

Steve Silver: We are talking with Mr. Ed McCabe for the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. Mr. McCabe, thank you again so much for talking to us about Bryce Harlow.

Ed McCabe: Very pleased to be asked, and I hope I can contribute something worthwhile.

Steve Silver: I'm sure you can. Why don't we start by having you tell us how you first got to know Bryce Harlow?

Ed McCabe: I became acquainted with Bryce when I was counsel for the House Committee on Education and Labor, and Bryce was one of several legislative liaison people at the White House, and this would have been in 1953. And I didn't have much traffic with him because of the subject areas that he was assigned to cover.

My chief legislative area was labor management relations. And here we are in the year 2005 and 50 years ago, this was a hot button issue in American society. It isn't any longer in the sense that people don't get into fights in the street about it as—

Steve Silver: Did they back then?

Ed McCabe: Oh yeah. There were emotional outbursts and I would say, probably—this is sort of a digression from the immediate point here. I would say probably in the 50's, the Eisenhower years, the single biggest point of contention, single biggest difference between the two major political parties was the field of labor management relations. And it's pretty hard, I know, to project yourself back now and look at things like the war in Iraq and whatever's going on today. It's pretty hard for the newer generation, my grandchildren's generation. And one of my grandsons is going off to college this week. This is very hard for someone in that age range—even living in a family where there's conversation about public issues.

It's pretty hard for a person now to transport himself back and simply accept the fact that 50 years ago—

Steve Silver: Sure.

Ed McCabe: But to realize that you and I are sitting here talking about an era where labor management relations was really a big, big item. And it was one of the major items where Dwight Eisenhower got personally involved. He put his personal prestige on the line behind major legislative proposals to regulate the conduct of employers and their unions. I say their unions; that's not the right

terminology, but employers and the unions representing their employees.

Steve Silver: Sure.

Ed McCabe: So, anyhow, that was the setting in which I met Bryce, along with some other White House staff assistants who were more directly involved in the work I was doing on the Hill. But I got to know Bryce, got to like him and we, I think, had a mutual regard there between us.

And in due time, after a couple of years, I was hired to work on President Eisenhower's staff, left the Hill and made that move. And then I was immediately cast into a day-to-day working relationship with Bryce.

So, I was aware of him—first knew him casually, but favorably. And then when I went to work as a White House staff colleague with him, we were covering the whole range of the legislative areas.

And I'd say as an aside here, which ought to be emphasized in any conversation about Bryce, the Eisenhower staff working on legislative matters—and this is something that is statistically susceptible of speculation—there was greater experience working in the Congress and with the Congress than any other White House that I'm aware of.

Bryce had—well, rough estimate he was more than 20 years of hands-on experience working either in the Congress—mostly in the Congress itself. When I say that, I'm talking about a staff assistant in Congress. He was not an elected official. I had closer to 10 years of actual work there as a staff guy on the Hill, then working with legislative problems as a private lawyer. And there were two or three others who had even more experience in terms of years than Bryce and I. But we used to say, we had 100 years' worth of experience, and we would have hoped that there might be something close to that in terms of wisdom.

Steve Silver: On the staff, yeah.

Ed McCabe: This was an interesting look at the White House. And this sort of digresses from it and gets off to the comment about President Eisenhower rather than on Bryce Harlow. And this reaches back beyond your own time. Steve, you're a young man. And you know we're looking back those 50 years, time will take care of that for you and then you'll be able—

Steve Silver: I have no doubt.

Ed McCabe: It just happens to all of us. But, there was a feeling and occasionally you get some superficial reference in the public prints to the notion somehow that Eisenhower wasn't all that keen on working with Congress.

The best answer I've been able to find to that is that he had worked with the Congress as a military officer where he had to deal with the congressional problems as part of his assignment—this was before the battlefields of World War II—and he had a great understanding of what sort of staff support anybody would need in dealing with major responsibilities in Washington.

And one of the first things he did as president was to set up a staff structure (in addition to the cabinet) where he had various staff assistants. Some of them were full-time, many addressing full-time legislative problems.

Steve Silver: And that hadn't happened before?

Ed McCabe: Oh, it had to some degree. The reason I think it's worth mentioning is that there are still some commentators who lightly dismiss Eisenhower as a serious student of Congress or seriously involved with Congressional affairs. And I said the first answer I had to that is well, if the guy is so uninterested and so detached, how did it happen—setting up his staff to help him do his day-to-day work; how did it happen that he had a special and immediate responsibility for people in legislative affairs?

As I said, that's an aside. The matter came up not too very long ago. There was a meeting at the Metropolitan Club. The Metropolitan Club in Washington periodically holds gatherings of learned people in certain areas. They had one on Eisenhower; his work in the office.

Mrs. McCabe and I attended; it was a nice evening, a good dinner and a lot of good conversation and stimulating questions. I was not on a panel there. There were three or four others who were dealing with the questions and an exchange among the four panelists. One of them felt, well, maybe we didn't get the whole story here of how interested Eisenhower was in the workings of the Congress and his dealings with the Congress.

Somebody on the panel said, "Well, Ed McCabe's in the audience. Ed worked on that area; maybe he's got something to add." So, I got up and I gave them the answer I've touched on here a moment ago. You've got to dismiss the notion that this guy was detached

and uninterested because if he were, why then would he have established a staff structure that would work for him on a day-to-day basis, a staff structure that included as a very major part of itself, the job of dealing with Congress?

And that takes me up to the point I was making here a moment ago about the cumulative experience we had as White House staff assistants. I had a senior job on the Hill before I left there to join the White House staff. But there were others on the staff who, like Bryce, had substantially greater years on that trail at the time than I did.

That group was sometimes three or four; we were a small group working on legislative affairs. In later years, White House full-time staffs have been set up differently. There's sometimes been as many as I think a couple dozen people working out of the White House on legislative affairs of interest to the president. And we had this group of three or four, and Bryce was a leader in that group.

He was very special in a number of ways. He probably was the one man more than anybody else who was called on—whom the president looked to on a tough speech making assignment the president was doing. It might have been the State of the Union message which came up every year, or some other critical thing in the work of the White House.

It came along and the president invariably turned to Bryce when efforts to just craft the right kind of a text seemed to not quite get the job done. And there were others who had the title at times in the White House staff structure of speech writer.

But we all knew that there was only one real speech writer for President Eisenhower, and that was Bryce Harlow. And this was an arrangement that really, really never wavered. There were very few times—I was one of those times—the only speech I ever wrote for the boss. The president decided—in the heat of one of those big legislative quarrels of the 50s—he decided he was going to go public behind a certain set of amendments being proposed to the labor management laws. And he said when I—talking with the congressional leaders which he did weekly—he said when the time is right, you gear yourself to fit into the way the legislation was flowing. He said, “I’ll go public with this and make a major radio and television talk.” And he did.

When the time came, I was up to my eyeballs in the legislation and he knew that. We’d talk about that weekly in his meeting with the

Republican legislative leaders. So, we had to get a speech text and he said, "Alright, we'll have McCabe draw up a suggested text."

Steve Silver: Right.

Ed McCabe: And I went from there and I had one of the great assignments of my life working directly with him. It was a rare treat. Bryce did this more than anybody. He had a flare for writing and expressing himself. His texts for the president were—he had the great ability to capture the president he was writing for. And you know, some of the stuff—it's a little hard to get your arms around. State of the Union message, you know; you're going to be ranging a lot from relationships with the Russians at that time to the need to revise our tax structure here at home for various good reasons, or at least we always hoped they were good reasons, and they were always plausible.

But it didn't matter what the subject; it mattered that somehow or other, whoever was writing for the president, had to have the ability to put concepts and ideas in words the president would be comfortable using. And that's a neat trick to do it over a wide range of things.

And some of them are fairly simple in terms of the public mind -- the differences with the Russians in those years. Getting into the concerns about the possible uses of nuclear weapons. And then you move along and pretty soon you gotta talk about something like agriculture policy—

Steve Silver: Right.

Ed McCabe: —and taxes and so on. And in its own terms for a couple of years in the last—second administration, there were labor management relations; and particularly in the State of the Union message. Really, everybody in the government of any consequence—cabinet officers, others – all want to get their licks in and have their subject dealt with by the president. And here's this one guy, Bryce, who more than any others -- he wasn't specializing day to day in any one area. Although there were times -- when his awareness of military organization with his defense department organization -- it came front and center for a couple of years in the second administration; second half of the 1950s; where we had to deal with that, and deal with the sensitivities of relationships with the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and all that. Bryce's background on that was from the Hill; very strong and deep.

But, he could somehow or other transpose himself when he got behind the typewriter; transpose himself to a point where he could put down the commentary in words the president was comfortable in using.

We used to kid around a bit about how that occurred—maybe a couple of Midwest farm boys going back to their roots. That was a rare talent. And I see occasionally in later presidencies some people really excelled in catching the flavor of the president. There was such a woman named Peggy Noonan who wrote for Ronald Reagan. He was an elegant performer. But Bryce wrote the book, so to speak, and he's the polar star for others who have tried to follow him. He was so gifted. He could draft a speech for you; he could draft one for me. He just had an extra gear in his system, I think, which allowed him to suddenly become the speaker of the speech from which—whatever he is working on. And I never saw anybody else who could do it as well.

Steve Silver:

I wanted to ask you actually about the State of the Union since you started talking about that. That, of course, is one of the biggest speeches anybody has to make, and I guess it hasn't changed a whole lot, between now having to get all the cabinets' secretaries, you know, to have approval. Was Bryce involved in that aspect of it too?

Ed McCabe:

Oh, yes. The president was much involved, too. He had his own ideas about so-called laundry lists. You know, you can have everything in under the sun. You got your recommendations from the cabinet departments. There were about a dozen of them at the time. And there was always, depending on the particular year or the crisis of the month going on, you know, some people who were much more demanding of space in the speech than others.

And the boss would sit back and say, "No, I'm not going to do it." Look at it as a list of suggestions—cabinets, chief advisors around the government were urging on him. He just—he had an aversion to this; the so-called laundry list we spoke of a while ago.

There were others besides Bryce who were assigned that duty in the earlier Eisenhower years. But somehow or other, the job invariably came back to Bryce when it wasn't coming together quite right.

And in effect, the president had to tell whoever was working on it—we're not getting this right. Let's get Harlow over here. And, you know it never failed, because Bryce not only immersed himself in the subject matter to a point where he could converse

intelligently about it, but he could put it all in words the president was comfortable in using.

And that's the toughest trick for anybody. To be able to somehow transpose yourself in that fashion. You know, presidents—all of them, including the present occupant of the office, you know—they're big egos. They didn't get to be president of the United States by being shrinking violets in whatever their other line of work was.

So, this is a tough area to work in, speech writing. Once in a while—you know, somebody said, "Well, you must have written a lot of speeches," and I said, "Really, I wrote one that I can remember." And there again was a great look at Bryce Harlow who was known—everybody in Washington knew, knew on the Hill, they knew throughout the government. The press knew there was only one real scrivener for Eisenhower and that was Harlow.

But, when it came to that labor management speech, he spoke to the nation. It was in what 1958 or '59, and there were a few of us there, three, four of us working with congressional affairs, and we didn't have any regularity of meetings. But, if once or twice, you know, in a 10-day period when we're getting ready for the president's speech on labor management, Bryce wouldn't even intrude to the point of saying how's it coming? He didn't. He had plenty to do without ever intruding on anybody else's area. And it wasn't his nature to intrude anyhow.

Steve Silver: Yeah.

Ed McCabe: But, if it had turned out that the president and I were not getting along in putting some of the text together, I'd like to think that I would have known the thing was not jelling well. Certainly, the president would have known and made a call for Harlow. And I was pleased that he didn't have to do that, and so on. But that's a point of Bryce's value that cannot be emphasized enough.

Steve Silver: His ability to work with the president in that—

Ed McCabe: Yeah.

Steve Silver: —capacity? Can you pick out a Bryce Harlow speech if you had heard it not knowing that he had written it? Was it distinctive in any way do you think?

Ed McCabe: I don't think so. And the main reason, Steve, is that Bryce was not into clichés or "signature" phrases. Now later on, he was very influential in the world of business and—

Steve Silver: Procter & Gamble—

Ed McCabe: Yeah, his Procter & Gamble years where he would speak at meetings—big conclaves of business leaders. And there again, mostly, you know, we're going to hear from Bryce Harlow. Well, there was a certain style of Bryce. But it's hard for me to think of a time when he wrote something for someone else other than the things he wrote for the president where you'd sit back and listening, you'd say, "See, that sounds like Harlow."

Steve Silver: But maybe that was a credit to him because it's not his words.

Ed McCabe: I think it was—all of this was an area of great credit to him.

Steve Silver: Right.

Ed McCabe: But, he—we should talk more I think about the kind of person he was to work with. My goodness, he and I worked day in and day out together for five years, at least five years in the White House. And you know, it sounds a little patronizing in a way, or bragging in a way is a better way to put it, to say nothing we were working on was unimportant—

Steve Silver: You work in the White House.

Ed McCabe: You work in the White House. You're working for the president—most powerful figure in the free world. And in its own way, and this is a term I remember picking up from Bryce one time, we're talking about, you know, the things that would shape a change in Congress.

And I remember Bryce saying one time it would have been typical of almost any area where the president decided to go public and make a major speech to Congress and to the American public. And Bryce would say we've got all these things shaping up; help each one to adjust the shape of this thing the Congress is going to produce. And you know, it'll be stumbling along, a little bit here, a little there and some progress made.

And then I remember his use of the term—he said, "Then you have the most beloved man in the free world who will get up and turn his charm and influence loose on the country." And that was the way he regarded Eisenhower. It was a perfect description of the man, too, coming as it did not too many years after the downfall of Hitler, and the biggest element, certainly, in the first half of the 20th Century had to be World War II. And this is the kind of guy you were trying to work for, and we did. And there wasn't any problem working for such a man.

But again, backing up to what we've been saying all along, to be able to transpose yourself in such a way that it covered all the aspects of, and the squabbling factions of, the military in reorganizing and establishing the Department of Defense. And just to be able to somehow do that, to capture all the details in maybe the same speech and have a major paragraph or two on such things as agriculture subsidies. This is a daunting range of things, but Bryce could do it.

Obviously, we all had access to people in the cabinet departments who were up to their eyeballs in their subject area. And usually, they would err on the side of trying to get too much done, trying to get the president to get in too deeply into the nuances, as in agriculture. That's just a good example, but there are other areas where people are fighting for time and space in all State of the Union messages.

But Bryce, more than anybody else in the White House staff, had the ability to look at these other areas, other than defense which was his personal fiefdom—not the best word, but the area of responsibility. He knew the ins and outs of all of that. He knew enough about the areas in which each of us was working.

He could move in and out of that freely and easily too. He just had a rare gift of—he used the term of knowing what's presidential and what isn't. Not everything in the White House, you know, was deserving of the attention of the personal involvement of the president, but some things are. And what's very important this year may be less important next year, or more important depending on the political whims and the legislative progress.

But Bryce had a great sense of timing and awareness of—I'd like to think in terms of knowing the fitness of things that would call for the president's personal involvement. You're moving big artillery when you talk about the president, whether it's George W. Bush or Bill Clinton or anybody between Eisenhower's time and now. I find myself talking more about Eisenhower than Harlow.

Steve Silver:

Well, it's a big part of Bryce Harlow. Could you talk about the relationship that they had—Harlow and Eisenhower? What did he mean to Ike? What did Ike mean to him?

Ed McCabe:

Well, it was a relationship that had already matured and grown when I joined the White House staff. And very quickly I came to realize that going back to wherever it began between the two of them, there was an established ease they had in working together.

Any comment on the relationship of staff people with the president ought to be prefaced by a couple of comments here. We were all a lot younger then, not of an age when we had really done anything worthwhile in life. And some people never quite got that message about themselves. They took themselves at times more seriously than they took the work they were doing. And that over simplifies it.

But your question is an excellent one about the relationship between Bryce and the president. It was an easy relationship, but because of a whole bunch of factors, not just the age difference. Eisenhower came into that office on the heels of managing the biggest war in the country's history, and presiding over the downfall of Hitler and all that meant to the world.

I think that—and it came very easily for Eisenhower to not try to be a buddy to his staff. And I think there have been some major faults in the efficiencies of the White House in the years since, where either the president or some of the staff people sort of forgot their roles. And there was never any doubt, much as Dwight Eisenhower respected and admired and knew how to use the talents of Bryce Harlow, there was never any doubt about the role of each.

The relationship worked out between two very different people—different in so many ways. One difference would be their ages. We were, most of us in those years, getting on to be about 40ish and, you know, knew all the answers to everything. Most of us have proven over time not to have been all that accurate.

But, he had—he, the president—he needed to have some kind of outlet for himself other than people who worked for him. He had varying degrees of enthusiasm for some people who worked for him like Bryce; Jim Hagerty, his press officer; General Goodpaster, who unfortunately died some weeks ago. He probably never did your oral history.

Steve Silver:

We didn't get a chance, no.

Ed McCabe:

But, he's done so much of this that I hope you'll be able to find a lot of his commentary elsewhere. But, there was a friendliness born of quality work that was obvious in Eisenhower's reaction to Bryce.

And also there were occasions where we would meet after he left office. He was up at Gettysburg and there were two or three of us left in Washington. Bryce being the most notable, we were called on occasionally to do a chore for the president.

And moving from the government affairs of the 50's, to the changes and environment of the 60's where the president was still—the former president was still called on quite often as a leader of the Republican Party to speak out on issues or not to speak out on issues.

Whenever the president needed to do anything in a public way to make a talk at some gathering, it would invariably be a Republican gathering where he was leader of the Party. And you know, there never was any doubt about who was going to write that stuff for the boss. It would be Bryce, because it was just a given. We knew that's the way the president worked.

And it backs me up again to your question which I find getting away from me momentarily here—the relationship between the president and Bryce. They had worked on speeches often enough so that—Bryce himself used to point to things like this. He said he would have a text that would scold somebody or just really work over a situation.

And he said a couple times—and one comes to mind—he said in editing a text, the president scratched off something, maybe out most of a whole page, and he said, “Bryce, you've got to be very careful that you don't find yourself questioning somebody's motives. You don't do that.”

Bryce had said a number of times in different settings to me and I'm sure to others that he learned from the president that there are some things you don't do. Again, as a speech writer, you don't—the president would tell him, “Bryce, you're getting into this guy's motives now. I don't want to do that.”

Steve Silver:

Right.

Ed McCabe:

And so, there wasn't a father-son relationship, was it teacher-student; teacher-pupil? Not that so much. It was just that these guys were working at their separate levels on the same government activity.

And the president had some—he had some tough rules of his own on himself. He was very gifted in the use of the English language, which again was something that fell out when current commentary was made. You don't hear people talking now about Eisenhower as much as they used to. And that's fitting enough because you know as time goes on, it just passes everybody by, including the Eisenhowers of this world. But I don't know; I guess you read about *First among Equals* or maybe the Pope. They're all

Cardinals but I think the president learned from being through these speech drills repeatedly that Bryce was much more than a wordsmith. He was someone I think whom the president understood to be a solid, good thinker who could transpose himself to being a wordsmith for somebody else very quickly.

And he wouldn't do it for just anybody else. I don't know anybody else for whom he wrote speeches. Now, I'm sure there were cabinet officers who had key presentations to make, particularly in the defense area where they quietly check things out from Bryce. How do I look when I'm Secretary of Defense? How do I look saying this and, you know, how many problems do I dig up if I get into that area, and so on?

And Bryce had great, great, good judgment on things like that. And of course, he came to the White House from many years of service with the House Armed Services Committee and that's where the power was in Congress on matters related to defense; it was not in the Senate.

Senators tend to get more public attention in the press than is warranted. And I think the notion of the Senate being the so-called upper house, that's a figment of somebody's imagination. You get some old pros in the House itself—House of Representatives, you know—they wouldn't use that language.

And one of the great ones was a man for whom Bryce worked at the House Armed Services Committee, Congressman Vinson of Georgia—Carl Vinson, referred to generally as, “Uncle Carl.”

And of course, some of the wonderful stories Bryce would tell, I'm sure you've got those on various tapes of some of his relationships with Lyndon Johnson.

Steve Silver: Yeah.

Ed McCabe: Remarkable.

Steve Silver: We do.

Ed McCabe: A most unattractive person, Lyndon Johnson.

Steve Silver: Although they respected each other from what I could gather – you know, certainly mutual respect.

Ed McCabe: Yeah, Bryce and LBJ—

Yeah. Well, you knew there was a certain “bull in the china shop” quality about LBJ, but he was the boss of the Senate. And that would be my characterization of—didn’t matter what was going on. LBJ had his own agenda part. But, he recognized when he was—whatever else LBJ might be said to be, he was not dumb. Not by any means. And he knew with Eisenhower that it was very important to get it right, whatever it was they were working on. And he looked to Bryce, LBJ—

Steve Silver: LBJ did?

Ed McCabe: Yeah.

Steve Silver: Was Bryce more oriented towards the House?

Ed McCabe: No, and I don’t think there’s much pay dirt in that notion. Bryce had a feel for the Hill, and where the power centers were. But, you know, I use the term power centers and that’s really what these guys are. And they’ll change over time. And we tried a lot of times in the White House to work out a division of duties so that different ones of us worked with different committees.

But between the House and the Senate, that was not really a way to guide your decision making. You know, in a certain issue, whatever it was, you’d have somebody, an obscure member of the Senate committee, who knew more about the subject than anybody in the world. And every once in a while, after long years in the Senate, he’d get a chance to show that off.

There was a senator from Nevada named Malone who—again I used the term a while ago of LBJ as an unappealing personality. It’s just interesting because these guys get where they are by appealing to more and more people all the time. And there was Senator Malone who was—he was kind of rough cut and crude. But, he knew more about silver than anybody had any right to know. It was said that the trails around Capitol Hill are littered with the dry bones of people who tried to take on Malone on silver in one way or another.

But where the effectiveness of Bryce Harlow could be measured as well as any other area was not whether it was the House or the Senate, or going back to his own days in the House as a staff guy there, it was just an uncanny ability to know in the beginning of a legislative project where the key decisions are likely to be made. And that might be a relatively obscure House chairman or Senate chairman, but it would vary. The real genius should be involved in

making legislative decisions in the White House was the ability that Bryce had.

And, you know, the rest of us developed a degree of that ability just by working around him and by seeing that the system functioned and things worked well and you just had to know. How you got smart enough to know is the story of Bryce Harlow's life. But he did know and he paid attention to his work. He lived and breathed, talked the Hill—the machinery of the Hill—how it worked; it was second nature to him.

[End of Interview_one]

[Beginning of Interview_two]

Steve Silver: You get a sense from Bryce how much he enjoyed and respected the institution of government and the Hill and how everything worked?

Ed McCabe: The best thing I could say about Bryce is he understood the system, the Congress and the executive. And, you know, we read a lot about, or think a lot about these days, the confirmation hearings of a new Chief Justice. But we didn't have any of those kinds of emotional thrillers. We had our own share of problems; just different from those the White House faces now.

But, Bryce had almost reverence, a word that's not too big a word to use, for the system and how it functioned, the executive and the legislative. And this influenced everything he did. He also had a great sense of humor.

There were some great humorous characters of that era in both houses. One was a senator who comes to mind—Everett Dirksen. He was an absolutely rare, rare bird. But where there was one Dirksen in the Senate, there might be 8 or 10 reasonable facsimiles of Dirksen in the House.

And in those days—I think it has changed a lot but I don't know. I've been away from it too long to make a judgment on how it is now. But it seems to me that there were more characters, sort of down-home type, and all-American characters in the House; proportionally the total number than there were in the Senate. Some of these guys, some of the funniest people you ever could run into.

And one of the great ones—one of the most entertaining people ever to grace the halls of Congress was one of Bryce's bosses

when Bryce worked for the House Armed Services Committee. I'm thinking of a Republican from Missouri named Dewey Short.

And Dewey Short warrants a few extra lines in any history of Bryce Harlow. Dewey Short was—well, if he wasn't an alcoholic, he was a reasonable facsimile. He consumed an awful lot of booze. He was also a Shakespearean scholar. And I think he was a clergyman. But, he quoted the Bible as well as Billy Graham could or anybody else. He just had a flare about him. And he captured an awful lot of the Ozarks (Missouri) area where he came from.

And this sort of permeated everything he did. And Bryce had been his—Bryce said he was Dewey Short's caddie a lot of the time when Short was chairman when the Republicans were in control of the House and he was a senior minority man when they were not.

In the meantime, Bryce was the staff officer of that armed services group. And Bryce, he was very much taken by the country boy approach of a lot of these fellows. And you know, some of them were so entertaining and just funny for the sake of being funny. But this was just the way they were.

And I remember, referring again to Dewey Short, he was finally beaten in a Republican primary, and I guess it was just that time passed him by. But he was able somehow to get the total support of an outfit called the WCTU, Women's Christian Temperance Union. And they were just hell-bent for election every day of the week, anti-booze.

Dewey Short was, as I said earlier, if not an alcoholic, he gave a reasonable imitation of one all the time. He consumed great quantities of John Barleycorn. But he kept the faithful following of these ladies of the Temperance Union because he was a dead end opponent year after year and managed to win in Congress against efforts to institute universal military training.

Now, that's the sort of strange pairing of interest where the ladies forgot their antipathy to the booze at the time and the support of Dewey Short and his election efforts one cycle after another. Because, you know, he was good. But Dewey Short was so entertaining, and this is part of the House and the Senate had some old characters like Senator Ervin of North Carolina who were of the same cloth as these fellows were in the House.

But the Dewey Short example is a good one for additional reasons. A couple of elections into the Eisenhower second term—couple of

congressional cycles, and we woke up one morning and realized that Dewey Short had been beaten. Well, this was a little hard to get hold of and get your arms around that kind of news.

But, it also got the question front and center of what use can the Republican Party and the Republican president now make of Dewey Short. And Bryce came up with one of his most ingenious ideas—and the president bought it. The president, like everybody, else knew of Dewey Short's affinity for booze.

And the question—Dewey wanted to work, he would like to continue being a figure of some sort in Washington and this made sense because he had huge reservoir of good will and ability in the national defense area. Bryce came up with the idea—and there again it backs us up to the relationship between Bryce and the president. Bryce came up with the idea –we've got to do something for Dewey Short. Well, everybody says fine; let's go. Whatever we have to do, we'll do something to involve Dewey Short.

Dewey Short, to bobtail the story, ended up as an assistant secretary of the Army. And this was a presidential appointment calling for Senate confirmation. And it confronted the president with the idea, put this guy with his well deserved reputation as a drunk into a senior management job?

And Bryce got together with Dewey, and I say this as though I was in the meetings. I wasn't, because I was sort of around following the thing with Bryce. He said, "Well Dewey, there's a job over there at the Pentagon that really needs somebody like you. You can get out and make talks, go to speak to influential groups and nobody'll do that better than you." He said, "We gotta have a pledge from you that—" and they did a little negotiating on this. One was to stop drinking, but I've got to go to the president and say, "Mr. President, I recommend that we put Dewey Short in this job." But Bryce, talking to Dewey Short says, "Dewey, you've got to give your pledge to me that you will not drink on the job."

Steve Silver: How did he respond?

Ed McCabe: He thought about it for a while, probably grumbled, and said that's pretty strong medicine. And Bryce's logic was sound. He said, "Look, we cannot go to Dwight Eisenhower knowing you as well as you and I, Dewey, know you. And knowing that Eisenhower knows you as well as anybody else and have him put himself on the line for you."

And I guess Bryce said, “Well, Dewey, if you and I cut a deal like this, I go to the president and I think I can sell him on this idea. He likes you and he knows your talents.” But to get to the punch line, it worked. And Dewey in effect took the pledge, and became a very successful assistant secretary of the Army.

Well, you know that’s maybe small potatoes in the longer look at Dewey Short’s influence in Washington, but it’s what was needed at the time. He was an old war horse who had been done in at the polls and really didn’t know where to turn. And I’m sure in his case like a lot of these guys—old war horse is a good term to use.

In the case of needing a payroll, you needed the prestige; you needed the visibility; that suddenly Dewey was not the hottest product on the congressional front any longer; no longer a congressman, but here’s an area where he can work and where he’ll be comfortable and where he’ll be recognized for the cumulative impact of all he had done.

But it took a rare kind of mindset that Harlow had to come up with an answer like this and then to go to the president. I don’t know what he actually said to the president, but you know it had to come with the heading of, “have I got a deal for you.”

Steve Silver: Right.

Ed McCabe: And he said what will we do and then the president might have laughed somebody else out of his office who came in with that kind of idea, but not Bryce. He had just a great regard, born of working with Bryce on delicate and difficult things. The president knew that Bryce was not going to sell him a bill of goods on something.

If Bryce said it, you could take it to the bank.

Steve Silver: You could take it to the bank.

Ed McCabe: And that was it. But, I thought that the Dewey short turn of events was one of the nicest things on a purely personal basis that I had seen done for anybody. You read a lot of political deals, people who say Mike Mansfield got tired of being a senator, so he became Ambassador to Japan and went on for years doing that. Well, that’s one look at it, but the fact is he, too, was a man highly respected.

And Dewey Short, in spite of his well known proclivities, and in spite of his well known identity, Dwight Eisenhower made this deal with him. He said, alright, you could be yourself. This is

Bryce talking to Dewey. But he said, “Dewey, by God, you cannot drink on the job.” And Dewey thought about it for a while and said, “Fine; it’s a deal.”

Steve Silver: He sold him on it.

Ed McCabe: And then Bryce went in and told the president. And you know, the president would accept the fact that Bryce had gotten into this arrangement; saw value in it for everybody concerned. Plus, the other thing that I think is built into that story is there’s a lot of human decency in it all.

Steve Silver: Absolutely.

Ed McCabe: And the fact that a towering figure of world history like Dwight Eisenhower could lean back and transpose himself again to the little town in Kansas where he came from—and you know he sort of—well, he knew the Dewey Short types because I’m sure every village in Eisenhower’s growing up years had to have people like that.

But also, I don’t think there’s anything that to me underscores the Harlow-Eisenhower relationship any better than that story does. It wasn’t a case of the president saying to Bryce, “Why don’t we figure out something we could do for Dewey Short?” It was just that Bryce knew his own relationship with the Boss—as we called the president—and knew it well enough to propose a bare-faced story like this -- we’ll take this unhorsed politician with all his warts, and so on, and his well known reputation.

And everybody knew once—you could just imagine the commentary on the Hill when it got around that Dewey will be appointed to something. One of the great institutions in the Congress—I hope it’s still there; I don’t know if it is, but it used to be that the various members, senators and House, various representatives—had their gathering at 5:00 every day. And they come in and the usual attendees, the usual suspects, were always there. But, they gathered and they exchanged their political wisdom and so on and had a drink or two, of course.

But also, you know, you could just see the thing rippling through the various 5:00 drinking galleries. So, my God, the president’s out of his mind. The word is he’s going to appoint Dewey Short to--

Steve Silver: Must have been news, yeah.

Ed McCabe:

Yeah. It was big news, but Dewey Short didn't have any enemies. He was a lovable cuss. And funny as could be; used to quote Shakespeare, the Bible and had an appropriate comment no matter what was going on. Funny, funny guy; also a great person.

There were a lot of others like that. I think Bryce, to back up to your question about working with the Senate and the House, I think Bryce, just by his own background and his time working in the House, enjoyed the characters of the Dewey Short type. And you know, they were numerous. There were some in the Senate but I think collectively it's wrong—they're gonna be wrong any generality like that's gonna be—you're gonna be wrong when they say collectively. The House was a more entertaining place to Bryce and to me and others. It was just more funny stuff, you know. Funny hilarious, not funny peculiar—it just—for the kinds of people. Like here's another example which unfortunately does not include Bryce Harlow. There was a member of Congress, a long-time member from Texas who was one of the great, great storytellers that I ever knew—Walter Rogers. Walter died a few years ago, well into his 90s, and he and I, not because of any congressional relationship with one another, but we both were members of the Burning Tree Club.

Let's see, that plaque has a place of some honor up there on the walls and my kids bought that for me. So, anyhow, there were a bunch of guys out milling around and have breakfast one noisy Saturday morning at Burning Tree.

There was a tremendous crisis going on up on the Hill; doesn't now matter what it was. The Greeks or the Yugoslavs or somebody was getting dangerously frisky.

Anyhow, we talk about these storytelling types. And Bryce grew up in the House of Representatives and he had a special gear in his system. And I use that term early in talking about his ability to get work done for the president. But there was something in Bryce's background and makeup that made people like Dewey Short and this fellow's story I'll burden you with now, this Walter Rogers vignette.

Saturday morning a bunch of guys were getting ready to play golf, sitting around having some breakfast. And Walter Rogers was holding forth with, "By God, you got to do something with those Greeks," or whatever. And somebody said to him, "Walter, if you're so damn smart that you got all these answers, tell me why was it that you got out of Congress? You oughta be up on the Hill telling these people how to shape the shape of the world. And

whaddya do? You quit. You makin' a bunch of money in the oil business and out here at Burning Tree, sounding off when you should be over there helping the government shape up."

And Walter said, "Well," he says, "You ask me, 'why did I get out of Congress?' Well, I'll tell ya why I got out of Congress. You know, in the House we run every two years," and he said, "running all the time, and into meetings and rallies and so on." He said, "I did this for"—whatever it was—"19 years or whatever." And he said, "The reason I quit, I just got sick and tired every election cycle and my opponents all over East Texas telling those damn lies about me and provin' half of 'em." Well, it takes a rare ability to turn a thing like that.

That, more than anything else, I think, would open a door for me on the question of did Bryce prefer working with the House or the Senate. And the shorter answer - the more accurate answer I gave you earlier is you follow the power centers. You're working for the president, trying to influence the shape of legislation, and you know you didn't just arbitrarily say, "Well, I ain't gonna work with the Senate on this."

Now, there are probably no more entertaining people than some of the senators that we knew—Everett Dirkson was one. Well, I hope somebody has done an oral history on him. And I think the sort of short response for Bryce and where he'd like to work was he followed the power trail. He knew where the big decision would be made on a piece of legislation. It so happened on the labor legislation earlier, the House was the place where historically this had been put together, even though there were important people in the Senate.

A law came along you all know as the Taft-Hartley law and this got its name from Robert A. Taft of Ohio, who was not a character. But he was one of the great intellects of my exposure to Congress.

But Dirkson was great, too. He would be the kind who would, if need be, have come up with the same answer that Walter Rogers did about getting sick and tired of his opponents telling those lies year after year and provin' half of 'em.

But these were the kinds of people, I think, who appealed to the Harlow we all knew. Dewey Short was another. There were many, many more. And somewhere along the line, I hope that somebody will be able to tell you more. Maybe Larry Harlow would have covered it at the time or times Lyndon Johnson had to go eat crow over something he had said about Bryce.

Carl Vinson, the chairman of Bryce's committee in the House—you know, Bryce said he was going to quit. Lyndon had impugned his integrity in something he had said. Bryce was staff chief of the committee and said, "I'm leaving, I quit." Mr. Vinson said, "Bryce, you can't quit. You're not gonna quit. I'll tell you what we're gonna do." So, he got LBJ (even as a young congressman he was a force to be reckoned with) and he got the two of 'em or three of 'em together in a room and made Lyndon apologize to Bryce.

Steve Silver: To Bryce.

Ed McCabe: Yeah.

Ed McCabe: That's a great story because it happened. Bryce never forgot it, but he never made much of it. But you can bet your boots that Lyndon never forgot it either, because it proved this little guy, Bryce, was tough.

Steve Silver: When Bryce was working for people, whether it was for Eisenhower or for Vinson or for Dewey Short, do you think he saw his primary role as serving them or serving the public or maybe a little bit of both?

Ed McCabe: I think he—well, I guess he would say he was just doing his job and soon it gets to the point of serving the public. I don't think he ever parsed out all his sentences and said, well, this equates to advancing the public good or whatever. But he knew that and he could spell it all out.

Well, you know, we were using a term—he and I got to commenting about it often later on. Something had appealed to me and then he says, "You're never going to go wrong doing right." I mean, if you do the right thing and somehow or other the politics of it all, the interplay and other influences like Dewey Short becoming Assistant Secretary of the Army.

That was a novel way to find a landmark place for an old war horse who was demolished; demoralized. It wasn't that he needed the payroll. He probably had a very profitable farm back there in the Ozarks and he could go back there. But he couldn't go back there as a defeated congressman, ashamed, and have the people at the country stores snickering when he went by; snickering and saying, "Well, he certainly got his comeuppance didn't he?" And wasn't it great to see.

Dewey Short would know that this is what people were saying and thinking and snickering about him. And Bryce would know it, too.

It would run over his radar. He would get it all. He'd get the whole picture. And the important thing was to help rehabilitate -- politically rehabilitate a great old Republican war horse who had done marvelous things for the country.

Also, there was just the innate decency of Bryce Harlow. And the decency of Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower didn't need—he didn't need to vindicate himself before the world and then, this would not be the way to do it, anyhow. You know, his stature and place in history were set, but the fact that Bryce could come to Eisenhower and say, Mr. President—.

Unspoken would be the fact that the president liked Bryce; that he found from working with Bryce or having Bryce work with him on a variety of things that he could rely on Bryce. Bryce knew this and he would trade—.

You know, if you tried to be a Sigmund Freud and analyze all corners of this sort of thing, you'd find all manner of things. But, I think the simple answer there is always the better one. Bryce was a very kind and decent individual; also very resourceful. When he was working, all the time—

Steve Silver: Right.

Ed McCabe: —he would do this. And when you look at that Dewey Short example, nobody anywhere in that story was disadvantaged in any way, as I see it!

Steve Silver: Right. Including the public who was probably well served—

Ed McCabe: The public was very well served.

Steve Silver: —with the Assistant Secretary of the Army.

Ed McCabe: Yeah. And you know Dewey didn't know how to do a poor job. It's just that you didn't want to trust him to tackle it when he was drinking. And when you get the bare bones of the thing, that story always appealed to me in what it says about Bryce. But also what is says about Dwight Eisenhower.

Steve Silver: Right. Do you think Bryce was concerned about Eisenhower's legacy after he left the Presidency? Was he protective of it? Did he try to make sure that he still looked out for Eisenhower when he was back in Gettysburg?

Ed McCabe: Yes, in a sense that he was going to be working around Eisenhower; just the nature of things. I mentioned about the two,

three of us, maybe, of the Eisenhower White House staff. But there's only one Bryce. I did a few things for the president and Bryce and I ran some errands for him together in the political area.

But no, Bryce was—lawyers like to use the Latin term “sui generis”—one of a kind. And he did these things not with any great scheme of protecting a legacy or the reputation of the president. Those were already set in stone.

And there again, it's a little difficult. You put yourself back 40, 50 years in history and then realize that this is a very rare bird that we had the opportunity to serve, Dwight Eisenhower. You know, his achievements were great and he didn't need anybody—his reputation didn't need to be refurbished. And yet, if there was an opportunity to straighten out a story here and there, we were not above kicking the tires, so to speak!

I remember once objecting to Dave Broder, who had dusted off an old theory—at least to me it was an old theory. And this was something that Bryce would be—gladly have been involved in but it happened that he wasn't. Broder had written a column in which he—for whatever reason, his thesis was served by the notion that when Eisenhower was president, he had the great help of two other Texans, Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson, in getting things through a Democratic Congress.

Well, I read that and I called Broder and said, “David, get your researchers to check something.” And I said, “I believe Eisenhower used the veto pen more frequently than any of his predecessors. How do you reconcile that with the claim that his two buddies from Texas, LBJ and Mr. Sam, were smoothing the way for all the things he wanted done? Well, he's repeatedly and regularly vetoing the stuff that they'd send him.”

So, I don't know where we come out on the old man's reputation. One of the things that was important after the president left office and where Bryce served him enormously well was in the political field. He was still the—as Bryce used the term—a well coined set of words, a good phrase --the most beloved man in all the world.

So, he didn't need anybody to burnish his reputation. It was just that there were times when, you know, somebody had to step up to the plate and devise a great talk for a political purpose. And that was important to Eisenhower that he had a hand—a continuing hand—in the affairs of the Republican Party, even though the major parade had passed him by.

He could not serve any longer; he couldn't be elected to anything. But, he enjoyed the approval that came with his status. And then he also knew from the experience of having Bryce work for him that if it's necessary to deliver a major talk to the beef industry in Kansas City, then Bryce would get it just right. And he made—the old man might have had to tinker with a word or two because he was, as I mentioned earlier, contrary to much of the lore about him, he really was a master craftsman of the English language. It must run in the family in the way his son, John, has been an accomplished author in his own right and the way David is coming along as a—accepted by the historians as a real historian.

So, Bryce's service to the president never stopped. And he also counseled a lot of others. And he would, in fact, work for Richard Nixon. He was Nixon's first appointee as president.

And I can remember just a few days before Bryce died, my wife and I went to the hospital and we took Sally to dinner, not any kind of festive dinner, just to get the poor gal out of there and sit down and have a drink and have a good dinner and, you know, kind of change the pace.

I was in the hospital room. Sally was there. I think my wife may have been there; she might have gone to the ladies room or whatever. We're getting ready to leave for dinner and the phone rang. And it was one of George Bush's (George the first) people on the line; an emissary from George Bush thanking Bryce for some work that he had done on a statement that turned out to be just right for Bush, and something nobody else could get right. And there he was, on his death bed, literally. He died, within days of that call. Bush didn't call him and they didn't get on the phone together. But they were great friends, played tennis together. But, that's just a reminder. The very day he died, he was still sought after by the people who made a difference. And I felt that was a most interesting reference point.

Steve Silver: Absolutely. I'm glad you told that story. Why do you think Bryce Harlow was such a unique figure in Washington? What made him a little bit different, I guess, based on what you remember?

Ed McCabe: Well, I think more than anything else there is a sort of perpetual hunger and thirst in this city, Washington, for people who not only are great in their mastery of what they're doing, but also who personify integrity and honor. The old West Point slogan of duty, honor, country; these are the things that really count. These are what personify Bryce Harlow. This is why I'm grateful he and I were good friends.

There'll never be enough Bryce Harlow types for the demands of any stretch of time. At this very day, I'm sure there are people trying to worry about this or that appointment and so on. And you know, there are a lot of people around even now who are not of the Harlow stature. Just a lot of, somehow, a lot who hunger and thirst for this quality.

And as somebody also who had great ability. You know, Bryce was more than just a wordsmith, although he was that. But he worked hard. He was a prodigious worker. He would understand the byroads and the nuances of some big issue. You know, it's hard to figure out a bigger issue in the United States than the influence of the military, focused as it was in the Harlow-Eisenhower farewell speech on the Military Industrial Complex.

Anyway, talking about the huge influence, the military was growing and looking down the road from that point when the speech was given, it would get bigger and bigger and bigger. And Eisenhower knew that and he felt that was a time to really rap some knuckles. And also, I think, maybe stake out a position for himself looking down the road of history. And Bryce put that together for him.

[End of Interview_two]

[Beginning of Interview_three]

Steve Silver: As sort of a final thought, talk about some of the more significant lessons that you think future generations should learn about Bryce Harlow, whether it's serving in government or in the private sector. What can he teach the future?

Ed McCabe: Well, you know it's hard to improve on the message we were trying to get out in that film. It has a shortcoming in a way of running big names at people like Tip O'Neill and Clark Clifford and everybody in his own way newsworthy. But, it goes right down to the doorman, as well as the helping of a Dewey Short in the context of this story.

And you notice that the whole story is all about integrity and thoroughness and doing your job. Knowing your job and doing it well. You know, there are a couple of good items in that film that I haven't seen in years but the best advice in a word has to be the heart of it all--bunch of important people get together in a room. And the chairman or whoever is looking around and says, "Well, are we all agreed on this, fellows?" And you don't agree. I mean, you know that your company or whatever doesn't agree. But, if you don't speak up, you know you're done. You've done yourself

in because you've let the group understand and believe that you're in favor of the course of action.

And I really can't think of a better message than what that film itself put together. In other words, done with that in mind. You know, how do you lobby? Is lobbying an honorable profession? If it is, how do you do it? You know, it boils down to me the facts; do your homework, know your subject and tell the truth.

Steve Silver: It's all about the truth.

Ed McCabe: Yeah, it's all about that truth. Somebody used the term I've thought about many, many times and forgotten where I've heard it first, but I've used it many times. "Take refuge in the truth." There are lots of ways that that's been said.

Steve Silver: It's all about the truth.

Ed McCabe: Tell the truth and you don't have to remember what words you've used. I mean, you don't have to remember how exactly you said things.

And you know, it's a simple thing, but it's a lesson that I liked to use on my own kids growing up. You talk about many things with them, and it's hard to improve on that message.

Steve Silver: Well, that's great. We'll just leave it there. I wanted to thank you again so much for talking to me.

[End of Audio]