

*Steve Silver:* We are talking with Pat Buchanan for the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. Thank you so much again for talking to us.

*Pat Buchanan:* Delighted to be here.

*Steve Silver:* Let's start at the beginning by having you tell us how you first got to know Bryce Harlow.

*Pat Buchanan:* I think it would be 1968 and probably got to know him after the president's victory. Nixon called Bryce Harlow up to the Pierre Hotel and Bryce was the go-between between President-elect Nixon, President Johnson and President Eisenhower. I remember him telling me up there in New York that he had one president on hold and was conducting a conference call between two other presidents at the same time and he talked to them all within 15 minutes. And it shows the tremendous measure of trust and respect that Bryce had across the board with LBJ, Richard Milhous Nixon and Dwight Eisenhower that they would all rely on Bryce as the honest broker.

*Steve Silver:* What was he like to work with? What are your recollections?

*Pat Buchanan:* He was a very gracious man. He was courteous. He's the pre-World War II generation. He's a generation older than we were and he was a wonderful fellow. He took kidding very well, and he could be a friend and comrade as well as a mentor. And he was always well liked and the president would usually call him in if we had a real conflict. I remember we had a real battle over a busing speech that I had written and wanted the vice president to give, and the liberals in the White House were against it and Nixon felt that it ought to be given and he gave the speech to Bryce to rewrite, which I regretted, but I understood why he did it, because Bryce would make sure that we didn't get into any trouble.

*Steve Silver:* How was Bryce regarded by the younger staffers in the Nixon White House? Did you guys see him as a mentor?

*Pat Buchanan:* He was not a mentor. Bryce – I remember he told us, when he spoke to all the future White House staffers when Nixon called us all together when he announced his entire cabinet in one venue. And I'll never forget what Bryce said. He stood up there and he said, "Boys, in Washington, trust is the coin of the realm. When you give your word here, it's your bond. In business you may have to sign a contract. Here when you give your word you keep your word. And that's the most important thing you can learn that trust is the coin of the realm."

*Steve Silver:* Did he teach you or advise you all about speech writing? You're obviously a well-known speechwriter; so was he. What did you learn about presidential speech writing from Bryce?

*Pat Buchanan:* Well, actually I was a self-taught speechwriter. I'm an editorial writer where you write for the reader. But a speechwriter writes for the listener, and you have to learn how to do that. But we learned those sorts of things by doing. You would have what we called Rose Garden rubbish. That was the terminology with these little speeches. The president would have to go out in the Rose Garden and say a couple of words about something and they weren't big major addresses. He'd sometimes give two or three a day and we called them Rose Garden rubbish. And I would do those, but you learn to speak for the spoken word and it took me a long time. It took me a while to learn this. But I couldn't fairly say that Bryce was a teacher. You've got to learn that yourself.

In writing a presidential address, you go through it with the president back and forth, back and forth, eight or nine or ten drafts, and Nixon was tough to write for because he always basically at the end had taken your whole speech and turned it into his own words. The more major the speech, the more work Nixon would put into it. Whereas writing for Vice President Agnew was much better because you'd draft the first, second draft, and by the time you got to the third draft, which is usually the best draft, in my judgment, you just hand it to him and he'd deliver it. So your ideas would get out the way you wanted to express them. But if you wrote, for example, a Cambodia speech, which I worked on, the Cambodia invasion, the president and I went through draft after draft after draft and while I can still see my imprint, it's Nixon's speech.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think the quality of writing today, political speech writing today, is as good as it's ever been?

*Pat Buchanan:* This fellow, Gerson, is very good. And many of President Bush's first term speeches – I might not agree with the policy – were well done. They said something and they were very well expressed. There's a high quality to the speeches Gerson has done; got a lot of respect for him as a speechwriter. He's not as famous as Sorenson or Schlesinger or Buchanan or folks like that, but he may be, I think. Because I think he's very good and an outstanding speechwriter.

*Steve Silver:* What do you think made Bryce Harlow such an effective counselor for Nixon?

*Pat Buchanan:* I think it was his experience and the relationship he had with the president and the trust that was reposed in him, and the knowledge that when we were in conflict that Bryce was someone who was trusted and liked up on the Hill and he could convey the president's feelings and sentiments. I remember someone said – and he said it a derogatory way that we're going to go to war with these guys, but Bryce would go up there and say "Mr. Speaker." He had tremendous respect for folks and he was respected and those were the things that commended him to Nixon.

*Steve Silver:* I read a great quote of yours. I want to read it just to make sure I have it right. "I was comparing Harlow to a small honorable neutral nation in the midst of the Vulcans. Like Switzerland at the beginning of World War II. I just wanted to explore that for a question. Do you think that Harlow saw the job of being a presidential counselor as needing to maintain a certain degree of neutrality or was that just his own style?"

*Pat Buchanan:* Bryce realized that the Nixon White House was engaged. It was embattled from day one. And you had a hostile Congress and a hostile city and he had to be our ambassador to the Hill who had to have the respect of the Hill as well as the respect of the White House and the trust of both parties and so it was like going to the Security Council and Bryce was someone who could be trusted and respected to deal honorably and honestly with all sides. And he could represent the Hill to the president as well as the president to the Hill.

*Steve Silver:* A lot of the other people I've interviewed for the project have talked about Bryce Harlow's sense of history; about how he had a really good sense of what came before him and what he was a part of. Do you think that people who advise presidents today, as well as congressional leaders, have that same sense of history of knowing of what happened before them, or is it more myopic?

*Pat Buchanan:* I think that's exactly right. Bryce had been through the entire Eisenhower administration. He knew people who had gone before that we didn't know. We didn't know Sam Rayburn and folks like that when we came in. And so Bryce had a sense of the history of the White House, the history of the Congress, the people, how they worked and how the whole system worked, whereas a lot of us who were younger came in with a lot of energy and fire and Bryce was a cooling saucer for that.

*Steve Silver:* What kind of a role was Harlow asked to play as best of your recollection within Watergate before it eventually got to the point?

*Pat Buchanan:* I think Bryce was the one who had to drop the hammer on Agnew. And I remember after Agnew left and it was a number of years later, Agnew came back and we were over at John Damguard's house and John Mitchell was there and I was there and Vic Gold was there and others and old Bryce came in and he had emphysema and I think it was the first time that Agnew had seen Bryce since Bryce had to tell him that he had to leave. It was very moving and Bryce was moving slowly when he left. I think it was fairly close to his death.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think that press coverage of people who advise presidents has changed since Bryce Harlow's time?

*Pat Buchanan:* Well, it has changed since Nixon – the late Johnson/Nixon era when the press declared itself an adversary press and basically saw itself as the check on the president of the United States and the adversary to the White House. And when they did that they should not have been surprised that we began to see them as our adversaries when they decided that was their role, and so, since then there's been a real loss of the distance between presidents and the press and the hostility of the press has been much more transparent and open and deliberate and conscious, unlike, for example, the Eisenhower years. And politics have become far more poisoned.

And I think there's a sense now, and frankly we decided with these Agnew speeches, or I did, my feeling was that if they're going to be our adversaries what we have to do is we have to strip away from them their flag of neutrality and their pretense of objectivity. If they're going to be in the political arena and in political combat then they have to be dealt with as adversaries whom you go after, just as you go after the Democrats and liberals who are trying to frustrate or defeat or bring you down. And so, they came out of the press box down onto the field and, I think, to their eternal regret.

*Steve Silver:* That kind of leads into my next question. Do you think that the press is more apt to cover White House staffers only when they're involved in controversy?

*Pat Buchanan:* Well, the press relies on White House staffers for background, for leaks, and the good journalists – the good ones – used to come in

to me weekly, the New Republic's John Osborn and a fellow from Time Magazine, Sim Fentress and they would come in and sit down and you would fill them in. The Nixon White House had a tremendously strong White House staff. I think it's the best one I've ever seen, the first term staff, before it all collapsed over Watergate and they knew this was where the decisions were made. It wasn't out in the Cabinet and there were great conflicts inside the White House which way we should go and there were conservatives and moderates and liberals and so they would come and I had an excellent relationship with an awful lot of journalists if I didn't find that they were after me the way they were after the president. They looked upon me as the conservative in the White House, but I felt like more of a target when I was in the Reagan White House than the Nixon White House. I don't know why that is; I think it was just because they dealt with White House aides and they didn't tend to go after White House aides; they were after the president. That's a good point, though. Later on the White House became more of a lightning rod like Karl Rove's become.

*Steve Silver:* When he's involved in controversy.

*Pat Buchanan:* Sure, but I wrote the Agnew speeches and people knew that and those were attacks on the press, but I don't recall coming under fire personally for that.

*Steve Silver:* Interesting. What do you think made Bryce Harlow such a unique figure in Washington?

*Pat Buchanan:* His integrity, his ability, his personality, his character, his experience and his capacity to get along and he was a perfect diplomat in Washington. He would convey the message of his chief at the same time he would honestly listen to the opposition and carry their arguments back. He was the first diplomat in Washington.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think history will remember the great White House staffers like Bryce Harlow or is there a certain aspect about the job that commands a certain anonymity within history?

*Pat Buchanan:* I think Bryce Harlow is known and will be known to people who know and love the White House. He's really a fine public servant but he's not famous like Henry Kissinger or Pat Moynihan, or some of the more better known speechwriters, Sorenson and Schlesinger and Valenti – and he did not become a public figure in that sense. So I think there's a lot of us who are probably better known than Bryce was and for some it's because they've done

things outside the White House, but I think it used to be said that White House aides were supposed to have a passion for anonymity. That's died in a lot of cases and the press has come to realize the power and influence of White House aides and to draw them out into the public arena in the way they did not used to in the old days, and a lot of that passion for anonymity has gone.

A lot of White House people are now on television with great regularity. I don't think I appeared on television until three or four years into the Nixon administration. I might have been interviewed briefly or when they announce your appointment, but you were not a visible face of the administration in the way White House aides are today.

*Steve Silver:* You mentioned some of the poisonness of politics today and I wanted to ask you, do you think Bryce Harlow with his integrity, with his lessons of staying true to your word and always being honest and up front, do you think he's somewhat on an anachronism today?

*Pat Buchanan:* I'm afraid so and I regret to say he is. Bryce Harlow was a very nice man. He got along with Congress, he was an outstanding lobbyist, so he was respected by all these folks on the Hill. He was a very friendly, nice man. He could be tough, but he wasn't a gut fighter; wasn't a savage gut fighter and there's a lot of that that goes on now. And he wasn't a partisan. He's not like these talking heads you see on television that simply put out the party line as brutally as the propagandists used to do for the Politburo.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think that integrity on the level that Bryce Harlow had could ever be taught to people or do you think that it just has to come from who he was?

*Pat Buchanan:* It comes from the time and the place where Bryce was raised. That time's gone.

*Steve Silver:* As sort of a final thought, what do you think are some of the lessons that future White House staffers and speechwriters should learn by studying the career of Bryce Harlow?

*Pat Buchanan:* That if you want to be respected and you want to be admired, then you want to behave in the way that Bryce Harlow did toward everybody – toward his colleagues, toward our political adversaries, toward his superiors, toward his friends. He's a wonderful fellow. I remember President Nixon sent him out with me and Safire on the Agnew 1970, seven-week campaign against

the radical liberals because he said, "I can't leave Agnew out there alone. We've got to send Bryce along to keep an eye on what they're doing."

I'll tell you a story. Bryce stayed with us and we would travel on the campaign and so we went down to New Orleans. Agnew loved New Orleans. And so Bryce said, "While the boys are in for the weekend I'll go home and see my wife." So he flew to Washington. By the time he arrived at the airport in Washington Agnew and I had gone to a backgrounder at the New Orleans Times Picayune. Agnew had used a line I had stuck in a speech of his months before, but the president had told me to take it out, but Agnew remembered it in his speech and we were after Charlie Goodell, who was a liberal Republican who had defected on the war, and so Agnew told the boys at the New Orleans Times Picayune, "You'd have to say that Charlie Goodell is the Christine Jorgenson of the Republican Party." He was the guy who had the sex change operation. *[Laughter]* So the president and Haldeman see this and they call up Bryce, "What in the..." Bryce is at the airport. He turned around and got the next plane.

*Steve Silver:*

Got right back on?

*Pat Buchanan:*

Yeah, but it was great fun working with Bryce. And there's another thing we had Bryce do. Agnew loved New Orleans. We used to go down there after every weekend of campaigning. We said we need another excuse to go down there, so let's get all the southern chairmen and we'll have a meeting on Saturday morning with the southern chairmen. We'll get in there Friday, and go out Friday night and have a meeting with the southern chairmen and then have the whole weekend partying.

So we did that and so what we did was Martin Anderson and I went down to the French Quarter and we got these newspapers that were made up where you could put your own headline on it, you know. It was called "New Orleans Star" or something like that and it had news column as normal and so we made up a headline that said, "Agnew Bombs in New Orleans. GOP Leaders Say Visit is Bust." And so we had that headline put on and we got on the plane on Monday when Agnew was coming to the plane and we gave the thing to Harlow and Bryce would sit there and when Agnew came on, Harlow was reading it like he was shocked and horrified. Bryce looked at Agnew and started trying to jam the newspaper and Agnew said, "Okay, let me see it. How bad is it?" And Harlow gave it to him and he looked at this thing and he looked at it and then he busted out laughing, "You SOB's."

Bryce Harlow was always up for a joke. He was a wonderful guy to travel with. He was very nice. He was very much a gentleman of the old school. He treated the ladies with respect. He came from a different generation and a different time and a different place. And he reflected the values of that time and place the way Ronald Regan did and he was just a very nice and respected man. Even when the president would tell him to go and calm so and so down he respected Bryce.

*Steve Silver:* Pat Buchanan, thank you so much for your time.

*Pat Buchanan:* Delighted.

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