

ROBERT J. DOLE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

JACK F. KEMP, JR.

May 23, 2007

Interviewer

Richard Norton Smith

Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics
2350 Petefish Drive
Lawrence, KS 66045
Phone: (785) 864-4900
Fax: (785) 864-1414

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 2

Smith: First of all, tell us about the rise of supply-side economics and the, in effect, intellectual conflict that that set up within the Republican Party and even conservative—

Kemp: Hold it for a second, would you you? One second. Excuse me.

[tape recorder turned off]

Smith: Let's see how it goes.

Kemp: Okay.

Smith: Somewhere between a sound bite and loquacious. But, no, I realize it's a big subject, but basically explain to a general audience.

Kemp: I never really liked the phrase “supply-side,” because it was too esoteric for people—I was much more populist. I would have called it incentive-oriented economics as opposed to supply-side. Supply-side was coined by Herb Stein in the [Richard M.] Nixon White House on the Council of Economic Advisors, to imply or to convey the idea that the economy is driven by the production side of the economy, the worker, the saver, the investor, the entrepreneur. So to that extent it is defensible, but I would have liked an easier way to convey the idea that we're going to create incentives in the economy for work and investment by lowering the tax rates across the board and increasing the reward, the incentive, for taking your hard-earned time and your hard-earned capital that you've saved up, and put it at risk in the economy. So it became radicalized a little bit by Art [Arthur B.] Laffer, my friend who designed the—

[brief interruption]

Kemp: I don't use “radicalize” as a pejorative, by the way. I'm using it to convey the idea that “radical” in Latin means to go back to the roots.

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 3

Smith: Absolutely. For example, I would say Ronald [W.] Reagan was a radical conservative and George Bush 41 was a conservative in the classic sense.

Kemp: Turn off that—

[tape recorder turned off]

Kemp: I'll try to behave myself here. It was radicalized by my friend Art Laffer, and I don't mean that as a pejorative; I just mean it to explain that he wanted to convey a more radical private-enterprise approach to growth or getting America moving again by designing a curve that showed there are two levels of taxation at which no revenue is raised—100 percent taxation, no revenue, no one would produce, or zero. And in between there's a curve around which people would be incentivized to help grow the economy by working and saving and investing. So Art, bless his heart, used to answer every question on fiscal policy by saying, "Growth cures everything. A growing economy is the maximum effort of the government to create the conditions for a bigger pie, more employment, more growth, and revenue comes from growth, not from just cutting spending."

So the most controversial part of it is when I had read the speech by John F. Kennedy at the New York Economic Club in '61 or '62, when Kennedy said, "It's a paradoxical truth that high rates of taxation cause low revenues, and the best way to get more revenue is to bring down the rates." People forget the top rate in '60, when he ran against Nixon, was 90, and Nixon did nothing about that. In fact, the conservative position was, you can't cut tax rates until you balance the budget.

Smith: That brings us to this, shall we say, traditional Republican view. How did the new economics come into conflict, say late seventies, early eighties, with the rise of Ronald Reagan?

Kemp: Well, the economy was on its backside in the mid-seventies, and I had introduced this bill that paralleled the tax rate cut of Kennedy of '62, '63, was passed under [Lyndon B.] Johnson, but it was Kennedy's idea, of a 30 percent across-the-board rate reduction,

so I had my staff design a Kennedy tax rate reduction for my office, for me, and it was actually 30 percent in one year.

Then Bill [Sen. William] Roth came aboard and the Kemp-Roth Bill was a three-year 10 percent rate reduction a year for three years. So it conflicted with traditional orthodox fiscalism because it was to reduce the rates to grow the economy in the face of a deficit which was very heterodoxical, to say the least, and parenthetically speaking, [Sen. Barry] Goldwater, [Sen.] Howard Baker, the Republican Party in '62 voted unanimously against lowering the tax rates across the board à la John F. Kennedy, but Kennedy was very popular in Buffalo [New York], where I was the congressman, where I was in Congress from the district in Upstate New York, so I had no problem quoting Kennedy all the time. I drove everybody crazy with my Kennedy quotes. In fact, I remember Teddy [Sen. Edward M.] Kennedy saying one time, "I wish my brother were alive to answer this young back-bencher in the Republican Party, Jack Kemp."

Smith: And Ronald Reagan comes into the picture at what point, in terms of embracing this?

Kemp: In '78, '79, being from a heavily AF of L-CIO district like Buffalo, I made a lot of points with my working-class district by talking about how the Kemp-Roth bill, the Kemp-Roth 30 percent rate reduction bill, would increase the after-tax earnings for not only the investor, but for the worker. In New York in the late seventies, as inflation pushed working families into high tax rates, our Chrysler, Ford, GM, Longshoremen, Electrical Worker unions were in the 40, 50 percent tax bracket, counting the federal and the state tax. The tax rates in New York were 14 under Nelson [A.] Rockefeller. So I talked about growth first and then increasing the after-tax rate of return for workers, labor.

I gave a speech in Bal Harbour, Florida, to the AF of L-CIO Longshoremen's Union convention, all black, all Puerto Rican, all people of color, and I gave this speech about how the Kemp-Roth Bill would increase their rate of return on working on the docks, working in the Ford stamping plant in Lakawanna, New York, and I got this standing ovation. It was picked up in the Miami papers. Reagan read about it, or somebody gave it to Reagan, and he called me and said he would support the Kemp-Roth

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 5

tax rate cut for the 1980 campaign, and everybody else was calling it voodoo economics, you know, witch doctors, snake oil salesmen, and that was just coming from Republicans. You can't believe what the Democrats were saying about it.

So Ronald Reagan really, in '79-80, was the only national Republican figure to support this radical lower tax rate in the face of inflation and unemployment, and the Keynesian economic model of manipulating inflation by allowing unemployment to go up and bringing down unemployment by letting inflation go up had reached its ultimate conundrum. They couldn't solve the problem of simultaneous inflation and unemployment, so the Reaganomics side of this, Kemponomics—excuse me, that's an overreach—the supply side answer was tight money to solve inflation, which [Paul] Volcker pursued, and lower tax and regulatory barriers to goose, to grow the economy, was a simultaneous action on both the inflation and unemployment level, and it ended up working, not till '83, though. Not till '83.

Smith: So you have an election in '80 when Ronald Reagan's winning this triumphant victory, and to the astonishment of many, the Republicans are taking the Senate, making major gains in the House, but taking the Senate, which means all of a sudden an orthodox Republican like Bob Dole is going to be chairing the Finance Committee and Howard Baker is going to be Majority Leader, and some of those very folks who were at least suspicious of this new unorthodox—

Kemp: More than suspicious.

Smith: Okay. How did that play itself out? Dole turned out to be a good soldier in terms of—

Kemp: Absolutely.

Smith: —carrying the—

Kemp: Bob had a lot of fun, sometimes at my expense, talking about this supply-side school of economics. Howard Baker called me a witch doctor and a snake oil salesman,

and he's one of my best, dear friends. So it really was controversial. All the younger Republicans in the House, particularly [Rep.] Trent Lott, Vin Weber, [Rep.] Dan Lungren, [Rep.] Henry Hyde, myself, we had a group of young back-benchers who were pursuing these ideas and it caused some friction, but Reagan was kind of our spokesman.

Howard Baker and Bob and George Bush, now vice president, had called it voodoo economics, and I served in his cabinet, so he—I think clearly the efficacy of the policies of fiscal, I'd say—some would say looseness and monetary tightness, worked. I don't know if everybody came around, but I know Bob Dole did, because he was intellectually honest. He was intellectually honest. He came from the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower wing of the party. The biggest fight Eisenhower had with the Congress was over Bob [Sen. Robert A.] Taft from Ohio trying to cut tax rates in 1952. Big, big battle between Eisenhower and Taft. And Bob came from the Eisenhower wing of the party, which is a great, more orthodox wing of the party of Lincoln, and Reagan loved Calvin Coolidge. Who would bring up Calvin Coolidge other than Ronald Reagan? Because Coolidge, in the twenties, had cut the top rate, the wartime rate, from 70 down to 28, and the Roaring Twenties ensued. [Herbert] Hoover reversed all that.

So I remember one time I was campaigning in Iowa, and they said, "What's the difference between you, Mr. Kemp, and all these other Republicans?" I said, "Well, I come from the Lincoln wing of the party, the Lincoln-Coolidge growth wing of the party, and everybody else comes from the Herbert Hoover wing of the party."

And someone said, "You know where you are?"

I said, "Yeah, West Branch, Iowa."

"Well, do you know who's from West Branch, Iowa? Herbert Hoover." The main street of West Branch, Iowa, is Herbert Hoover Boulevard. [laughs] We had a lot of fun with that.

Smith: One thing I would think you and Dole would have in common, though, first of all, I mean, Dole's a complex guy. I always thought there's a bit of populist in Dole. I mean, growing up dirt-poor, in Depression-era Kansas, I think was at least as much of an imprint on him as the War, and—

Smith: Well said. Yes. He definitely was a populist, a prairie populist. That's, in my opinion, why he was so much for free trade. He knew what we needed markets for our agricultural exports, and he was not just a populist in the sense he was going to hurt the manufacturing sector, as happened under—that was a traditional battle between the manufacturing Northeast and the agricultural Midwest right through the Lincoln years, and up until Hoover. So Bob, being an internationalist, saw that a strong foreign policy, a strong military, a strong trade policy, were essential ingredients of a prosperous, small-d democratic America.

Smith: Another way I think you have an awful lot in common, it's well known, beginning in your football days, I mean, that you were an outspoken champion of broadening the Republican Party, making it much more inviting, particularly to African-Americans and other minority groups, and I know that was a fight that Dole was interested in as well. Banging your head against the wall or—

Kemp: Bob Dole was a classical liberal, an 18th century liberal on democracy and making the Republican Party inclusive. He had a wonderful congressional record and senatorial record, and he made so many friends across the aisle, like [Sen.] George McGovern, joining together in Food for Peace Program. So Bob really understood, I think, the Lincoln side of our party as opposed to some, unfortunately, who kind of come from the know-nothing wing of the party. "I know nothing." There are strains in both parties. Both political parties had that split. The Republican Party had a great history, in my opinion, of civil rights and human rights and voting rights, and kind of walked away from it, other than Bob Dole. The Democratic Party had a horrible history of racism, but overcame it thanks to Lyndon Baines Johnson. So I give the Democratic Party credit for that, but Bob and I, among a lot of others—we don't take credit for it—wanted to make the party much more Lincolnian, much more inclusive, much more diverse, and it's a tough battle because we still have those strains in both political parties.

Smith: Let me ask you, in addition to the philosophical disagreements that you had in the early eighties, how much of this was the House versus the Senate? Is there, in fact, that tension between the two bodies?

Kemp: I think there might have been. We were really back-benchers. The leadership of the House Republicans kind of went along with us, and of course Reagan shoved it to its maturation point in '82 and '83. There was tension between the House and the Senate. Bill Roth would call it the Roth-Kemp Bill, and most people called it the Kemp-Roth Bill.

A funny story. I was at the Roth memorial service—it was packed—in Delaware, and all the speeches were about the Roth-Kemp Bill, and all of a sudden Dick [Richard B.] Cheney had sent a letter to be read, and he said, “By the way, to the Roth family, thank you for the great service of Bill Roth and his great contribution to America because of the Kemp-Roth Bill,” and everybody in the audience turned and looked at me. I felt very pleased, a little bit embarrassed. There was tension, but it wasn't animosity.

Smith: It sounds like there was also an element of generational divide here. There was talk about the college of cardinals, the old bulls, in effect, in the Senate, and you were of a different generation, different outlook.

Kemp: I had played professional football for thirteen years, and I was used to battling on Sunday and then being friends on Monday or after the game. To me, I loved to compete in the arena of ideas and still be friends post-policy differences. Some people took those policy differences very seriously, and some people didn't.

The good thing about Bob is, you could debate him and he'd give you a good right slam at the right side of the jaw, but it was always with humor and friendship, and I respected that because I think he had been through the valley of the shadow himself, and his life being saved, he had a very compassionate attitude towards the people with whom he disagreed. How else can you explain McGovern and Dole being such good friends? I mean, I used to rail against George McGovern. Today I can't do that anymore because I have such enormous respect for George McGovern and the genuine—I'm going to say love and respect between Bob and George McGovern. It's a beautiful friendship. I sat down after the Dole announcement in Lawrence when we had that big dinner, and my wife and I were having a late night snack, and George McGovern came in. We sat down

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 9

with him and talked for about an hour and a half, and I just came to see that Bob had more influence on him than he had on Bob.

Smith: That's fascinating. You ran against each other in '88, and there's that extraordinary week between the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary where Dick Wirthlin is telling Dole, I think by Friday of that week, "you've got this made." And I don't think Dole ever really believed him. Then, of course, what was it? The ad? The [John] Sununu organization went to work with the Senator Straddle ad, and then there was the debate and the non-signing of the tax pledge. Can you describe—

Kemp: Bob did not sign it?

Smith: Right. It was the televised debate, I think Sunday before the New Hampshire primary.

Kemp: I think Pete du Pont, former governor of Delaware, was tougher on Bob than was I. I had the idea that you could run a campaign—and I was very naïve about this—strictly on ideas, and I wasn't much of an in-fighter. So du Pont really challenged Bob Dole. I think I finished third. It was really du Pont who nailed Bob for not signing that pledge. To me the pledge was a priori self-evident truth, just sign it and get it over with, and Bob wouldn't.

Smith: Then how do you come to be on the ticket in '96?

Kemp: [sighs and laughs] After the campaign was over, Bob said publicly, with me in the audience, that he wished he'd picked Tiger Woods. Remember Tiger had just won his first Masters. And I always thought, well, only Bob Dole could say that. I've teased him about it and he teases me about it. Bob had people around him who were fans and friends of mine—Scott Reed, Charlie Black and John Buckley, who had worked with me in the past. I guess they got so hard up—no, no, no. I had done my work at HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] had given me a little different profile than most Republicans. I'd never sacrificed any of my heartfelt principles from the

supply-side days, but I tried to do it in the inner city, where people were left out, left behind, in public housing and enterprise zones and ownership and things that I thought could help convert our lower-income people to, if not upper, at least middle income, and got some credit for it, got some publicity for it, and here's a guy who can talk to black audience and brown audiences and mixed audiences, and I think Bob came to the conclusion, with the help of advisors, that maybe Kemp would make a good candidate.

We sat down. I was reluctant, because I had enormous respect for Bob, I knew it was going to be a tough race against [William J.] Clinton and [Albert] Gore [Jr.], because they had a good economy and a relatively peaceful world, and that's a recipe for reelection. It did that for Reagan. Didn't do it for Bush 41. I thought it might very well do it for Clinton-Gore. We talked several times, and I—

Smith: How early, how far out from the convention?

Kemp: Gosh, it was late June or early July, right before the convention. I went to his apartment and talked with Elizabeth [Dole] and Bob. As I said, I was very reluctant, not because of disrespect to Bob, but just the concern that it was going to be a very tough campaign, and I thought he needed more of a pit bull, and I'm not the pit bull politician that [Rep. Newt] Gingrich is or some of our other friends. So I thought Bob needed somebody different than a Jack Kemp. I was kind of the happy warrior, you know, always kind of smiling and seeing the sunny side of the street and the glass half full, and reluctant to go. And Bob said, "You know what, Jack? We're not going to run that kind of a race. Bill Clinton's our adversary, not the enemy. He's an adversary." And I liked that. I liked that formulation. Bob is a gentleman, notwithstanding how tough a life he had been through, experiences, but he was a gentleman's gentleman and he was highly regarded on the center left and the center right. So once I was assured that was the way the campaign was going to be run, and I wasn't going to have to rip off the face of Al Gore and Bill Clinton, I decided—my wife and I talked about it and decided to do it, and loved every second of it. Elizabeth and Bob Dole treated Joanne and Jack Kemp in such a wonderful fashion, that it was a joy, even to lose. [laughs]

Smith: What other names were being tossed about as prospective candidates?

Kemp: You're going to have to remind me of that.

Smith: Gosh, I remember from [Gov.] John Engler to [Sen.] Connie Mack, I think, was mentioned. [Gov.] Jim Edgar was mentioned. I mean, the great mentioner, but I mean there was a sense of real surprise when your name was unveiled. How much of that was, in fact, part of the equation? Remember, Dole, needing to sort of restart the campaign, had quit the Senate, pretty dramatic, and that hadn't really turned things around. How much do you think they were trying to let people know, "You think you know me, but you don't know me. I can surprise you," and picking you in many ways was—

Kemp: Yes, it was a surprise because I was not orthodox. I was outside the box in my congressional days and in my days at HUD, and everybody knew that Dole and Kemp had had this kind of not adversarial, but clash of ideas. How could Kemp accept or how could Dole pick Kemp? The Convention in San Diego, I played for the Chargers. I was the first quarterback of the Chargers in San Diego. It was kept secret almost until the last eleventh hour, and when it was announced, it was quite thrilling for all of us, Bob included.

Smith: Do you remember where the actual invitation was made, how he—

Kemp: Yes. The Watergate Hotel, his apartment at the Watergate. Scott Reed was there and John Buckley was there, and Bob and Elizabeth. I'd visited them two or three times and expressed heartfelt reluctance, and as I said earlier, once I knew how the campaign was going to be waged and respectful of both of us, and he wanted to lower the tax rate 15 percent, and made fun of the fact that I was old number 15, and Joanne and Elizabeth's letters—it was really clever. Bob's got an unbelievable mind. Very few people can comprehend how quickly he comes to these jokes and quips. He said one time that Joanne and Elizabeth had fifteen letters in their names, and I was old number 15, and my son was old number 15, and we're going to cut tax rates 15. The whole campaign, he would come up with different ways of calculating number 15. It was a joy. It was an absolute joy and a blessing. I didn't have to go out and raise money. I hated

raising money. All the money had been raised. Bob had these friends all over the country who had done a great job of putting him in the financial shape, that I didn't have to do—I went to a couple of fundraisers, but I didn't have to do any heavy lifting. So it was a real fine experience.

Smith: Remember there was the trip to Russell.

Kemp: Yes.

Smith: Talk about that, because that must have been for him very emotional to show the place off to you.

Kemp: Yes. The night before, we were in a little motel. I can't even remember the town; it was outside Russell. They wanted to keep it a secret, and my wife and I are flown in in secret and landed at the airport, and we sneak into this motel. All of a sudden, about eleven o'clock at night it starts to storm, and anybody who's lived through a Kansas rainstorm knows what I'm talking about. I mean, it was not just raining; it was just pouring in gushes and lightning and thunder, and we can't sleep. My wife says, "Do you think this is an omen?" [laughs] We got very nervous that night.

Woke up the next day, went over and had coffee with Elizabeth and Bob, had a great announcement, and found ourselves on the cover of *Time* magazine and *Newsweek*. Went to San Diego and Bob got a hero's welcome. I'd throw footballs around, you know.

Smith: He took you through the old family home in Russell.

Kemp: Yes. Talked about his family and his roots. See, my daddy was a truck driver, and we had a very modest home in Los Angeles, California, and he drove a truck, never went to college. My mother was well educated, went to University of California at Berkeley and University of Montana at Missoula. So she was highly educated, Phi Beta Kappa. My dad was just a truck driver and a good athlete. So my roots were not unlike Bob's—hard, hard work. Never saw my father. Six days a week he worked. I'd see him

on Sunday at church or maybe a little bit on Saturday. Bob's life in Russell, to go through that house and to see what it was like for the Dole family just bonded us, at least me to him. That was very emotional, very emotional.

And Elizabeth, throughout that time, I think she's one of the most wonderful women I have ever met, because she just had so much empathy, had a strong faith, and it helped Joanne and me to weather some of the bricks and stones.

Smith: Did you ever hear him talk about his wartime experiences, after the War?

Kemp: No, not in the sense that he—he didn't like to talk about that, but I'll tell you what, when he would see anybody in the audience from the 10th Mountain Division, he would have to stop his speech. He could be talking about cutting tax rates or cutting the growth of spending or talk about trade, and he would pause and invite this old warrior up on the stage. Then he would talk about how few were alive today and how many were dying off, and that great generation that [Tom] Brokaw—made him very emotional, as well he should be.

Like me talking about my football. I'd call up my football player friends. We went to Buffalo when I got the nomination in San Diego, we did a couple of stops in between. Went to Springfield and did the Lincoln recollections and looked at the memorial to Abraham Lincoln in Springfield, then we went to Buffalo and I had all my old teammates back. We had a great event. Bob loved it. He loved them. He loved football. He played football. He played football himself, and I think that was—I'd always said had Richard Nixon been first string at Whittier instead of third string at Whittier, he never would have had the—Bob was first string and it served him well.

Smith: Tell me, the 15 percent tax cut, which was the centerpiece in many ways of the campaign, certainly [unclear], how did that come about?

Kemp: You know, I don't know. By the time—I did a Tax Reform Task Force for Speaker Gingrich and Leader Dole right before the '96 campaign, and we had some really good people on there and we came out with a plan to reform the tax code and have a single tax. All people should pay tax. Nobody escapes taxation, but it should be one

tax, not five. You earn income, you pay a tax. You save it, you pay a tax. You invest it, you pay a tax. Capital gains is un-indexed; that's the fifth tax. And if you die, which is a distinct possibility, you're going to pay again. So we came out with this plan, Bob really liked it. I think out of that overarching reform agenda, Bob adopted a 15 percent reduction in the rates, which had been lowered by Reagan and raised by Clinton and, frankly, raised by the [George H.W.] Bush administration.

In fact, I think, in retrospect, not to pick on George H.W. Bush, but I think that tax rate increase of '92, '93 sunk his hopes. I feel bad about this because we went around the room in the Bush administration, and all the Cabinet members supported it, and I said, "Mr. President, I love you dearly and I'm honored to be in your Cabinet. Please don't raise taxes. Don't buy into this [Sen.] George Mitchell three dollars of spending cuts for every one dollar of static income tax increase." He'd made that pledge, "Read my lips. No new taxes."

Bob was great, though. He loved talking about that 15 percent rate reduction. It wasn't a 15 percent tax cut. Tax cut implies a revenue loss. With a lower rate you'd have a bigger economy and more revenue, and I used to drive people crazy with that, because they'd say, "Jack Kemp's idea of stopping an intercontinental ballistic missile is to cut taxes." I said, "Yeah, that's the first thing I'd do." [laughs] The second thing I'd do is rebuild our missile defense system.

Smith: So Dole had become, in effect, a convert, if you will—

Kemp: Yes.

Smith: —to the basic concept.

Kemp: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I respected him enormously for that, because he had to go back on what he thought—but I had changed my mind about things. I don't mind people changing their mind if they get on the right side of something, and I think Bob had the intellectual honesty and political integrity to not only adopt it, but adapt it to his rhetoric and to his mindset. We were serious about it.

Smith: Early on, you had these discussions about campaign strategy. And looking back, it's sort of hard to imagine how that campaign could have been won, but obviously at some point they thought it could have been won. What was the notion? How were you going to beat Bill Clinton?

Kemp: Well, you know, I wasn't in on a lot of the strategy. I was picked as vice presidential candidate very late in the process. The strategy went on in the Dole camp, as opposed—I was out on the road with my wife and my team. We both had good teams. It's hard to think how it could have been won. Again, in a relatively peaceful environment in foreign policy and with a pretty good economy, which it was, and, you know, Clinton had signed a lower capital gain tax, he had signed welfare reform, he had signed NAFTA, which lowered tariffs in North American Free Trade Agreement. Those were three tax cuts.

Smith: Remember hadn't he said "The era of big government is over"?

Kemp: Yes, yes. One other thing, nobody's really investigated this, but it would be interesting to observe what TV was like post- San Diego convention. If you remember, the Clinton administration started bombing northern Iraq and southern Iraq ostensibly to help the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south, and they bombed for about fifteen days, and all the Republicans in the Senate, including my buddy [Sen.] Trent Lott—and I don't say this to be mean about it, but they all were supporting this bombing program, and the front pages were filled for almost two and a half weeks after our convention, after Labor Day when campaigns really start, the papers and the television every night was our bombing of Iraq and weakening the regime of Saddam Hussein and protecting the Kurds. It was Reagan foreign policy at work, or Dole foreign policy. By the time the middle of September rolled around, we were sixteen, seventeen points down.

Again, I'm not an expert and I can't remember every headline or every newscast, but by the time we got in October, Bob was campaigning day and night, and I think Bob Dole himself saved the Republican House and Senate. Had it not been for Bob and his indefatigable tenacity saved, for the Republican Party, the House, and the Senate. I think

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 16

to this day had it not been for Bob, we'd have lost not only the presidency, but the House and the Senate.

Smith: What makes you say that?

Kemp: Because the polling data was so negative, and Clinton was popular. I think he could have beaten Ronald Reagan in '96. He had that charming demeanor. Everybody knew everything you could know about Bill Clinton. Some people got mad at me in the debate with Al Gore that I didn't rip off the Clinton façade. Everybody knew that it was a façade. It was redundant to be talking personally about Bill Clinton. He was easy to like and he had a good economy and he had relatively strong foreign policy credentials. Anyway, I—

Smith: And let's face it. I mean, Republicans had taken over Congress in '94, but paid a certain price. The whole government shutdown, for example.

Kemp: Terrible mistake by Newt Gingrich. Clinton sucked Gingrich into a terrible political cul-de-sac, and he was very clever, and then Newt whined about it, and not being on Air Force One, allowed to come off the front of the plane, and the papers were full of cartoons making fun of the Gingrich House.

Smith: It must have driven Dole up the wall.

Kemp: It did.

Smith: Just stylistically.

Kemp: He would never do that. Bob Dole knew there were limits to how you negotiate over budgets. I remember Newt saying one day, he would keep the government shut down even if it meant defaulting on the credit worthiness of the United States of America. I remember calling Newt and saying, "Newt, do you realize Alexander Hamilton is turning over in his grave?" Because he established the credit worthiness of

the United States at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 to 1789. He paid off 100 cents on the dollar of all our Revolutionary War debt. He put the country on the gold standard. He established the common market of the United States because it hadn't been functioning. I told this story to Newt, and I said, "Newt, the American people love revolutions now and then, but they elected George Washington as our president, not Patrick Henry. You cannot be Patrick Henry in perpetuity. We've got to govern. Get this budget deal signed." Look, I'm smiling as I say this, because Newt himself knows he made an error. But the Republican Party in the House was not held in high regard in '96, and Bob saved it. Bob saved it, bless his heart.

Smith: Remember in the last couple of weeks he also got a little bit of help because there were the questions being raised about Clinton fundraising.

Kemp: Yes.

Smith: And abuse of the White House, the Lincoln Bedroom and so forth and so on.

Kemp: Yes.

Smith: That began to filter into the political discourse a bit.

Kemp: Yes, to a certain extent, but people knew there were personal failings by President Clinton . . .

Smith: Let me ask you, because something happened in the Clinton presidency that I think is a real turning point. For the first time in history pollsters asked two questions about presidential performance. For the first time ever they asked voters, "What do you think about the President's performance in office?" and then secondarily, "What do you think about the President personally?" And it almost gave license to the electorate to hold these two seemingly conflicting views, and in effect, institutionalized the notion that the President's character, personal behavior, whatever, is a secondary part. As long as the stock market was going up, as long as people felt good, they would tolerate a lot.

Kemp: Well, I'm going to go back to what I said earlier in answer to an easier question. People knew just everything you could possibly know about Bill and Hillary [Rodham] Clinton, and I don't say that to be mean about it. It was just a fact of life in politics, from Kennedy on, people were aware of just about everything in their candidate. And Bob made it very clear that he would never attack anybody personally. He would attack their positions and their policies and there was reason to do that, but again, given the foreign policy of the Clinton administration, given his statement that "The era of big government is over," he signed welfare reform, NAFTA, signed the capital gain tax cut, gosh—

Smith: It was hard to get traction.

Kemp: The market was going up, and no one was going to—the Republicans' Republican, the Democrats' Democrat. The fight for the middle was where we tried to get, and he captured it.

Smith: Of course, [H.] Ross Perot did run again, but Perot presumably was—

Kemp: He was a non-factor, a non sequitur.

Smith: How did you prepare for your debate with Al Gore?

Kemp: [Sen.] Judd Gregg was Al Gore, and we went to Bob's condo in Florida and spent two or three days. It was interesting preparing for that debate, because I had trouble getting a handle on how to attack them without seeming to be personal, and it was a fair debate. It wasn't—I enjoyed it, but I didn't—

Smith: Did Dole give you any advice before it?

Kemp: No, no. I'd been on *Meet the Press* the weekend before, and Tim Russert's from Buffalo. He's a tremendous interlocutor. He not only asks the question, it's an interesting question, plus he gives you time to answer it, which is unlike so many talk

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 19

shows. He'd asked me the question about the 15 percent tax cut, how would we pay for it, and I had said, "Well, the revenues would come in like Niagara Falls," and the Gore people had seen an opening, and during the debate I defended it by using that phrase again, and Gore picked up on it and said, "That would be a Niagara Falls of debt and deficits and disaster," something like that, and everybody laughed and gave him a [unclear].

Smith: During the campaign, how frequently would you talk with Dole?

Kemp: We campaigned together quite often, and then I campaigned a lot in California. I don't know why, but they wanted me to be in California, thinking that maybe California could come into play. So we would talk once a day, once every other day, and then campaign together a couple days a week. I like to be with him, because I think I would energize that side of Bob that I thought was—the Dole humor, the Dole optimism, the Dole courage, the Dole as a vision for the future, because politics is not about the past, it's about the future.

Smith: That raises a good question, because I got sort of sucked in at the very end on the acceptance speech, and remember Mark Halperin sort of stormed out of San Diego, and the reason was because old Dole hands were rewriting the ending. I put in the line about "I'm the most optimistic man in America," because that's what Dole thought he should be running on, is about his optimism grounded in his life story, but projected onto the future.

Kemp: Yes.

Smith: And of course, we had this intense internal debate about the Halperin text, which was all about the past, trying to get around the age issue, remember, and that's where the whole "bridge to the future" and the Clinton people came in and exploited it.

Kemp: Yes.

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 20

Smith: Did you see the text before it was delivered?

Kemp: No. Because I'd be with you. Again, in my experience and part of my existential being, everything is about the future. People will forgive you the past. They will not forgive a lack of vision for their future or their children's future. Reagan—"You ain't seen nothin' yet. We've come a long way, but we've got a long way to go." And that was really Dole, as you say, grounded in his life experience; projected onto the future, that was Dole and his view of his country. So that's where I was, and I'm glad some of that got in the speech.

Smith: Not enough, but a little. But it did make the headline in the [*New York Times*] the next day.

Kemp: What did it say?

Smith: "Dole: Most Optimistic Man in America, Pledges—," you know.

Kemp: Great.

Smith: But the problem was, for three-quarters of the speech he sounded like the most pessimistic man in America. [laughs] And then at the end kind of flipped the switch and this Reaganesque optimism.

Kemp: That old-time religion of our party was grounded in cut spending, balance the budget, Scrooge. I used to show people my view of politics: that people don't care how much you know until they know that you care. Liberals show that they care by spending your money. Conservatives show that they care by balancing your budget. What's more popular, Santa Claus or Scrooge? Now, what is Santa Claus on the right? Cut tax rates, more income after taxes, more growth, more jobs, more revenue, and, yeah, we're going to cut the growth of spending, but start with first things first—growth, jobs, after-tax income, a better life, better future, lower tariffs, lower duties, more prosperity. Santa Claus. We were the party of Scrooge.

Smith: It sounds like in the '96 campaign, in effect, those two streams came together.

Kemp: Yes, but the empirical evidence at work in that campaign, the objective historical empirical evidence at that moment in the campaign was that Clinton was tough on foreign policy, which was Reaganesque, and had signed NAFTA, capital gain tax cuts, and signed the welfare reform bill. So he had a perfect position for a center left pro-business Democrat running against a center right pro-business Republican.

Smith: Did you ever think you were going to win?

Kemp: [sighs] I didn't see how we could after that September of Clinton bombing everything. [laughs] I mean, it was brutal. I kept calling Bob, "Bob, why are the Republicans in the Senate praising Bill Clinton?" Go back and look at the newspaper. It was full of praise. All our guys were praising the robust foreign policy of Bill Clinton, who was taking the headlines away. We didn't get a headline for about two weeks after Labor Day. So I had trouble thinking how to do it. You hope against hope, and I wanted to win. And Bob—I mean, could anybody have campaigned any harder and longer hours than Bob Dole?

Smith: There's a story that he went back, he read the leaks, and there were people in the campaign who were sort of for self-serving purposes, trying to distance themselves from the candidate—

Kemp: I'm shocked.

Smith: I know, I know. In Washington!

Kemp: Was gambling.

Smith: [laughs] And people tried to make themselves look good at the expense of someone else.

Kemp: Yes.

Smith: And apparently one day—and it only happened once in the campaign—he lost it. He went into a meeting, I guess, and he said, “You don’t know how hard it is to be out there, twenty, twenty-five points down in the polls, and to campaign your head off, with a smile on your face and optimism about the result, and to come back and read this stuff,” which is a very human reaction.

Kemp: Yes, and the press would exploit it. I remember one time I gave a speech in Harlem. My wife and I had gone into Sylvia’s Soul Food Restaurant in Harlem, and there was some griping in the campaign, “Why is Kemp hunting for ducks where there are no ducks?” Long story short, there will never be any ducks for our party if you don’t go places where you’re not expected to campaign. But the young owner of Sylvia’s Soul Food Restaurant, Van Woods, a friend of mine, a Republican, black Republican, and we had this rally at his restaurant, and Charlie [Rep. Charles B.] Rangel came, and Charlie was an old friend from my House days. The press asked him, “What are you doing at a Kemp event?”

He said, “Jack and I are friends.” And long story short, we had a nice reception.

I get on the plane, flying to Boston, and a *Boston Globe* writer says, “Could you give the speech you gave at Sylvia’s Soul Food Restaurant in Harlem to a suburban Kansas City, Kansas, audience?”

I said, “Of course I could. Kansas City wants the same thing for urban Harlem as anybody—jobs, good education, chance to own your own home. These things are universal. It’s not the American dream; it’s the universal dream.” So I started bragging a little bit, which was a big mistake, because I took the answer to the next level. I said, you know, the Million Man March had just happened. So dumb Jack Kemp said, “I could have given that speech at the Million Man March.”

She said, “Oh?” Her antennae go up.

And I said, “Yeah, that was as conservative—small c—men be good fathers, be good husbands, you want the best thing for your family as everybody does.” I was alluding to that. The headline of the *Boston Globe* when we woke up the next morning,

“Kemp Praises Farrakhan” or “Kemp Praises Nation of Islam.” Oy vey. I mean, all hell broke loose. So it isn’t at all what I had said, but she took it and it really—

Smith: Has that kind of “gotcha” journalism become more prevalent over the course of your political career? Is that one of the contributing factors to the ugliness of politics today?

Kemp: I am reluctant to agree with that, other than to say clearly there are those who can take relatively harmless missteps and enlarge them to a point of worldwide—but I think it’s always been true in politics. You’ve got to be very careful how you word things and what you say. I learned the hard way. I went with Bibi [Benjamin] Netanyahu, the finance minister, I think, at the time—maybe he was prime minister at the time—to a Presidents of American Jewish Organizations. I’m stumbling over the exact—but there were about two thousand leaders in the Jewish community, and I walked in with Bibi, who was an old friend of mine. [makes sound of one person applauding] Because the *New York Times* had picked up the story that Kemp had praised not only the Million Man March, but the Nation of Islam and Louis Farrakhan. Oh my gosh.

Bob and I were very pro-Israel, very pro-human rights, both of us cared deeply and profoundly about Soviet Jewry and the cause of reunification of families, and the whole issue of civil and human rights, both domestically and internationally. I almost wiped it out in one stupid comment.

Smith: Do you remember the incident—of course, you weren’t there, but the Chico incident? Remember when Bob Dole fell off the stage in Chico?

Kemp: I don’t remember Chico, but I remember the incident. It got blown up. It wasn’t exactly Gerry Ford falling off of Air Force One’s—I bumbled and stumbled. I was at Pepperdine [University] and I had a lot of family at Pepperdine. My brother was on the board, and we finished out the campaign at Pepperdine in Malibu, gorgeous scenery, and I’m looking out at the ocean. I grew up in L.A., so I was home, had my family with me and some of my old football buddies from the National Football League, and I’m on the stage. My son Jeffrey, who had played in the NFL eleven years—I played thirteen—he’s

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 24

right behind me, and I said, “And next Tuesday we’ve got to go out and beat Bob Dole.” And Jeff tugged on my coat and said, “Dad, we’re trying to beat Bill Clinton.” [laughs] So I said, “Yeah, beat Bill Clinton, too.” Anyway, the press didn’t pick up on it. I guess they gave us a free ride on that.

Then Bob said, in San Diego, “It’s great to be in San Francisco.” Do you remember that one?

And I said, “Bob, we’re in San Diego.” And he laughed. I don’t think there’s anybody in politics, including Reagan, who had the ability to turn a faux pas into a little quip and get a laugh, than Bob Dole.

Smith: Where were you on election night?

Kemp: Where was I on election night? I was in Orange County, California, with my family, and Bob was in Lawrence [Kansas]—or where was Bob—

Smith: I think he was in Washington.

Kemp: Oh. When we lost Ohio, I told my wife, I said, “We can’t win the presidency without Ohio and Florida.” It was so much fun, though. I have such great memories and to think about them again is a joy, and my respect and love for Bob Dole is unmatched, unparalleled to by anybody other than Elizabeth.

Smith: How do you think he’ll be remembered?

Kemp: Bob Dole, service to America through war, through Congress, the Senate, running for vice president, running for president. Service. Martin Luther King [Jr.] said, “Not everybody can be famous, but everybody can be great in service to mankind.” Bob Dole was both famous and great. He’s the epitome of what Dr. King was alluding to in that great speech.

Smith: It’s interesting, because one of the things he’s proudest of is his involvement in the King Birthday Bill.

Kemp: Yes. I was the Republican sponsor in the House, with Dan Lungren, and Bob was in the Senate. The Reagan White House was not going to sign the bill. They wanted it on Sunday, wouldn't cost money. They were worried about the cost. Not Ronnie Reagan, but the staff. That's what they're paid to do, look at the cost of things. And they weren't going to sign it. Bob called in his views, I called in mine, and I can't remember who I talked to, but I told somebody, "You want the ghost of Abraham Lincoln hovering over your bed like Ebenezer Scrooge in that great play by Dickens?"

And they signed it, and Reagan gave a speech about Martin Luther King that was absolutely beautiful, and Dole and I were there. It was one of the proud moments. In his life; it's one of the proud moments in my life. I don't think we can have racial reconciliation until we understand the black experience, and Bob did.

Smith: Finally, talking about service, I think one of the things he's proudest of is the World War II Memorial.

Kemp: Yes. Oh yes.

Smith: Probably wouldn't have happened—

Kemp: It wouldn't have happened without Bob and his constant reiteration of the fact that the empirical evidence that that generation was dying off and we had to do something about it. Bob put his heart and soul and shoulder to the wheel to get that done. Boy, his speech at that dedication was one of the great speeches. It reminded me of Reagan at Normandy. Bob is eloquent.

Smith: I wrote it.

[End of interview]

Index

- Baker, Sen. Howard H. Jr., 4, 6, 7
Black, Charlie, 12
Boston Globe, 31
Brokaw, Tom, 17
Buckley, John, 12, 15
Bush, George H.W., 3, 7, 13, 18
- Cheney, Richard B., 10
Clinton, Hillary Rodham, 24
Clinton, William J., 13, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 28
Coolidge, Calvin, 8
- Dole, Elizabeth, 13, 15, 17, 33
Dole, Robert J., 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 33
 1996 presidential campaign, 26, 29
 and civil and human rights, 31
 and football, 18
 and Israel, 31
 and Martin Luther King Day Bill, 33
 and Sen. George S. McGovern, 11
 and tax reform, 19
 and World War II Memorial, 34
 announces in Russell, Kansas, that Jack Kemp is his vice presidential running mate, 16
 asks Jack Kemp to be his vice presidential running mate, 15
 on tax reform, 19
 on William J. Clinton, 13
du Pont, Gov. Pete, 12
- Edgar, Gov. Jim, 14
Eisenhower, Dwight D., 7
Engler, Gov. John, 14
- Farrakhan, Louis, 31
Ford, Gerald R., 32
- Gingrich, Rep. Newt, 13, 18, 22
Goldwater, Sen. Barry, 4
Gore, Albert Jr., 13
 debate with Jack Kemp, 25
Gregg, Sen. Judd, 25
- Halperin, Mark, 26
Hamilton, Alexander, 22

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 27

Hoover, Herbert, 8
Hyde, Rep. Henry, 7

Iraq
influence on 1996 election, 21

Johnson, Lyndon B., 4, 9

Kemp, Jack F. Jr.
1996 vice presidential campaign, 12, 13, 14, 20, 26, 28, 33
accepts offer to be Robert J. Dole's vice presidential running mate, 15
and Benjamin Netanyahu, 31
and football experience, 11
and George H.W. Bush, 18
announcement in Russell, Kansas, of being Robert J. Dole's vice presidential running mate, 16
debate with Albert Gore, Jr., 25
football background, 15
member of Department of Housing and Urban Developing, 12
on Alexander Hamilton, 22
on civil and human rights, 31
on Democratic Party, 9
on Elizabeth Dole, 17
on fundraising, 15
on Gov. Pete du Pont, 12
on H. Ross Perot, 25
on Israel, 31
on Kemp-Roth Tax Cut, 4
on *Meet the Press*, 25
on politics, 28, 31
on Rep. Newt Gingrich, 13, 22
on Republican Party, 9, 28
on Richard M. Nixon, 18
on Robert J. Dole, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 33
on Ronald Reagan, 32
on Sen. George S. McGovern, 11
on Sen. Howard H. Baker, Jr., 7
on supply-side economics, 2, 3, 4
on tax reform, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 18, 19
on the media, 31
on the U.S. Congress, 10
on the U.S. Senate, 10
on Tim Russert, 25
on U.S. economy, 4
on William J. Clinton, 21, 22, 24, 28
parents of, 16
Kemp, Jeffrey, 32
Kemp, Joanne, 11, 14, 16, 17, 20, 30, 33

Kemp 5-23-07—p. 28

Kemp-Roth Tax Cut, 4, 5, 10
Kennedy, John F., 4, 5, 24
Kennedy, Sen. Edward M., 5
King, Martin Luther Jr., 33

Laffer, Arthur B., 3
Lott, Rep. Trent, 7
Lott, Sen. Trent, 20
Lundgren, Rep. Dan, 7, 34

Mack, Sen. Connie, 14
McGovern, Sen. George S., 9
 and Robert J. Dole, 11
Meet the Press, 25
Million Man March, 30
Mitchell, Sen. George, 18

Netanyahu, Benjamin, 31
New York Times, 31
Nixon, Richard M., 2, 4, 18
North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTRA), 20

Pepperdine University, 32
Perot, H. Ross, 25

Rangel, Rep. Charles B., 30
Reagan, Ronald, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 18, 21, 27, 32, 35
 and Kemp-Roth Tax Cut, 5, 6
 and Martin Luther King Day Bill, 34
Reed, Scott, 12, 15
Rockefeller, Nelson A., 5
Roth, Sen. William, 4, 10
Russert, Tim, 25

Smith, Richard Norton, 26, 35
Stein, Herb, 2
Sununu, John, 11

Taft, Sen. Robert A., 7

Volcker, Paul, 6

Weber, Rep. Vin, 7
Woods, Tiger, 12
Woods, Van, 30