

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
MARVIN H. "MICKEY" EDWARDS

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Interviewer
Morton Kondracke

JACK KEMP FOUNDATION
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Morton Kondracke: This is a Jack Kemp oral history project interview with former Congressman Mickey Edwards. Today is March 22, 2012, the interview is being conducted at his offices at the Aspen Institute in Washington, DC and I am Morton Kondracke. Thank you so much for doing this, Congressman.

Mickey Edwards: Sure, Mort. Glad to do it.

Kondracke: When you think about Jack Kemp, what immediately comes to mind?

Edwards: Not economics. What comes to mind when I think about Jack is that he had a vision of a government, a nation that served everybody, that was color-blind, but that recognized real problems, that recognized the needs of the people who were in minorities and the needs of people who lived in the inner city. He wanted the Republican Party to be a party that really served the country and not narrow interests. He was for small business and for private enterprise. He wasn't a puppet of big corporations. Jack Kemp was pretty much what I came into politics to be about, and more than anybody I ever met he exemplified that idea of what I thought the Republican Party should be. Outreach, making it a true national party.

Kondracke: What are your standout personal memories of your association with him?

Edwards: During the time that he and I were serving together, we had wars, we had recessions, we had all kinds of problems, and Jack was always upbeat. Jack was the perennial quarterback, that no

matter how far behind you were, you knew that on the next play you were going to break a guy free to catch a 40-yard pass and go tie the game. My experience with Jack was that he melded not only perpetually upbeat approach and positive approach, but that he also felt very strongly about a lot of things. I remember—do I call this a conflict? I don't think it was a conflict at all. Jack was senior to me for a while on a committee, and we had a foreign aid bill on the floor, the Foreign Ops [Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations] committee which oversees foreign aid budgets, and I had just come back from a trip overseas. I'd been to Rome and I went to the headquarters of the International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], and was questioning them about the projects that they were funding and what oversight they were conducting, and got really vague answers, and the truth was they had no idea what was being done with the money. So I came back and I offered an amendment to cut a pretty sizeable chunk, basically to cut the U.S. portion of the UN budget that goes to IFAD, and Jack came up to me, because he was managing the bill on the floor, and he grabbed me and he said, "Mickey, what are you doing to me?" And I just said, "Jack, I'm not doing it to you. I'm doing it to the International Fund for Agricultural Development." [laughs] But he was so full of enthusiasms, that he wasn't just managing this bill, he was invested in this bill. He fully understood the importance of foreign aid as soft power and all that. He came forward with the bill in this form and I was trying to change it, and we were good friends, but you know, "Why are you doing this to me?" I always remembered that. I didn't know [Alfred E.] Al Smith, obviously, I'm not that old. But I said Jack was the original 'happy warrior,' that I knew.

Kondracke: Any other anecdotes?

Edwards: I don't know that I'd put them in the anecdote category. I saw him give speeches at various meetings, he came out to Oklahoma and he spoke for me at a fundraiser, and you know, one of the mistakes that people in politics make is that they try to manage their time, so you go into an event and you shake hands with the donors, you shake hands with the volunteers. Jack would immediately make a beeline to shake hands with people who were serving the food and people who were doing all the menial jobs. I remember that, that when he would come out there. And you get people who want to go to the Petroleum Club if you're in Oklahoma City, or have all this fancy stuff, and Jack, who was much more a big name, said, "What's the best Mexican restaurant?" And I took him to this place way over in southeast Oklahoma County, a very poor part of town, and it was kind of a dumpy little restaurant, but it was the best Mexican food you'd ever find. And he was just totally, deliriously happy. For a guy who had been an all-pro quarterback, who was one of the real stars of the Party, he was just as down-to-earth, and this was not an act. This was him every single day, it's just who he was. I know of nobody today in either party who's like that. I didn't know of anybody else like that then. It was the personality. Part of him was the quarterback personality, which is the part that said "Why are you doing this to me?" But part of it was, he may have been the guy wearing the uniform and throwing the passes, but he could have been one of the cheerleaders on the sideline. That's who he was. I think he would appreciate this. There's been this big battle over the Martin Luther King [Jr.] statue, about the quote on the side about being a cheerleader. I think Jack would have seen himself in the words that

King actually used, "a cheerleader for justice." I think that's what personified who he was, the way he just jumped in, this grand, happy idea of what we can be.

Kondracke: You're a student and you've written about the history of American conservatism. Jack was obviously a conservative, called himself a conservative, so where does he fit in the broad reach of American conservatism?

Edwards: Obviously it has to come through my filter, right?

Kondracke: Yes.

Edwards: I've made this distinction, that true American conservatism began in the sixties, because before that it was, Winston Churchill said, "What is conservatism? It's God and king, church and king," which is not American conservatism. American conservatism is more like Goldwater, which is like "Does it advance freedom?" I think Jack certainly modified that, because [Barry M.] Goldwater was blind to a lot of things. He would say, "I'm for the Constitution and the Constitution doesn't say you can do this and so I'm going to vote against the Civil Rights Bill." Or whatever, and he just had blinders on, which Jack did not have. So he had a much more optimistic view of what government could do. But he's more the heir to that more modern kind of conservatism. Jack was religious, but he didn't run around trying to tell everybody in the world how to behave. I don't know what he would have done on a gay rights bill, but he certainly would not demagogue it, I know that. Those issues weren't there at the time he was there so I don't know. But Jack would have been all

about possibility, and I see that as more of a sixties kind of conservatism. In the last election, just put myself in perspective and compare it to Jack, I was the national chairman of the American Conservative Union [ACU], I was one of three founders of the Heritage Foundation, and I was not only in the Republican leadership but I had a very high conservative voting record. I supported [Barack H.] Obama, just like Colin [L.] Powell did, just like [Kenneth M.] Ken Duberstein did. I don't believe Jack would have supported [John S.] McCain [III]. I think Jack would have been right there beside me repudiating George W. Bush and saying, "What the Hell do you mean, presidents can disobey the law? What do you mean that we condemn the Chinese for waterboarding; now we can do it?" Jack wouldn't be there. I don't know whether Jack would have actually publicly, openly supported Obama, but I don't think he would identify with the people in the Party today who are all about telling people how to live their lives and how to expand the power of the presidency and expand the power of government. I just don't think Jack would be there, and of course he's not here to tell us how he would be.

Kondracke: Did you ever have a conversation with him about George W. Bush?

Edwards: I don't remember that I did, no.

Kondracke: You've identified in a piece of writing that I saw, "opportunity conservatives." I take it you would regard Jack Kemp as the ultimate opportunity conservative?

Edwards: Yes, but I have to draw a distinction, because Jack, who was one of the smartest people I knew, and certainly socially smart and all, was very much an opportunity Republican. [Newton L.] Newt Gingrich, who in my mind is a total phony and not nearly as smart as he thinks he is, adopted that phrase, the Conservative Opportunity Society, and I don't know how they got along personally, but in my mind in terms of sincerity and competence and all, and the sincerity about broadening opportunity, I would almost classify Jack as the anti-Newt. But Jack really believed in opportunity, he really believed in it. He believed in creating a path for people. I think that in its final iterations, as compromises were made, I think he would have been in favor of the path to citizenship for people who came in. I think Jack would be the one who would say, "What do you mean some little kid was brought over here by the parents and has now grown up in America and gone to school here and worked here, and now we're going to kick them out of the country?" I think he would gag on that idea. My guess is that Jack would have been in the front lines railing against what the big corporations did on banks, the Goldman Sach's and all that, because he believed in free enterprise. He probably would, if you forced him to talk about the difference about what people mean when they say capitalism or what they mean when they say free-enterprise, free enterprise, you know, got out here and start a haberdashery and do whatever you want and let them do it. Don't take away opportunity by high taxes. He didn't have any problem with government, and he understood that you needed taxes to run what government was required and obligated to do. But he also understood that every time you take a dollar away from somebody it's something they can't invest in a business, or they can't hire somebody with, or they can't help send their kids to college. I mean he had a much more

balanced approach. I think he would be really unhappy, really unhappy with a lot of the people running around today calling themselves conservatives, who really have nothing in common with American kind of conservatism in my view.

Kondracke: On foreign policy would you say he was a neocon, an early neocon?

Edwards: You know this pretty well, Mort, better than I do. I think the definition of neocon has changed in that whether it's the reality of the people in the neocon movement, or whether it's just people in the outside, the media and all, trying to label them. Neocon has come to mean "We, by God, are going to make the world look like America and we've got the guns to do it." I would say the way I understood neocon, and I think where Jack would completely agree, is sell American ideals, sell American values, use foreign aid, use the bully pulpit and other means to get people to have democratic governments, to have free elections, to have rule of law, have the essence of America. But I don't think that he was, today I heard John McCain speaking in a committee meeting, talking about Afghanistan, and about "what's the formula for victory? Why aren't we talking about victory?" And I don't think Jack would get caught up in that kind of rhetoric. I think he believed in a very strong national defense, but it was to defend us, it wasn't to try to impose American values on other people. So I would say in terms of what the neocons' movement came to fruition, Jack was very much a neocon. He was a neocon like Carl Gershman and the people at the National Endowment for Democracy and all, but in terms of the later ones who said, "We've got

the bombs and we can make it happen," I don't think he would be that kind of a neocon.

Kondracke: He was in favor of the Contras.

Edwards: So was I. In fact I was the floor leader for the Contras. But what the Contras were was providing the means for a people to be able to rise up against their own in this case pro-Marxist government. Would he have been in favor of a U.S. invasion? I doubt it. He was in favor of using the means that we have, the soft power, support, and I completely agree with that. Jack was a very big ally in the Contra thing. In fact I worked with him and with [Richard B.] Dick Cheney and with Democrats like [Charles W.] Charlie Stenholm and others. I chaired that bipartisan task force for the Contras. The Boland Amendment was basically overturned by my amendment. The Edwards Amendment provided \$100 billion in aid to the Contras and Jack supported that.

Kondracke: When did you first meet him?

Edwards: I don't know that I met Jack until after I was elected. He was already in the House and I knew a number of the Members in the House already. But I don't think I knew Jack until after I'd been elected. Met him when we were both members of the Republican Conference.

Kondracke: When were you the head of the American Conservative Union?

Edwards: I can't remember exactly.

Kondracke: Before you were in Congress?

Edwards: Yes. And then I resigned when I got to Congress. The same thing with the, I was a founder of the Heritage Foundation, that would have been in 1973, and I got elected to Congress in '76. I followed [Philip M.] Phil Crane as ACU chairman and preceded David [A.] Keene.

Kondracke: And so you had no association with Jack while you were at the ACU or the Heritage Foundation, because he was involved with both of them later on.

Edwards: Later on, and I'm sure that he did things that were supportive. I'll tell you the first thing where I remember really getting to know Jack and being just amazingly impressed by Jack. In my first term, I started a lunch group, and I said, "How do we create a Republican Party that cares about African-Americans, that cares about the poor, but that is conservative?" Before anybody had invented the term "compassionate conservatism" or whatever. So I started this lunch group and I decided that I would invite, that it would be by invitation only because it was my lunch group, and I would choose the speakers, and I would decide who would be the very small group of people that I would invite to be part of this lunch group. So it included people like [Edwin R.] Ed Bethune [Jr.] and [Robert L.] Bob Livingston, people who were known for outreach across racial lines and gender, people like that, and Jack. In my first term, when I said, "Who are the people who represent what I think?" It was Jack, and I went by to talk

to him and to get him to do this which he did. Our very first speaker was Jeane [J.] Kirkpatrick, who was then, this was prior to the Reagan election, and Jeane was a professor at Georgetown [University], and so one of the first things, she wrote this article for *Common Sense Magazine* called "Why we're not Republicans," so we had her come talk about that. So Jack was very much involved with me when we started doing stuff like that.

Kondracke: Was this an ongoing enterprise?

Edwards: We did it for maybe six or seven meetings. It didn't become something that we just continued forever, but we formed this relationship of people who had this common mindset about what it should be and what conservatism should be, what Republicanism should be, and Jack was one of the very first people I reached out to, because everybody knew that Jack was about "we're all in this together." We're one country, and everybody has aspirations. He more than anybody I can point to today, maybe more than almost anybody then, maybe because of playing in pro football, I don't know. But he had this real awareness of the difficulties that African-Americans faced, and a respect for what they needed to have: opportunity. So I think that's my earliest recollection of what Jack was, what Jack was all about. He supported these tax policies which I love. I'm very much a Kempian, I suppose. But it wasn't about drowning the government in a bathtub. It was about allowing people to have the means themselves to grow and that he really believed, and I do too, still, that if you allow people to keep more money in their own pocket, they will do more, they will create more enterprise, and the result will actually be a bigger tax base. He was the first person I

ever heard articulate that. [Arthur B. "Art"] Laffer might draw something on a napkin, but it was really Jack Kemp ideas.

Kondracke: Were you a supply-sider from the get go?

Edwards: Well, to be truthful, yes, I suppose. I had, like a lot of people, I went to the University of Oklahoma, which is a really great university, but it was not then, it was not a great university. I had two basic semesters of economics and didn't understand any of it, so I never quite understood the distinction between supply-side and production-side or whatever. But yes, I totally bought the idea that the way you keep the economy growing is by private initiative, and that too much taxation stifles what you can do, so I totally bought that idea. I didn't know what the term supply-side, but it just made sense to me.

Kondracke: You arrived in 1976, and that's when Kemp-Roth is beginning to gain momentum. Seventy-eight it becomes the principal platform plank of the Congressional Republicans, so were you involved in that whole effort to advance Kemp-Roth?

Edwards: No, I don't want to overstate it. I was completely supportive, but I wasn't a player in it. I was never a player, really. I did foreign policy and a lot of other things, but I was never a player in the economic side of it. It took smarter people than me.

Kondracke: So how close were you to Kemp? How often did you see him and talk to him?

Edwards: I wouldn't say, I mean he came to my district and spoke for me, got together several times to just talk in his office or in mine, we did some traveling together, but were we close? No. He had a dinner at his house for a group of people of like mind and I was there, but it was probably a dozen of us who were there, so I would say that I knew him pretty well, he knew me pretty well, we had a lot of interaction, but we weren't socially close. To be truthful I was probably a little intimidated, you know, a football player, he was a great football player. My God, this was, we may have been peers in the sense of being Members of Congress and all, and then we were both in the leadership together, but he was still Jack Kemp and that made a difference. [laughs] I never felt like I could just pop in and say "Hey, Jack, let's chat. Let's go have a drink. Let's get together and go to a movie tonight." I never felt comfortable with that. I could have. He was a totally welcoming guy, but I was a little bit intimidated.

Kondracke: Were you a Conservative Opportunity Society person ever?

Edwards: You mean Newt's thing?

Kondracke: Well, weren't there two iterations of it, where Kemp had his part in it and then Newt took it over and it became an effort to beat up on the Democrats. But wasn't there an earlier iteration?

Edwards: Well if there was I didn't know about it. The first thing I knew was a meeting that Newt called, and I went to it. [Robert S.] Bob Walker was there, [John V.] Vin Weber was there. I don't

remember everybody, a lot of the people. I still feel very close to Vin. And I liked the sound of the ideas and of Opportunity Society, but to me it seemed like by the second or third meeting, it was anti-Democrats more than I liked, because I thought our job was to help govern the country. I think it was more Newt. I just decided the real purpose here is to advance Newt, and so I stopped going. I never attacked them, I just dropped out of it. So the Conservative Opportunity Society I am familiar with was strictly how do we advance Newt kind of thing, and I didn't want any part of that.

Kondracke: What was Jack's relationship with Newt like?

Edwards: I don't know. I have no idea. I will tell you that to my mind, looking at them from outside, I cannot imagine two people more different. So Newt might compare himself to Pericles, and Jack might say, "Wow, but Pericles was a smart guy." [laughs] They're just completely different. Jack did not have nearly the ego. And I think partly again it's football player. You can be an all-pro quarterback as he was, but man, if your line can't keep you from getting sacked all the time, you're nothing. I think he had this different approach.

Kondracke: Just going back to that earlier question about conservatism, one of Jack Kemp's great heroes was [Abraham] Lincoln, and so Lincoln as a kind of a Whig, really, so was Jack a Whig? He definitely believed in government doing stuff. I just wonder whether you ever talked to him about Lincoln.

Edwards: No, I never talked to him about Lincoln, but we both did talk about, the way I have framed it I had never heard him use this, but I

have a new book coming out that makes this point, and I also have a new textbook coming out soon that makes this [point], and what I always talk about is that the Constitution is about both empowerment and constraint. It not only constrains the government but it empowers it to do certain things, and a lot of the other people don't see the empowerment side. [James] Madison and [George] Washington and all those people, what they did was create a federal government. They didn't want the Articles of Confederation. They wanted a federal government that could operate. And he understood that, he understood the constraint and he wanted limited government because he didn't want government getting in the way, but he was all about what government can do for people, short of getting in the way. He understood about a rising tide lifting all boats and that what you needed to do was to try to make sure that the circumstances were there so that the tide did rise. I never heard him talk about Lincoln. I never heard him mention Whigs. But he did have the sense that when he took the oath of office as a congressman he had certain obligations to the country.

Kondracke: He became a leader in 1981 but announced in 1980, after the election, December 1980. So were you part of the effort to get him elected to the Conference chairmanship?

Edwards: I don't remember that I was. I supported him.

Kondracke: He beat John [H.] Rousselot.

Edwards: Yes, I supported him, but you have to remember, I was pretty junior Member, so if Jack turned around to see "Who's my

leadership team?" it never would have occurred to him to ask me. I had become fairly associated with [C.] Trent [Lott] because Trent had made me one of the regional whips and all, so I was involved in those circles. I was for Jack but I was not any key player in any of that.

Kondracke: Is it your view that Reaganomics worked? Reaganomics was Kemp-Roth, and do you think it worked? Was it successful?

Edwards: How will we ever know? I believe in the basic idea of having the government take no more money than it needs for what you think by popular demand is either essential or a really good thing to do, but that you want to keep taxes low enough for people to be able to achieve their own dreams. But [Ronald] Reagan had a Democratic Congress to deal with, he was forced to go along with tax increases because of both circumstance and being in the minority. So how would it have worked if [Lewis E.] Lew Lehrman could have just designed everything the way he wanted, and there would have been "Here was Reagan's ideas" and then you would have a Congress that endorsed it fully, who knows? But I certainly agree with the concepts of Reaganomics. You know, it's funny. If I had to say, and you didn't ask this, "Was Kemp a Reagan Republican?" I would probably praise Reagan by saying Reagan was a Kemp Republican.

Kondracke: What do you mean by that?

Edwards: It was that Reagan was much more like Kemp. A lot of the economic firepower came from Jack's brain. They were similar in a lot of ways, but to some extent, like with Kemp-Roth and all, to some extent, the administration was following, not leading. Reagan had an

economics degree and he and I did talk some at length about economics, but I think the lead was not coming from his Treasury Department or people like that, I think it was coming from Jack Kemp. Bringing up Reagan brings up one of the saddest moments for me in regard to Jack. In 1980 I was, I'm not going to exaggerate and say I was part of Reagan's inner circle, but I was involved. And Reagan set up these Congressional task forces where you had one House member and one Senator chairing a subgroup on defense, another on a subgroup on transportation, advisory groups of members of Congress on policies, and I was the head of the whole thing. So I was close enough that I was one of the people who in Detroit in 1980 was up in the suite at the top of the hotel sitting around the table with Reagan to talk about who should be his running mate. And Jack was there. I recall Jack sitting right next to me but I can't swear to that. That's what's in my memory now. But I felt very close to Jack. I think Jack Kemp should have been president and I still think that. But when Reagan, who I was close to, was going around the table asking who should be his running mate, I said George [H.W.] Bush. I wanted Jack to be president, but Reagan was going to be the nominee and I thought that Bush would be a better asset to the ticket. It wasn't sure then that he was going to beat [Jimmy] Carter, and I thought that Bush could help him get elected in a way that Kemp, who was so much like Reagan, that there wouldn't really be anything added especially to the ticket. And so with Jack there, Jack in the room, and I'm a big fan of Jack, having to say to Reagan "I think you should pick Bush," that was, that still weighs on me. I hated to do that, not that I think I was wrong, but because it had two bad effects. One is it kept him off the ticket, and secondly, if he had been vice president maybe he would

have become president and that would have been really good for America, I think.

Kondracke: There was a little boomlet at the Convention for Kemp.

Edwards: I know.

Kondracke: You weren't part of it obviously.

Edwards: I wasn't part of it, but I was really sympathetic with it. I was really sympathetic with it. I felt exactly the same way.

Kondracke: Did anybody at that table recommend Kemp?

Edwards: I don't remember. I don't take notes and do all that. I just remember my part only because it was so bothersome to me. I wasn't the first one called on; we were going around the circle. And I was just agonizing in my head over what I was going to say, and to be quite honest, I don't think I was totally sure. You know the thing about you don't know what you believe until you say it? I don't know that I was totally sure what I was going to say until I said it.

Kondracke: What did Kemp say?

Edwards: I don't remember. I mean I was just too focused on "Oh my God, what did I just do?"

Kondracke: On the subject of Reaganomics, cutting taxes has now become the Republican answer to absolutely every problem, practically.

Edwards: Cure cancer, cut cancer, right? I know.

Kondracke: Yes, so do you think that that's a valid way of looking at economics nowadays? It probably was in the days of high inflation and 70 percent top marginal rate and stuff like that, but is it for all time?

Edwards: No. You deal with circumstance. That's why the idea, Grover [G.] Norquist is not a terrible guy, but the idea of asking somebody to make a commitment in advance, that no matter the circumstance you're not going to vote for a tax increase is outrageous. We used to have this thing when I was there that people would be for across-the-board cuts of a certain amount. Well, that was ridiculous, because some programs needed to be cut by two percent, some should have been cut by 40 percent, and some should be increased. You're not doing your duty if you just do these. I was in favor of a balanced budget, but a balanced budget amendment. I mean okay you've got to balance the budget. Well, liberal Democrats can balance the budget. You just figure out what you want to spend and then you raise taxes enough and you balance the budget. We kind of have turned things around since I was young. When I was young I thought that your money was yours, and then there was a debate about how much of it to surrender to the government. Now when you talk about cutting taxes, people say you're costing the government money, you're taking money away from the government, as though they have

first claim and you're second. So all of this is complicated, but I do think that we've gotten carried away with the idea that you should keep taxes low because you want government to be small. Well government has some obligations. If you have a [Hurricane] Katrina, government has obligations. I think we're in a couple of wars we don't belong in, but if you go to those wars, you've got to pay for it so your troops have ammunition and they have stuff. I think we've got way off base on this. It's become a mantra. And it's also become, I don't know when, I wish Jack were here to speak to this, I don't know when we became the party of corporate America, when we became the party of Wall Street. We were the party of Main Street. We were the party of the small businessman, we believed in how incorporation allows you to accumulate and how big corporations are able to achieve great things, but the idea that you have to protect multi-million dollar bonuses for companies that are going down the tubes, I think there's something going on, where there's no rational common sense going on with the people who are saying "cut, cut, cut." And Jack Kemp, the great believer in lower taxes, I don't think would be going along with that stuff. And it's interesting who's, you mentioned him before, who's at the heart of this, because Paul [D.] Ryan, who thinks of himself as a Kempian, I think is getting hammered by people in his own caucus. His new budget that he unveiled, getting hammered from the right as well as from the left. I don't think Jack would be going along with this idea of just shrink government all across the board. It's got duties, it's not a business, it's not about making profit. It's about governing our country.

Kondracke: Kemp was against every tax increase that Reagan put through, TEFRA [Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982], Social Security taxes and stuff like that.

Edwards: I was against most of them. I think that there was an awareness on our side that we knew where the majorities were, and Reagan had different responsibilities than we did. Reagan had to figure out what he needed to get the funds to administer what was important to him and what kind of deals he had to cut. We had the luxury of just standing, we didn't have to cut the deal, we just had to stand for what we thought was the right thing to do. Yes, I think Jack would have been opposed to most tax increases. I don't think Jack would have said that when circumstances change, that you have to prevent any kind of higher taxes for, I mean I think Jack would have wanted to tear up the tax code anyway. I think he would certainly agree, maybe not support Obama on it but I think he would certainly agree that when your secretary is paying more than the head of the, if Warren [E.] Buffett is paying lower tax rates than his secretary, there's something a little screwed up.

Kondracke: Let's go to Foreign Ops. David [R.] Obey suggests that Kemp was too busy running for president or doing whatever to pay really close attention to what was going on in the Committee. Is that a fair charge?

Edwards: No, I don't think so. Because I've got photos still of myself in meetings with Jack and Bob Livingston and [Charles J.] Jerry Lewis and John [E.] Porter, the ones of us on that subcommittee. No, Jack was fully engaged. Maybe Jack would be president if he was ignoring

everything else to spend his time out there campaigning. No. By the way, Dave Obey is a friend of mine. We disagreed on just about everything you could disagree on, but we talked on the phone two days ago and are planning to go to lunch. But I think that's a very unfair assessment. Now Dave was in a different position. At the time Dave was not chairman of the subcommittee, [Clarence D.] Doc Long was, if I remember.

Kondracke: The last two years. Doc Long got defeated and then Obey took the chair for two years, I believe, that Kemp was still in Congress.

Edwards: Okay. And then I succeeded Jack as the ranking member. But I don't think that's true. Maybe from Dave's perspective, because he was trying to get sign-off onto the things he wanted to do. Maybe Jack wasn't cooperating, but I never had the sense that Jack was too busy. He wasn't Phil Crane. And Phil's a friend of mine. But he wasn't all focused outside of Congress. I think he was taking his responsibilities very seriously.

Kondracke: So he knew what was in the bills?

Edwards: I think so. I told you he jumped all over me, why was I doing it to him when I was cutting IFAD funding.

Kondracke: Obey says that you Republicans were against the banks, the World Bank, the IMF [International Monetary Fund], that you would vote against their funding year in and year out and that he finally pulled a maneuver whereby he organized the Democrats to also vote against the banks as a means of forcing the administration to

lean on you guys to be in favor of the bill. Do you remember any of that?

Edwards: I don't remember it, but I'm trying to think of where I think I was, and where Jack would have been and where John Porter would have been. I wouldn't say we were against those banks. I think that what we were for was more conditionality. We were more restructuring of the terms of how they operated and all that. You see, I would turn it around and say that it was Dave and the Democrats who were resisting the reforms that we wanted to make. I don't remember the details about them now, but I don't recall any kind of a knee jerk reaction against those banks. It was against taking loans and switching them to forgiven loans, in other words a give-away, a grant. So there were certainly differences, but I don't think they were against the concept of having a World Bank. It was more against the operation of those banks.

Kondracke: Where was Jack on sanctions against South Africa?

Edwards: I don't know. I don't remember. I was definitely in favor of sanctions, and my guess is that he was too, but I don't remember what he said about it. It was a certain moral plane. When people like [Danny L.] Dan Burton and others argued that sanctions would end up hurting the workers, that was probably true. But for some of us, nonetheless, at some point, if you see tyranny, you've got to draw the line, and you have to do whatever you can to try to pressure it. I can't put words into Jack's mouth, and I don't know. There were plenty of amendments and then votes on what to do about South Africa, but I

was in favor of sanctions, and I would guess Jack was. I don't know that.

Kondracke: Yes, I think he switched, actually. He thought, I just wondered if you'd been a part of all that. He declared that the ANC [African National Congress] was a terrorist group, but then he actually voted to overturn Reagan's veto on sanctions, but—

Edwards: Yes, little by little, it's like so many other things, you learn more. So at first when the claim is made that the ANC has Communist ties and they're trying to overthrow a pro-Western government, and sanctions will hurt that black workers and all that, there's a certain merit to that argument. And then as you learn more, here's a good example. Jack and I both supported the Salvadoran government against the rebels and supported the Contras against the Nicaraguan government. As time went on, I never changed my mind, and Jack didn't, about the Contras, but as time went on you learned that purity was not all on one side. And I found quite frankly that the Reagan administration and especially the George H.W. Bush administration just lied to us about who was doing what and who was responsible for what killings and so forth. You know, Jack was probably in the same boat. As time goes on, you're able to get a bigger, clearer picture of what's really happening. And the biggest mistake you can make as a member of Congress is to just blindly accept whatever the executive branch tells you, even if it's your own party.

Kondracke: In 1987, Kemp actually called for George [P.] Shultz to resign because he didn't think that Shultz was supportive enough of

Jonas [M.] Savimbi, of Solidarity [Polish democratic movement], and he was leery about arms control. Do you remember all of that?

Edwards: Not really. A lot of us were not terribly enamored of Shultz, but not my inclination to place the blame on the secretary of State, because secretaries of State are never the final word on something. I kind of remember that Jack did that, but I wasn't really a part of that. I certainly was not part of anything about Savimbi or whatever. That just wasn't my area of interest.

Kondracke: So the 1988 presidential campaign, what part did you play in it?

Edwards: None, really. I kind of wished that I had. I wanted Jack to be president, and I certainly would have supported Jack.

Kondracke: Why did you want him to be president?

Edwards: One of the reasons I supported Obama, which was in opposition, really, to both Bush and McCain, but one of the reasons was I thought he had the right temperament and I thought he had the right vision. Jack Kemp never would have said, demeaned "the vision thing." I think he had a clear idea of what America should be and how America should be, a land of opportunity, and it wasn't just against H.W, who I liked, but who was really just a manager. And I thought Jack could have very well opened doors to break down the racial barriers or to help break down the racial barriers, to create tax codes and economic plans that would be fair, and you could do what government had to do, but you could also allow people to build their

businesses. I bought totally, I thought Jack had the right values. Because presidents aren't in charge. I shock people all the time by giving my speech when I point out the president is not the head of government, that every major power of government is not in the presidency. What do you look for, then, in a president? Somebody who espouses the right values and who can promote those values, and I thought Jack was exactly the right person to do that. I didn't object to Bush, but I thought he wasn't going to do anything good or great. He [was] certainly very competent to manage in a critical situation, but he was not. I wanted us to, it's kind of like what people who supported Obama, "Hope," "Change." And maybe that's what I was putting on Jack. I think that's what he would have been. I think had it been able to happen, Jack would have gone down as one of the truly great presidents. Certainly in terms of his personality, in terms of his vision, in terms of his empathy, in terms of all that, I think Jack was really a great man, and I think he would have been a very good president. But you know, we never got that chance, and for whatever reason, it never took off.

Kondracke: So besides opening the racial barriers that exist in the country, or breaking down the last ones, what else would he have done that would have made him a great president?

Edwards: I think that he would have had a better way of figuring out how to deal with the economics, the tax code, creating [a] different relationship. He actually saw business and labor as on the same side. They were the two halves of the production side. He brought this whole different idea, and I think he would have worked to try to create a vibrant economy that did not pit one against the other. How he

would have done it I don't know. Jack was a lot smarter than I am, so I don't know what he would have done, but I think Jack was about how to increase prosperity for all Americans, because he saw, he really saw, that when you had some part of America, black, Hispanic, whatever it was, that was doing badly, it was a drag on the rest of us. So I mean to some extent I think he would have been a great president just because of the attitudes and ideas that he would have brought. I will tell you this. Jack Kemp would have gotten enormous pushback from Republicans in Congress if they were like the Republicans today. Enormous pushback. Just like I've always said I don't think Ronald Reagan can win a Republican primary today. I'm sorry we didn't have the chance to find out.

Kondracke: So you endorsed him in '88 but you weren't central to the campaign?

Edwards: Right, not at all.

Kondracke: Did you campaign for him at all?

Edwards: No, I don't think I was ever asked to campaign for him. I was not part of his inner circle. I was a big fan. I was more of a fan than a peer.

Kondracke: Did you have much to do with him during the HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] years?

Edwards: Yes, I went to see him a couple of times and I got involved in a couple of issues, I don't remember the details now. Yes, I went

over, I talked to him in his office and so forth, but I wouldn't say it was a lot. It wasn't a lot. Then after he was in government service we still talked from time to time, but it was more casual. I wasn't like one of his little circle of people making plans together and all that. I wish I had been, but I just wasn't in that.

Kondracke: So when is the last time you saw him?

Edwards: Oh, wow. I don't remember actually. But when he died it had probably been a year or more. I talked to him, because when the whole idea of this foundation came up and Jack was still alive and he was making calls to friends, he and I talked. We talked several times. But I didn't see him, and I know I didn't see him after he got sick, so it had probably been a couple of years since I'd actually seen him.

Kondracke: So final question. How do you think he should be remembered in history?

Edwards: I'd have to say he should be remembered as 'the great what if.' What if we had had Jack Kemp as president? He had the buoyant personality of FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt]. He had the same vision as FDR. He did not have the same solutions. Just like Reagan was a big FDR supporter. Here was a guy who had so much to offer and the country did not take advantage of it. I don't know why that was. I don't understand why he could not, you know, he didn't have the advantage of, he was the true Ronald Reagan heir, but a guy who had been Ronald Reagan's vice president could claim to be the heir. I think the sad—besides the what if—the sad thing is that Jack laid out a road map. You can go back and read his books. He laid out a road

map for a Republican party that embraced opportunity and embraced all Americans, that somehow the people who now dominate the Party have forgotten about. I'm not just talking about the Tea Party. [Willard] Mitt Romney every day—of all the candidates is the best, of all the Republican candidates—every day he says nutty things in terms of what government should be and about all this stuff. So somehow we had this guy who laid out, "Here is how to really be a conservative and make conservatism the dominant idea in America, of a government that stands beside you. It's not pushing you, it's not standing in front of you blocking you. It stands beside you and it helps you, but that's all it does. It doesn't try to dictate to you. And we laid out the great vision that I still think would be perfectly where we should go, and his party has turned an absolute deaf ear. So far as the members of the Republican Conference today, it's as though Jack Kemp never existed. And I think that's a real tragedy.

Kondracke: Why did it go off in that direction, do you think?

Edwards: Oh, I think several things happened. I think one of the things that happened was that even though Jack was religious, and the moral majority was not extreme. The moral majority disappeared and was taken over by the Christian Coalition. The moral majority was not Christian. It was various faiths. And that morphed into even well beyond where the Christian Coalition was. We are going to have very strong positions, whether it's on gay rights or abortion or whatever. Those were single issue do or die issues for us, just as they were for Democrats. So we became more reactive against government instead of pursuing where government could be useful. I don't know where it all came from. I will tell you in my last book, *Reclaiming Conservatism*

and then in this new one that's just coming out in July, I put a lot of the blame on Newt, I put a lot of it. Because Newt, for all of his talk about the idea guy, he changed the Republican Party from a party of ideas to a party of non-stop warfare, win by any means. So instead of having, where Jack might have had a serious economic conversation with Obama, Newt calls him a Kenyan socialist. Or whatever. It changed the direction to you do whatever you have to do to beat the other guys, and Jack never would have bought into that, and that changed the trajectory of what the Republican Party was. That plus the rise of the religious right, the social right, and where that came from I don't know. I don't know what fueled that. To some extent Jimmy Carter fueled it. Remember when Jimmy Carter decided that church schools, this preceded Obama with what he's doing now on contraception, when Jimmy Carter decided that church-affiliated institutions like their schools should have to be subject to taxation, the religious right just rose up and more and more began to feel like they're under attack. I don't know where it all changed. I blame Newt, I blame a lot of factors. But we're different. I'm still a Republican, but today I'm more of an anti-Democrat than I am a Republican. The Party today doesn't stand for or reflect anything like what Ronald Reagan was about or what Jack Kemp was about. We've become some kind of an alien thing. The only problem for me is that we're not quite as alien as the other guys. I wish Jack were back for a lot of reasons.

Kondracke: Thank you very much for doing this. I appreciate it.

Edwards: Oh, yes, I'm glad to do this.

[end of interview]