

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
MICHELLE K. VAN CLEAVE

February 3, 2012

Interviewer
Morton Kondracke

JACK KEMP FOUNDATION
WASHINGTON, DC

Morton Kondracke: This is a Jack Kemp oral history project interview with Michelle Van Cleave, who was Jack Kemp's foreign policy and defense aide. We're doing this interview at her home on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Today is February 3, 2012 and I'm Morton Kondracke. Thank you so much for doing this.

Michelle Van Cleave: Mort, it's so nice to have you here, you and Brien [R. Williams] both.

Kondracke: What do you think Jack Kemp's signal contributions to foreign policy were?

Van Cleave: He was a champion for spreading freedom and democracy to the world. He stood for the American idea as the finest idea in human history, and that all people everywhere should have the opportunity to aspire to the liberties that we enjoy in this land. That was his banner under which so much that he did was fit.

Kondracke: What do you think he got accomplished to further that end?

Van Cleave: I think that he ended up being an important asset for President [Ronald W.] Reagan to bring to fruition the objectives of the Reagan Revolution as they pertained to national security and foreign policy. He is so well known for the work that he did on the economic side of the ledger, but in fact, if you look at the record, most of his major committee assignments and his political assignments at the Convention in '80 and '84 were in the defense and foreign policy

arena. So he became a thoughtful and passionate spokesman for peace through strength, for exporting the American idea, for the Reagan doctrine to oppose Soviet expansionism, for a realistic position on arms control. He had very thoroughly and well-reasoned and fiercely advocated views in all of these areas. So as a spokesman, as a political leader, as a thought leader, a lot of what he did was directed at advancing those themes and those enduring interests of the United States. He also had a legislative role within the Congress where he had responsibility as the ranking member on the Foreign Operations subcommittee [of the House Committee on Appropriations] for overseeing the U.S. foreign assistance budget, and that subcommittee became and remains to this day the leading forum within the House for debating and discussing foreign policy issues. You would say, "Well, isn't that really the Foreign Affairs Committee? I mean that is their job, that is their jurisdiction." And that is very true, except for the fact that we haven't had a foreign authorization bill since '85, that was the last one and there were precious few before that in the eighties. The '85 may have been the only one we had back then. So the Foreign Ops subcommittee, which does all the appropriating, became where the rubber meets the road on real foreign policy issues. So Jack had the responsibility for that too.

Kondracke: Free associate. What are your standout experiences working for Jack Kemp. You can just talk as long as you want.

Van Cleave: Well, how long have we got? That's obviously the immediate question. His energy and passion. It was always a stretch just keeping up with him, and I mean that physically and chasing him down the hall trying to work in the last-minute thoughts and

comments and recommendations as he was racing off to the next meeting. It was the intellectual rigor. I think I said before in the larger staff symposium that we had that my first meeting with him, my interview with him, my interview for the job consisted of him asking me a barrage of rapid-fire questions that I had to answer.

Kondracke: Like what?

Van Cleave: Like what should we be doing about the SALT II [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks] agreement? What do you think about [Jonas M.] Savimbi? What position should we be taking on the Salvadoran military assistance? What about the expansion of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]? What are your views on Israel? He would ask bam, bam, bam, bam, bam and give me a moment or two to answer before going on to the next one. So being able to be quick and also comprehensive in your knowledge and interest and understanding was important to him, because he was always moving from one thing to the next. And he had to have staff that would be willing to keep up with him. So that was always a stretch, keeping up with him.

Kondracke: How long did that first interview last?

Van Cleave: I don't know. It was less than half an hour, as I recall.

Kondracke: You covered the world.

Van Cleave: Yes, we covered the world. It was on, and I went back and checked the record on this, it was on Lincoln's birthday, February 12 of 1981.

Kondracke: You obviously passed muster, but what did he say to you about hiring you?

Van Cleave: I think, you know I don't remember. Honestly I don't remember whether he offered me the job on the spot. I don't think so, because then I would have been pressed to answer him on the spot and I had other job offers also on the Hill. And I remember that I had one from him, I had one from the Judiciary Committee in the Senate and those were the two that I was most interested in, and I ended up consulting with friends before deciding and calling Jack back and saying yes, and it was the best decision I've ever made.

Kondracke: Why did you decide on him?

Van Cleave: Because he was such an important leader within the Republican Party. He was a force, he was going to be someone who would make things happen. I was in Washington, D.C. because I was very cause-oriented on national security issues. I had come here with the Reagan campaign, I deeply believed in what President Reagan wanted to accomplish, and Jack was an ideal fit for me. I think that I didn't realize how ideal a fit until after I'd been in the job for a while, but I came to believe I had the best job on Capitol Hill ever, for anyone in the national security business. Why? Because he was in the leadership. What we did was significant to Republicans throughout the House. He was the chairman of the Republican Conference, so I

was able to do a lot of work more broadly for all the Republicans in the House. I was able to work for him, and on the issues of the Foreign Operations subcommittee and the Budget Committee, which were his two major assignments. So substantively digging into the substance of all that it was a rich opportunity for learning for me, for really doing good and dealing with all kinds of different people across this Washington community and into the hinterlands of Buffalo [New York]. I shouldn't call it the hinterlands of Buffalo, but to this day I've never been there I'm sad to say. But also it was that he was someone who was a national figure and it was important. The work we did for him was important because he was a spokesman that engendered a lot of public following and interest, and I always felt that the most important thing I could ever do for him in this rapid-fire response that he always wanted was to be honest when I didn't know the answer. And I always felt that it was important to say, "Jack, I don't know. I'll find out." And I learned that very quickly, that he was relying on me, that he came to trust me a great deal. So I had to be sure that when I gave him information that he wasn't going to walk out the door and say something that wouldn't be right or was unfounded or it was mistaken, and it would be my fault. That would have repercussions beyond my own personal stake in it. This was Jack Kemp. This was Jack Kemp speaking, so as a staffer I felt a huge obligation to get things right.

Kondracke: Sounds like a lot of work.

Van Cleave: It was great fun and a lot of work, yes.

Kondracke: So the day was how long?

Van Cleave: Jack did not get in early, thankfully, because I'm not an early person either, except when we had conferences in the morning. Republican Conference meetings were at 8:00 am, so if he had to be in for a conference that was an early start. But going late, we would go late like gangbusters all the time. If the House is in session it's a standard rule that if your issues are on the floor, those are the ones being debated, then you stick around. In your issues this meant if anything in foreign policy or defense-related was being debated on the floor, whether or not Jack was personally engaged in the debate in the evening, I still had to stick around. So for staff the late hours are pretty common. And when your boss ends up speaking and his comments are becoming a part of the *Congressional Record* and a part of the enduring history of the House, you've got to get a hold of those transcripts before they're put to bed, and do all the editing that needs to get done. And if you've ever had to edit lengthy people going on and on and on, and I'm smiling at Brien right now because I am sympathetic for all the work he has to do on these oral history interviews, but it's a lot of work to do that.

Kondracke: Did Jack go on and on and on and on on the floor as well as in campaign speeches and so on?

Van Cleave: Yes, yes. He was the same man whether he was in the House well or in front of 1,000 people or on TV or in his own living room. I think that his exuberance was something that became a way in which he expressed himself. When he cared about something, when he was passionate about something, one adjective was never enough.

Kondracke: How well did you get to know him personally?

Van Cleave: Personally he made sure that all of the staff was included in parties that he would have from time to time at his house. I met all of his kids at a young age. I remember going to speak at Jimmy Kemp's grammar school history class because Jack asked me to do that. So, personally I met the family and I certainly came to know Joanne [Kemp] well. We traveled together. I went with the Kemps, both of them, to Russia in 1983, and so traveling together you get to know one another personally as well. While I was working for him I knew a little bit and came to know a little bit about his family, but it was later after leaving his staff and over the years that I kept in touch with him professionally, but also personally—"How are you doing," those kinds of conversations we would have from time to time. I always felt extremely grateful for the extent to which he supported me professionally and personally, and was always there if I needed a recommendation or an introduction to someone or whatever the case may be.

Kondracke: Was he concerned about your personal happiness, your personal life, that kind of thing?

Van Cleave: No. He never asked questions about that.

[pause]

Kondracke: You talked in the staff symposium about his unbounded optimism and enthusiasm. Did you ever figure out where that came from?

Van Cleave: It seemed just a natural part of his personality that I suspect was part of the reason why he was so successful on the playing field. He was a true jock in the wonderful sense of that word. He was always the man who was saying, "Yes we can. We can make it. We can go. We're going to go." Or "Come on, let's come on team!" So it was just a part of who he was. At least that was my take on it.

Kondracke: Does he compare with Ronald Reagan, the famous pony story, pile of manure—

Van Cleave: The sunny optimism? Yes, as far as his political outlook, but also his outlook on life. To be optimistic, to look to our best days being ahead of us, all of that is a big part of what made him a successful politician, to be sure, but I think also successful in life. We used to joke about it; we still do, his former staff, that somehow, even when everything looked darkest, when all of the indicators were that we were not going to get where we needed to go, where there were problems, Jack would always believe that it was all going to work out. And more times than not, it did, it really did.

Kondracke: Do you remember any specifics?

Van Cleave: The kinds of things where, they were small things, maybe not major things but small things, like events. Were we going to be ready on time? All these things seemed to just come together in ways that you would not have expected it to happen, where the odds

would have been against it. I think his son [James P.] Jimmy [Kemp] is a lot like that too.

Kondracke: Your duties. Did you write speeches?

Van Cleave: Yes. But I think my duties were sort of in three different baskets. My first set of duties were with respect to the Foreign Operations subcommittee, the work of the subcommittee looking at all the foreign assistance requests coming from the administration and reviewing them and preparing for hearings and marking up the bill and working the legislation through the subcommittee, full committee, House, conference, all of the legislative work that went around that foreign aid bill, and all the continuing resolutions, and all the reprogramming of money where President Reagan wanted to increase military assistance to El Salvador, for instance. The administration would come in with a reprogramming request taking money already appropriated in one area, requesting that it move to another area, and then all the mechanism of the Congress would have to be engaged to allow that to happen. So we had not only the big annual legislation, but supplemental legislation, these reprogrammings and other measures, special measures.

Kondracke: You knew line by line.

Van Cleave: Well, I was responsible for having reviewed line by line. Of all of the military and security-related parts of the foreign aid legislation. Now there was a huge amount of that foreign aid bill that was economic assistance, humanitarian assistance, development assistance. Somebody else's responsibility, not mine. But I did have

the defense and military assistance side of that package. So that meant dealing with all the embassies in town, and you'd get people coming in like the Zimbabwean defense minister would be in town and would want to meet with Jack or I would have to meet with him. You'd have lobbyists coming in representing the interests of Turkey, and then meetings with the Turks, and the Israelis, of course and all of the action around that. The Egyptians as well. Israel and Egypt between them had such a lion's share of the foreign aid bill, so we were engaged with them extensively and all the time. So a lot of diplomats would come through Jack's office or be funneled to me, having to deal with them, meet with them, go to their meetings, go to their embassies. That happened a great deal. Then there would be individual lobbyists who were interested in specific pieces of the bill, lobbyists representing interests like those of defense contractors that wanted to be able to consummate a particular kind of arms sale one way or the other, the AWACs [Airborne Warning and Control aircraft] sale to Saudi Arabia comes to mind. Dealing with those kinds of interests was a part of the subcommittee's work too.

Kondracke: How minutely did Jack Kemp get involved in that stuff.

Van Cleave: Well he wasn't the one sitting back there looking line by line, you know, "What are the numbers here?" He was a macro-picture guy. So he would for instance be out there fighting for particular reprogramming of money because President Reagan needed it to accomplish something and Jack would be stressing how important it was to be able to get that money.

Kondracke: So fighting in the sense of lobbying his colleagues, or making speeches or—

Van Cleave: All of the above. Making speeches, lobbying his colleagues, working legislative strategy, writing legislation, doing Dear Colleagues, you know, letters you would send around to say why a particular issue is important. Using the podium of the Conference, the Republican Conference, to discuss major issues, legislative strategy on those issues. The Republicans back in those days, of course, did not control the House. So how do you operate as a minority? How do you make deals with Senate colleagues? All of that was part of it, and then Jack, being a national figure, received a lot of press attention, so what about his appearances on TV? What about his interviews with media? With reporters who are interested in writing the story and he ends up being quoted, so preparing him for those kinds of speeches, interaction with reporters, media appearances, Q and A settings where you don't know what the question may be but he's got to be ready. All of that was another set of responsibilities that fell to the staff, depending on your issue area. So for me it was all the national security questions that he might get, the national security-related appearances, where I would draft speeches, they would be circulated to others in the office, they would go back to him for review. More than review. He would work on speeches and then half the time threw them out the window and just spoke from the heart instead of from a prepared text.

Kondracke: So you said that there were three baskets. One was the Foreign Ops [sub]committee and all of its legislative—

Van Cleave: And the second was his broader leadership role within the House, for instance the nuclear freeze was a huge issue, '82-'83. A lot of time, a lot of debate time was devoted to that on the House floor. There were demonstrations and meetings, one after the next. And Jack spent a fair amount of time dealing with his colleagues and providing leadership on that question.

Kondracke: Just for the record, the nuclear freeze movement basically wanted to allow the Soviet Union to maintain its SS-20s, medium-range missiles, in Europe without a response from our side. In other words to freeze all nuclear weapons as they were instead of our increasing the numbers. Is that—

Van Cleave: That is correct. The SS-20 was the precipitating issue. Our response to the SS-20, building intermediate nuclear force for deployment in Europe was the immediate issue, but I think if you go back and look at the freeze [movement], they really encompassed everything. There was strategic modernization that President Reagan had proposed when he first came to office, the MX [Missile-eXperimental] missile or some kind of mobile platform, ICBM [Intercontinental Ballistic missile] or other strategic modernization. I think the nuclear freeze group said, "Throw it all in the same basket. No more building a nuclear capability" was basically their viewpoint.

Kondracke: And obviously Jack was against it.

Van Cleave: Yes.

Kondracke: What did he do about the nuclear freeze? I know that was a big issue. Just make a lot of speeches? What all did he do?

Van Cleave: Yes. I mean in America, issues get debated and discussed across this great country and it is incumbent upon national elected leaders to be thoughtful spokesmen, to provide information and insight and education and their best viewpoint, and a lot of people would look to Jack Kemp to say, well what does Kemp think about this? It was something that was important. So if you've got a grassroots kind of movement, although it was a minority, but a vocal minority involved in the nuclear freeze. Their position is, "Well, let's stop building nuclear weapons." Well if you're an elected official and you're responsible for voting on the defense budget and you're a part of a co-equal branch of government, it's incumbent upon you to look at this and say why is it right, why is it not right, and if it's not, to speak out and to provide the information as to why it would be not in the interests of the United States in this case to halt our development of a nuclear capability. What the implications would be for us and for our allies across the globe. So yes, Jack was a major figure in American politics, and so what he said helped frame the debate in important ways. It's all a part of the democratic process.

Kondracke: Third basket?

Van Cleave: So the third basket really, that is the third basket. His leadership in the House, supporting him in his leadership in the House and interaction with the administration was basket two, but basket three was really his larger role on the scene of American politics and thought. He became of course a candidate for his party's nomination

for president in connection with the '88 campaign, so here was an opportunity to be working for someone who was a presidential candidate. [Who] Went out on the campaign trail, on the stump, and fought for his party's nomination.

Kondracke: David [R.] Obey, who was the chairman of the Foreign Ops subcommittee from '85 to '87, overlapping with Jack when he was ranking, says that Jack Kemp was really not very interested in the work of the committee, that he focused in heavily on reform of international financial institutions like the IMF [International Monetary Fund], but that he was really most of the time preparing the way for the '88 campaign and was interested in national issues. What's your response to that?

Van Cleave: I think that Jack did not spend a lot of his personal time on the regional standard form hearings that the subcommittee had. When Mr. Obey became chairman, I can't remember what year that was—

Kondracke: '85.

Van Cleave: '85? Okay. By '85, Jack had been the ranking member of that subcommittee for four years already. And the way the routine of the subcommittee works, the major hearings would be the Secretary of State, sometimes the Secretary of Defense, sometimes the Secretary of the Treasury, talking about their different areas, the Ambassador to the U.N.. So at that level, when you had Cabinet-level people show for the hearings, Jack was always there as the ranking member. But then the subcommittee would also invite in all the

assistant secretaries for the different regional areas, and so they would speak to the specific foreign aid issues within their region. And sometimes we would have representatives from the Defense Department, also at the regional level. The head of the Defense Security Assistance Agency would come talk about his agency, and when those sort of I'll call them second-tier hearings would happen, Jack would always appear for the opening gavel, but he may not stick around for the whole of the hearing. Mr. Obey, being the chairman, he couldn't leave until the last word was said, and sometimes, I have to confess, these things could put you to sleep. They could put you to sleep. And no, Jack didn't stick around for all of that. So Mr. Obey is right, from that perspective that he wasn't hanging on every word of the hearings of the subcommittee, that's true.

Kondracke: Obey was on the Committee, though, all the way through, wasn't he?

Van Cleave: He was, yes.

[pause]

Kondracke: Would Jack go beyond the floor during debate on a Foreign Ops bill, the foreign aid bill?

Van Cleave: Oh absolutely. And he was responsible for managing the legislation when it was on the floor, so he would be there the whole time for something like that.

Kondracke: And the story on Obey was that he never allowed a Republican alternative bill to reach the floor. Was that an issue between Jack and Obey?

Van Cleave: I think it was, although my recollection is probably not as sharp as others' might be on that. I remember Obey more because he was an outspoken advocate of a liberal point of view on a whole range of issues. So he was a good debater with Jack on a lot of different things.

Kondracke: How did they get along personally?

Van Cleave: I don't think that they were close personally. But I don't think that they were enemies either. I don't know who would be considered a Jack Kemp enemy. It's an odd thought. [laughs]

Kondracke: Did Jack have contempt or low regard for any of his adversaries? I mean there were some pretty dovey people around in those days, who sometimes sounded as if they were hostile to the whole of the United States, not just Reagan.

Van Cleave: Jack's response to someone like that would be to be more forceful in trying to recruit them. As a matter of fact from a staff position, it drove me crazy because he was spending a lot of time trying to engage with people where my attitude would have been forget about them. Let's go do something else. But his attitude was always that it was possible to reach anyone on anything when you knew you were right, if you could only find the right way in so that they would really understand what you were saying.

Kondracke: Do you remember any specifics?

Van Cleave: I'll have to think about that. Specifics are hard to recall.

Kondracke: Did he go on CODELs [Congressional Delegation travel] with Obey? Obey couldn't remember ever being on a—

Van Cleave: No, not that I recall. Jack didn't go on many CODELs at all.

Kondracke: Why?

Van Cleave: I think that when he traveled, which itself was not that frequent, he traveled for his own purposes rather than as part of a group.

Kondracke: By himself?

Van Cleave: By himself, with staff, with someone else that he might invite to go with him, but for a purpose that he would have decided he needs to go somewhere to see someone and he would go do that. The CODEL model is much more of a broad, fact-finding kind of trip where the whole of the subcommittee, for example, goes off to visit with you-name-it. It's more of a routine kind of trip. Jack's travels were rarely routine. It was purposeful.

Kondracke: So how often would he travel?

Van Cleave: He was traveling all the time, but whether it was abroad—

Kondracke: I mean abroad.

Van Cleave: Yes. Many of his trips abroad, okay, first of all there were several a year. Most of them I would not have gone with him because most of them would have been economic in orientation. He would go to Japan for reasons of Asia trade issues, for example. If that were to happen I would not go along. I can count the trips that I went on with him and they were all national security-related.

Kondracke: Count them.

Van Cleave: In '83 we went to Russia. It was then the Soviet Union. It was Jack's first trip to the Soviet Union ever. Joanne came along, as did Senator [William L. "Bill"] Armstrong and his wife. I remember we got to Moscow, we had been there probably less than 24 hours when Jack turned to me and said, "How long do we really need to stay here?" Because I think he found the place oppressive, and it was. Back then [Yuri V.] Andropov was the head of the Soviet Union. Jack did not meet Andropov, but did have meetings with the head of Gosplan [Soviet Union State Planning Committee], which is their bank, for instance. He met with a number of officials, I would have to go dig up the list, but mostly he met with Americans. He met with our ambassador in Moscow, he met with our councilor in then-Leningrad. He had a lot of meetings also with Soviet Jewry representatives there. And quite by accident one day, maybe the second day, we're there walking around Red Square, and who do we run into but Jack [J.]

Valenti. So we had a conversation with Jack Valenti in the middle of Red Square, which is the first time I remember seeing him. But the interesting thing about traveling with Jack in the Soviet Union was that he treated it like being anywhere else. So again we're in the Middle of Red Square and if you've been there you've seen, at least back then there were a lot of folks in uniform. Uniformed KGB [national security agency of the Soviet Union], security personnel, walking around Red Square, and I remember Jack going up to these guys, shaking their hands and chatting them up—we had a translator with us—chatting them up about what they do, and do they like ice hockey—"Oh, yeah!"—and do you know they started talking about ice hockey teams and establishing a kind of rapport. No problem at all. Same was true at an embassy party where there was a big, gruff guy, like out of Central Casting, whose name was Victor something. I don't remember his last name, a nice big long Russian name. And he was a very stern person, who was perhaps the most senior Russian at this gathering, and Jack checks out the room, starts working the room, goes up to this guy and says, "Hey Vic, how are you doing?" Throws his arm around Victor, who was completely nonplussed. I mean, what do you say to such a gregarious, outgoing American? That was Jack.

Kondracke: What other foreign trips do you remember?

Van Cleave: The biggest trip we took was in '86, at the beginning of his interest in exploring a presidential campaign. Yes, '86, '87, maybe it was '87, now that I think about it when we went to Germany, France, and Great Britain and Jack had meetings with the heads of state, except in France, he didn't meet the head of state in France. But he met with [Margaret H.] Thatcher, he met with [Helmut J.M.]

Kohl, he met with the defense ministers in those countries, the foreign ministers in all three countries. We also went to Geneva, where he met of our arms control delegation, had conversations with them. That would have been Senator [John G.] Tower at the time and [Henry F.] Hank Cooper was our ambassador to the Defense and Space Talks, so we had conversations with them. And this was his big tour where he was seriously regarded as a potential candidate for the presidency and received in that way. In these different meetings—we went to Berlin, he met with the Governing Mayor of Berlin—and in the different cities where we visited he also had events with American Chamber [of Commerce] representatives and with other business groups and other groups where he would make speeches. So it was a full-blown tour, two weeks in Western Europe. We took one other trip just to Germany, maybe it was later that year. Now my dates are a little bit confused. But this was a defense-related tour looking at the Fulda Gap and what the German lines of defenses were, American troop deployments in the area, so we met mostly with military personnel on that trip. Richard Billmire and I accompanied Jack on that trip, and I think Joanne was also along on that one, I'm not sure. John [W.] Buckley was along.

Kondracke: So there was press chasing you? John Buckley was his press secretary.

Van Cleave: I don't say that press was chasing us, but sometimes it's helpful to get press, so yes, John Buckley was his press secretary. And then Jack and I went with just a Defense Department escort to Guantanamo Bay. We went to Cuba, an American outpost in Cuba, which was not known for the things it's known for today. There were

no prisons at Gitmo at that time. But we went to Guantanamo to get a briefing on the situation as a U.S. encampment on the island of Cuba, to view the defense lines, people sometimes trying to come across. I remember that trip very well. But perhaps the most impressive part, now cycling back, was our being in Berlin, because when we were in Berlin the wall was still up, and it was a very impressive on-the-ground experience to be going through Checkpoint Charlie from the West into the East to have meetings with American personnel in the East, gain an appreciation of how horrific it was to have a city divided, to have people imprisoned, in essence, on one side, to have many people who had risked and many people who had lost their lives trying to cross over into freedom. These are indelibly poignant realizations. It's one thing to know that intellectually, it's another thing to see and touch it up close.

Kondracke: How did he react?

Van Cleave: I think that it was something where he felt very deeply reenergized in the positions that he was taking, that freedom needed to be on the march and to oppose Soviet imperialism and the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe. It's almost impossible to understand now how deep the Cold War drove our thinking and everything we did on national security, but it did, because there was a real struggle between totalitarianism on the one hand and freedom on the other, and all these calculations were made in the context of such high stakes.

Kondracke: Did he ever go to Central America?

Van Cleave: Yes, he did.

[interruption]

Kondracke: So tell me about his trips to Central America. Did you go?

Van Cleave: No, I did not go on the trip. However, [Oliver L.] Ollie North went on one of them.

Kondracke: Let's hear.

Van Cleave: So Ollie North was a very charming guy. I think he probably still is, although I haven't seen or heard from him in decades, but I think he and Jack sort of hit it off, because Ollie accompanied him on this one trip to Central America. They visited, I guess, all the places they were supposed to visit. I don't know, as again, I didn't go along on this particular trip, but I remember that Ollie had gotten a bunch of photos, or Jack had photos, so I had to take the photos over and sit down with Ollie North and go through, "Now, who's this person? And who's this person?" So we had accurate records, which I think was the first time that I met Ollie. That was an interesting trip. After that whenever Colonel North would call the office rather than dealing with the staff he would always ask just to talk with the Member, and I think he was able to work Members pretty well that way because he was a personable guy and got to know people directly and cut out the middleman.

Kondracke: Did they visit Contra camps?

Van Cleave: Oh, no, I don't think, well, I don't know. I don't recall where they went on that trip. I was in Central America myself but not with Jack.

Kondracke: And what other trips did you take with him?

Van Cleave: I think that was it, those four, as far as international trips are concerned.

Kondracke: There's one trip that seems to have been a circus, that Richard Billmire described and John Buckley were laughing about.

Van Cleave: This is the two weeks in Europe, the tour of the capitals.

Kondracke: Okay, so tell me what was so funny about that trip. They were talking about 'National Lampoon goes to Europe' or something like that.

Van Cleave: Well, as I recall, the fun started from the beginning because I think the first place we went was Berlin. We checked into the Kempinski Hotel, the whole of the delegation, which was then Jack, Joanne, his wife, and John [D.] Mueller, John Buckley, Richard Billmire, and myself. So we had, what's that, one, two, three, four, maybe five rooms at the Kempinski, nice big hotel back then, at least, in downtown Berlin. Jack has to give a speech like the morning after we arrive. It's work, work, work when you're on one of these trips because there are always public appearances or meetings that were prepped and advanced and all the substantive work done as well. So there's a speech, and John Mueller, who was the principal speech-

writer gets to the Kempinski Hotel and goes to plug in his laptop, which back in those days weighed a ton. It wasn't an easy thing to take a laptop; this was a major haul-it-around piece of equipment. He goes to plug in the laptop, and when he plugs it in, it blows out all the power at the Kempinski Hotel and several blocks around there, I think, in Berlin, and it took a while for the power to come back up. So that wasn't a real good start. I don't think we ever got press on that though. I don't know that the press ever knew that John was responsible for that. But it was just running from one appointment to the next. In Berlin, for instance, the meetings with the governing mayor and other officials in Berlin and then also with the head of the Military Liaison Mission in Berlin, which is American representative—back then we had exchanges with the East—and we had military personnel that could go into East Berlin and Russian personnel that could come into the West and it was kind of an exchange. Those were sensitive activities, and Jack wanted to get briefed on those activities, and did, while he was there, in addition to giving speeches and meeting with economic ministers and all of the things and then wham, out the door and you're on your way to the next meeting, wherever that might be. Maybe Bonn, probably Bonn, from there to Bonn. From there to Switzerland or from there to France and then London, so it's a bit of a blur, I think.

Kondracke: He went to East Germany and had an exchange with some apparatchik and asked him, "How can you do this?"

Van Cleave: Yes, I think, who was it who told that story? Maybe it was Billmire who told the story in [the] Congressional staff symposium about an exchange that he had, but I wasn't witness to it.

Kondracke: Okay. Who were Jack Kemp's principal influences on foreign policy? I mean Jude [T.] Wanniski is clearly his big influence in economics. Were there similar people

Van Cleave: Jeane [D.J.] Kirkpatrick, far-and-away, Jeane Kirkpatrick. He and Jeane talked all the time, and, of course, she was our ambassador to the U.N. during the Reagan administration. And he had just enormous respect for her, of course, as did President Reagan. So they talked quite a bit. He came to know and respect Richard [V.] Allen, who was the President's National Security adviser.

Kondracke: Not for long.

Van Cleave: But not for long, yes, that's right. The know-and-respect continued; the National Security service for President Reagan was short-lived.

Kondracke: Did they go back a ways?

Van Cleave: Politically they had known one another for quite a long time. Dick was Governor Reagan's lead in the campaign on all national security matters, and, of course, Jack was a surrogate for Governor Reagan on the campaign trail and also headed up the defense section of the platform. So he and Dick would have worked together on those kinds of issues back then. So, yes, they'd known one another for a while.

Kondracke: Would you describe Jack in present-day terms as a neo-con?

Van Cleave: No, you know I'm not comfortable that I can give a good definition as to what is a neo-con, because "neo" implies that you had to have been something before you were a "con," conservative, and I don't think that Jack was ever anything but conservative in his thinking and outlook in a classic small L liberal sense, a conservative on his political philosophy. So, no, I wouldn't call him a neo-con. Are there many similarities between his position and the neo-con position and did he talk with a lot of people who maybe self-identified as neo-cons? Absolutely, no question. Irving Kristol, Podoretz, Gertrude Himmelfarb, these were all people that he respected enormously and had many opportunities to work with.

Kondracke: We sort of know a lot about his famous meetings with his economic brain trust, but what about his foreign policy brain trust? How often would he get together with them and what kind of meetings would he have?

Van Cleave: He didn't have a little circle of people who were his foreign policy brain trust per se, but, as I said a minute ago, had regular conversations with Jeane Kirkpatrick

Kondracke: Did they go back a long way?

Van Cleave: I think she came into the picture because she got involved in the Reagan campaign, so it would have been dating from then—

Kondracke: She was a Democrat, she'd been a Democrat.

Van Cleave: She had been a Democrat, yes. So whether they knew one another before then I don't know. [William J.] Bill Schneider [Jr.], of course, had been my predecessor on the staff and Bill went on to be the associate director of OMB [Office of Management and Budget], so he had all the defense responsibilities in OMB, and then an under-secretary of State, and so he was frequently in Jack's office talking. He was a member of the Reagan administration with these responsibilities, but they engaged a great deal on issues, and I have to say, here's a little secret from the standpoint of how good staff operates. If you find people who can come in and brief the boss and give him good information and reinforce a line that you're urging him to take, then you do that as much as you possibly can. So I would frequently go in to Jack and say, "You know we really should call Bill and see what he thinks." And so we would, and he would and that's how you the staff looks after the boss.

Kondracke: So you were in cahoots with Bill Schneider—

Van Cleave: Absolutely, yes, in the best way possible.

Kondracke: to get points that the administration wanted to get across, and you would

Van Cleave: Oh, not necessarily what the administration wanted to get across, just for the good of the order the points might be. Because let's not forget, administrations, to include the Reagan

administration, are not monoliths of viewpoint. Within the Reagan administration, as in subsequent administrations where I have been honored to serve, there are currents of opinion and conflict and cabals even of different camps arguing for different policy directions, and this would be a constant background noise on most everything you can think of because all of these things are so important. So the tug and pull of policy formulation within the executive branch is an interesting study in how our constitutional and tripartite government works. Because the relationships between the legislative branch and the executive branch are not only at the point where legislation is handed off for a signature or not. It is not only through the formal channels, but also through the informal channels of interactions that happen at meetings and in phone calls and in discussions in the hallway and so many intersection points where people in the Congress are interacting with counterparts in the executive branch on a continuing basis.

Kondracke: Was Bill Schneider's primary responsibility over defense funding?

Van Cleave: When he was the OMB associate director yes, he had all defense and international accounts. And then he moved from that job to become the under-secretary for science security assistance and international issues, I'm not sure that's the exact title for that under-secretary position, but it's the one that has oceans, environment, IO [International Organizations], and all assistance matters. So a huge interlocutor from the Foreign Operations subcommittee perspective.

Kondracke: Just as an aside to this, how did he get along with David [A.] Stockman? David Stockman was fighting against big defense increases—

Van Cleave: Right.

Kondracke: and presumably Jack Kemp and Bill Schneider wanted those defense increases to go through, no?

Van Cleave: Yes. So I don't think that Bill was at OMB for that long. He moved very quickly over to the State Department.

Kondracke: Was Jack an ally of [Caspar W.] Cap Weinberger's in trying to get more money? Even though he wasn't on the Defense Appropriations Committee anymore, but—

Van Cleave: Right. I think he was an ally of—he was clearly an ally of wanting to hold the line on defense increases. Ronald Reagan came to office saying he was going to reverse the decline in American defenses, build up our strategic force capabilities, build SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative], which is something that came in later, it was a huge fight, of course, legislatively. Jack was a big champion of SDI. It became one of his major pillars in all of his stump speeches when he was running for president, to support the strategic defense capability of the United States. These were things that Weinberger advocated, these were also things that had arms control implications, which is to say in order to build SDI, one had to address the restrictions that were inherent in the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty against building defenses. So there you have a tailor-made conflict between the

Pentagon and the State Department: the Pentagon wanting to advance this strategic defense capability, the State Department adhering to arms control agreements, which is something that they do because they negotiate agreements, so trying to uphold them is something that State wanted to do. When you had those kinds of conflicts between the State Department on the one hand and the Defense Department on the other, then yes, Jack was a big ally of Cap Weinberger's. But that didn't translate into all issues. This is a very complicated world we live in, and so when it came to questions especially having to do with the Middle East and Israel, Cap Weinberger was not seen so much internally as an advocate for the state of Israel. Jack very much was, and so he would be critical of Cap on those kinds of issues, so it wasn't a partnership on all things, it was Jack taking a principled position wherever the chips may fall.

Kondracke: So if you were going to take a position on a foreign policy issue, would you generally speaking check with Jeane Kirkpatrick about what she thought? And who else might you consult with?

Van Cleave: On matters having to do with exporting democracy, on the moral dimension of foreign policy, Jack spoke with Michael Novak a lot about those things. I think that his view that economic freedom and political freedom were inseparable meant that a lot of his foreign policy was influenced by his views in thinking on economic policy and visa versa. So that sort of blended together. He read voraciously, so articles would inform him as much as anything, as much as anyone, on different issues, and he would call and talk with authors—

Kondracke: Did he have any favorites?

Van Cleave: Well he liked you, I think. [laughs] Did he have any favorites? He talked a lot with William [L.] Safire, I know they did. William Safire was a columnist. But I think I mentioned a minute ago from the neo-con perspective [Irving] Kristol, he talked a lot with Irving Kristol and [Norman [B.] Podhoretz and those folks. He would talk with [William F.] Bill Buckley [Jr.], from the very more conservative side. I think across the board from the conservative community he talked with a lot of people who were opinion leaders and thinkers.

Kondracke: Richard [N.] Perle?

Van Cleave: Yes, now Richard, of course, was an assistant secretary of Defense in the Reagan administration, so on arms control matters, definitely he would have spoken with Richard. And Fred [C.] Iklé, who was of course the under-secretary for policy at the Defense Department in the Reagan administration.

Kondracke: Elliot Abrams?

Van Cleave: Elliot was at the State Department then, so yes.

Kondracke: In charge of first International Organization Affairs and then, I believe—

Van Cleave: Human rights?

Kondracke: Latin America.

Van Cleave: Latin America.

Kondracke: It was IO first, I think, and then Latin America. The Reagan Doctrine. The Reagan Doctrine was not announced as a Reagan doctrine initially. It sort of developed and then I believe Charles Krauthammer tagged it as the Reagan Doctrine. Did Jack have the Reagan Doctrine in his bones before there was a Reagan Doctrine? That is to say that it was okay to help freedom fighters, for example.

Van Cleave: Yes. I think that's a fair statement. So President Reagan also had the Reagan Doctrine in his bones in that sense of the word. The concept that people who are struggling for their own liberties and freedom in the name of democracy should be supported was in his DNA. Whether it was in Third World environments like Central America or South Africa or in Eastern Europe, where the same cry went out to support Solidarity against Soviet oppression or the people of Czechoslovakia or the people of the Captive Nations, all of this was of a piece.

[phone interruption]

Kondracke: Reagan Doctrine.

Van Cleave: So the Reagan Doctrine was a moral doctrine, but it was also a carefully thought-through strategic position. It was one of the three parts of NSDD75 [National Security Decision Directives-75], which was the Reagan administration's strategy on how to deal with

the Soviet Union. Part one of that strategy was to oppose Soviet influence globally. So it was a practical strategic move, as well as a moral imperative. Those two things come together and no wonder it's called the Reagan Doctrine.

Kondracke: I know you weren't there then, but did Jack sort of uphold those principles during the Carter administration and during the Ford administration? Do you remember any history before you got there of—

Van Cleave: I'm going to say, "Probably yes." Some of this is reflected in the 1980 Republican platform where Jack would have had the lead on the defense part of that platform. But as you said, Mort, it wasn't called anything back then, so it's more of a generic view rather than a firm view. But if I'm recalling this correctly, I think it was the [James E. "Jimmy"] Carter administration, frankly, that began military assistance into El Salvador, at least, to try to oppose Russian influence there, and it was the [John F.] Kennedy administration to try to get the Russians out of Cuba and to support the Cuban people, and that didn't work. But the whole notion is really very American rather than just being the provenance of one president.

Kondracke: Did Jack believe, as Reagan did, that the Soviet Union could be defeated.

Van Cleave: I never heard him say that. I did hear him credit Reagan for having that vision where he himself personally did not have that vision. I recall him in an interview hearing him say that, "Can you believe that President Reagan saw that this was possible? That the

Soviet Union could be ended? I never believed that," said Jack. "But President Reagan did. He had the vision." Now whether he said that because he was giving kudos to President Reagan that he richly deserved and that he, Jack, genuinely didn't have that vision, I don't know.

Kondracke: Hardly anybody did.

Van Cleave: Hardly anyone did, yes, that's true.

Kondracke: Let's go area by area. On Central America, Jack was in favor of helping the government against the FMLN [Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front], the communist guerillas, right? What kind of fights did he get into in Congress over that that you might remember?

Van Cleave: Well, the fight over El Salvador was harsh from the opening salvos. My second day on the job was a hearing where Carter's ambassador to El Salvador, Robert [E.] White, was testifying because [Clarence D.] Doc Long wanted him to come in and explain about why we should be keeping out of El Salvador, you know, leave things alone and let them go in the direction that they will go in. And this was completely contrary to the new administration's perspective on El Salvador, we needed to be shoring up the government, providing military assistance to fight against guerillas. So the fight was engaged from the very beginning, and it was very serious arguments, but in the end even the Democrats in the House gave the new president the benefit of the doubt and supported the original tranches of military assistance going to El Salvador, as I recall. That honeymoon period a

little bit with a new president coming in is a time when I think all wise presidents know they have an opportunity to do things that might be more difficult to do later on in their terms.

Kondracke: But El Salvador was a very contentious issue, especially when the death squads were active and killed the archbishop and killed a bunch of nuns and all of that.

Van Cleave: Oh yes.

Kondracke: Now what kind of position did Jack take on all of that? Roberto D'aubuisson, for example.

Van Cleave: Right, to condemn the violence but not to move from proper condemnation of that to abandoning El Salvador's future. So Jack did not swerve from his support for military assistance going into El Salvador to stabilize the government in its fight against the guerillas. There were American forces deployed in Honduras, as I recall, to provide some kind of stabilization there. And there were refugee camps of people who were both fleeing the violence but also looking for safe harbor, so there was humanitarian support the United States provided to the region. But to stand back from that and say, "Look, strategically, what is happening here is that we're seeing different movements, bad things being exploited by the other side, but movements by Cuban-backed and ultimately Russian-backed forces in Central America to try to destabilize the region and turn it against the United States and against the West, and we're not going to let that happen." That was Reagan's perspective and that was Kemp's perspective.

Kondracke: There was a clique in Congress that honored D'aubuisson. As a matter of fact in 1984 he came to Washington. Faith [R.] Whittlesey, who was some sort of former ambassador—

Van Cleave: Ambassador to Austria.

Kondracke: Yes, sort of got a gang together to honor Alberto D'aubuisson. Now Kemp wouldn't have been part of that, would he?

Van Cleave: I don't recall that Jack was ever a part of that, no.

Kondracke: Do you remember whether he ever condemned D'aubuisson?

Van Cleave: I don't think so, no.

Kondracke: Because D'aubuisson was accused of death squad activity.

Van Cleave: Yes. There were accusations that were flying about a lot of different things. Do you recall whether that was ever proven one way or the other?

Kondracke: He was certainly never jailed for it, but. . . . Okay, the Contras. What was Jack's relationship with the Contras, and how did he proceed on the Contras?

Van Cleave: He was obviously in favor of all the support we could channel to the Contras. And he did meet with Adolfo Calero

[Portocarrero]. He was a great admirer of Adolfo Calero, who was the representative of the Contras' voice in Washington, DC.

Kondracke: Enrique Bermúdez?

Van Cleave: Oh you really are testing my memory, aren't you? I don't know whether he had any interaction with him. He may have. One of those things where I'd have to go back and check the files.

Kondracke: There were fights in Foreign Ops, I take it, about whether to give aid to the Contras.

Van Cleave: A little explanation is in order. The original program to support the Contras was an intelligence program, which is to say this was covert aid, covert assistance, approved through channels that would have taken the funding through the Intelligence Committee. And the appropriations would have come through the Defense subcommittee, not Foreign Ops, because Defense handled all intelligence-related programs. Later when the aid became overt, when it was direct assistance, then yes, then it would have come through the Foreign Operations subcommittee, but the secret aid? That went through the Intelligence Committees. We—the Foreign Operations subcommittee—did not get an opportunity to review that.

Kondracke: What happened when the Iran-Contra scandal broke? What was Jack's attitude?

Van Cleave: Jack publicly criticized the decision, I guess it was selling arms to Iran and also, if true, the extra-legal funneling of money to

the Contras. At both ends no one stood up and said anything that was done under Iran-Contra was done right or well. And Jack, like everybody else, was critical of that. But he also said, "But it is wrong to derive from that a position that says this president is not trustworthy," you know, he defended Reagan, "and it is also wrong to say that our overall policy to support the Contras is wrong because of the mistakes that these people have made." So he tried to put it in context. He tried to put it in context of the larger strategic issues of the United States and President Reagan's record. The Congress had voted to support the Contras, to provide aid to the Contras before it became known that this little back door dealing had gone on in extra-legally funneling aid to them. So the policy position the Congress had come around to the Reagan administration's policy objectives. That only got called into question when it was learned that Ollie North et al had been involved in doing this outside-of-constitutionally-approved channels.

Kondracke: Did you ever have a conversation with Jack about Ollie North and Ollie North's alleged involvement in all this, since they knew each other?

Van Cleave: They knew each other well. All that I remember about that was Jack one day saying, "Okay, so Ollie North is involved in this." And I looked at him. He said, "Remind me, how do we know Ollie North? He's one of your friends, right, Michelle?" I said, "No, Jack. Remember that guy who went with you on that trip to Central America where I wasn't there? That was Ollie." [laughs]

Kondracke: Did he defend Ollie?

Van Cleave: I don't remember him ever saying publicly on Ollie's behalf, or critically for that matter.

Kondracke: Is there anything else about Central America that you remember that is important?

Van Cleave: There was that whole [Henry A.] Kissinger Commission or something on Central America, where Jack served as one of the members, and they did a full-up review. It seems to me that a tried and true approach by most any administration to deal with a difficult problem is to set up a commission, so Jack was frequently on commissions. This one dealt with Central America. He served on that.

Kondracke: Did you staff it?

Van Cleave: No. It had its own staff. Well I staffed him, but the Commission had its own staff.

Kondracke: And did anything important happen? Do you remember anything memorable?

Van Cleave: Here you had Kissinger coming out with recommendations that we should continue to oppose Soviet influence in Central America, validating, in essence, the Reagan administration's approach.

Kondracke: One more thing. In 1984 a bunch of Democrats wrote a letter to [José] Daniel Ortega, the Dear Comandante letter,

recommending opening up the political environment in Nicaragua, and got blasted for it by [Newton L.] Newt Gingrich and [Robert S.] Bob Walker and some others. Do you remember whether Jack took a position on that?

Van Cleave: I don't remember specifically, but if I had to place my bets, he would have been with Gingrich and Walker on it. The Dear Comandante letter. I would think he would have been involved with that. Mort, I just don't remember.

Kondracke: Okay. South Africa, now here's a case where the Reagan administration was pursuing constructive engagement. Jack is a well-known integrationist, or pro-black person.

Van Cleave: A big tent Republican.

Kondracke: Well, more than that, somebody who had black friends, as a football player. Was he conflicted about Reagan policy on South Africa?

Van Cleave: As I recall the evolution on this, he originally supported Reagan's efforts on engagement with South Africa as the better way of trying to open up the political system there. But I think he later came around on the sanctions issue and ended up supporting the sanctions. I think there was a lot of internal discussion about that, and then, if my memory serves me, which is really not that reliable on this, but I think that the Reagan administration itself came forward with an initiative on South Africa in order to forestall legislative action that would have been more extreme.

Kondracke: That's correct. But Congress passed what you might call more extreme legislation. Reagan vetoed it, and Congress overrode the veto in 1986. Do you know how Jack voted on that?

Van Cleave: I would have to go back and check, but I suspect that he may have voted to override the veto. He may have been, I'd have to go check. That's an important question but I don't recall.

Kondracke: Because he denounced U.S. contacts with the ANC, the African National Congress.

Van Cleave: Oh, yes.

Kondracke: And called the ANC a terrorist organization.

Van Cleave: Yes, and then he denounced George [P.] Shultz for meeting with [Adelaide "Mama"] Tambo, right, or was that Angola?

Kondracke: No, that's right.

Van Cleave: ANC, he was ANC, yes. He denounced Shultz for doing that, as Shultz undermining the President's work on South Africa by meeting with this. . . . So any time there was a, if it's going to be Communist involvement, that's pretty clear. Jack would never have approved engagement with the ANC on anything because they had a pro-Soviet agenda, not in U.S. interests. Different question, his views on apartheid. He found it abhorrent.

Kondracke: Did he have any views on Nelson [R.] Mandela?

Van Cleave: Mandela was in jail back then, and I don't think we knew as much about Mandela then as we do now. I think subsequent to his release, and for all I know and this would have been long after I had left Jack's employ, he may have even met with Mandela. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that that was true.

Kondracke: Afghanistan. Did that money come through your subcommittee?

Van Cleave: No. No, the [FIM-92 missile] Stingers and all of that, the support for the Muhajadeen would not have come through the subcommittee, because again those were covert assistance, covert aid.

Kondracke: [Charles N.] Charlie Wilson was on Defense Approps.

Van Cleave: Charlie Wilson was on the Defense, and he was on the Foreign Ops subcommittee. He was on both. So while it didn't come through the subcommittee, Jack was still very outspoken on behalf of supporting the Muhajadeen in Afghanistan as part of the whole Reagan Doctrine theme of supporting freedom fighters. He gave a number of speeches supporting them, but never had legislative responsibility for that. Charlie did.

Kondracke: And I take it that he had no premonitions that the Muhajadeen would, or the Taliban would—

Van Cleave: Did anybody?

Kondracke: No, nobody's to blame for that. Well, somebody should be to blame for that, but who knew? All right. The Middle East. Where did he get this strong support for Israel? How did that all come about?

Van Cleave: I don't know, because it was already there before I joined his staff. But I suspect that if I had to assess it, it would be because here was a democracy, an outpost of democracy, in a strategically significant area where the creation of the state was very much something that the United States had supported from the beginning and he, I think, admired, throughout his life admired the Israelis for their stamina and for their courage in standing up in a very rough neighborhood for freedom.

Kondracke: Was he a two state person? Did he believe that the Palestinians deserved a state of their own?

Van Cleave: I never heard him say that.

Kondracke: What was his attitude toward the Palestinians?

Van Cleave: Talking about the 1980s, now, when I was working for him, the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] was considered a terrorist organization, and the Palestinians did not per se have an organizational representation, other than the PLO. So the politics back then were a little different from what they are now and Jack wanted to close down the PLO office and get them out of the United States. So he was certainly anti-PLO. Beyond that there wasn't really a quote

position on the Palestinians, quote unquote. He supported Israel living within safe and secure borders, which meant that he wasn't out there advocating to create a Palestinian state, because it's almost impossible with the geography to draw a Palestinian state that leaves the state of Israel with safe and secure borders, and that's been the conundrum since the partition in '47.

Kondracke: Reagan quite early in the administration called for a freeze on Israeli settlements of the West Bank. Do you remember Jack taking any position on that?

Van Cleave: I don't remember the call for the freeze, but Jack would not have supported that, I'm almost certain of that. He opposed the Reagan administration on a lot of things they did on Israel where he felt they were being insufficiently strong in their support for the state of Israel.

Kondracke: And he was against arms sales to the Arabs?

Van Cleave: He supported the security assistance to include arms sales to Egypt, vigorously, but he was against the big arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

Kondracke: He had a close relationship with [Benjamin] Bibi Netanyahu.

Van Cleave: Yes.

Kondracke: Tell me the history on that.

Van Cleave: Netanyahu and Jack met before I met Jack some time in the mid-seventies. Bibi Netanyahu's brother had led the raid on Entebbe [Uganda]. Jonathan ["Yoni"] Netanyahu. And Bibi headed up an outfit called the Jonathan Institute, I think it was called, named after his brother, that was sort of a think tank effort looking at how to fight terrorism. And I think that Jack first met Netanyahu when he went to speak at an event hosted by this Institute.

Kondracke: In Israel or here?

Van Cleave: I think it was in Israel. Then in the early eighties, like right away in '80, '81, Netanyahu was the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], I believe, the Israeli deputy chief of mission here in Washington and then later became the Israeli ambassador to the U.N. So Jack had routine interaction with him as part of his Foreign Operations work, but also as part of his larger interest in U.S. Defense and foreign policy issues. And they became friends.

Kondracke: Was Bibi his best Israeli friend would you say?

Van Cleave: Oh, my gosh. I don't know. He had a lot of Israeli friends. Bibi was certainly among them though.

Kondracke: How often did he go to Israel while you worked for him?

Van Cleave: I went with him on one trip. There's a trip I forgot.
[laughs]

Kondracke: Yes. Tell me about it.

Van Cleave: He went other times without me, but the one trip that I went on with him was in I think it was '86, '87. It was the rollout of the Lavi, which was the Israeli fighter aircraft. Jack was the only American asked to speak at this rollout, and he was long in his remarks. He talked for a very long time at the rollout. But he had been an advocate of providing the military sales support to Israel so that they could build the Lavi. And I believe there was a fair amount of back and forth with Weinberger or Weinberger's representatives, other members of the Reagan administration, because Jack was eager to give the Israelis the support that they needed to go forward with this indigenous fighter, and there were other approaches that were advocated by others in different parts of the Reagan administration that would have slow-rolled the program, or encouraged them to buy the F-16s [jet fighter] that the Carter administration had refused to sell them originally. So there were differences of opinion and Jack was very much—his advocacy became important to actually getting the program off the ground.

Kondracke: Did he have a relationship with Yitzak Rabin?

Van Cleave: Yes. Yes, Rabin was in to see him, but the relationship was one of professional rather than personal. Unless, now let me caveat this. My presence in meetings or discussions would have all been at the professional level. Now whether Jack's having dinner and going off to social events, as I'm certain he was, with so many people, I would not have been a part of that. So it's hard for me to gauge where the professional and the social may meet. But in the case of

Rabin, he was in the office on a number of occasions and had conversations because he was what, the defense minister for a while, right? Before he was prime minister, right? I'm trying to recall.

Kondracke: Yes, he'd been ambassador here.

Van Cleave: Ambassador, that was it. But Moshe Arens also. So Arens had been ambassador here, and Jack had a lot of interaction with him as ambassador, and then Arens went off to be the defense minister, so the conversation continued. Also true on the economic side of the ledger of Israeli government officials.

Kondracke: But you knew that Bibi was a personal friend, a buddy.

Van Cleave: Yes.

Kondracke: Were they buddies?

Van Cleave: I don't know if they were palling around together much, because as I recall back then, Netanyahu was considered one of the most eligible bachelors in the Washington, D.C. arena, and that was not Jack's scene, so I don't know that they were buddies in that sense.

Kondracke: The Lebanon involvement. Troops went in, troops came out, troops went back in, then 241 Marines were blown up. What was Jack's position on all of that? Weinberger wanted us out, Shultz wanted us in. How did Jack come down on that?

Van Cleave: Lebanon was being exploited by the—

Kondracke: PLO.

Van Cleave: The PLO, the Syrians, terrorists, as a staging ground for attacks against Israel, but also to destabilize the Lebanese government and it was a real cauldron, and Jack supported a U.S. presence in Lebanon to try to stabilize the situation. But you'll recall the Israelis had also moved into Lebanon, and there were tensions, real problems as between the U.S. military presence and the Israeli military presence in Lebanon. So I do remember one major issue that Jack had in contention with the Reagan administration, and that was that there were, I don't know if it was actually shooting incidents, but certainly confrontations between IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] forces and American Marines and others in Lebanon. And Jack proposed that there be an exchange of formal liaisons between the two militaries in Lebanon and the Reagan administration, Weinberger, refused to do that, and the reason was that the United States did not recognize Israel's presence in Lebanon as being anything other than an occupying force, an invading force. They weren't there to stabilize, from a diplomatic perspective, they shouldn't be there. They should leave. So the Reagan administration did not establish a liaison relationship, and as Jack saw it, this contributed to this kind of confrontation. This was another example, perhaps of many, where he was taking a different view than President Reagan.

Kondracke: Did he feel allied with Shultz at all, considering the later developments? This is a case where Weinberger had a position which was opposite to Jack's, and he was taking a position that basically Shultz agreed with.

Van Cleave: I don't know that Shultz agreed that we should have a liaison.

Kondracke: Well I don't know about the liaison, but our presence there. Shultz was in favor of.

Van Cleave: Yes, that's interesting.

Kondracke: Weinberger and Shultz were always at each other's throats, as I get it.

Van Cleave: Yes. [laughs]

Kondracke: So did Jack pick issue by issue?

Van Cleave: I guess that from the inside of the Congress looking out to the administration it wasn't as though we were choosing sides, or that he was choosing sides, but rather he was stating what he thought was right. He wasn't keeping score on whether he agreed more with one Cabinet secretary or another Cabinet secretary. One of the interesting hallmarks of the Reagan administration, and now I'm thinking about this since I've served in subsequent administrations, in the [George H.W.] Bush 41, I served under President Reagan, and Bush 41 and in George W. Bush's administration. That inside the administration, in inter-agency discussions in the Reagan administration, policy conversations always came back to the question of the Reagan viewpoint, the President's philosophy. One could argue about how does this fit with the President's position on so many other

things, because what Reagan stood for in foreign and defense policy was rather well-developed as far as a philosophical foundation was concerned. Not necessarily true in subsequent administrations, but certainly true in the Reagan administration, a distinctive part of the Reagan administration. Well, Jack was a firm believer in the principal philosophical tenets of the Reagan revolution, and what all of that meant coming in in 1980, and where the administration positions might wax and wane depending upon internal debates and so forth, if you're standing outside of it, if you're in the Congress, you almost have the luxury of being able to say, "No. We're sticking firm to our principles, and if it veers to the left or it veers to the right we're going, I—this member of Congress—will stand up for my principles, for what I believe." And Jack always did that, so he would be critical of the Reagan administration frequently, where he saw it diverging from where he thought the right endpoint should be.

Kondracke: Did Jack Kemp ever have any self-doubt or trouble deciding where he stood on foreign policy issues?

Van Cleave: He had pretty solid instincts on foreign policy issues, so instinctively he knew where his endpoints, his goals would end up. But like so many things, foreign policy is pretty complicated, and sometimes it's not clear what the right answers are, and Jack was endlessly intellectually curious about things, and I think we've said many times a voracious reader. And so he would take in a lot of information. He was always reading and inquiring and one of the tricks of working for him effectively was being able to bring in thoughtful reading and articles, "Have you seen this or watched that program?" introducing him to people who could come in and explain

things, that are real experts. His calendar, I'm sure you've spoken with Sharon [Zelaska], his confidential assistant for so many years, his calendar was always chock a block, morning till night, with meetings, and it was one subject to the next. And so getting people on his calendar was a way of introducing issues and getting him engaged and thinking about things. It wasn't as though the answers were pre-cooked, but if you've got a solid philosophical position and you know where you want to end up, you know, to the betterment of freedom, what advances freedom and democracy in the world? If that is sort generically the big picture, then answers fall out from that.

Kondracke: Did you get to sit in on these when foreign visitors came or foreign policy experts?

Van Cleave: For the most part, yes, yes.

Kondracke: So did Jack ever have a big fight with anybody?

Van Cleave: A big fight.

Kondracke: Either a big fight or a particularly illuminating conversation, anything stick in your mind?

Van Cleave: The only time I ever saw Jack really get angry was not sitting in his office. It was when we were in Russia. We were in Moscow. We were in a meeting with this guy who was the head of the Gosplan, and he was old-style Soviet. And through the interpreter he was spouting a lot of propaganda. At one point where he ended up to coming close to comparing Ronald Reagan to Adolf Hitler, at that point

I thought Jack was going to get up and punch him. I mean walk out of the room. He got very angry, he got very agitated, as he should have. You don't sit there and listen to that.

Kondracke: What, how dare you? What did he say?

Van Cleave: It wasn't how dare you kind of thing. It was more substantive than that in his response, because this fellow was not being serious, he was just working off some old talking points that he should have shelved a long time ago but maybe he wasn't used to dealing with American visitors. Entirely possible. So I did see him get angry then, but sitting in his office, the people who would come in and out of his office, again it was constant. I know I never saw him lose his temper at anyone that I can recall. To get agitated, yes. To get impassioned, yes, but to lose his temper? No. He and I had arguments, I had arguments with him. The guy argues a lot, but he didn't lose his temper.

Kondracke: What did you argue with him about that you remember?

Van Cleave: We occasionally argued about policy things, but not very often. That was one of the fabulous things about working for him. We agreed on 99 percent of everything that came forward to him, and on the one percent, he's the boss.

Kondracke: [David M.] Dave Smick, in our interview with him, said that this tendency of Jack's to give the same assignment to different people was a kind of control mechanism and bespoke some kind of insecurity on Jack's part. What do you think about that?

Van Cleave: I think that Jack was the least insecure person perhaps that I've ever met. And he just genuinely would be just go-go-go all the time, and would want to receive a lot of different input from different perspectives. And he'd ask lots of different people all the time to contribute ideas. I think it could have been rather frustrating to try to be his chief of staff, because if you think your job is to try to keep control of everything, and the boss has got everybody going all the time in so many different directions, that could be pretty frustrating. So maybe it was more frustration from Dave Smick that you were hearing in those comments than an accurate reflection of Jack's work style.

Kondracke: On the Soviet Union, Reagan in the first term clearly is aggressive toward the Soviets. "Evil empire," and so on. Then in the second administration he starts negotiating with [Mikhail S.] Gorbachev, basically. Newt Gingrich denounced the first Reagan-Gorbachev meeting as the worst thing that's happened since Adolf Hitler and [A. Neville] Chamberlain met in Munich. Was Jack similarly hostile toward the summits?

Van Cleave: Jack was very critical of the Reykjavík, big speech about going into it.

Kondracke: How about Geneva, the first one?

Van Cleave: I don't remember specifically what he said about Geneva, but I do know that there was sort of a change or an evolution from the first Reagan term to the second Reagan term. That things seemed to

be going a little off-track the second Reagan term from the standpoint of relations with the Soviet Union, than they were in the first Reagan term. I know Jack was very critical of the INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty, that initiative. He was perhaps the leading voice against INF in the Congress, which was quite at odds with the Reagan administration, but a curious thing because here you had a president who came to office in 1980 where the major defense issue was being critical of Carter and the SALT negotiations, and the unreliability of arms control especially treaties that are not verifiable, that they're not in the interests of the United States and that the Reagan administration would fix all of that, would not be sucked into unverifiable agreements as a substitute for strength. And it all seemed to go in the right direction the first term. Where that started to change, Jack was critical of Reagan and his secretary of State for going in that direction.

Kondracke: Did Jack ever talk to Reagan about it?

Van Cleave: Not one on one, but I was never present in his meetings with President Reagan. Typically staff was not included in those meetings at the White House.

Kondracke: But did he come back and report anything?

Van Cleave: No. But as far as being critical in person, no, he would not have shared that. But there was plenty of criticism in writing. Lots of written letters, "Dear Mr. President, I admire what you've done in x but I'm very disturbed about y," and that happened a lot. And

similar letters to Cap Weinberger. That was a routine way of respectfully expressing dissent—put it in writing.

Kondracke: What was his diagnosis of the problem? Why did he think Reagan switched?

Van Cleave: Well you'll remember perhaps more from that time, there was a little slogan that said, "Let Reagan be Reagan." The diagnosis was that there were influential people in the administration who were leading policy down a direction that was at odds with what President Reagan represented and believed. And an administration is not a single individual, it's a lot of different forces and people in discussions and programs and influences, so it's not always that easy to keep on the straight and narrow as it were.

Kondracke: Some people say it was Nancy [D.] Reagan. Did Jack have any views on that?

Van Cleave: I don't know. Not that he expressed to me.

Kondracke: Reagan in his writings says that he really thought that Gorbachev was a different kind of guy from [Leonid I.] Brezhnev and Andropov and—Jack didn't think so, I take it.

Van Cleave: No. I mean a different kind of guy. He was a different Soviet leader, but he was still a Soviet leader.

Kondracke: The INF Treaty, which Jack opposed, was based on the zero option. That was our negotiating position, that the Soviets got

the SS-20s, they were threatening Europe. We deployed the Pershing 2s [missiles] on our side.

Van Cleave: Yes.

Kondracke: And then the Soviets decided that they would negotiate what had previously not been negotiable. And the treaty as I understand it got rid of everything with a short-range and up to 5,000 kilometers or whatever it was, zero.

Van Cleave: Right.

Kondracke: So what was wrong with that?

Van Cleave: Think about the geography of that. You had Soviet deployments that were on mobile platforms that threatened Western Europe. There was a NATO response to build an intermediate-range nuclear force that could deter the Soviet intermediate force. Then the zero option comes along. The Russians pull back a mobile force and NATO pulls out a nuclear capability altogether. It wouldn't take much to redeploy a mobile force. So the geography made it easy for the Russians to recover a position if they chose to do that, and nearly impossible for the West to do that. So that's the going-in inequity. But on top of that came the question of verification. How could you be sure that the SS-20s that are supposed to be dismantled so that they can't be redeployed, in fact, that did happen. So all the negotiations over the verifiability of that agreement came to the forefront at a time when we had major fights within the Reagan administration about issuing a report on Soviet adherence to and violations of existing arms

control agreements. So what is the strategic move? In dealing with the Soviet Union, what message are you signaling if you're signing new arms control agreements while they're violating the ones that we already have with impunity? This was the other major theme. Why would you do that? Are you encouraging bad behavior on the Soviets' part if it's clear to them that they can get away with violating these agreements and not have to pay for it in any sense?

Kondracke: What kind of feedback did Jack get from the administration about his objections to this stuff?

Van Cleave: I don't remember whether we had anything in writing back from the administration.

Kondracke: Did Bill Schneider, who was then at State Department, say "They really hate you over here" or anything like that?

Van Cleave: Oh, that I don't know. I do know that by then it was a major issue between Jack and George Shultz, but was one of many. Richard Perle, of course, who was supposedly Mr. Hardliner, was in favor of the INF agreement. He was an advocate for it, and so people said, well, Richard had gone soft, which in retrospect seems a little funny. But no, I don't think that, since Jack was not in a committee assignment where he could block anything, his opposition as far as legislative opposition was not that significant to the administration. But as a political matter, it was significant. As a political matter it was significant in the context of the '86-'87 primary campaign. It became an issue, one of many issues that he talked about on the stump when he was running for the nomination.

Kondracke: How did it become an issue? Was Bush defending—

Van Cleave: Yes.

Kondracke: Bush was defending what Reagan had done.

Van Cleave: Well, yes, of course. Bush was the vice president.

Kondracke: So this was a contentious issue in the primaries?

Van Cleave: Yes. The larger positions on arms control and dealing with the Soviets, and Jack could point to his opposition to the INF treaty as part of a demonstration that he was a clear-eyed realist when it came to arms control, and that he wasn't going to look the other way when the Soviets were violating treaties. That was the line as I recall, the point, as I recall.

Kondracke: Right. And he had a difference with the administration over Solidarity in Poland?

Van Cleave: He was an advocate of more forceful support to Solidarity, but I don't think that the Reagan administration was able to provide much in the way of open support to Solidarity. I guess Jack wanted to see the President more forceful in his comments on behalf of Solidarity. But again, Poland was under Soviet control, and it wasn't a matter of funneling in some kind of, I mean this wasn't an area where the United States had much leverage, I guess, other than moral support.

Kondracke: How did he get involved in the Soviet Jewry issue?

Van Cleave: There's someone who worked on his staff who you should talk to about that. I've got to get you her name. There were a lot of groups, I think, within the Buffalo area, that were interested in Soviet Jewry and agitating on behalf of Soviet Jewry, so I think much of it began from being inspired by dealing with his constituency.

Kondracke: And when he went to Russia he met with Soviet Jews?

Van Cleave: Yes.

Kondracke: Natan Sharansky

Van Cleave: Sharansky was in prison, I think back then. But when Sharansky got out of prison then Jack met with him here in Washington. I'm glad you remembered that. And Joanne Kemp was very active on behalf of Soviet Jewry causes.

Kondracke: What did she do?

Van Cleave: She organized some women's rights group on behalf of Soviet Jewry, I think, one good question to ask her. I'm sure she'll like to talk about it.

Kondracke: Besides Bibi Netanyahu, who would you say were his favorite foreign leaders?

Van Cleave: Thatcher.

Kondracke: What did he have to do with her?

Van Cleave: He met with her a couple times. He just admired her enormously. Many of the foreign leaders with which he engaged were on national economic issues. So again the way the staff broke out, I was not personally involved with some of those discussions, so would not have been there. He had his interactions with Kohl and with the Germans, with Manfred Werner. Do you remember Manfred Werner, who became—

Kondracke: Defense secretary, Defense minister.

Van Cleave: Defense minister. I know he had a fair amount of interchange with Werner.

Kondracke: Who were Jack's principal Congressional foreign policy allies? Was there a gang like the amigos on economic policy that talked about foreign policy?

Van Cleave: I think that was more issue-specific. If it was a nuclear freeze or a defense issue it would have been the people on the Arms Services Committee, the leaders there. It was more fluid, so it wasn't a single group.

Kondracke: And within the administration, besides Jeane Kirkpatrick, who else was he close to or did he regard as an ally.

Van Cleave: Well of course Bill Schneider as we said, on those matters. I'm trying think who were some of the other interesting people. Well, [Richard V.] Dick Allen

Kondracke: Dick Allen was gone pretty soon. And I think after him it was [William P.] Bill Clark and then [Robert C.] Bud McFarland and then John [M.] Poindexter and Frank [C.] Carlucci [III] and Colin [L.] Powell. There's a whole series of people who were NSC [National Security Council] advisers.

Van Cleave: Right. And of course he had some interaction with all of them, although Powell, I think, was Bush 41 rather than Reagan.

Kondracke: Could be, yes.

Van Cleave: Carlucci was the last then. I think I mentioned Fred Iklé, some of the—well, he dealt with everybody it seems in the State Department and the Defense Department, because they were always in and out on foreign aid issues. But when you ask who are his real allies, it wasn't so much forming alliances as it was just the natural interaction of caring about issues and trying to find good answers. It wasn't like people were a member of a particular group or cabal or something. It was all, I think, more fluid than that. So you're asking me who would be the people who would—

Kondracke: I just thought that Jeane Kirkpatrick, clearly is somebody that he would check in with and I just wondered if there was anybody else that he regarded as a close friend or soul-mate.

Van Cleave: Yes, Jeane, Bill Schneider, Fred Iklé.

Kondracke: Fred Iklé was undersecretary for policy, right? How did he get along with [William J.] Bill Casey? Did he know Bill Casey at all?

Van Cleave: Yes, but didn't have a lot of interaction with Bill Casey. I recall [Herbert E.] Herb Meyer, who was the head of the National Intelligence Council, used to come over a lot. But Herb didn't stick around that long either. Then there was the NSC staff, Constantine Menges and Ollie North, who had responsibilities in the Latin America arena. A lot of the Latin America, who was the, Elliot Abrams, I guess, and he had that account. So a lot people who were involved in Central America, since that was such a major fight all the time, he was engaged quite a bit with them, conversations with them. The ambassadors from the region. I remember Ambassador [John D.] Negroponte come up several times. He was ambassador to Honduras then. Who was our ambassador to El Salvador? Also was in from time to time. So the regional ambassadors from Central America, the assistant secretaries, they were in the office a lot.

Kondracke: Did you staff the '84 platform?

Van Cleave: Yes.

Kondracke: Tell me what was that all about. Obviously he's thinking about running for president and did he have the foreign policy portfolio there?

Van Cleave: Yes he did. He and Paula Hawkins, Senator Hawkins from Florida, right? If I'm remembering that correctly, were co-chairs of the Foreign Policy subcommittee of the platform committee. And he was sort of a natural choice for that, because again, he was the ranking on Foreign Ops, and this is where all the foreign policy conversations came through the House. So it was sort of natural that he would do that and I think that Senator Hawkins was on the Foreign Relations Committee. So they came together, they chaired this, and—you've been to conventions—you know what platform committees are like. You've got delegates from across the country who are serving as representatives on the platform committee, and so he had a subset of people from across the country who were staffing the development of the platform. And the way that worked was that we put together a draft back here, and then took it to Dallas and then circulated it in Dallas, and then invited people to come in to testify as public witnesses. It took about a week to review the draft of the platform, and then it was amended and voted on and finalized by the subcommittee and then the subcommittee reports it up to the platform committee and the whole platform committee gets together and makes further refinements, and then the platform is issued. And I will tell you that, I mean you can go back now and look at the platform and it all looks to be pretty straightforward, but there were some fights, small fights behind the scenes, and maybe on things that you wouldn't expect. One of the biggest arguments with the Reagan administration over what would be going into the foreign policy section of the platform was on the subject of Hong Kong. Jack had sponsored a bill in the House calling for self-determination for the people of Hong Kong. This was at the time when the 100-year lease that the British had negotiated with China over Hong Kong was coming up, and the

Brits had taken the position that they were simply going to back out, and that they were going to recognize mainland China as the successor in interest to the lease, and then Hong Kong would then revert back to China. Jack, being constant in his principles, said, "How can the United States stand by when free people are one day free and the next day part of a communist totalitarian society?" And he advocated that there be a plebiscite whereby the people of Hong Kong could vote to stay with Great Britain, go independent, or join China and let them decide. Self-determination for Hong Kong. Well, the Reagan administration did not support that. They did not support it, and I guess at the time it seemed inappropriate that the Reagan administration didn't support it because it seemed inconsistent with the views that President Reagan had taken on the need for self-determination more broadly and freedom and democracy. And yet there's some Realpolitik behind all of this, and the Realpolitik behind all of this was that the Brits were not going to do anything but cede Hong Kong back to China, and so the United States was not going to stand in the way of its best ally and make trouble for them.

Kondracke: It was Margaret Thatcher who did it.

Van Cleave: It was Margaret Thatcher who did it. So the Reagan administration did not want this plank in the Republican platform. Didn't want it. Well, it didn't make the first cut, the first draft. I had prepared this amendment for Jack to offer when the platform full committee met to reconsider whether we should call for self-determination for Hong Kong as a part of the Republican Party's position. And it came time for Jack to offer this amendment. I couldn't find him anywhere. He was supposed to be on the podium,

we had come to that section of the platform. I don't know where he was. I don't know if he's off talking to people, I don't know where he was. So I had this and it needed to be offered or it was going to be missed, so I went up to Senator [Jesse A.] Helms. I said, "Senator, Mr. Kemp was going to offer this amendment but I can't find him. Is this something that you would be interested in supporting, Senator?" He looked at it and he said, "I'll handle that." So he did. He offered it and it ended up in the platform. And if you look now you'll see that, and it's kind of an oddity in history that it's in there, but there it is.

Kondracke: Were Kemp and Helms allies on a lot of stuff.

Van Cleave: No. I mean, they sometimes voted on the same side of issues, but I never saw them work together. I think their personalities were very much divergent.

Kondracke: Helms was a critic of the U.N.

Van Cleave: Yes.

Kondracke: Was Jack?

Van Cleave: Jack was a critic of the U.N. not doing things that were consistent with its charter and purposes. Yes, he was a critic of the U.N., for sure.

Kondracke: Some people, there was the whole movement of get the U.N. out of New York.

Van Cleave: Yes, Jack never wanted to de-fund the U.N. I mean, saying goodbye to them, let them leave New York when they did things like "Zionism is racism." When they voted on resolutions like that, shush, yes. And why should we be paying this much money for the United Nations if all it is going to do is take positions that are opposite to U.S. interests and objectives and friends and allies worldwide, yes. So the criticism of the U.N. from a political point of view was something that Jack was willing to do. But he never stepped up in his capacity to say we should stop funding the United Nations. He would not have done that.

Kondracke: Who drafted the speech, the CPAC [Conservative Political Action Conference of the American Conservative Union] speech where he called for Shultz's resignation?

Van Cleave: I think that that was a staff, I mean I certainly had a part of it. The way that speeches like that got drafted is we would have different pieces, like I might have developed some of the policy points, and then John Mueller would take it and integrate it and turn it into a speech for the most part. Whether or not that's the process that was followed for the CPAC speech I can't say for certain, but that was the common—

Kondracke: That strikes me as a major speech. You don't have any vivid memories? Calling for the secretary of State's resignation is a big deal.

Van Cleave: Right, and that would have been discussed probably with some of the folks in the campaign as well at that time.

Kondracke: But you weren't party to the specific—

Van Cleave: No.

Kondracke: You probably had input.

Van Cleave: Yes, I had input.

Kondracke: But as to whether the speech ought to be made and what led up to the speech?

Van Cleave: Whether or not to make the speech, that was probably a campaign decision. But the substantive, I mean my responsibility would have been the policy content in the speech. Calling for Shultz's resignation was a way of making a number of policy points. When you start adding it up, at the bottom you're left with this question, all right, is Jack Kemp really saying that President Reagan is a bad president? No. What is he saying? He's saying that there are forces within the administration that are moving Reagan away from his natural inclinations and doing things that he shouldn't be doing. Well, who's the strongest voice in the administration for doing A-B-C-D-E? George Shultz. Well then it's Shultz's, Shultz should be taking responsibility for moving us in the wrong direction. Shultz therefore is not a good secretary of State for President Reagan, would be the analysis. Shultz should go. So it's a policy assessment leading to a recommendation and then the recommendation itself, of course, becomes the sound bite, right?

Kondracke: What kind of press did he get on it?

Van Cleave: Fair, pretty good press. We were certainly not disappointed.

Kondracke: Was it seen as a poke at Bush too?

Van Cleave: No.

Kondracke: Okay, the '88 campaign. What did you do in the '88 campaign?

Van Cleave: Could we take a little break before we go to the '88 campaign?

[pause]

Kondracke: So what part did you take in the '88 presidential campaign?

Van Cleave: The '88 presidential campaign began—laying the baseline in '86 and I think he announced in '87, later in '87, but by the time the campaign was in full swing, I had left Jack's staff. I left in summer, I guess summer of '87. So my part in the campaign was after hours. I'd go to work, I was working in the Reagan White House then. I'd go to work, work all day, and then I'd go over to the Congressional office or meet someplace and start working on campaign things. And I organized all of his defense and foreign policy advisers for the campaign, coordinated all of the issue statements on behalf of the

campaign that dealt with defense and foreign policy, contributed to speeches that he would give, did talking points for media events, prepped him for debates.

Kondracke: And who were his principal foreign policy advisers?

Van Cleave: We had Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Richard Allen was involved then, and Richard Perle a little bit, and a fellow by the name of [Robert] Bob Andrews, who had been an army intelligence officer later on John [H.] Glenn's staff and then an executive at one of the defense contracting firms. I'm trying to think who else was involved. Not that many people, but a small group that could turn out papers. Richard Billmire, of course, because he was on the staff, Jack's Congressional staff then. Working in campaigns when you're on a Congressional staff you have to be respectful of the law and the restrictions. You can't be working on campaign activities out of the Congressional office or during your workday, so any Congressional staff that worked on the campaign had to do so on their own time, so those strictures were always there.

Kondracke: But you worked out of the Congressional office, not the campaign office.

Van Cleave: After hours and from home and in meeting places. We would meet at a hotel, for example, and work there.

Kondracke: How big a part did foreign policy play in the campaign?

Van Cleave: It was pretty important in the campaign. One of his major campaign issues was on strategic defense. He talked about the need for strategic defense a lot, so the proponent of SDI, he was outspoken on that, and on the Reagan Doctrine, that was also a part of the campaign. He had such a strong profile in these issues and was so well-versed in them, that it was very natural for him to be able to talk about things that he had studied and learned well in the course of his time in Congress, so he was a natural on the campaign trail when it came to foreign and defense policy questions.

Kondracke: Was there much dispute among the candidates over foreign policy?

Van Cleave: There were areas of disagreement. We were talking about INF a moment ago, and arms control, and how skeptical to be of arms control as a modality for working with the Soviet Union. That was an issue between Jack and [Robert J.] Bob Dole, for instance, or Jack and then-Vice President Bush, for that matter.

Kondracke: Were there a lot of debates in those days?

Van Cleave: Not like there are today, but there were some. And there were joint appearances, media appearances. I remember Jack's position being very strongly pro-defense. The defense budget, which we didn't talk about so much, but the defense budget began to climb in the first part of the Reagan administration and then started to go down. Because of deficit-minded Republicans, there was even a Republican position in the House, and for that matter in the Senate, that was supporting defense numbers lower than the Reagan

administration's numbers, and there were big fights there. Jack was very much of a minority leader within his own party to try to hold the line on defense increases and not to see big cuts in the defense budget. So he and Dole argued about that. So defense spending became an issue, somewhat of an issue in the campaign too.

Kondracke: Was there ever any kind of a real dust-up with any of the candidates over foreign policy?

Van Cleave: During the period that Jack was involved? I don't recall dust-ups. Relative to what we see now in the current primary season, they were all respectful of one another and sort of subdued compared to this. But don't forget also Jack didn't stay in the fight that long. When it became clear that he was not going to, as John Buckley said, he wasn't able to take Michigan in a way that he thought he might be able to, then after that it wasn't a heart and soul, "I believe I can get the nomination" effort from him. It was he stayed in it for as long as he could to advocate his ideas, but I don't think that the campaign was something where he thought he was going to come out on top.

Kondracke: So after '88 he goes to HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] and that's not foreign policy, so what was your connection during those days?

Van Cleave: He was at HUD. He was a Cabinet secretary, and I was in the Bush 41 White House, and I recall that there was certainly a joke going around that Jack Kemp was the only HUD secretary who had his own foreign and defense policy. Because he would come into Cabinet meetings and he had opinions about lots of things, to include

foreign and defense policy, so we were casually in touch, not often, but occasionally I'd go see him. I do remember one time I took a group of on-site inspectors who had been stationed in Votkinsk, in the Soviet Union, inspecting the SS-20 dismantlements and production lines. And Jack had arranged for a flag, a big American flag to be sent to them so that outside of their station, which is in the middle of snow-laden fields, in No Where, Soviet Union, there would be a really big American flag that you could see for miles around. And I brought the whole group in to meet with the HUD secretary and present the flag. There were small things like that but that's about it.

Kondracke: Did you hear any reverberations inside the White House about Jack's interventions on foreign policy?

Van Cleave: No, anything I heard was second hand from other people who were grumbling about it, but there are other friends of our acquaintance who might be able to share some of those more first-hand with you.

Kondracke: And then in the Empower America days, did you have anything to do with that?

Van Cleave: Again from time to time Jack would say, "Could you come over? Let's talk about. . . ." and it would be whatever it might be, and he probably would invite Schneider to come over as well, and the two of us frequently would go down and talk to him together to keep him current about things or because Jack was inquisitive, or had been invited to serve on some kind of a commission or whatever. So I guess what I'm describing is having once been on his staff, that you

were forever a part of his circle of advisers, and so that was a privilege.

Kondracke: [Malcolm S.] Steve Forbes [Jr.] says, who was the chairman of Empower America, says that everybody viewed Empower America as a platform from which he was going to run in '96. Did you assume that that was going to happen?

Van Cleave: That he, Steve Forbes, was going to run?

Kondracke: No. Steve Forbes says that everybody who was around Jack assumed that he was going to run in '96. Were you aware of that?

Van Cleave: Maybe it was wishful thinking, yes, hopeful thinking. I mean, anyone who had ever worked for him always wanted to see him in the Oval Office, so yes.

Kondracke: And how did you find out that he wasn't going to do it?

Van Cleave: He announced that he wasn't going to do it.

Kondracke: So then did you have anything to do with his run for vice president? After he got nominated did you staff him at all?

Van Cleave: Yes. Senator Dole's decision to invite Jack on the ticket, of course, came as a surprise, a huge surprise. [laughs] And I remember, I think I was in Boston on business of some kind when the news came across.

Kondracke: What were you doing then?

Van Cleave: Giving a speech or something.

Kondracke: No, no no. I mean what was your job then? What were you professionally doing?

Van Cleave: In '96. In '96, what was I doing in '96? I think I was working for Feith and Zell, a law firm. I was back practicing law in '96. But Jack gets announced as being the vice presidential candidate, and I remember calling other friends from the staff, and then we all agreed, we were just going to go to San Diego. Dropped everything, got on an airplane, flew to San Diego, and it was fabulous. It was a surprise, and suddenly we were all out there again. It was back to being in campaign mode, and "Okay boss, what do you need us to do?" That's how that happened.

Kondracke: And, what did you do?

Van Cleave: And so the staffing a vice presidential candidate is not nearly as rigorous as staffing a presidential candidate. While there are all kinds of appearances and speeches and the usual kinds of things, still the policy line is set by the presidential candidate, so those who were managing Dole's campaign and effort, they were the ones putting out the direction of the campaign, and it was Jack's responsibility as a good lieutenant to fall in line. So I remember pulling together some talking points maybe, and contributing some thoughts to a speech,

that kind of thing. But it was less of an intense effort than the '88 campaign had been by a long shot.

Kondracke: Was there any foreign policy content to what he did?

Van Cleave: I think very little. Most of the foreign policy part of the campaign was headlined by Dole rather than by his running mate. Jack was used, quote unquote, in a good sense, for other purposes.

Kondracke: The tales are that basically his close staff was kept away from him, that he was sort of minded by Dole people.

Van Cleave: So I wasn't involved that much with the management of the campaign. Again, my contributions were more in idea and talking points and not staffing campaign activities per se.

Kondracke: Right. So after all that's over he's basically in business. How much contact did you have with him in later years?

Van Cleave: I would say a couple times a year we would talk or I would go visit with him, or I went on to having other interesting jobs in the government and wanted to keep Jack informed about things that I was doing. And I sort of continued to have a sense where I wanted to contribute to his education and knowledge and understanding of what I thought were important issues, so I would funnel things to him from time to time. The last time I saw him was in February of 2008, when some friends of mine decided they were going to throw me a surprise birthday party, and Jack and Joanne came, and it was at a little restaurant, and it was just a reunion of Kemp staff

using the excuse of my birthday and a surprise birthday party to do it. We sat around and we told stories and had a great time, and that was the last time I saw him. I had an appointment with him the month that he was diagnosed and he had to cancel the appointment because he wasn't feeling well. That was it.

Kondracke: So are there any favorite anecdotes of yours that we have not elicited up to now?

Van Cleave: Favorite anecdotes. You heard the one about Arnold [A.] Schwarzenegger, and I told earlier about his speech at the Naval Academy where he managed to embarrass his daughter, which was pretty funny.

Kondracke: Yes, that's hilarious. We got that one.

Van Cleave: I guess the only other one I would mention is not funny so much, but really the poignant one, which really revealed the character of this man, and I will never forget late one night dragging ourselves over to the House floor. You're in the Rayburn House Office Building, which is where Jack's office was, and there's a little, there used to be a little train that chugalugs and takes you over to the Capitol, and I rode along with him because he had to vote and we were sitting there, and it's quiet, there's like nobody else around. It's probably like midnight or something. And he was going to go over to give yet another speech on an issue where he was not going to win. There was no way on earth that he was going to gather the support that he needed. And he just looked at me, he just said very quietly, "You know why I do this?" And I shook my head. And he said,

“Because if I don’t, nobody else will.” And it was a part of the magic of his commitment that he just wanted to do what was right, and he did.

Kondracke: Okay. I think we’ve covered it unless there’s anything else. Thank you.

Van Cleave: Thank you.