it worked on the collaborative model. The kind of thing that "We're all in this together."

Smith: Which must have added to the pain of losing in '76.

Cavaney: Oh, to be so far behind, for good and sufficient reason, and yet to come that close. I remember that last weekend when the polls actually went Bing! And, Ford was ahead. It just didn't hold. But I think the other part, sad as that was, is that I am so happy for Betty and the Ford family and all the people who worked so hard and selflessly. The pinnacle of Jerry Ford was embodied at his funeral. But you could see the re-evaluation beginning ten years before that, the acknowledgment of the right person in the right job at the right time for what Jerry Ford did. In that two and a half years, took America from one of its worst leadership moments back to normalcy. We had a real election horse race – our country had survived in a healthy manner.

Smith: I've often said, by the time of the Bicentennial, there was something to celebrate more than just the calendar. Contrast the mood in the summer of '74 and in '76. I'm jumping ahead, but there's a wonderful Rex Scouten comment on election night, about two in the morning and it wasn't over but it was not looking good. And the President finally said, "I'm going to turn in." It was not a concession, but people could all read the body language. So Rex was up there on the second floor with the family and he went across the hall into the President's room because he wanted to say something consoling. And, you know, what do you say? He said, "You know, Mr. President, just stop and think. You have devoted your entire life in service to this country, the war, and 25 years on the Hill and what you've done as president, it's really a shame. You really deserved to win, but you know, Mr. President, maybe it's just time for you to take a well earned rest." And Ford said, "I don't think so."

Cavaney: I've never heard that. How beautiful. Perfect!

Smith: "I'm willing to make the sacrifice."

Cavaney: "Try me!"

Smith: He really was down for awhile wasn't he?

Cavaney: It was tough.

Smith: Can you talk about your observations?

Cavaney: Yeah, it's sort of like the wind went out of your sails. I mean, he was there, of course, but all the things that filled the room, his laughter, his jokes, his easy demeanor, they just weren't there.

Smith: He was in mourning?

Cavaney: Very much so. I think, again it goes to that point, if you're a practiced politician, in almost every case, you've got to love being around people, you love the adulation, not so much from an ego perspective per se, but in the validation that what you're doing is the right thing to be doing. And then all of a sudden to have that - even though by the smallest of margins - pulled away from you is almost like a repudiation. So, many internalize it all, as opposed to saying that there were forces greater than me that were out there; the forces that he had to face in going through that campaign. I've never heard anybody say that the pardon of Nixon didn't cost him the election. Even if it was the smallest of all those estimates, he would've been president, had it otherwise been the case.

And then to think, coming out of a bitterly fought and contested convention, 33 points behind and close the gap in of a couple of months. Unprecedented, even to this day. That's something you don't see. And almost to pull it out. And, so there's a part of you that says, I think, he had a greater appreciation for it, as time went on. A real pride. I think he did a great service for the country. If you think of where we would've been if we had not had that 1976 Bicentennial - during which President Ford's leadership and poise brought back a sense of pride. The people were now going to vote for what they thought was the right thing for the times, and they did. It just didn't quite come together for Jerry Ford. But I think it's a huge, huge accomplishment. Probably the singular, stellar thing that he did for the country.

Smith: Did he bounce back before the inauguration?

Cavaney: I think there was still some essence of that disappointing feeling hanging around. I remember we were on the helicopter after the "changing to the guard" up on the Capitol - the Inaugural swearing in of Jimmy Carter. We got on the helicopter and we're flying out to Andrews, and President Ford was

commenting, Dick [Cheney] was sitting next to him, and they were just looking down. He couldn't take his eyes off that crowd, that place up there on the Capitol where he'd spent much of his life, and then flew over the White House on the way out to Andrews Air Force Base. So I think there was that nostalgia. That sort of "letting go" was actually happening. But I did not go out on Air Force Two with him after that, so I'm not sure how they worked through that withdrawal process. But I'm sure he had to be reflecting on some of those memories because that looked to me like a very personal moment.

Smith: What was Mrs. Ford's demeanor after that point?

Cavaney: I think she was, I'm sure a lot of people would say, the "rock" in that marriage. She held firm when firmness was needed. I think she was trying to make it a little bit light, but you could see that she wasn't quite there herself. She was just very gracious and endearing to him. She gave him a little pat when we came on the helicopter, and a few of those little touches that say, "I hurt for you."

Smith: Non-verbal.

Cavaney: People would understand if they've been with somebody for a time that they'd know that "I feel your pain" or "I understand where you are" sentiment. You know the mood, when it's not appropriate to say something, but "I get it." And you know all those little gestures they had as well as that wonderful capacity to do what was needed with one another, and joke and laugh.

Smith: They had almost a bantering relationship.

Cavaney: Yes, exactly. She could give him as good as she got. It was to her credit. She's was a great lady.

Smith: She would be the first to admit that punctuality was not her defining characteristic. How much of an issue that? How did they deal with that? How did you deal with it?

Cavaney: One of the things the President would do when the wait got a little long was "Well, I guess I'll have to have a second drink," because he would be out and

ready to go and he would be sitting down, relaxed, and every so often he would make a little comment about that. “Well, it was a two drink wait.” Some little thing like that, in his own little way, he would give her a little verbal “poke”. But not very often did he ever get mad.

Smith: But it was the norm. I mean, you factored that in?

Cavaney: Yes. exactly. And I think after that long period of time you’ve been married, you just kind of say to yourself and act it out as though, “It ain’t worth falling on my sword for this one.”

Smith: Were you aware that she had a problem, however defined? Was it something people knew about? Suspected?

Cavaney: Not really. I mean, people that are under that much pressure and having been there and seen the Nixon group and all, you are different than you are otherwise. Speaking for myself, I thought a lot of it was attributable to the pressure, the loss of privacy and all the little things that you take for granted that you don’t have anymore. But then it’s always at the back of your mind even though you try and put it away. It’s not something you’d dwell on. The thing that I think put her at such incredible standing with the American public was the way she handled the alcohol issue and then her cancer in a public, “teaching” moment. To this day I get, “You worked with Jerry Ford? Ah, what she did!” Women say this to you, my wife and my mother-in-law being classic examples of working tirelessly for “the cure”. And I’m amazed at how many thousands and thousands of people that I’ve been able to meet would say, “Had she not done that, I wouldn’t have been concerned” or “I wouldn’t have gone” and “It made a difference in my life.” And it’s just...wow! Talk about transformative!

Smith: It’s hard to explain to a younger generation that, not so long ago, breast cancer was a subject that you literally didn’t discuss. And she made it possible to do so.

Cavaney: Yeah, she did.

Smith: It's funny because when she did the famous *60 Minutes* interview, one senses that the immediate reaction - because people always fight the last war - was, "Oh my God, what has she done?" And it took a little bit of time, there was a little bit of disconnect, until the polls started coming in and the mail came in. And all of sudden you discovered that, yes, some people were P.O.ed, although a lot of them weren't going to vote for Ford anyway. But there was this audience out there that perhaps hadn't been identified before - what later might be called soccer moms or whatever - for whom she was giving voice to their innermost feelings.

Cavaney: Yeah, she's a silent champion to a lot of things that occupied their minds. As I say, I hear that mentioned so many times, I couldn't even begin to count it the mentions. Whether it was her independence - you know, here's the most powerful person in the world as president and here she is doing her own thing right next to him, even though sometimes he'd give a little look like "oh, there goes Betty". This empowers people to think in ways they didn't before and speak out about how, "Wow, what a great role model she was for the times."

Smith: And people did sense that, for them, she was totally genuine. He wasn't simply resigned to her doing things the way she was; but that's the way it had always been. That's part of what he always loved about her, and he wasn't going to try to change her.

Cavaney: That's love. And, I think it worked the other way. One of the great stories I told on a number of occasions is we were down in the primaries fighting "tooth and nail" in Texas in every little town we could get to, and in this instance in East Texas. We were at a "small" football stadium. We got the idea that "Geez, if we can go there, then we can go to Tyler and Longview and all the towns. We can engage the Kilgore Rangerettes." And, each little town had their own wonderful, fabulous 250 Rangerettes.

The first time we got to the one of these "Rangerette Rallies", the President said, "Oh, I didn't realize quite what Texas..." He didn't realize the massive crowd and all these people. So he's going along, and they're doing all these acrobatic moves and the President is throwing kisses in appreciation and, well, by the time we get to the second and the third town, the "Rangerettes"

were collapsing in on him and giving him these big red kisses on the cheek. And, of course, click, click, click! All that's making the wires are the "kiss" photos. And then Lee Domina, the Marine aide to the President, and a few other people, started as we got back on the Marine One helicopter to head back, "Oh, Mr. President, I'm already hearing stories back in the White House. Betty wasn't exactly sure what you were doing out here."

And, of course, all of us were picking on him which was routine. Next thing you know an aide has a big bouquet of flowers ready for the President, so when he came off the helicopter on the South Lawn, he had the flowers to give Betty and it was so funny. He just felt like the young kid that had been caught doing something he shouldn't have been doing, or maybe, should've used better judgment. And the President just knew he was going to get it. Again, you saw that little magic between the two of them - the sort of unspoken love they had for one another.

Smith: And then there's the famous Vickie Carr story.

Cavaney: Oh, yes.

Smith: Did you have much contact with the kids?

Cavaney: Yes, a fair amount. They'd come and go on their own. I think that was another thing that made the Fords so human was they had at that time what could be called a typical American family. Where you had all these kids doing something, somebody wanted to do this; somebody else is doing that. Very different kind of White House occupants. They didn't try and hide who they were or make it anything it wasn't. And, I think, people appreciated the honesty and the earnestness with which they didn't go out and take political advantage of the children or try and use them for anything. They just let them do their own thing, and I think that was pretty well handled. I remember Susan probably had the roughest transition. Because she was going through that year becoming a woman right in front of our eyes, and that's got to be a difficult process for anybody, let alone have Secret Service agents following you and people around you constantly, setting up expectations.

Smith: What a transformation. I mean, here's somebody who said, "I'll go to the White House but only if I can wear my blue jeans."

Cavaney: Yeah.

Smith: To that extraordinary scene where her mother has her cancer operation and Susan puts on white gloves for the first time and stands in for her mother at a diplomatic event.

Cavaney: Yeah, she's become quite a lady and then a real leader in the Ford Foundation effort and all that's been going on there. As you watch all this, I think of how all those kids have turned out to the point that I'm sure the President's told them a number of times how proud he was of them. Often you watch your kids go through different stages. You know you have to push yourself away from your parents in order to find who you are. And then, if the system has worked well, you've been brought up well, you tend to return once you got to where you were going, then you move back in and you get close to family again. And, I think that not only inside the White House we were able to observe that, but the public got to see touches of that as well. And again, it's so humanizing, I think. Maybe back in the FDR days, you learn about some of the things when he started to use the radio to an extent that others hadn't done before. Maybe you were reaching masses with a little slice of it, but certainly with the Ford family, you were very much seeing that out in front in ways you hadn't seen it before. With Jack Kennedy, as brief as his White House tenure was, you were able to see perspectives in ways that we hadn't seen much before either.

Smith: Everyone's heard the term 'advance man.' But they have only a vague idea of what they do. Walk us through - if you were putting together an event for President Ford. Obviously there's a wide variety of those, maybe what you do depends upon the venue and everything else, but it'd be interesting to hear you talk about what you do as an advance man and what are the pitfalls and the satisfactions?

Cavaney: Well, the first thing you want to do is ask, "Okay, where are we going to?" either very specifically or generally, and "What's the objective?" That gets

you going. And then there's the step, if you have the time, to do some assessment - travel, shall we say, going out and looking for those two pieces of information at an area to say "Well, here's a place where two or three options might work." And then you would come back and take that raw data and say, "Okay, I've put these things in the four quadrants and slated four possibilities. One of them has really too high a risk element to it, so let's eliminate that. That leaves us with three and, if I had to rank order the three, 'We'd do this one and here's why and the advantages and here's this one.'" And you methodically go through this process. Now, if you've been in advance for awhile, you've been to many of these places and you don't even need to do this special pre-advance trip to develop the options. You can assess pretty well from your own experience. So, you capture what you're going to do.

Smith: Now, there's an element of political judgment as well as logistics.

Cavaney: Exactly. What you want to do is you want to be able to go in to an environment, have a successful event by the standards that you are asked to achieve, either on policy message or a special occasion -- a dedication or something of that nature that's significant. You want to leave the people, elected officials locally and the Congressional members that are from those districts or those states, you want to leave them feeling good about the experience, feeling that they and the people who are their constituents are the better for it. So, by definition, you're playing politics with a lower case P, not necessarily a political party P, balancing off and trying to optimize what 1.) you wanted to get out of your objectives, 2.) what the local folks wanted to get out of their objectives; and then, of course, how do you execute it? I would say you spend about equal time between working all these various elements in measuring the value of the experience.

Smith: And egos.

Cavaney: And egos. Setting up conditions and setting up the site. We've done some unbelievable things "over" in advance work, because you want to be creative and you want that one picture to tell the story, even if without a headline or a tag line. And, if you can get that and leave town, and the people were happy

you were there, you've achieved the "A." for your grade. You also have to meld in locally the institution of the President, so you've got to deal with the Secret Service and their needs and demands. You've got to deal with the White House Communications Agency and their needs. You've got to deal with White House press corps as well as the local press corps, which don't always see eye to eye on how they ought to be covering the event. And then you've got to deal with the Congressional Delegation that's around from there, as well as state and local officials. So you spend a lot of time, and one of the skills you have to be pretty good at is empathy.

To be a good advance man, you've got to have a big dose of empathy, because you need to get a feel for where the sensitivities are and what they are early on enough that you can get the local contacts to buy into being a part of the process rather than come in to them and say "Well, here's what we're going to do."

Smith: Which also presupposes checking your own ego or agenda at the door?

Cavaney: Absolutely!

Smith: You're an instrument.

Cavaney: Yeah. Your ego is that "I want to do an "A" event and if I do an "A" event, and I meet the other objectives, that's all I need." And so you really do, you are the bottom man on the totem pole when you're working through who gets taken care of and what gets done. And the secret to an advance man back in the old days, it's a little less so now today, is that you should take none of the credit for anything and you shouldn't be seen around because it's not about you. You're the facilitator. It's all about the people who are the "set pieces in this play", if you will, that should be on the camera, should be the ones that get to do the handshaking and get the kudos.

In the advance annals, if you go back a long time ago, there were times when people with strong personalities tried to play in that role and you could, to a degree be successful. But one of the things that President Ford stressed is that "I don't ever want to hear that we went some place and that we caused a

lot of damage or we left a lot of people with broken hearts or felt we were heavy-handed.”

This goes back to the model he was comfortable with. In the Nixon administration, you had very detailed, very, very precise and to the minute schedules. Most everything was signed off at a higher level. It's the model that they used. That was the Nixon and Haldeman approach; it worked for them.

Jerry Ford, going back to the Congressional experience is, “This is what I need and I trust you'll do this and so make it happen.” So you never really had to go back and get all the details approved, once you knew what was going down, except for some rare cases or for an individual who wasn't going to quite fit in, but was going to be a problem if he didn't get it taken care of properly. But by and large, that's what made the President so loved by folks -- he had this view of inclusiveness, this idea that we're all part of this. And another thing that's interesting as an advance man is that Nixon and Reagan, to a degree, always wanted some private time, always wanted “Give me two hours right in here. I want to work.” Well, we started this approach with President Ford, and it didn't take long until where he'd take fifteen minutes off this and off that and when you were in the last year in office, you couldn't put private time on the schedule or in the holding room. He'd invite people in. He just was so charged up – he got his energy from being with folks.

Some of the best events that I did as an advance person, having done it for both presidents, were the Jerry Ford events because they just turned out exactly right. And some of them were done a little more on the fly than one would like to admit. Some of the Nixon highly measured events turned out less successful for me because you can't control everything. So it really is this idea of facilitating and making happen what the objective is for taking the trip in the first place. And there are certain kinds of things that are more poignant, better understood, if they're done in the White House because you want the mantel of the Presidency to add to the significance of the event. And then there are other things, because of the symbolism, become bigger than they might otherwise be, if the President was there and you did something

“on site” so to speak.

Smith: One event sticks out, because nobody except Gerald Ford thought it could be done, including Dick Cheney. The event in Russell, Kansas. Were you part of that?

Cavaney: Absolutely. Wasn't that a great thing?

Smith: Describe that improbable homecoming because, clearly, Cheney said they'd been through this incredibly difficult process and all were exhausted. Russell's in the middle of nowhere. How are you going to get a crowd? And from there, what happened?

Cavaney: As soon as they started to talk about it, we sent somebody out there because you needed every single moment of time. So that's the way we got started. And then we got calls, “Well, we can go over here” and “We can do this.” And so, we'd get on the phone and say, “Well, you can't really do this because that house was moved about two years ago,” or something. So there were all these little things that had changed or were changing that weren't quite what was envisioned. and there wasn't time for people go out, and not many people had made a pilgrimage to Russell, Kansas to have any idea what was there.

I remember the guys that were there, all of a sudden, they were getting overwhelmed because the phone lines were just burning up. The old farm phones, you know, seven people, ten people on a party line, you know. “Guess what, we think the President's going to be coming!” And the town just went crazy. It just went nuts. And I remember driving around to the back door of this one place and Dole saying, “Oh, come on, we've got to go do this and that.” Again, it was one of those kinds of things that I think if you went through it you thought, “Wow. This is real, and this is good.” And I think they left after the bruising convention, after the tension-filled period of time when we were in K.C., and still a lot of hard feelings were felt as you left. I think the call on that trip to Russell ended up being perfect because it just worked. And it worked because the people that were there, and their view of

the honor being bestowed upon them by having this stop, was wonderful beyond words.

Smith: And, remember they went to Dole's mother's house?

Cavaney: Yeah, to the back door, literally.

Smith: Because the key wasn't there.

Cavaney: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. It just sort of all played itself out, because there wasn't time to structure it and the goodness of the people that were there and the President's not being an uptight person and just sort of going with the flow. It worked perfectly

Smith: It's hard to imagine with Lyndon Johnson. It wouldn't be quite the same reaction to the unexpected.

Cavaney: That's true. Very, very true.

Smith: Were you thanked after great events? Was there acknowledgement of what you'd done?

Cavaney: Yes. The President was very gracious to everybody, and he always went out of his way to thank folks. I know one of the things that we were always asked to do is have the senior leaders of the police and the fire and the local event organizational leadership come by and be at the steps of Air Force One at the end of the trip, so he could come by and say thank you. Their job was done at that point, yet he always would do that. He would go down there and thank the speechwriter if they went along on the trip. It was just his nature. It was very good.

Smith: Painful as it may be, can you think of an event that didn't really go well?

Cavaney: Well, the balloon plop that I referred to earlier, that was one. It was a great event except for the damn balloons, which I will never forget. Another cute incident from the Japan trip. The President, was the first American president to go to Japan – significantly very, very big recognition for the Japanese, very much planned. There are two little events that stick in my mind that occurred there. The first one was when we went to Kyoto to enable Jerry Ford to see

some of the precious treasures and Japanese antiquities there. We were staying in a certain hotel and we'd practice everything that you were to do, and there was this cute little Japanese girl in a kimono who was going to be the operator of the elevator when the President got on. So, she's standing, she can't be more than four feet tall at most, and here's the President with his pipe in hand and he just walked in to the elevator. And, of course, when you get in the elevator, everyone backs away, and there's already one agent in there and the President comes in. And this little girl says in broken English and shaking her finger at President Ford, "No smoking! No smoking! No smoking!" And he looks around and just taps his pipe in his palm and puts the pipe in his pocket. It was just one of those little things that captures you in a special moment.

And, of course, the other one is the famous "short pants" episode. We'd gone over the formal greeting and what made it bigger than anybody really fully understood is the advance people were going to do that. That's our job, working with the valets and having all that attire always there and proper. Ambassador Cato, who was the Chief of Protocol at that time, insisted that he was going to do it because in the Japanese culture it was the right thing to do, and he wouldn't share that or let anybody do it. And I can just remember, "Damn, you just can't. You've got to have it done right." In our own minds, we check it two or three or four times. Well, it didn't happen with this, because he kept the formal attire and, for whatever reason, either it didn't arrive quite on time or something. "Let's see it. We want to take a look at it. Does it need to be pressed?" So it arrived at the 11th hour with only minutes to spare. There was nothing, nothing you could really do at that stage to fix it. And the rest is history. The president was none too happy at that, nor was anyone else around him about that. That was an interesting time in so many words. Ambassador Cato, in his function of a Chief of Protocol changed that day. And, the advance office, we inherited all the international trips and took over the role of negotiating logistics and protocols with all the governments visited, because of what had transpired. And, luckily, the rest of the international trips worked out. We didn't have any other problems like that.

Smith: It tells you so much about the change in media culture. The enormity of the trip itself, the historical significance of the trip was overshadowed by a photo.

Cavaney: Yep, that's right. That's what the essence of what advance work is all about. You want the "A" photo, and the "A" photo ought to, without words, say what this whole trip was about. And the whole thing was, not ruined in a sense, but the opportunity to tee up that relationship and the incredible historic significance of the trip was diminished hugely by a faux pas.

Smith: What are your memories of the '76 convention, because we keep hearing from people that it was bitter? It was tough.

Cavaney: It was. When we first heard about it, we thought, "Well, how are we going to take the advantages that the President had against somebody who was one hell of a campaigner, which Ronald Reagan was." So we came up with an idea, and we talked to Dick Cheney about it, and he talked to the President about it. And it was "Let us replicate the Oval Office in this suite in the Hyatt there at the Hallmark Center." And so, what we did is we went and put the flags and the pictures. You got the same kind of desk, and the only difference in the setting "feel" was an orange colored rug. You ushered people in like you would to the Oval Office and they felt almost as though it was the Oval Office. However, you're still going back and chasing each individual delegate. And "How many are undecided?" and "Which delegations are there with us?"

President Ford spent several days bringing these people in. They'd get ushered in like they would get into the Oval Office. There'd be a photographer there to take pictures. They'd sit down like they would in the Oval Office. And so what we were trying to do there was to gain a comparative advantage, let's say. It was tough. People were working very hard. There was a lot at stake. Working around the clock trying to gain intelligence as to what was going on over at the Reagan side. What should you be doing here in terms of where you stage people? What delegations did you think you could control and, therefore, you'd have a positive outcome?

Smith: And then you have those dueling entrances of the candidates' wives which touched off strong emotions.

Cavaney: Yeah. I mean, as we later learned, those emotions had been there for a long time, they were sort of teed up in a fish bowl for the American public, world-wide to see. And after it was over, the political fissures between the sides never would dissipate to the extent that they never fully went away. I mean, we all recall Texas sat on its hands, so to speak, and a few other places like that where you just couldn't make the breakthrough, possibly costing the election.

Smith: That raises an interesting question. Jim Baker's the classic illustration, but you also... was there any awkwardness initially in demonstrating to the Reagan people your bonafides? Having been a Ford person, was there a period of transition of proving yourself?

Cavaney: At what time?

Smith: When you went to the White House, obviously they hired you, so they were comfortable. But over the years, maybe it's an urban legend, but there were a lot of people in the Reagan White House who, let's just say, didn't always return calls from the Ford office. Lingering sentiments.

Cavaney: I'm sure there was some of that.

Smith: How did you view it?

Cavaney: Interestingly just the way I was hired by Jim Baker. I was the Deputy to Elizabeth Dole, so both of those people had incredibly close ties to President Ford. So I was, in my daily work, somewhat sheltered a bit from some of that. But at that point, having won, it really was all about moving on and doing things, and I think the calibration was "What do we need going forward?" Not necessarily, "what do we need going backwards?" So, I wouldn't say there was a widespread view that "We won't learn anything from the Ford group, let's just go forward." Again, it was more, "Look, we think we've got the right people in the right place and we're only going to get

this opportunity once. Let's go for it." And that's what they did. But any lingering was transitional.

Smith: Were you on either or both of the California trips with the assassination attempts?

Cavaney: I was at both of them, yes.

Smith: What do you remember of those?

Cavaney: I still have it to this day; we drew a map, a walking map from the hotel that we stayed at across the street from the Capitol. The map covered the grounds where the President was to go in Sacramento where Squeaky Fromme was. And where just for the sake of, literally, Larry Buendorf and that little small piece of skin that fits between those two fingers, got his hand down there at the critical moment, so that the hammer basically couldn't fire.

Smith: You could clear up something. Was that a spontaneous decision by the President to just walk over?

Cavaney: Yes.

Smith: It wasn't something planned?

Cavaney: Well, we talked about it as a contingency, and we had said dependent upon how things are; it would be a nice thing to do.

Smith: You, the advance planners, not the President?

Cavaney: No, not the President. We told him, "Look, we're all set. We could go either way and here's sort of a drop dead time where you've got to be at this side, to take the car," and it was a beautiful day. The Secret Service obviously were not all that comfortable, but it wasn't a predetermined route. There was no evidence of where it was going to go, so you didn't have those concerns.

Smith: As spontaneous as a modern President could have it.

Cavaney: Yes, absolutely. Again, because there were obviously demonstrators still around and doing things that were still in vogue a bit, not hugely, but still in vogue. Obviously, you picked up some people like that and Squeaky Fromme

among them, who sort of trailed in and then obviously innocent people trying to go to work and walking through the park, they came along. To this day, I feel terrible about, you know, I say, "Gee, if I hadn't had made that decision to go that way and recommend that President Ford could do it if he wanted, and it's a nice day and a good photo," it's something that really, dramatically happened badly. And I really felt terrible about it. That was a burden it took me a while to get away from.

Smith: So, I take it that a sort of impromptu crowd assembled? Was that it?

Cavaney: No, we were walking about people; they would flow into the crowd. We weren't going to stop and work the crowd. He was walking across, and people would flow in. Then you'd walk up and then there'd be a few people, and we would move into those and they would sort of, obviously, say on recognition, "It's the President!" You know how all that goes. So it was clearly a moving kind of a group and that's why I say that the fact that they were able to stop anything happening is a tremendous credit to the role that the Secret Service plays. They are good at what they do.

Smith: Did you see her?

Cavaney: I didn't recognize or know who she was when she was moving around, but we could see people moving in. You could see the agents moving to provide the wedge that was their best security, since they didn't have a lot of sight angles. And as I said, it was when she started moving close, and it became obvious and Larry Buendorf, the lead agent, made his reach and got this little piece of skin wedged between the hammer and the firing pin of that gun. And that stopped what would've been a shot.

Smith: Did you see that?

Cavaney: I could see something going on. I probably conjured I saw something happen.

Smith: Was she wearing a red dress?

Cavaney: Yes, some colored dress, very clear, because you could see the movement, a very quick movement because you're always attuned to seeing something like

that, but its advance or Secret Service or whatever. We then just, you know, moved like crazy to get out of there and inside the Capitol.

Smith: On foot?

Cavaney: On foot. That's the way you did it, yes.

Smith: And then a great follow up to that question of course is when he went in to see Jerry Brown, he never mentioned it.

Cavaney: Yeah, I know, I know. The other thing to show you how incredible he was; he took one of those maps that showed the route he was going to walk on and he signed it and he says, "Here, give this to Red." So, I still have that map of that almost tragic walk around there and there he is, you know, right after almost being assassinated, moving on. I mean, just quite a person. Quite a person.

Smith: And then, three weeks later, in San Francisco.

Cavaney: We were out at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. At the St. Francis, there's a side street - a pickup entrance where you park the limos along the curb, and the crowd is held on the sidewalk across the street. Well, it's a very narrow side street, very narrow. And, obviously, with the car there, it's pretty evident to people who want to cause mischief what's going to happen and where the President's going to be. And the agents, you could see them. When you came out you always looked around, and they obviously are doing that a lot more than we are and you could see all these people in the crowd and [they're] doing what they do best. There didn't appear to be anything that looked strange and there's nothing that would've been. We were moving fast, because I think we were five or ten minutes late at that time, so we're moving really fast and then he stepped down.

You came out the door and then you had to go down a bit before you actually could get into the door of the car and away. It happened so fast, I literally was right in the line of fire because I had gone out in the street, to make sure I could see the end of the motorcade, and all the rest of the people get in their cars. The President was always taken care of at these moments. And, all I

remember is hearing this crack over there and you could see almost the instantaneous move of pushing the president in the car. One wonders, had that shot been done a few seconds earlier when he was a few steps away from the car and at a slightly higher elevation. But, it's very hard, as most people know, for somebody particularly one not trained to fire a gun at that range and in those particular circumstances.

Smith: Also, she had been deflected by someone.

Cavaney: Yes, somebody who saw what was happening and all. It was interesting. I remember warnings and discussions with the Secret Service about potential problems, but in all the things that he did and the many, many, many campaigns that he had to go through and expose himself so much, I don't remember any other instances at all that even came close to those two. And they both happened in California, in the northern part of the state.

Smith: Did he wear a bullet proof vest?

Cavaney: Later.

Smith: Later.

Cavaney: Yeah, I think he may have had one on for that event because the first one had already happened. He didn't care for that. There were a few discussions about the vest issue.

Smith: Really?

Cavaney: Yeah. But I think it was Kevlar, it was very modern, and so it wasn't too bad, hardly visible.

Smith: It might as well have been a hair shirt.

Cavaney: Exactly.

Smith: And, of course, Mrs. Ford got back on the plane and knew nothing about it.

Cavaney: Yeah. Because she'd been off doing her part of the trip. Again, you think of the significance of those kinds of things and how, but for a small split second

of time, like in the Reagan experience, they had early on. Again, but for half of a split second, it could've been a totally different world.

Smith: A couple of quick things and we'll let you go. In the campaign, the famous Polish gaffe.

Cavaney: Yeah, that hurt.

Smith: Where were you that night?

Cavaney: I was there, right at the spot, and that was my alma mater of all places, which really hurt - a place I'd been to many a time. We had also had later that night the captain of the *Mayaguez*, the President thought this guy had become a great and heroic soul and he wanted to meet him and said, "Have him over at the place afterwards, and have him come in, and I'll see him and have a chance to have a drink" and all that. But... it happened and right away you could see what was going on. We picked up and traveled. And we headed back out to the house to make sure everything was all set there. So, we arrived there, and the trip colleagues are all there. And President comes in feeling "Alright!" and then in comes Scowcroft and then they had to tell him and of course it didn't sit well with him because that wasn't what he meant, and he wasn't going to say so. We went through that - I guess it was seven or eight days, where the polls had been going up before all that happened and then they just laid flat for 10 long days and then they went back up. But it just froze everything for a time, too long a time as history is our judge.

Smith: He had a stubborn streak.

Cavaney: Oh! I can remember Dick would come back and go, "Nope!" You didn't need to say any more than this because you always went in with, "Here's a great opportunity where you can go ahead and do this..."

Smith: It's interesting to hear Stu Spencer talk about all that because he thought he was going to get fired and then Dick thought at one point he was going to get fired.

Cavaney: Oh, absolutely, this was a matter of principle to the President and if there was one thing he felt strongly about, it was his principles. Yeah, it was tough and

go. That poor captain of the *Mayaguez*, he just couldn't believe it. We finally had to just tell him what was going on. A whole new world took over, and we finished off that trip trying to do that. The other thing I think – you've probably heard this from other folks – but I thought one of the great cameo stories which made his homecoming to Grand Rapids so poignant was the deal that was worked out between Dick Cheney and the political people and the President. The President, of course, wanted to go out 24/7 and loved to campaign. So in his mind's eye, he ought to get out, but what the polls showed of course was the more he stayed in and acted Presidential, the better it was. So it was this constant tension, the back and forth, and finally they worked out that deal where, "Okay, I'll do what you do, but with two weeks left, we're closing the doors, shutting off the lights and not coming back until we win!" And he went off and did that two weeks constant on the road, and that's when he really put the talking car into motion. He loved the talking car!

Smith: Describe that.

Cavaney: There had always been speakers in the grillwork of the limousine, that you can't see. Of course, that's just like a lot of police cars and other kinds of emergency vehicles but the White House Communications Agency worked out this system - there was a microphone in the car and they said, "Mr. President, sometimes we can go to these spots that we couldn't otherwise get to because there isn't a stage or anything and you could just stand up in the car and talk from there." And he went, "Really?!" God, he just thought that was the greatest thing in the world. And I can't tell you how many towns he went to and that's what he did. And then sometimes he'd get all fired up, we're on a long ride and then these farmers along the side of the road or something and he'd go, "Hey there! How are you?" And it was like a whole new toy, and he was this perpetual motion machine at the campaign's end.

And what it ultimately cost him, of course, was his voice. And it really was painful and the doctor took care of him all the time, but the President was able to get through it all. But, as I said, I think it really made poignant that night that I'll never forget, that night that he finally went home to Grand Rapids. To

go through all that, and he came in at night. The place was absolutely jammed, and he really couldn't say a thing. Jerry or Betty wouldn't come out to greet the massive crowd, as he'd break down in tears because of both the significance of what was happening as well as the frustration of that I'm sure was welling up. And, he just can't tell these people how much he loves them and how much they mean to him. Later on, he talked about it, but it was quite a deal to see somebody on a sustained basis at the Presidential level to just go out and show no let-up. You could not have a blank spot in that schedule that he did not fill. He got up early in the morning and started and stayed up late at night.

Smith: We've heard it from a couple of people - there were those who wanted him to go to Ohio at the very end of the campaign, particularly southern Ohio, which is where in the end he lost the state, barely. And for whatever reason, the decision was made to go to Grand Rapids rather than Ohio. Does that ring a bell?

Cavaney: Yes. We actually had some people in Ohio just in case, again, it was pulled out of the bag. Having seen Grand Rapids, it's very difficult to think of what Ohio was going to be like and then make the case to do Ohio. From my standpoint, you would've had to explain to the President that your Grand Rapids homecoming would be even better and that meant, how you were going to do it. It wouldn't be at night. It wouldn't be in the candlelight. It wouldn't be all those things.

Smith: So it was never a question of not ending in Grand Rapids. In other words, one way or other, the President and Betty were going to go home to Grand Rapids.

Cavaney: Yes. Yes. He wanted to go home, and they wanted to go to this favorite breakfast place where they always went when they were there, which we did and that was sort of their way. So, I was not a part of what was a pure political discussion about Ohio. We got wind of it and had some people on the ground, but that's all we could have really done. So I'm not sure how viable it would've been had we done it, and what would've changed. But obviously those were key stops.

- Smith: And I'll never forget the election eve broadcast, which had obviously been taped. It was on Air Force One with Pearl Bailey and Joe Garagiola and the President, which is really thinking outside the box.
- Cavaney: Yes, it is.
- Smith: One senses that those two people, he really enjoyed. They brought out the best in him.
- Cavaney: They did. Garagiola was the old jock and the two of them and, of course, Joe can tell stories like very few can and then the President was always "Ha ha ha ha" while puffing on his pipe, and he would sit there and just be regaled by Garagiola. And then Garagiola did a lot of rallies and things for the President, and the President just loved the man. So it was just a wonderful, wonderful circumstance that they came together, because I think they both so enjoyed one another that it was one of those nice little relief moments. You know, campaigning is really hard work when you're out there. Not only just being in the limelight all the time, but it is hard on the body. And you can see the President, when he would get that time to be around somebody -- it was a little bit of a lift and somebody that he wanted to be with, it was like pumping a whole new shot of adrenaline into him.
- Smith: Again, the difference between him and Nixon.
- Cavaney: Yes, he [Nixon] enjoyed being by himself. That's what made him feel comfortable, being by himself. And again, Ford just enjoyed hearing things and being with others.
- Smith: And Pearl Bailey was a real friend of the family, wasn't she?
- Cavaney: Yes, she was, and she was also one who had a sense of humor and could poke fun at the President and he'd go "Ha ha ha". I mean, people who were like those two must have thought Jerry Ford was one of the best audiences you could ever have because he didn't ask for much. He would just sit there puffing away at the pipe or just sit there with a drink and always react laughingly to whatever one had the punch line or a funny comment or

something like that. He'd give you feedback. He'd let you know that he got it and he appreciated it.

Smith: And obviously he and [Bob] Hope were good friends.

Cavaney: Oh, yes. Yes, very much so. He was like a lot of lifelong politicians in those days who didn't have to "protect" his district so to speak. And, he was moving into the leadership, he obviously spent a hell of a lot of time on the road. And you just can't help but run into all these different kinds of people, including celebrities. And so when you finally get elevated to this job, and go to a town, like when he was vice president, we were advancing him and the advance guy would go, "Geez, I got 70 phone calls from people that say they're Jerry Ford's best friend here." We'd always joke about the 340 men who were on the University of Michigan football team, because there was always "another" classmate of Jerry's that was on the team with him. But they were just people he'd touched or knew in one way or other over the years, and they remembered him, of course.

Smith: Do you remember the last time you saw him?

Cavaney: I do. I do. The saddest day I've had in years and years and years. I had hoped the last time I saw him was going to be at his funeral. And I had been part of the group that put together the ceremony and everything like that -- and all the planning that had been going on for several years. My first wife had passed away from a stroke a few years before, and I was going to get remarried. The day of the funeral was the day of my wedding ceremony. But Betty told me I belonged at my wedding and Jerry would have had it no other way. It was the right choice, and I'm sure the President would've appreciated that, but I wanted to say 'goodbye,' that one last time like everybody else did, and I didn't get that chance.

Smith: Were you at all surprised -- I mean, I was wearing two hats --with ABC for part of the week and then with the family. And I can tell you the media were surprised at the extent of the public response, which seemed to build as the week went on.

Cavaney: Well, the whole thing that we had talked about was this frustration that he was there for only a short window of time, but accomplished a great deal. Then we went through tough times, and then Reagan became a bigger than life person. The Ford history had occurred and was pretty spectacular. So, the whole thought of how do we do things that capture the essence of what Jerry Ford was to remind people that he wasn't a Reagan, but he was the right person at the right place at the right time and did extraordinary things? And I think having seen tons of historical references and whatnot; you didn't have to do a lot of prompting to see that. It just sort of came out, and I know from the family and conversations we still have about that experience, the way the country reacted to who Jerry Ford was and what he meant in his service as President couldn't have been written better. It didn't happen by chance; or saying, "Gee, he wasn't elected and he didn't get to do much. Why are we doing this?" There were two big extremes, and I think, in part, it was because many of the old line media who'd been around for a while and served with him, in talking to some of them, they would talk about these stories with the new generation of press – you know, the media role had changed, we were covering different kinds of things in different ways. But I think a lot of that treatment that Jerry gave to the press, never feeling any animus towards them or anything at all, but treating them as equals. And, I think that treatment redounded to his benefit as those people talked about their days with Jerry Ford. And they said, "Whoa", and gave him back credit. Because, we've been through a lot of different presidents since then and he served his country well.

Smith: One thing I want to ask you about at the time of the fall of Saigon, there was a trip to Tulane where the president in effect said our role in this war is over. Apparently, there'd been a real tug of war about that speech with Dr. Kissinger. What do you recall about that trip and the reaction?

Cavaney: I remember the to-ing and fro-ing about how it was going to go, but it became pretty evident to us that that was going to be "the war is over speech" kind of a thing. And we tried to do all that we could to create a serious environment. We had some demonstrator problems and a few other things like that. What were trying to do was to have him walk in the building with a feeling that this

is a special moment without telescoping it - but not the dancing bands and all those kinds of things. And I can remember people after that. The impact was so great that afterwards people went "Oh my God, did I really hear what I heard?"

And so, in that regard, he hit the right chord. I think he didn't overplay or over make it by trying to do something big and sensational, which goes to the point that we talked about earlier. It was the right place to begin to heal the wound and do it in a way that it wasn't so hyped up and so built up that nobody felt happy with the way that it ended. I think it's one of those things that actually turned out better than anybody could've hoped, when you really thought about how we were going to do this and what the significance of it was. So, again, just a touch about who Jerry Ford is and his capacity to capture the essence of the moment, be very empathetic, himself, and realize what needed to be done and how to do it.

Smith: You know, the flip side of that is he is the least self-dramatizing of presidents and in the short term that hurt him. In the long term that did redound to his benefit.

Cavaney: It did serve him well. I think it did. And he was very conscious about that. He would say, "Oh, we don't need to be doing that. That's not me." Just very much a regular person. And, I think by the time he was in the campaign mode and proved himself through some number of things, that's what attracted people to him. He was a regular person, and I think that, again, the few amount of votes, the pardon, and where we ended up going - I think a lot of people wish they could've taken that vote back again. I've heard that said many, many times.

Smith: I've often thought if there'd been a full term, then we'd be looking at this man with almost a Trumanesque cult because there were those similarities, the plain-spoken, unflashy, Midwesterner with solid values who knew who he was.

Cavaney: I think he was a person who wore better with time, and I think he could've successfully done another four years during a challenging period. To your

point, I think we would've had no less luster and probably a good deal more accolades for what he was able to achieve during that really short time.

Smith: Perfect.

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