

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
Sen. C. TRENT LOTT
June 13, 2012

Interviewer
Morton Kondracke

JACK KEMP FOUNDATION
WASHINGTON, DC

Morton Kondracke: This is a Jack Kemp Oral History Project interview with former Senator and Congressman Trent Lott. Today is June 13, 2012. We're at Senator Lott's office in downtown Washington, D.C., and I'm Morton Kondracke. Thank you very much for doing this.

Trent Lott: Glad to be with you again, Mort.

Kondracke: You said that you first met Jack Kemp in 1970 when you were an aide to Congressman [William M.] Colmer, and he was brand-newly elected. Do you remember the exact circumstances of your meeting?

Lott: No. Just that by the seventies, while I was still working for the Democrat chairman of the Rules Committee, I had crossed the Rubicon and pretty much thought of myself as a Republican, and I was particularly attracted to the young, new stars they had, [Philip M.] Phil Crane and Jack Kemp. I was still involved at the time in the state Jaycees [Junior Chamber of Commerce]. I think I arranged for Jack to go down and speak to the state Jaycee convention, was the first direct contact I had with him. [I] was just an admirer of his style and politics that I'd heard him espousing. I had watched him play football, of course, when I was in law school. I always thought he was one of the slowest quarterbacks with the biggest feet I'd ever seen, but I can remember distinctly watching Jackie Kemp play with the Buffalo Bills. So I was just drawn to him. And then when I ran in 1972, a lot of the Republicans encouraged me, and contributed, including [Gerald R.] Gerry Ford [Jr.] and the then-Whip, [Leslie C.] Les Arends. And then when I got elected in '72 and came in in '73, I immediately gravitated to [William R.] Bill Archer [Jr.] and Phil Crane and Jack Kemp, and Bill

Archer and Jack Kemp got me into a group called Chowder and Marching, and that gave me an opportunity to be with them on a weekly basis, Wednesday afternoons. [We had] really interesting discussions, and it was so helpful to me, because even though I had been around for four years, I was working for a Democrat, so it gave me a chance to get to know Republicans and listen to some of the Old Bulls that were still coming, like Rogers [C.B.] Morton, would come to the meetings. But Jack and I just became good friends, and [Patricia T.] Tricia [Lott], as soon as she met Joanne, like everybody, she fell in love with Joanne Kemp. They had a religious connection too. So it became a very close, warm and fruitful friendship, but one that quite often led to some pretty ferocious debates. Jack and I, you know, Jack always elicited a lot of debate and discussion. He was always giving me a hard time about my Deep South roots, and of course I was saying "What do you know, from Buffalo, New York?" And it went from there. [laughs]

Kondracke: Did you have any real differences?

Lott: Not very much. Philosophically we were pretty close. We argued sometimes over issues, a little bit over education, as I recall. As I worked into the leadership positions, Jack influenced me when we shot down initially the 1987-88 tax bill, TEFRA [Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982].

Kondracke: '86, yes. TEFRA is '82. The tax reform is '86. We'll get to that.

Lott: And I wound up under his influence, partially, helped him kill the rule. I'll never forget. It was called "let's kill this snake before it gets out of the ground speech," and we took it down on the rule. Then when we finally got to the vote, I remember one of the things that I argued with Jack over, he wanted to exempt 10 million people from paying federal income taxes, and I disagreed vigorously with that. I thought everybody ought to pay something. We started down that trail then, and it's gotten much, much, much worse since then. So we argued over that. But then in the final analysis, I couldn't get him to vote for it. By then I was the Whip, and I remember going up the center aisle. I'm pretty sure he didn't vote for it, but I remember going up, and he was sitting on the next-to-the-last row, alone, going up there and pleading with him. I'm pretty sure that that happened on one occasion when I was trying to convince him.

Kondracke: I think it was probably '82.

Lott: Was it TEFRA?

Kondracke: Yes, it was TEFRA.

Lott: I couldn't break him loose. From '73 on it was a close relationship. But you know, my background, I grew up liking to argue and being on debate teams. One of my best friends from junior high school, actually still one of my best friends, is also a very liberal Democrat. Now that I look back on it I think, "How weird were we?" I remember one night sitting in front of my house arguing with him over predestination. I mean here are two guys in junior high school, I

mean juniors in high school, one a Methodist and one a Baptist, arguing over predestination. And we went at it for an hour.

Kondracke: It wasn't Jack Kemp.

Lott: No.

Kondracke: What about race? You know, he famously showered with more blacks than lots of people have met. You're from Mississippi, so did you ever talk about race?

Lott: Sure, oh, all the time, and Jack was a, what is the word I'm looking for? When you're always trying to reach out to people, convert people?

Kondracke: Evangelist.

Lott: Well, that wasn't the word I was looking for, but he was. First of all some of it was picking at me, you know, "You're an Ole Miss cheerleader." And I said, "Yes, I might have been an Ole Miss cheerleader, but I spent more time on the football field than you did and you were the quarterback." We had that exchange, and he called me the [Alfonse M.] Al D'Amato of Mississippi. I think you might have heard me say that, because I was always trying to get earmarks and to get money for Mississippi, and I tried to explain to him "Jack, I'm from the poorest state in the nation. We need help. For many years we didn't even ask for help and that's why we didn't get much. I'm trying to make up for lost time, and I consider that a compliment when you call me the Al D'Amato." But he also would talk to me about how

we had to reach out to minorities and labor, and he knew I have a labor background. My dad was a pipefitter union member in the shipyard in my hometown, and when I practiced law I actually, the firm I was with represented the boilermakers. the laborers, and longshoremen, and I closed the loan on the longshoreman union hall, so I had a connection there, and I always managed to get more labor votes than any other Republicans, but Jack helped push me in that area. He said, "You've got that background." And I actually worked on my Master of Laws at the GW [George Washington University] Law Center. And he said that I ought to push that more and Republicans should be open. And I tried to do that, not with a lot of success. I remember after I became majority leader I actually met with the union leaders, including the one before the current head of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations], the head of the Teamsters, they all came in there and I told them about my labor background and said "If you can come to me and convince me that what you're advocating is in the workers' best interest, I'll be for you, but most of the time I think what you're doing is not in their interest. You're making them pay for stuff they don't really want or get benefit from." And they never came back. So Jack worked on me on that, and he also urged me to reach out to African-Americans, include them in our meetings and on my staff. He introduced me to [Ernest] Ernie Ladd and I love that big picture of Ernie Ladd fixing to crush Jack. And Ernie was 40 miles from where I lived, that's where he's from, Mobile, Alabama. And he had an influence—not necessarily on my views but on my understanding and agreeing that we could do better there. A lot of people never knew it, wouldn't believe it and probably don't even care and don't want to hear it from me, but the last time I ran for reelection in 2006, my

opponent, a Democratic nominee, was African-American, and I actually got 38.6 percent of the black vote in Mississippi. Now, I will admit that over 35 years plus four more as a staff member, you can help a lot of people, and you don't have a place where you check race, and one thing I know about African-American people, citizens in Mississippi, if you help them, they remember it. And I had a close relationship with Evers, [James] Charles Evers.

Kondracke: Did you and Jack have theoretical discussions about race and the history of racism and that kind of stuff?

Lott: Oh, we did, some. But he was more of an advocate, a proselytizer, that's the word I was looking for earlier. But I explained to Jack that he didn't understand how difficult it is sometimes in the South, or was, and he didn't even understand how we grew up. First of all I grew up for the most part in a town, Pascagoula, which did not have difficulty integrating. It was done very easily, and it was more open, more moderate type, but that's along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. We have a lot of military people there, a lot of African-American military people retired there. But we grew up playing together, living together, and Jack didn't quite understand any of that. But I took him down there. I remember I took him down one time. One of the many things that Jack advocated that had a great appeal to the African-American community, that was a good thing to do, is free-enterprise areas. And I got with his encouragement the free enterprise program to designate a large portion of the Mississippi Delta.

Kondracke: Enterprise zones.

Lott: Enterprise zones, yes. Free-enterprise zones. And when we announced it in Greenville, Mississippi, I took Jack down there with me. It was so interesting to watch him, because he thought he knew more than he really knew, but he was surprised that the number of African-American people that came, the mayor was African-American, I had a great relationship with him. Then we got into the car and we drove from Greenville, Mississippi to the heart of the Delta, and this is a part of Mississippi, everybody not from Mississippi thinks that all of Mississippi is like the Delta. No. Only the Delta is like the Delta.

Kondracke: Poor.

Lott: Poor, white and black, but also probably 70 percent black in the Mississippi Delta. So I drove him from Greenville on the river up to Clarksdale, and on the way, for instance, we kept seeing these big what looked like ponds, and he said, "What is that?" I said, "Those are rice ponds, that's where we grow rice." And he said, "Where do you grow your grits?" And I said, "We don't grow grits, Jack. Grits are a product of corn, you clod." And then I took him up to Clarksdale and we went to a public housing project, the likes of which he had never really seen either, although I'm sure he was an advocate of having them. And so I took him into the project, and I took him into this lady's house, and I'd not met her before but I wanted Jack to meet her and I wanted them to meet him, and she was cooking collard greens. You know what collard greens are? Jack didn't really know. They cook them with ham hocks, and they're greasy, and so I insisted that he sit down and let's eat some collard greens. And he did that. I think he was really stunned at all he saw, the poverty but also the relationships

that you have with people regardless of color in a state like Mississippi. You have to.

Kondracke: Did he acknowledge that he'd learned something?

Lott: Yes he did. He said it was one of the most eye-opening things he'd ever done.

Kondracke: This was when he was HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] Secretary, I take it.

Lott: It may have been when he was HUD Secretary, and I'd probably gotten him to do the enterprise zone thing. So it could have been when he was Secretary. I can't really remember. I'd have to go back and check on that.

Kondracke: Because he was, this is jumping ahead, but he was an advocate of tenants being able to buy their own public housing units.

Lott: Yes. And you know he developed a really close relationship with [Alphonso M.] Mike Espy when he was in the House. And then of course he became Secretary of Agriculture, and I think Espy was one of the early supporters of the Jobs Creation Act.

Kondracke: That's way back in the seventies.

Lott: Yes.

Kondracke: Jobs Creation Act is '75-'76.

Lott: Maybe it was the enterprise zones, but one of the things Jack was pushing, I remember Mike Espy was on it, which shocked a lot of people. An African-American congressman from Mississippi, one of the lead cosponsors of a Jack Kemp bill. But Mike Espy is that kind of guy. He was somebody you could work with. I have a great relationship with him. I actually I think talked to him very seriously about running for lieutenant governor of Mississippi as a Republican.

Kondracke: Jumping back to the seventies, Jack Kemp gets himself involved in tax policy, '74-'75, Jobs Creation Act and all that. Were you an ally of his in those days?

Lott: Oh absolutely, absolutely. We talked about how in the late seventies in particular, but it was Jack's style. I remember him saying—you've heard me say this before—"We have to stop root canal politics, you've got to cut this, you've got to squeeze that." It was all negative. Our language was not open and communicative, and we had to change our language. Then [Newton L.] Newt [Gingrich] came along and helped us actually choose the words we would use, but the real inspiration was Jack, about how we had to be for something, we had to be for growth and opportunity and the Jobs Creation Act was that. That's what the idea behind Kemp-Roth, and that was the idea behind the enterprise zones. All those things were Jack's ideas, and all of them were examples of how Republicans changed their language and changed their emphasis, and started winning. And I'll lay that mantle on Jack's shoulders, because he was the inspiration, and he worked us. When we would have a vote on the floor of the House, he was always harassing somebody like me, or [John V.] Vin [Weber], or

even a Jon [L.] Kyl or a [Daniel R.] Dan Coats. We were all his acolytes, you know.

Kondracke: You say harass them. You mean just working on you?

Lott: He was relentless, yes. He'd work you over. But I like to think my nature is like Jack's. I like to be for things, I like to be positive, I like upbeat. And so all of his messages and all his ideas were just right down my alley. I loved it.

Kondracke: Dave Hoppe, who was both of your chiefs of staff at one time, said that he'd never seen Jack so stunned as when he came back from a Chowder and Marching Society meeting after having been beaten up by senior Republicans. You must have been there for some of that.

Lott: I'm sure I was there.

Kondracke: Do you remember any of this?

Lott: I can't remember what the issue would have been, but I do vaguely remember that he probably did get hammered a few times, probably by some of the Old Bulls like [Elford A.] Al Cederberg and Davis what was his name? from Wisconsin [Glenn R. Davis], maybe even [Melvin R.] Mel Laird, who would come. Jack was rocking the boat. But they called us, they had all kinds of names for us. We were the Young Revolutionaries, we were the Blow Dry Group, remember? Because a lot of us, [James G.] Jim Martin from North Carolina, had the shock of hair like Jack, and Carroll [A.] Campbell [Jr.] and a whole

group of us. We were all in Chowder and Marching. [David C.] Dave Treen was in there too, Carroll Campbell from South Carolina. I suspect, I do remember that there were some times when they got on him pretty good, but I don't remember a particular incident.

Kondracke: It was, the way it's been represented to me is that because he was outside his lane. In other words he was getting into tax policy and he wasn't on Ways and Means.

Lott: Yes, I think he was on [the House Committee on] Appropriations, but he wasn't an appropriator. That's why I think Al Cederberg was probably one of the ones that gave him a hard time.

Kondracke: What do you mean he was on Appropriations but he wasn't an appropriator?

Lott: He didn't come to Congress to spend money. And yet he was on the Appropriations Committee. He would have been better on Ways and Means. But [William] Thad Cochran and I had that, Thad's on Appropriations and I was on Finance [Committee]. We really should have been the other way around.

Kondracke: By 1978, Kemp tax policy, Kemp-Roth, goes from being something that's not recognized by the senior Republicans to being Republican policy.

Lott: Absolutely.

Kondracke: So, how did that happen?

Lott: I think that we had achieved, or were beginning to achieve, a critical mass in the Republican Conference by 1978. If you look at the makeup of who was there, [Cornelius H. M.] Connie Mack [III] and [Robert S.] Bob Walker and Carroll Campbell and [Robert L.] Bob Livingston and [John V.] Vin Weber and [Richard B.] Dick Cheney. Did I mention Dick Cheney? We were all there. We were the revolutionaries and Jack was our leader, he was our spiritual leader. Now Jack was undisciplined as a leader. That's why he needed, modestly, somebody like me that would actually take the time to count the votes and try to help make it happen. He was out there driving it with a vision, but somebody else had to do the routine work.

Kondracke: So you weren't yet leadership, but you were acting as the Whip?

Lott: No. In '78 I was elected chairman of the Research Committee. That was my first entry-level leadership position, which put me in the chairs. And then '80 was when I got elected Whip, in the aftermath of Kemp's ideas being adopted by Reagan and Reagan getting elected. And I still argue with my friends in the House and the Senate, don't wait for the Republican nominee. You get out there, help decide the agenda, develop the agenda, promote the agenda, and let the nominee adopt the agenda. And Reagan took the House Republicans' agenda lot, stock and barrel, the whole thing, on the defense side, on the tax policy, and it was made to order for Reagan anyway. It was the perfect fit. But Jack was the guy that, I'm convinced, got him to adopt what we'd been pushing. Henry [J.] Hyde was in that group. We had a group of 30 of us in the House that originally, early on, said

we're on the Reagan team. And remember, beginning in 1979, he was considered by some as too old and having no chance at all, but he had that cadre in the House and he included us, he met with us.

Kondracke: Tell me about your relationship, your own relationship with Ronald Reagan.

Lott: Well, I had, of course, been involved in the '76 fiasco, and somewhat typically of me I felt like Gerry Ford deserved to continue so I supported Ford. And then that led to the knock-down, drag-out at the convention, where Mississippi voted 16 to 14 for Ford. The delegation split, 16 to 14. It was ugly. And the scars from that experience still exist to this day in Mississippi. [William] Billy Munger and Clarke Reed have hated each other since. You recognize those names. Because of that I saw what was coming and I did not even go to the convention. I didn't run to be a delegate. That leads to the '80 situation. I felt badly about it from then on, especially after we lost. I made a decision early on, actually I made the decision under the influence of a congressman from Minnesota, at Windsor Castle, to support Reagan, and I came back to Mississippi and made the call—

Kondracke: Windsor Castle in England?

Lott: Yes. I was there for a conference, Adam Smith conference. I flew back and called, this is actually in 1979, and said that I wanted to be the state chairman in Mississippi for Reagan, and at that point I guess they were glad to get anybody. So I was the chairman in Mississippi in '80. So I had contact and worked with his regional people. We had lost Mississippi to [James E. "Jimmy"] Carter by

10,000 votes. In order to carry the state for Reagan, we had to carry my district by I think about 40,000 vote margin, and we did, and we carried the state by 10,000 votes over Carter, for Reagan, in 1980, so that was considered a, you know to get Mississippi to vote for a Republican from California named Ronald Reagan over a Southern Baptist incumbent from Georgia was a challenge. But we haven't lost Mississippi to a Democrat since. [laughs]

Kondracke: Which year was it that Reagan announced in Philadelphia, Mississippi?

Lott: He didn't announce in Philadelphia, Mississippi, but he went to Mississippi and had a huge crowd, it was a great event, and it got hammered in the *New York Times* because he advocated states rights, which—

Kondracke: Was this '80 or '76?

Lott: This was '80.

Kondracke: '80. Did you influence him to go to Philadelphia?

Lott: Absolutely. And I had a running war with [James A.] Jim Baker, who was involved in the campaign by then. Basically they didn't want him to go to Philadelphia, and I kept insisting that he go.

Kondracke: Why? Why Philadelphia?

Lott: Because it's the biggest political house party probably in the South. All political candidates go there. [Michael S.] Dukakis campaigned there. I took Jack Kemp there, and he cursed me, because he said it was the hottest he'd ever been in his life. And people in Mississippi—and Jack never wore an undershirt or T-shirt, you know—no politician goes into a crowd in the South without a T-shirt on, because you'll be ringing wet the whole time. So he had on a blue shirt, no undershirt. So it turns dark blue instantly and in Mississippi we're hands-on politicians. We hug you, we slap you on the back, we shake your hand with both hands. It was another new experience for Jack. But Reagan went and I knew it would be a hugely successful event, but then I told Baker and them, "We want to present him with the Greg Harkins rocking chair." Actually I believe it was a double-rocker. This chair maker, you know what rocking chairs are, cane bottom rocking chairs. We had this guy that was well-known, and his rocking chairs sold all over the South, and he would make these double-rockers, and I said we want to present him with a rocker, and Baker said, "Absolutely not. You know, I can just see it now. The old man sitting there in a rocker." So, we went running around. Finally we come up, they have these stands, they have this horse racing with the two-wheel horse races, I don't even know what you call it—

Kondracke: Sulky?

Lott: I don't know what it is, but they have those races every year in Philadelphia, and we came over the back side of the track and the crowd was there, 60,000 people were lining those tracks, and huge roar. My co-chairmen in Mississippi were John Bell Williams, [Thomas]

Tom Abernathy, Bill Colmer, three Democrats, and the Democrat chairman of the state Board of Supervisors. And so he gave a speech, it was a great speech, and when he finished, we gave him a rocking chair. Because they didn't have Secret Service that could block us in those days, so we just put the chair up on the stage and Baker didn't know we were going to do it, and what did Reagan do? It was the most masterful thing, and I don't think it was planned. I think it was instantaneous. He walked over, sat down, reached up and grabbed Mrs. [Nancy] Reagan by the hand and pulled her down in his lap. And that was the picture that went all across America. Not an old man sitting in a rocking chair, but the candidate putting a move on his wife, right there in that rocking chair. It was a great event.

Kondracke: Philadelphia, Mississippi is famously the place where the three civil rights workers were killed in 1964. So what did Jack Kemp think about Ronald Reagan's? It was a major—

Lott: I don't know that we ever discussed that. People in Mississippi don't think of Philadelphia. This is the biggest political event in an election year in the state. It's where that happened. It's never been connected to that. Republican, Democrat, liberal, everybody campaigns there. But I'm sure Jack would have said, first of all Jack would have said don't go to Mississippi, and he would have certainly said don't go to Philadelphia,

Kondracke: But you don't recall any such conversation?

Lott: No, I don't think he ever tangled with me over that. But quite frankly probably the kind of thing I wouldn't discuss with him anyway,

because I had my head set and we were going to do it. By the way, he carried the state and he carried the South.

Kondracke: What was Kemp's relationship like with Reagan?

Lott: You know, during that period, in the eighties, I think, well, you know, he worked for Reagan when he was governor in California, and of course we got some stories about some difficult or unusual things that happened during that period out there in California. But Jack had an entre with him that most of the rest of us didn't have, and clearly I remember we went out to a meeting one night out in Virginia, maybe even Middleburg or somewhere out there, some residence. I think Jack had engineered that. We took our cadre of 30 or so House members out there. I can't remember when it was but it was at a critical moment, and it was a great experience. So to answer your question, I think Jack was very much involved and could talk to the governor, became President Reagan. I think after the president was elected there reached a point where their relationship kind of cooled off, and I'm not sure why. I suspect that Baker was running interference there. And then one time Kemp and I shot down their Social Security effort, remember that one?

Kondracke: That was '83?

Lott: Whenever it was, the House, the Senate—

Kondracke: It was [Robert J.] Bob Dole's idea, right?

Lott: Yes, and the Senate had passed it. [Pete V.] Domenici was involved. In fact, I'm not sure Domenici ever forgave me for that. Jack and I did collude and publicly blasted it, and helped keep it from ever moving in the House.

Kondracke: So before Reagan gets elected president, did you have, what was your sense of the kind of communication that there was between Jack Kemp and Reagan?

Lott: I thought that during, before and during the election that he had a good relationship, a regular relationship, and input, and he knew all the campaign operatives. He knew [Franklyn C. "Lyn"] Nofziger, and who was the PR man? Sears, and John [P.] Sears, although I had the impression that he and Sears didn't geehaw a whole lot, but who was the third one in that group, the one that was a public relations guy?

Kondracke: [Michael K. "Mike"] Deaver.

Lott: Yes, Mike Deaver. He had a communication, as I recall, with them. I know he had involvement with them throughout the campaign.

Kondracke: There was a plot, quote unquote, by Arthur [B.] Laffer and Jude [T.] Wanniski whereby Jack would actually—and Irving Kristol apparently was part of it too—whereby Jack was going to run for president against Reagan in 1980.

Lott: I never knew that, and I would have been against it at the time. Now, I did support Jack in 1988, even when I was running for the Senate, and I'm not sure the Bushes ever forgave me, either.

Kondracke: Yes, we'll get to that.

Lott: Okay.

Kondracke: How much did you discuss, and how early, what Jack's long-term political future ought to be like?

Lott: I'm not sure we really discussed that that much.

Kondracke: I thought that's what politicians talk about all the time.

Lott: Yes, but then by '80, I was the Whip, and I was very much involved in the legislative process and working with the White House. But when we would go to the White House, Jack was the number three in the leadership too. He was chairman of the Conference. And Dick Cheney was in the leadership then too. I don't know. Maybe I was so focused on the House and what I was doing, at that time I didn't really, I don't recall really colluding or talking to Jack about all that. I do remember distinctly talking to him, I guess it would have been then in '87, because then he was getting ready to run, and I never will forget the conversation because I said to him, "Jack,"—by then I'd learned a lot of lessons the hard way—"you know, I think you probably ought to do it, but before you do it, make sure that you've assessed every thing that it is your closets, because it will come out. And whatever it is, make sure Joanne and your family know all about it." I

think that was in '87. I guess it was late in the eighties before we really started to talk about what he could do next or what he ought to do, and I thought the time was right. You've seen the video of my introducing him in the House chamber, what a great crowd we had lined up there.

Kondracke: This was when he announced?

Lott: Yes. I was worried that he would be an undisciplined candidate and I was concerned that he didn't have strong enough people around him and advising him. But I never was, because I was running for the Senate race, I never was that directly involved in his campaign. I'm not sure I would have been anyway. I'm not sure Jack considered me that much of a political operative. I think he considered me more of an inside the chamber, inside the ballpark sort of guy.

Kondracke: Going back to 1980, were you at the convention in '80? You weren't. You didn't go.

Lott: No, no I didn't go in '76.

Kondracke: Oh, that's right. In '76, you didn't. In '80 you did.

Lott: I was co-chair of the Platform Committee. [William E.] Bill Brock, another Chowder and Marching guy. It was the House's turn in rotation, well, the chairman was John [G.] Tower, and I was the co-chairman with Tower from the House. That was a great experience too.

Kondracke: Was that the year that you had Jack be the Defense subcommittee chairman?

Lott: No, that was 1984.

Kondracke: That was 1984, yes.

Lott: I was chairman of the Platform Committee then, since I'd done it co-chair in '80. Then when the rotation came up in '84 I was the chair, and Jack was on that platform committee, it was quite a group. We had all of our young revolutionaries there, and [J. David] Dave Hoppe was there, and [William] Bill Gribbin. Actually we wrote the platform. I'm till this day proud of that platform. You ought to go back and take a look at it for whatever they're worth. That was the one also where we did the famous comma, remember that?

Kondracke: I do. Now was the comma, this is the '84 convention. Explain the comma.

Lott: Well, I can't remember exactly what the comma, what the words were, but when you took the comma out, it completely changed the meaning.

Kondracke: It went something like-if I remember correctly—it went something like "We oppose increases in taxes, comma, which will hinder economic growth." If you take the comma out, then you're only excluding taxes which inhibit economic growth. And the White House apparently wanted the comma left out and you guys wanted the comma in.

Lott: The White House sent, you'll be interested in this, [Andrew L.] Drew Lewis and John Bolton to make sure that the Platform Committee stayed in line, and of course we never had any intention of staying in line. We quickly disposed of John [R.] Bolton, but we didn't want to embarrass Drew because we liked Drew Lewis, but when we finally completed it, with the comma, we presented Drew the platform with a bow on it. They were not happy, to say the least.

Kondracke: Somebody said that this comma controversy was less important than the press made it out to be, and it was designed to make the platform hearings interesting and to give the press something to chew on.

Lott: No.

Kondracke: It was a real dispute.

Lott: Oh, yes. It was designed by Dave Hoppe and yours truly.

Kondracke: To make the point that you should not increase taxes.

Lott: That's right. And I went on the show with [Samuel A.] Sam Donaldson. What was he on then?

Kondracke: "This Week."

Lott: "This Week" with [David McC.] Brinkley, wasn't it?

Kondracke: Yes.

Lott: In which I said, under question, "No. We're not going to be for raising taxes, and we're not going to raise taxes." But Baker did not like that. [laughs]

Kondracke: And what did Baker say?

Lott: He never let me forget it. Probably till this day he'd still harass me about it. But I had a great relationship with Jim Baker, even though I came from a different school, and I've said on occasion, I thought the Reagan Revolution ended in December of 1980, when the Bush people basically took over the White House staff, and Jim Baker didn't appreciate that too much either. But over the years I grew to respect him. In fact years later, I went back to Baker to try to get Bush to come to the Neshoba County Fair. It's not Philadelphia, it's the Neshoba County Fair, it's out in the county. I was going my usual tricks trying to engineer it, trying to get Bush to come. Finally I called Jim, who was unfortunately belatedly the chairman. Remember he didn't come in, take over the campaign until August, and I'd pleaded with him and I pleaded with George W. [Bush] to get Jim involved earlier. I think Jim knew that it was over. But at any rate, I went up talking to him, "This is important, getting him to go to the Neshoba County Fair." And I'll never forget, he said, "You want me to give it to you with the bark off?" I said, "Yes, that's the way we like it in Mississippi. Give it to me straight." He said, "He ain't going." So I said, "I can understand that. I got the message. Thank you very much." And I dropped it and didn't push it any more. But Jim and I did have some conflicts later on. I remember one time I really got

mad at him, and he basically said, "If Israel wants to talk any more, our number is 456-1414." Remember that?

Kondracke: No. What was that about? Is that after Bush violated the no new taxes agreement?

Lott: No. This is about Israel, and he had gotten agitated with Israel's positioning and basically said he was tired of messing with them and if they wanted to talk, here's my number. And boy, I thought that was a dumb thing to do.

Kondracke: And Jack did too?

Lott: Oh, yes. And I thought it was uncalled for, and not diplomatic, for a guy who ordinarily is extremely diplomatic. It was out of character for Jim.

Kondracke: Let's go back to the 1980 campaign. Some people say that in December, or January of 1980 or December of '79, I can't remember which, there was a meeting out at Los Angeles International Airport at the Marriott Hotel, where Jack quote unquote converted Reagan to Kemp-Roth. Other people dispute that Reagan needed any conversion. What's your impression?

Lott: I wasn't aware of that and wasn't involved in it. I doubt if he had to convert him, but I think that when he explained to him what it was, it was something that Reagan took to like a duck to water. But I was, you know, I can't remember if Jack and I talked about that, and I

was not involved in any way, so I can't confirm or deny that that happened or what happened.

Kondracke: Okay, so as you say, the Bush people basically took over the Reagan White House staff,

Lott: Yes. They pushed [Edwin "Ed"] Meese [III] aside.

Kondracke: And David [A.] Stockman was an apostate, who was one of you guys—

Lott: Yes, and [Richard D. "Dick"] Darman too.

Kondracke: Right. So Kemp-Roth starts getting watered down right at the beginning of the Reagan Administration. How did Jack Kemp take that?

Lott: Not well. And we would conspire to try to have an influence on him. We sent one of my people over there to be Stockman's head of Congressional relations, let me see if I can remember her name, a woman from Mississippi, that we sent over there to try to talk to Stockman, and she had worked with Stockman, she was on the Rules Committee with me. Jonalynn Cullet [phonetic]. Remember Jonalynn Cullet? Name ring a bell? To try to influence Stockman. In fact, they did start trying to water it down, but as time went along, I felt that our biggest problem was not Stockman but was Darman.

Kondracke: Because?

Lott: Because he, right till the very end, when decisions were being made, he had a tremendous influence on it, bad influence we thought. I did, and I'm sure Jack did too. We were not happy with Stockman or Darman, but in the end, Darman became our number one villain.

Kondracke: 1981 you enact the biggest tax cut in American history. 1982 he comes along and raises taxes.

Lott: Was that the Hance-Conable, Conable-Hance?

Kondracke: That was '81.

Lott: Yes, and then '82 was the budget cut.

Kondracke: Was TEFRA

Lott: Well, we did the budget bill in '81 or '82 too. Gramm-Latta?

Kondracke: Yes, that was '81.

Lott: Yes, I think we cut like \$80 billion. We thought that was the greatest thing ever, and now it would be chicken feed. Yes, I remember those events.

Kondracke: So 1982 comes along. You remember the '81 tax bill had all kinds of ornaments on it, safe harbor leasing and all that stuff. Reagan, because the deficit is big, Reagan comes along and advocates a \$98 billion tax increase, and, I forget, a \$10 billion or something like

that in spending cuts. You're the Whip, you help engineer the passage of it, but Jack was against it.

Lott: I was against it. The one I really fought to kill was in '86, the tax reform, wasn't it?

Kondracke: Yes.

Lott: I'm trying to get these two separated.

Kondracke: Eighty-two you were, I've looked this up. Eighty-two you were whipping in favor of the White House, and Jack, who's number three leader in the House of Representatives in the Republican Conference, is against it. So how did that work?

Lott: Well, it was not very comfortable, and that was the occasion, I'm sure, when I went up to the center aisle while the vote was on and tried to, and pleaded with him to come on and vote with the team so that we could win and get it done. He wouldn't do it. But, it wasn't an angry sort of thing because I understood. I had some of the same feelings and there was stuff I didn't like. I guess it was the '86 one where I wound up saying I can't be for it and announced I wasn't going to be for it, and I turned it over to [Thomas G.] Tom Loeffler, who was my chief deputy Whip, and Tom said, "I ain't going to do it." And I wound up in the Oval Office with Reagan, and Jim Baker's sitting on the other side of the desk, I've got a picture of me sitting there, and he's trying to convince me to be for it and I'm saying "Mr. President, I think it's just a tax increase. I don't think that's what we came here for." And then he said, "Well, Trent, if I can't count on the

Whip, who can I count on?" And I'm sitting there thinking, "Good gravy. With my background, here I am telling a guy I love and admire, president of the United States, who do I think I am?" Long silence while I was rolling around in my mind. And then I said, "Okay, Mr. President, I'll do it." I do consider that one of the two worst votes I cast in my entire career.

[interruption]

Kondracke: When Kemp opposed Reagan on tax increases, and he did it again and again and again because Reagan raised taxes a lot, what happened? There were reports that he was in the dog house in the White House.

Lott: I think he was. He did get in the dog house at the White House, and I thought, my impression looking back on it was that he was kind of on the outs with the White House, and frankly it began to take a toll in the House of Representatives too.

Kondracke: How so?

Lott: Some of the people, like [Robert H.] Bob Michel, were not happy with that. Some of the other what we call "Old Bulls," in those days I was not one. Somewhere along the line I became one. Jack's passion and his unwavering support for taxes that would spur growth, opposed tax increases and the burden they put on the economy, it had weakened him within the ranks there in the House, and I think that's one reason why his run for the presidency did not take off like I thought it would, I hoped it would.

Kondracke: Did you ever hear Reagan say anything to Kemp about all that?

Lott: No. Never Reagan.

Kondracke: Baker, Darman?

Lott: Baker, there got to be a little bit of testiness between Jack and Jim, [laughs] but it was typical of Jack. It was not ugly. I remember one time, I don't know why in the world we were in the Cabinet Room, but Tricia, my wife, came in, and Jack and Baker were standing over there on the other side of the room, and Tricia goes over, and she starts to speak to Jack, and Jim Baker speaks, and "Oh, Jim Baker." And she just turns right away from Jack and shakes hands with Jim Baker, and Baker loved it and harassed Jack about it, and Jack was crestfallen that she was so eager to pass him by and acknowledge Jim Baker. So we kidded and laughed about that for years, and Baker always loved it. So there was that kind of a relationship, but I think clearly Baker viewed Jack as problematic, but by then I must also say, by the late eighties, maybe it was even '87 or '88, I remember going in there in that same room, in that Cabinet Room, and I went over to speak to the President, and he looked at me like he didn't know who I was. And I thought it was so strange, because, I mean, I'd been with him a lot, and to his credit, he met with the leadership a lot, just about every Tuesday at nine o'clock, and I hated him because trying to get to the White House at eight o'clock coming from Northern Virginia, I mean nine o'clock, was always a pain in the rump. And I thought then

that it was curious. I think he was beginning to actually have the early signs, because it was the blankest look I've ever seen.

Kondracke: In December of 1985, is when the House Ways and Means Committee, [Daniel D.] Danny Rostenkowski, had passed a version of tax reform which the whole Republican Conference practically was against, including you, right? And you defeated the rule.

Lott: Right. With the help of Dick Cheney by the way.

Kondracke: So then Reagan comes up to the Conference.

Lott: The day after the Challenger [space shuttle disaster], and he'd been to something, or it was right around the Challenger thing, and the whole country was in a state of shock and mourning, and it was after he'd given that unbelievable speech that [Elizabeth E.] Peggy Noonan wrote for him. And he came up there, we met in one of the committee rooms there in the Rayburn [House Office] Building, the entire Conference. Basically he turned us all around, he was ashen, he was obviously emotional and he pleaded with us to get it done, and Michel, of course, stepped up and committed to get it done, and he flipped us. We got it done.

Kondracke: You included.

Lott: Yes.

Kondracke: And then tax reform ultimately passed.

Lott: Yes.

Kondracke: What did he say to you, because it was a closed meeting.

Lott: I can't remember. I remember, I can visually see him up there on the podium, because it's one of the committee rooms where you have the two levels, and he was up on the second level. But I think it was the timing and the circumstances and his demeanor. And by then people like me, I'm guessing I'm kind of the old school, I believe in following the leader. I guess I was emotionally attached to him and I'm sure he was saying we had to do it for our economy and all of that. We did it. But that was one of the things that eventually got me in trouble, because, like Reagan, even though I disagreed with him sometimes, I disagreed with him and I voted to override one of his vetoes, twice I fought him, on the highway bill, which we overrode him on, and I think that was in the House, and then on the textile bill. I said, "No, I'm not going to work to sustain your veto," and we didn't. We overrode it. So I'd get tangled up with him a little bit every now and then. I was loyal to him, but I had a higher loyalty to my constituency. [laughs]

Kondracke: So '84 convention, when you're the platform chairman, did you have Jack become the Defense subcommittee chairman to help out with '88, or just because—

Lott: No, because he was on the Platform Committee, he was on the Defense Appropriations subcommittee. And by the way, Hoppe and I loaded that platform committee. We decided who we wanted on the Platform Committee and we called them and said, "Get on the Platform

Committee.” Vin Weber was on it, Jack was on it, I think Newt was on it, Jesse [A.] Helms [Jr.] was on it. It was quite a group. But I did want to, part of my goal was to try to help embellish his credentials, not just as Johnny One Note on the gold standard or tax issues and growth issues, but expand the portfolio, but as I think back on it now, maybe I had a vision of how it would help him in the presidential effort, but really I think it was just of the people on the Platform Committee, he was the best choice.

Kondracke: Going to '88, did endorsing Kemp help you or hurt you in Mississippi?

Lott: It didn't hurt me. You know I did it early on, too, but there was nobody else stirring around to challenge me in the Republican primary. And then once Bush became the nominee, obviously I was advocating for him. And I remember one of the biggest events I had toward the end of the campaign was in Macomb, Mississippi, the home of my opponent, Congressman [Charles] Wayne Dowdy. And I remember really emphasizing how important it was that George Bush get elected and that he have a Senate that he could work with, so as time went along I got in line and advocated for him as much as I could. But I never felt it hurt me in Mississippi. I think in Mississippi by then people knew that I had a personal friendship with Jack. I'd had him down there on more than one occasion.

Kondracke: How did you decide that—

Lott: Plus, Mississippians never were supercalifragilic excited about Bush 41, so rather than hurt me it became a sales job. In fact, at the

convention in '80 when Reagan picked Bush at the convention, I almost had a blow-out. I was chairman of the Mississippi delegation, and I had people like Billy Munger, I had to take him off the convention floor, back in the back of the chamber, and say, "He's our man. He's made his choice, and we've got to vote for him." And I was going to let a guy named Jerry Gilbraith [phonetic], from Laurel, who'd been an early Bush supporter, actually do the vote for the Mississippi delegation, but because of fracas was about to break out, I wound up casting the Mississippi delegation vote. But it was not well-received in Mississippi Republican circles in 1980.

Kondracke: Who was the favorite?

Lott: You know, probably again I'd have to go back and think about it

Kondracke: Because Jack was talked about in '80 as a possibility. There were demonstrations at the convention for Jack.

Lott: I think the delegation, Mississippi delegation, wanted Paul [D.] Laxalt, as I recall. But I don't remember

Kondracke: But you didn't participate in any Kemp demonstrations at the convention?

Lott: No, no, look, I'm an order sort of guy, I'm an organization sort of guy. I thought "Reagan is our man, it was his choice, and we were going to support his pick."

Kondracke: Looking to '88 now, your gang in the House, because you hadn't yet, you were running for the Senate but you hadn't, so at what stage does the gang start forming for Kemp for '88?

Lott: I think it was in '87, because I remember we started to talk then. I think by then we had our little kemo sabe group. No, what was it we were called?

Kondracke: You were later the Amigos, but I think that was in the nineties.

Lott: It was later on, I guess we started the meeting, I guess after he had gone on to HUD, but the group was basically the same. We started to form around Jack in '87. I don't think it was earlier than that.

Kondracke: Your announcement on the House floor. Tell me about that and how—

Lott: No, this is a video. Actually it was, I'm trying to remember, I think it was in one of the committee rooms on the House side. You know, some of your people sent me the video. I'd never seen it, but I introduced Jack and we had everybody lined up on the platform, and Newt was there and [Robert C.] Bob Smith was there, Joanne and the family came in. We had a huge crowd there that day. I guess that would have been in early '88, probably.

Kondracke: You were off running for the Senate so you didn't have much to do with the '88 campaign, I take it.

Lott: No.

Kondracke: But you don't think it was well-organized.

Lott: No, it wasn't well-organized.

Kondracke: And who do you blame for that?

Lott: I always blame the candidate. It's just not Jack's forte. Jack, you know, he was always his own manager, his own greatest inspiration and his own greatest problem. He was just an undisciplined candidate, I'm sure, and probably wouldn't prep the way he needed to. Like we talked about the Gore debate, when I was sure he was just going to eat Gore alive, and Gore beat him when they were running for vice president, when Jack was. Beginning in March of '88 I was consumed in the state, Senate campaign.

Kondracke: Did Jack consult you about taking the HUD job?

Lott: I think he did. I remember the thing I most remember about Jack, though, was when Bob Dole called me to ask me what I thought about, I think he—

Kondracke: '96.

Lott: Yes, and I remember I was on the cell phone standing outside the leader's office there in the Capitol, and of course I was a big advocate for Jack. I thought Dole needed him, I thought it would

bring some youth and vigor to Dole's campaign. Dole was hesitant. I was comfortable with doing it. I hope I did him a service by advocating Jack. Other than kind of blowing the vice presidential debate I thought Jack did bring life and vigor and energy. I must confess that at the convention, this would have been in ninety—

Kondracke: Six.

Lott: Six. I'd just been elected majority leader, but I remember they had a rally there at the hotel where we were all staying, and I was up by the pool. You probably are familiar with the area, looking down on the crowd and listening to Jack and listening to Bob and thinking "I wish Jack were on top of that ticket," and thinking that with Jack maybe you could save the ticket.

Kondracke: Do you think Jack would have been a good president?

Lott: I don't think he'd have been a particularly good vice president, number one, and as I look back on it I guess I have my doubts about what kind of president he would have been. He'd have had to have strong people around him, and even then he would have been hard to control. Kind of reminds me, a lot of people were shocked when I was so aggressively for John [S.] McCain [III] so early, because McCain and I fought like tigers. Typical Scottish clansmen. His family, the McCains' farm is right down from my mother's farm. The Watsons, the McCains, the McCalebs, the Kellys, the McClouds, all clans lived in Carroll County, Mississippi, and so John and I had a long history. In fact my uncle was elected to the state Senate in 1952. His campaign manager was Joe McCain, John's uncle. So a long history there, but I

fought him like a tiger with campaign finance reform, and a lot of other issues. We were tangled up a lot. And then some people, I remember Bob Livingston asked me, he said "Why in the world are you for McCain?" And I said "Because I think he might actually get elected, and it's pretty scary, and if he does I want to make sure I can talk to him and tell him when I think he's fixing to do something really dumb." And if Hillary had been the nominee I still think, and if the economy hadn't tanked right when it did, McCain could have won. But it's kind of that sort of thing. He'd have had to have some strong people around him. Jack had the vision, but he wasn't a mechanics guy. And he'd have had to have people who could work with the Congress and could help communicate his message, and the main thing is he'd have to have a chief of staff who would have had to be a tiger. But he had so many great assets and so many good ideas. He was the kind of inspirational leader that we haven't had many of in recent years.

Kondracke: There's one unpleasant subject that I need to cover with you and that's the 2002 when you made your remarks about Strom Thurmond and Jack attacked you for it, right?

Lott: Well, more or less, in the *New York Times*. And of course I confronted him and we had some pretty tough conversations, and then he gave me advice, most of it was bad. And if I hadn't have taken some of his advice, it might have turned out differently. We had a very estranged relationship there for a while, but I got a letter up there on my desk from Jack where we basically made peace.

Kondracke: Let me just walk through it a little bit. When you said, or were quoted as saying that Strom Thurmond should have been elected and it became a big flap, Kemp did not warn you in advance that he was going to say that it was inexplicable and indefensible?

Lott: No, I think he was in New York and got sort of bushwhacked by a reporter, and said some unhelpful things, and then called. Now it wasn't weeks or even days, it was, this all happened like on a Thursday, and things started blowing up on Tuesday, and it was probably maybe Thursday or Friday of that week or early the next week where we had some long conversations. He was urging me to do some things. Didn't I actually do an interview with you? Yes.

Kondracke: What did he advise you to do that was a mistake?

Lott: Oh, it was what you would expect of Jack, come clean, apologize, correct what you had to say, just mea culpa all the way. It wasn't so much that, but also he advised me to go on B.E.T. [Black Entertainment Television], which turned out to be a disaster.

Kondracke: Why?

Lott: Well, it was not the right venue, and some of the things that I said there actually caused more difficulty on the other side of the equation.

Kondracke: Sounded as though you were groveling or something like that?

Lott: Yes, well, it was even worse than that. I was pointing out some of the things that I'd voted for and been for, which some people like Jim Inhofe said, "What the heck are you thinking?" The main thing was one of the things I should have known and nobody really told me at the time, the one person that could have told me was actually in England, so I couldn't talk to him, but let me see how much I can say this, but, Harry Reid said something recently that was a little, in the same venue. And I sent word to him, "Correct yourself, apologize once and say nothing more." He did, and it went away. Part of my problem was I felt so badly about it and I was being advised, I kept apologizing and trying to say I'm sorry repeatedly, and every time I did it actually was a story again. So it's one of the basic rules in Washington that I learned the hard way, and others maybe have learned from watching my example. You make a booboo, admit it, apologize and say no more.

Kondracke: And so what kind of a riff did it create in your relationship with Jack?

Lott: Serious. I really felt like he had betrayed me, let me down, really disappointed.

Kondracke: And how long did it take to patch it up?

Lott: Oh, let's see. I guess that happened in 2002. I'm not sure we got it completely patched up till 2007 or eight.

Kondracke: You didn't talk all that time?

Lott: No, we talked a little bit, but I pretty much had him in the dog house. [laughs]

Kondracke: So did you ever have real words about it?

Lott: Neither one of us have that kind of a disposition I don't think. He knew I was disappointed and I think more than anything else, I didn't have much to say to him.

Kondracke: So how did you patch it up?

Lott: He wrote a really, really nice letter, just a very personal sort of thing, and I responded, I hope, in kind about how much that he had meant to me and how much had meant to the Party and the country. When you put something in writing like he did and like I did, then it's over.

Kondracke: You said in our panel discussion that your shared religious faith helped you over difficulties. Is this what you were talking about?

Lott: Sure. Jack had some difficulties.

Kondracke: Personal?

Lott: Yes. And I always reached out to him. I remember we had some meetings up in my little Capitol office with Lloyd [J.] Ogilvie [Chaplain of the U.S. Senate], some pretty deep emotional, spiritual conversations when I thought Jack needed it. And I think it helped.

Kondracke: Is that anything you can talk about?

Lott: No.

Kondracke: Okay. The Amigos. The Amigos met where? Mexican restaurant.

Lott: Mexican restaurant up there on that corner where you've got the Hart [Senate Office] Building on one side and right around the corner there, kind of across the street from I guess where the Heritage Foundation is. I can't even remember what the name of that place was. And I think Jack was the one who wanted us to meet there. We always thought he was a little crazy. And we talked about who the Amigos were, it was Jack and Newt and Vin, I think Coats was in the group, I think Kyl was in the group, and me.

Kondracke: Connie Mack was in the group.

Lott: And Connie, yes, sure, Connie for sure.

Kondracke: This was when he was HUD secretary?

Lott: Yes.

Kondracke: So what did you talk about? Why did it get formed?

Lott: It was just friends. We would get together and we'd get into pretty heated discussions. Jack would always stir things up. We kind of missed being together as much as we used to be on the floor of the

House or even during the years when he was at HUD we wanted to visit with him. I remember one time, I can't remember exactly. I think maybe I told you this story, maybe I didn't. We met in Connie Mack's office, and we were pretty full of ourselves, pretty excited about the fact that by then Connie and I were both in the leadership and Newt was in the leadership. I think this is before I became Speaker and leader. And Jack was at HUD. So we were kind of just there to celebrate what was going on, and Newt announced just out of the blue that he'd be running for president, and we were all sitting there thinking "Where did that come from? And by the way here's Kemp. If anybody in this group should be running for president it would be more likely to be Kemp than Newt." Well we found out this year that actually Newt [laughs] did plan on running for president.

Kondracke: It was just like a social gathering?

Lott: Yes, oh yes. It was just purely social. I don't think there was anything substantive about it. I'm sure Jack harassed us about being more supportive of some of the HUD programs. And you know Vin's wife worked over there for him, as I guess personal assistant. But it was just old friends that we'd developed those friendships when we were all in the House together in '78.

Kondracke: There was a moment when Jack did tell you guys that he was going to run for president. Was it for '96?

Lott: I don't remember when that was.

Kondracke: I think it was September of '93. It was early. And supposedly, the newspaper accounts I've read have you asking him "Are you going to run?" And he said, "Yes." Do you remember anything like this?

Lott: In when? What was the date?

Kondracke: I thought it was September of '93, early.

Lott: I don't remember that one. I would think I'm getting a little senile, but that was 20 years ago, wasn't it? Hard to believe.

Kondracke: Hard far did that ever get? And why did he not run in '96?

Lott: You know, again, I apologize but I just don't remember why. I think for one thing he didn't get much encouragement. After the aborted thing in '88, it just didn't look viable. Who else was running in that year? Ninety-six.

Kondracke: Well, [Andrew] Lamar [Alexander, Jr.] ran. I can't remember either.

Lott: [Howard H.] Baker [Jr.].

Kondracke: Yes, Baker. Baker started out running and then dropped out. Lamar Alexander and [Patrick J.] Pat Buchanan, I remember.

Lott: Oh, yes, the pitch fork group. I remember that, yes. But I don't remember why Jack didn't get in there. It's just that things had not gone well in '88 and he'd sort of been, I guess you could say he'd kind of been out of the loop during that period of time.

Kondracke: When did you first hear that Jack might be Dole's running mate?

Lott: Well, there were a lot of us who advocated it. I think probably even Connie Mack was mentioned too. I think we'd kind of been advocating it and hoping it would happen and hearing it, but the first time I realized that it was very serious and likely to happen was when Dole called me and asked me what I thought about it. I'd been Dole's Whip, and while he was opposed to me being Whip and didn't know what to think about me for a long time, by the time he left we'd gotten pretty close. So it wasn't unexpected that he would call, because he knew my relationship with Jack.

Kondracke: And what did you say?

Lott: I told him oh yes, and probably, knowing Dole, probably he asked me if he could control him or would he be a reliable partner, and I said, I'm sure I said I thought he would be all of the above and I thought, as I said earlier, that he'd bring a level of interest and support and energy that was going to be needed. And Joanne and Elizabeth [H. Dole], I think had a really good relationship too.

Kondracke: Better than Jack and Bob Dole did.

Lott: Yes.

Kondracke: Because they were oil and water for years.

Lott: They were, yes. Jack was the leader of the House Snits. We were called, I think Dole referred to us as minnows and some people referred to Dole as the barracuda. I think that was the terms that they used, it was the fish analogy, the barracuda and the minnows, and of course that was a shot at Newt and the House guys. When I was over in the House I remember [Tom C.] Korologos was one of the ones that talked about that, and I didn't take well to that, you know. We were good friends with Newt too, and at that point I was not a fan of the Senate, to say the least.

Kondracke: You became one.

Lott: Well, I've always become an institutionalist, but in the late nineties and the early part of this century we were doing some good things in the Senate. In fact it really gets my goat every time I read in the paper about the unemployment level, the growth numbers, the balanced budget and all the wonderful stuff that Bill Clinton did. Hello! We had to make him do most of that stuff.

Kondracke: Speaking of Clinton, how did Jack feel about impeachment?

Lott: I don't know that I really even ever discussed that with Jack. I'll bet I did, but I can't recall it. I remember first of all I was sick at my stomach when I sat there at my house in Pascagoula watching the

Senate on a Saturday vote for the three articles of impeachment, and realizing, while I was not happy with the way that was done and then I realized—

Kondracke: The House, you mean.

Lott: Yes, the House. It was sitting in my lap, whew, and I called [Thomas A.] Tom Daschle the next day, on Sunday, and I said “Tom, we have a constitutional job to do. I hope we can do it in a respectful and honorable way, and I’d like to be able to talk to you and see if we can figure out how to get this thing done.” That’s a whole other story too, but it’s not about Jack. But that’s why I was probably so consumed with trying to figure out how to get through that. I probably talked to Jack but I cannot remember it.

Kondracke: In later years, post-’96, how close were you and Jack?

Lott: We talked a lot. I can remember one conversation in my dining room there in our row house on Capitol Hill when Jack called and said “You’re the only guy that’s left that can get some of our policies in place.” Of course, you know, we did a lot of that. The nineties, everything we did, you remember, was to get the budget under control and encourage growth and lead to a balanced budget and surpluses, but we did it without raising taxes. Of course Clinton had raised taxes by one vote House and Senate in ninety-whatever that would have been, one?

Kondracke: One.

Lott: So the fact of the matter was, there was an awful lot of revenue in there, but we did everything else that had to be done to keep unemployment at like 4.2 percent and growth going strong. And then of course in 2001, I think, I talked to Jack a lot when we were going after the [George W.] Bush tax cuts, the first round of Bush tax cuts, which we got done by the skin of our teeth before we lost the majority.

Kondracke: He was supportive of that.

Lott: Oh yes, absolutely. And then we came back in 2003 and got another round of them. And he loved all of that.

Kondracke: What did he think about George W. Bush in general, and about the Bush presidency? W?

Lott: I'm trying to remember our discussions about that. You know, I don't recall having that many conversations about that. My perception would be probably that he was not a huge fan, but thought, he liked the compassionate conservative term. You know Jack was a compassionate conservative. And I think he appreciated the fact that he did serve in his dad's administration and handled it pretty well at HUD, I thought.

Kondracke: He was frustrated at HUD wasn't he?

Lott: Yes, he was. But he was frustrated because he had to stay in the traces, which is what you're supposed to do when you're a Cabinet secretary. You're not a free agent, you're not a congressman or a

Senator or a presidential candidate, you're a Cabinet secretary working for a president. So while I'm sure he was frustrated with some of it, and of course I disagreed with him, I disagreed with probably 80 percent of the programs at HUD, and so I was not a supporter of a lot of what Jack wanted to do or tried to do, I'm sure. But we never got in a real tanglement, that I can remember. But typically of me I was against most of the programs they had, but I tried to get as many of the programs as I could into Mississippi. Which always would agitate Jack, you know. [laughs] Here he is, Al D'Amato, trying to get some more pothole money. Yes, that's right, man.

Kondracke: So when the Amigos would meet, did he ever talk about Darman and [John H.] Sununu, who were thwarting him at every turn?

Lott: Oh, yes, I'm sure we all blasted them freely.

Kondracke: When did you find out that he was sick? How did you find out?

Lott: I'm sure I heard it and I can't remember whether I called Jack or he called me, but I remember we had a conversation, and it was, I guess the terminology would be it was sort of fatalistic, but he was "It's a fact, but I'm going to fight this." Tricia, I know, talked to Joanne a good bit. I didn't really realize how bad it was. I was shocked when he actually passed away.

Kondracke: When did you last talk to him?

Lott: It was while he was there at home, basically sitting in that chair, which you probably seen him sit in. It was the usual stuff. We were always kidding each other about our level of education and the words we would use, you know, typical Jack, or what book he was reading. So I don't remember exactly when it was, but it was not too long before he passed away. And I'll always remember that memorial at the Washington [National] Cathedral, the crowd, the diversity of the crowd both politically, racially and everything. It was a beautiful tribute to him, I thought.

Kondracke: Anything I've missed?

Lott: No, I probably gave you a lot more that you didn't need. We had some great times together, and he certainly influenced my politics in the late seventies, and my career in the Senate. And while I got myself in trouble with that [James] Strom Thurmond thing, some of the things I learned from Jack are what got me in trouble in other ways too. The things that I advocated for, a lot of the Old Bulls did not like. Also, I guess, I became a little bit too much of a pragmatist, maybe more than Jack. Where I was so determined to try to get things done, that I was willing to make deals. And he harassed me about that some too. But the problem today is we have no dealmakers. Makes me sad.

Kondracke: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Lott: All right.

[end of interview]