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RONALD REAGAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH STUART SPENCER

November 15-16, 2001
Charlottesville, Virginia

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UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA

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Young: This is a Reagan Oral History project interview with Stu Spencer. We have reviewed very briefly the ground rules, which are understood by all. For the record, I have to say on each tape that all people participating in this interview understand that everything said in the room stays confidential until such time as a transcript is cleared by Stu Spencer. Before we actually begin, to help the transcriptionist connect the voice with the right name, we go around the table and ask everybody to say a few words to help with the voice ID. We'll start with a few words by you, Stu.

Spencer: In reference to what you mentioned about information leaving the room, I can say I've never been misquoted. Maybe I haven't liked what they wrote, but I wasn't misquoted so I don't worry about that stuff.

Young: Good. I'm Jim Young.

Riley: I'm Russell Riley, an assistant professor here at the Miller Center.

Culbert: I'm Gar Culbert, I'm a graduate student at the University of Virginia and a research assistant at the Miller Center.

Freedman: I'm Paul Freedman, I'm an assistant professor in the department of Government here at UVA and I actually have been misquoted, frequently.

Knott: I'm Stephen Knott, an assistant professor at the Miller Center.

Young: When Stu and I were chatting a little while ago, I indicated there were two main subjects, broad topics, in which we're interested. One was Reagan, the President, the politician, the Governor, the campaigner. Stu Spencer saw Reagan throughout his active political career and so he has an interesting window on Ronald Reagan.

The second thing we're interested in is the whole business of political consulting, the role of the consultant, because Stu Spencer is one of the founding fathers of the political consultant phenomenon, a phenomenon that has come a long way since he began. His history is also the history of political consulting and the history of Ronald Reagan as a President. That's where most of our questions are headed for the historical record.

Why don't we start off with some questions, Stu, about the beginnings; your beginnings and then the beginnings of Ronald Reagan. You mentioned his political career. His second career, I guess you'd call it.

Spencer: Second career.

Young: The second career. You mentioned that you were in charge of the '68—did I understand you correctly—the Reagan delegation, the California delegation.

Spencer: It's hard to find a beginning for these things. I can talk about that incident if you want, but that's not the beginning.

Young: No, talk about the beginning.

Spencer: The beginning of Spencer-Roberts . . . I'll talk about the Spencer-Roberts company first, get it out of the way. Spencer-Roberts is the company that Bill Roberts and I started in 1960. For basic background, I was in athletics. I was a coach. I was a Navy veteran. I went into the Navy when I was a kid, 17 years old. When I came out, I had a lot of [interruption for microphone placement]—so I was in another profession, coaching and the emerging profession of public recreation for communities, which was new at that time. I was director of parks and recreation for a small city in southern California. All during this period of time many young people coming back from World War II were starting to run for state legislature, for Congress, and jobs like that. A lot of them were friends of mine. So, as in all political campaigns, you ask your friends to help you first.

I became involved as a volunteer in a lot of those campaigns. Then I became involved in the Young Republican movement in the '50s in California. Up until 19—I think it was '58 or '59—I was a volunteer. Politics was a hobby, an avocation, but I loved it. I just got more mired in it every day to the point where the city attorney would call me and say you've broken every rule. I decided I better move on.

I went to work for the party. My partner, Bill Roberts, did too. We went to work for the party in L.A. County. In the process we made the decision to form a company and, if we were going to stay in politics, to do it that way instead of be at the mercy of a county or state chairman. Every time there's a change, there's a change in staff.

We had two role models in the political camp. One was Whitaker-Baxter up in San Francisco. Leone Baxter and Clem Whitaker, who were very prominent in California politics. They were some of the eyes and ears, the spokespeople, for the Southern Pacific Railroad, which ran California back in the '30s. They elected the Democratic state chairman and the Republican state chairman. They really had a handle on the state.

They didn't do a lot of candidate work, but they did a lot of what we call proposition work in California. Under the reforms of Hiram Johnson, we were a unique state at that time. We were for years. You could put practically anything on the ballot and have it decided there instead of the legislature.

After that, maybe a year and a half to two years before we formed our company in 1960, Bill Ross and Herb Baus had formed a company in L.A. called Baus and Ross. They were doing candidates and propositions and those sort of things. We looked at those two people, the political scene, and we loved the game. We wanted to be in it. We didn't want to run for public office and we envisioned this as the best opportunity to be in the game, to play the game and make some money, or at least make a living at the time. So we went that route. We started a business on 500 bucks each and never looked back. It was a phenomenal story, for us anyway. That was the beginning.

In our firm—it's different today—we brought what you call full management to the firm or to the campaign; strategic planning, campaign plans, survey research, media production, media buy, press relations. We didn't do a lot of fund-raising. In that era—and I think it's somewhat true today, though the young people don't believe me when I say it—it took people with money to raise money, if you exclude the direct mail aspect of it. We always made damn sure that we had a finance chairman that knew how to raise money and not a finance chairman that had money necessarily. There are a lot of analogies there.

For instance, Holmes Tuttle, who is without a doubt the biggest single force in the early part of Ronald Reagan's career, was a tremendous fundraiser. He had a few bucks, but he wasn't as wealthy as David Packard who came along a little later. I remember in the Governor's race, not Reagan's, but another Governor's race where David was my finance chairman, I went to him and said, "I need 200,000 bucks for a TV buy next Tuesday." It was easier for David to give me the 200,000 bucks, which he did, than raise it. That's the difference between a person who can raise money and a person who has money.

That's basically the way we handled fund-raising. Later on there was a lot of direct mail fund-raising going on, which takes professionals, but in many cases you don't raise any more money than you spend on a direct mail piece. Sometimes if you have a hot button issue, you can do very, very well. Those were the early days.

We had three campaigns the first year. One was John Rousselot, the famous [John] Bircher. He was not a known Bircher when we ran his campaign for Congress. The second was Al Bell, who had been the county chairman in L.A. for the Republican party for Congress. Both of those campaigns had interesting sidelights. John, a long time friend of mine, was one of the best candidates we ever worked with, including Ronald Reagan. After that campaign, he and I were flying to Washington—he'd won—and he asked me to go back and help him put a staff together. In that discussion on the red eye from L.A. to D.C., we got into some philosophical points and he started making crazy statements—in my mind, crazy statements—like Birch-oriented statements.

I looked at him and said, "John, wait a minute, let's back up. Are you a Bircher?" There was this long, long pause and finally he said, "Yes." I went ballistic. All of a sudden my mind went back. We had received checks from all over the United States during that campaign. I attributed that to the fact that he'd been in the FHA [Federal Housing Authority] in Washington and he'd met all these people in the real estate and finance business. But, no, they were Birch checks. When we

landed, a guy—I can't even remember his name now, he's not with us—picked us up. We stayed at his little home in Georgetown. He was a very conservative guy out of New York politics.

In the car, I said to him, "We've got a Bircher with us." He almost drove over the freeway. He's saying, "We what? We what? We what?" I told him the story.

We spent the rest of the night until nine in the morning pounding on Rousselot, saying, "We're going to walk out of here. We're going to have a press conference. We're going to get rid of this thing, gone forever." He didn't do it. He paid the price and not only that, but then he went into Congress later. Here's a young man who could have been Senator from California, could have been the Governor of California. He paid the ultimate price for his membership in the Birch Society.

Al Bell had been part of the very wealthy Bell Petroleum family. Half of southern California, Bel Air, Bell, California are all named after him or his family. He was one of our other candidates. The interesting part of that campaign was that he was running against Murray Chotiner in the primary. Chotiner had been one of our mentors. He was one of Nixon's political guys, a very, very bright politician. The irony of it was, when he transferred from the political lawyer campaign type to the candidate type, he broke everything he ever taught us. Everything. Brochures should be short, simple, sweet, direct. His brochures had everything in them, including the Magna Carta. He used to tell us you can't beat somebody with a name that has four letters in it. Then he runs against Al Bell.

It was hysterically funny. We even thought it was funny at the time. Of course Murray got beat two to one. After that, in the first big break, we did Senator [Thomas] Kuchel in southern California. California in the old days used to be a north-south situation, almost like a borderline. Northern political figures in both parties didn't like southern California and vice versa, so campaigns were usually broken north-south. We got the southern end of Senator Kuchel's campaign in 1962, which was a break. That's a statewide-type thing. Out of that in 1964 we got Nelson Rockefeller for President in the West, in California particularly against Barry Goldwater.

Riley: So you were handling other states in addition to California?

Spencer: We did some work in Oregon. It was a great campaign for us. I think it was one of the best campaigns we ever ran.

Young: The Rockefeller?

Spencer: Yes, we lost because a baby was born on Saturday.

Young: But you started out—

Spencer: The first polling data we looked at in January—that year the primary was June—was like 59 to 27 for Goldwater. We thought, *oh boy, we made a mistake.* But we had made the commitment and so we geared a campaign around it. We didn't have money problems—you can imagine—but we had all kinds of other problems. Nelson was a fabulous guy to work with.

Young: Tell us a little bit about that.

Spencer: The campaign?

Young: How he was to work with? And what you learned or didn't learn in that campaign.

Spencer: Our strategy in that campaign was simple. We had to bring Barry back down to us. There was no way we were going to catch him in a straight-out, heads-on, positive campaign. We had to attack him, bring him down to our level, and then rebuild ourselves into something that was feasible as a presidential candidate. So we attacked. We attacked, we attacked, we attacked. I mean we attacked everything. Some of it was valid. Some of it was borderline.

Young: Birch? The Birch connection?

Spencer: No, we didn't talk about the Birch thing. It was obvious to people. The Birch thing was really a small thing. It really didn't come up until the Reagan race in '66.

It was the nuclear aspect of it. This man is going to be President of the United States. He's going to have access to these materials and yet he is a little bit deranged. He's not quite there. He'll do something scary. It was scare tactics. We approached that from every way.

There was another reason we did that. We were trying to confuse the issue. Nelson had marriage problems. He was divorced. He'd just married Happy. She was pregnant and there was a question of how many months she was pregnant. I never knew, but we certainly weren't on the right side of the family morality question at that time in history. We had to confuse that.

We could do it by attacking Barry Goldwater and his weaknesses. Frankly we did a very good job of it. All of a sudden they forgot all about Happy and the potential baby. I'd say 48 hours out, or something like that, our polling data showed us dead even. We lost by less than one point or something.

But in New York, when you work with someone like Nelson or a lot of eastern candidates in those days, they had their entourage. I'll tell you, Nelson Rockefeller had an entourage. The last week of that campaign at the Ambassador Hotel, there must've been a hundred people there from New York. All of them came out to help, including all the people that had been on retainer at some time in the history of the Rockefeller family. They brought labor union people. They brought black people. Jackie Robinson was one of them. If you know anything about campaigning, it's over by then. What can you do except try to keep the course steady? They came and they were all over the place.

Within the framework of this group, our basic contact was George Hinman, who was on the national committee, a very classy guy and a fine guy to work with. He came to us on the Friday before the election and raised the question about the birth, the question of Nelson Jr. He was named Nelson, Jr. We just said, "Forget it."

“Is it going to happen?” he said. “We don’t know, it could happen.” I said, “Do something. Hide it. You’re a Rockefeller, you can do something.”

After the fact, I find out what happened. The New York people thought that this was going to be a plus, that he became a father and the whole thing. All it did was reopen the wound, which we had spent two million of his dollars to cover up. The Goldwater people were very smart. Every Sunday paper in the state of California had a full-page ad of the Goldwater family with his kids around him. That was a good-looking family. It was great.

They asked a lot of questions and all of a sudden that wound was open. Of course it did a lot to stimulate the troops on the Goldwater side, and he had all the troops. We didn’t have troops. That single act cost him the California delegate. He still would not have been the nominee. Goldwater had the nomination locked up before the California election that year. It was a last hurrah for Nelson to say, “I beat him one place in a big state.”

Working with Nelson personally and with George Hinman was great. George Hinman was a classy person. He was astute politically. He knew there was a difference between westerners and easterners and political thinking and so forth. He listened and he acted. Nelson listened. He was very similar to Ronald Reagan in that he had beliefs and he had a great value center of his own. You couldn’t talk him out of something. You could only try to work around him.

The best analogy was the year he was running. We had the Rumford Act on the ballot, which was the Fair Housing Act in California. It was controversial as all those things are. And Rumford, [William] Bryon Rumford, was a black Senator from northern California, a very bright guy. We didn’t know whether it would pass or not. All we knew was, we were running a primary and with just the Republican vote, it was going to get beat. So we said, “Nelson, just stay away from it. It’s a state issue. It’s not a New York issue. Let’s just stay away from it.”

He had very strong feelings on the race issue. I’ll never forget. We were in Long Beach at the Federated Women’s luncheon. An hour before I’d brought up that question. “Don’t talk about it today, okay?” He was tired. He was out on his feet. He’d flown 24 hours to get out here and all that sort of stuff, in his own plane. He’s giving his speech and all of a sudden five black waiters come walking in front of him. All of a sudden he launches off on the Rumford Housing Act and I’m in the back of the room, saying, “I can’t believe this. It’s just train of thought. He saw something and he went on to the next matter.

All of a sudden that bunch of women got up here. You could just feel the room go down. He knew what he was doing. If that’s what he believed, he said it. You can’t knock him for that. It’s just that in our business there’s a time and a place to say things we think. From a national standpoint, I learned a lot watching him.

One time we were in deep trouble and I went to him at the St. Francis Hotel. Keep in mind I was a Californian, I grew up in the [Richard] Nixon school of politics. Nixon was paranoid about the eastern “establishment,” paranoid about the Kennedys and all these sort of things. I said, “Governor, we need some help from that eastern establishment.”

He started to laugh. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "You're looking at it. That establishment's long gone, Spencer. I'm the only one left." I was in a state of shock. Afterwards as I watched it over the years, he was right. He was the last of the eastern establishment.

He had that kind of sense of humor. He was dedicated to what he was trying to do. He was open to new ideas, more so than most people at that age in life and in that kind of economic background and that level of politics. He spent a fortune on experts. There are academics still out there in this country that retired on him. I see them all the time. Money was never a problem with Nelson. The family would have a meeting because we'd spent two million—that was a lot of money in '64 because TV rates, things, were a lot cheaper—and we'd raised $200,000. The family spent 1.8 million, and he'd gather them together in New York, David and his sisters. The other family members didn't like this idea a bit, but Nelson just put the screws on them until they came. Then he'd leave and take their money with him. He was a classy guy.

Young: Paul? I think Paul had a question.

Freedman: I had a question about the campaign itself. You mentioned the success of focusing on the anxieties over the nuclear issue. I'm wondering, to what extent was that obvious at that point? Obviously this became something that was an issue in the fall campaign as well, but was it something that showed up in research? Did you test it extensively? Why that? And were there others that you could have done in terms of alternative attacks?

Spencer: There were alternative attacks, but none as strong as that. Research in the 1960s wasn't as good as it is today. It wasn't as sophisticated. It was up or down and not too much insight, but there was a great fear of nuclear war. There were bomb shelters being built in backyards. Everything going on in our society was connected to fear of the big bomb, the big boom, the big blast. And there was enough material out there to support Barry's hard line positions over time. Barry never minced words. He said it like he felt and he said it in a harsh way.

Two years later Ronald Reagan ran for Governor. He believed basically what Barry believed. He said a lot of the things that Barry said, but he said them differently. He said them in a soft way, in a more forgiving way. Style was the difference. Barry was a hard-nosed, up-front Arizonan cowboy, and that's what scared people. So you took his style and put it with the issue of the hot button, you made some headway. If it were Ronald Reagan running, we could've never pinned it on him because of his style. People would not have believed us if we'd tried to pin on Reagan what we were pinning on Barry Goldwater in 1964.

Young: Had you done surveys or was that a gut feeling?

Spencer: We did surveys, but, as I said, they did not tell us too much of this kind of information. Later on certainly it was researched. This was a lot of gut instinct. And the surveys, the research got much better after that. In fact we were doing a lot of experimental stuff with it then too. The fear of nuclear war, for instance, you could get at very easily in a piece of research, but in those days it was difficult to ferret out which people were afraid as opposed to just being Republicans or Democrats. The ethnicity question or even the male-female issue, those were the things that were tougher.

The tools that you used then for targeting in politics were tougher to identify through research. Mostly it was done instinctively with your own feelings or the group you put together. After '64, we did Reagan. Of course that was the big race that projected our company. Kuchel was really the beginning because we would have never gotten Rockefeller without Kuchel because they were both in the moderate wing of the party. Then we would have never got Reagan without Rockefeller, which is ironic because he's not from the moderate wing of the party.

He went over and asked Barry on one of his trips to his mother-in-law's, "I'm thinking of running. What would you do? Tell me." And Barry said, "I'd hire those sons of bitches, Spencer-Roberts," which was well stated and we deserved. That was the first event that showed me how practical—

Young: So Goldwater recommended you to Reagan on the basis of what you did for Rockefeller. That's quite a story.

Spencer: That showed me the practical side of Ronald Reagan. People thought he was such an ideologue. We opened negotiations and we discussed it. It was one of the few times in our career as a company that we had this opportunity with people whom we liked. Reagan was the underdog and Bill Christopher, the mayor—George Christopher of San Francisco was the favorite—and we had the opportunity to run his campaign. It was the first time in our history, and probably the only time since then, that we had to make a choice between the two top candidates in the campaign. That makes it tough. When the guy is an actor and he's not a politician . . . We did a lot of soul searching and had a lot of discussions with Reagan. Finally we said, "You know, this guy could do it. If we do it right, this guy could do it."

As to the criteria we had for campaigns, we would sit down and examine the candidate: his ability to communicate, money, issues, and organization. When we applied those four criteria to Reagan, he measured up.

Riley: Superior to the other candidate on all four dimensions?

Spencer: On all four. The media didn't think so. They didn't believe that. But Reagan was extremely articulate, the most articulate guy, not only then but since then. The troops loved him. That was just a hangover from the Goldwater days when Goldwater had all the troops. But if you put Henry Salvatori, Justin Dart, Holmes Tuttle, Jack [Jacquelin] Hume, Jack Warner in one room, I think you know you're going to get some money.

Then you get down to issues. That's probably where we spent most of our time, worrying and thinking. After many discussions with him, we realized this guy was a basic conservative. He was obsessed with one thing, the communist threat. He has conservative tendencies on other issues, but he can be practical.

When you look at the 1960s, that's a pretty good position to be in, philosophically and ideologically. Plus, we realized pretty early on that the guy had a real core value system. Most people in my business don't like to talk about that, but you know something? The best candidates

have a core value system. Either party, win or lose, those are still the best candidates. They don't lose because of their core value system. They lose because of some other activity that happens out there. But the best candidates to deal with, and to work with, are those who have that. A lot of them have it and a lot of them don't, but Reagan had it.

Young: How do you find out whether they've got it?

Spencer: It's an instinctive thing. You have a lot of discussions, ask a lot of questions. You test them. You take an issue and you ask them, "Where do you stand on this issue?" Once they tell you, you start playing devil's advocate. You start working them over, coming at them. At the end of the day they still smile and say, "All well and good, but this is where I stand."

If you can move them from here to there, you know that they don't have a very hard-core value system. On a philosophical question, if I can move them in an hour's discussion from point A to point B—and I've done it many times in my own best interests—that's a person who has no value system. A lot of people in my business would say that kind of candidate is stubborn. Most candidates are stubborn in public life. Every President with whom I've been close has been very stubborn. I don't like the word stubborn, but it's a quality that bodes well in the job that they have.

Getting back to '65, we made the decision to go with Reagan.

Riley: Were there any points of disagreement between the two of you about whether this was a good idea?

Young: Between me and Roberts, you mean?

Riley: Yes, exactly, I'm sorry.

Spencer: Between Bill and me?
Riley: Yes, in retrospect is it clear that maybe one of you was headed more in Reagan's direction than the other and helped convince the other partner? Or was it pretty much equally—

Spencer: One of the reasons Bill and I had so much success was that we were on the same page. We are different people, very different people strategically and in a lot of ways. If you give any candidate at six months or a year out with a six-point lead to Bill Roberts, he's going to win it. I might screw it up. But you give me a person that's six points behind, and six or seven months out, I've got a good shot of winning it.

Where's the difference? I want to roll the dice. I want to gamble. Bill knew how to stay steady, so we complimented each other in that aspect. On this issue with Reagan, we both had known George Christopher for many years. He was a good mayor, but he was dull. We knew that California politics is a little bit of Hollywood. You can't be dull in California politics and be very successful, and George Christopher fit the bill of being dull.

Riley: Was there a sense already at this early stage that you knew whom the Democratic opposition was going to be?

Spencer: Yes, it was [Edmund "Pat"] Brown, the incumbent.

Riley: It was the incumbent Governor.

Spencer: Yes, we knew whom we were running against. I say all those things, but in retrospect, there wasn't anybody in the media in California that thought Ronald Reagan could be elected Governor. George Christopher laughed when he heard about it. The guys who were putting up the money weren't sure either, but they wanted to roll the dice. They wanted it badly. I think Bill and I were the only two people that had a lot on the line professionally. We didn't say he could do it. We said, "We think if all goes well this could happen. You could be the Governor."

Riley: Were you meeting independently with the financial people at this time to get their sense about what they were willing to put up? Or is that only done in the company of the candidate?

Spencer: You don't talk money in the company of the candidate, not this candidate anyway. He just glazed over. We'd done a lot of work with Holmes and his people. They knew who we were. We'd been running a lot of other campaigns in the state. We put a Cal plan thing together where we had started electing new people to the state legislature to try to take over the legislature. We'd spent all their money on those projects so they knew us well. They knew our expertise.

In fact Ed Mills, who was one of the original group, was very close to Holmes. He was in our office practically every day in some way, shape, or form. No, we didn't meet individually. We knew who these people were. They knew who we were. They gave us our space. We said, "Hey, we've got to make this decision on our own. It's our profession. It's our future."

Young: Did they also know Reagan independently?

Spencer: Yes.

Young: They knew both you and Reagan?

Spencer: We didn't know Reagan and Reagan didn't know us, but yes, Holmes and some of them knew Reagan quite well because of the Goldwater connection. A lot of the L.A. business community was on the periphery of Hollywood too. They knew him through some of those things. And George Murphy, who never gets mentioned, who was the Senator from California, who was an actor, who was smarter politically than Ronald Reagan, George was very good and smart. He loved politics. He'd been in it his whole life. He was a bridge between a lot of these people and Ronald Reagan. It gave him a stamp of approval politically.

Young: You're right, I've never heard George Murphy's name mentioned in any of this.

Spencer: George used to sit me down early and say, "I've got to tell you about Ronnie." [laughing] "He's stubborn. He's this, he's that." He was very supportive of the whole thing, but we were meeting with Reagan independently.

Here's an important point in my story. We met with the Reagans. The Reagans are a team politically. He would have never made the governorship without her. He would have never been victorious in the presidential race without her. They went into everything as a team.

It was a great love affair, is a great love affair. Early on I thought it was a lot of Hollywood stuff. I really did. I could give you anecdotes of her taking him to the train when he had to go to Phoenix because they didn't fly in those days, or to Flagstaff to do the filming of the last segments of that western he was doing. We'd be in Union Station in L.A. at nine o'clock at night. They're standing there kissing good-bye and it goes on and it goes on and it goes on. I'm embarrassed and I'm saying, "Wow." It was just like a scene out of Hollywood in the 1930s, late '30s, '40s. I tell you that, but then I tell you now twenty-five, thirty, forty years later, whatever it is, it was a love affair. It was not Hollywood.

At that time I thought, *oh, boy*. It's not only a partnership, it's a great love affair. She was in every meeting that Bill and I were at with Reagan, discussing things, us asking questions, with him asking us questions. The curve of her involvement over the years was interesting because she was in her 40s then probably. She always lied about her age so I can't tell you exactly, but she was somewhere around 45, I'd guess. She was quiet. With those big eyes of hers, she'd be watching you. Every now and then she'd ask a question, but not too often.

As time went on—I'm talking about years—she grew more and more vocal. But she was on a learning curve politically. She learned. She's a very smart politician. She thinks very well politically. She thinks much more politically than he thinks. I think it's important that Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan were the team that went to the Governor's office and that went to the White House. They did it together. They always turned inward toward each other in times of crisis. She evolved a role out of it, her role. No one else will say this, but I say this: she was the personnel director.

She didn't have anything to do with policy. She'd say something every now and then and he'd look at her and say, "Hey, Mommy, that's my role." She'd shut up. But when it came to who is the Chief of Staff, who is the political director, who is the press secretary, she had input because he didn't like personnel decisions. Take the best example, Taft Schreiber, who was his agent out at Universal for years, and Lew Wasserman. After we signed on, Taft was in this group of finance guys and he said to me, "Kid, we've got to have lunch."

I had lunch with Taft and he proceeded to tell me, "You're going to have to fire a lot of people." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Ron—" meaning Reagan—"has never fired anybody in his life." He said, "I've fired hundreds of people. He's never fired anybody." I laughed. I said to myself, *Taft's overstating the case*. Taft was right. I fired a lot of people after that.

Reagan hated personnel problems. He hated to see differences of opinion among his staff. His line was, "Come on, boys. Go out and settle this and then come back." You're going to have a lot

of that in politics. You're going to have a lot of that in government. That's what makes the wheels go round. It doesn't mean that they're not friends or anything. They have differences of opinion, but Reagan didn't like that too much, especially over the minutia, and it usually happens over the minutia.

Over the years she developed, she knew who fit best with her husband. She knew what his weaknesses were and his strengths. And she always had that number one criteria; whose agenda do they have? That's very important and very smart politics because people come in and out of all these campaigns, Democrat or Republican. Their agenda isn't Steve Knott's. They have their own agenda and they're going to use Steve Knott to get there. In varying degrees that's fine, but during an extended period of time, they better have the same agenda as the candidate and what they're trying to do. She was very good at sorting out what agenda each person really had as they came forward.

Young: Getting[1] back to the first issue, when you were deciding to go with Reagan rather than Christopher, there was a period of time when the team was looking you over and you were looking the candidate over. You said a moment ago that you talked to George Murphy and others about this. What were the high points of that process, of the candidate and the consultant getting to know each other for the first time? How did that go?

Spencer: From our point of view, Spencer-Roberts' point of view, the Birch Society was an extremely hot issue. The *L. A. Times, Santa Barbara News Press,* both had done big exposés seven days in a row. All the dirt was out there.

Young: That was hot during that period before Reagan.

Spencer: Before Reagan, California was a hotbed of Birchism, no doubt about that. We were confident he was not a Bircher. That wasn't the problem. The problem was, are they going to be able to hang this on him? Is he going to let them? What's his state of mind? We spent a lot of time asking him those questions and going over those things. He satisfied our qualms about it; if that issue comes up, how he would handle it, and that he had no involvement with it. The record shows he was a Democrat, a pretty liberal Democrat. He was president of SCSAG [Southern California Screen Actors' Guild]. He made a transition from the left to the right politically. There's no doubt about it.

He'd seen a lot of splinter groups in his career on both sides, and had dealt with splinter groups on the left when he was more or less on the left. Some of those would draw him to the right, I'm sure. This phenomenon of a right wing group emerging, he'd seen it before. He'd seen the process before. He knew pretty well where it was going to go and that was nowhere. He was a great believer in the two party system. The Birch Society didn't fit that mold.

Young: A little while back you referred to how you find out the core value of a candidate or a client. I believe you said one of the ways to find out is by pushing to see if he moves.

Spencer: Um-hum.

[1] Start tape 2 at 044

Young: Did any of that go on between you and Reagan? Testing?

Spencer: Yes, we did that. That was an ongoing process for 30 years.

Young: Thirty years, it started—

Spencer: It started out then. I'm trying to think—what's the magazine [William] Buckley put out?

Young: *National Review.*

Spencer: That's right. He was a big connoisseur of the *National Review* when we first met him. I remember, sitting there one day, talking about something else and I said, "Ron—" in those days he was still "Ron," he wasn't even "Governor"—"That's right out of the *National Review.*" And he'd laugh. That was his beginning point philosophically, I thought. There was nothing wrong with the things that [William] Rusher and Buckley and those guys were putting into the *National Review.* They were the cutting edge of conservatism. A lot of thoughts were new.

As I look back on it—we'll probably get to it later on, we've got to get to it—he never changed that much philosophically, ideologically. He never talked about his goals, but when you look back on it, his goals never changed. He only had one item that really bothered him, and that was the communist threat. Everything else was second tier. He conducted himself with that in mind as Governor as well as President.

He had to face up to a lot of dirty housekeeping problems as Governor. But he had this vision of America that all these things we have—Democratic party, Republican party, this and that and everything, our warts and our good things—we're not going to have any of those if this communist threat proceeds through the world. Whether that's overstated or not, it's hard to say. I read [Anatoly] Dobrynin's book and he acts like they weren't really doing anything in that period of time. But is Dobrynin right about them? Who knows? The threat certainly was clear to most people in government in either party. That was THE issue that drove Reagan into the arena. He had to start somewhere. You usually don't start out running for President. He ran for Governor.

Riley: Did he talk much about his experience with the screen industry, the film industry, and how that affected his sense of this threat?

Spencer: Yes, his whole involvement in the communist thing he spoke about a great deal. I laughed about it. He always considered himself a labor union guy and I used to say, "There is no similarity between the Screen Actors' Guild and the teamsters." He'd give you all these reasons why there was. Then I'd say, "Walter Reuther does not consider you a big union." Reagan considered himself a union man.

The only time I ever saw it really work was during the campaign. We had United Airlines charters, two planes, 727s, and we had the same crew of eight or nine guys and gals, hostesses or

whatever they call them. The union said they had to rotate every six weeks. I didn't know this at the time until I found out, until they told us.

One day the lead stewardess came to me and said, "You know, we've got to go off next Tuesday. They're bringing six new people." I said, "They're not bringing six new, eight new people on here. Reagan has gotten used to you people and I'm not going to live through that one again." She said, "The union boss . . ." It was a woman.

I went to Reagan and told him the story. He said, "Get her on the phone." He went union boss to union boss. It was a conversation. I'm listening to it and he backed her right down. The crew stayed with us the rest of the time. It's the only time I ever saw his union affiliation be of any political help.

Young: Why didn't you want to go through with the change of crew? He was nervous—

Spencer: You're in a 90-day period, high stress, 90-day period—

Young: New people around—

Spencer: You're living a 24-hour lifetime every news cycle. That's your life. You have to have people there who were there in the beginning, who know the rhythms of . . . me because I can be the biggest bear on the plane or of the candidate. In our case [Michael] Deaver, [Joseph] Canzari, [Ken] Khachigian, whoever else was with us. We all have our different idiosyncrasies. These girls are smart. They figured it out. They knew.

Plus the Reagans were very comfortable with them. And Reagan doesn't make friends easily. He'd be very polite to any new face, but he wouldn't tell a joke to the new one until he got to know her. All these gals were telling jokes to each other all the time. It was just an atmospheric thing that you don't want to happen.

Young: Yes.

Spencer: The same thing would have been true on [Walter] Mondale's plane, whatever they were doing.

Riley: I want to go back and ask you one more question about your decision-making over whether to accept Reagan as a candidate. Given what you had just come out of with the Rockefeller campaign, you had to have been a little bit sensitive about family backgrounds, divorce and so forth. Was Reagan's personal history in that area something that you thought was a vulnerability in his case? And if not, why not?

Spencer: No, no, two reasons. Number one it was an old story, a common Hollywood story. The bigger question on our minds was Hollywood actor, not what happened. No, he had two families. He had the family with Jane Wyman and he had his family with Nancy.

Bill and I went and saw Jane Wyman in this period of time and she smiled. She said, "Don't worry about me. Ronnie has always wanted to do this. I won't say a word." And she never did. She was true to her word. That's a capsule of the conversation, but part of the problem in their marriage was his involvement in all these political activities in the Screen Actors' Guild, about which she didn't give a damn.

Young: So that long ago he wanted to do this?

Spencer: The divorce question never entered our minds. That was common.

Riley: Because it was Hollywood and—

Spencer: Because it was Hollywood and because it was old. He'd reestablished himself in a new marriage and had a family in this marriage, which was true of a lot of people in California in the electorate. That didn't bother us.

Young: You also said a moment ago that it was his concern about the communist threat that really drove him into politics. I don't think I've ever heard that particular insight about Reagan. Did this at all figure in the conversations you were having with the team before you accepted him? Did Nancy weigh in on that subject or did she keep off that subject?

Spencer: No, they never weighed in.

Young: Did she weigh in on the Birch issue?

Spencer: No, Nancy was the great listener at that stage in the career. As I said to her many times afterwards, "I wish you were still the listener." We call her Mommy. He always calls her Mommy and so did the staff, some of the staff, irreverent members of the staff. There were members of the staff that would not do this, but Deaver and [Edwin] Meese and some others, we called her Mommy. She loves it because he calls her Mommy.

Young: So she was fairly passive during this first—

Spencer: All she was interested in was, what is my husband getting into, how is he going to be protected, who's going to take care of him, what are these two guys sitting in my living room, Spencer and Roberts? What's their agenda? When things get tough, are they going to run? Are they going to tell us the truth? Are they going to work 24 hours a day? Those are the questions that were in her mind. If she asked any questions, they'd be related to those.

Young: So this wasn't a role that she developed in relation to some experience, but one that was there from the very beginning, this role of wanting to know what the agendas were?

Spencer: Somewhere in their marriage early on—most marriages have a division of roles—this is the division they took. I don't know this, but she may have taken that sort of same position dealing with the producers and those people when he was still doing movie work. She might

have done the same thing then. It's certainly logical to think that she did. But that was her role in the relationship.

Knott: Earlier in your remarks you singled out Holmes Tuttle of all the members of the kitchen cabinet as perhaps the most significant. Could you tell us a little bit more about Holmes Tuttle and his role in Reagan's political career?

Spencer: Holmes Tuttle was a man of great . . . He was a car dealer, a Ford dealer in southern California and he also had some agencies in Tucson, I think. Holmes was a guy that came from Oklahoma on a freight car. He had no money and he started working—I don't think he finished high school—for a car dealership, washing cars, cleaning cars. He's a man of tremendous energy, tremendous drive and strong feelings—which most successful businessmen have—about how the world should be run, how the country should be run as well as how their business should be run and how your business should be run. They're always tough and strong that way. That was Holmes' background.

In the southern California—I won't say California because we have two segments, north and south—framework of the late '30s and the '40s, there were movies made about a group. I can't remember what they were called, but there were 30 of them. In this group were the owner and publisher of the *L.A. Times,* the [Harry] Chandler family top business guys, Asa Call of what is now known as Pacific Insurance. It was Pacific Mutual Insurance then, a local company. Now it's a national company. Henry Salvatori, the big oil guy; Holmes; Herbert Hoover, Jr.; the Automotive Club of Southern California; that type of people, they ran southern California. They had the money. They had the mouth, the paper. They ran it. [William Randolph] Hearst was a secondary player. He had a paper, but he was secondary player. He wasn't in the group. Hearst was more global.

These guys worried about everything south of the Tehachapi Mountains. That's all they worried about. They worried about water. They worried about developments. They've made movies about that. Most of it's true. The Southern Pacific was the big power player, but these guys were trying to upset the powers of the Southern Pacific to a degree. Holmes Tuttle came out of that power struggle, that power group.

He was a guy who would work hard. Asa Call was the brains. Holmes was the Stu Spencer, the guy that went out and made it happen. He was aggressive and he played a role. He started playing a role in the political process in the '50s, post Earl Warren. None of these guys were involved with Earl Warren to any degree. But after Earl Warren and Nixon, they were players there. They never were in love with Nixon, but they were pragmatic. The Chandlers were in love with Nixon, and a few others, but with these bunch of guys, Ace would like Nixon. Holmes was the new conservative and Nixon was a different old conservative.

There were little differences there. Holmes emerged in the new conservative element and was heavily involved in the Goldwater campaign of '64. Of course that's a whole 'nother story. When Nixon went down the tube all of a sudden—it was lying there latent in the Goldwater movement and they were waiting for Nixon to get beat and when he did [sound effect]—here they were up in your face.

Reagan was the first legitimate person that Holmes was absolutely, totally, in synch with, and who he totally loved. He became the leader of that group that I just described to you. Additions to that group that came about later on. I knew if I had a problem with Henry Salvatori—Henry could be a problem because he had such strong beliefs on everything and he tried to impose those beliefs upon you, on the candidate, on anybody—Holmes Tuttle would go to Henry and back him off, really back him off. He never got a thing out of all this. He never asked for anything out of those 20 to 30 years he was involved. He raised millions and millions and millions of dollars for Ronald Reagan's political efforts.

The only time that group ever got involved, really got involved, in the policy aspects of the job was the governorship. They sat down initially when he was elected Governor and decided they were going to tell him how to fill his cabinet. I remember going to a meeting and I sat there and I said to myself, *I can't believe this*. I listened and I heard names and then I heard jobs. I heard them matching names to jobs.

I remember them saying, "What do you think, Stu?" I said, "This is bullshit. You guys don't know what you're talking about. Let's just take this director of finance, the single most important job in the state of California. You want to give it to a guy by the name of Gordon Smith, some CPA out of some high-powered firm. He is no more qualified . . ." Not only do you have to know numbers as director of finance, but you have to have the political skills to get it through the legislature. That's the tough job. I distinctly remember saying, "The guy you want to get is Cappy [Caspar] Weinberger out of San Francisco." You know what they said to me? "Oh, he's too liberal."

Cappy was too liberal. I have to admit Cappy was on the left side of the party, but over the years he came over to this side of the party. He was somewhere in the middle at that point in time in his career and so Gordon takes the job. He screwed up the first budget, really screwed it up. They fired him and they appointed Cappy. Cappy did a very good job as director. It's during that period of time that Cappy became close to the Reagans. He kept that closeness through the years and he eventually ended up—

Young: Was Nancy Reagan at all concerned about filling these slots with these people?

Spencer: She was when I told her. Because we had reached the point where she trusted my judgment in these matters. She would rattle Holmes' cage as much as she'd rattle my cage. Holmes would call me up, "Help me, help me." She was still in a period of learning and frustration because she could see all this going down—

Young: Gordon Smith was replaced—

Spencer: Replaced after about a year, after the first budget, by Cappy.

Young: She was in favor of that, if not playing a major role in that?

Spencer: She was in favor of a change. I'm not sure she really knew who Cappy Weinberger was at that point in time, but she knew there had to be a change.

Young: At that moment in time—

Spencer: Stu and maybe ten other people said, "Cappy is the kind of guy that could do it." She'd say, "That's all I heard."

Riley: In this meeting they were also producing names that were matched up with other—

Spencer: Others, oh, yes.

Riley: That did go through and—

Spencer: The accusation that the kitchen cabinet was trying to stuff the cabinet was correct. After that, it diminished. At the presidency there was still some of that, but not much. In the presidency they were trying to take care of themselves like William French Smith ambassadors, which is understandable.

At that point in time Reagan didn't understand government, which was one of the things we learned early in the Reagan thing. There was an actor and a state legislator by the name of Charlie Conrad. A bit player, a member of Reagan's union, he was elected to the state legislature. He was considered the premier parliamentarian in the state legislature in California. We realized that Reagan didn't know how the government worked. So two mornings a week Charlie went up to his house. This was in '65, after we got through Basico [Behavior Science Corporation of Van Nuys]. You may have read something about that, behavior that didn't work.

After about three meetings, Reagan said, "Who are these guys? Who are these guys? What are they talking about?" Frankly we couldn't tell him because we didn't know what they were talking about either. We decided, bye-bye.

We got Charlie. He went out there two mornings a week and sat down. It was so great because both actors could talk at the same level about things I didn't know anything about. The rapport was there between them. Charlie would say, "Okay Ron, we have a bill here, Bill 1A. We want to get that bill through the process," and he'd say, "This is how we get it through the process. We go to this committee and we get an author here and we get a co-author here. We go through that committee, and then we go to a committee as a whole, then we go to the legislature."

He went through the process. I'm sure he bored Reagan to death, but he started to get an understanding that when there is a bill introduced, this is the process of what it's going to go through before it gets to him, before he can do what he wants to do and be Governor.

In a lot of other ways Charlie was very, very helpful. We used to call it Politics 1A. It was helpful to Reagan in that it helped us. We were always in utter fear, particularly in '65, in the pre-campaign aspect of him being on the stump, of him being asked a question and he'd make something up. And so, with this little background here of the process, and being honest and

saying, “I’m not a professional pol,” it worked. It even worked on the cynical media that was covering him. They were kind. Ronald Reagan doesn’t realize how kind they were to him.

I’ve thought about it many times since. Number one, it was because he was forward and honest, and number two, they were in awe of him. They were in awe of Ronald Reagan the actor. We had some tough reporters out there then like [Richard] Bergholz. That was part of the process that we went through early. If you’re looking for the number one cheerleader for a person, it was Holmes. He was the finest thing that could ever happen to Ronald, to any candidate.

Riley: Justin Dart’s role in this was different?

Spencer: He was a member of the group.

Riley: Can you tell us a little bit about him?

Spencer: All of them were subliminal to Holmes. Holmes had the President’s ear. Holmes had my ear. Holmes had Nancy’s ear. Holmes had Bill’s ear, my partner. Those were about the only ears around that had the input. They all had to go through Holmes basically. Now, socially no, but if it got down to a political question, Reagan might say, “Talk to Holmes about that.”

You know these are all peers, right? Okay. Justin was a great fund-raiser. Justin was hard-nosed. Justin understood power. He liked power and he had a lot of power. He was a major player.

My first job as a kid was to drive Justin—in the ’50s he was finance chairman, state party—to drive him around and carry the suitcase. The company was Rexall Drugs. Dart Rexall or something. I can remember him sitting with some guy that made toilet paper—maybe it was Weyerhaeuser—and he asked the guy for 50 grand for the party. The guy squeaked, “Me?” In the next breath Justin would say, “How much toilet paper do we buy from you?” He was going to make this very simple. At that point the guy would go, “Hmmm.” Numbers are coming up in his head and we’d get 50 grand. But that’s the way Justin Dart operated. He was right up front with you.

Knott: You mentioned earlier that these were very strong-willed men and they had a vision of how things should be run. Did you have to have any showdowns with them where you said, “Look, I’m the expert here. I’m the campaign guy”?

Spencer: Many times. Many times. Not with Holmes. Holmes would come at me and ask questions. You knew he was probing, that he had a concern about something you were doing or not doing. Henry Salvatori would call you and tell you how to run the campaign. You’d fight with him and you’d argue with him and you’d do what you wanted to do because Reagan always backed us if it was political. Because he compartmentalizes everybody in his life, we’ll get to this later. When it’s politics, Stu will go. When it’s money and stuff, it’s Holmes. On a philosophical matter, I’m going to call Bill Buckley. He wouldn’t call me. He’d call Bill, but he wouldn’t call Bill about the political. That’s the way he was his whole life.

Young: And if it was personnel—

Spencer: It was Mommy, Nancy. But that's not unique to the Reagan effort. When you're in the role of political manager, campaign manager, whatever titles you want to give it, you're going to run up against business types. Or if you're a Democrat, up against labor types who have a lot of influence, who have a lot at stake, who think they can do your job better than you can, they're going to try to muscle you. They're going to threaten you. They're going to get you fired and they can sometimes if you're not willing to stand up. I don't say this in a negative way. I found that people who are successful in their ventures—whether it's to get to the top of a labor union or the top of the business world—have these characteristics.

I see it today. I belong to a country club to play golf. They're all guys that were successful. The board of directors is a mess. They all know how to run the club better. That's why I stay out of it. I just play golf. But it is reminiscent of a political campaign in every sense. One of the great things I loved about George Hinman was his style. He would quietly come in and help you and question you. He never came in and sat you down and said, "This is the way it's going to be." Ted, Justin, Henry, they were good at that.

Freedman: Can we back up just for a minute? Can I ask you to say a few more words about Basico? Because I'm interested in the nature of Reagan's resistance, but also what did you think of those guys? It sounds like they were on to something. It sounds like it was the same kind of thing that you and Roberts were up to to some extent.

Spencer: In terms of our PIPS [Precinct Index Priority System] programs that Bill and I put together—

Freedman: Exactly.

Spencer: I have to be honest with you. Bill spent more time with them than I did. He is not with us so he can't talk about it. Any time you come up with a program of this nature, a scientific behavioral program, and try to apply it to the political process, the big question is how do I move it from the theoretical to the practical? We couldn't do that with what they were giving us. We couldn't see how we could move this over here, except for a few things that they were doing that we were already doing. Reagan didn't know what they were talking about and he had no interest in what they were talking about. It made it easy.

From our side of it, they were saying, "Is this a tool we can use?" We couldn't see how to translate it. They were asking for a lot of money so we decided that our resources were better spent in other ways. There are other people that could give you a better answer to that than I can. It just wasn't working from our standpoint.

I don't know of anything they did afterwards either. They were dead in the water. It wasn't a bloody parting or anything like that. It was a very professional relationship. My answer is simply that what they were talking about theoretically, we couldn't see how to apply practically. Reagan didn't understand what they were talking about and didn't want to hear what they were talking about or the economics of it. We decided we would part ways.

Freedman: But you did, though, go on to have great success with the PIPS?

Spencer: Precinct index priority was another form of targeting. All the politicians talk about targeting. Larry Sabato talks about targeting all the time. It's very important, but you know they were targeting in the Roman days. They've always targeted. The bosses—Boss Crump, Tammany Hall, Boss [Frank] Hague—they're all targeting. They were targeting based on ethnicity alone and patronage, the combination of patronage and ethnicity. Those are our guys.

These new people in my profession think this a wonderful new thing. This is not new. It's just every election cycle somebody in my profession technologically thinks they've improved targeting. Targeting is better than when I started, but we started with overlays—pink, purple, green—because we didn't have computers. We were the ones who decided to go to census data to start our targeting. The year after we did that Matt Reese, who was a Democrat, moved to census data.

We went for different reasons. We went because we were usually in the minority as Republicans. We had to figure a way to get the difference. Matt was working for labor unions and all across America there were Right to Work initiatives. He was getting paid a lot of money to beat them. It became important to Matt: where do the labor union people live, who are the labor union people?

Through a process similar to ours, index priority using census data, we could simulate a campaign or build a campaign to the point where we knew what a Reagan voter would be or a Don Riegle voter. Michigan's where we would probably use it to the best extent. We called it precinct index priority. We took age, housing costs, income, ethnicity, labor union membership, and applied that to past voting patterns and some other things, whatever we could steal off of census data. It was problematic to overlay a voting precinct with a census district. That's where we used the overlays, all the colors and stuff.

If you really have an interest in that subject, there's still a gal down in Arizona. Her name is Patty Hawkins. She lives in Phoenix. She was one of the 21-year old kids who were working on this thing with Vince Barab. He ended up being census director under Nixon or something. Those are the two people that kind of developed it for us. I don't know where Vince is now, but Patty is still in Tucson.

Every two years we'd find a way of improving that. Then computers came in. I don't even know how they target today, but what used to take us a week, they do in an hour and they can play around with it a hundred different times in an hour.

Freedman: Is it fair to say you think the fundamentals of political campaigns really haven't changed, that they can just do it faster?

Spencer: And better.

Freedman: It's an art, not just a science.

Spencer: It's an art form. I'll make the difference – politics is not a science, it's an art form. If you're an Irishman, you can be better at it than an Italian. My big argument with Joe Cerrell—

Young: [Rudolph] Giuliani is an exception then—

Spencer: Rubbed off on him from the Irish.

[BREAK]
Young[2]: I want to go back to the Reagan gubernatorial. What was he good at? This was his first political campaign, wasn't it? What was he good at? What wasn't he so good at? How did that work out in terms of his learning curve on the stump?

Spencer: He was good at communication. He was the best communicator I've seen in my political life and that starts with [Franklin] Roosevelt, who was good. That's how good I think he was. Secondly, and a very interesting point in terms of communication, Ronald Reagan wrote all his own speeches when he ran for Governor. I say to this day, he's the best speechwriter I've ever seen in all this period of time. His ability to write and put into words what his thoughts were, what his beliefs were, and then to have the style to communicate it.

He also had the style to use the new medium of the time, television. There are lots of people that are good on the stump speaking, but they can't translate it to television. There are lots of people, including the present President, George W.[Bush], including Bill Clinton, who can't use a TelePrompTer. When they use a TelePrompTer, you know they're using the TelePrompTer. Follow the eyes. Reagan knew all those tricks. A lot of that came because of his prior profession, being an actor, being in Hollywood. That was the overwhelming thing that he brought to the campaign for Governor.

The second thing was, he was a new, fresh face. The theme we had for the campaign was citizen politician. He fit it. He had no prior political experience. He was a citizen that was concerned and he was going to run for a job as a politician. He was just one step ahead of the electorate, not twenty steps ahead of them in the political arena.

The third thing is he has great self-discipline. He would make sure—there are only two or three examples in his whole career that I can think of where he didn't—he was prepared for every event. He took pride in that. He was professional in getting prepared for them. He had the discipline that it takes to do that. Those were the real pluses.

The other plus, which was not necessarily tied to him, he had great name ID. From our point of view, everybody knew who he was. He was either the good guy or the bad guy or the guy next to Errol Flynn. We did some studies through the ad agency, Hixson and Jorgenson at the time. He had an approval rating with women in 1965 of 93%. Isn't that interesting? Because of the gender gap over the years, it went down once he became a politician. That was purely based on the roles he played in the movies, the nice guy versus the bad guy. He never played the bad guy. He only played the bad guy in one movie called the Killers or something. That was a big plus for us, it

[2] Start Tape 3 at 022.

was a good one. We didn't have to worry about spending money on name ID. They knew who he was. We just had to define him.

Freedman: So that's what made citizen politician necessary?

Young: I thought the citizen politician grew out of the way you wanted to position him vis-à-vis the Birch—

Spencer: Vis-à-vis Pat Brown, too.

Young: And Pat Brown.

Spencer: That was an extension of the other thematic thing, the creative society. Citizen, non-politician, creative society. The great society, which was Lyndon Johnson's, was going on at the time. Everybody liked it conceptually, but it didn't work out. We were taking advantage of the society aspect, not the great. We put creative into the society. That's what we were doing.

I've been in 500 campaigns in my life. You can go into campaign after campaign, you're always looking for a theme. Sometimes you can't find one and you fake one and it comes out phony. It even looks and sounds phony. You're better off just to ignore it and go without a theme. Sometimes they just fall right into your lap.

In this case we felt that the creative society and citizen politician just fell into our lap. Everything fit. It all worked with the media. It worked with the candidate. It worked with the press people.

Young: Was the gubernatorial campaign heavily TV? A media campaign? Or was that not so important as it later became?

Spencer: TV was just coming into its own. The first election that ever had TV spots was [Dwight D.] Eisenhower's in '50 or '52. It was all film. It wasn't tape. It was hard to do. There was a time frame problem. ABC [American Broadcasting System] had to do it on film and had to get it down to a studio. It was a mess.

Television was in its infancy and we used it. Even in terms of news coverage, television was still in its infancy. It was not in its infancy in terms of a commentator that might be reading from a script about what you did. It was nothing but radio with a face. Print was still important, but not like today. Print was still very important in the political process. Every year television came forward more and more. When he ran for election, it was a much bigger factor in '70 than it was in '66. After that it really went up exponentially but—

Young: He was very good at that, but it wasn't as important in the first gubernatorial campaign.

Spencer: The amount of TV advertising we did? I'm trying to think in numbers of dollars. I don't think our ad budget was over a million dollars in '66. That doesn't sound like much, but with today's rates, that could be seven million dollars for all I know. It was all pretty canned TV spots and stuff.

Young: A lot of it was just going around and giving talks, or—

Spencer: In May of ’65, we said, “Okay, we will do this.” The question was how do we do it. Our answer to him was, “We do an exploratory committee between now and the end of the year where you can go out, talk, do your thing. We’ll start getting some organization put together and then in January you make a decision whether you want to do this. You may get out there and not like this. This is a whole new world.” He said, “That’s fine.” We put the exploratory committee together.

That was May, first of June. Roberts and I looked at each other one night and said, “This guy’s running. To hell with this exploratory stuff, he’s made his mind up.” He kept singing a song and dance though, when people asked him. “I’m going to make a decision in January.” It was obvious to us that he’d caught the bug. He was running.

This was a period of time in my whole career with Ronald Reagan when I found it very, very helpful to take his past profession and project it to his present profession whenever I was explaining something to him. I explained it to him in Hollywood terms. George Murphy told me this would be a good technique. I would say, “This is like a stage play in New York and then we’ll take it out of town. We’re going to go out of town to Visalia and to all these little burgs up in northern California and try out your act. If you screw up, only a small number of people will see it, and if it’s good, we can keep it.

He understood that. It was right within his knowledge of learning. That’s what we did. We tried out speeches. We tried out everything. He would adopt those things that he felt . . . He was very good at reading a crowd. He never took survey research very seriously. He liked all the good numbers, didn’t like the bad numbers, really didn’t care. Dick Wirthlin dies when I say this, but Reagan really didn’t care.

Campus unrest was the big issue in the campaign; University of California, Berkeley, Mario [Savio] and company. Reagan had strong feelings on that and he talked about it. He’d pound that issue, but it never showed up in our polling data. I went to him one night. We were in Fresno or someplace, and I said, “Ron, the way you keep talking about Berkeley doesn’t even show up in the polling data. He says, “It’s going to.” This shows you, this guy understood the communications and the power of media.

By God, he pounded it and pounded it. This was without a big TV ad campaign. This is just one guy running around the state of California kicking the hell out of the hippies in Berkeley. Pretty soon on the polling data, he had 7 points, 9 points, 10 points, 15 points, 20 points. You’d show him the data and he’d smile and start looking for that number. He’d say, “What did I tell you?”

That’s learning for us, right? That’s what all of that was about and all the other key things of a political campaign, exploratory committee or not. We never left town without leaving pledge cards and all kinds of things. We had people who would pick them up and get them back to us. We were building the base of the organization, one of the four ingredients of a campaign, so that

by January we had thousands and thousands of people who wanted to go to bat for this guy. That was what that whole process was about.

I've hardly mentioned Pat Brown. Reagan had an opponent, George Christopher, who finally realized about four or five months into the campaign that he's in trouble. George really started hammering Reagan. That was a test. Ronald Reagan had never been hammered before. He'd never been hit. I learned one of the big lessons about him in the process. I used it when I ran [Gerald] Ford against him X number of years later. The simple fact is that he's a rhythm candidate. You knock him off his rhythm and he staggers around for about five, six, seven days unless there's somebody there that can get him back before he gets it back.

George basically called him a racist in a meeting at Santa Monica at the old hotel there. Reagan was steaming. He wasn't a racist in any sense of the word. The race issue was just not one he had as a high priority. But as an individual, he was not a racist at all. He didn't think that way. He came off that stage steaming, cussing and steaming. A couple of press guys picked it up. They're running around, grabbing me and the others, trying to get confirmation of the exact verbiage. I said, "What are you talking about? I didn't hear anything." They'd go find somebody to confirm it. It really threw him out of whack. He got obsessed about this thing.

I kept saying, "This isn't the last. As long as you're ahead you're going to get hit again and again and again." He started to adjust to it, but he never liked it. When people attack him à la Christopher, à la George Bush, Senior, he remembers it. Until he finds a practical reason to use it in another way. He doesn't forget it.

That campaign got pretty rough. Basically it played into Reagan's hands in the sense that the rougher George Christopher became, the more the public realized this guy's behind and is panicking. He's attacking this real nice guy whom they conceived of as a real nice human being, a nice person. It really backfired on George. If I'd been in George's camp at the time . . .

There wasn't a lot he could do. We were dealing with a phenomenon coming up, this politician. You could go down in flames attacking him. So what happens? It was bound to happen. Reagan was bound to get elected.

Young: He was good at communications obviously. How was he at working the room with politicians?

Spencer: Terrible. Ronald Reagan is a shy person. People don't understand this. He was not an introvert. Nixon was almost an introvert and paranoid. That's a bad combination. Reagan was shy. People who I met through the years said to me, "I saw President Reagan at this," or "I saw President Reagan one-on-one, two or three people in the Oval Office," or something. He never talked about anything substantive. He just told jokes.

Ronald Reagan used his humor and his ability to break the ice. He wasn't comfortable with you and you coming in the Oval Office with strangers and talking.

Number one, he's not going to tell you about what he's doing. He doesn't think it's any of your damn business. Secondly, he's not comfortable and so he uses his humor. He can do dialects. I mean the Jewish dialect, a gay dialect. He can tell an Irish ethnic joke. The guy was just unbelievably good at it and he'd break the ice with it. You'd listen to him. But if you were that type of person, you'd walk out of there and you'd say, "What the hell were we talking about? He didn't tell me anything."

Young: How was he working the room? You said he was shy.

Spencer: He was shy. The first time in '65, we took him to West Covina. I remember the town. I took him out to West Covina to somebody's house for a fundraiser. They probably had fifty to seventy-five people there. He walked in with Nancy. Or he came with me, I can't remember now. He goes over to the corner of a room and stands there. These people are milling around here and the bar is over here. I'm watching all this.

Finally I walked over to him and I said, "Ron, you've got to get out and mix. You've got to rub shoulders." He was used to people coming to him. I said, "You've got to go press the hands. You've got to move it." He didn't like doing that. He didn't like doing that.

Not that he was above all that. He was a shy person and he didn't want to walk up to you and say, "I'm Ronald Reagan and I'm running for Governor." Now, the exact opposite to that was Nelson Rockefeller. He'd work a room if there were three people in it. It was always, "Hi ya, fella. Hi ya, fella." Just the opposite type of person. Reagan slowly developed a tolerance for working a room and doing those things. That's the best way I can describe it. At communication, one-on-one, he was not very good. At global, big communication, the stage, he was fabulous.

I remember in Cleveland one time we had the city hall, 80,000 people are out front. Reagan is going to give a speech. Jim Rhodes was Governor, I remember that. I'm in the back with Art Modell at the time, owner of the Cleveland Browns, and we're talking. Pretty soon the advance guy comes over. He says, "Reagan's got to go on in two minutes." I always had to talk to him last when he went on because he always had some question. So I go over there and say, "Ready to go?" "Yup." He turns around.

I could see him walking away from me. Here he is. All of a sudden he's the President. Physically he hits that stage with that presidential walk and that presidential look while I'm standing there going, "Jesus, I can't believe this guy." After all these years, I still see this quality in him. Then he does his deliverance, which is always first rate. That's what he liked to do.

Young: And that's what he was best at.

Spencer: That's what he was best at, and that's what he liked to do. I have seen major public figures in our country go from that point backstage to the front where they go downhill, not uphill, in terms of the presentation that they're going to do. That was his forte. It always was. He enjoyed it and he was good at it.

The Reagans never had a lot of friends. I cannot sit here today and tell you of a good, close, personal friend. They had each other and a lot of acquaintances. Maybe Robert Taylor was, maybe Jimmy Stewart was, some of those people. Maybe Charlie Wick and his wife, but other than that, I don't know of any that they had. The Tuttles? They were not what you'd call close friends of theirs. They did things together but . . . it was he and Nancy.

Young: Was Paul Laxalt a friend?

Spencer: Paul was a friend, yes. A political friend, a close political friend.

Riley: What was the hardest part of your job in that campaign?

Spencer: Which one? Governor?

Riley: The first gubernatorial campaign.

Spencer: To keep from screwing up probably. We had a good thing going. We had the ideal candidate. We had the money. We had the troops. It was, *don't do something stupid*. To try to make a point or something, just deal with what you've got and do it right. It's almost like a football team. Whatever your system is, keep running the ball until you have to pass it. Just don't start throwing the ball all over the field. I think that was our biggest challenge, to not screw it up.

Riley: Was he inclined to speak off the cuff in front of groups in ways that sometimes made you wonder if you were on the verge of having a problem?

Spencer: Every candidate does that. Reagan was naïve at this point in time in the process. He didn't realize that what he said to 15 women in Monterey in a little gathering at a coffee hour could be leaked to the *San Francisco Examiner*. He didn't realize that. Number one, he didn't think that people were evil enough to leak. He didn't know that reporters had plants and all those sorts of things. He didn't know.

He spoke what he felt. He told anecdotes of what he thought was good. He slowly regressed from that over the years because you get burned here and there, but he never lost his sense of humor vis-à-vis the great open mike on Russia on the Saturday radio show. You'll never make me believe he didn't know it was open. He would think that that was the funniest thing he could do.

That happened on the Birch question in this period of time. There was a gal in Monterey who was a source for Carl Greenberg of the *L.A. Times*. The Birch question had been discussed internally and I had talked to Rousselot. Johnny had basically said to me, "I'll do whatever you want. I'll be for you or against you, whatever helps the most." I relayed this to naïve Ronald Reagan when he asked, "What's going to happen with these Birch people?" I told him of my conversation with John and he thought that was fine.

At this little gathering, some woman asks him the question. He says, "Let me tell you what Stu said." This little gal calls Greenberg and Greenberg runs the story. It was a good, legitimate

story. He runs it the second day. He runs it the third day and I call him up. I say, "Carl, you're beating it to death. You had a good story but now you're overdoing it."

Carl was the kind of reporter who'd say, "Ummm," and then he'd hang up and he'd call five other people. They'd tell him what they thought. He called me back and he said, "You're right. Everybody told me I was beating it to death." That was the end of it, but most press guys wouldn't do that.

It shows you also our concern about that issue at that time in that campaign. We did not want it to get a life of its own. We didn't want to have to be on the defensive and point out that he wasn't a Bircher. After that, we weren't defensive about it and we never had to be.

Knott: Did Pat Brown ever get under his skin? You mentioned Christopher getting under Reagan's skin with the racist comment. Were there similar—

Spencer: Yes, Pat got under—

Knott: Did it throw Reagan off?

Spencer: [Charles] Guggenheim? Does that name ring a bell? He's the guy who did that half hour thing.

Knott: Um-hum.

Spencer: It was a brilliant piece incidentally, a very good documentary for Pat Brown, except the 60 second slot there where he's talking to the little black kid and he says, "Do you know that it was a Republican actor that shot Abraham Lincoln?"

That got under Reagan's skin. That got under Hollywood's skin. Frank Sinatra was on our phone the next day. Frank was a big Democrat for whom I had done work before. "What can I do?" he asked in that voice. "What can I do?" Man, they were coming out of the woodwork. A lot of them were hidden Reaganauts, but they were Democrats and they didn't want to get out front.

The only honest Democrat I've ever seen in Hollywood is Warren Beatty. He has a value system. He believes something. It's almost like [Adlai] Stevenson's was, but he's got it. The rest of them are in and out, whoever is in power. They quietly liked the idea of an actor having success in the political arena, but that incident just blew them right out of the water. Reagan was as offended as the rest of them because he was an actor. It was his profession.

I've always thought that was such a good documentary. The whole essence of it went out the window because of this one lousy sixty seconds they left in there. I never could figure that one out.

Other than that, all of these prominent politicians hate the media, probably for good reason. They spend a lifetime being vilified, hit all the time, every day. Five thousand people trying to win a Pulitzer Prize off your head, it's that kind of mentality. Reagan handled the media extremely

well. When he was running for Governor, it was a little different. He really didn't pay much attention to it. Once he got in the big time, I've sat there and watched with the Reagans when Sam Donaldson's on. Sam is a good example. He says something and Reagan takes off his slipper and throws it at the TV set. He has a few choice words for it.

I'm always apologizing for these guys because we need them. The next morning Reagan would be walking down to the Oval Office. Sam would pop his head out of the press room and Reagan would smile and say, "Sam, I hope you have a good day today." He'd go on and Sam would be hoping he'd got under his skin last night. He's popping out there to see, *did I score?* I know a lot of Presidents that would have [sound effect] the head off when he stuck it out. Not Reagan, he'd smile. "Sam, hope you have a good day today, hope everything's going fine."

It drove them nuts. It drove them all nuts. "Doesn't this guy ever get mad?"

"Nah, he loves you, he loves you people." That went a long way in the end. Sam would deny this, but I'm convinced he voted for Reagan the second time.

As a talent, that's an art form. It's a discipline that he had. He was mad the night before, madder than hell, but he was not going to let it get in the way because if he kept getting mad and getting mad, he was going to be mad all the time. They would see it and it would play into their hands. There were 5,000 people out there. Most candidates fall into the latter. They get mad and they stay mad. They get favorites and Reagan had no favorites.

Young: He didn't harbor anger?

Spencer: Not very long. I was a prime example of that. Take the Ford campaign, which I was involved in for reasons that weren't his fault. I took some heavy hits at him. You know that one I pulled—"Governor Reagan couldn't start a war, but President Reagan could." Based on his remarks about Rhodesia or something, I forget what it was. He got pretty mad. I think he put his fists through a book in the airplane. Deaver told me later. X number of years later he wanted me back.

I only tell that personal story because if there are good, pragmatic, practical reasons, he can overlook past sins. George Bush was that way. When Reagan and I flew to the convention in Detroit after I'd come back with him, he kept talking to me, "What am I going to do about this Vice President selection?" Prior to this, on the plane he'd spent twenty minutes dumping on George Bush. He was still mad at George Bush about voodoo economics and some other stuff he'd said in New Hampshire. He was still mad. I listened to this whole thing. When he got through, I said, "I think you're going to pick George Bush."

He said, "Why?" I said, "Because you need him. We're going back to a convention where they've locked in a platform that's way far to the right of you." He said "Umm." He thought about it. He talked to a lot of people, I'm sure. I don't know what they said to him, but at the end of the day he wasn't mad at George Bush. He could select him. He could live with him because he was going to help and that's what, in the end, he was all about.

Young: I'd like to dial back again to the campaign for the governorship. It's now over, Reagan's won. Some of the people in my trade like to talk about the transition, the difference between campaigning and governing. I know you. I've read some things you've said. You dispute some of the differences between campaigning and governing, that too much has been made of it. But nevertheless it does confront a candidate with a different environment when he comes in. Here I'm talking about Reagan as Governor during his first, and maybe second, term as Governor.

I think about your observations on how he made the move from one environment to another. One of the things that struck me is, you were in charge of the candidate and the campaign when he was running for Governor and that seemed to work well for Reagan. Who was in charge when he became the Governor? Did he need that? How did that go?

Spencer: He needed it. The Chief of Staff role, the way it's organized out there, and maybe two other people. Reagan, more than most people I've seen in these top jobs, has to have a strong Chief of Staff who has his agenda. Reagan's agenda, no other agenda. Every time he's been successful in the process of governing, he's had that. When he hasn't had that, his governing has been hurt in a lot of ways.

Young: Did you see that in California?

Spencer: We're going to get to that. In California initially he wanted Bill or me to go to Sacramento and be Chief of Staff. That was out of the question. I love running, but I hate governing. Bill was the same way. There's no way we're getting into that crap. We fished around and gave him a bunch of potential names. He picked Phil Battaglia, who'd been our southern California chairman.

Battaglia was a lawyer in L.A. at the time, very young. It was a mistake. Number one, he had his own agenda. Secondly, he didn't understand what he was getting into. The first two years of the Reagan governorship floundered because they didn't have a single person who was the clearinghouse, the broker.

To be Chief of Staff with Reagan, you're not telling him what to do. You've got to make sure that he gets all points of view and they all get into the office, not just *a* point of view. That's why you have to be an honest broker if you're going to be a good Chief of Staff for Reagan. That wasn't happening. It didn't happen until Phil left. I forget what time frame he left.

Young: Was that his first government experience?

Spencer: Yes.

Young: You also should pick somebody who knows the fine print of how things work, don't you—

Spencer: But I don't think any of us really knew that at that time. I'm sure Reagan didn't. Plus there was always this surge of—they'd had eight years of Pat Brown—we're going to clean this one out and bring our people in. The biggest problem was the people in this administration,

including Meese. You've got to remember, Deaver and Meese were way down on the totem pole in '66. In fact they weren't even in the campaign except as volunteers. They went to Sacramento at very secondary jobs. I think Ed was clemency secretary or something. [William P.] Clark brought in Mike as a go-fer out of the corner office. They started moving up the ladder as people fell out.

One of the problems between all these groups there was they're all fighting, jockeying for position in this early stage. That created some problems. The stable guy through the whole thing who came from the campaign into there was Lyn Nofziger, who was our press secretary in the campaign, who I brought out from Washington and who was very loyal to Reagan. Lyn was the steadying force, the extension of the campaign into the government. But being a press secretary only, you get treated accordingly by other members of the staff. Finally they got it right and Clark was Chief of Staff. Tom Reed was in there. Ed was in there. Deaver was now in a position and they had a little group basically. Then the governorship got on track.

They all learned, not only Reagan, that the legislature was an important body. Finally, first term. Jesse [Unruh] took their pants off on every issue. Finally he and Bobby Moretti, the two speakers who were there when Reagan was there—Democrats—realized three years in that this was the toughest guy they'd ever have to deal with. The reasoning was very simple, and that was, if we had a problem with Jesse on a bill, a major philosophical bill, we'd just go on television. We'd go right over his head and get the folks going and Jesse would start screaming like an Indian. Reagan's mail would turn around.

The politics of it were simple. They had to deal. At an impasse, they started coming down to the Oval Office and talking the thing over before it went public. They'd make their deals on the budget.

Reagan became a pol who had to make deals. The legislature, which was Democrat- controlled, had to consider that there is a Republican Governor here. We're not getting anything done without him.

Young: Yes, and one that could also go over their heads. He was very good at that on the media.

Spencer: He could go over their heads and that hadn't been done before.

Young: That was my next question.

Spencer: That hadn't been done before. Any prior Governor just sat there and they cut whatever best deal they could cut with the opposition party. Reagan probably got more of what he wanted in welfare program revisions and things like that because of his ability to go over the heads of the Democratic leadership directly to the people. He'd build a pressure base that fed back to them and brought them around. I can remember Reagan just screaming like a banshee to me about it.

Freedman: Was that something that you were pushing him toward? Or was that his instinct or a combination?

Spencer: It was both. It was his natural instinct. Let's go on television. Let's go talk to people. He learned that in the campaign process.

Young: But there might have been some issues where that wouldn't have been a good thing to do.

Spencer: No, you have to harbor it. You have to use it correctly. You can't abuse it. You can't use it every time you have a difference. In any given legislative year there are probably three issues that are contentious. He can settle one, maybe two, but with the other, he can go on television and get what he wants.

Young: Then they'd come to him and make a deal when they saw he was a factor to be reckoned with. Did he make these deals himself? Was it done in his office? Did he do the bargaining or did others do it for him and he signed off on it? I'm asking because you say he was uncomfortable sort of—

Spencer: No, he'd be part of the process. He would always have people with him. If it was financial, he'd have Weinberger. He'd have the apparent cabinet member present. They would've totally prepared him with good position papers as to why and where they are, where this could lead. He never got into minutia. The only time he ever got into minutia was in the cold war aspects, which we'll get to down the road.

He signed an abortion bill when he was Governor, the most liberal abortion bill in America at the time. Tony Beilenson put the bill in. To this day I don't know what the process was because that was not like Ronald Reagan. I happen to believe that abortion was not the foremost thing on his mind one way or another. Somebody had a strong feeling about it. Someone we would now term a pro-choice person in the administration came in and they did it. Abortion wasn't the high level issue back then.

Young: That wasn't close to one of his core values either.

Spencer: No.

Riley: My question was about your relationship at this time to the administration. You hadn't taken a position with the administration, but you're on the outside working informally as an advisor?

Spencer: Getting gouged. We made a conscious decision. We had to live with it. The first couple of years things were always in flux as they were having problems. Nancy would call us and say, "You've got to get up here and do this and do that." People around a President or a Governor I term the palace guard. Even if I'm in it, they're the palace guard, right? It's tough to come from the outside and deal with the palace guard. You're dealing with power, and people fight for power. It's an awkward position to be called up there by the Governor's wife and be told, "Go straighten something out." I did it a couple of times and made some enemies.

Then the kitchen cabinet would call us up. "Damn, you've got to go up there and straighten those guys out." Big deal, right? Taft would go up because he was tough and he'd chew up the whole staff from Clark on down. All that happened was they hated Taft the rest of their life. We were put in a very bad position.

Then they had the gay flap in the administration. Story was leaked that certain members of the staff were gay and this was going on, that was going on. I was in Europe and I saw in the *Herald Tribune*, a little bitty squib and I thought, *oh my God, they've got to be friends of mine*. When I get home, the first call I get, "You've got to come up here and straighten this out."

They had named names and they knew everything by that point. They didn't know everything because I got trapped in a couple of things. I tried to talk to certain people. I finally got something going, but that's the kind of issue where everyone runs for cover. [Laughter] That's a terrible issue. Today it wouldn't be a flap. Then it was like the Walter Jenkins thing. It was a big problem, a gay guy working in the Governor's office.

At that point in time I said, "I've had enough of this. I'm not going to put up with this abuse." They were abusing us. They were starting to abuse us in a lot of different ways, business and other things. Sixty-eight comes along and Reagan is calling me up. This is a meeting about the presidency. Cliff White is there from the east. That means it's serious. I listen to this whole thing and think, *this is going to be tough*. When it was over, I stayed after the meeting with Reagan, with the Reagans. We had some drinks and I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "The guys said this and the guys said that."

I said, "You have no idea how to get there. The people around you don't have any idea how to get there. They have a little bit here and a little bit there, but there's nobody there that knows how to get there. If you want to get there, you have to get a Ray Bliss or you've got to get some of those people who've been there like Leonard Hall." I went down the list.
[BREAK]

Spencer: He gave me the great quote of all time.[3] It was, "the office seeks the man." I looked him right in the eye and I said, "That's bullshit. If you want to be President of the United States, you've got to go get it and you've got to fight for it." After that he told me that twenty times. He never got off of that kick, "the office seeks the man." No matter how bad I was in my response to it, until the point where it got to be a joke between us, I used to say, "I'm not going to do that because the office seeks the man." He'd say, "You're going to go do it." But I knew that that was a failure.

I very definitely thought that he had a possibility of being President of the United States, but timing is one of the most important things in politics and his timing was terrible. But the people around him wanted it. They wanted the big banana. That's where agendas come in.

I told him point blank, "I didn't tell the staff. If that's your attitude, 'the office seeks the man,' I'm out. If you want it and you want to fight for it, I'll go with you, no matter what it takes." I

[3] Start tape 4 at 048

said, “If you believe that, I’m out.” I think he was relieved, because I think he was beginning to wonder what’s this all about anyway.

We backed off. The staff just started burying us every way they could because they didn’t want us around. This was going to be their show. We went into what you call a defensive mode. Stay alive. They were making accusations, like I still deal with Rockefeller. They wanted to check my phone records. I’d talk to Nelson once every two months. He’d call me up about some ludicrous thing, and I would deal with them.

Nixon was calling me. He asked us to run his campaign after he’d gone through his own internal turmoil. This is how practical Nixon was. I finally said, “Dick, our Governor, your Governor, my Governor, has got stars in his eyes and I have to do business in this state.” Nixon understood that. There were two things with that conversation. Number one, Nixon found from a good irrevocable source, “yes, this guy’s going to run.” That’s important for the way Nixon thinks.

Secondly, he understood my problem of doing business in a state where the Governor announced, so we backed off. We didn’t do anything except I did the finance guys. We agreed with them that I would put the California delegation together, pick the people with their approval. It’s a pro forma you have to go through—make sure they get there, the logistics of it, and make sure they stay in line, which I did.

Interestingly enough, I put the delegation together. The kitchen cabinet was in the room. They had their favorites and I slotted them there. But I made damn sure that that delegation had a back-up position for Richard Nixon. If push came to shove, on the first ballot they would be with Reagan, but if Reagan was out of the picture, there was no Nelson Rockefeller. There was no whoever the next guy in line might have been. I worked that out with [Robert] Finch. He was the Lieutenant Governor at the time. He and Reagan never got along about anything. Then I was out. I was gone. We were out.

Young: Were you at the convention?

Spencer: I was at the convention in Miami, but after that exercise, at which he did not look good—they made him look very bad at that convention—I thought it was an aborted effort for the presidency. Our relationship to the Reagans . . .all this knifing, all these things. You could have Deaver here and he’d tell you exactly what I’m telling you because he was on the other side. We’ve since made our peace. The Reagans didn’t know about it. They didn’t know what these guys were doing to us and we weren’t the type of people who would go crying. We were big boys and we fought back. We took care of them in a few spots too.

As time went on, we were doing our thing and they were off doing their thing. Come 1975, I get a call from Rummy, [Donald] Rumsfeld, Chief of Staff. “We’re having all kinds of problems with the Ford campaign. I said, “Wonderful. I like California and I’m staying in California.” I knew Ford as a Congressman. They conned me into coming back and doing New Hampshire, I think it was. New Hampshire and Florida, the first two primaries. We had a whole scenario. They were going to get rid of three guys when I showed up, which I didn’t even know about. I was

there for 17 months. Otherwise I was in the Ford campaign. Here I am, a Reagan guy, and I'm in the Ford campaign.

All these people were making damn sure I wasn't in the Reagan campaign. That didn't bother me. That was life in the big time. I had an opportunity here. I liked Gerald Ford. I've always had the philosophy that you don't run against a sitting incumbent in your own party. That was always my philosophy, which was true in this case. Never broke the rule. It wasn't a matter of being vindictive. It was an opportunity professionally to go national with a sitting President in my own party, knowing full well I was never going to be invited into the primary process any other way. But the Reagans didn't know the history of my problems with the palace guard. They thought I was being a big traitor. That didn't bother me either.

I went and ran the Ford campaign. The Ford people wouldn't admit today, but we were a real plus because I was the only guy who understood him in that. I went to Washington. They thought he was nothing. This was going to be a cake walk. I said this guy is tough as—

Young: Who thought that?

Spencer: The Ford people, from the President down and Mel Laird and the whole trappings around the President and the Congress. I said, "This guy's tough. This guy's going to be tough." I never really got through to them until we almost got it stolen away from us. I proceeded on that basis. I was the only guy in town who thought that way. Everything I did, I said, "Okay, if X happens, what will Reagan do?" I would think that way. *If I do this to Ronald Reagan, what's he going to do?* The other people didn't even know what I was talking about. My basic premise was every three weeks I have to throw him out of rhythm. I have to do something that pisses him off.

I had one guy, full-time, named Peter Kaye. He was a press secretary from the *San Diego Union* who had good press credentials, a smart little sucker. That was his job to find something somewhere in the last ten, fifteen years where Ronald Reagan has said something foolish. Somewhere somehow. You've got to find it because we're going to remind him of it. He came up with five, six things.

The first one probably won New Hampshire for Ford. It was Reagan's 90 billion dollar program, which was a story buried in the seventh page of the *Chicago Tribune.* He had gone out and given a speech in his off-election years when he was out of office. It had been handed to him by Jeff Bell on an issue that was on Jeffrey Bell's agenda, not particularly Reagan's. Reagan gave the speech. It sounded great. You took the 90 billion tax thing, which it was, and if you applied it in New Hampshire, your taxes were going to double. If you took it to Florida, your taxes were going to triple.

It was one of those *National Review* theories that, when you applied it to the practicalities of the political world, didn't come out too good. We did the numbers, got it totally prepared, had our package, pre-released it to the press—those who were traveling with Reagan as well as with Ford—and they asked these questions about the 90 billion dollar package.

Reagan had no idea what the 90 billion dollar package was about. I knew he didn't know what it was about, that they'd handed him the speech. He stumbled around and he staggered around. I understand he went back and chewed out some tail about this thing. Everywhere he landed around America he was asked about 90 billion dollars. He really went down in the polling data. The numbers were atrocious. New Hampshire is a non-tax state basically and all of a sudden they're going to have big tax bills.

That was the first thing we did to him. Then in the California primary. . . we knew we were going to lose the California primary—winner take all—because there was no way Ford was going to beat Reagan in California. I said, *what can I do in California that's going to help us nationally? So we get beat by five points or we get beat by twenty points, what can I do in California? I'm willing to roll the dice, to take the twenty points, if I can get something done in Ohio, Pennsylvania*. Peter had found this great war hawk-like statement Reagan made about Rhodesia. We came up with the ad, a little short TV spot—ran it only in California—that said Governor Reagan couldn't start a war, but President Reagan could. He went ballistic on that one.

Nofziger and all those people said, "You blew California." We didn't blow California. We lost California bad because of that ad, yes. But when he landed in Ohio and he landed in Jersey and he landed in Illinois, everybody said, "What about Rhodesia?" He had to talk about Rhodesia for ten days explaining, no, he wasn't going to start a war. Again, he's off-balance.

Young: Off-stride.

Spencer: He's got to talk about something he doesn't want to talk about and that he doesn't know that much about and that he isn't comfortable with. It again raises an element of doubt with people. Not in California, they were solid for him, even the Democrats. But in these other states, there was still that element about it, 'Is this guy really a hawk, a real war hawk? Really a Goldwater underneath the whole skin of things?' Those were things we were trying to use to raise up Ford.

Then we get back in rhythm and all of a sudden wham, he'd nail us in Texas. He beat us here. He beat us there. We're fighting for our life the whole time. I tell Ford, the biggest political victory in his life was his ability to beat Ronald Reagan. That was a major feat. I don't think they realized it.

With that and the incumbency . . . we used the power of the incumbency fiercely in that campaign. There was a delegation there. We won by 80 delegates, wasn't it? We had four delegates in that Kansas City hall that were in tears, crying when they voted for Gerald R. Ford. Their first choice was Ronald Reagan, but we owned them for some practical, pragmatic patronage thing, or something we pulled on them. It was really a very interesting political situation. You don't see that very often. The guy that comes in second is really the darling of the convention, as demonstrated when he gave his speech and the place went ballistic. I've been wandering around, but . . . that's sort of the history of my relationship.

Then in ’80 I was still working. I did a lot of stuff overseas by then, but I had a great schedule. I would work hard for three, four months and then go play golf for two, three months and go fishing with [Richard] Cheney. We had good times.

Deaver called me. Prior to this, Deaver and I had made our peace with the palace guard. Deaver had a drinking problem, which is public now. I didn’t know about it then, not until he told me he was going into rehab. I’m in New York one night, checking into the Hilton. He’s checking in and he says, “Let’s have a drink. We’ve got to talk.” I said, ”Okay.” I’m still mad.

We go talk. I’m drinking scotch and sodas and he’s drinking scotch and sodas. I notice he’s putting his swizzle sticks over here. I’d learned through years, having come from a family of alcoholics, that they’re always going to quit so they keep track of how much they’re drinking. I watched Mike doing this and I thought, *huh*. When he went to the lavatory, I took all my swizzle sticks and I put them in his pile over here. He comes back and I remember his kind of like looking . . . because he wasn’t that drunk.

Then we proceeded to hammer out a deal. What it boiled down to was he didn’t like being on the outs. I was still taking the best shots I could get at him around the world. I said, “Okay. We’ll make a deal from this point forward, but if I ever catch you even trying to do something to me again, I’m going to really get you.” We made a deal and to this day we’re close friends.

That’s six months out. Reagan’s running for the presidency. They’re going through all that. That spring they developed a lot. I really wasn’t close to it and wasn’t paying much attention frankly in ’80. They had all kinds of internal problems; money, the way it was spent, this that. Everybody had his own agenda. Mike had been canned. Nofziger was canned. [John] Sears was running it. I’d seen Sears here in North Carolina at the Governors’ conference. It was common knowledge, in the profession, about my palace guard problems. He was talking to me about his and I was laughing. He said, “What advice you got?

I remember telling him, “I’d pick them all off except one. You have to have one person, either Lyn or Meese or Deaver, so that when Reagan gets up in the morning he sees a familiar face. That’s very important, but dump all the rest of them.” John took my advice except he went one too far. He got them all. There was no face left. Reagan got up some morning and said, “Who are all these people around me? I don’t know these people. Mommy, do something about these people.” Sears would’ve still been there if he’d kept the one face.

Then it was all coming apart. When Deaver is thrown out, the Reagans, being the kind of people they are, they’re still talking to Mike on the back side. Mike was like a son to the Reagans.

Mike is up there giving advice on the back side. Finally one day he said, “You know, Nancy, we need Spencer. We’ve reached the point where whatever we do, we’ve got to get Spencer back.” She says, “Can you get him?” He says, “I can try.” All that started.

Of course the first question I asked, “Does Nancy want me back?” He said, “Yup.” The second one was I made him put five, six of these people in a room, made them all look me in the eye and

say they wanted me back. They all said yes and walked out of the room, "I'll get that son of a bitch."

It was fun. It was payback time. So I went back aboard the campaign.

Young: Okay.

Spencer: That same group didn't even have an office for me at the headquarters. They were still trying to find ways out. Billy Timmons was in charge. He was a friend. So I went and told Bill how to do it. He'd never really been through it before. In fact he went on two weeks' vacation while I put the whole national organization together for him. Then Reagan really screwed up somewhere out there on the campaign trail.

They had this meeting out in a house in Middleburg, or wherever it was. I wasn't there. They were trying to do reclamation work. How are we going to put this? Nancy looked around the room and said, "Where's Stu?" I hadn't been invited. Casey and Wirthlin and those guys, they didn't want me around. Neither did Meese. She said, "Next meeting, make sure Spencer is here."

From that point on they all got the message. Mike came to me. I said, "Mike, you and I know one thing about this guy." This is sort of a crude way of saying it and I don't mean it to be taken the wrong way. Historically I hope it's cleaned up. In Reagan's case particularly, whoever owns the body owns the campaign. Whoever is with him. I knew that. Michael knew that. These other guys didn't know that. I said that to Mike and he said, "Yeah. What do we do?" I said, "We take our group. We go on the plane. We cut off the phones and we run the damn campaign." He liked that idea.

We went on the plane. We brought [Joe] Canzari for schedule. I kept Lyn on the plane because he was press. We needed that. I kept Marty Anderson because he is the true philosopher. When Spencer comes up with some idiot idea, it will pass muster with the Reagans if it passes muster with Marty. He's a very good guy to work with. We took Jim Brady, who was important to us because he'd worked probably in every department in Washington at some time or another. He knew the bureaucracy. Khachigian came because he's the great speechwriter and great wordsmith. That was it.

I had a speechwriter. I had a press operation. I had a scheduling operation. I had a philosopher. I had me and Deaver. For 90 days we ran the campaign from the plane. The Reagans were very happy with it. They were very comfortable.

It was so bad back in Arlington at headquarters. Say we're talking in Des Moines. We gave the speech the day after our speech was supposed to be given in Des Moines, but it wasn't important because they all heard the speech for Des Moines. Khachigian had heard or Marty, whichever one of them we made write the speech. They were back worrying about hostages, and November surprises. I used to call it [Bill] Casey's OSS [Office of Strategic Services] operation back there, but we were out having a good time on the campaign.

Young: These were—

Spencer: You can only do that as an outsider.

Young: They were inside-the-beltway kind, weren't they?

Spencer: You can't run a campaign that way with an incumbent. You cannot overwhelm about all that crap back there, but in this case we weren't the incumbent. You can do it. As long as you have the tools available that we had, that's all the tools you need.

Knott: Could I just ask? You were involved in the 1970 re-election campaign—

Spencer: Yes, uh-huh.

Knott: Even though the palace guard had long since frozen you out—I hate to keep bringing you back—but how did you—

Spencer: They hadn't totally frozen us out yet. It really started after the '70 campaign, but the beginnings started before that. Two things happened. It was politics. The Reagans said, "Where's Spencer-Roberts?" The finance guys weren't about to raise the money that they were supposed to raise unless we were involved. That was the muscle they held over the palace guard. So we took it over.

There was a problem we had. My partner had a problem with Tom Reed. We divided our workload up based on a lot of things. Number one was familiarity with the person, ability to get along with the candidates, other time frames. Bill was going to be the lead in 1970 because I was running this whole bunch of statewide and out-of-state congressional races. Bill had diabetes. He never took care of himself. I say all this in retrospect. At the time I knew he wasn't, but I didn't think much about it. He was getting worse and worse.

One of the side effects of diabetes is depression. As I look back on it he was going through that, starting his depression problem, because he was bitching about everything and moaning about this and that in the office. He was in a depressed state of mind.

I had this conversation about three months ago with Tom Reed—funny, because that's who it was with and Tom was the chairman of the campaign to re-elect. He'd been part of the palace guard. He and Bill had some terrible arguments, Donnybrooks. Tom came to me and told me about them. I talked to Bill about them and I could tell Bill was really depressed. Murphy was running for re-election. In a political sense the worst thing to do is have somebody dumped out of the campaign and all the press that goes with it and all the explaining.

So we cut a deal. I would go do the Reagan thing. Bill would go do the Murphy thing. This one really got to Holmes. He's the guy who has to raise the money for both of them. He said, "Now I've got to give you guys two checks instead of one." Oh God, he was funny.

Bill went over and did the Murphy thing and I took over the Reagan thing on a full time basis and worked very well with Tom. After that campaign, then the onslaught came: palace guard versus Spencer-Roberts.

Young: Let me go back to pick up just one loose end about the Miami nomination. You'd said he had stars in his eyes. That was well known. The palace guard was pushing him despite the fact that it wasn't a prudent thing, or the timing wasn't right. Nancy was there with him in Miami. Did she see a palace guard problem with pushing him? Or did she have stars in her eyes too?

Spencer: I don't know. I can't answer that because I wasn't close. Once I removed myself from the effort, which was a year before that probably, I didn't know what her thinking was. She had to have been nervous. She worried about those sorts of things, but there wasn't just the palace guard. There were major conservative figures across America, a la Cliff White. Cliff came with credentials, national credentials, which were pushing him towards this goal. It wasn't just the palace guard. There was this national thing. But my problem was, with all this, I saw no way that they were going to put it together against a guy who had spent from '62 building a base in the Republican party, a guy named Richard Nixon.

He spoke to every Congressman, every Governor. Everything Dick Nixon did was premeditated and planned. His goal was to get back and it wasn't a spur of the moment emotional thing. He had the delegates. He had the folks out there that count in the delegate process. Reagan's people had to crack that. I'm not saying they couldn't have done it. I'm just saying I didn't see how they were going to do it unless they went out and threw a lot of big bombs around and did a lot of things. They weren't prepared to do that. So I don't know what her thinking was. I have no idea. I didn't have contact with them.

Riley: Did Reagan have any relationship at all with Nixon?

Spencer: Yes, they did. He liked Nixon. I think the record shows he was supporting Nixon almost to the end on the Watergate thing. They were never close. They had a relationship. Nixon always wanted to know where Rockefeller was, where Reagan was, certain political figures that could have been his problem. He wanted to know who they were, what made them tick, how they operated. He would give Reagan assignments like special emissary to Hong Kong for some special deal. He kept him in line.

He was always worried about Ronald Reagan because, as I said, Nixon was a much better political manager than he was a candidate. He would have been a tremendous manager. He understood timing. He understood everything. With that skill he looked around and said, "This guy's a threat." He always wanted to know where Reagan was, what he was doing, but they weren't close.

Knott: If we can jump back to the Ford campaign, the impression you had was that the Ford folks were underestimating Ronald Reagan big time?

Spencer: Correct.

Knott: And this is something that Ronald Reagan seems to have encountered throughout his entire career—is that a fair statement—being underestimated?

Spencer: Pat Brown underestimated. Jimmy Carter did. They shouldn't have by that time but they did. The reason I say that is that Jesse [Unruh] was an adversary of mine, but a very close friend in a lot of ways. During the Carter-Reagan race early on before I was involved, in'80, I saw Jess somewhere. He said he'd been to Washington and he'd been talking to Carter people. He said, "Do you believe they don't think Reagan is tough? They're underestimating him. I told them, I told them five different ways. Don't underestimate this guy."

By that point Jesse, who had dealt with him as a legislator and had run against him for Governor in '70, realized that this guy was for keeps and was tough. But most of the Democrat apparatus in the East didn't believe it. They paid the price for it.

Ford people were that way in '76 in the primary. Carter people were that way in the general election of '80. Christopher was that way. Pat Brown's people underestimated this actor. I always said he was a lucky politician. That's where I think luck gets involved. He was always underestimated. It didn't bother him.

Knott: Did Ford ever consider—he dropped Rockefeller, he selected [Robert] Dole—Reagan as a possible running mate?

Spencer: You get five people here, you'll get five stories. By this time Ford didn't like him. Ford didn't want to offer him that. Ford made a call that left the door open, but was praying to God he'd say no. These things happen. Reagan didn't want it. People in Reagan's camp wanted him to do it. There was all kind of BS going on.

The basic decision was in the Ford camp. We said, "We have one person who is going to be the emissary over there so we don't get all this mishmash. You, Cheney, are the guy in charge of going over here and talking with whomever they put up." They told us it was Sears. Reagan had said to Sears and a couple of others, "I don't want it." That was the operative word. That was told to Cheney.

We went from there to pick a selection. The palace guard comes charging into the bedroom after that, telling Reagan he's got to do it. They're going through the whole thing. I don't think Reagan ever told them what he'd already done.

You're going to get mixed messages from whoever comes here to talk about it. Basically Reagan didn't want it, I know that. Ford didn't want it, I know that. What all the mishmash was, how they arrived at that point, you're going to have to talk to some other people. I think that it was the right thing for all the parties concerned. I don't think Reagan as VP candidate would have made that much difference. People always look at these things in retrospect, but in that time frame it was different than now.

Bob Dole was a great choice in that time frame. We were losing every farm state coming out of the convention, every goddamn farm state, with a Republican. We won them all. Bob Dole

brought them back, not Gerald Ford. So Reagan made about half of them back. Ronnie wouldn't have brought them all back. The better question—not that that wasn't a good one—was there anything to the Reagan-Ford thing in Detroit?

Knott: Yes, I was holding off on that.

Spencer: Ludicrous. The answer is no. There was never any love lost between those two guys. That's just the natural attrition of what happens over the years when you're at heads with each other. I think Ford has become a better friend of Jimmy Carter's than he ever was of Ronald Reagan's. But the point is, that was a palace guard move from the Ford presidency. Brent [Scowcroft], [John O.] Marsh, Henry Kissinger. I'm speculating here, but it's fun. These guys were all out of power. They were going to be out of power. Reagan isn't going to grab any of these guys. Reagan ran against Henry Kissinger for God's sakes in 1976. So they're playing all these head games up there.

One thing happened. Dick Cheney and I were there. We heard about this. He wasn't in this palace guard then. We said, "We're going to hide. We want no part of this one. This is ludicrous." So we hid. Somewhere in the conversation—this went on for, like, a 72-hour time frame with Reagan on the plane—I get a phone call from Reagan in my room. My calls were being screened because I wasn't going to get into this thing. He didn't ask me about the Ford thing. He said, "Do you still feel the same way about Bush?" I said, "I haven't changed, haven't seen a thing to change it." He said, "Okay."

But I had talked to Betty Ford somewhere in that 72-hour period. She's a funny lady. She said something like "I'll divorce him if he does that." I said to myself, *okay, I've got the answer to this one, they're all playing games up there on the top floor*. Dick and I just stood there. Nature took its course and it died.

Dan Rather got mud all over his face and a few other anchors got mud all over their face going with it. [Tom] Brokaw, I told. I didn't tell him, he kept calling me. I said, "All I can say to you is I don't know anything, but I wouldn't go with the story yet." He didn't and he was the only anchor that didn't get mud all over his face. He still owes me for it. But that was ludicrous. That was really inside politics, power, all these things.

At the end of the day if fifty people had come and said he had to do it, he wouldn't have done it, I don't think. He wouldn't have put Ford on the ticket. They were dealing. They had a piece of paper and they were talking about power sharing. You get this acre and I get these two acres and you get this acre. It was ludicrous.

Young: Who were the people on the Reagan side who were engaged in this conversation?

Spencer: Meese was always there on the policy stuff. Mike had to have been around. Some of the kitchen cabinet was there. I say that, but I don't know if any of them even took it seriously. It didn't emanate from them. It emanated over here and was brought to them. Whether they were playing around with it and they got serious or not, I don't know. I can't believe that they were,

but you've got to be polite. This is an ex-President of your own party. You can't blow them out of the water.

It's one of the great stories of the Kansas City convention. We sent Charlie Black out there. I said, "You're in charge of the platform hearings. Whatever the right wing wants, give it to them. Whatever the Reagan people want, give it to them, just give it to them. This went on for about four and a half days, all these hearings.

All of a sudden I get called into the Oval Office. I get in there and there's Henry Kissinger standing there with the President. Henry sees me coming to the door and he's pointing at me. He says, "That man's giving away my whole foreign policy." He goes into this tirade and I said, "You're right, Henry." I tried to explain to him the consequences of a platform versus an election and that you and the President are going to do what you want in foreign policy. I'm just not going to put it in the platform. Ford understood what I was talking about, but Henry was steaming.

In the end it made absolutely no difference one way or the other, but Henry's ego was bruised and rightly so. The man spends a lifetime to put a foreign policy together and this dummy blows it out of the water in three days. But Henry is a piece of work.

I'll never forget in the Bush thing in '88, they asked me to come up to UCLA when he was debating [Michael] Dukakis to do the spin operation. They wanted Henry. Everybody was afraid to talk to Henry. I said, "I'll talk to Henry." I went to Henry and I said, "Henry, I want you to be out at UCLA. You're going to be part of this operation."

He goes out there and he's standing in the corner. Nobody will talk to him. I walk in. I see him. I go over. He said, "Vat am I supposed to do? I'm not a spinner. I don't know how to spin." I said, "Henry, I want you to go in there. Afterwards, when any question comes up at this debate on foreign policy matters, I want you to take the Bush position and explain it to these people." "Oh I can handle that, I can handle that," he said.

We walk over. I walked him over about five minutes afterwards. The room is full. We're on the platform. Baker's on one platform. Somebody else is on the other. The minute I opened that door and walked in with Kissinger, all the cameras all went [sound effect]. The star. He knows it too. He handles it. He gets up there and he went on and on and on. He spun the hell out of them.

We're walking back and he said, "How did I do?" I said, "You're one hell of a spinner." And he just laughed. He just laughed.

Young: It's time for a lunch break right now.
Spencer: (speaking about Ken Khachigian and Ronald Reagan).[4] Then Reagan pulls his cards out, paper clip on them. He gets out his cards and he's going over his speech. I knew enough to shut up. Then he put the cards down here next to us before he put them in his pocket. Then he took a nap. I said, "I want to see how good this guy is." I took the cards out, shuffled them, put them back, and put on the pin.

[4] Start tape 5 at 018

He woke up. He put them in his pocket. He goes to give his speech. I'm at the back of the room. He always has this routine. He pulls them out, pin comes off, pin here, and when he's done, pin goes back on, goes over here. He got there and he started talking and all of a sudden I can see he's getting all screwed up, but the audience didn't know this. He was going on through the thing while he's organizing his cards back where they were. I'm standing there at the back of the room and saying, "Goddamn, this guy's good."

So that night I wasn't going back to Sacramento. Barney the driver from Highway Patrol came and found me. He said, "Governor wants to see you." I said, "I don't want to see the Governor." He said, "I think you better go over." So I go over. Reagan's sitting in the back seat. The window comes down. He says, "Don't you ever do that to me again." The window goes up and he drives off. But I proved my point. That guy is good at that stuff. So good.

Ken really knows the process of how he approaches a speech and what he wants in a speech, because he takes speeches and rips them apart. They have to go back and put them together. Sometimes he wouldn't but—

Young: I'm glad to hear that. I think he's scheduled for next month.

Spencer: Say hello to Larry Sabato for me.

Freedman: I sure will, I sure will.

Spencer: Ken knows a lot about Nixon. That's where he started, a little go-fer in the Nixon operations. He understands Nixon very well because he stayed with him and went to San Clemente with that little group after he was out of power. An interesting side of Nixon came forward down there. If you were working around him every day, you saw some interesting things.

Young: Maybe we ought to talk to some of those people about Nixon too.

Spencer: Did you do anything about Nixon?

Young: No.

Spencer: Somebody's got to do that before they all die.

Young: Well, I thought most of them were gone, but they're not.

Spencer: Oh, there's plenty enough around to get something. Herb Klein's [Herbert Klein] around.

Young: [Robert] Finch isn't, is he?

Spencer: No, but of course a lot of them probably wouldn't talk to you. I don't think [Chuck] Colson would talk to you, but there are some around. Bob's passed away. There were two Nixon groups. There was the original group and then the [John] Mitchell group. They were black and white. You'd have never gotten in trouble with the first group, but he liked what the second group was telling him. [H.R. "Bob"] Haldeman was in the second group. I saw lots of transition through the years from this group to that group. It was fascinating.

Riley: Had you known Haldeman in California? He was in the PR business right?

Spencer: He was with J. Walter Thompson, tried to buy my company.

Riley: No kidding?

Spencer: Tried to buy us out for one reason, so he'd own us to go on the Nixon thing of '68. We wouldn't go for it. The problem was Nixon. It's just the point that everybody got in trouble around him, capitulated to him, instead of telling him. Of course if you told him, you were out. But that's the price you pay. Your job is to tell him.

Young: I'd like you to talk a little bit about this. As you said at the beginning it's not just tracking Reagan's career, but it's also tracking your career too. I'd like very much to hear about Nixon, the two groups, and your experience and witness on that.

Spencer: We were talking about the Nixon thing. Having grown up in his congressional district, my father was one of the committee of a hundred who picked him to run for Congress against Jerry Voorhis in 1946. Then he went the fast track to the Senate and the VP. He was a hero, a political hero back in the old San Gabriel Valley in the 12th district, which was changed to the 25th under the reapportionment of 1950, I guess. His replacement was Pat Hillings, a young guy in his 20s. He was close to all of us, so we all worked a lot with Hillings. This was in my avocation days.

Being from Nixon's district, we all had access to Nixon or his people in Washington as Vice President and Senator. We were basically trained in the Nixon school of politics, which was Finch and Murray Chotiner and Pat Hillings and all those guys, Earl [Frank E.] Jorgensen and Bernie Brennen. That group was around him in the Vice President days and were involved with him in the '60 campaign, which he lost to Kennedy. Finch was campaign manager. Then he came back and ran for Lt. Governor.

There was just total division within this group about whether he should even do that or not. He shouldn't have. His heart wasn't in it. What logic he did, I don't know because I wasn't around it that much. Out of that he developed this other group. He went to New York, was in the Rose law firm, met John Mitchell, started dealing with them. He brought Haldeman in, who was a west coast kid. Haldeman brought [Bob] Ehrlichman as advance man and he started building around this.

The original group didn't go away, but every year they were pushed a little further back. When they reached the point of victory in 1968, Mitchell and Haldeman were calling the shots in a lot

of ways. Finch was put over to HHS [Health and Human Services], which was HEW [Health, Education and Welfare] then. He was the Lieutenant Governor of the state of California, with his own constituency. He'd been given an appointment, which is the worst single job a Republican appointee can get. Philosophically from our party standpoint, handing out money to welfare people is a terrible job. I spent three hours at my house when I told him, "Hey, go muscle him for a good spot." "No, I'm going to do this. Dick wants me to do this."

He was a disaster at HEW. It was so bad that Mitchell had a guy sitting over in his office, within his secretariat of HEW, who was a spy from the other camp over here. The guy's name was Bob Mardian. I went back to see Bob one day. I couldn't believe it. I looked and I said, "What are you doing with that guy in here?" That group always acquiesced in the dark side of Nixon, in my judgment.

In the other group, Murray would be outspoken with him. Harry Dent, who they brought in, would be outspoken with him. Finch, in a gentlemanly way, would be outspoken. Bob was just not a guy who liked confrontation. All of that old crowd—

Young: -- That businessman too. Who was the businessman with Nixon?

Spencer: Bebe Rebozo?

Young: Yes. Was he from California?

Spencer: No, nobody ever knows where Bebe came from. Nixon found Bebe Rebozo somewhere along the line. Nobody knows where he came from. I don't think we want to know. In my judgment Nixon was his own worst enemy with this paranoia. These guys fed off his paranoia, the second group. They let him do it. I say all that, and if they disagreed, he might have found a third group. It's possible. It always goes back to Nixon in my judgment, his problems. He was so brilliant in some ways, but paranoia can eat you up.

Young: Kissinger was from the eastern—

Spencer: The eastern establishment.

Young: Eastern establishment. So Nelson Rockefeller wasn't quite the last one.

Spencer: No, no. Nelson owned Henry. He paid him money, big money. Nelson would get an idea and he'd go buy somebody to put the idea on paper. There're guys who made big money. After a while Nelson would say, "I don't like the idea [sound effect]." The guy still got his money. Henry's in that group. And Dr. Bill Ronan.

Young: Yes, I knew him.

Spencer: [whispering] Made a fortune off him. Even in the will he got millions or something. I don't know what it was.

Young: New York Port Authority was his official post.

Spencer: He replaced [Robert] Moses. That is a power position up there. But he was so close to Nelson, he had his ear. It was a real problem for us in our campaign, but he had the ear.

Young: So, any more about Nixon? How that played out, the two groups?

Spencer: We all know what happened. The other group, the first group, always stayed loyal to him, even through the whole mishmash. Herb Klein's in that group. They all mish mashed and felt bad.

Young: Bryce Harlow worked for him for a while.

Spencer: Bryce started with Eisenhower. A lot of the Eisenhower guys—because of the VP thing under Eisenhower—made a natural transition to Nixon. Bryce was our Clark Gifford. He went from administration to administration to administration. If not in office, like when I dealt with him, he was one of my mentors when I went to Washington. He was close to Ford, very close to Ford, and a very classy man.

Freedman: What about Reagan's view of Nixon during, especially during, the Watergate? He was surrounded by the palace guard presumably at that point? Did you have any insight into what his perceptions were?

Spencer: He just couldn't believe it. He didn't want to believe it. He was supportive of Nixon, publicly on the record, but he was like a lot of them. Ford was the one that was really shaken up about it. He just couldn't believe it. He'd been a very heavy Nixon supporter as a Congressman. That whole group of people who knew him through those years in Washington and the Senate and the VP didn't believe it, and didn't want to believe it, until tapes started dropping. You had to start believing it. There was a shock. It was a shock that ran right through the party and through the country as well. But it really went through the party.

Young: There was [Spiro] Agnew in there also, another problem.

Spencer: Yes, Nixon was a VP, but he never thought much of people who were VPs. It was something to use for greater gain. Why he picked Agnew, I have no idea. They certainly didn't do a very good check on him.

Riley: You're still doing California races in the early to mid '70s, in the post-Watergate environment. Were you encountering problems with that? You said the shock went through the system. Were your local candidates having to confront this? And how, as a consultant, were you—

Spencer: Yes, it was like the Birch question in the '60s. How do you handle it? Point in case, I was running the Governor's race for Hugh [Houston] Flournoy in '74 against Jerry Brown.

Riley: Timing's bad.

Spencer: I get a call from George Bush, number one. Bush was national chairman of the party. I get a call from him and Eddie Mahe who was deputy director. He said, "We're going to have a nationwide fundraiser, closed circuit television, big screen, seven big cities. One is going to be in L.A.. I said, "No, I don't want one in L.A.. I'm a candidate's guy." They said, "Why?" I said, "Because I don't want it here. I don't know what's happening." They said, "Oh, we've got to have it. George wants it." I said, "Tell George we're not going to do it." This is the start, incidentally, of my twelve years of problems with George Sr. He sends Eddie out on the midnight flier. I said, "Eddie, don't waste your money."

Eddie comes out. We go through the whole thing again. "George wants this. George wants this." I finally said, "You tell George we can have it, but the candidate is going to be in Yreka, which is the other end of the state on that night." Which was an insult. He goes back. George Bush is mad at me.

Three weeks later they found the tapes. They're all canceled all over America. It was that type of problem. We didn't know what was going to happen tomorrow in Washington and with Nixon. It was very difficult. What happened, how it went through the party . . . Flournoy got beat by Jerry by about a point and a half. We had absolutely no money. Watergate dried up the money. People were disenchanted.

Jerry was a flake. He was a Buddhist flake, or whatever he was. Totally different than his father. His father didn't understand him even. He had no business winning. He was a charming guy in a lot of ways, but he wins by a point and a half. When I go back and look at it, I went precinct after precinct in the San Fernando Valley where the Republican vote was normally 65%. It was 30 all across the state.

Jerry won because Republicans stayed home. Why did they stay home? They were just gut sick about Watergate. This guy had been a hero of theirs, Nixon. He destroyed them and did these terrible things. So that went all across the party, clear down to the precinct level. You couldn't get people to work. You couldn't get people to give money. They were in shell shock.

While all this was going on the Democrats are having a heyday. Their people are energized. They're vitalized. They're saying, "We've got a shot. This is our game now." You put those two things together and it was devastating. Legislative seats, Governor's races, Senate races, all across America? It was a very down period in the political career of Republicans—candidates, campaign managers. It was something over which they had basically no control. That's the best example I can remember of Watergate having a direct effect.

Young: You referred a moment ago to the beginning of your twelve years of problems with George Bush.

Spencer: He's Ivy League. I'm a western boy. That was it.

The next one I ran was [William] Clements' race in Texas in '78. It was the first time we elected a Republican Governor in 100 years. Bill is a crazy candidate; great guy, big oil, Defense

Department, sort of Lyndon Johnson cut of the world. He came back and was going to save his home state. Now there's Texans and Texanians. This guy's Texanian. Most Republicans in Texas from that period were from Houston. They were Bushes. This guy was from Uvalde County, Texas. He could talk Texan, know what I mean? He had a lot of money, and he was willing to spend it. We spent it.

We developed a real Texanian campaign. In the process of doing that, I had a shooting session, endorsement session, at a hotel in Houston where I brought in John Connelly, Ann Armstrong, John Tower, and George Bush. We had scripted him. We had scripts and production people there, the whole thing. We were going to run them through the room and then go back and put them in the can.

John Connolly, great BSer. He knocks this stuff off in three seconds. Ann did a good job. John Tower's the same way. We get down to George Bush and he's not. His syntaxes aren't very good. He's struggling with this thing, which is not unusual. These people are experienced at it more than he. The quality of the first shot wasn't very good. I said, "We'll do it again."

We did it again, and we did it again. I was going to do the damn thing until we got it right. I thought that was in his best interest too. He was going to be on statewide television in Texas.

By the end he was so mad at me. As he walked out, he said something to his staff profanely about me, which I heard. But I was doing my job, getting the best spot I could get out of the guy. Clements didn't think too much of him anyway. He said, "The hell with him. Forget about him." It was one of a bunch of bad incidents.

Then the Don Regan thing. Oh my God, we got into that. When I realized that, he had to go because that's really what the Reagans wanted. I got the assignment. I made the survey of whoever had any rapport with Don Regan. I figured out the only guy in the White House he'd talk to was George Bush. I went over to see George Bush. After I explained it all to him, he looked at me and he said, "The President hasn't said anything to me about Don Regan."

I lost it. I said, "George, you've been here four years and you haven't figured this guy out yet. I wouldn't be sitting here if he wanted Don Regan. I don't like this job." I go through that whole thing with him. He didn't like it, but I notice in his book he took the credit for getting rid of Don Regan. Fine with me. So, there's a whole series of things like that. They had a cumulative effect.

When he was running for President, if there was ever some quote in the paper—and there were a lot of them—and the guy didn't want to use the source or he couldn't use it, he'd write, "Former Reagan aide." Had to be me. I wasn't even near the reporter. I wasn't doing that stuff. But it had to be Spencer.

Of course the enemies within his own camp re-enforced that for him always. I must've had about five phone calls. Lou Cannon did one one time. It was a funny thing. Somebody said something about Bush, "a Republican, former Reagan aide" and I started getting phone calls. I called up Lou and I said, "I didn't say that to you." He said, "I know you didn't." I said, "I'm getting the

credit." He thought it was funny. He laughed. He'd never divulge his sources so I don't know who did it, but all these other things that happen, they build on you.

All of a sudden I couldn't do right. It was terrible. It was so bad that my buddy Jimmy Baker wouldn't even defend me. But Bush did a pretty good job as President, I'll say that.

Riley: I want to dial back and ask one question. It's the privilege of an interviewer. And I'm from Alabama. I wonder if George Wallace in the 1960s was on your screen in California and the extent to which, while you were doing your gubernatorial races, you were watching Wallace stylistically. Or as you were getting closer, thinking about presidential politics, the extent to which Republicans were watching Wallace to see what he was up to?

Spencer: Yes. I'll tell you. There are two areas. He really came alive to me in '66 in Michigan when I was doing Don Riegle, who ended up being a Democratic Senator. He was a Republican then. I walked through the Buick plant with spray paint all over the walls, "George Wallace for President." I'm going, "What?" The labor leadership obviously had no control of these people. That's when I noticed it.

In California we watched Wallace. We watch those phenomena in my business. What I noticed was when Wallace came to town, was there anything on the ballot that he got involved with which could have been an issue? He did on occasion. I'd see where his strength was. It was a Democrat's strength, it wasn't a Republican strength, incidentally. It was white, blue-collar, Democrat. Those people eventually became named Reagan Democrats because we knew where they were. They were in Maywood. They were in Downey. At that point in time through my PIPs, I could tell you where they were. We targeted them.

Jesse [Helms] and those guys couldn't believe what was happening to them. These were southern Democrats basically, who were Wallace types. They felt very comfortable with Reagan. That's how we used his involvement in the process to help us. Other than that, we had no contact with him. Reagan thought he was a little bit crazy.

Riley: Did you have conversations with Reagan about Wallace?

Spencer: I don't recall. I'm sure we did. Anything that was on the screen, we did. Some things you [sound effect]. I don't remember him talking about it. The Nixon people for years had contacts with the Wallace people.

Riley: There were allegations about money coming into Alabama to support candidates.

Spencer: Probably true.

Young: Okay, 1980. You had a question about 1980.

Riley: No, my question was preceding that.

Knott: You've already dealt with this, but you talked about a conversation or a couple of conversations you had with Ronald Reagan about selecting George Bush as his running mate even though, by this point you'd already had some problems with George Bush.

Spencer: Sure, I had a lot of 'em. I didn't, he had problems with me.

Knott: Oh, I see, okay.

Spencer: That doesn't affect me. I'm very practical. I was brought aboard for the campaign and the first question I'm asked is, "What should we do with the Vice President?" I've got to make the best political decision I could make. When you look at the scenario at that time and place, George Bush to me was obviously the guy to put on the ballot.

Number one, he'd run in the primaries so he did have a base. He'd done pretty well in a few states. He was perceived as a more moderate member of the Republican party compared to Reagan. He had a New England base. With all the other options that were out there, which was every Republican Senator in America always and all that kind of stuff, George Bush stood out as just the logical person politically for him to pick. It proved out that George was very helpful to him. They developed a very good friendship in those eight years that they were in Washington together.

If Bush kept his eyes open, he could learn an awful lot about this guy and this guy's skills. In fact I can remember on election eve in 1980 we did one of these cross-country killer trips. We stopped in Peoria, Illinois. We went through there and ended up in Seattle, Portland, Frisco, to L.A., to home. In Peoria we shot a half hour show that was going on the tube that night, on network. We had a chair here and a chair there. It started with a wide screen. It was Bush and Reagan and then it faded away so it was just Reagan and he gave his speech.

Reagan got about three minutes into it when Deaver and I started looking at each other. The guy was terrible. This wasn't Ronald Reagan. We just stepped up and stopped the show. We went over. He was so alert to this, Reagan said, "God, I'm awful. It's that chair. It's too soft. I want to go to sleep. Get me a hard chair." So we went in the back room and got him put back together, his head and so forth. He shot one half-hour in one take.

The Bush connection to that is this: I watched Bush sitting over here. He was awestruck at how good this guy was. He'd been campaigning for VP. They weren't together very much. He hadn't seen him. George Bush was awestruck at this guy's ability to do what he was doing. He had to have learned from those situations over the years.

Knott: Do you recall Mrs. Reagan's reaction? Did she talk to you about the selection of the running mates?

Spencer: No. If we political types said this was the best thing for her husband, she'd go along with it, even if she didn't like the person. I'm not saying she didn't like Bush. At that point I didn't know how she felt about the Bushes. Whatever was the best thing for Reagan was where Nancy would come down. She and Laxalt were buddies. Laxalt really wanted it. Paul is a classy

guy, but he's also the Senator from the biggest gaming state in the union. You're not a Senator or Governor in that state unless you do business with Moe [Dalitz] and the boys. That's representation as it should be, but on a national ticket that could have been a problem. I don't know what Paul was saying to her, but in the end she must have gone along with it because it happened.

Knott: I don't mean to jump ahead here, but then you had the debates. Could you tell us about your feeling about those debates?

Spencer: In '80?

Knott: Yes.

Spencer: Nobody wanted him to debate. This is John Anderson year, right?

Knott: Uh-hum.

Spencer: John wanted to debate everybody. Jimmy didn't want to debate anybody. I don't think anybody in our organization really wanted to. They were scared. There was great debate within the political group, all kinds of diverse points of view. She was really nervous about a debate and she entered the fray in the discussions.

I had come to a conclusion in my own mind. I hadn't been saying too much. We've got to debate. It's become part of the system. We're going to lose more by turning it down. Done the right way, the format and everything done the right way, Reagan can hold his own. That's all you can ask for. Maybe win, but hold his own.

I had come to the conclusion that we were going to have to debate, but I hadn't said anything. I was letting it play out. Then Nofziger and I were somewhere and he brought it up. He and I were on the same page. His attitude was, "Christ, I guess we've got to do it." I said, "I think you're right, Lyn. We have to do it."

There was a meeting held and Casey was on one side. This guy was on that side. I'd already gone to Nancy and said, "We've got to do it." She said, "Okay." In that same discussion, Reagan looked at me and said, "I've got to do it." I said, "That's right. You've got to do it, so you've just got to get ready and do it right."

When that fed back into the rest of the political group, they all said, "Yes, let's do it." We went ahead. That's when I brought in Baker because Casey and those guys didn't want Jimmy Baker around. Baker is so meticulous about things, so precise. Just look what he did to [Al] Gore and Bush in the recount thing. He knows how to put that stuff together. So Jimmy was in charge of the debate preparation. He put together a format that gave anybody a chance to break even. That's all we were going to ask for.

Prior to that Carter made a real strategic error in not coming to the Reagan debate with Anderson. It was a great warm-up and a great practice session. The only person that had anything

to gain was John Anderson. Then Carter realized what we realized. You've got to debate in this modern age. You're not going to see a presidential election from that point forward that's not going to have debates.

The problem is always controlling the formats. We've always had a problem with League of Women Voter formats because they're just too damn Democrat-oriented usually. But Jimmy went out and he did a great job setting up the format. It always seems to me that style is the only thing that comes through in a debate to the people. I don't think substance comes through.

Reagan won the thing on style, probably lost it on points. What did he jump? Five points in the polls after the debate or something like that? They were all stylistic points in my mind. He's like a high diver in style. Because Carter on the issues did a pretty good job, but he had a totally different style than Reagan. Both sides usually go into those things with the attitude, *Jesus, God, we're going to get killed, but we've got to do it.* You fight to stay alive. When you move forward to Mondale . . . we had Louisville where Reagan bombed, wasn't it?

Young: Yes.

Spencer: You've read a lot and you're going to hear a lot in this interview, but I'm going to tell you what happened. Everybody makes excuses. Ronald Reagan didn't do his homework for that debate. All these books were prepared, stuff he'd look at on the issues for direction. [Richard] Darman did most of it and did a pretty good job. He probably did too much. I went to Camp David with the Reagans the weekend before the debate. He had the books. We went in the cottage where he stayed, the books went on the credenza.

We spent the next eight hours watching old movies. Most of them were his movies. The next day I come over, the books are still sitting there. I look at them. I said something off the cuff to him. He didn't react. He was supposed to do his homework at Camp David. He didn't do his homework. He came back and he got killed. He knows it.

We walked out together back to the hotel. He looked at me and said, "God, I was awful." I said, "Yes. You didn't do your homework." He didn't answer me. He knew it. You're going to hear all these excuses. He was over-organized. He was over-organized: hell, he didn't even read the briefing books. She was all upset and brought Paul Laxalt in. Paul came down and gave a speech to everybody. I just sat there and said, "Hell, we'll recoup next time. I know Reagan. He's a competitor. He'll come out next time. We'll do all right."

But they're trying to make a big deal out of something that happens to all of us in life. If you don't prepare, the odds are you're going to get in trouble. It was one of the few times I saw him really lack discipline. Maybe he thought, *I'm going to wing it and I'm going to do all right*.

Young: I was just going to ask, was he just over confident?

Spencer: Mondale was so well-prepared. In fact I saw him coming down the ramp afterwards and he was 20 feet high. "I killed him," he said, "I killed him." And I'm thinking to myself, *you're right, you're so right.*

Then the next debate Reagan did fine. He did his homework and he was ready. His adrenalin was up and his competitive nature was up. His humor was up, which is very important with Reagan in those situations where he can pull off those little goodies he has.

Young: I don't remember all the details about the debate, but where Reagan seemed really confused was on the factual, a lot of the factual. His style was still there, but he seemed confused.

Spencer: The stuff that was in the briefing book he hadn't read. On either side, you can anticipate 85 to 90% of the questions or the issues that are going to be thrown at you. Your candidate can be prepared in a broad general sense of either a good direct answer or a very evasive answer, but it's still an answer. I've only seen one situation in all the debates I've ever seen, when Jerry Brown and Pete Wilson were debating, when Pete beat him for Governor, or Senator. He and Pete are running against each other and we're doing this pre-debate thing. Knowing Jerry Brown, we knew there would be off-the-wall questions somewhere along the line. It was a Senate race.

I'd just come back from working in Namibia. They were supposed to have an election, but the South Africans wouldn't have an election. I was down there looking at that stuff. Somewhere in the conversation I started talking about Namibia. In that debate Jerry Brown had a question for Pete about Namibia. Pete didn't even know where Namibia was until I'd talked to him about some other incident five days before. That's the fates. But that's the kind of question that you have to have a stock answer for that says, "Obviously I don't know what you're talking about, but here's the answer." That's what Pete ended up doing.

Most of the time you can predict what's going to come. You just have to be prepared for it, either in the sense of that's the kind of question I can knock out of the park or I've got to get really defensive and cut the damages. Properly prepared, Reagan—he isn't a debater in the old style—has great presence.

I can remember driving down San Joaquin Valley in my little Volkswagen in '60 when Kennedy and Nixon are debating. I was running a congressional race up there. I'm listening to this thing and I thought, *Nixon won the debate, he did fine*. I look at the papers and I wondered who the hell was I listening to. Then I saw the TV tapes and he looked like hell. Nixon looked like absolute hell. As for the graphics, the issues, the material stuff, he was very good. Kennedy was an imposing-type guy. He handled himself well. Nixon looked like death warmed-over.

It's the presence that carries the debate more than the substance. Now, that's not the way it should be, but that's the way it is in most cases.

Freedman: In that second debate obviously the critical line, or one of the critical lines, was the age, "exploiting my opponent's age." What's the story behind that line? Was that yours? Or where did that come from?

Spencer: I think it was his. I don't remember. It wasn't my line.

Freedman: It was a pretty good line.

Spencer: He either said it to Deaver or to Nofziger. They were driving somewhere in the car. This is the way his mind works. He turns to them and he says, "How about trying this on him? What if I try this on him?" And he laid it out. Whoever it was, Mike or whoever, went, "Great." As I recall, that was the birth of that.

Riley: Was he likely, in a debate of that magnitude, to use a line like that without trying it out on the staff first?

Spencer: Sure, if he felt secure in it. His instincts were good, very good.

Young: Was there a rehearsal where people play the debater?

Spencer: Always is, sure.

Young: Did that do anything for Reagan? As against the book preparation.

Spencer: I don't remember whom he used.

Riley: This is against Carter?

Knott: I thought David Stockman played the role in '80 of either John Anderson, maybe—

Spencer: He was closer to Anderson. I don't remember. What it does is, it gets him used to the format: how the back and forth goes, the timing, when you speak, when you answer, those sorts of things. If you've got somebody that's really good and they go do their homework, they can throw some heavy stuff at you, which makes the guy start thinking.

I remember when [Dan] Quayle was getting ready for his debate, I brought in [Bob] Packwood, who is one bright son of a bitch. Jesus, he just nailed Quayle. In the practice, he just nailed him. The other side does the same thing. It's the procedure. Some people think it's the end of the world, that it's going to be the greatest thing that happens.

I'm one that will go back and say, I don't believe that Gerry Ford's screw-up on Poland in the debate in San Francisco was that meaningful. We had other problems.

What it did do is—we were sort of creeping up like this—after the debate we leveled off. We didn't go down here, but I have reason to think that we were going to level off anyway for other reasons. Historians will attribute his defeat to that. I would say to historians, "He had a bigger problem called Watergate, which takes much bigger precedence over the defeat of Jerry Ford. Seven per cent of the Republicans in my polling said they would never vote for Gerald Ford because he pardoned Richard Nixon. That's seven points out of your own base going into election day. That's a much bigger problem than saying Poland is not dominated by the Russians.

That's an interesting story because I was sitting next to Brent Scowcroft in the holding room watching this. I heard him say it, and I didn't think anything about it. Brent, in his style, punched me and said, "You've got a problem." I said, "What's the problem?" He said, 'What Gerry just said about Poland. He means 'emotionally.' He said, 'There are X number of divisions in Poland.'" I don't even know how many are in a division. I said, "How many is that?" He said, "Some 240,000." I go. "Oh God, these are Russians, 240,000 Russians? And they don't have control of Poland."

I go out. By this time, Cheney and I were spastic. We get back to the house. Henry's already there, Secretary of State. He's saying, "You were wonderful, Mr. President. You did a wonderful job." He gets through and Dick and I say, "Goddamn, what are you talking about, Henry?" We go into this Poland thing.

Spencer:[5] He's going to listen to Henry. Henry's the expert, Dick and I aren't. This is the foreign affairs guy. We get on the plane the next morning, we're beating him up, and he says, "What do you expect me to do, go out, and say I was wrong?" We said, "Yes." We almost got canned. I think we came within two inches of getting canned, Cheney and I did on that flight to L.A.. Then we beat him up some more and finally, after two intervals, two time frames, news time frames, he came out and made some statement straightening the whole thing out. By that time it was over with.

It's those little things. You live in a 72-, 48-hour lifetime. You live news frame to news frame. That's your life. Everything can be wonderful today and disaster 48 hours later for you, depending on what happens, what's said or—

Riley: Did you learn anything about Jimmy Carter as a campaigner in '76 that proved to be very useful for you in 1980? Or maybe I should more generally ask you about your thoughts on Carter as a campaigner?

Spencer: No, the first one is a good question. Didn't learn much because they're different kinds of candidates, totally. Reagan is a media candidate and Carter was an organization candidate. The primary campaign for Jimmy Carter, 1976, was one of the best campaigns I've ever seen in my lifetime. They did an outstanding job. The guy in January was nine per cent in the polls in terms of his name ID. He ends up getting the nomination. Lots of things had to go right for them. Lots of breaks they had to get, breaks that they didn't create, but they got them.

All that considered, the primary campaign was just an outstanding one. It was a lot of Jimmy Carter's effort. He worked his tail off. Things kept setting up for him. The Kennedys kept vacillating and going this way and that. Everything kept setting up for him. They ran an outstanding campaign.

They had problems in '80 because issues caught up with them. Their governance was not as good as their ability to run, which happens. I attribute most of it to his micromanagement. All of the Reagan people learned a lot from watching that because we had the opposite. [laughs]

[5] Start tape 6 at 040

Young: The opposite problem?

Spencer: You've got to go to work. Carter ran a great campaign. I give Ham [Hamilton] Jordan a lot of credit for it. He did a great job.

Riley: What was your overall strategy? Realizing that in 1980 you're coming in when things are already very much in motion, how much latitude do you have that late in the process to reorient things to fit your vision about what the campaign ought to look at?

Spencer: You've got plenty. Everything that counts is done in 90 days. You just sit down with the media people. Carter had good media people in there already in place. Most media people that you bring in aren't—today we have a professional media—political people. They call themselves strategists. In those days it was usually a good ad person out of Madison Avenue. They were very open to anything someone like me would say. They wanted help.

I can remember in '84 when Hal [Riney] came in. To me, he's the greatest media guy we've ever had in America. They had all these meetings down there. They were coming up with nothing, yet they had the smartest media guys. This was the "Good Morning America" crowd, the smartest media guys in the country, and nothing was coming out of the building.

So I went over at seven o'clock one morning and started raising hell. I said, "When are you guys going to do something?" I got a sense from them, *we don't know what to do*. There were too many of them in the room. I spent an hour and I went through the whole thing for them conceptually. At the end of it, Hal said, "Okay, now I know what to do." Somebody just had to give them some direction. And he went out and put some great ads together.

Riley: Sure.

Spencer: Particularly the bear ad, if you ever remember that one. That was the greatest ad that ever happened. You have time to get the input because the mechanics of it, that's what they can do and they know how to do. It was just the twist, the essence. How do you capture the Reagan part of it, the Reaganistic part of it? It's fine. Then, if you control the candidate and the speeches in 90 days, you don't worry about anything else. The less bureaucracy you have, usually the better job you can do.

Knott: What was the bear ad, just for—

Spencer: He drew this ad, he put this bear on—

Freedman: The bear was in the woods.

Spencer: The bear is walking through the woods and the verbiage is something like, "Who is scared of the bear?" It's supposed to be Russia and the Russian bear walking around. I have a copy. If you ever want it, I'll send it. It's the greatest ad. It's so funny because we left St. Louis

one time going back to the airport on a back way, and there's this guy in a suit with a sign under an overpass. There's nobody around. The sign says, *Reagan is the Bear*.

I looked at Reagan and I almost fell out of the car laughing. It was so funny. That guy got the essence of it. It was a subtle ad and it was so subtle that a lot of people missed it. But people like you would have caught it and [snap of fingers] and that's something else.

Freedman: But it was also effective because it was a serious message. It was the message that you're saying today was "THE" issue—the threat of communism—for Reagan from the beginning. But, it wasn't overbearing, no pun intended, in its—

Spencer: That's right. He didn't call them an evil empire. It was just this bear walking around.

Freedman: Exactly. And you think about it in the same breath, or the same thought, as the morning in America. It was an upbeat campaign.

Spencer: That's right. So does that answer your question?

Riley: Yes, but the other part of the question was, if you've got a chance to make your imprint in 90 days, what did you find when you came in? Maybe we can start that way. What did you confront once you came in? What did you consider to be the biggest problem that you had internally?

Spencer: The problem wasn't message. The problem was there were too many people running around, a building full of people. A three-stories-high building full of people, all in charge of something, all stepping all over each other. Research, coming in every night. Overkill on research. It would scare the hell out of you. Up down, up down, up down. With a candidate that was getting depressed because he was taking a lot of heat and hearing a lot of different things from a lot of different people. He was beginning to question his own competence to a degree probably.

My attitude was, first you get a hold of the candidate. You get his ego back up. You get him in shape. Give him some confidence. You get the right people around him giving him some help with the words. You discuss the pertinent issues with him and Marty Anderson and the Khachigians. You put it in words. You target the country with a schedule: where are you going, what are you going to say when you get there. It doesn't take a rocket scientist. A lot of the people in my business like to think that, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist if you've got the touchy feely understanding of politics. So it was putting him back in shape, getting the campaign organized in a little different fashion around him so he was comfortable, then going out and dealing to his strength.

We had a litany of Carter problems a mile long. We could talk about one every day. We could pick and chose what we wanted. That's the problem with being an incumbent. And we had the subliminal thing of the hostages hanging over Carter's head, which we didn't have to say one word about except "I hope they come home." Carter had to wake up every morning, "Where are they?" They're still there.

Riley: Was there any internal debate about whether to try to do something with that?

Spencer: Casey spent his whole goddamn 90 days running around, spies up at every air base. He thought we were going to get this big November surprise where Carter was going to get the hostages released and they'd arrive five days before the election.

My attitude was, that's the power of the presidency. There ain't a damn thing we can do about it so I'm not going to worry other than to congratulate him, which Reagan would have done, if he'd done it. It might have been the difference in the election, I don't know. But Casey ran around worrying about all that kind of stuff. He came out of intelligence, the OSS community, and that's the way he thought.

So, yes, Reagan's attitude was like mine. It was very practical. I can't do anything about it. I hope they come home. We'll deal with it.

Young: You mentioned earlier in interviews, Darman joined the group.

Spencer: Everybody in politics has a Rabbi. Baker was Darman's.

Young: And he was it?

Spencer: Darman had a lot to contribute. Darman is smart, issue-wise, policy-wise. His biggest contribution to the re-elect campaign was—I was in there one day and I realized this—he was the only guy in the Reagan White House who knew where every piece of paper was and what was on it on policy. That's the kind of animal he is.

I went in and sat down with Dick. I think Craig Fuller was in the room. Thinking to myself that in the next year policy issues can be brought up and you can incorporate them in the campaign to show progress, I said, "What's in the pipeline, Dick?" He looked at me and said, "Nothing."

I said, "There's nothing in the pipeline?" He said, "No, he shot our wad the first two years."

Young: This was for the second—

Spencer: I was in a state of shock. But that was a real contribution because, boy, I really went to work in a hurry. I went to Baker and told him and he said, "Oh, God." Deaver went, "Oh, God." I put a group together of think-tank types and said, "Come up with some stuff that we can put in the pipeline. If it passes muster with the people in the West Wing, we'll get it in. If it doesn't, we won't." Darman was the guy that oversaw all that stuff and did a good job of it. He was like a lot of people. The reverse of it is true. When I start thinking I'm a real policy wonk, I screw up. When Dick starts thinking he's a real politician, he screws up.

Young: I was dialing ahead actually to a later time.

Spencer: He's just not there, but he's bright as hell. He did a great job for whatever Baker was using him for. He was with Baker at Treasury. He's a professional Washington bureaucrat.

Riley: Can we go back to 1980? Can I ask you a question about the beginning of the fall campaign? There was the Ku Klux Klan claim that kind of rattled people's attention, that Reagan had made the comment about, I guess, on Labor Day, or the day after Labor Day. Do you remember that particular episode?

Spencer: Yes, yes, it was before Labor Day, a little bit. It was the incident that put me on the plane. He'd had about three in the row.

Young: One was Ohio, wasn't it? The environment or something?

Spencer: That trees give off more smog than the smokestacks, which is true, I found out later, but there's more trees in the world. He had a series of those. How they happened and why they happened, I don't know. I wasn't there. It was just a feeling of the Reagans and Deaver and some people like that. Those things basically didn't happen when I was around. That's not totally true, but they had that perception.

I was always willing to say, why argue with them about this or that? Or if he started getting off, I could smell him moving down tracks, which I used to call the human event track. He'd slowly work his way to saying something like that. I'd say to him, "you know, it's great when Bill Buckley says it, but not when you say it." Being alert, I had a timing in me that I could see things coming that the others couldn't. I'd go talk to him about it and try to divert it.

Plus, he categorizes everybody. Maybe I went through this this morning. I'm the—if it was political, fine. If it was policy, Meese. Meese was the guy. If you were sitting in this room and you asked Ed about an issue, he could give you the precise answer that Ronald Reagan would give you. He totally understood Ronald Reagan ideologically, because they're so much alike ideologically. It used to dumbfound me to listen to Ed pontificate. Reagan would have said the same thing. He was just good at that. So he'd lean on Ed for policy.

If it was political, it was Stu. We were in a political environment the last 90 days and so that's why he felt more comfortable with me. That "trees give off smog," that was in Steubenville, Ohio, where plants were closed—steel mills, I think—and he made that dumb statement. A week later we're out at Pomona, Claremont College, I'll never forget it. We're on the bus. College kids always come up with the best lines. It never fails. A big four by eight sign says "Chop me down before I kill again." Reagan—that's the great part of him—he starts to roar. He said, "That's really funny." Nobody is standing there. An oak tree with a sign on it. Says "Chop me down before I kill again."

Knott: During those last 90 days, you end up winning big. You end up re-taking the Senate. How did it look? Were there points along the way where you could see this coming? This guy's going to win big? This is going to be a landslide? Or was it a much rockier?

Spencer: The day he said he'd go for re-election, I knew we'd win. Because I knew it, I knew Fritz and I knew the problems the Democrats were having. Fritz was a classy guy by the way—Mondale—but, they weren't going to beat this guy as long as he didn't get caught with boys or something. It was just a matter of not making any mistakes. As every week went by, it looked better. I remember we were even or ahead in every state except Hawaii and Minnesota and a couple of others.

I remember we diverted to Minnesota one day, to show you how dumb that can be. You're flying the plane. You've got to get off of it. They didn't have the equipment to match the 727. We couldn't get off the goddamn plane. We're sitting out there in the middle of the airport, but we could say we went to Minnesota.

Knott: I was thinking more of '80 actually, against President Carter.

Spencer: Oh, '80. I didn't have a good feeling until three weeks out. Reagan is superstitious. He never wanted to hear I'm going to win. He wanted to wait. That's when he got into that whole Chief of Staff thing, and that was when I was convinced he was going to win. Deaver and I started talking about it because we knew one thing. This man needed a Chief of Staff who had certain capabilities where Mondale wouldn't, or where somebody else would need different capabilities.

Ed Meese was the frontrunner. There was absolutely nothing wrong with Ed Meese except he couldn't organize a two-car funeral. You went in his desk and the papers were here, there, down on the floor, across the room. One of the jobs of a Chief of Staff is to make the paper move in the White House and go to the right corners and the right boxes. It's a terrible job. We knew that Ed couldn't do that.

Deaver and I decided I would bring it up. Of course, I said, "Since you're going to win." He said, "No, we aren't going to talk about it." I said, "Well, let's say, you MAY win. You've got to start thinking about staff." We went into the conversation. Everyone assumed that Ed Meese was going to be Chief of Staff, even Stu Spencer. I thought, *this can't be, I'll give it my shot*. I brought up Ed Meese. Before I said one word, both the Reagans said, "Oh no, not Ed." They understood.

They wanted Ed around and they wanted Ed to do something, but they understood this single organizational problem that he had. I felt good about that, not for Ed, but for the fact that I thought it was in the best interests of the President. I went one step further, which nobody ever bothers to talk about. I said, "I think Ed ought to be Attorney General. He ought to get something out of this that's substantial." Not counselor to the President or whatever he ended up with. There was no reaction to it.

So we went on and we talked about people. I brought up Baker's name. To show you how pragmatic they were; here was a Bush guy, the Bush chairman. They didn't know him. They knew of him. I talked about all his pluses, and said that I suggested, in the remaining two or three weeks, that I'd have Jimmy get on the plane with us. "The two of you can just sit and talk. So

you can get a touch and a feel of this guy and vice versa." I remember calling Jimmy and telling him. He said, "What are you getting me into?" I said, "Something you'd like."

Bottom line, Jimmy came out. Of course nobody knew but Deaver and me why Baker was on the plane. Those situations, you can't predict. They got along fine.

Young: But the Reagans knew? Or did they not know?

Spencer: They knew why he was coming out, sure. I said, "Ask him any damn thing you want to ask him. He's being job interviewed here." It worked out very well.

The day after the election in L.A., I did my usual disappearing act. I'd had it. I've always had it by then. I got burnt out. I went back to where I was, Newport Beach, played golf, did something. Then I read something in the paper about all this negotiation going on up in L.A. between Meese and Baker and the Reagans.

I called up Deaver and said, 'What the hell is going on?" Ed reacted as I would have expected Ed to react, he was in a little bit of shock about this decision. I don't know what the term is, fight back. He was going to protect his property. They negotiated out this joint powers thing. I went ballistic. I said, "That's idiotic. You can't run the place like that." I lost that one.

I blame a lot of it on Baker because he put all this down in writing like a lawyer and Meese is a lawyer. There's two lawyers negotiating over who's going to run the bathrooms. It didn't work. Ninety percent of the problems he had his first term was because of the troika.

Young: Deaver was in there from the beginning or was that just—

Spencer: He was in the troika in the beginning. That part was fine. Deaver would've had the same role under Meese that he had under Baker. But the great part of the Deaver involvement for Baker was that he knew Reagan. He knew the Reagans, and he could be the buffer on these things. He was a tremendous asset. But you had two camps in the West Wing. That was not good. Things were falling through the cracks. They were shooting at each other.

Best example I can give you. I'm up at the residence one night and we're having dinner, Reagan and I and Nancy. He's mad. The President's mad. He's mad about leaks out of the White House. I said, "There's always leaks out of the White House. Everybody's White House has leaks." I told him the story of how Ford got me out at Burning Tree one day and almost destroyed the golf cart, kicking it, he was so mad about leaks. I said, "You're not alone."

Then I had a thought toward the end of the evening. I said, "I've got a solution." He jumped up just like that. I said, "Your problem is your damn troika. I'm not saying it's any individual's problem. It's the system's problem. You created it. Now if you want to live with it, you're going to have leaks. There's only one way to solve the problem. When you walk down, you go by the press office and you stick your head in and you say, 'I want everybody in this press office to know that everybody in the West Wing is always on the record, no matter what they tell you.'" He smiled and said, "That's a great idea."

This is the way he is. He goes down. He doesn't stop in the morning. He goes down and the troika comes in for their nine o'clock meeting, the three guys I'm talking about. Reagan says, "Gee, Stu had a great idea last night." [laughter] He tells them. All of a sudden I've got three guys on my back. I don't have one camp on me. I've got both camps on me.

They talked him out of it. I still say it would have been one of the great coups of all time and the leaks would have stopped in a hurry. The troika was bad news for government and for his governing. It was bad news.

Young: You say he had two camps. How would you characterize those two camps?

Spencer: The way it started—the Meese camp and the Baker camp—some people tried to—

Young: Was that conservative, moderate, or—

Spencer: People tried to put that twist on it, but that wasn't true.

Young: That wasn't true?

Spencer: It was power. Baker's so much more conservative than I am, for example. Baker is Texas conservative, pragmatic. Ed is a conservative. Deaver is a moderate. He always has been in his own personal philosophy and beliefs. Newspapers like to put a twist on it, a philosophical twist, but that was strictly power, who was going to run the shop. Baker was better at running the shop than Meese. He took a lot of shots from that crowd.

Young: But Meese pretty much kept the policy portfolio, didn't he?

Spencer: Yes, he had the policy portfolio. He did a good job at it. The toughest thing we all have, me included, is really knowing what you can do and what you can't do. That was the problem there. By proximity and by history and by everything else, Ed was the logical choice. But not for the presidency of the United States and the way Reagan operated. Meese probably could've been a pretty good Chief of Staff under a Bush or someone like that because it was a totally different style.

Young: You mentioned a while ago and a little bit earlier some of the things historians think, like this was a turning point, this little gaff or little triumph in the debate. Ford had problems that were much deeper than that Polish thing. I want to put in a plug for what we're doing here. It's very important that you say those things because you're talking to historians in a sense. It's very good to get your comments on this.

Spencer: As I said to somebody at lunch before I came back here, I read *John Adams*. It's a funny thing. I read *John Adams* with the idea that I was going to go give a presentation and historians are going to look at that down the road. I have a much different perspective of [Thomas] Jefferson after reading that book than I ever had before. [David] McCullough

somewhere had done his homework. Whether he's right or wrong, that's not the Jefferson I've heard about.

Riley: There's one aspect of the 1980 campaign that we haven't touched on. That is that Reagan was perceived at the time by his Democratic opposition and subsequently by historians as being very interested in party building, that this wasn't just a race with people focused on the presidency, but that there was an effort to coordinate with individual candidates out in the country to try effectively to create coattails.

I wanted to ask if you have recollections of that? Or is it the case that you really were focused exclusively on the presidential campaign and, to the extent that others could patch into that, that was fine but you had your job to do and you weren't really concerned about what was going to be happening with the other party candidates?

Spencer: You're always concerned first with the principal office. If you see the opportunity to do something that is going to help you secondarily, such as elect a Senator or a Congressman, you definitely crank that in, but your first concern is the presidency in this case or in some cases the governorship. Reagan had coattails once in his life. I'm not a big believer in coattails. When he was Governor, he elected a whole bunch of state legislators one year on a big swing in '66. After that he didn't have any coattails. We lost seats in the legislature as his incumbency went on and on. In one of these years, in Congress or the Senate, we lost . . .was it '80?

Knott: '80 you took the Senate.

Spencer: But that was a national movement. Reagan may've been the head of it, but it was the whole series of malaise, speeches, hostages. They were all sick of the whole thing. It wasn't all just Reagan. Maybe he crystallized it and put the spotlight on it through his candidacy. All these people were elected to Congress and the Senate underneath it. It wasn't just because he was running. It's usually overriding circumstances. Reagan wasn't a big party man. He'd do what you asked him to do for the party. He appreciated the party, but . . . you're having Deaver here?

Young: We've asked him.

Spencer: Okay, remember this question when Deaver's here because he'll probably disagree with me. In 1976 Reagan goes away. He gets beat. We're negotiating with Deaver, who is representing Reagan about campaigning for Ford. There's real reticence out there. We can sense it. The answer was basically he's going to campaign on the platform, the platform that I gave away to him. I said to Cheney, "I've got to stay out of these negotiations because I'll screw them up. I'll go ballistic."

The best way to say it is that Reagan didn't bust his tail to help Gerald R. Ford. Ford knows that. That's not the reason he lost. But the point is, when you come out of the Nixon school of politics, you take your poison. You do your dishes and you go out and you bust your tail for the next guy, that's the way I was raised. Reagan never had that philosophy. He never had that philosophy.

Riley: That's interesting.

Spencer: I don't know why.

Riley: It's interesting because everybody associates Reagan with the so-called eleventh commandment too, the "don't speak ill of another Republican."

Spencer: But we created that for his protection. We were in power. We didn't want anybody dumping on us. [Gaylord] Parkinson was chairing the party. Bob Walker was working with him. The three of us sat down and we came up with the eleventh commandment. It was a defense mechanism for Ronald Reagan. He never understood that. I explained it to him a hundred times. He didn't understand, "We're putting all these people who were going to attack you in a very bad position because they're going to break the eleventh commandment."

Riley: I'm grateful. This is very illuminating.

Spencer: He loved it. He loved it. He quoted it forever, but he never understood what it was. I don't think he wanted to. He did his bit for the party, always. He went here, there and everywhere. The sum total of him is simply this: here's a man who had a basic belief, who thought America was a wonderful, great country. I don't think you can go back through 43 Presidents and find a President of the United States who came from as much poverty as Reagan came from; income-wise, dysfunctional families. I can't quite remember where [Harry] Truman came from, but you're not going to find one.

This guy came from an alcoholic family, no money, no nothing. He was a kid who was a dreamer. He dreamed dreams and dreamed big dreams and went out to fulfill those dreams with his life and he did it. As he moved down his career and got really involved in the ideological side of the political spectrum, which is where he started, he had real concerns about all this leaving us because of communism.

You look back—some of it sounds a little silly—but at the time there was perceived all kinds of threats, all over the world about communism moving into Asia, moving into Africa. That was the driving force behind his political participations. It was the only thing that he really thought about in depth, intellectualized, thought about what you can do, what you can't do, how you can do it.

With everything else, from welfare to taxation, he went through the motions. Now, this is me talking, but every night when he went to bed, he was thinking of some way of getting [Leonid Ilyich] Brezhnev or somebody in the corner. He told me this prior to the beginning of the presidency. Because I asked questions like, "What the hell do you want this job for?"

I'd get the speech and the program on communism. He could quote me numbers, figures. He'd say, "We've got to build our defenses until they're scary. Their economy is going down and it's going to get worse." I'm simplifying our discussion. He watched and he fought for defense. God, he fought for defense. He cut here, he cut there for more defense. He took a lot of heat for it. All the time he delivered, in his mind, the message to Russia, "we're not going to back off. We'll out-bomb you. We'll out-do everything to you."

His backside knew that we have the resources, this country has the resources and the Russians don't. If they try to keep up with us defensively, they're going to be in poverty. They're going to be economically dead and an economically dead country can only do one of two things, either spring the bomb or come to the table. He was willing to roll those dice because he absolutely had an utter fear of the consequences of nuclear warfare.

Again he was lucky. He couldn't deal with Brezhnev. He was over the hill and out of it. [Yuri Vladimirovich] Andropov was gone, dead. Reagan lucked out. In comes this guy [Mikhail] Gorbachev who was smart enough to see the trend in his own country. He started talking with Reagan about cutting a deal. That's what it got down to. In that context Reagan was very benevolent. He was willing to give up a lot. If this guy was serious and willing to go down this road, he was willing to give up things to get the job done, which was to get rid of the cold war. To him the cold war was the threat of nuclear holocaust in this country and other countries.

That was a dream that he had before he was in the presidency. These words I'm giving you and interpreting for you were given to me prior to his election to the presidency. If you do a lot of research, you'll see that he was always asking questions of the intelligence people, "What's the state of the economy in Russia?" He must've had a Dow Jones bottom line in his mind—what he thought it was going to take to do it—because he always knew how many nukes we had and where they were. He was really into this.

Young: Does that mean that Reagan was a visionary?

Spencer: I don't know. He was a dreamer. He was a dreamer. He dreamed that he was going to be the best sportscaster in America, that he was going to be one of the better actors in Hollywood. You know he got tired of playing the bad guy alongside Errol Flynn, who got the women all the time. But he still dreamed big dreams. That's the way he was.

I consider this, what I just told you, a major achievement for a President. I think it will go down in history when they look at all this stuff. I don't think anything else he ever did is going to get any great notice in history, but I think that this will when they figure it all out.

There's a book coming out by Tom Reed. I think it's coming. He's written a book. I don't know if they're going to publish it. Tom was a nuclear scientist in New Mexico at that place—

Young: Los Alamos.

Spencer: Los Alamos. He was an [J. Robert] Oppenheimer-type guy, younger, one of the bright young guys that came out of that movement. He got really interested in politics, was in the California races. The Tom Reed I referred to earlier came back to Washington. He was Secretary of the Air Force under Ford. I think it was Ford. Then he came back and was close to Meese and to Clark and to those guys. He came back in when they were putting these nuclear packages together, disarmament and all that kind of stuff. He was in the middle of it. He saw some of these things I'm talking about. He's interviewed me at length about it. It's going to be in the book.

What's interesting—because he called me back after one of these discussions—he said, "Nobody's ever said what you just said. I don't think anybody ever had the same conversation that you had with him about this." I'm not the kind of guy who goes in and says, "We've got to talk about this policy." I just sit with him and let him feed off me, let him bounce crap off me.

One day this all came out. I'm sitting there saying, "Makes a lot of sense, makes a lot of sense, you know, not bad." He was trying things out, but he was totally dedicated to that.

Spencer: And that's[6] where his presidency will end up in history. Several Presidents ahead of him did things to get to the end of the cold war, but he just compressed it into a short period of time, took advantage of the situation that existed. Some other President might have ignored the economy. I'm sure that Mondale would have cut defense. You could've never gotten Reagan to cut defense because it was part of his master plan. He'd have gone down in flames before he would've given up on defense. He would've given away the whole store on a domestic issue to keep his defense. They all thought he was a big overbearing hawk for doing it.

In all my relationships in that period of time, the biggest hawk I ever dealt with was Nelson Rockefeller. It wasn't Ronald Reagan. He would have been dangerous in there. That's a summation of where Reagan is historically. Others may tell you differently, but based on my conversations, I sure sensed and felt that. I watched it all develop. Tom Reed could probably make some contributions in this area too.

Knott: Did you ever get the sense that this anti-communism that Reagan firmly believed in, was it simply that we had the better economic system and Ronald Reagan had benefited from the American dream economically? I guess what I'm asking, was there a religious element to it? I've heard this before as well.

Spencer: Yes, there was a religious element to it. The basic element is this is a grand and great and wonderful country and we've got to fight to protect it. These are the bad things. I used to use the terminology with him. I'd say, "This business is about saints, sinners and savables. We're the saints, Carter is the sinner, and in the middle there's a bunch of savables." He understood that.

He was a very religious man in a sense. He believed in a higher being. He believed that things happened in his life because of his religious beliefs and his relationship to a higher being. He believed in Armageddon, a very nervous subject with me.

In this time frame we're talking about he'd sit around and I'd hear him start talking about Armageddon and I'd [sound effect]. That's scary. Nuclear war and all that, but he believed it. I argued with him about it, not that I'm an expert on biblical stuff, but I'd just say, "That's kind of scary to be talking about." He'd say, "Yeah, but it's going to happen." That's a religious belief that he carried until the day he lost his ability to rationalize. He had deep personal religious convictions.

He demonstrated them in a very personal way. My folks died and he called me and he started talking to me about that. He invoked that sort of conversation. He had deep-felt religious beliefs.

[6] Start tape 7 at 018

He wasn't great on institutional things like going to church every Sunday. For one thing he didn't like the crowds and gawkers, which he didn't think he had to prove. He felt very secure in his belief. He didn't feel he had to prove to the American public "I'm a religious person" by showing up across the street.

Everybody knew that Jimmy Carter was very deeply religious. We all know that Lyndon Johnson showed up at the church, but you can't fool the people over the long haul. The answer to your question is it's a combination of the two.

Freedman: I want to hear just a little more about the Armageddon discussions. Did he have a particular time frame in mind? I would imagine it would be very frightening to hear this—

Spencer: If he did, I didn't ask it.

Freedman: He felt that this was a possibility.

Spencer: Definite possibility.

Freedman: Nuclear destruction.

Spencer: He didn't say nuclear, just that we could have an Armageddon, whatever the Armageddon concept is. All I can remember, and I may be wrong, is it's going to be the end of the world, right? He didn't say because of nuclear, but – if you add two and two in that time frame, that was the biggest thing that could end the world.

Freedman: In your discussions with him, it sounds like you had not only a great deal of access to him, but also fairly intimate conversational relationship with him. I'm wondering how that played out. In particular we talked a bit about when you rejoined in 1980 and the relationship with Nancy Reagan. I'm wondering if there was a conversation between you and Ronald Reagan in which you acknowledged you're coming home, you're coming back, you'd been with Ford.

Spencer: I had that conversation with Nancy. While I was sitting in that plane going to Detroit, he came up and sat next to me. It was just like nothing ever happened. Nothing was brought up. Five years ago we did this, now today we're going to do this. He didn't say one cotton-picking word. And I expected the worst.

Freedman: Just nothing.

Spencer: We're back in business. Let's go. Which is pretty nice, pretty practical too, don't you think? This is a side people don't realize about this guy. It's like legislation. The Presidents since George Washington have made a lot of policy decisions based on the best political thing to do. This issue, that issue. I found early on the worst thing I could say to Ronald Reagan was, "You've got to sign this bill," or "You've got to veto this bill," because it's good or bad politics. That tuned him right out. He just tuned out. You couldn't sell him on an issue based on its political premises.

I can name one bill in the history of his presidency. I went to him before the '84 election. Mark Hatfield had called me up about a timber relief bill for the northwest, some bailout of the timber companies. Mark had this thing all lined up and he'd gotten word that Meese and those guys were going to tell the President to veto it. I didn't much care about it, but I got to thinking, *Jesus Christ, I can't carry Oregon with that thing. I'm in a marginal basis in Washington with it and in northern California.*

I got on my high horse and I went in to see him. I said, "I'm not going to tell you what to do." That's the way I used to approach it. "But I want you to know something. I cannot guarantee you Oregon or Washington if you don't sign the damn timber relief bill." End of conversation. He looked at me. I left.

About a week later Baker called me on the phone. He said, "Hey, you won one." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "He's going to sign the timber relief bill." That's the only time that happened. I don't know if he was going to sign it anyway. I know that Meese and those guys were lobbying against it. He probably wouldn't have, but it's the only time I can point to where I think that maybe politics had something to do with his decision on a policy matter.

Freedman: Along those lines, let me ask you what Wirthlin's role was at this point? And who was listening to him? Who was paying attention to his work?

Spencer: We all were. Dick was in most of the meetings because when the book came in, the guy was tracking every night. We were over-killing on it. I really believe this. I'm one of the few in my business that says there is a role for research, but they overdo it. Anyway, his role was to do the studies, bring the information to us, and interpret the information as he sees it. Let us argue with him as how we see it. In some cases, take it to the President, give it to him. But it was used by the media people. It was used by us in the strategic campaign end of it. We'd use it for scheduling.

Dick would come and say, "The tracking shows we're going down to eight points in Colorado." We'd say, "Okay, go find out why." Maybe it was an aberration, maybe we had to put Air Force I in there and do the show. Show time.

Freedman: Hopefully with the stairs—

Spencer: Yes, the old show time. He was the gatherer of all this information that we could use. He would interpret it in his mind. We had many disagreements over that. You always do. Dick never delivers bad news. He used to come in and give a presentation to the first lady and Reagan and Deaver. One of us would always be there and he said all these wonderful things. You knew there was some bad news in there. I'd looked at the survey beforehand.

When Dick would get through, I'd say, "Okay, Dick, tell them the bad news." Dick didn't like that. Reagan would go, "I don't like to hear the bad news." He was joking about it. He didn't. All he really wanted to know is, am I ahead or behind. That's all he really wanted to know out of the damn thing.

It was all being paid for by the National Committee. When you're federally funded, you'd have never paid for that much research. Neither side would have, if you weren't being able to get soft money for it. It would just eat up 10 to 15 million bucks for a presidential race now. Dick was a big contributor in terms of data. He played a very important role. He does a good job.

There are others. [Robert] Teeter does a good job. There's five or six of them out there. There's Linda Duvall who is doing great work now doing a lot of women's issues. She does good work.

Freedman: You worked with Teeter in the Ford—

Spencer: Yes, we also had him in the Reagan campaign. Teeter was at the table in the Reagan campaign. Reagan wasn't very comfortable with him and Wirthlin in the same room, but, when you're President, you can invite anybody you want.

Riley: I want to circle back and pick up on a thread that Paul introduced and that is that the President had, or seemed to have, very, very strong support among religious conservatives in America. I wondered, did you have conversations with him about his relationship with Jerry Falwell and the moral majority or anybody that sort of fell along those lines? Were those people he felt comfortable with because of his religious beliefs? Or were they people with whom he had perhaps some level of discomfort because of their outward show of religiosity when it was something that he personally didn't feel?

Spencer: Didn't bother him. He wasn't close to any of them. He had a very basic attitude: I'm not buying into their philosophy. They're buying into mine. He had that attitude about anybody. I had Ralph Abernathy and Hosea Williams with him, and he acted and worked and treated them just the way he did Jerry Falwell when he was in the room, no damn difference. He acted in the same way with the air traffic controllers as he did with those. He was glad that people were buying in, that they were a part of it. He didn't make deals with them. He didn't sell out to them.

The bottom line with the moral majority, or whatever it was called that was started by Falwell, was that they had no place to go. They had to go with Reagan. He could have even dumped on them a little and they had no place to go, right? He knew that. He accepted people for what they were and went on about his business.

Young: That was the basic posture that developed, or was developed, early in California with the Birch society. It wasn't the society—

Spencer: Exactly. You buy what I'm saying and—

Young: That was a very carefully worked-out way to position oneself.

Spencer: What we did there is we did a one-page statement, which we worked on for days. He signed off on it. We said, "Whenever you're asked the Birch question—" this was in the Governor's race—"this is your answer." We had it in writing. He'd say, "This is my answer. In the back of the room it's in print and you can take it with you." That drove the press nuts. Finally they got tired of asking the question, which is exactly where we wanted to get them.

The religious right phenomenon is still around today. I don't think it's a phenomenon now. It was the end result of alienation and discomfort, in their minds, with the government as they saw it and as they viewed it. Reagan was the positive recipient of it through his efforts. There was nobody closer to the religious right than Jimmy Carter. It's one of the reasons—again people won't agree with me—that Reagan couldn't have won in '76, if he'd gotten the nomination. He couldn't have carried the South, which was our base. They were going to vote for Jimmy. They had a real, live, legitimate southerner. They're going to go with him and he had a good base in the religious right.

Carter wasted all his equity in his four years of incumbency. He turned out to be a President that they didn't particularly like in the South. Reagan was the recipient. He would have had it difficult in the Northeast in '76, in Ohio and Michigan. He would have struggled in those states. He might have won one or two of them, but he needed the south as a base. He couldn't have taken it from Jimmy Carter.

Freedman: Is the implication of that, though, that Ford couldn't have done it?

Spencer: We had to win. Ours was a big-state strategy.

Freedman: So Ford couldn't have done it?

Spencer: Ford could have done it. We came close. We needed another big state. We knew we weren't going to win the South, but we knew we had to do California, Texas, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania. We knew we weren't going to win New York or New Jersey. Some combination there plus the mid-west states, the farm belt. It was the only way he could win it.

You can't sit there in 1976 with Ronald Reagan and look at Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Illinois and think he is going to win many of those states and not pick up the South. He would have been in trouble. He was lucky again. Timing. If he had won in '76, he'd have been in trouble. In '80 it was a walk.

Freedman: This is actually a theme that has come up at several points today, and that is the role of luck. Reagan seems to have been lucky at a number of key points, including the Soviet Union, in campaigns. From your vantage point, I know you've seen a lot of this. Another theme that has come up is the role of hard work and preparation. What's the mix?

Spencer: I don't know what the mix is. I know that luck is a factor in politics. You can do everything wrong and still come out ahead of the game because the other person does more wrong. I think there is some merit to saying you make your own luck too. If you've done all your homework, done all your ground work, done all your organization, done everything right and then you get the break, luck can be the difference.

Riley: Which golfer is it that said, "the more I practice, the luckier I get"?

Spencer: [Lee] Trevino probably. With this guy, it's phenomenal when you look at his career. At certain key points something happened that you really can't put your finger on and make an attribution of it. Probably the only place luck deserted him was on Iran-Contra. He could've got lucky there.

Young: Let's have a little break and then we have not too much longer.

[BREAK]

Young: It's been a long day, and a very good day. Do you have anything you want to pick up on at this point? Or want to call on? Steve? Or Russell?

Riley: I actually wanted to ask one thing. My assumption is that there was never any conversation about your coming to Washington permanently.

Spencer: No, they knew what I was about. They knew that I was available outside the framework if they wanted to talk and that I had no interest in it. In a lot of people's judgment that know me, they probably thought I wouldn't be very good at it. I don't think I'd have been very good at it.

Riley: Did anybody ever make any inquiries of you about appointments, senior appointments? Did people ask your advice about—

Spencer: Cabinets?

Riley: Yes, cabinet or staff appointments in the White House?

Spencer: Deaver asked me about some people. I interjected, on my own, some names. I didn't think Reagan had a very good cabinet. I didn't think it was the class cabinet he deserved. I went to him about HEW [Health, Education and Welfare]. There was a political-type doctor, a respected doctor—the pharmaceuticals and the AMA [American Medical Association] and the other people that are involved a lot with HEW respected him—Ted [Theodore] Cooper, out of Indiana. I thought he'd make a great HEW secretary. I went in to see Reagan. He was in the Blair House. He looked at me and he said, "We're giving that to Dick Schweiker. We owed one to Dick Schweiker." I said, "Jesus Christ, what did he do for you?" But Dick wanted it and Dick got it.

Young: He didn't stay in it.

Spencer: No, he parlayed it into a million dollar a year insurance job. But, you know, fine guy and all that, but Ted Cooper was better. I still think Ed Meese should have been attorney general then. He was as good, if not better, than William French Smith. William French Smith wanted it.

I had a lot of people to consider for ambassadorships, the crowd with Diner's Club. I'm sitting next to Betsy Bloomingdale at a dinner one night in the early days. She's one of Nancy's best friends. The attitude of those people was like—we're sitting in some room in the White House. It

was a dinner of 100 for his birthday and I look around—this is ours. We own this place now. They were ecstatic after all these years. I laughed. It was fine. And Betsy says, "What do you think Al and I should do?"

Al's her husband. They got into a lot of trouble later. I knew Al Bloomingdale. She was talking about his being ambassador to France. I knew Al Bloomingdale would be a disaster. I said, "Betsy, you know what you ought to do? You ought to get a condo and stay here in Washington. This is where all the action is. You can go in and out of the White House when you want to." She said, "That's not a bad idea."

[redacted] They had a committee and the committee was like most of them. I'm sure they looked at qualifications, but they looked at political dues. They looked at philosophical questions. Pen James was a personnel director from one of those headhunters. Pen was close to Meese. I'd say Meese probably played the biggest role in the appointments to the cabinet and sub cabinet.

I never played a role. If I had somebody I really wanted to do something for, I'd go put blood all over the floor to get it to happen and it might work, but it might not work. The quality could've been better. There were some good people in the cabinet.

Young: There were some of the California outside group. Were they not participating in this transition?

Spencer: They loved that. It was just like the Governor's thing all over again.

Young: That's what I was going to ask.

Spencer: Same story. They were a few years older and a few years smarter themselves in terms of what they recommended. Cappy was put in. George Shultz, Al Haig, after the Al Haig fiasco. George was a very stable, solid Secretary of State. Cappy did a pretty good job at Defense.

Young: How did Stockman get in there?

Spencer: I don't know. Stockman was one of the bright lights of the Republican party, the young bright lights in the Congress. He was emotionally unstable, there's no doubt about that. He proved out to be. He was on the fast track. You see those people all the time and you want to move them along and move them up and put them in spots where they can make a major contribution. David just reached the point where he couldn't handle the job. He couldn't handle the pressure and he lashed out, that's what he basically did. You never hear of him. You never will.

Young: We're hoping to get him. But as I—

Spencer: He's got a story.

Young: I don't know what he'd do.

Spencer: He's got a story, but the bottom line was he wasn't a team player. If you're OMB [Office of Management and Budget], you better be a team player. You've got to be like Mitch Daniels. Mitch is good policy guy, but he's also a damn good pol. He could balance the policy problems and the President's wants; the policy versus the politics of it. That's the kind of person you need.

Young: Was Darman anywhere near that?

Spencer: Yes, he was closer than Stockman. I think Darman learned a lot watching Stockman self-destruct.

Young: Darman was—as you say, and I agree from what I've studied about it—pretty good at inside-the-beltway politics. He knew the fine print. But outside the beltway—

Spencer: They don't think anything exists outside the beltway. There's a bunch of people in there that go back in my career, that are still in the beltway; [David] Gergen, Darman, [Kenneth] Duberstein. Deaver has decided to join that crowd. They really have a hard time realizing that people in St. Louis don't give a damn about what's in the headlines of the *Washington Post.* I get these calls all the time. You ought to see the *Post* today. The *L.A. Times* isn't anywhere on it. L.A. didn't think it was that big a deal. The whole office is absolutely totally upset for three hours and the rest of the country couldn't care less about it, which is the way it should be. You get in that beltway mentality.

My friend, Bob Strauss, has got it too. He always gets upset. They enjoy themselves and they'll make a lot of money. There are people that are suited for it. There are people who are not suited for it.

Young: Reagan was not. He was an outsider in Washington. He comes into high pressure, inside-the-beltway politics. How does he adapt to that? He never loses his ear for what's outside. But how does he adapt? Or did he adapt very well to that inside-the-beltway stuff?

Spencer: He assigned the responsibility to others to take care of it.

Young: That was Jim Baker and—

Spencer: He thought it was rather silly, that it wasn't important, but it was a reality. It was like the way he finally had to recognize that there is a California state legislature, and I've got to deal with them. Same way here, the Bakers, the [M. B.] Oglesbys, whoever is doing the legislative liaison at the time, it was their job. If we reach a point where there is heavy lifting, call me and I'll go talk to Senator so-and-so, but don't call me if it ain't heavy lifting. That was his attitude toward the beltway. His wife got into it more than he did. Everybody that came to Washington to the White House did. Kay [Katherine] Graham found a way to capture it with her own inimitable style. She was good. Every President's wife or President, she got next to them. There is that Georgetown group. Nancy got into that, but that's her nature. If she were in Des Moines, she'd

get into that group. He could care less about it. She might say, "We're going over to Kay Graham's for dinner tonight." He'd say, "Fine, no big deal."

Young: Was she captive to it? Did she get—

Spencer: No, no, she wasn't captive. She took the approach that "I'm going to convert them." She wanted to know what those people were saying, and what they were thinking. Maybe there was a time or point where she could use her influence to help her husband because the media are basically considered an enemy by most Republicans. Most of the people are Democrats in that Georgetown crowd and come out of the Kennedy era. So she took the attitude that "I can neutralize them if nothing else." I think she did in some cases.

Riley: Took a while though. She got very bad press the first year or so.

Spencer: Yes, but she never really worried about her press. She worried about her husband's press.

Riley: She had the second-hand rose.

Spencer: Yes, and the china,

Riley: The White House china.

Spencer: There were lots of things. The astrologers always had some hook on her. But he thought they were all funny. It didn't bother him. Every now and then he'd say to me, "Nancy's so vulnerable." I'd say, "Wait a minute. Vulnerable? In what way is she vulnerable?" He got mad. Anybody picked on his women—his daughter, his wife—he'd get mad.

That was Don Regan's problem. He hung up on all of them. I said, "That's death. This one's over."

Young: You're history, as they say.

Spencer: She's still plugged into that crowd. She still talks to them all the time, to a lot of those people. The Strausses are good friends.

Riley: A lot of that happened after the assassination attempt, or at least we have the impression it did. Was it something that was occurring before then?

Spencer: The assassination happened three months after he was inaugurated.

Riley: Exactly, but I wondered if there was any history that you were aware of.

Spencer: You know Bob. He plays the game. He may be a Democrat and a Democrat leader, but he always made sure that he had good inroads to the Republican administrations. He was very good at it and he became very fond of the Reagans in his older age. The Clinton-type

Democrat—what do they call them, new Democrat?—alienated the Strauss types. They migrated more toward some of our leadership in that period of time.

Riley: Can you tell us where you were when you heard that the President had been shot?

Spencer: I was in the Irvine Coast Country Club. I had just walked in the locker room when it came on the TV. I had to sit down. I thought I was going to fall down. I lost the blood in my head, almost passed out. It was terrible.

I was with Ford both times he was shot at. Here's a totally uncontroversial man. There's no rhyme or reason to these assassination attempts. The guy is bland, right? One little nut tries to kill him and a nice old lady up in San Francisco, Sarah Moore. All these cases, which may not be true today with terrorists, they were deranged people. With [John, Jr.] Hinckley, it was established that he'd gone nuts.

Knott: Did you notice—

Spencer: Why nobody ever took a shot at Clinton? Nobody took a shot at Nixon and he was controversial. What's the reasoning? I don't know.

Young: Nobody took a shot at Carter and he didn't have any, not a single attempt.

Spencer: But Ford twice.

Knott: Did you notice any change in the President after that? I don't know if it's [Edmund] Morris or one of these biographers that say that it reinvigorated that religious sense of destiny that Ronald Reagan had that he was the man. Did you—

Spencer: I read that.

Knott: You don't put any—

Spencer: The only change I saw—he had an energy level problem for a while coming back. He almost died. There was a big change in her. She was scared to death after that. She even lobbied not to run again. She had real qualms. If she asked me once, she asked me fifteen times whether he should run again or not. It wasn't the fear of winning or losing. Every time he went out after that, she had a fear of him getting shot.

Why did she talk to Joan Quigley and all these astrologers? She was looking for help. She might have gone in to see the priest to try to get help. It was that sort of a grasp. You and I can understand it. He was very fatalistic about it, but she was scared to death. Big change in her.

Riley: Did you come to Washington when he was in the hospital?

Spencer: No. He'd say, "What are you doing here? You're not a doctor."

Freedman: Compartmentalizing?

Young: The change in Mrs. Reagan though, was not a change in their relationship.

Spencer: No.

Young: In fact, it may have intensified even.

Spencer: One of the great love stories of all time. We went through that earlier. It's not phony. It's real. It's true. When she's gone very long, he asks, "Where is she?" She's so protective of him. It's a great story. They have each other. They don't need the rest of us, which is sort of comforting for them. We all need each other.

Young: How did it change her? Was she more protective?

Spencer: More protective.

Young: More active?

Spencer: More active in scheduling input. Not input, asking questions. You'd send the schedule up and if it looked like it was a tough schedule, she'd say, "You're working him too hard." Without even knowing the facts, she was testing you all the time. She was more protective of him after that, yes.

Young: When Meese left the White House and Baker left the White House—one became Attorney General, the other Treasury, and then Don Regan came in. Did that have the promise of solving or muting some of the problems that you saw with the troika in the beginning? He now has a Chief of Staff who thinks of himself at least as—

Spencer: I hope I'm not contradicting myself when I say it. By that time in his career, they'd worked it out. The troika had worked it out so that everybody knew what their job was and it was futile to keep sniping at each other. There were truces. Organizationally, structurally, I would have still said it would have been better to bring in a Chief of Staff. Don just wasn't the right guy. Baker and Deaver knew it. Baker, at that point in time, had real burn out. I knew it because I'm so close to him. He was so good and he worked so hard and it was a tough job. The guy said, "I'm going to worry about Russia. You guys worry about the rest." So he wanted out of there.

But Jimmy is the kind of guy who wants to get out on top. He had his eye on a cabinet spot, and he and Deaver were together on all this stuff. That was the type of thing that they would both not talk about to me. I heard about it. I heard about it on the radio, but they didn't talk to me because they knew how I would have reacted. I'd have flipped out and said, "Don Regan is not the guy, conceptually."

But here, Jimmy put together a package: "I get Treasury, Regan gets this." Deaver said, "Okay, don't call Stu." Not that I could have changed it. Publicly nothing, but internally I'd have broken a lot of china because knowing Ronald Reagan and knowing the skills that are needed for Chief

of Staff, that was not Don Regan's cup of tea. He was imperial. He thought he was President half the time. He made a lot of strategic errors. He did a lot of good things, but made a lot of strategic errors internally with the family.

Nancy called you up and talked to you on the phone if you were Chief of Staff. You don't hang up on her, you listen. And don't be afraid to argue with her, but it's part of the process if you're dealing with this family. I'm sure the Clintons had some other kind of arrangement in which Hillary had her input. They all have different ways. That was the way the Reagans operated. Don decided it wasn't going to operate that way. It was his downfall.

Riley: By this time Deaver is already gone?

Spencer: Yes, he's gone.

Riley: The impression that those of us from the outside have is that Deaver was basically Nancy's point of contact into White House operations.

Spencer: He was.

Riley: As long as he was around.

Spencer: He was without a doubt. He was the closest thing. The two closest people to Nancy were Mike Deaver and me. He was more so than I even. We were the two that could talk to her. We were the two that would argue with her. We were the two that could change her, the two that she trusted. It took a big load off Baker as Chief of Staff.

Riley: Right. So it—

Spencer: Regan never filled that role when he got there.

Riley: Exactly. In some respects, you're confronting the same problem here that you described for us at the campaign. He looks up and says, "Wait a minute. I don't know anybody around here."

Young: Who are these people?

Spencer: To a degree, but there was still a lot of staff around by then that had been with him a long time.

Riley: Sure.

Spencer: It wasn't quite as abrupt.

Young: And Meese was still around.

Spencer: Yes, he was in there every day.

Young: Did Nancy Reagan sign off on Don Regan? This looks like something—

Spencer: Coming in? I'm sure she did. I can't envision it not happening. There's no reason. You could make a case for him if you want him. If I were there, I could have made a case not to have him. Which one would have prevailed? You could make a case. In the end I happened to have been right. I just knew this was not going to work. And I'll be honest with you, he hates me.

I defended that guy for a long time. I said, "Let's work it out." I'd go back. I'd hear all these horror stories, I'd say, "Okay." I'd go talk to him or to a guy working for him, Thomas, something Thomas. I'd sit with him and say, "Now Don's got to do this. Don's got to do that if he wants to really get this thing." I worked and worked. Finally it became apparent to me that I certainly wasn't getting through to him because his conduct in terms of the dynamics of a Reagan family didn't change a lick. He just kept on doing what he wanted to do the way he wanted to do it. To this day I don't know what the hell he was doing when Iran-Contra was going around. I know this much, Jimmy Baker would have known what the hell was going on.

Even if you're not confronted, you see enough paper sneaking around corners that you go, "I'll be damned. What's this?" You have to do that to protect this guy because that's the way he operates. And then with Maureen [Reagan] in the act—she was pretty vocal, yelling and screaming at him—Don hung up on her. When Nancy got mad at him one day, which she does, he hung up on Nancy. When I was told that, I said, "This gig is over with. It's going to happen."

Somewhere upstairs Ron and Nancy decided, because he still was publicly saying she would. They called me and I came in. They said, "You've got to do it." I said, "I don't want to do it." Nancy said, "You've got to do it." I'm smart enough not to ask her, "Does the President want this?" She's not going to do anything unilaterally and he doesn't want to have to answer that question because he's so soft on personnel problems. He just hates them. I know the game.

I start to put a strategy together, the one we went through earlier with Bush. It all leaked out in the paper before we got around to it and Don went ballistic. That was unfortunate. I don't know how it leaked that it was going to happen. Deaver was under indictment or something and still drinking too damn much. He was an alcoholic. Baker was over at the Treasury Department with his hands over his ears. He didn't want to hear about all this. "Don't call me." Meese didn't have any rapport with Regan so they called me in, which is fine. "I'll help you guys."

Don has another slant on it, but he's written a book on it. He's already stated his position. I'm never going to write a book on it. It was unfortunate.

Knott: You were opposed to him right off the bat. What had you seen—

Young: But you weren't asked.

Knott: What had you seen?

Spencer:[7] The guy IS a prime minister. He says, "I AM the Secretary of the Treasury and I have all these minions. I have this domain and I'm the boss." Bill Simon had that same quality. I can go right around. Al Haig had that quality later on. He didn't early on. This quality isn't bad when you're Secretary of Treasury because you've got to run your shop. But you can't take that quality over here and put him in a subservient position as Chief of Staff in the West Wing with all these counterparts that have been around this man longer than they have. You have to blend into the woodwork as best you can. He didn't.

Knott: If they had asked you at that time who to select as Chief of Staff, did you have a name in mind?

Spencer: I probably didn't, or else I'd remember. It happened so fast. I didn't even have time to think. For example, when they want to go on the road, there was never a picture taken that Ronald Reagan wasn't in it with Mr. Regan. The first time it happened I told those advance guys, myself included, "If I catch you in a picture, you're canned. You're not running." Don was right there. That suggests a quality to me: *I'm right next to power*.

Riley: When you were dealing with this, did the experience of Phil Battaglia ever come to mind as a premonition or as a relevant parallel?

Spencer: I don't think so. I spent my lifetime trying to forget about Phil. Phil was one of the gay guys. The worst part of that story was one night trip to Sacramento. I went up there because Nofziger was all over me. I didn't know Phil was gay. I took him out for drinks. We sat at a bar. He had some gay guys working under him and he had committed that he was going to can them. He was dragging his feet on it. Some of them are still around so I'm not going to name their names.

I'm there saying, "Okay, God damn it, Phil, you've got to dump this guy. You've got to get rid of this guy." I'm going through this whole speech about the homosexual question and the problem. He's just looking at me right in the eye. I find out a month later he's one of them. I used to think back, *what did I say to him about gays*? What did I say?

The irony of it was when he quit—he gets dumped basically—he comes roaring down to me in my office and says, "I'm going to fight it. I'm going to sue him." I listened to him all the way out and I said, "Phil, you ain't going to do a damn thing because the more you do, the more prominence you're going to get. Think about where you are and what you are." He never did a damn thing.

That was such a terrible two weeks of my life, I try to forget it. My partner in northern California was gay, I knew he was gay. He was a very good politician. That son-of-a-bitch got mixed up in that whole thing. That was a bad period of time in my life.

Riley: I didn't mean to jump track.

[7] Start tape 8 at 047

Knott: You mentioned earlier that you were formulating a strategy to ease out Don Regan. Is that the correct way to put it?

Spencer: To convince him that it was time to move on.

Knott: And then it leaked.

Spencer: He might have leaked it. Or his people.

Young: What was the other plan that you—

Spencer: My only plan was to find somebody in whom Don had enough confidence and trust that he would listen to long enough to hear the story out and realize it was time to move on. Something's going to happen one way or the other, so let's do it right. At that point in time I looked at the whole White House—I had had a pretty good rapport with him but a couple of things had leaked out already, which blew my rapport—and the only guy left in the complex was George Bush. That's who I went to. He was a big help. I don't where it leaked. It could've leaked out of Don's office too. It could've leaked out of Bush's office. It could've leaked anywhere in that place.

Knott: You were called back in November '86 to handle the Iran-Contra problem. Is that an accurate—

Spencer: I never heard of Iran-Contra for a long time. I never knew who Ollie [Oliver] North was. I was called in when the Tower Commission got going. Basically I knew three things. I knew that Ronald Reagan was looking for an opening to Iran from conversations with him. I knew he loved the Contras and I knew he really had deep personal concern about the hostages. I knew those three things. How they all got mixed up in Iran-Contra, I don't know. I can speculate a hundred different ways, but I don't know.

Baker—not Jimmy, Howard—had taken over and Duberstein—Chief of Staff and Assistant Chief of Staff. They were aware of my relationship to the Reagans and they called me up. I also had a good relationship with John Tower over the years. They called me up and said, "We want you to come back and talk about this thing." I went back and we talked about it. I reached the point where I thought we needed a preemptive fire drill of some kind. I had no idea what the Tower Commission was going to say. Reagan was no help in terms of defining what he did or didn't do. Howard didn't know a damn thing. Poor Baker, he didn't know what was going on.

A few guys who knew it were in the circle; the [John] Poindexters, the Norths. Casey knew something, I'm sure. I finally said, "You know the easy way out of this thing: we just get John over here and we'll make him tell us what the hell they did." So, I bring John in through the treasury building, down through the tunnels underneath the street, up the elevator to the office. There sits Landon [Parvin], the speechwriter who is going to write the speech in answer to the report, Tower, Nancy, and me. After the niceties are all over, I said, "Okay, Tower. What's going on? What are you guys doing?"

John started to talk. He got very emotional. Tears came to his eyes, the whole thing. He really liked Reagan. He was an admirer of Reagan and he has to tell him some bad news. I was sitting there and I looked at Nancy and said to myself, *there's going to be bad news, John is crying*. And Landon's looking around like this, *how am I going to write a speech*?

Basically he told us what was in the report. Then I took John to the elevator and he left. We spent the rest of the evening, particularly Landon and I, talking about approaches to his speech. My attitude at this point was, I don't know what you know, but you've got to mea culpa what you know. Tell the world what the hell you know and what you don't. You can withstand the blow.

I don't know what the truth was. I know this much and I think you've sensed in what I've been talking about today that he delegated authority to people. He expected them to have his agenda. He certainly took the attitude that everybody must know my agenda, they've heard me long enough. Because of that, he was always historically a person that you could take advantage of from a staff position. That's why I always worried about Chief of Staff and those appointments when I was around him.

Did they take advantage of his concern for the hostages? His interest in the Contras? Or did he sign some damn piece of paper? When he signed the piece of paper, did they really tell him what it was doing to the thing? I don't know. How many people did they include in the loop? I don't know the truth. Somebody else's going to have to tell you that. But I know the three things he was interested in: who shot who? Between Weinberger, Casey, Shultz, there's a hundred stories out there. I don't know what the truth, or the parts of it, are.

Somewhere in the process Reagan wasn't really told, like he has to be told, "This is what will happen if you do A, B, C." Like we used to do politically to him, this is A, B, C. I don't think they really sat down with him. I think there was an agenda that North and Casey and those guys had. Did you ever talk to Casey?

Young: No, never did.

Spencer: You couldn't understand him, he mumbled. We called him "Mumbles." Reagan used to say to me, "What did he say?' Or he would say, "He's eating his tie." Casey liked to chew on his tie.

Knott: He used to chew on his tie?

Spencer: He'd put his tie in his mouth. We're on the campaign trail. He's chairman of the campaign. We're in the bedroom, nine o'clock and the phone rings. I'd answer it. Bill Casey, [gibberish]. I'd put the phone down and say, "Mr. President—" or at the time Governor—"Bill Casey's on the phone."

"I don't want to talk to him." I'd put the phone down and say, "You've got to talk to him. He's your chairman."

"But I don't want to talk to him." And he'd go, "Yes, um-hum, ah-hah." He'd be through and I'd say, "What did he say?"

"I don't know." With that background I said to myself once Iran-Contra happened—and Casey was not dumb, Casey was a very bright man—*did he have an agenda?* Did he mumble his way through it because Reagan wanted to get rid of him? I don't know. History is going to find out somehow. He might have just also made one hell of a big mistake by saying, "Yes, let's go do it." That's a very great possibility.

Knott: There were reports at the time and later that you had to work on the President to get him to say, "I traded arms for hostages." In that speech that he gave in the spring of '87, I believe he did say that. After that he went back on it, but—

Spencer: Work on him? We pounded him. He didn't want to say it. Everybody else crapped out on me, but I wouldn't. I just hung in there.

Freedman: Starting when? When did you realize, or think, it was necessary?

Spencer: The night we were sitting in his residence with Tower. That's when I really personally went to bat. I think Nancy was backing me too. She never said anything. Sometimes that's good when she just sits and listens and lets me pound. Landon couldn't do much in the role he was playing, but I think Landon agreed with me. I haven't read anything about that, but Reagan just couldn't bring himself to say that. I don't even remember the logic I used, but I pulled out all stops.

My attitude was, get this thing behind you and go on about our business. Sometimes in this political life you've got to take some hits to get something behind you. You take them and you go on. They don't seem to learn. Clinton never learned. All these people that come after, they never learn. They never look at what the guy or gal before did and they take the same hits. I don't understand them. But Reagan had a hang up.

I'm speculating, but he may have known that he did the sign off and he just didn't want to be held responsible. That's a possibility. We'll never know from him. We'll never know from Casey. I don't think North's ever told the truth. I don't know what Poindexter knew. I know John. He's a Navy guy. He may go to his grave with it. I don't know about Bud [McFarlane]. Bud's a pretty straight guy, but on this one he was all over the lot.

It's the lowest point in his eight years in Washington. It was handled poorly. Whoever designed it, if they did it, it was designed poorly. It wasn't realistic.

Young: There was real concern with impeachment, wasn't there? Or was there?

Spencer: There was talk. But they weren't going to impeach a President over a mistake. Your enemies talk about it, but they know damn well they don't have the votes.

Riley: By that time Congress had reversed its position of funding the Contras anyway so it was a bit of an embarrassment. Was there anything in your experience with Reagan that paralleled this in terms of his having to take a serious hit like that and move beyond it, say in his time as Governor?

Spencer: Nothing that serious. The scandal in the staff was a hit, but it wasn't that bad. He just changed staffs. I'm convinced that if Baker had been Chief of Staff and Deaver had still been around, that it would've never happened. Believe it or not, in any President, that little stuff is going on all the time. The smart people in the West Wing, whether they be Democrat or Republican, say, "Wait a minute, we have a couple of zealots over here who are trying to put something over." I really think that, which only emphasizes my point about how important the type of Chief of Staff Ronald Reagan had was, in any government position that he held, whether it be Governor or President, more so than Ford.

Riley: Or as a candidate, the necessity of having somebody around who is—

Spencer: Ford wouldn't even have had guys like me in the room. He would've looked at them and said, "Forget it."

Young: It's about time to stop and have a little relaxation.

[End of day one][8]
Spencer: I'm ready.

Young: Okay. Do you have anything to say at the outset? Or should we just start with the '84 campaign? You haven't referred to the re-election campaign, but if there is something else you'd rather start with . . .

Spencer: No, I'm not really up yet. Mention a few names, I'll get excited.

Riley: Walter Mondale.

Spencer: No. I like Walter. The '84 campaign was a year where we strategically felt, number one, that we had to use the power of the incumbency, and number two, we had to stay out of trouble on big issues, particularly during the last couple of years of the administration in '82, '83. The big point of the 1980 campaign was to project hope in the future for America. Again, through this whole period of time, the only thing that was really on Reagan's mind was the Russian situation, the cold war, nuclear holocaust, that sort of thing. I'm trying to think of the timing. When did Gorbachev come in the picture, what year was that?

Riley: Good question.

Spencer: That was during the second term, was it not?

Knott: I don't think he was there yet, during the '80s.

[8] Start tape 9 at 040

Spencer: [Leonid Ilyich] Brezhnev went then—

Knott: [Konstantin] Chernenko briefly, right?

Spencer: Yes, Brezhnev. Then the guy who was the head of the KGB.

Riley: Gorbachev is March of '85.

Young: Andropov.

Riley: No, that's later.

Spencer: The meetings were not productive conversations, which he was having with them. The few that he had with the Russian leadership went just nowhere. He'd just give you that funny look when he'd talk about them. They're not listening, there's nothing there. When Brezhnev died—remember the funeral?—people were trying to push Reagan to go to the funeral. I was in Washington for some reason. I saw him, and he said, "What do you think?" I said, "What do you want to do? He said, "The guy's not a friend of mine. I don't want to go to his funeral." I said, "Don't go then."

The staff all got into it. In Washington they have this game you play: you go to the funerals, you sign treaties, all these things, which I find particularly interesting with this new President we've got. He doesn't seem to think much about treaties any more. He says they break them anyway. That's kind of where I came from, or come from. Reagan always had a problem with the protocol of the whole Washington scene. The Brezhnev funeral was pretty controversial within his staff. They were pushing and pushing to get him there and he just said, "I don't want to go."

He knew how phony it would be for him to go to this guy's funeral. He basically didn't know him and probably didn't like him. He isn't very good at that

Riley: Bush went?

Spencer: Yes, he sent somebody. *Anybody but me*. The '84 campaign was really uneventful. We had great crowds. He was in good shape. We had one downer with the debate. If you can go through those 90 days with one downer, it's good.

Riley: Staffing? Any considerations about making changes in some of the key personnel? I'm looking at the timeline we prepared. There's an indication that in 1982 you had some meetings with senior aides at the White House regarding the staffing and the organization. That may have just been the typical kind of things that you go through in setting up—

Young: Staffing the organization, looking to the campaign. This was after the mid-term elections.

Spencer: One of our strengths is that we took our time and we started early. We weren't looking to make changes. It was just that people who had certain roles in the '80 campaign had gone on to do other things, like Dave Prosperi. Canzari had moved on to other things. It was scheduled in advance. It was Deaver and I and Baker who sat down and talked. The biggest single thing we had to find was somebody who was the day-to-day administrator, the conductor of the campaign. I had a candidate. They had a candidate.

My candidate was either Paul Manafort or Charlie Black. Their candidate was Ed Rollins. This is good for history at this point. They were mad as hell at Rollins. Ed has a propensity for dumping on everybody that he works with or works for. He'd done his fair share on Deaver and Baker. They're sitting there yelling and screaming. I capitulated to their Rollins with one condition, that he had to bring [Lee] Atwater with him. I knew that Lee was a protégé and I knew he was on the upward trend. He would do his best to keep Ed from shooting off his mouth at everybody.

Riley: How did you get to know Lee?

Spencer: Through Harry Dent in South Carolina. Lee was involved in the local election during the first Reagan race in 1980. He was a South Carolina kid. Harry Dent was a good friend of mine. He'd called me one day before '80 and told me, "I have this young kid down here that's going to be good. You've got to get with him." That's how I first heard about Lee. They were both in the political office of the White House at the time. They moved to the campaign basically at a certain time and took up roles. I think Rollins' title was chairman. Lee was his assistant, doing what I would call the political director's job.

Then we had to make some decisions on who the steering committee—for lack of a better word—was going to be. The guys and gals had already made the decisions. That went pretty smoothly. We had Deaver, Baker, Paul Laxalt, Margaret Tutwiler from Alabama, and Darman because he knew where the keys were to the White House, and Teeter, Wirthlin, and myself. I think that was about it. Then people floated in and out. We'd bring Ed in and out. He wasn't very happy with that, but that's the way it had to be. Atwater in and out. Other people as we had a need for information or expertise. That's a group that met weekly, two years out. The closer we got, the more we met.

Riley: The entire steering committee.

Spencer: Yes. Every morning at seven o'clock when we really got going, that's what we'd do. We would face up to any problem we had, look at the research and decide on what we were going to do. The coordination between the campaign and the White House when you're in power is very difficult. Two palace guards, two sets of egos, the whole thing.

We were fortunate because Baker and I had done the same thing in '76 with Ford. I brought in Morton. Rogers Morton brought Jimmy in in '76. We'd gone through a whole bunch of chairmen in the Ford campaign early on. For sixty days at one point I was the acting chairman. I was trying to be political director, and I hate that job. During this period [Howard] Callaway left and Rogers came.

While Rogers was there—he was dying of cancer and he could only come in for about four hours a day—one day I went to Rogers. He was a great guy. I said, "We have all these primaries out here and we have so many of them behind us." This is how we met Baker. I said, "I can't keep track of the delegates. I've got to go out and win five more states next week. I need somebody who's going to come in behind me, take over the delegate stuff, count the delegates, keep them in line, tell me when I'm going to lose somebody or something." He said, "I ran into this guy over at Commerce that worked for me, Jimmy Baker. He wants to do something."

It's ironic today because Bob Teeter and I interviewed Baker. We tell Baker, "You know we interviewed for your first job, Baker." He laughs. Jimmy came over and did a fabulous job. He went and started doing a lot of political things after that with George Bush. In the process, after Rogers had to leave and we got into the general election in '76, we were searching for a chairman. Cheney and I decided that Baker would make as good a chairman as anybody. "Let's just put him up at the top." So we did.

Jimmy and I had lived with this problem of dealing with the White House from the outside: how it works, what you can do, and what you can't. We brought Teeter in to do some stuff in the '84 campaign. There were three people sitting there that knew that the true power rested in the White House. It doesn't rest in the campaign.

That made the transition easy. We always met together so we were always on the same page. I'd leave the meeting and go back to the headquarters and make things happen that we had decided in the meeting. If it was something that the White House had to do, Jimmy pulled the people in and made them do what they had to do. In a campaign, when you're running as an incumbent, all the scheduled activity goes through the White House. They have the whole scheduling apparatus, the advance men and all.

With the campaign, the only thing is you've got to pay for it. It's got to be a budgeted item. The airplane, that whole thing, really eats up money in the campaign. The biggest problem any campaign faces in an incumbency situation, and we faced it, was the coordination between the two entities. It worked out very smoothly, very, very smoothly.

Young: It doesn't always.

Spencer: Normally it doesn't. But we started early. Also we had a lot of people that knew each other and had worked there before. Deaver, for instance, didn't know what the relationship would be. Rollins didn't know what the relationship would be. Other principals around the campaign didn't know what all the pitfalls were, but the three of us did. That really helped.

We didn't have any other problems other than we had a little by-play personnel problems, but you always have that in a campaign because you have a couple of hundred people running around the building. I didn't know who half of them were.

Riley: I was going to ask you, who was the primary contact in the White House? Was it—

Spencer: Baker. Baker chaired the meetings. We were all comfortable with him. Deaver and Baker built a great relationship. Baker and I were very close. I just viewed him as Chief of Staff. It was the end of the line. It didn't cramp my style. Jimmy was never one that tried to keep me out of something or to not let me state my opinion. He knew I had full access to the presidency. It didn't bother him.

The only thing I ever did that made him mad was the story I told you about the press, "Go down this morning and tell them everything is on the record." He wasn't the only one that was mad at me. Everyone in the building was mad at me.

Young: I'm thinking of the '84 campaign, President Reagan is the incumbent and you have two palace guards. In contrast to the '80 campaign when he wasn't the incumbent and you had—

Spencer: Two palace guards there.

Young: In reference to that, your post was on the plane and whoever owns the body owns the—

Spencer: Right.

Young: How did that work with the incumbent? Did you have a group that went with Reagan on the plane everywhere?

Spencer: With an incumbency, the political aspects diminish. The people on Air Force One, which is the plane you use, are basically the people that have to run the government. You have your National Security Advisor with him at all times, either Deaver or Baker, and all the attendant secretarial help. He's running the government from the plane. What we did that year is we always put a political person with them. It might be me or we'd let Rollins go out or somebody. We put Paul Laxalt on a lot. He loved it. That person is there from a political standpoint so that when they land in Des Moines, our political person knows all the political apparatus that we may have in that state. He knows who they are and makes sure that they get into the right events.

All the speeches and position statements are things that we would look at in our seven o'clock meetings with the steering committee. The politicians would have signed off on the speeches maybe four or five days ahead of time before they went out. But any political questions or even just spinning the press while you're on the ground would be handled by one, maybe two, political people. It was a combination government, a political arm on Air Force One whenever he traveled as an incumbent in a campaign mode.

Since we had to pay for it, I used to say to Baker, "I'm going to send as many guys as I want to send." He'd say, "Okay." There's a thin line, a thin blue line there. There's a tremendous advantage to being an incumbent. They've got all these laws about pro-ration of money and seats. It costs the government more than we pay, I don't care who's in power. You're using limousines, the trappings of the presidency. You don't pay for all the trappings of the presidency from the campaign. You can't. Yet, they're useable and they're effective in a campaign. People come out from everywhere to have their little five-year-old kid see the President, no matter who

he is. People just love to see Air Force One land and take off. I've seen some of the biggest crowds I've ever seen watching Air Force One land.

And the advance work? It's all done with White House advance guys who already exist. They're all people basically that came out of the campaign as advance people. Advance people in the campaign moved on and became presidential advance.

Young: Aren't there more restrictions, though, on what the President can do from the Secret Service standpoint? Don't conflicts arise there?

Spencer: Tremendous conflicts arise there. Progressively every year. Today I'm not involved but I see it because I see people who are. I saw Cheney last Thursday, whatever day that was. I can hardly get through the hallway in the West Wing because there are so many Secret Service people standing there. In '84, one of the problems of our campaign was called the difference between men and women—

Riley: Gender gap.

Spencer: I talked the other day about Reagan's rating in '65. It was 90-something percent with women. We had reached the point in his political career where he had a tremendous gender gap for a lot of reasons. Tutwiler was the only female voice in this meeting and she had a big voice. I'd hired her out of Alabama in 1976. She was a receptionist in the Ford campaign. She was a nice, sweet Alabama girl.

Riley: Good bloodlines.

Spencer: Yes, great bloodlines. In fact, she came to me after the primary. I'm regressing, but I think Margaret was an important factor in this. She came to me after the primary in the Ford campaign and said, "I want to do something meaningful." I said, "Okay." It was the start of a feminist movement. The women who worked for me were always having meetings and then coming and seeing me. I was not much help in some of these areas. One day they got me to agree that they weren't to be called secretaries. They were all going to be called somebody's assistant. I said, "I don't give a damn, just do your job."

Margaret comes to me after the primary and wants something meaningful. I thought about it. She had to be in her early 20s then. I said, "Okay, I'm going to make you state director in Alabama." She looked at me, and she said, "But you've written Alabama off." I said, "That's right. I'm going to make you state director in Alabama and I'm giving you a $30,000 budget. She looked at me—that's what I loved about her—and said, "Okay." She took the challenge.

Now I knew she came from a very wealthy family. They owned half of Birmingham. I knew she'd find a way of getting money into Alabama somehow, somewhere. If she wanted to do something, she'd find a way to finance it. Incidentally we didn't carry Alabama, but she did a great job down there and got the bug. Baker took her with him after he started doing other things. Her next step, she went home and did some things. She got involved in the early Bush campaign before 1980 and just took off.

I was talking to her one day at a steering committee meeting, and gender gap came up. I kept saying, "We've got to get some women Secret Service." The guys in that room, all friends of mine, are all male chauvinists, every cotton-picking one of them . . . Margaret piped in, put in her two bits, and finally we won the battle. All of a sudden there were women showing up. The other day when I was there I saw a bunch of women, they weren't Secret Service and they were all [sound effects]. They could have taken me down in two seconds. There's been a lot of progress there, but it's an example of the little things you have to think about.

You have an issue problem. How can we solve the issue problem? What symbolically could we do other than just have words? The people who have that issue as a concern notice when they see Secret Service women around a President. You may not notice it. He may not notice it, but they notice it and it registers with them. That isn't particularly true of the ethnicity thing anymore. People don't think that way too much, but the women's thing was in a growth period, particularly then. It wasn't very prominent.

Riley: What was the reaction to Geraldine Ferraro's nomination?

Spencer: We were happy. We knew that it might be a woman. There were some others that we had in mind. I can't remember who they were now. I think most of us knew that sooner or later it would be a woman. In fact, we had discussed that within the framework of the Ford campaign when he ran. It wasn't discussed in the Reagan campaign.

It was our opinion that Ferraro didn't bring him anything other than to reinforce the gender gap with us. We knew that could be a problem with any liberal male. We knew that her husband had had problems—business problems, funny friends, things like that.

Riley: You had already gone out and done research on all of the prospective candidates?

Spencer: Yes, he had tax problems. Normal problems that New York politicians have. We knew that with our help or without our help, the media would get a hold of that stuff and play around with it. They did. Some media went too far with it. Some were pretty accurate and fair about what really happened. We thought he could have done better in his choices. Why he did it, I don't know.

Riley: Was there anyone in particular from whom you really hoped he would stay away? Or thought this is the one that will give us the most trouble?

Spencer: I can't remember the list of women that we were thinking he possibly could choose. Who were the prominent women then?

Riley: I don't know. I was thinking more generally though. Had you looked at the array of possible vice-presidential candidates?

Spencer: We always do, but I don't remember what we were looking at at that point in time.

Riley: I don't either.

Spencer: Our basic philosophy was always: people vote for the President. They don't vote for Vice President. I'm sure we'll get into that in the Quayle thing. It's something that takes up about ten days of the news when it happens. During that period of time good things or bad things can happen to you. The way it's handled—we never worried too much about that.

Young: Can I go back to a little bit earlier in the campaign? Didn't the President keep you wondering what he was going to do about running again for a while? Or maybe not, but that was the appearance. There appeared to be some genuine reluctance.

Spencer: I think there was genuine reluctance between the Reagans, in their discussions about it. Mrs. Reagan was really concerned about his safety and he had real reservations about doing this thing again. He never said much. He'd say, "I'm thinking about it." I know they talked a lot about it, but they never tipped their hands.

Of course a lot of people were getting very goosey by that point. One night I went up there. I don't remember how far out it was, maybe four or five months. I didn't push anything. I just said, "The point I'm making is you have to make a decision because things have to happen. We have to do things if you're going to do it." He said, "Nancy and I are talking about it." That went on for a while. One night I was up there again and I probably got pushy again. He said, "We're going to do it."

Then we discussed how he did it. He had to tell Deaver and Baker and all those guys. He might have tipped Deaver off by then because they were very close. She was still nervous. I remember her asking, "Think we can win?" "Sure, I have no doubt we're going to win." But she was still concerned about the personal safety aspects of the presidency and she was that way until the end. It was certainly understandable.

Young: Was she nervous about his personal appearances out in the crowds?

Spencer: Yes. Every time he went on the road he was exposed.

Young: She was on the campaign plane with him?

Spencer: Not too often. She didn't travel too much, just sometimes. She traveled with us all the time in '80. Occasionally he had to pull her off and put her on a private plane. I usually took her myself to do some event. She was very good. We weren't getting a lot of labor support in '80 and I'd take her to these labor halls. Those labor union wives went ballistic.

But once he became President, she didn't travel that much with him. It was overseas state events, big events, but if we were going to go on a three-day campaign trip to the Mid-west, she might not go. She usually didn't. She stayed back and worried.

Riley: Who was the keeper of the body on those trips if she wasn't going along with him?

Spencer: Either Deaver or me.

Riley: So you were traveling with him?

Spencer: We were basically all interchangeable. Deaver and I operated this way. When we'd broken our pick for doing something for three or four days, then we'd say, "Your turn. Get my face out of here. You've got to come and do it."

This was a point in time in history. It will be interesting to see what Michael says when he comes because he is very open about his alcoholism and his recovery from it. This is a period of time when he was an alcoholic and none of us knew it. In this campaign, he'd disappear. You couldn't find him for five, six or seven hours. Mommy would say, "Where's Mike?" I'd say to myself, *he's either playing tennis*—he's always doing something. I rationalized it by saying, "I'm here now and Michael knows that I can do what he has to do with her and so he's enjoying himself and I don't blame him."

Or Baker and I would have a seven o'clock meeting and no Deaver. I never thought much about it. We just covered. We did what we had to do. It was after that that he told me one day that he was going to go into recovery and that he was an alcoholic. I said, "Boy, that explains a lot." His conduct, the disappearing, that was the trait of an alcoholic. He said, "I was sitting in my room drinking" while we were having a meeting. So he was with us. I'd be there, he'd be there. Baker developed a good relationship with them and with Nancy, but he was always the gentleman. He wouldn't hardball her, which Mike and I felt you had to do every now and then. She certainly hardballed us.

Young: The questions were generally about who was taking care of the political part on the plane. So the two palace guards worked okay this time, where it was a little problematic during the '80 campaign.

Riley: Do you have any recollection or thoughts on the convention in '84? I can't think of anything in particular.

Spencer: Where was it?

Knott: It was in Dallas.

Spencer: The one in Houston was with Bush.

Freedman: '84 was Dallas.

Spencer: Boy, I hardly remember it.

Riley: You can go on to the next question.

Spencer: I hate conventions, number one. Number two, I think Timmons ran it for us. Bill is a very good convention manager. He'd been doing them for a lot of years, all the hoopla and all

that. Every campaign I've ever run I just tuned out at conventions. The closest I got was the Ford one because I wanted to make sure the platform was such and such, but usually I just tuned out. I said, "Timmons, it's your job. You go do it."

He knew the format. He knew we'd had a lot of early meetings about speakers and what image we want to project. Deaver really likes that kind of stuff and he was involved in it very deeply. We had our media people involved in it very deeply. We didn't have a fight. I didn't have to count delegates. There was no need for my skills. I probably enjoyed the convention in the bars around Dallas.

Knott: You mentioned yesterday that you always preferred to take on a campaign where you were coming from behind. Here you had one where everything seemed to be in place. Did that cause you some anxiety? Or had you learned to adjust to it?

Spencer: No, I learned to adjust. I wouldn't say I liked it. I felt early in my career I was probably better at it, at taking the campaigns from behind and maintaining status quo. I adjusted to it. The '70 Reagan race for Governor was a status quo race, and it was similar. There was no reason in 1984 to break any new ground, to do something dramatic. He was in good shape. If anybody in our campaign didn't think we were going to win, they weren't in touch. We could have lost. Some things could have happened, but you work to keep them from happening. I had no concerns with that.

Knott: There was some criticism at the time, maybe later, from some Republicans that you didn't run on any issues. It was a good morning in America. You didn't have a mandate in a sense. You didn't have an agenda to take a head of steam into the second term. Any comments on that?

Spencer: It was valid. I think it was a valid criticism. Talking about issues to take into the second term—we talked about it the other day—there was nothing in the pipeline. He had done taxes. He had done this. He had done all these things in the first two years. The things that were created—I won't say they were phony—weren't high profile.

This relates to the incumbency question, the question of frontrunners. That's what we felt we were. We felt we just had to make people feel good and that was the whole good morning America concept. We were avoiding anything that would be controversial. We avoided confrontational politics. The philosophy being the important thing is getting there, then you can govern the way you want to govern. In the process of a campaign, of getting there, what you say about an issue may not even come up when you're governing. You may not want it to come up when you're governing. So, those are—

Young: The incumbency—

Spencer: The incumbency. From a strategic point of view, where Reagan was sitting, where his support was coming from, the status of the nation economically, the problems overseas, foreign affairs, with all those factors, he was sitting pretty good. His ratings were high. We don't break new ground in those situations. You maintain the status quo and you win. That's what that

second campaign was all about. We used his style, which was very presidential. The media used his President's style and the fact that people were feeling good about themselves and about their country. We were very simplistic. It worked. It usually works.

Young: This is a little bit of a diversion, but I'm contrasting this with the Bush re-election campaign. There seemed to be a big problem about the incumbent getting organized for a re-election campaign. There a lot of people will say this shows the incumbency disadvantage in a re-election campaign. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Spencer: Sure. An incumbent has to pay the price for his stewardship, positively or negatively. There are times between '80 and '84 . . . but things were very positive for Reagan basically. The economy was bad, but it came back when he went in. Bush went in in '88 on a good economy and it went bad at the end. He had all-time highs in the Gulf War during this period of time. They never nurtured their highs to the degree I think they should've. They're going to go down.

Bush II's highs are going to go down. They're not going to stay up there. His father was the same way. He never addressed the economy other than to say--correctly so, as Alan Greenspan [Alan Greenspan] would probably say—some gobbledygook about how it's going to come back because it's cyclical, which is true. But he never identified with the passion or the concern of the people that were hurting. He never came out and said, "Hey, we've got a problem."

I'll tell you something. A lot of people told him he had to do it. He wouldn't do it. The people who were losing their jobs, the people who were taking pay cuts—all the things that were going on in that recession during that period—were watching. They said he didn't care. In truth, I think he really cared, but he never said to the American public, "We've got a problem and we're going to do something about it." Then to go and do his economic gobbledygook about how you're going to get out of it.

Most Americans now, because of our communications over the years, understand we have a cyclical economy and that we go up and down. They basically try to plan for that in a lot of ways, but when we're on the downside, they want some passion. They want some concern. Bush didn't demonstrate that.

I notice his son has already done it. He's demonstrated it. I think he watched his father very closely and is not going to make the mistakes that he made. As to the recession we've started now, he's already said, "We're in for some tough times. We're going to do this, or that."

I wasn't in that campaign. I was called to a couple of meetings and we talked about my Bush relationship. I'm sure by the time I got through talking at some of those meetings they wanted to throw me out because I wasn't on the same page as they were. That didn't bother me.

I knew more about Clinton than they knew about Clinton. I knew what kind of a guy he was. I knew what kind of a President he'd make. They weren't taking him seriously enough. He's a silver-tongued phony. You've got to grab a hold of that guy.

Riley: How did you get to know about Clinton?

Spencer: Watching him as Governor. I went to a lot of Governors' conferences and did a lot of work for the Stephens Company in Little Rock. Jack [Jackson T.] Stephens was the seventh biggest investment house in America, the biggest one outside New York City. They had bought and paid for Clinton about a hundred times as Governor. I knew quite a bit about him.

Riley: Bought him a hundred times because he wouldn't stay stuck the previous 99?

Spencer: It was funny. In the family the young people liked him. Jack and the older ones hated him. The company was in transition between the kids and the other ones. That's how I met Jack. He was a Democrat. He was an Annapolis graduate with Jimmy Carter. They went to Annapolis together, and that's how I got Jack for Reagan.

He voted for Carter the first time. It was the southern thing, but after that he said, "Wait a minute." When you were in my business in that era, you watched all politicians across America. It was great fun to figure out all those questions. Who was going to be next? Who was going to rise to the top? Why did they rise to the top?

The year the Democrats put Clinton on as their keynote speaker—which was one of the world's worst keynote speeches I ever heard in my life—I said, "They must have some feelings about this guy down the road. They must think he has some potential. Watching that convention, God, he was terrible. He spoke for an hour and a half. It was awful.

Riley: It was '88.

Spencer: It's the difference of personalities. You were talking about the '92 campaign of Bush. It was a difference in types of people and the personalities of the people around him. Was it '92—

Young: There was a big disconnect, between '92.

Spencer: He lost Lee. I was Reagan's political guy. Lee was Bush's political guy. After he lost Lee, there was all kinds of struggling in the organization to replace him. Baker had become a statesman, not a pol. He didn't want to mess with this stuff. Things just came apart for Bush.

Spencer: They[9] didn't assess that situation. I don't think they had a good strategy for [Ross]

Perot and Perot was big in that election. No Perot, Bush wins. With Perot, Bush lost. I know Perot and Bush hated each other from another scene, another picture. I know Perot was hard-headed. I'm sure they had emissaries going. Maybe they had the wrong people. Maybe there was nothing that could have pushed out Perot, but an honest effort should have been made to push him out.

It's obvious that Clinton wouldn't have won if Perot were out of the race. He wasn't really a strong candidate at that point. He hadn't captured the imagination of the country. Again it's

[9] Start tape 10 at 040

circumstances and preparation for it. They were probably a little lazy because they had such high ratings coming out of the Gulf War.

Young: I didn't mean to get off too much on that subject, but I'm thinking about the contrast. They have the two palace guard problem there in spades in the '92 campaign in addition to the people and the circumstances being different. But let's move forward from the '84 campaign. The President's been re-elected. There's a new cast of characters in the White House and some times of trouble coming on with Iran-Contra. You touched a bit on your role in that yesterday.

Spencer: They had three chiefs of staff in the last term; Regan, Baker and Duberstein. I think we covered the Regan thing pretty well.

Young: Yes, we did.

Spencer: How he got here, how he got there, and what the positions were. After he left as Chief of Staff, the Iran-Contra thing erupted during that period of time. Under Baker's tenure they had to solve it or address it publicly. Howard went about it in a very systematic, lawyer-like way, trying to find out what really happened. I don't think he's ever told the world the whole truth of his findings. He'll probably write a book and tell them some day.

He's a very classy guy, and he understood his own strengths and weaknesses. He knew he was a Senator. He wasn't a day-to-day nuts and bolts organizer. He brought Duberstein along. Ken had to do those things while Howard did the big things. The Reagans liked Howard very much and—

Young: How was he selected? Do you know how they chose Baker?

Spencer: I think Laxalt was the key guy. They bounced names around. Paul was the one who brought up Howard's name. When you bring up a name like Howard, you run it by everybody. Everybody says fine. They're not going to be, but I'd be very surprised if anybody spoke up and said, "I don't think he's qualified." The reaction would probably be like mine, "Hey, if you can get him—I don't believe it—to come and do this job."

Paul was his godfather, so to speak. He did a great job. He was having problems at home. His wife was quite ill back in Tennessee and he was coming back and forth. When he decided to move on, Duberstein inherited it. Being young and aggressive, he was going to use it to make his mark in that town and he did. He became very prominent, did a good job, and parlayed it into a very successful business in the community there. Other than the Iran-Contra thing, there was very little going on.

Young: Reagan had five National Security Advisors. In the second term he had three chiefs of staff. That's kind of a puzzle. Is there a different story around each one? Or was there some other difficulty in the White House?

Spencer: It's not a difficulty, it's burn out. Burn out is a problem in the White House. Burn out is a problem when you have a nine to five President, which he was. He'd come by at night and he

would see people working. He'd say, "What are these people doing here? Why don't they go home?

A part of what people do in the White House, the West Wing crowd, started with Nixon. They'd work all night, past midnight. They're all dedicated, buttoned down, can go do it. Kennedy was somewhat the same way. It got to be a habit. You couldn't be the first one to go home if you worked in the West Wing because then you were a slacker. It became the culture. It just carried over into every administration. You talk to any young person or intern at OEOB [Old Executive Office Building] today: "I can't get off till nine o'clock tonight." Reagan never understood that. I don't understand it. There are times that you have to work all night. There are times when you go home at four o'clock, but you don't do that around the White House. What does it do? It creates a burn out situation. [Robert] McFarlane was burned out. Poindexter was a victim of Iran-Contra. Bill Clark was moved to another position, right? Didn't Bill move from NSC to Interior?

Knott: Richard Allen started—

Spencer: Richard Allen got caught with his hand in the safe. There's a reason for each one of them. Bud was definitely burned out. The Chief of Staff situation was stable. The only unstable period was the Regan period. If we'd gone from Baker to Baker, it would probably have been two people.

Young: Judge Clark had been his chief of staff in Sacramento. I'm wondering why he wasn't considered for that position in the White House.

Spencer: Number one, he was a judge in California. I don't think he wanted to make a change. Number two, I'm not sure he would've been ready for the big time. He didn't have enough inside experience in Washington. You never know what would've happened, but to make a judgment beforehand, I'd have been one that said, "I'm not sure Bill would be ready for this." He may have taken it and done a hell of a job, but are you going to gamble on that? He's close to the President, always has been close to the President. When he did finally come back, he wanted in on some action. This guy's only going to be here so long.

When they had a problem spot, Reagan was always confident if he put Bill in there. He was probably more qualified for the Interior thing than the NSC [National Security Council] thing. He spent a little time over at State, but he was only there because they were trying to keep track of Al Haig. They wanted to know where's this guy going, and rightly so. He was the guy sitting over there watching Al Haig.

The first group that came in and went out in cabinet and other positions are just people where it wasn't going to work out. They probably made a mistake in picking that person. But they settled in over time to pretty good cabinets. The Reagan cabinets are not going to be on a historic all-star list. Most of them are journeyman-type people who got the job done. George Shultz is one of them. He's a very nice, classy guy, but he'll probably never go down with [Dean] Rusk and Kissinger and those guys.

Young: Were you called on for any advice about the Haig fiasco?

Spencer: No. I knew Al. I knew what he was like. He had a lot of the qualities Don Regan had. That's all right because he was going to be Secretary of State and you have to have the trappings of it. He'd been exposed to the Nixon thing. He was a protégé of Henry's. I'm sure that Al didn't think that this Reagan crowd knew a darn thing about foreign affairs. They hadn't been in the group or in the loop. If you really analyze it, all the seeds of destruction were there. The odds of it working were not good. It happened that way.

Al was a candidate. He wanted to run for the presidency. He used to call me in the middle of the night from New Orleans or somewhere. He wanted me to run his campaign. I wouldn't do it. But he was persistent. He'd call me. We had a final meeting one time in Washington, with a bunch of right-wing guys. I'll never forget it because this is in '80 and I'm not with Reagan. These guys are trying to talk, the right-wing guys, [Richard] Vigary types. They're trying to talk Al into running, and Al tells them, "I'm not going to run unless Spencer runs my campaign." I'd already told him no three times.

I'm in D.C. and I get this phone call. He wants to see me at the Sheraton. I go in his room and I look around. I see all these right-wing guys. A couple of them used to work for me. They give Al this pitch and Al sets me up. He says, "If Stu will run my campaign, I'll run."

That made me mad. First I said, "I don't understand why you guys are sitting here." I wasn't involved with Reagan then. I said, "You're all a bunch of right-wingers. You'll never find a candidate closer to your philosophy than Ronald Reagan. I can't for the life of me understand why you're looking." I said, "I don't believe this. I just can't believe this."

Al's wife was with him. Finally I said, "Al, I told you once. I told you twice. I'm not going to do it." And she goes [loud sigh]. I can remember her going [loud sigh]. We went on to other discussions. He used me as a ploy to say no to them, I think, but he wasn't up front enough to tell me, "Here's what I'm going to do." He just had me be there.

The last couple of years were holding on. Reagan was working on his Gorbachev thing and what he was trying to do there. He wasn't worrying about much else. He was trying to leave a good place for George Bush to take off from.

It was a pretty smooth transition. Bush became more independent the closer you got to the day you're going to leave. People didn't really know how to ask the President, "What can you do for me?" I put a luncheon together and had all the principles there. I said to the Bush people, "Okay, tell these people, the Reagan people, what you want." They told them that. Then I said, "What are you guys going to do?" The beginning of sniping between camps had started, which was not unusual.

I said, "We can't have this." Bush wouldn't want to have this because, without Ronald Reagan, Bush wouldn't be sitting where he was, a potential President. He needed this guy. Reagan wanted him to succeed him. We had one or two of those meetings and it worked out.

Young: Who were the two camps there?

Spencer: You had to have Fuller over here and Lee and those people. Over there I had Deaver and Duberstein. No, Deaver wasn't there then. Duberstein and Oglesby were probably, maybe a couple of other people. But George Bush was an honest man. He'd sit with Reagan every day in some meeting, and yet he never reached the point. I could sense where he'd say, "Ron, you've got to help me. These are the things I want you to do for me." Ron might have said, "Check with Howard on it and we'll work something out." Ford would have said, "Yes, we'll do it." Or Nixon, but Reagan would probably say, "Tell Baker to sit down and we'll work it out."

I just never sensed that George Bush could bring himself to do that with this guy, not because he didn't like him. I just think he was always thinking, *this guy's big, this guy's good. I don't know how I can do this*. That's the sense I always had.

Reagan included him in everything. He even included him in things that he denies he was in, but he was there. Reagan's not the kind of guy who reminds you, "Wait a minute, you were there." He just lets it go. Bush learned a lot watching him. The relationship was always good.

Young: What do you think he learned? This is an interesting question.

Spencer: Number one, he learned that you've got to keep your staff situation and your cabinet situation as steady as you can keep it. There wasn't much change in his era. In fact he had a Chief of Staff problem with [John] Sununu, which he didn't address because he'd watched what had gone on in Reagan's administration. Realistically he should have addressed the Sununu problem earlier because it created a lot of problems for him down the road. His son, the son who's now President of the United States, was aware of it. He was one of the people telling Bush he should address the Sununu problem.

I think he learned—I don't know if he ever was able to adapt it very well—from Reagan what the trappings of the presidency were and how they were useable. I'm not sure he always pulled it off too well, but I'm not sure anybody would have. He realized there was something there to use. Stylistically they're totally different men.

Young: They come from different political—

Spencer: Oh, yes. George Sr. in late life was in Texas, but was really a New Englander. He was an Ivy Leaguer. He thought like that. In the campaigns he didn't like California. He never came to California. He didn't like us. Californians noticed that.

I remember arguing with Sununu or somebody who said, "He's got that big boat he runs around up there in New England all the time." I said, "I'll get him a big power boat down there at the Coronado in San Diego. He can run it all over the Pacific Ocean. He can stay at the Del Coronado. Have him spend his vacation in California. Californians would love it. He'll be identified. He didn't want to go out there. I said, "Okay." Ron was a westerner. He was happier on a horse than he was in the Oval Office.

Young: He was also a self-made man. That wasn't the Bushes.

Spencer: No, they came from totally different worlds. Not that one is better. It's better to come from Bush's world. It's easier than to come from Reagan's world. They were totally different people, totally different. Philosophically, ideologically, hardly any difference. There was no difference between Rockefeller and Reagan. The party types don't like me to say that, but Nelson was a bigger hawk than Reagan, for God's sake.

On public housing issues and some domestic issues, Nelson was pretty liberal and Reagan wasn't. That's the only difference. It was the same type of thing with Bush in fact. Bush and Reagan were closer than Nelson and Reagan. There were no philosophical differences between those two people.

Young: The biggest apparent contrast was in the communications area. You gave us a little picture the other day of Bush when he got in the room with Reagan. He was just in awe of what Reagan could do. You never know whether he didn't even try to do that because he knew he wasn't as good at it. Bush never tried to do very much in the way of public outreach.

Spencer: He even had a syntax problem when he was speaking. He'd start a speech and he'd get louder and screechier and screechier. I was helping with Quayle for Baker. In '88 I was sitting in all the seven o'clock meetings that Baker had. I didn't say too much. Baker asked me a question and he used me as a sounding board.

One morning I sat there. I'd been watching TV at night. I said, "Jimmy, the guy's starting to screech again. He's screaming. You've got to get in that plane and go out there and settle him down. Jimmy knew it, but he said, "I've broken my pick trying to tell him not to scream." I said, "Then find somebody else. Send him out there."

Bush seemed to work himself into frenzies and then he'd start. I've seen Ronald Reagan walk out on a stage when he's madder than hell about something that happened in the back. He was a pro. He goes out and does his thing, comes back and starts the argument again. George took what happened in the back room right out on the stage with him. He'd let it all hang out, go back and continue the fight back there. It had a lot to do with their training. I'm sure Reagan in his acting days had to go out and scream. When he was hung over, he didn't feel like doing something, but as a pro he knew he had to do it and do it right. It carried over to his political life.

There were only a couple of people I noticed in the '88 campaign who had influence with George. His wife and Jimmy, and Junior to a degree. He had a desk and he was in there screwing around. In and out. Bush was on a real learning curve, just watching what's going on. It's evident he did a pretty good job of watching.

Lee had some influence, and that was about it. Fuller didn't. He was Chief of Staff. When he was on the plane, I ended up yelling at him for Baker because Fuller wasn't keeping the guy under control. Maybe it couldn't have been done. I don't know the man that well, not intimately. All my relationships were star-struck for some reason. I liked the guy. I still like the guy. He's an honest man.

I don't consider him a political animal. He's a guy that loves politics. He was on the periphery of it and then deeply involved in it, but I don't think he ever really understood what it was about. There are people like that. I don't think Jimmy Carter ever understood what it was about. Bush wasn't successful when he wanted to be. He really wanted to be the second time around.

Young: Most of his experience had been as an appointed official.

Spencer: He was a safe guy. You wanted an ambassador. He was a safe appointment. It was like Ford's elevation to the vice-presidency. The only criteria Nixon used was, who can I get through the Congress? You could always get George Bush through the Congress. The biggest demonstration of his lack of political skill—because I know you're going to get to it—that's his process of selection for Vice President.

Young: Let's talk about that.

Spencer: This was criminal. This is indictable. He decided all Presidents have a stubborn quality. He's not alone. He's stubborn. Reagan could be stubborn. Ford could really be stubborn. He decides he's going to pick his Vice President. He has some very early discussions with Baker. We're talking three or four months out. Some of his key people had a lot of ideas. They got the sense where he brought that whole process in right here. Baker wasn't in the process. This person wasn't in the process. Other people weren't in the process. [Robert] Kimmitt, a lawyer, who was a Baker creation, was brought in and sworn to secrecy because he had to do all the vetting of these names.

All the names came out; the [Peter] Domenicis, all the Senators. All the names came out, and somewhere in this process Quayle had caught George's eye. He put him into the vetting process. The press was playing with all these names and rightly so. That's the way it should be. Quayle's name shouldn't even have been bounced around. This was out a ways.

Somewhere along the line he was going to go with Quayle. He didn't tell Baker that. He didn't tell Fuller. He didn't tell anybody that. I have no argument with his choice, but if you're going to pick a young, totally unknown Senator from a state like Indiana, you'd better use the political process to see how it's going to work. Five weeks out, four weeks out, he should have made sure that Quayle's name was leaked so that it could be bounced around, so that the press could go do their vetting, which they do. They vet all these people themselves. They're looking for something to nail them with.

But Bush kept the name right here. That's why it was criminal. The first vetting Quayle gets is New Orleans where there are 5,000 animals who don't know who he is and are mad because they hadn't guessed who it could be. They go out and do their vetting.

They end up with stories about marijuana use. Untrue. A guy's sitting in Stillwater prison in Oklahoma says he sold marijuana to Danny Quayle. The guy is a convicted felon. He was called the Indianapolis bomber. I'm right behind the press in this ten-day window myself. I talked to the police chief in Indianapolis. He says, "It's BS. This guy's a bum. He's a liar." Quayle's involvement with how he got into the National Guard was reported totally incorrectly. His

involvement with law school was closer to the truth. He goofed off, but a lot of people goof off in law school. There were a couple of other accusations.

If you go back over time, none of them were true. But to varying degrees, varying papers and varying medias, they were playing. They were never retracted. Within the first 72 hours, maybe double that, he was dead. He was dead. I told Baker early on, if you want me to do something with the VP stuff fine. If not, I'm going to stay home. I thought it was going to be a Domenici.

Young: You had told Baker this before.

Spencer: Way before. I was dumb. It was my own fault. "Let me see who it is and then I'll tell you what I'm going to do." I didn't know the guy. My business partner in Washington was very close to him. They played golf a lot. A little yellow editing, remember the Paula Parkinson thing? My partner was at that event. He said he and Danny played 36 holes of golf every day while these other Congressmen were running around with Paula Parkinson. The inference was that Danny was running around with them.

We go to Indiana. Great crowds, but a hostile press. We go somewhere else, a hostile press, people with fire in their eyes. We go back to Washington. I'm staying up all night saying, "What am I going to do? How am I going to do this?" First I've got guys checking him out. My own guy and I'm checking him out. I've got his staff over. I put them in the locker room. I said, "Did Danny smoke marijuana?" Poor kids. We're going through all this. I go to Baker and Bush and I say, "What do you want me to do with this guy?"

By this time they're in a state of shock. Baker is really mad because of what I just told you. He knew what should've happened. I don't get any good answers. The answers were sort of a shrug, "Do what you want to do."

I looked at them and said, "Okay, I'm going to go out and bury the son of a bitch. We've got 90 days and all they can do is harm you. He's going to every burg in America. He's not going to any high press level towns. He's going to do nothing." They didn't say no.

I proceeded to do that. After about ten to fifteen days of that Quayle figured out what I was doing. His wife figured out what I was doing and it all hit. I don't lie very much so when Dan asked me, I told him. "This is the problem, guys. You got off to a bum start, and it's not your fault. But you can't save George Bush. You can't win for George Bush. You can't do anything but be a problem for George Bush unless we do this right so that the focus is not taken off George and put on all your alleged problems.

He wasn't even ready for it. I really limited him in his press access early on because I didn't know what the hell he was going to say. Finally I gave some major paper interview. It was on the plane. Marilyn [Quayle] was there and Dan Quayle was there. I was here and the press guy was here. The press guy starts out kind of warm and fuzzy and he says, "Who are your favorite authors?" He looks at Marilyn, and he says, "Who are my favorite authors?" Oh, God.

The second question is something about music. My position is, if you really haven't thought about it in your own life, about who your favorite authors are, you can always say [Ernest] Hemingway. There are some names out there that you can use. If it's music, you can say the Grateful Dead. Say anything you want to and think about it afterwards. "I was wrong, I like this guy better."

It showed me a relationship, which turned out to be correct. To this day if Marilyn walked into a room and saw me, she'd walk out that door. She holds it pretty good. He wouldn't. I've seen him several times. When he came to California since he's been out of office, we've talked. He's a very nice guy, and not a dummy. He just wasn't ready for big time.

Bush made the mistake. He should've done a big build-up job on the guy and then he would have been ready. They would've left him alone. He could've made his honest mistakes and gone on about it. We're at Chicago at the World Affairs Council. We wrote him a speech, a non-controversial speech. He didn't like it. In all fairness he also had his battle scars. We were feeding him information about "what these people are doing to you." He just broke the knot at that meeting and went up and gave his own speech. God, did he bomb. It was terrible. The press were all over me. I just smiled my way out of that one.

I quit traveling with him because I was a bad fixture. If she got up in the morning and saw me, she was mad for the whole day. I put on Mitch Daniels, who was a good pol, a good soft soaper. He was an Indiana kid. I moved other people in and out periodically. My whole goal was to take the heat. I was never told to stop it. They went and bitched to Baker a couple of times and Baker backed them off. I know he was not happy with this whole scene. He was happy I was there to take the heat.

The biggest thing that came out of it was I put a lot of young people in there in scheduling and other places. For most of them it was a great experience. They're doing very well now, so some positives came out of the thing. I wasn't there, but I don't think they included him in the loop as Vice President the way Bush was included with Reagan. That ten-day period destroyed his political career.

He came back. I used to be asked the question when he started to run for the presidency. I said, "He ought to be running for Senator in Indiana or Governor. He's going to have to start over again and build a base back up and get rid of all these problems." He was never taken seriously by the media.

Young: There've been stories. I don't know anything about stories that when it hit the fan very quickly with Quayle, that Bush acknowledged he'd made a big mistake. I'm not so sure what that referred to, whether he meant Quayle was the mistake or his way of doing it was a mistake.

Spencer: He probably meant Quayle. He'd never admit that he made a mistake in the process. I remember the first meeting was in New Orleans, probably late that night after the selection. It was between Baker and George W. The kid was a little upset about this whole thing. "What's going on, Lee?" Lee was panic-struck. It was Baker and me and probably Darman, I don't remember. Also Kimmitt, the guy that had vetted him, because I was all over his butt. I said,

"You better have vetted this guy right." I think he did, because these accusations that came out were out of left field. They were not legitimate.

My daughter was there and she remembers it better than I do. She says she had never seen such pandemonium in her life. Major big shot pols saying, "What are we going to do?" I was among them. Nothing came out of the meeting. I had to leave that meeting and go meet Dan Quayle.

His story was he had all these strangers around him, which is true. He had a vision of how he was going to do this. His vision really didn't fit the facts of the time. With my experience and Baker's we had a vision of what should happen next. We didn't meet. I think we did pretty well considering all the internal bloodshed that was going on around the place.

Young: But Bush himself was not at this meeting with the pols?

Spencer: I never heard him. The process was second-hand. I grilled Baker at length and he wasn't much ahead of me. That told me a lot. He said, "I didn't know until he stepped off that boat." I said, "I don't believe you." We went over and over it, and he said, "That's it." I think Kimmitt was the only one that really knew.

Knott: Do you think Dan Quayle would have followed your guidance, but it was Marilyn Quayle that sort of lowered the boom?

Spencer: I think it would have been easier. But you have to remember this, he had ten experts on his Senate staff too. I had to find places for some of them, which I did. Some of them I didn't want around. They would have done everything to do me in.

She's a strong woman. She has her own ambitions. She's a lawyer. She's probably a damn good trial lawyer, I would guess. I wouldn't be surprised to see her run for something some day. They seem to have a good lasting relationship. He is not a guy who screwed around on his wife.

They've got five kids. The kids were very sullen during this period, but they didn't know what they hell they were into. They didn't like what they were into. They couldn't go to their soccer games. There were Secret Service guys hanging around. They weren't hot on this at all, but they were a nice bunch of kids, well-behaved, well-raised. It was a nice family.

What the dynamics are in families you never know. I wouldn't last an hour with her if she were my wife, but he did and they got along. He respected her, and I think he respected her judgment. It's just one of those things. The basic point is that Dan was a nice person. Most people don't recognize it. I preach it to some of them, to the media. He was a good guy. He wasn't all the things they said he was. The process that selected him was really unfair to him and he paid the price.

He paid the price. When he decided he wanted to run for the presidency, all that came back to him. The person he ought to be mad at is George Bush, not me.

Knott: When it came time to debate Lloyd Bentsen, were you—

Spencer: Ohhhhh. You know what I did? I brought [Robert] Packwood in. He played Bentsen. Bob's smart. Had a drinking problem and he paid the price for it, but he's smart. I'd known Packwood since he was a precinct organizer in Oregon. I said, "Robert, I want you to get tough in this debate."

Goddamn, he worked him over. He came prepared for bear. He was tougher than Lloyd Bentsen would ever think of being. What happened, time and time in the debate practice, pow, Packwood would hit him with another one. I wanted to make sure that he knew that he could really get taken apart if he didn't do it right. I think he did pretty well in the debate.

He[10] had this Kennedy question. He didn't introduce much legislation—I remember in my research—when he was a Senator, but he had done a joint co-sponsorship with Ted Kennedy on some damn workplace labor bill. That was his claim to fame. He always talked about his relationship with Kennedy. He had this ingrained in his head. He kind of equated himself to Kennedy in some ways, in his own mind I think.

When that came out, Bentsen jumped right on it. It was a great line. It took him back, but neither one of those guys were great debaters. Both of them were in there trying to not make mistakes. The consensus was that Bentsen won the debate because of the Kennedy thing. That may be true, but I don't think Bentsen put him away. Dan held his own pretty well. Vice presidential debates aren't meaningful in the whole picture. Look at Dole and Mondale down in Texas. Bob goes off on his . . . that didn't hurt.

Young: Why would you suppose that Bush would have chosen Quayle?

Spencer: I've thought a lot about it. The only thing I could think of would be if you were his age and looking at the demographics of America, you might say to yourself after eight years of Reagan and Bush, I want to get some young blood. I want to get a bright, young face. That's the only logical conclusion. I have no argument with that. If that's the way you're going to go you have to prepare it differently.

You could pick Pete Domenici, holding it tight forever. Pick him at the convention. No flap is going to come out of it. He's tested, proven. Everybody knows what he's all about. But when you pick someone like that, you have to prepare the media first. They're the first line of defense you've got to get through. They have their own ideas. When you don't do what they think you ought to do, then you pay a price for that. They make you pay a price for that.

Young: Don't you have to prepare the candidate himself?

Spencer: Oh sure, there's things that he would've—

Young: Was there any communication that you know about between Bush and Quayle?

[10] Start tape 11 at 18

Spencer: There was some, but there was also communication between Bush and other potentials. I don't think that Quayle got any more attention from Bush than the other potential candidates. I don't think that Quayle had any real idea himself until the closing hours that he was going to be the choice.

The reaction of Dick Lugar was hysterical. Dick Lugar is the senior Senator from the state of Dan Quayle, I think he'd have liked to have been it, but he didn't have any ambitions. Incidentally, he would've made a great Vice President. Mitch Daniels was with him. With absolute total shock, Mitch said, "You wouldn't believe it."

But Lugar was a true soldier. When he walked out of that hotel, you would've thought Dan Quayle, the junior Senator, was the greatest guy in the world. You shouldn't shock people like Lugar. From the same state—Bush should have talked to Lugar about Dan Quayle. Lugar would've been fair to him. That's just another indication of the process falling apart.

Young: I'm trying to think of another consequential decision with a big political consequence that George Bush made secretly with almost nobody else knowing about it and then presented it with no preparation. I can't think of any.

Spencer: I doubt if he did it again after that. He probably learned from that one.

Riley: Budget deal?

Spencer: Budget deal, 1990.

Young: That was played awfully close to the vest, but he wasn't playing it. The budget dealers were doing it. He certainly got people to sign off on it. He thought he'd done that before there was any announcement. They all knew where they were headed, and he did too.

Knott: Gar just pointed this out to me. You wrote an op-ed piece in May 1988 for the *Los Angeles Times.*

Spencer: I was writing op-ed pieces then. What did I say?

Knott: There's just a line in here that sounds familiar. You were talking about Bush-Dukakis. "Mike Dukakis ain't no Jack Kennedy." [laughter] We were wondering if Lloyd Bentsen got his line from you.

Spencer: I don't know. That was a tough assignment. The gal, the editorial page editor there, is a left-winger. She's still there. She never liked anything I wrote. I was writing pre-primary and I didn't want to bury myself with the poor Republicans. She had this thing. She hated Jesse Jackson. All my press friends through the years have always told me of the problems they had with editors, with their editors. If they wrote something that I thought was bad, they'd say, "My editor . . ." Sometimes it was true. Sometimes it wasn't.

After I was doing these pieces, I realized the problem they can have with editors. Finally I told her one day, "I don't like Jesse either, but I'm not going to be your hatchet man. You go find, buy, somebody else if you want to cut up Jesse, but I'm not going to do it."

[BREAK]

Spencer: I think that was the right decision. He had a cabinet—

Young: Excuse me, we're talking about President Ford?

Spencer: Ford had a cabinet where a lot of it was in place from Nixon. There were agenda problems. There were a couple of them in there that thought that they could get the Vice President nod with Ford, like Bill Simon. They had their own agenda.

Simon is a prime example. He was going around the country giving these speeches. My agents out in the field said Simon was in town. He never mentioned Ford. All these good things that were happening in the economy, he never mentioned Ford. I said, "Bah." I go trotting over to Simon's office in the Treasury Building. A man named John Gartland was his chief advance guy. He used to work for me. Simon had a low boiling point.

John says, "What are you going to talk about?" I said, "I'm going to ask the son of a bitch why he hasn't talked about Ford." John said, "Oh Jesus, I'm not coming to that meeting." He stayed outside.

I go in there. We chat. He tells me all these wonderful things he's doing. "I gave 115 speeches, blah, blah, blah." I let him go through all this and then I said, "I understand that, Mr. Secretary, but you never mentioned Gerald Ford." I thought he was going to come across the desk at me. He really flipped out. It got worse from there, but I'd made my point. He was so irate about it.

I went from there back to the West Wing and found Cheney. I went in the Oval Office. I said, "I'm going to tell you guys what I just did." I told them. They burst out laughing. Ford was great that way. He said, "Good, tell the rest of them that."

He protected your butt. If you did wrong, they'd call you in and tell you that too. He finally got around to a cabinet that he was comfortable with after some changes. He and Bill Coleman were great together. He and Earl Butz were great together. I think Simon got the message on that day.

I knew otherwise, but Simon really thought he had a shot of being the VP on the ticket. Henry was promoting Bill Simon. Of course Henry was a mainstay of everybody's foreign policy at that point in time and he was a plus for him.

Young: What about the selection of Rockefeller?

Spencer: I'm a minority there. I thought it was a great selection, but it was also a selection he knew he could get through the Congress. It was a Democratic Congress. Nelson had a lot of friends on both sides of the aisle, but he was dumped just before I got back there. They never

said a word to me about it. This was Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld had something he didn't like about Nelson. Cheney was his assistant, and of course he must have signed off on it. I don't think Cheney ever cared for Rockefeller either. After the fact, in the discussions, my position was that somewhere down the line you're going to wish you'd kept this guy. He would have been a plus, which was true. In the general election Nelson would've been.

The validity of their argument now would be . . . I don't know how I would say it. Could we have gotten through the primaries against Reagan with Nelson on the ticket? We probably could have because the target that Reagan people used was Henry, not Nelson. Henry was just as visible and just as big a target for them. In fact he was a better target in some ways than Nelson. They vilified Henry.

The Coors family put up spots in the Texas primary that made Henry look like a felon. Of course with his ego he wasn't very happy about this whole act. That's a question that could be debated. I used to go up to them every Friday night, over to EOB [Executive Office Building]. Nelson and I would sit and talk because nobody would tell him what was going on. He loved politics and he was good at it. I'd go over there and Ann Whitman, his secretary, would get out the Dubonnet. He always drank Dubonnet. He'd lock the door and everybody would go home. He and I would sit there and I'd say, "Okay, this is what's happening, Nelson." He'd say, "This is what you . . ." We'd go back and forth. We'd get in arguments, but he was a big help.

He saw things through different glasses than I was seeing every day with the people with whom I was talking. He was happy, informed, and I was gaining something from it. I felt that I owed him something myself. He was being mistreated in the West Wing.

He was always a very conspiratorial man. He was, I swear to God. Nelson Rockefeller had a better intelligence operation around the world than the NSC. He knew every President in Latin America. He knew everybody. He'd come up with some gems. I'd sit there and go, "Oh God, I can't believe this, Nelson. You're making this one up."

Despite the manner in which he was treated, he and Ford remained close. He was a true soldier, in the campaign. Anything I asked him to do, Nelson went and did it. I watched him give a speech one night in California when he was passing kidney stones. The guy was in agony. He gave the speech. We got on Air Force Two, flew back, and he passed out he was in so much pain. The doctor was punching him with morphine or something to kill the pain until he got back to New York. He was the true trooper.

Young: He was given a pretty rough time in Congress.

Spencer: Yes, but they knew he was going to get it. You have to look at the context this is in, the period of time. The Democrats had the opportunity to work somebody over early on. They had no idea that he was going to be dropped from the ticket, that he wouldn't be on the ticket. In the end they all knew. They probably said privately, "Don't worry, Nelson. You're going to happen, but we've got to work you over." With all the things he'd been involved in in his life, he was vulnerable to being worked over; business deals, political deals, foreign affairs deals. He was a very active man and he loved being a statesman.

He really thought he could change the world. He had that money syndrome, where the money was made by the grandfather or the father and he had it, and "how can I justify getting it?" They demonstrate that in many ways by going out and trying to do these great things with it in the world. The only preeminent one in that family, except for Laurence, who decided he was going to save the environment, was Nelson. David just said, "I'm going to make more money." The sisters didn't do too much.

But Nelson was a true activist. The guy really said what he thought and was willing to put his money on the line and put his reputation on the line and everything else. He created some of the best foreign policy people we've had in the last couple of decades. He found them. He bought them. He paid for them. He supported them financially while they learned. Henry is the biggest example of that. He saw something in Henry. Henry would probably still be teaching at some college somewhere if Nelson hadn't paid him pretty good money to do things.

Young: His big disappointment, through David's operation, was [Zbigniew] Brzezinski.

Spencer: Who?

Young: Brzezinski, he had money too.

Spencer: Interesting about the tentacles of those families. I'm in Angola working with the rebel leader [Jonas] Savimbi. He spent a little time in Namibia in Angola. You sit back and you say, "What in the hell are these people fighting over this place for?" I can't figure this out. You've got the Czechoslovakian army in there and ammunition. You've got Russian—you've got all the communist empires and experts telling the regular forces in Rwanda how to fight a certain way. I'm over there with Savimbi. Then you've got the South African influence in Namibia. You've got all this going on. You've got foreign powers at stake. U.S. versus Russia. You've got Standard Oil, Shell Oil, all these things out there. I'm saying, "Why are all these guys fighting over this miserable place in the world?

The biggest mineral holdings left in the world are in that ocean and on that land. David Rockefeller and his people are supporting the communist government in Rwanda against Savimbi, which is totally against our foreign policy at that time for economic return. Everywhere I'd go I'd see David's tentacles.

Knott: Trilateral commission.

Spencer: That's a phony one really. I'd say to Nelson's people, "What the hell is David doing?" He'd just go [sound effect].

Riley: I had a couple of follow-up questions, specifically about the Reagan presidency, before we get to Clinton. General observations and wrap up. One was, in the second term both of the Reagans had recognizable health problems with cancer, Nancy in particular. I'm wondering if you recall how that affected them. If it affected them at all? If it had a noticeable effect on their relationship also?

Spencer: In their relationship, if anything it pulled them closer together. Closer from being close, I mean really close. He's very philosophical about that sort of thing—"what will be will be." He isn't going to worry about it.

She became very aware of her mortality in her breast cancer situation, which she really wasn't much before. The biggest things that happened in her life that I could see were the death of her stepfather, Dr. [Loyal] Davis. She was very close to him. The cancer scare, the breast cancer, she went through. The shooting of her husband, and then the final thing was the death of her mother, which I think happened after she was out of office, wasn't it? Just shortly. She was very close to her mother, who was a really sweet old woman. Nancy was a woman, but Ron, in terms of being shot and of having colon cancer, he was always philosophical. He had something else?

Knott: Melanoma or something?

Spencer: He was always philosophical. He had that great faith and he used it. He worked with it. She had more concerns about what was happening to him than he had about what was happening to himself. That was the way that relationship was.

I was talking to her the other day. I said, "Nancy, every time I open the paper, one of our friends is dying." She's ten years older than me. She says, "First thing I look at is the obits." I said, "I know the second thing you look at because I look at it. You look at how old they were. Then you look at what they died from." She says, "You're right, you're right." She's going through such hell now. This is such a terrible thing, but she's handling it.

Then Maureen passing away didn't help her any. She and Maureen had become very close. She was the only one that was really being supportive of the kids through Ron's problem. She has her friends. She goes out to lunch with them and they gossip and they do all the things they want. They're a bunch of good old gals. Marge Everts, who used to own a Hollywood race track and Betsy Bloomingdale. They're a good bunch of gals and they keep her spirits. They're a support group, a good one. She's getting by.

To answer your question, there was nothing complicated about it. He's one way. She's the other way. They can handle it.

Riley: One more policy-related question. How our successors will look back at the presidency and the state of the Supreme Court nominations is something that has some lasting historical relevance. Were you at all called in, especially on the [Robert] Bork nomination, when things started getting inflamed? Did anybody give you a call and ask you to come in?

Spencer: No. As I tried to tell you yesterday, Reagan compartmentalizes everything. He wouldn't in the world think of asking me about it. "What the hell does Spencer know about Supreme Court appointees?" What he'd do is bring in some political hack and say, "We owe him. He'd talk to his lawyer friends in the staff around him.

The only time I was ever involved in a Supreme Court thing was with Ford. It's really funny, but it shows you what happens with Supreme Court appointments. They're probably the single most important thing that a President does, unless start a war or stop a war. I've done a lot of work for James Francis McIntyre, Cardinal McIntyre, the archbishop of the diocese in L.A. He had had some problems with priests and they were making *Time* magazine. He called me up. I wasn't a Catholic and he hired me.

I went out. This guy's name was Father [William] DuBay. I went out and watched him speak a couple of nights. I came back and said, "Your Eminence, the guy's crazy. He's going to die of his own weight." He wanted to excommunicate him. He was going to get rid of this guy because he was a tough guy. I said, "Sure, you're going to make a hero out of him, a martyr. He'll be all over *Newsweek* and *Time* magazine for about six weeks." He agreed with me and didn't do it. He kept me on because he had a great interest in politics.

McIntyre is a guy who didn't go to the priesthood until he was 27. He'd been in Wall Street before that. He was a great businessman. The way he got his cardinalship is interesting. The school district, the Catholic school district in his archdiocese, had 55 schools in it. They were all paid for. It represented quite a bit of money; high schools, elementary. That caught the eye of the Vatican and he got his cardinalship. He leaves the job as bishop. We had a lot of fights; the right to work, the abortion fights. We were in the middle of everything because he was an activist and political. He was not a theologian. He was a businessman, a hard-nosed politician, a cardinal in the [Francis] Spellman mode.

His successor, Timothy Manning [Timothy Manning], who was a cardinal, who'd been one of the auxiliary bishops was the exact opposite. He was a theologian and a very sweet man. I have this contract, an outside contract. The chancellor, [Benjamin] Hawkes, was a hard-nosed Irishman. He was the personnel director, the money guy. I went to Ben one day and I said, "You know Manning isn't using me. There's no reason for you guys to be paying me this money." He says, "Why don't you go talk to him?"

I went in to talk to him and I told him very politely, "There are things I can do. There are things I can't do, but the Cardinal, your predecessor, used me in these ways. You don't seem to have an interest." He basically said, "I don't know how to use you." I said, "Why don't we terminate it on a good basis." He said, "Okay," and we did.

Then '76 comes along and I'm sitting in Washington running the Ford campaign. I get a phone call from Cardinal Manning. He says, "The bishops are meeting over here at the Hilton Hotel. We'd like to have you come over and have lunch with us." I said, "Fine." I was working Kroll at that point in Philadelphia. I was working all these other bishops in the East for Ford.

I go over. The monsignors are sitting around the table with the damn lawyers and the bishops. We have drinks and we have lunch. I'm trying to think about why am I here. There has to be a reason. Pretty soon Cardinal Manning got up. He explained to these guys my closeness to the Catholic bishops. They all look at me. Some of them knew me, but in a different light. This is the bishops' meeting, just like the one they just had where they elected a black guy as the head of the bishops.

Finally they said, “The President has an appointment to the Supreme Court and we have an interest it.” I said, “I’m sure you have an interest in it. What are you talking about?”

They started throwing stuff around. I said, “I’ll tell you what. I’m not going to go to the President of the United States and tell him he’s got to appoint so and so to the Supreme Court. I don’t think it’ll probably do you much good, but I’ll suggest this to you. Why don’t you give me a list of people that are acceptable to you.” There was a sort of a half public list out there of whom Ford might appoint. Thank God, the lawyers took over. I walked out of there with a list of three names.

Every night when he was in town or we were in town, I would meet at six o’clock with the President and tell him what was going on. I walked in and at the end of the conversation that night I pulled this out and said, “I met with the bishops of the Catholic Church today. They have an interest in your appointment to the Supreme Court.” He smiled. “I bet they do.” I pulled out this list and said, “They gave me this list. These are people who are acceptable to them. I’m not going to lobby, I’m just going to give you the list.” He says, “Thank you.” He looks at the list, puts it in his drawer. We finish up the meeting. We leave.

Ten days later he appoints John Paul Stevens to the bench. He was on the list. To this day the Catholic bishops think I’m God. I have not disabused them of the idea that I didn’t go over there and make it happen. Ford and I never discussed it, but I’m sure the politics of it went through his mind. The irony of these appointments is this guy turned on him and everybody else.

When Reagan was Governor of California, he appointed a Chief Justice who looked like a safe bet. I was involved with that somewhat. He totally turned on him before he left in terms of rulings, in terms of what his ideology was and philosophy. I’m very cynical when I see this process. They’re lawyers. They’re judges. They’re going to do what the hell they want to do. You don’t know what you’re getting. I just don’t think any President really knows what he’s getting until he gets there and he serves. There have to be outside influences within the court that affect how they make their decisions.

I think Sandra Day [O’Connor] basically stayed the course for Reagan, and maybe a couple of other people. That’s a roll of the dice for a President. If they want to perpetuate their philosophy, they really have to do some vetting.

Riley: I think we’re at a position after the Bork situation where I think it’s very common for Presidents to want to call on people with your expertise to try to help them figure out how to deal with the public dimension of the fight over these candidates, which didn’t have really a precedent up until the Bork situation.

Spencer: Maybe, but you have to remember in the Reagan days, there were a lot of lawyers in there. Meese had a lot to do with those appointments because that’s what he liked to do. Baker was a lawyer. All these guys are all lawyers. And lawyers don’t come and ask politicians very many questions about what they ought to do with Justice or other places.

The next round of appointments is going to be very contentious at the Supreme Court. The things that you're talking about, getting input from all levels—political levels as well as legal levels and philosophical levels—any President would be wise to get, so they know what they're buying.

Knott: In some of the Reagan interviews that we've conducted we've heard a lot of references to Edmund Morris' book, *Dutch*. Have you read that book? Do you have any—

Spencer: I got one quarter through it and threw it out. So much time and effort and money was put into it, but he never caught the essence of the man. He wrote a novel. His publisher should be very unhappy with it. He was given access to anything he wanted.

In fact, I think I told Deaver the other day, I'd seen this guy around. One day I said to Deaver, "Who the hell is this guy?" The guy never interviewed me for his book, which is fine. I said, "Who is the guy?" He told me, "Writing his biography." I'm not going to worry about the biography. The hell with that stuff, that comes out after the campaign.

In reading the book it's evident to me that he hung around and that he was looking—which most of them do—for the silver bullet, the other Reagan, the things that were behind the scenes that made him move in this direction or that direction, the things that McCullough wrote about in *John Adams* between Jefferson, Franklin, and Adams, those sort of things. He's got to be a smart enough guy to have hung around as long as he did and realize that it wasn't there. What he saw the first day he met him is what he got. There's nothing else out there.

It probably frustrated him. He wasn't honest enough to go back to his publishers and ask what approach did they want to take. So he decided that he'd write a third party book, or whatever it is, and insert himself into it, which doesn't catch the essence of Reagan or the administration or his life. There'll be others written with a more objective point of view than anything that's been written now. They can base it on all the stuff they'll have here and other people. To this point the only one that's meaningful out there and that really captures him is Lou Cannon's work. Lou captures the essence of the guy. He's not a historian. He's just a reporter who likes to write books.

I know Lou quite well and I'll tell you, it's hard for him to write a book. He works hard at writing a book. He isn't one of these guys like Jimmy Naughton, who used to be with the *New York Times,* or like [Thomas M.] deFrank, who can just whip things out. The best works out there to date are Cannon's works on Reagan.

Nobody who's ever been around Reagan takes the Morris book seriously. In fact, some of them get mad. He was picked by the Reagans. It was their decision. They went through this whole list of writers. A lot of people wanted to do it, naturally. I didn't think that Reagan's own book was worth a hoot. Did you? I didn't think it was very good.

Young: You don't have quite the expectations of the President's own book that you have of others. I read Nancy Reagan's book not expecting very much, but actually I thought I learned a lot.

Spencer: I think her book was better than his.

Young: I thought she told a lot.

Spencer: Critically I don't think Morris got any acceptance either. I didn't see any reviews of it that were worth a hoot. They put out a lot of money.

Knott: He was looking for a complexity in Reagan that simply wasn't there.

Spencer: Yes, Lou was the same way, but Lou came to the logical conclusion that there isn't one. He said, "I'll work around it and say what he is like."

Young: Lou also had a real interest in politics. I don't think Edmund Morris has any interest.

Spencer: He didn't even put any politics in his book hardly.

Riley: If he didn't talk to you in the fabrication of the book, it's a remarkable omission.

Young: I wonder whom he did talk to actually. I can't think of many other people who—you're right in there and you're associated with him over a period of time that would have inspired this point of view about Reagan.

Spencer: It was like the Kitty Kelly book. She quoted everybody and never talked to them. They cheated, or made it up, or took it out of somebody else's book.

Knott: Ed Meese said he talked to him a number of times and tried to get him off this complexity tract.

Spencer: I'm sure he talked to Ed. I know he talked to Deaver. I don't know if he talked to Jimmy Baker or not. He talked to a lot of the old policy-type Reagans, but he didn't talk to any of the political-type Reagans.

Young: Talking to somebody is not the same as listening to what they're saying.

Spencer: I find authors of books interesting. I've had to deal with a lot of them through the years. Some of them really come in prepared, correctly. Some of them just come in on fishing trips, off the wall. That makes you very nervous. Correctly or incorrectly, when the person comes in prepared, they have a direction they're going. The ones that don't, they're looking for a direction and you think, *God I don't want to send them in the wrong direction or pick up some book some day and look at all this junk I might have said*. Tough job being an author.

Young: There were a couple of books, more than two, about Kennedy for example, by people who supposedly knew him well—Arthur Schlesinger, Ted Sorenson. And yet I know some of the Kennedy pols, or talked to some of the Kennedy pols. They weren't pols and they have the same complaint. They read this book, but they don't see anything like—

Spencer: Sorenson's book—

Young: Yes. They didn't pay any attention to the politics. They didn't see Kennedy, the politician, whom these people told them about.

Spencer: Which is really too bad because the Kennedy political machine is one of the better ones that was ever built in America. In my judgment, it's never been analyzed totally. The roles of a lot of people in what we would call the Bobby [Robert Kennedy] camp have never been known. I know all these guys and they did a lot of great work. The role of Joe [Kennedy] has never really been—that's a book in itself. I've seen innuendoes to it in a lot of different books, but Joe's involvement four years out . . . . They had a plan. They had a program. They had a candidate.

He started putting stuff together, which you would never get away with today but you could then, and he did it. That's got a lot of historical value in how the Kennedy operation was put together and run. It was not Camelot. It was hard-nosed Boston Irish pols.

I did a thing at Annenberg School last week. It's a journalism school at University of Southern California communications center. Ed Guttman is involved with it. He was one of Bobby's guys, and he was there that night. I said to Ed, "Maybe you don't want to answer this question, but one thing that's always in my mind: politically, why did Bobby, once he became Attorney General, decide to go after the people his father had put together to finance some of this effort? It was a lot of the hoods and Chicago guys that he'd done business with when he was a bootlegger. There's been references to it, but did Bobby not know that this transpired? Or did Bobby say to his dad, "The hell with it, this is good politics. The hell with it—I believe this—these are bad people. He went right to the heart of what thirty years before were Joe Kennedy's business associates.

There are conspiracy theories out there that cost him his life. I don't know if they're true or not, but God, that's a fascinating triangle. He wouldn't answer the question. He said, "I don't know what you're talking about." I've never seen that before in our life. It's like you have the support of the National Rifle Association or the National Environmental Council and you get into power and you gut them. I've never seen that before. But he went after them tooth and toenail.

Knott: I was going to ask you if you—this is one of those leading questions that you probably don't like—have we missed anything about Ronald Reagan or his presidency? Is there something in the last—

Spencer: I don't think you've missed anything. We've covered just about everything. The thing that you've got to remember the most about his presidency was his whole Russian detente, cold war, nuclear holocaust concept. That was the thing that he was really interested in. That was the thing that he took the most of his waking moments on. He had a strategy. He had a plan, which we went through. Everything else that happened in those years had some significance to some segments of society.

From a historical point of view, he pulled one off there and he finalized a situation that other Presidents had started. He really finalized it and really did it without the normal bureaucratic approach of treaties. We'll treaty for this, we'll do a treaty for that. He did it on a one-on-one basis with a Russian who was ready, a leader in Russia who was ready. Reagan was smart enough to have figured out that they were in trouble. "I'm going to play hardball but I'm going to back off and give them something. Every inch they give me I'm going to find something to give back to them." It wasn't a hawk-like approach. There were personal meetings that he and Gorbachev had at Lake Geneva, and others, that went a long way toward doing this. Otherwise none of the other people were in the room.

There was no second-guessing stuff. He was totally prepared for it. That's the thing I think that should be looked at, and will be, really closely by scholars and others. People will have anecdotes about it. There'll be tapes around some place. I don't know if they recorded the meeting at Lake Geneva or not, but that's the thing about Reagan. He's going to be a factor in history because of that action.

Young: You're saying also it defined his political career.

Spencer: To me it defined his political career.

Young: That's something that wouldn't naturally occur.

Spencer: That's the way he would want it defined too.

Young: Do you think that he thought the time had come for some breakthrough? Or was that just happenstance?

Spencer: The time had come. He was monitoring two things; our defense build-up, which he felt was one of the tools he had when he was dealing with Russian government, and the economy of the Russian government. With those two things, he was building and he was watching. As our defense went up, their economy was going this way, not that they were interrelated. They had so many problems in Russia within their system that people were starting to really hurt economically. When the economy goes down in a major country, it's hard to support a defense buildup. It's[11] hard to keep up with us over here when you're taking all the money away from the people, from food and clothing, to put into missiles and warfare. There had been revolutions in Russia before. They were building toward a very unstable situation.

Young: This wasn't part of the conventional wisdom.

Spencer: No, no.

Young: It was against most of the conventional wisdom.

Spencer: That's exactly right and he knew that, but—

[11] Start tape 12 at 044

Young: I'm wondering how he read about it, where he got that information about monitoring and how he read it. There were a lot of fuzzy figures around about the state of the Russian economy.

Spencer: He got his figures from the intelligence people. He had to. Whether they were off ten percent or twenty percent, he knew—

Young: The trends—

Spencer: He knew the curve. The trend was there. The concept of what he did, that was his concept. He'd thought about it. To envision what he would do, he would say, "How do we approach this problem?" He felt we had to be strong.

He really believes in a capitalistic form of government as being better for most people. The socialist government and the communist government that Russia had was going downhill in a lot of ways. It was really a true case where the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. From the lack of competition, they weren't able to take care of the mass of humanity that they had there under their system. The brutalities that were there, he could see all that. He just thought if you connect these two things, we'll have a chance.

He had that thought it would happen when he talked to Brezhnev, but he said, "It was like talking to the wall over there." He had that same experience when Andropov was there. He was a dying man with no sense of future. And the other one—

Knott: Chernenko.

Spencer: With Chernenko, it was the same way. This young bright communist comes along named Gorbachev who is sitting there in Moscow watching this and saying, "We really have a problem. How do I solve the problem?" Reagan made his usual personal entrée to this guy, which he couldn't do to the other three because they just rebuffed it. There was some warmth there and it started something.

Young: For somebody in the future who's picking up this idea about Reagan's idea and what's motivating him, what's driving him to where he is going, how far back in his life do you start before you begin to see this direction, this political purpose to his life? Do you have any idea?

Spencer: Political purpose? Or this issue?

Young: This issue, which becomes a presidential issue.

Spencer: I didn't see it until just prior to his presidency. You have to remember there was a gap between '80 and seventy-something where I wasn't around. What he was talking about then, I don't know. But the belief he had in our system and the anti-feelings he had about the Soviet system were there from day one. That's what got him started in politics. The whole communist threat to him was a major threat and motivated him. Before he made up his mind, when I first

heard from him prior to 1980, he explained to me a couple of times when I asked the old "What do you want to do?" He came up with this dialogue—

Young: He articulated—

Spencer: He articulated it, and I had never heard that before. He could have thought about it. I don't know who else he articulated it to.

Young: I was just noticing that politics was his second career, and he was a mature man by that time. I'm trying to understand how this idea about his purpose in politics coincided with his movement to a political career.

Spencer: I would say it came slowly. His first step was the anti-communist step, to stop it around the world. It wasn't in the best interests of this country. It's not a system that he believed in. Then the next step after that—he went through all the anti-communist movements and all the anti-communist rhetoric from the evil empire . . . . When that speech was given, there were a couple of us that said, "Wait a minute." I was one of them. I said, "That's pretty harsh."

I react to things intuitively and instinctively politically. When we were sitting in a speech meeting and that came out, I went to myself, *oops, wait a minute*. He said, "No, that's what they are and that's what I'm going to call them."

He also knew that he was going to get their attention with it. It was part of his process over here. I'm not just going to see it. I'm going to put ten more missiles over here to back it up. It got their attention. His instincts were always good and he seemed to have a pretty good understanding of the communist leadership's state of mind. How he got that—whether it was intuitive or whether it was through intelligence operations—I don't know. I find it interesting too. Did you ever read [Anatoly] Dobrynin's book, *The Ambassador*?[12]

Young: I haven't.

Spencer: Fascinating book. When you look at our whole cold war activities and then read Dobrynin's book, he tells you what was going on there while we were going on here. You read the book and you say, "Why were we wasting all this time worrying about these guys?" I'm sure he's playing the game here. Dobrynin almost became Americanized because he spent so much time at the embassy. He had so much time at the White House and had so many backside deals with Kissinger and everybody else that he was almost not a part of the communist structure.

To read that book and look at what we did through Kennedy and Johnson and Nixon, you really wonder. It makes you think we were sure spinning our wheels. We spent a lot of money on stuff that wasn't going to happen. I recommend it.

Young: The name of Margaret Thatcher hasn't come up. Should we have asked about that?

[12] *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents*

Spencer: Yes, you should have. It was a mutual admiration society between Margaret Thatcher and Reagan.

Young: How did it start?

Spencer: In the normal meetings between heads of state—discussions, one-on-one, in groups—they thought alike. She was tougher than he was. She was more of a hawk than he was, but they liked each other. She just admired him. Mrs. Reagan and Thatcher were close. They got close. It was just a mutual admiration society.

If he wanted something from the British government, she'd get it and vice versa. It was a personal relationship that built, which I can't think that he had with any other head of state. It was one that stayed alive after they were both out of office in terms of her visiting or conversations until he wasn't capable of doing it. He didn't have that with the German Chancellor or anybody else to my knowledge.

Young: Perhaps this was even before Reagan had had a serious meeting with Gorbachev—Gorbachev had visited Downing Street. I remember a picture of them out on the steps of Downing Street, and she was saying, "We can do business with Mr. Gorbachev." They must have discussed—

Spencer: That's right. I'm sure when he would meet with a head of state he would somehow get around to asking questions that related to his plan without telling them what his plan was, sensing and feeling them out. If he had shared it with anybody, he would have shared it with Thatcher. I don't know that he did, but I'm sure he was always looking for information that would help him in terms of working toward that goal. The information that she gave him about Gorbachev was probably a real plus in terms of his planning. If she said we can work with them, Reagan would think, *I'm going to use my personality. I'm going to deal on my own strength. I'm going to get Gorbachev alone and we're going to talk.*

The other three were the bear. They were the bear and they frustrated him.

Young: Were the people around President Reagan nervous when he went into a room to talk with another head of state?

Spencer: Apoplectic.

Young: And he knew that probably.

Spencer: Sure, he knew it.

Young: How did he deal with it?

Spencer: Smiled. Great line he used to use on Deaver and me. When we'd really start yelling at him about something, he'd take his glasses off. "You want to be President? You run for President." We'd say, "Oh, okay." That was his attitude, "I'll take so much of this BS you guys

are handing out. I'm going to go do my thing," and he'd go do it. If you're talking about foreign leadership, I wouldn't worry about it. If you're putting him in the room with the head of the Air Pilots Association, you might have second thoughts because he didn't know who they were. He didn't care.

I sat in a car with the head of the Air Pilots Association in 1990 and Ronald Reagan. We couldn't get a meeting together. I think we were going from Tampa Bay to the airport. I put this guy in a meeting. There were all kinds of air pilot problems back then. For this discussion, Reagan basically committed. I'm having a heart attack. He basically committed to this guy, "We'll take care of the problem."

You know what happened when he got in office, he really looked at the issue and he canned them. He went the other way. Yes, in those kinds of situations I used to get nervous. But I would never get nervous if it was the big picture of what his real interest was. It's the little things. When you're a politician, the little things build to big things so you worry about it. He'd joke with me all the time about it.

The open mike thing about Russia was one. Things like that he'd say, "I'm going to tell this son of a bitch the following." He knew exactly what he didn't want them to do, and he'd go, "Oooohhh." He'd laugh and shut the door, go in and do the job right.

Young: My recollection may be faulty and I haven't studied up on this, but there was the Iceland Summit—

Spencer: Reykjavik.

Young: Reykjavik. A lot of entourage from our side, and probably the Russian side too, was over there. Some of them talked to the press. Some of our people talked to the press. We began to get stories about what a foolish thing this whole idea was. I remember one of the Defense figures—it wasn't Weinberger—saying the meetings weren't worth trying to attend. He was having a good time in his hotel room dining on caviar, just playing down the meeting. The meeting didn't turn right for Reagan's agenda, but that made a public thing out of it. That's why I asked the question.

Spencer: Who was the Russian leader then?

Young: It was Gorbachev.

Spencer: Was that the first Gorbachev?

Knott: No, the first one was Lake Geneva. The second one was Reykjavik. That's when Reagan said, "Let's abolish all nuclear weapons."

Young: "Take a giant step down."

Spencer: Okay, I wasn't involved. I know what you're talking about. I remember the press that came out of it was bad. What went wrong, I don't know. I just don't know. Maybe it wasn't as bad as reported, maybe it was.

Young: Reagan did not succeed, he was—

Spencer: He might have been asking for too much. Maybe that was the point when Gorbachev decided to play hardball from their side. It certainly didn't go well, that's evident.

Young: As I remember it, it looked awfully much like some people in the U.S. government, who thought the whole meeting was a bad idea, were doing their best to sabotage it.

Spencer: That's possible too. I don't know if it's fact, but that's possible, sure. There weren't many State Department types in that era—and today too, by the way—who really liked the personal diplomacy concept that Reagan was working with the Russians. They liked the treaties. They liked the committees. They liked the whole thing. Reagan had made this a personal thing, particularly when he got to Gorbachev. His hopes were to make it a personal thing with whoever the leader was, but he couldn't find one until he got to Gorbachev. A lot of the professional foreign affairs types don't like that.

They don't like it with this President. It's just been started this week where he's saying, "What treaties? They break them anyway. We'll have a handshake." That sends waves through the Foreign Service. A lot of things I see George W. do, he has watched Reagan. He made a study of Reagan's eight years. From verbiage, from some of his speeches, to some of the ways he handles actions and the way he's trying to personalize his relationship with [Vladimir] Putin and other leaderships, with people around the world—

Young: Tony Blair.

Spencer: The question you've got to ask of his people is, did he take any time when he studied Reagan to come to this degree? When I ran Ford's campaign, I went back and read Clark Gifford's campaign plan for Harry Truman. I spent a lot of time looking at Harry Truman because I could see some similarities maybe that were useable. That stuff sent waves through the Foreign Service, because it was an entity unto its own. It'll be better with Colin [Powell] to a degree, but Colin also gets captured. I think Colin is getting captured by the State Department now. I haven't talked to him lately, but I told him, "Don't," but I'm sure he is.

Young: If there weren't a constitutional prohibition against three terms, do you think Reagan would have considered a third term?

Spencer: No, no, I don't think so.

Young: Why do you say that?

Spencer: Because he'd accomplished what his goal was, number one. Secondly, he was getting tired. At our age we know what our energy level is versus what it was a few years ago. He knew

that. He was in great shape and he had a great energy level, but he was still saying, "Oh, come on, do I have to go there? I'd rather stay home and watch Bedtime for Bonzo." Or some movie. She was definitely ready to bail. He didn't want to match Roosevelt's record or anything of that nature.

In fact, he believed that the two-term limitation was the correct thing for the country. Having been an old Roosevelt guy in his youth, and a big supporter, he saw the shortcomings of it as he got older, of a party staying in power too long.

Young: Some writers have suggested that Reagan used Roosevelt as a conscious model. Is that believable?

Spencer: It's hard for me. I've used this comparison a long time because for me it is the only one. They were the two greatest communicators of this hundred years. One vis-à-vis radio basically and speeches, which was THE medium. And then Reagan with television. It is THE medium. Other than that, I don't see any similarities.

Roosevelt was cunning, politically smart. He used people against each other. Reagan never did. Those things never crossed his mind. He wouldn't do that. He wasn't the kind that would put three people in a room because he knows they're going to be at each other's throats and he's going to get something out of it. He'd rather have three people in a room that were going to agree. As to the similarities between the two, if he was emulating Roosevelt, I think he would have picked up those traits, watched and used those traits. I never saw him use those traits other than he certainly knew the power of the fireside chat, the importance of words.

Young: He probably didn't need Roosevelt to know that, do you think? This was his—

Spencer: At his age though, Roosevelt had to have made a major impression on him with his communications. I'm younger and it made an impression upon me as a kid.

Young: Me, too.

Spencer: I remember listening. I'm sitting in a house where my old man hated him, and I'm listening. He sounds pretty good. My father thought he was the biggest bum in the world. I can remember him telling me how Hoover was going to kill him. I was a little kid.

Young: Wishful thinking.

Spencer: We lived across the street from a cemetery. They didn't have bumper stickers then. They had window pennants that they put in the window. As a little kid I'd sit out there in front and the funerals would come by. I'd count the Roosevelt stickers and I'd count the Hoover stickers. One day my dad was raking or something, and I said, "What's happening?" He told me, and at that point, I remember he said, "Hoover's going to kill him." A year later I said, "He was a little out of touch with that one."

Knott: This is your start in public opinion polling, counting the stickers.

Riley: These things skip a generation.

Knott: You've had a long career in political campaigns. What changes have you seen occur? You hear some people say now that's it's not any fun any more. It's more vicious or negative, is that—

Spencer: No, it's not more negative, it's not more vicious. I don't know where that comes from. People have lousy historical memories. What was that one for [Warren] Harding? "Ha, ha, ha, he's on the way to the White House for his pa." The inference was that he had an illegitimate child. That's pretty rough stuff. I've been in campaigns that were bloodbaths. Unruh, all those guys. I remember the Governor's race in Louisiana and there was blood all over New Orleans. I don't think campaigns are any more negative today.

The only reason campaigns are negative in the first place is because we have found out that it works. If the people really were concerned, it wouldn't work. They'd have no bitch. It works so we use it. If it didn't work, we wouldn't use it. There's nobody more pragmatic than a politician in the end.

How has it changed? It's changed tremendously because of technological advances. That's where it's really changed. [Milton] Friedman was talking about PIPs the other day. All the stuff we were doing then, I've got on the computer. Everything that took me a week and a half to do, they do in two hours because of the ability to do it, which means you can do more. You can play around more with demographics and play around with games.

The first political campaign that used television advertising was Eisenhower's and it was limited. Stevenson didn't even use it. Then it grew. When we really started in '60, it was beginning to become a factor. Before we got through that decade, it was it. It was the game.

The differences are the presidential and the public financing, that has changed it a lot. The soft money question, which has come in. In '76, the first campaign under public financing that I ran, it was terrible. We got 21 million bucks each. In the end we spent 18 million on media, the rest on overhead and organization. What did it mean? We didn't have any troops. They didn't have troops because we had no way to motivate them. We cannot put a headquarters in without it being applied against my budget. So I said, "No headquarters. They changed that to soft money.

Now they say you can give it to the party. That was the thing they learned. But now they're abusing soft money and they're going to change that probably. There's five times the amount raised in soft money as there is in the federal government giving to each campaign to run their campaign. Those are all tremendous changes.

Proliferation of political pros is out of control. There are no generals any more. They all are either money types who raise money, put out direct mail, do survey research, do the phone bank operation. Everybody's a specialist. They don't have any grasp of the totality of what the campaign is doing. In relation to this, I'm somewhat responsible for this because I went around the country in the 60s. We put campaign management seminars together under the auspices of

the Republican National Committee and the American Medical Association and others. You can name a city. We had 35 people in a room for five days and we trained them. They went back and ran for Congress and ran this and did all that.

In the process we built this perception that you had to have a pro, that you had to have a survey. That's not true. I still get calls from some guy in Oregon who wants to run for Congress who knew my cousin or something and he wants me to run his campaign. I'll say, "What's your budget?" He'll say, "It's a hundred and twenty-five." I say, "You willing to give up a fifth of it?" You'd be surprised how many would say yes.

The point is there are a lot of campaigns at the lower level, the state legislative level, where if they've got a good friend whose got a little political sense, who's a lawyer or a young guy on the way up that can run the campaign, they can piggyback on a piece of research for a couple of grand instead of paying 12 for a broad base thing that isn't going to be worth a damn a week later maybe because things happen. They think they have to have this special survey. They think they have to have a pro, but they don't need that. If they're prepared to run for Congress, they have to have, within their friendships or within their party apparatus in their counties, people who can do these things on a voluntary or low rent basis.

This premise that everybody has to have a pro. Now they have 5,000 pros out there, of which fifty of them are good. It's become a cottage industry. That's a big change. I don't think that's for the plus.

The other thing that's changed, we have pundits now. We never used to have pundits. Pundits are all the old tired pros who want to be on TV, who pontificate about something. They maybe have political smarts, but they don't know a damn thing about what's going on in the Bush administration. They're pontificating. "They ought to be doing this, they ought to be doing that."

[James] Carville has come into that category now. He's done some stuff overseas. He's a little different because he just decided he was going to be point man for Clinton and went out and became point man for Clinton. There's a lot of those kind of changes.

Fun? I think fun is if you make it. They ought to be having fun. Maybe the old guys are saying there's no fun out there any more—

Young: I think that's what—

Spencer: I think those kids are having a lot of fun out there, if I read them right. I get calls from all these young people all the time. They come through town. They want to see me. They have all these questions. I get the impression they're having fun. I get the impression the older guys that I dealt with say to me, "God, they don't have any fun any more."

There is one big difference. These young ones don't drink like we used to drink.

Young: Maybe that's it.

Spencer: They smoke a little grass, which we never did. We—with the press—closed every bar every night in every town. I'm lucky I never developed a problem with alcoholism. A lot of my compatriots did. A lot of my press compatriots did.

Today I notice these kids don't drink. I've gone out on the campaign trail a couple of times with them. You go to a bar and they have a glass of white wine. You've got to have scotch. [redacted]

The marijuana use is no greater than the average in the society in that age. So what. I'm not going to make a value judgment on it. All of us old guys couldn't believe it. How in the hell you going to run a campaign when you're high? You can be drunk, but you can't be high.

Lee: There's a difference in the effects.

Spencer: I don't know, I never tried it. The other.

Young: Do you see any change in the role of the party organization?

Spencer: Big change. Power and politics goes where the money goes. Both parties accept it. I referred to it earlier, the soft money thing that came into being later. People give to candidates. They don't give to the party. The party's role has been diminished considerably and it will be, until they change campaign-funding laws. The party's role is diminished. Television has diminished it. Professionals like me have diminished it.

That would all change if there was some change in the law where we're going to give a hundred million bucks to the party and they're going to parcel it out. Christ, then we'll all be running over to the party and they'll have great power. The apparatus has changed considerably in that aspect. Candidates—no, that isn't the right answer to it. Yes, the parties have diminished in the last twenty years.

Young: You think that has an effect on the role of the party in governing?

Spencer: Oh, sure it does, sure it does.

Young: And the President's relations with Congress people?

Spencer: To a degree, but as to the Congress, themselves, the party in their district is diminished. They're their own little entity. The Congressman is THE biggest thing in that party in that district. Some Congressmen work within the party to build the party. Others try to keep it crippled.

We're getting into an area that has really changed politics in a way. That is what I call single issues. In the days of party strength, there were issues, but whatever was done was in the greater good to win. All of a sudden now we have rifle pro and con. We have abortion pro and con. We've got trees. We've got whales. We've got porpoises. All these are very big single issues that

people put a tremendous amount of resources into and put an enormous amount of time into. That's their issue.

They make their decision on that candidate based on that issue. Not where he stands on foreign affairs, not where he stands on whatever, but where does he stand on drilling this oil. Where does this woman or candidate or whatever stand over here? How did they get there?

In my mind they got there partly by the alienation they have with the existing system of "this is my issue." I go to Congress and I can't get anything out of them. They won't act on this issue. They go for a single issue. This issue drags off a lot of resources, a lot of money, and diminishes the umbrella capacity of a party. You see? Push comes to shove on the abortion issue, I'm pro-choice, but I bet you 90 percent of the people I worked for are pro-life. I don't like the issue. I think it's a personal decision, but it's still an issue.

Both sides, the pro-choice and the pro-life, make it the issue. It doesn't really come to bear in my decision on this person when I'm voting—where does he stand on foreign affairs, where does he stand on the economy, what's the general philosophy of this person? He's pro-life. I don't give a damn. I'm not going to vote that way. But I'm a minority in a lot of cases.

The single-issue question is accentuated by this great American concept, which started in California, of the initiative process. It's the way you bypass the legislatures to get your single issue out there. Again, that sucks a lot of money out of the process. It totally ignores the party apparatus on either side so the parties become weaker and weaker.

The only solution is—and I don't think it is going to happen this way—if Congress decides that the Treasury is the funder of all the campaigns of this world. If this is going to be done to the parties, give them the money and then they've all got to go there and the party will have control. They'll have discipline. They'll have control. They'll have more input on the issues.

I don't know if that's good or bad, but it's the only way the party is going to be built back. Right now it's an ancillary thing on the side that candidate X, Y, Z uses for his own benefit at a given point in time as a fence for money or whatever he's going to do or for a statement. A national chairman didn't mean anything to what Ray Bliss was. People like that.

Young: Is it likely that the members of Congress will vote that change?

Spencer: I've had a history of not trying to predict what Congress is going to do. I haven't thought about it enough. If they see where it's an advantage to them, they'll say "Do it." If they see it's not an advantage to them, they won't do it. It will never be done for ideological reasons. Their fiefdom . . . .

This single-issue thing shows up again in the Congress too if you notice it, district by district. At this Annenberg School the other night, some smart kid—the kids are always the smartest guys when you go talk to them—stands up in the back of the room. He says, "How in the world do you Republicans think that you can keep control of Congress in 2002 when you've got a

galloping army on TV every day?" Great question. I've thought about it myself. Of course I said, "What would you do?"

I thought about it. I thought, *how much trouble do I want to get in?* I said, "You're right, and if I were in charge I'd be more selective." It got the kid going—but I believe that. They're going to cost us, image-wise, a great deal.

Bush is a guy who is perceived with more of a compassionate image, involvement, a big cooperation theory. He's trying, he working for that. [Tom] DeLay is probably one of the best whips there is up there because he knows how to count votes, but he shouldn't be on TV. He turns everybody off, scares them to death. But what are you going to do? They're not smart enough to see it. There isn't enough muscle in the leadership to back them off. They're going to cost some congressional districts in my mind.

It's the age-old question. They have skills that are not being used correctly, and probably a lot to do with [inaudible]. With the Congress, you never know what's going to happen in Congress. I see a less unified Congress and caucuses than there used to be. You don't see the Rayburns, the Lyndon Johnsons.

Lyndon Johnson was not a good President in my judgment, but he was one of the great Senate leaders in history. The guy was good. The way he backed Eisenhower in foreign affairs. He made it happen because he thought it was the right thing. He and Rayburn ran the place. That leadership capability and how they get there has changed. It basically means when you have the division we have now that is very small, no matter who is President, whether Clinton or Bush, they're a headache, they're a real headache. Cheney must spend half his time up there cracking heads, just to get support against the terrorists. That shouldn't be.

Young: Final observations?

Spencer: Me? I have none. I summed it up when I talked about Reagan and what his goals were and what he accomplished. That was my highlight of what I can contribute.

Young: That's a lot. I want to thank you very much.

Spencer: Who's the poor soul who has to transcribe this?

Young: Oh, she'll do okay. It may take her a little bit longer. If she doesn't do okay, you'll know about it.

Spencer: I'm not worried about that stuff. What I say, I say. You're going to get everybody's point of view so I don't worry about that. You're going to get points of view that don't coincide with mine, I'm sure.

Young: Well?

Spencer: You're going to have people here who are going to try and protect him too. I don't think he needs protection.

Young: No, I don't think so.

Spencer: He did well.

Young: The point is, let everybody teach what he has to teach about him. Let others decide how it fits together or doesn't fit together. What's really rare in my experience in these oral histories is people like you. You're almost in a category by yourself, of people who are, even given the compartmentalization that you spoke about, people[13] who are in a very good position to make close observations of a President. People who are not in an administration, that's increasingly rare. So many people who are knowledgeable about the campaign now move into the White House. I have the feeling in some of these interviews that when they move in and they become part of the palace guard, it sort of colors—

Spencer: I'm sure that's true.

Young: This is just extremely useful. Thank you again.

[13] Start tape 13 at 020