

Steve Silver: This is an interview with Vice President Cheney on October 12, 2005 for the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. Mr. Vice President, thank you so much for giving us some of your time to talk about Bryce Harlow.

Vice President: Happy to do it.

Steve Silver: Why don't we start by having you tell us your significant memories and recollections of Bryce Harlow and what he meant to politics?

Vice President: Well, I – first of all, I guess, this used to be Bryce's office.

Steve Silver: Oh, really?

Vice President: Yeah. In the Nixon administration this is where he hung out.

And I first became aware of him – I came to town in – oh, August, September of 1968, at the tail end of the Johnson administration.

I was a congressional fellow and going to spend a year on Capitol Hill, and a Ph.D. candidate from the University of Wisconsin, after I did my year here in Washington, and then I was going to go back to Wisconsin and write my dissertation and become a professor.

And Bryce was – he'd become – he obviously was a prominent figure in town because of his past history. He'd worked during the Eisenhower administration and so forth.

He came back in with the Nixon administration, 1969, when Nixon got set up.

And he was revered, I guess, would be the way to describe it.

In terms of his – his expertise, his knowledge of Congress, his personal integrity – so I really became aware of him when I first came to town.

Somebody I got to know, Bill Timmons – Bill was then working for Bill Brock and I was a very junior staffer on the Hill, and Bill Timmons was a big deal because he was Bill Brock's chief of staff.

But it was – I can remember what an honor had been extended to Timmons when he was asked to come down and join Harlow's staff as part of the congressional shop for the Nixon administration.

Then in the spring of '69, I went to work for Don Rumsfeld in the Nixon administration and we had offices upstairs on the second floor here in the corner office.

Throughout the first four years of the Nixon administration, I had an office, a cubbyhole, up there I shared with another guy. And Bryce was, as I say, was very much a fixture of the White House in those days.

He was the architect of the basic legislative strategy. He was somebody Rumsfeld had great confidence in. And the two of them worked closely together.

I can remember Rumsfeld coming back to the office talking about Bryce's theory of how you worked the Congress.

And there was a debate, as I recall, at various times, between those who advocated sort of having their hard core of support and always going back to that same base when you wanted legislation passed on the Hill.

And Bryce's approach, which was much more one of you went and built the coalition you needed for every vote but you never did anything on any one issue that would make it impossible to go back to that individual on the next issue and ask him for his vote.

He had a more pragmatic kind of approach. I think it was a good one, in that day and age especially, because we were faced with a Democratic Congress.

Bryce was my – I believe I'm correct – well, I'm probably – no, I won't tell you that story because I'm not sure I am correct, so I'll withhold.

(Laughter)

One of the things I remember best about him, he was involved in 1974, when Ford became president – a couple of years later, by 1976, I was Ford's chief of staff and Nelson Rockefeller had withdrawn from the ticket; wasn't going to run in '76.

So we had to find a new running mate, and the president called me down to the Oval Office and gave me the assignment of setting up the search process to find a running mate for him for the '76 campaign.

And he had a piece of – a couple pieces of paper, yellow legal-sized tablets that he pulled out of the drawer and showed me. And it was the process he had used in '74.

When he became president in August of '74, when Nixon resigned, the first thing he had to do was pick the vice president under the 25th Amendment.

That's when he picked Rockefeller. But what he wanted me to do was to follow the same basic procedure that he'd used then.

And he had these papers that laid out the names of all the various would-be vice presidents on the Republican side, including people like Bob Dole, Howard Baker, Don Rumsfeld, George Bush and so forth. All the usual suspects from that era.

And then on down the other side he'd listed all the qualities that he thought were important. And then he'd rated each of the candidates on each of those qualities.

And I asked him who'd done that work for him; who'd put that chart together? And he said Bryce Harlow.

Which was always, I thought, always intriguing that here was Gerald Ford, brand new president of the United States, who has been thrust into the presidency, and the guy he turned to at that moment for help and advice and counsel with one of the most important decisions he was ever going to make – who his vice president was going to be – was Bryce Harlow.

It said a lot about, well, both about Ford, as well as Bryce. That he had a kind of reputation that had been earned over years and years of service in this town, first of all.

He'd worked for George Marshall in World War II; he'd been part of the Eisenhower administration; had really created Procter & Gamble's lobby shop here.

And through that period of time he'd built the capacity and the appeal so that somebody like Jerry Ford would immediately turn not to his chief of staff or anybody else in 1974, but to Bryce.

And seek Bryce's advice and counsel, as it turns out, to make that selection.

Later on he was, I think I always remember also, he was involved in the 1980 convention as I recall, in Detroit. Part of this went back, again, to the '76 campaign.

I think Bryce believed that the right ticket in '76 would have been Ford and Reagan. And he was always disappointed that it hadn't been possible to get the two of them together after the shoot-out in Kansas City.

In 1980, by the time the convention moved to Detroit, Bryce was one of those who was a big advocate of getting Ford on the ticket with Reagan. And you may remember there was a brief flurry of activity where it looked like that might happen in Detroit.

And he always thought that was the right way to go. And that's – but that's the last time I was around him when he was working politically, just a few years before he died.

Steve Silver:

Could you talk about why – or could you talk about why he was so effective at bringing business and government together, and what he means to the lobbying profession?

Vice President:

Well, his reputation, I suppose, more than anything else. Here was a guy who represented a major American corporation.

And I served on the Procter & Gamble board in later years and after I left the Defense Department in '93 I served on the P&G board for about eight years; got off of it when I became vice president.

And Bryce obviously is still remembered, and very highly regarded by the company. But lobbyists didn't always have a positive image, if you will.

Lots of jokes about lobbyists, and what Bryce did was demonstrate that it was a profession with the right to petition government as an invaluable part of our democracy and our representative form of government, and he did it in the best possible way.

Nobody ever questioned anything he said; he always was honest and straightforward in his presentation. Integrity was what he managed to convey when he was representing whoever he was representing, whether it was Procter & Gamble, or whether it was the president of the United States.

And it was that fact that he did it so well that he was so highly regarded, both in the business community as well as on Capitol Hill, or among political figures and public officials of the day that if you were to ask those who knew him or those who were involved, if you will, in the business of government or in the business of representing customers to the government who was the best. Who was the best?

Who represented those qualities that you'd like to think are integral to that process, there would have been, I think, unanimous agreement, Bryce Harlow is the guy.

Steve Silver: With all that's been written about the partisanship and lack of civility on both sides in Washington these days, do you think Bryce Harlow's brand of politics has become somewhat of an anachronism?

Did he just belong to a different era or do we have that again?

Vice President: It's a different time.

Steve Silver: Yeah?

Vice President: I mean the city was different in those days. Back in the 50's, especially, during the Eisenhower years.

I'm reluctant to say Bryce Harlow's style of operation wouldn't work today. I don't think you could say that at all. It would be different. It would be a different environment for him to operate in.

But he had – I don't know that he ever – if he had an enemy; I never knew who it was. But it was also – it was an era where Jerry Ford's best friend in Congress, one of his best friends, was George Mayan, the Democratic chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

Ford had served on the committee with him for 25 years; was very close to him. Ford had a lot of close Democratic friends as a member of Congress.

And as I say it was – that was more normal in those days than the situation that we have now. But it was different communication systems, much longer sessions, government was bigger.

I mean it's bigger and more complex today. There was more of a national consensus, I suppose, coming out of World War II and what we'd had to do then. And it just was a different historical period.

But Bryce was a very important part of it.

Steve Silver: As a final thought, Mr. Vice President, how did Bryce Harlow influence your own political career, would you say?

Vice President: Well, I suppose the thing he did for an awful lot of us was he provided an example. We wanted to be like Bryce, not necessarily a lobbyist, or in fact I chose to go after I'd worked in government in the executive branch a while, I chose to go home to Wyoming and run for office.

But he – I think he was instrumental in terms of giving me an example of somebody who obviously revered politics; thought that politics was an honorable profession.

Being around men like Jerry Ford and Bryce Harlow had, I think – had the effect in my case that when we lost the '76 election and I was out of work, that I made the decision to pack up Lynne and the kids and drive home to Wyoming and start my own political career running for office.

But it was people like Harlow and Ford and so forth that were an integral part of that process. I'd had the privilege of working with them, seeing how they functioned, and it had to be honorable work if they were involved in it.

Steve Silver: Mr. Vice President, I just wanted to thank you again for your time and your thoughts on Bryce Harlow.

Vice President: Thank you.

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