

*Steve Silver:* This is an interview with Mr. George Koch for the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. Mr. Koch, thank you very much for talking to us about Bryce Harlow.

*George Koch:* Well it's an honor. Anybody that knew Bryce would consider it an honor to talk about him. I have a long history with Bryce in that we first met in 1962, and we started together on a project which I'll get to in a minute, but I think we want to first examine why he was such a person that all of us so admired. He served two presidents officially, and four presidents unofficially. He served two great military generals, and numerous members of Congress, and his 11 years in the White House are still today unmatched. And why do we still honor him? Because, of course, of his record. But there's many reasons.

President Reagan summed it up when he bestowed upon Bryce the President's Medal of Freedom, which is the highest civilian honor that one can receive. And it's really equivalent to an Olympic gold, and Bryce received that as one of the only, to my knowledge, only one of the Washington Reps of corporations that ever received it. And what he meant to the lobbying profession is very meaningful because no man ever bridged government in the business community like Bryce did. He was a giant of a man in the public policy arena. Since Bryce is the supreme example of integrity in public policy, he has no equal; unsurpassed and exemplified the priceless qualities of integrity. He was a mighty man, five-foot-four, but no one stood taller than he did when it came to integrity, genius, dedication, professionalism, and the ability to wordsmith with a staggering vocabulary.

Bryce was born in Oklahoma in 1916 and he, as I said, had this unshakable integrity that overshadowed all other qualities which made him a man none of us here in Washington will ever be able to forget. He went to the University of Texas where he got a Masters in government, and then he did a thesis on the House Ways and Means Committee on how it worked, and he really only intended to stay here for one year but we're here today in this interview because he stayed much, much longer.

He worked on the staff to the Armed Services Committee and the Pentagon. His high regard, and I keep using this word over and over because it was – he was Mr. Integrity – but the high regard he had for integrity caused him to move back to Oklahoma. His father had founded a publication back there and Ike, President Eisenhower, tried to recruit him and was not able to. But, at any rate, a call to duty brought him back when Carl Vinson, the most

powerful man in the Senate at the time, or on the Hill really, called him back to work for him on the Armed Service Committee, and he was one of Bryce's many mentors along with Eisenhower and others. But the interesting thing is that Bryce called Truman, President Truman, and he suggested Eisenhower run for president, and that prompted Truman to call Eisenhower, write to Eisenhower, urging him to run for office. So it was a combination of Ike's urging and Vincent, and so forth that brought him back. And this letter to President Truman – I don't know whether it's still available – but it'd be worth seeking out if you can.

*Steve Silver:* We're going to try.

*George Koch:* Ike's presidency was, of course, a great one. And I think Bryce Harlow was brought in as the liaison for President Eisenhower to the Congress, and Bryce had the House. And that was the first time a president ever had his own lobbyist in Congress.

They used to speak, I guess, dictum and expected the Congress to carry it out. And somehow we got from 1776 to the early 1950's before the president ever thought of having his own lobbyist, and that was Bryce Harlow. That gave him a singular honor, so to say, around town.

*Steve Silver:* Why, do you think, did he chose Bryce Harlow for that unique role? What was it about Bryce?

*George Koch:* Well, Bryce had worked at the Pentagon and had worked in the Armed Services Committee and Eisenhower saw in him a man of great talent. And you know, you don't get to be a General like Eisenhower and president of the United States without an amazing ability to pick people. That's the name of the game. And he saw in Harlow, in Bryce, a man who could get things done; a man of integrity; and that people listened to him. I worked with him for years and I never heard him raise his voice.

Another thing he used to do was always interesting to me. He would sit in a room with, I don't know, 10, 20 people, or 100, and the meeting would go on, and you wouldn't hear from Bryce until the very end. And then Bryce would speak, and it was kind of amazing, because everybody waited for that. They waited for, "What does Bryce Harlow think of whatever we were discussing?" And Bryce was a man of conviction and he always had the courage to say what he thought, and he did it in such a low tone that you would think that what he wasn't listening. But on the contrary,

everyone was hanging on each word of what Bryce Harlow thought had transpired.

Now he had another secret, and I guess it was no secret to us who worked closely with him, and an unusual thing. He could take shorthand – he had learned that under President Eisenhower, and he would take shorthand so he knew what everybody had said. He would look at that during the meeting and know just how, in his concluding thoughts, to tear down any ideas that were put forth that he may not have agreed with or thought were good ideas. And yet he never offended anybody, even though he, you know, said what you didn't want to hear. It wasn't offensive at all.

So anyway, Neil McElroy had been Secretary of Defense under Eisenhower, and I well remember when he asked Bryce to come to Procter & Gamble, and I think Bryce's second virtue was evidenced in, when somebody in the press was asking, well, you know, what about this? And he said, This is Procter's biggest Gamble."

*Steve Silver:* Harlowisms.

*George Koch:* Yeah, yeah. I don't think anybody ever – and I watched Procter & Gamble from the time I was a kid which was in the Depression, and knew the company, knew the people that worked there, but I never heard anybody use that that way—

*Steve Silver:* Right.

*George Koch:* And that it truly spoke of what the man was. So, anyway, he then became the Washington Rep for Procter & Gamble and that's where I really first started to work with him. I was hired by a struggling little mail-order house out of Chicago called Sears, Roebuck and Company. At that time it was the sixth biggest company in the country. Today I don't even know whether it's in the top 100, but in those days it was big and so was Procter & Gamble. And both companies had a profit sharing plan, and it was a true employee profit sharing plan. We had tire changers in Sears who had more in their profit sharing than the chairman.

It was an amazing thing. Anyway, the father of former Senator Albert Gore threw an amendment one day into a bill that was going through the Senate which would have taken away the capital gain treatment on lump sum distributions of profit sharing, and he, and Gene McCarthy of Minnesota thought they had a real, real deal here. And I, representing Sears, and Bryce representing Procter &

Gamble – we had more money in profit sharing than all the rest of the profit sharing plans in the world, so it just immediately brought us together like magnets, and we fought that issue very successfully. And after that we were a real team and always after that – and I just stood by in awe – year after year to watch this man operate and to listen to him philosophize. He was quite a philosopher in his day. The interesting thing (we're talking, this is long before you were ever born), but this is back in the early '60's and at that time it's hard to believe, cause there's about 10,000 lobbyists here now I'm told?

*Steve Silver:* Right, something like that.

*George Koch:* Yes, there were – I'm sure there were more than 13 – there were only 13 corporations who had people dedicated to lobbying. And Bryce and I were 12 and 13, I think I was 12, he was 13. He was far from being unlucky though, the fact that he was 13. It was amazing how – I was the youngest in the group; I was ten years younger than Bryce and they, all the others, were about Bryce's age. They would – when Bryce came over from the White House to Procter & Gamble, and he came into the meeting, I was at first struck by the awe of those people of Bryce because they had seen him work. I hadn't, over the years before that. But he was just the unchallenged leader of the corporate representatives in this city. I think he left – well, I know he left an indelible mark. I'll never meet a man who left such a stamp of integrity and humility as Bryce Harlow.

*Steve Silver:* So did the other corporate reps in town look at him as kind of a mentor for their profession and what all you guys were involved with?

*George Koch:* I don't want to call it a mentor as much as a leader.

*Steve Silver:* Okay.

*George Koch:* Now maybe that's the same thing. I'd have to hit the dictionary for the difference, but he was more a leader than a mentor. But everybody learned from him. But none of them would probably admit he was a mentor. But he was a leader.

*Steve Silver:* I've also heard dean of Washington lobbyists; would that be fair to say?

*George Koch:* Oh, no question about that. Yes, that's a good term, that describes him. I wish I had used that, because that's a good – that's a very

good description of him. And he was a guy that accepted a challenge and he acted. No fluff; he just went right to the heart of it and he was always a participant, by the way, but he has his own style, and I go back and I know I'm repeating myself in those meetings. He would wait until the end and then you could just see him scanning his shorthand notes and bang, that was it; everybody listened and he usually ended up with the unanimous support of the group in the direction he wanted to go and the mechanics to get there. So it was, again, "dean" is a good tag name.

And he was, in addition to being one of the greatest speech writers, every time Nixon got in trouble, he was with Procter & Gamble, they'd call him back to the White House to write the –

*Steve Silver:* To fix it, yeah.

*George Koch:* Fix it; write the speech. So that's how – such high regard that they had for him as an individual. And, as I said before, he was so strong in his convictions yet he understood and had the ability to implement compromise. He was great at the art of compromising. As I look back, he knew how to get it done and he was this man of great courage, and he'd have these great points, and yet he could still bring people around. He ended up with the same thing but they may not have thought so; they might have thought, "Well, that's the way I thought it should be;" just a genius of a man.

He was a successful corporate executive, too. He knew how to manage. He had a clean desk and he just was very, very precise and dedicated each day and each hour as to what he was going to get done in that time; just a legend in his own time. I always looked at him as an exemplary person and I think everybody else did, and they just – there was just none like him. And most of all, he was a loyal and dedicated patriot. I will live a long time and probably never have – God willing I live a long time – I will never meet a more dedicated patriot. I mean his country meant everything to Bryce, and loyal and so forth. So he embraced, as I've told you, the quality of ethical behavior which is all too rare today, helping his fellow man, also, as we went along.

*Steve Silver:* Was he a real partisan guy? I mean he was a Republican for sure--

*George Koch:* Oh, yes.

*Steve Silver:* You said he was good at compromise too, so he must have had a lot of Democratic friends, I mean to be able to--

*George Koch:* In fact I think Bryce was a Democrat before he became a Republican.

*Steve Silver:* Right; I think I read that too.

*George Koch:* I think he was a Democrat but he never looked down on Democrats, he never made them feel inferior. He never made anybody feel inferior. That was another way he got where he got. But he had as many friends on the Democratic side as he did on the Republican side despite – he was a ferocious Republican loyalist, and he managed the floor at conventions, and you know there was just no compromise on what he believed in, and he believed in the philosophy of the Republican Party.

*Steve Silver:* Out of all of the jobs that he had in Washington – he’s legendary for speech writing, corporate representation, all that stuff – as somebody who knew him, did you ever get a sense of what he liked doing the most?

*George Koch:* Oh, he loved to strategize, and he was great at it. He had a great strategic mind, and I think he loved that more than anything else. Now that’s my opinion; everybody else may have a different one.

But that was it. And he would sit and we would talk many times for hours on what was the best way to make one approach. I mean, you know, he wanted to get it right.

*Steve Silver:* Did he talk that much about the role of a corporate representative in the policy making process? In other words, he was certainly working for his company, but did he also feel that he was, and all of you guys were, an important part of how things actually get done in Washington?

*George Koch:* Well, I think that Bryce’s modus operandi as I thought, was to first find out where his company stood on an issue, and then he would bring the rest of us, if he could, around to Procter & Gamble’s thinking. Not only was he king in this town, but the policy came out of Cincinnati. It’s a terrible thing to say, but it – they were brilliant, I mean, Bryce was brilliant in how he managed that; just great.

*Steve Silver:* A lot has been written and said about Bryce Harlow having played an invisible role, behind the scenes of a lot of historical events that happened. Do you think he preferred a certain degree of anonymity?

*George Koch:* Oh, absolutely; he was a humble man.

He was really a humble man. He acted like he made nothing happen, and he made everything happen, no question about it.

*Steve Silver:* It's interesting. What do you think are the biggest contributions he made to the field of corporate representation?

*George Koch:* I think the fact that it was not just a game of entertaining Congressmen – public policymakers – and that you had to be prepared strategy-wise and factually loaded to get the job done. And I think he taught all of us as Washington reps – you better have your facts all there, and there just better be no slippage in what you're saying. It had to be the absolute truth. You could not mislead and work with Bryce Harlow.

*Steve Silver:* If Bryce Harlow were working as a corporate rep today in Washington, do you think he would think the profession is in good hands? Or do you think there are some things that he'd think that everybody could be doing a little bit better?

*George Koch:* No more than there was back then. I mean, truly, there is a man writing an article, I don't know how it's going to come out, named Victor Gold, which will be playing in the Washintonian very shortly, on how the lobbying profession has changed. And I'm going to be interested to see what he really says, or what others say to make this article a piece of work, and Victor Gold may be the guy that makes an article full of facts and how it really is. But, you know, there were dishonest people then in this business. Now, there weren't so many, and there's dishonest people today, and there's going to be dishonest people in the future. And they can pass all the laws they want, but if a person doesn't have integrity, it aint gonna happen. And so I would urge, you know, in fact, if I ever get on an actual lecture in a school, I would emphasize the integrity factor. I learned a lot from Bryce. I was at Sears Roebuck and then at GMA, Grocery Manufacturers of America, and we never had a PAC. I think a person can do this job today without a PAC. Now, I am sure that there are 5,000 to 10,000 people who would disagree with me, but so be it, you know.

*Steve Silver:* Was Bryce Harlow very conscious of the image of the corporate representative?

*George Koch:* Oh yes--

*Steve Silver:* Could you talk maybe about what he did to make sure that corporate representation had a positive image? Was he concerned about that?

*George Koch:* No, he led by example. Yeah, he never preached it, he never trusted – he was not a fancy dresser, or, you know, if you say to him you wouldn't say, hey, he's got to be a lobbyist, you know. He was a down-to-earth, home-grown Oklahoman, who came to Washington and made good and kept a low profile. You mentioned that word a few minutes ago.

*Steve Silver:* For students and people that are coming into the profession today, what do you think is the most important thing they could learn from studying Bryce Harlow?

*George Koch:* Well there are many lessons.

We all learned that his integrity paid off. But they would learn how important fact gathering is, how important the research is, how important putting your case together. You know, Bryce never went to law school, and yet I'd say he was the Clarence Darrow of lobbying in his low-keyed way. I told you, I never heard him raise a voice; he would almost talk in a monotone. But when he spoke, everybody listened, whether they were an elected official, an appointed government employee, or one of us downtown in the lobbying sector.

*Steve Silver:* George Koch, I just wanted to thank you very much for participating in the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project.

*George Koch:* Well it's been a real pleasure to think about Bryce and bring back many memories and many lessons, and we're all thankful to Bryce Harlow.

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