

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
Sen. DANIEL R. "DAN" COATS
June 14, 2012

Interviewer
Morton Kondracke

JACK KEMP FOUNDATION
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Morton Kondracke: This is a Jack Kemp Oral History Project interview with Senator and former Representative Dan Coats. Today is June 14, 2012. We're doing this interview in Senator Coats' Senate office, and I'm Morton Kondracke. Thank you so much for doing this.

Dan Coats: Sure.

Kondracke: How would you characterize Jack Kemp's role in the [Ronald W.] Reagan Revolution?

Coats: Absolutely instrumental. It was a Reagan-Kemp revolution in my opinion. Reagan, of course, was speaking to the country and to the world in a way that only Reagan could communicate. He was the great communicator. Jack had, as you know, a completely different style of communication, much more aggressive, but I think critical at the time because we were talking about a lot of new stuff, a lot of revolutionary ideas. And of course Jack was Mr. Idea Man, but his ability to reach out to influential members of the Congress and others that were necessary to be on board in order to support the Reagan program, he was just a force. So he was the aggressive end, let's see, how would I best characterize this? Reagan was the great persuader and I think Jack was the great drive it home enforcer of the message. I think the two were a great combination. They dovetailed. I know Jack had an influence on Reagan and certainly Reagan had an influence on Jack.

Kondracke: What do you know about the contacts between Kemp and Reagan before Reagan became president?

Coats: Not a lot. I was running for office at that time. Ronald Reagan made one visit to our area. It was the first time that I had met him, and had really no contact, so all that that happened during the campaign before the election, I had met Jack Kemp through [James Danforth] Dan Quayle, because I was working for Dan Quayle prior to my getting into the race when he made his decision to run for the Senate. I was introduced to Jack Kemp, and once you're introduced to Jack Kemp, you never forget him. He becomes a part of your life, and he makes you a part of his life. That was one of his great strengths, I think.

Kondracke: Were you Quayle's chief of staff?

Coats: I was his district representative, operating out of Indiana.

Kondracke: When would you have met Jack Kemp and how?

Coats: Dan Quayle brought him in to come to speak and to fundraise, and I first met Jack Kemp at the Marriott Inn in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, when down the hall comes this whirlwind of a person and reaches in his pocket and pulls out a gold coin and said, "Gold, gold, the gold standard. We'll never be back where we need to be as a country until we get back on the gold standard."

Kondracke: So this was your introduction to Jack Kemp.

Coats: Absolutely.

Kondracke: How did your relationship develop from there?

Coats: I was elected and then we served in the House together, and of course he came and appealed to me to provide support in his run for leadership, which I did. And then I was inducted into the Chowder and Marching Society in the House of Representatives and the group of conservative Republicans, of which Jack a member. And once again, once Jack embraces you, gets his arms around you, you're his friend for life and you're within the Kemp camp. So our weekly meetings there. Then we began to have some personal interactions with family. Joanne [Kemp] and Marsha [Coats], and our kids. Judith [Kemp] ended up working for me for a time and probably Joanne is Marsha's closest friend. So we've had a 30-year relationship with Jack Kemp and the family. It's everything from traveling together to going to football games where Jimmy or Jeff are playing. With the girls, weddings, babies. And still, Marsha and Joanne are very, very close. I think some of the most meaningful times that I had with Jack were in the last few months of his life. We spent a lot of time together at his house, talking about a lot of things.

Kondracke: Can you describe how he handled his sickness?

Coats: Typical Jack Kemp fashion, "I'm going to overcome this," the power of positive thinking, no complaints. But even though I think there were times when he was in a lot of pain, he was Jack Kemp, he was Jack Kemp the football player, bloodied on the field, walking off, never defeated. We had some very meaningful times together in the last few months.

Kondracke: I'm curious about his Christian Science upbringing.

Coats: Yes, I am too.

Kondracke: Did he ever talk about that?

Coats: Some, but not much. No, Joanne talked to Marsha a lot about it. No, Jack was not one to bring that up, but I think it was known that it certainly had a big influence on his life. At the same time, there's Jack with Jerry [Lamon] Falwell [Sr.], there's Jack with the Christian community, there's Jack espousing issues, regular attendee at Fourth Presbyterian Church, basically acknowledging, Jack and [Charles W.] Chuck Colson. I always thought that kind of a tension within Jack, the Christian Science upbringing and all that that brings with it, and kind of the opposite spiritual view of faith, which Joanne was a champion of. Trying to reconcile those two and straddle those two probably produced a lot of questions in Jack's mind, but he did not want to just really dig into that. He was always curious. He had a great mind for curiosity and knowing more. Well versed in the Christian faith, but I think it was well understood and known that Jack also was brought up in the Christian Science faith. And frankly I wondered when Jack, I've skied with Jack and so forth, and if you ski with Jack then it's a race to the bottom of the hill and you better not win. Jack will catch you the last 20 yards no matter where you are. It is so classic. We were out in Vail with him several times, and you go up the chairlift, Jack's the first one off, it's straight for the line. It doesn't matter whether it's his kids, his wife, his guests, the head coach, whatever, waiting, "Come on, come on, come on, come on." As soon as he gets there he's got to be the first one off the hill and it's

just hell bent for leather all the way to the bottom. One time I was really, really pushing him, but there was never anything about "Wow, you really pushed me." He went straight to the chair, backed up yelling at Joanne, going up the lift, "Come on, hurry up, hurry up." Like this was a football game and the clock was ticking, and if you didn't get enough ski runs in, you lose. I mean, just classic. Then he goes home and gets two huge bags of ice, plops them on his knees, so you realize he was in pain the whole time with bad knees, and of course giving orders to Joanne, "Get more ice," or get him a Coke, or, you know Jack. He was one of a kind, and he would frustrate people, he would anger people, but there were never any hard feelings. So many times you felt like getting up and walking out. But there was something magnetic about him. We had some incredibly intense debates.

Kondracke: About?

Coats: Policy, about life, about everything. He had a contrarian streak, I think, but maybe it was testing you or whatever, I don't know.

Kondracke: I take it these were Black Diamond runs?

Coats: Well, not at that point. I don't think his knees were up to Black Diamonds, but at one point it was. Mine certainly were not up to Black Diamonds. This was out in Vail. But they were challenging runs.

Kondracke: What are your other outstanding all-time memories of Jack?

Coats: Going to Jimmy's football game, Churchill High School [Potomac, Maryland], Jack in the bleachers, high school football game. Jack pacing, can't sit down, pacing back and forth. If you watch a USC [University of Southern California] game, the U.S. band plays in between every—well, the Churchill band director must have thought the same thing. Jimmy was having some problems, Jack said "It's the band, it's the band. The band, they can't hear the signals, they can't hear the signals." He was yelling at the band director, "They can't hear the signals out there. No wonder he didn't get that play done right" and so forth and so on, and we're way up in the bleachers, we're in the last row in the bleachers and he's yelling at the band, and no, there's no way he could hear him. So I was watching the play, and all of a sudden Jack is gone. And I look around, look around. He's down there in the face of the band director saying "Stop playing in between the plays." That's Jack.

Kondracke: So, if Jimmy was having trouble on the field, how did Jack behave toward Jimmy?

Coats: He was always, well, advice but encouragement. His favorite phrase to his kids was, every time they'd leave the house, "Be a leader. Don't be a follower, be a leader." And whether it was going to a party or whether it was going out with other kids or going to football or going to school, "Be a leader."

Kondracke: Did he ever explain what that meant to convey?

Coats: I think what he was trying to transfer to his four kids was this: you can overcome any obstacle that life puts in your place if you have the right attitude. Look at it as a challenge to be overcome, look at it from a positive standpoint rather than a negative standpoint. The mind always triumphed over feelings or emotions, over the body, I think.

Kondracke: That's Christian Science, isn't it?

Coats: That is Christian Science, yes. The triumph of the mind over anything negative or anything characterized as undoable. That's probably where Jack and I had some real differences. We talked about it sometimes.

Kondracke: What's the tension between that and conventional Christianity?

Coats: Well, the real tension is that Christianity basically says we're all frail and we're all in need of something greater than ourselves. And I think Christian Science basically says, if I characterize it right, our mind can overcome any negativity. And there really isn't evil in the world. There's good in the world. And I think Jack was always seeing the good in people or the potential for good in people, and there's nothing wrong with that. But Christianity would say it's a personal struggle for all of us. I love the quote of, and I said this to Jack too. The head of the United Nations way, way back, Maliki [Charles H. Malik], I think was his name, and it was a Lebanese. He was asked the question during the time of the Cold War, "Is the Berlin Wall the division between good and evil? And he said, "No. The line that

separates good and evil runs down the center of every human heart, and we have a choice of which we're going to favor." I don't think Jack would have accepted that statement because there wasn't a place for that concept in it. I kept wondering. That's why he would look at any part of the world, any despot or anything else and think "This can be overcome."

Kondracke: But he did agree that the Soviet Union was an evil empire, didn't he?

Coats: I don't know if he would ever characterize it as evil, an evil empire. It was clearly a country with the wrong ideology, the wrong philosophy, but I don't know if I ever heard him support that characterization.

Kondracke: Look, you're a font of stories, so just pick out some other of your favorite stories, either in Congress or out.

Coats: Well, as a member of C and M [Chowder and Marching Society], we have a rule. It's the first arrive, first speaks, and each of us rotates and hosts the meetings every Wednesday in the Capitol. And we were very diligent about defining who comes first and second and third and so forth. Jack would always burst into the room halfway through the process and immediately seize the floor. Just the force of who he was. And he would always have a confrontational issue or question to pose. So sometimes we'd end up yelling at him "Jack, you've got to wait your turn." "I don't have time to wait my turn. You've got to hear this." That is Jack. Jack and I were standing in the United State House of Representatives just before the calling of a vote,

and somehow we just ended up there, and someone in rabbinical dress stood up in the front row of the gallery, right above us, put his hands inside his clothing and started yelling in some language, I don't know if it was Hebrew or what it was. And the security people, the guards, immediately rushed down and wrestled him down, and Jack was saying, "Don't be so hard on him, don't be so hard on him." He thought he was a man of the cloth or whatever. And they were hauling him out of there. Then shortly after that they called the vote, and so 435 members show up. I went up to one of the security people and asked what was that all about, and he said he had a bomb attached underneath the clothing and he was trying to ignite it by putting the two wires together. And only because the battery didn't work, I said, "What would have happened?" And the guard said "They would have been carrying you out of here in a bucket." Obviously that was a sobering statement. And here Jack was saying "Take it easy on this guy. He's just somebody overexcited, and he thought he might be wearing some kind of a—again, looking at the positive side of things, it didn't occur to him that that could happen. Oh gosh, it just goes on and on. He came over to visit us when we were in Germany, and we had found a place that the Germans don't like to advertise and nobody really knows where it is, but you drive through probably the most wealthy neighborhood in Berlin, magnificent homes built in the twenties and thirties, the tens and twenties and so forth, and winding streets and trees. And there's this bucolic little station down there where you can board the train and it's like getting on the train in Greenwich going to New York or whatever. And there's a back road there, unidentified, no signs, and our driver took us up there because he worked for the military, drove for the military during the Cold War days, and he said "You need to see this." So we went up there. And

there's an abandoned railroad siding and a long platform down both sides, and scrubby trees and rocks and weeds and everything else. That was the siding where they backed the trains in to take the Jews and load them in the cars, and you start at one end, and at the very beginning of that process going all the way through to the end are plaques about this wide, and it would say "April 19, 1942, 1100 Juden, Treblinka. April 29, 1942, 846, Dachau," and on and on it went. We started that and you just keep going, you just keep reading, and it just keeps accumulating, and when you're about a third of the way down there's just dead silence. Nobody wants to talk, and then you keep going and you keep going and you keep going. Then you cross and you come back up on the other side and you get all the way near the end. It's literally days before the Russians invaded Berlin. And the Russians were on the doorstep, and they're still shipping people out. And you know Jack's support and love for Israel and the Jewish people. Jack was very influential with me with that and also with apartheid and some other things, but that had a profound effect on him. It brings home the reality of what was happening during that time. And then you think about them rounding up people throughout Berlin, particularly in the Jewish sections of town, and then driving them through trucks or marching them down these streets where the wealthiest of the wealthy, the elite of the elite lived, and then they say "We really didn't know what was going on."

Kondracke: When you say it had a profound effect on Jack, how did that evidence itself?

Coats: We couldn't get together without him bringing it up. Every time we were with a group he'd say, "Let me tell you about the time that

Coats and I were in Berlin together and we went to see this." As you know, Jack would get something in his mind and just had to tell everybody, some incident, it could have been one of the many heroic black women from the HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] projects and so forth that he would use as examples that have overcome the hardest of obstacles in their life and were talking about how to address their situation and deal with the drugs and the gangs and all these sort of things and these heroic women. So Jack always had those stories in his mind and used those to illustrate what we needed to do from a policy standpoint. I could spend hours dredging up memories of things. My most memorable and precious memories were just the last weeks and months of his life. I wanted to do something for Jack, and I went over there, and Jeff was there, this is his last days. Jack was really weak then. I said, "I've got something I want you to watch." And we pulled up the last several minutes of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. When right after the fall of the Wall. Leonard Bernstein went over to Berlin and they put an orchestra together of West Germans and East Germans and they performed that, and this was a recording of that. And at the time Bernstein was dying, and that's a long symphony, as you know. One of the cameras was facing toward the orchestra, but one of the cameras was on Bernstein, and you could see him put every last ounce of energy and sweat and tears into that, and of course it ends in this magnificent crescendo. I wanted to show that to Jack because one, here's a Jewish conductor, here's the Wall, here's Reagan, "Tear down this wall," here's the encapsulation of his belief in freedom and liberation and all of that all kind of come together. I said, "Jack, Bernstein at this point is dying and he's giving his last, best into this magnificent performance," and I wanted him to draw the analogy that

"you've given your last best, you've fought the fight, all the way to the end." I know that really moved him. So that's a great memory.

Kondracke: Did he have anything to say about it?

Coats: No. I could see he was very moved, I could see it had a tremendous impact on him and I could see that he made the analogy and so forth and so on, was grateful, thanks and all that.

Kondracke: So do you regard yourself as a bleeding heart conservative too, and did he make you one?

Coats: He influenced me there also. I don't know if I, I would always tease Jack about being a bleeding heart conservative, he was always persuasive in that, but when I did get into the Senate early on, I put a major project together which was labeled "The Project for American Renewal," some conservatives would define as a bleeding heart conservative program, because it was essentially, recognized some of the dysfunctions that exist in society but acknowledging the limitations on government to solve all these, how can we energize the civil society. It had a whole bunch of demonstration projects and grants for things and so forth. So whether it was Catholic Charities or whether it was Jewish synagogue outreach programs or whether it was Christian soup kitchens or whatever, we identified a whole range of these things. Interestingly enough, [Michael J.] Mike Gerson was very instrumental in putting all that together, who then went on to be Jack's speechwriter. You ought to talk to Mike Gerson. I hope he's on your list, because Mike can write these magnificent speeches. You've read his columns and so forth. And he said Jack could never get more

than three sentences into his speech before Jack was off on his mantra on, his story, you know. But Mike's got some good stories along that line. At the convention in San Diego, when Kemp was named vice president, was electric. All of a sudden a moribund "How are we going to go forward? Is this [Robert J. "Bob"] Dole the right guy?" Et cetera, et cetera. Kemp energized, the way Sarah [L.] Palin energized for [John S.] McCain [III]. Interestingly enough that both came short, but same level of spark, a catalyst to just energize the conservatives when Kemp was selected. And Kemp was a huge [Winston] Churchill fan, as I am. I don't know if you remember the part when Churchill is brought back into the admiralty after all the wandering years out there outside of government, and the guard asks Churchill, "What should I tell the people? Tell them Winston's back?" We came back from the convention, Jack came to address a meeting of the House and Senate to lots of applause and so forth, and on the way up he saw me standing there and he said "Tell them Jack is back." [laughter]

Kondracke: In those years when you were both in the House, well, you were there when he was already leader, right?

Coats: He became leader the year I came in, so I voted him, I was one of the ones who helped vote him into leadership.

Kondracke: Just going back to Chowder and Marching, in his pre-leadership days, and when he started getting into tax policy, my understanding is that senior Republicans resented that he was getting into tax policy and gave him a lot of trouble in Chowder and Marching. So when he's now a leader, despite the fact that he's violating the rules, was there more respect among those people?

Coats: Well I think we all had a grudging respect for Jack just because of his persistence and his personality and the kind of person that he was and his constant encouragement for adapting to the ideas that he was promoting. But by the same token, there were always people that were resenting the fact that Jack was sort of invading their territory or getting the credit in issues they wanted to pursue. My favorite story there, and Jack tells this, you've probably been told by others, when he was Cabinet member the Cabinet was meeting, and immediately Jack interjected himself with I guess what Reagan would do is go around the table. Jack would interject himself in some way in virtually every presentation that every Cabinet member made. Jack says, "[James A. 'Jim'] Baker interrupted. He said 'Kemp, you are not Secretary of Commerce, you are not Secretary of State, you are not Secretary of Defense, you are not Secretary of the Treasury, so will you please shut the - - - up. You are the blankety blank Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.'" [laughs]

Kondracke: I hadn't heard that story.

Coats: Jack tells it very, very well. And Baker, I guess was just furious with him. And of course typical Jack, Jack was up afterwards, "Jim, what was that all about? I'm just trying to make some points here and there." Baker turned, I guess, turned his back and walked away from him. They eventually reconciled. But Joanne and Susan were very close friends, Susan Baker.

Kondracke: Were you ever in a group with the Bakers as well?

Coats: With Jack? I'm just trying to think. Probably events, but a small group, no, not that I can recall.

Kondracke: During the era at the beginning of, when Kemp-Roth [tax bill] was becoming national policy, it was getting watered down and stuff, do you remember Jack, the byplay between Jack and the White House? And [David A. "Dave"] Stockman?

Coats: Boy, that goes back 30 years. Jack was always pushing at the edges. I knew that byplay was there, and Jack was always pushing at the edges. It really started out as Roth-Kemp, but it quickly turned to Kemp-Roth, which is not surprising. [laughter]

Kondracke: Were you involved in the '86 tax reform?

Coats: Yes. I was pushing very hard for child tax credit. I guess that comes out of the bleeding heart. I'm the one that went to Jack and I think convinced him to take up that and go to Reagan to get that in. I remember Jack working with me on that, talking to Reagan and so forth. I remember when he came back and said, "Reagan's going to do it." That was the first introduction of the child tax credit.

Kondracke: Were you ever with Reagan and Kemp at the same time, and have any notion of what their relationship was like?

Coats: Not enough to really feel comfortable defining what that relationship was. I'm sure there are others that have a much better—

Kondracke: Were you Conservative Opportunity Society?

Coats: Yes, original member.

Kondracke: And so were you making the one-minutes?

Coats: I wasn't nearly as active as probably [Newton L.] Newt [Gingrich] would have liked me to be. I started getting a little bit nervous about Newt's methods. I described it once, I said, and so I left after a few months. I dropped out. People asked me "Why did you leave?" I said, "Well, two reasons. One: every morning, every time we met, Newt would come in with five new ideas, and we had yet to execute the five new ideas that he wanted us to be engaged in last week. I said, "So it's always changing," and I think that characterizes Newt. Too many new ideas popping up all the time. And I said, "The second thing was I sort of got the feeling like what Newt was asking us to do, it would be like walking into a meeting and Newt would take a grenade, pull the pin, hand it to you and say 'Roll this under [James C.] Jim Wright [Jr.]'s door.'" It's just not my style. I said, "Okay. I understand, you're a revolutionary, you want to change things here, and maybe this is what it takes. I'm not the right guy to do that." Their two styles were very different. They were both idea people, they both were effective communicators, but their style of execution was different. I would call Jack's just persistent persuasion, and Newt's was persistent challenge. Jack would work at you until you agreed, and Newt would kind of lay it on the line, you're with us or you're against us, here's the challenge.

Kondracke: How did Jack relate to Newt in those days? Because Newt was part of the gang, wasn't he? The Kemp gang?

Coats: Newt? Yes, but Newt was also trying to do his own thing, and that was the Conservative Opportunity Society, which Jack was not engaged in, so it was like two forces, basically working on a lot of the same ideas, but Jack really wasn't a throw the leadership out, take down the leaders. He was very respectful of [Robert H.] Bob Michel, for instance, even though Bob was not the kind of personality and leader that would have been as aggressive as Jack would have liked, but he always respected Bob. Bob was a member of C and M too. Newt I think probably said unless we change leadership, both places, "I'm the one that should replace Bob, I'm the one that's going to get rid of Jim Wright." That's not Jack.

Kondracke: Were you also one of the Amigos when Jack was at HUD in the nineties?

Coats: On the fringe of that, but no, I wasn't one of the Amigos. [Cornelius H. M.] Connie Mack [III] was and [John V.] Vin Weber, of course, and so forth, but no, I had moved on to the Senate and they were still in the House.

Kondracke: But you were pals, with Kemp.

Coats: Yes, very much so, but as much for personal family reasons, maybe more than professional at that point, once I went to the Senate.

Kondracke: How frustrated was he?

Coats: If he was frustrated, he wouldn't let you know it, and he didn't let me know it. I'm amazed. I think one of the toughest Cabinet jobs in the government is director of HUD. Jack, like everything else, he threw himself into that. He would go down and eat lunch with the employees, he would walk the halls, he was full of ideas, he hired good people, came up with a lot of innovative things. Threw himself into it, so I think by far he's the most HUD secretary probably ever, the most engaged ever. He took it very, very seriously. All through the rest of his life he would think of himself not only as a former member of Congress but as secretary of HUD.

Kondracke: You think that he had any lasting effect on either the Republican Party or the conservative movement?

Coats: Well, the movement has changed since Jack left the scene, and there are certainly elements of the movement now that Jack would not have embraced.

Kondracke: Such as?

Coats: The departure from, quote, the compassionate conservative issues. That is not on most of the agenda of the conservative movement; it's all fiscal. I think an area where Jack and I didn't see, Jack was always, Jack was never a budget guy. I always felt that we had to have a combination of tax measures and budget measures in order to get to a balanced budget, and Jack would always insist that no, it's all on the tax side, rising tide lifts all boats, supply-side economics, etc. etc. So I always had a caveat to that, and I was amazed, and I think it was because of our personal relationship and

the family relationship that Jack didn't push me too hard. We had some debates, some talks about it, but he didn't push me too hard on that.

Kondracke: Are there any Kemp Republicans left?

Coats: I think so. Those that think the way out of all this is on the tax side and on the growth side and on the stimulus through tax policy, that this is the best way to grow the economy. Yes, they're there. How much they would attribute that to Kemp I don't know, but I think they would a lot. Paul [D.] Ryan is a Kemp guy. He's now come down on the budget side much more on the fiscal side much more than on the tax side.

Kondracke: The circumstances of the national economy are totally different.

Coats: They are totally different.

Kondracke: Debt wasn't the problem, although lots of people thought deficits were the big problem in those days, but stagflation was a bigger threat, I guess, in those days.

Coats: Yes it was, it was.

Kondracke: So it's hard to know what Jack would be advocating now. Probably tax cuts, though, right?

Coats: Definitely tax cuts, retaining, at least, the [George W.] Bush tax cuts, for sure. And more. He'd be all over the corporate tax issue, for sure.

Kondracke: Tax reform.

Coats: Tax reform, tax reform, like '86, the role he played in '86 with [William W. "Bill"] Bradley and Reagan.

Kondracke: Right. So you said that besides admiring him and loving him and all that, that you were frustrated with him at times. So what were you frustrated with him about?

Coats: Jack was not a good listener. He was so intent on persuading you, that his view was the most important thing to talk about, to discuss, to debate. He really wasn't open to someone else's questions or other view, and sometimes, I think, kind of hypersensitive to anybody who would question that. I don't know if I should tell this story or not, but it's been told.

Kondracke: Tell it.

Coats: You should give Connie Mack, is Connie Mack on your list?

Kondracke: Yes, but—

Coats: He's an Amigo. Tell Connie Mack to tell you the story about Priscilla and Jack Kemp, okay?

Kondracke: Okay.

Coats: Okay? I won't tell, but you've got to hear that story.

Kondracke: Okay. I'll ask him. Are there any other stories that you've got on the frustration line?

Coats: On the frustration side? When I was a pastor [phonetic], we were together in France because we wanted to go to Normandy. And so we were having dinner at a very nice place, I think it was Ambassador [Clifford M.] Sobol, maybe Ambassador [Craig R.] Stapleton and myself and our wives, and Jack and Joanne. Oh, no, it was the [Stuart A. and Wilma] Bernsteins, I think, Bernsteins, Sobols, Coats, Kemps, that's who it was. We were in France, we were staying in a lovely place. We had a private dinner. It was right at the time of Iraq. Iraq was building. And we got into this heated argument at the table, to the point where it was getting fairly raucous, because Jack thought we were making a big mistake going into Iraq. The three of us were appointed ambassadors, there to defend the President, carry the story, and so forth and so on, and Jack just wouldn't yield on that. It got very boisterous and very loud, and almost embarrassing, but it showed the passion that, I mean once Jack picked a position—

Kondracke: When Jack got passionate like that, what kind of language did he use?

Coats: Well, the wives were there. [laughs] Joanne's impact on Jack is enormous, as you know.

Kondracke: Talk about that. Kept him civil?

Coats: Very much so. Yes, very much a moderating influence.

Kondracke: So when she wasn't there, what was his language like?

Coats: Well, I tell you, around me, I think he respected my commitment to my faith, so I can't say what it was like when he was with others, but when he was with me, he always was temperate.

Kondracke: Were you involved in his '88 campaign?

Coats: Yes. I campaigned for him up in New Hampshire. I remember they rented a plane and I think they were operating on limited money and so forth, and about 15 or 16 of us piled into this plane, it was something out of World War II. I think they resurrected it off some scrap yard or something like that, some air surface. And we went in the dead of winter, you know, it's January in New Hampshire. So we went up there and we all spread out and went door-to-door and did a whole bunch of things. We finally got back on the plane only to find that the heater malfunctioned. There was nothing but metal, sitting on metal seats, metal on the floor of the airplane. I've never been colder in my life. Henry [J.] Hyde was with us and some others, Vin Weber and so forth. When we landed we couldn't move our legs. They were frozen from here down. Of course Henry had a lot of girth, so I remember it was a huge effort for him to get off that plane. But it was all for the cause.

Kondracke: Did being for Kemp help you or hurt you in Indiana?

Coats: Oh, it helped, it helped. He was well-known, he was a force, he was a voice of conservatism, he was the star football quarterback, a compelling story. I think the combination of that and his political was very captivating for people, so it added an aura about him with the two big championship rings on his fingers and the stories that he would tell and so forth, gave him a, you know America's in love with famous athletes. They're not in love with politicians anymore, but some people are drawn to them, so Jack was a two-fer on that.

Kondracke: Do you think he ever had a prayer in '88 against [George H.W.] Bush?

Coats: I thought he did initially, starting out, but it's like the system just, he couldn't break into the system. The Bush machine was just too extensive, too well funded.

Kondracke: Do you think he performed as well as he could have?

Coats: After New Hampshire, he called a bunch of us together to get our opinions on whether he ought to continue on, and I guess I turned out to be the skunk at the picnic because I thought the handwriting was on the wall and they were short of money and so forth. Jack had already decided that he was going to go on. I don't know why he called us together but he had already decided that he was going to do this and wired it with some people. I never did quite figure out why he felt that was necessary or what the thinking was, rationale was behind that. For me I thought it was obvious. I think under the circumstances he did what he could. I know that he saw the vice

presidential selection as a moment of potential redemption, and I think he added a lot to the Dole campaign, but the big disappointment was the debate. There was so much emphasis put on what this could potentially be a game changer, and Jack was the person that really needed to take it to Gore. What am I thinking of here?

Kondracke: Vice president.

Coats: Where are we? It's '96, he was vice president, yes, '96. Yes, Gore.

Kondracke: Were you down there in Florida?

Coats: No. I was campaigning in it, but I know that Judd [A.] Greg was playing the role of Gore in getting Jack ready, and I remember calling Judd, and said, because I knew Jack's propensity to slip back into not being an attack dog. Another big difference between Jack and Newt Gingrich. Newt's a pit bull and Jack's, I'm not sure what breed here. But in any event I think at that point we probably put too much expectation on Jack really scoring points against Clinton and Gore, and in my opinion Jack punted in that debate. Halfway through, I was in, I cut my campaigning short and I was in a hotel deliberately to watch the debate. Halfway through I called Judd Gregg, I said, "What happened?" Earlier I called him, I said, "Is Jack ready? Is he going to do this, this and this?" And he said "Jack's ready. He's got it." I called him halfway through and I said, "What happened?" He said, "He went totally off script." And so for whatever reason he did not want to attack Gore. There's speculation out there as to why, but I don't try to go there. It wasn't in him to show a mean streak. It

wasn't in him to be seen as someone personally going after someone. Again maybe it had to do with that Christian Science mentality or whatever. "This is a good person, and it might appear that what I say is characterizing him is less than a good person." Maybe that's what—

Kondracke: So you don't think it was, it was his maintaining his image as a nice guy?

Coats: Yes. And I happen to know Bob Dole was very upset, very upset that Jack didn't do what he wanted his vice president to do. Dole couldn't do it because he was quote the hatchet man. The last thing he wanted to do was reinforce that image, and so he needed somebody to be that person, who would be confrontational and stick it to the other side and fully expected that Jack would do that, and then when he didn't I know Dole was bitterly disappointed over that, and it affected their relationship post-campaign.

Kondracke: They had a bad relationship going way back.

Coats: They had a challenging relationship going all the way back, yes.

Kondracke: And so Dole was talked into picking Kemp, right?

Coats: Yes, I think the people around Dole basically said "This is what you've got to do." I mean it's not unlike a Kennedy-Johnson. Yes, he saw Dole as part of the problem. A House member looking at the Senate leader, not someone, someone making the trains run but not bringing the issues forward.

Kondracke: Also root canal, root canal economics.

Coats: Well yes, yes, that was a fairly harsh race.

Kondracke: He said something about Bob Dole's library burned down with all of two books, or something like that.

Coats: Yes, that's right. I forgot those. That's not characteristic so much of Jack, but yes. I think it started off great. The Doles and the Kemps were on the trail together and all that. Everything changed at that debate.

Kondracke: Did they ever patch it up?

Coats: I don't know that they ever, no, I don't think they did. They may have in private, but neither one of them seemed to indicate, I mean Jack was "Hey, you know, I did the best I could and I don't hold anything against Bob Dole. I don't know why he doesn't talk to me or why he doesn't invite me to this or that or whatever," so I guess that maybe they never patched it up.

Kondracke: Some people say that Jack Kemp was a very difficult person to get to know intimately, but you sound like you were an exception to that rule.

Coats: I think I was an exception to that rule at the end. I think what you said is true. He certainly had a protective shield around him, his own protective shield. Frankly I think our two wives shared

everything, so even though Jack never mentioned it, I think he knew that what had been shared probably I knew. But he also knew that I accepted him and loved him even though I didn't agree with a lot of things that I had heard about or knew about.

Kondracke: What do you think his place in history is?

Coats: Well, he certainly made his mark. I'm sure he wished he had made a larger mark. But I think there is a place in history. For conservatives 1980 is still a shining moment, and we replay that video a lot. There's still a lot of yearning for the Reagan days, and Kemp was very much a part of that. For young people coming in, I don't know if Kemp means that much to them, so I don't know how penetrating and lasting his legacy is going to be relative to policy. But for those of us who were there at the time, it's lasting for us as long as we live.

Kondracke: Is there anything else?

Coats: We love to get together and tell stories about Jack. Everybody's got their experiences about Jack. That's why when you talk to Connie Mack, just say "Tell me the Priscilla, his wife, Coats said I should ask you about the Priscilla story."

Kondracke: Okay, I definitely will.

Coats: It really characterizes, I don't know, it just kind of says a lot.

Kondracke: Okay. Anything else you think we haven't covered?

Coats: Let me just look at my notes.

Kondracke: Driving stories. He was famously manic behind the wheel. Any of those stories?

Coats: You were always looking for a way to get to Jack's house without riding with Jack, because he multi-tasked in the car, I mean multitasks everything, he's always got four or five different things going on. And paying attention to the road is the last on the list.

Kondracke: And speeding too.

Coats: Moving along, yes, moving along at quite a pace. Let's see here. I tried to write down some things. I've covered most of these here. Baker. Yes, I don't see anything, any story—

Kondracke: One area that we didn't cover, and that is race.

Coats: Yes. To most conservatives Jack had an inordinate preoccupation with the African-American community, believing that he could convert them to the Republican side of the political spectrum, and most of the others believing that while that would be a good thing, it's not possible. I think a lot of people thought Jack was just, I mean I think they admired him for what he was trying to do, but they didn't have much confidence that it would make any difference.

Kondracke: Do you think he would have been a good president if he'd ever gotten elected?

Coats: He would have been an exciting president. I think you can only measure good or bad after a presidency, because events happen that I think define what a president is. It did for Truman and it certainly did for Clinton and it has now for Obama. It did for Bush, 9/11, it defined his presidency. And this economy, it defined Carter's and it may be defining Obama's. I think it's hard to assess whether or not someone, the talents and the skills and the things that he brought, who knows how that would have worked out given the unexpected. It just seems like in most presidencies there's the unexpected.

Kondracke: Why was he against the Iraq War?

Coats: He essentially thought it was, he was always very skeptical about the weapons of mass destruction characterization, and to many of us he seemed sympathetic to Saddam Hussein and sympathetic to the Iraqis. He thought that they were being mischaracterized, that we were missing something there. And that's what the heated debate and argument was about in France. We had a different view of Saddam Hussein and a different view of Iraq. As I said there were three ambassadors there, selected by George Bush, and we were carrying his water.

Kondracke: What did he think about George Bush in general, the Bush Administration?

Coats: He certainly applauded the position on the tax cuts, he, like before, wasn't concerned about the debt and deficit, and he really thought Bush was too aggressive on the security front.

Kondracke: Even though it was his pal [Richard B.] Dick Cheney who was—

Coats: Jack was never hesitant to pick up the phone and call Dick Cheney or [Donald H.] Don Rumsfeld or any of those people and basically say, "I don't agree with you. You're wrong, you're seeing this wrong." I don't know if he did that, but knowing Jack, yes, he did. He would call Rumsfeld, he would have called Cheney. "Dick, I think you're on the wrong track here. What are you doing? This is not how I see it." I think he felt very free to do that.

Kondracke: Any last thoughts?

Coats: Well, I think family was very, very important to Jack, very, very important. He was a good father. Freedom. Family and freedom and the gold standard, defined Jack Kemp. [laughter]

Kondracke: Which he never got anywhere with.

Coats: Which he never got anywhere with. That's where the Priscilla Mack story comes in. I wish I could tell you that because I think it's such a great story, but you should hear from the source.

Kondracke: Okay.

Coats: And if they don't tell you, come back to me and I'll share it with you, maybe off the record.

Kondracke: Thank you, Senator Coats.

Coats: You're welcome.