

*Steve Silver:* We are talking with Mr. Roemer McPhee for the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. Mr. McPhee, thank you, again, for talking to us about Bryce Harlow.

*Roemer McPhee:* Delighted to be here with you.

*Steve Silver:* Let's start by having you tell us about some of the work you did for President Eisenhower and how you got to know Bryce.

*Roemer McPhee:* Well, Bryce was there when I got there, as I recall. I mean, I came at about the 1.3 year point, but Bryce had been there before that. Bryce was well known to some people on the White House staff. He knew General Persons and others, and he was able, and they would have valued him highly. Anyway, I came somewhere in the early summer of '54. I came to work with Gabriel Hauge, who was the president's Special Assistant for Domestic and International Economic Affairs. He worked very closely with the Council of Economic Advisors which was external to the staff. He had wanted a lawyer to work with him. I had gone to law school, and had a law degree, and had practiced law. It was a thorough vetting process that he went through. He had other people he was considering, and I was very pleased, having seen and talked to him at his request. When he called me up about a week after that and said he was going to have an opening in his office and asked me if I would be interested and I said I would, so, it all went from there.

But all the clearances have to be done, so that takes a long time. Anyway, that's how I got there and I started working with Gabriel Hauge. The reason he wanted a lawyer was because, as the Economics/Commerce person on the staff, he was given many things the president had to do or work on that derived from statutes and other legal issues. Hauge had all these trade agreement things where the president has to act, so that's all statutory. I admired Gabriel Hauge very, very much, and he was an admirer of Bryce. Everybody was, really, from his past and his present so to speak. I did that for about three years and then Jerry Morgan, recently named special counsel, cleared it with Hauge and asked me if I would come and work with him in the counsel's office. I went over from the Executive Office Building to the West Wing, and we were occupied with all the things that come to lawyers. It's interesting because you get into things beyond one particular scope. Lawyers tend to do that and they are used that way, too. So, that's how I got there.

Then when Sherman Adams left in 1958, General Persons became the assistant to the president, Jerry Morgan became the deputy

assistant to the president. Dave Kendal came in as special counsel and I became the deputy special counsel and the office was kind of divided up between some things that I did and some things he did, but he was the special counsel to the president and that lasted for the last two years of the second term. So, Bryce was there the whole time I was there. I don't think he left us at any point and came back. Bryce took General Persons' place at that time, as head of congressional liaison.

*Steve Silver:* Right. What was he like to work with, what are some of the things you remember about him?

*Roemer McPhee:* I can't ever say enough good about Bryce. That White House was an extraordinary staff, as far as I could ever figure out. It was almost beyond credulity because it worked so well. Did you ever hear the name Jack Martin? Well, when Jack left to be a judge of the Court of Customs and Patent Appeals, he got up at his farewell lunch in the White House mess (we were all there) and he spoke after of all the tributes to him and said something I thoroughly believe to be true. Jack had been in Taft's office as Taft's number one and had come to the Eisenhower White House after Taft died to help unite partisans on both sides. Jack said in all of his political career – which was long because he'd been involved with Taft so long. He said he had never, ever worked with or seen a staff like this, because there was no back biting or trying to crawl over somebody else or fighting for something like that. It was just kind of a commitment to the president that everybody had and I thought, those were my thoughts exactly and I was delighted to hear him say it that way. Bryce was a part of that. Bryce was never overbearing or in any way unpleasant. It was a pleasure to know him as well as to work with him. He was a hard worker and did stay late (we all did there in that office), but Bryce never left without answering all his phone calls or trying to, and that was a mark for him, and it was a mark as other people judged him because it was not the usual thing. Bryce was very talented, very knowledgeable, highly educated, particularly about government and the law as it's applied in the government and the Constitution. He wasn't a lawyer, but he certainly had a very good grasp of what he was about and what he was doing. And, as I say, everyone was in admiration of him. He was a totally delightful person to know and to work with.

*Steve Silver:* What were some of the memorable issues or policy battles or anything that you just remembered as far as working the work you did with Bryce; anything that stands out?

*Roemer McPhee:* The first thing that comes to mind was a big comprehensive agricultural bill that had been enacted by the Congress and was before the president. There was enormous pressure to sign the bill. I don't know where Bryce was on this but it would be worth you're trying to find out (Ed McCabe may know, and the only reason I don't know is because I just don't remember), but lots of people were advising the president that, "There were, yes, problems; we recognize there are problems. We know that, but politically, we've got to sign this bill. You know, this is the agriculture bill and it's not a bad bill totally, it has some things that are good."

So that was a hot question that was going on, and the president decided he was going veto it anyway. Notwithstanding the political fears, he couldn't accept the bill. His concerns had something to do with spending. It provided for something – too much money or whatever – and he couldn't abide it and so he vetoed it. He was totally vindicated four or five weeks later or whenever it was when the Congress reenacted the law eliminating the things he objected to and sent it to him and he signed it. He got the bill he wanted. It was a remarkable lesson. Jack Martin hadn't left yet, I know, because Jack was urging the bill to be signed. I'm sure that's right but I can't remember about Bryce.

*Steve Silver:* If Bryce was involved in that?

*Roemer McPhee:* This was before the Adams rollover would have happened. So Bryce would have been involved. He headed liaison with the House side. Who had the Senate, though? I can't remember. As you know, Ed McCabe worked on the Senate side and will know. But there were four or five people in congressional liaison. We didn't have a very big staff. We had a staff of maybe between twenty and thirty. Political staff, now, and I shouldn't digress, but they had these four, five, whatever it was, it was a guy named Jack Anderson who was a pear grower from California but had been a congressman. He worked the House with Bryce and Bryce, as the head of the House group, would have been in there talking about his view of things including the politics.

The politics is what made it a fascinating issue. The president had objected to the bill all along, and the Congress passed it anyway. They challenged him and he gave it right back to them and prevailed. The bill was mitigated and enacted, really very nice. I'm trying to think when that was – a big farm bill; couldn't have been in '58. It was probably a couple of years earlier, but it would have been in the second year of a Congress. Follow me? These things didn't happen in the first two months of a Congress. It took

a long while to percolate and boil up and then the big day came and it got voted on. So, it was in there somewhere, the middle 50's plus; not minus, but plus. In any event, Bryce was always in the play. His opinion was respected. General Persons had a very high regard for him, as I said. Jerry Morgan did also. They all worked on the Hill, knew each other and Bryce was a star, much admired and respected for his history and for his talents.

*Steve Silver:* Right. You mentioned the harmony of the staff, the Eisenhower staff. Why do you think that was? Did that stem down from the president, himself, or was that...?

*Roemer McPhee:* Absolutely. I've always thought that every time I've ever mentioned that. I've said that I've concluded this had to be attributed to the president himself because there was a commitment to him, working for him and all that. This is not to say that the staff didn't have some tensions and some disagreements, but it was all because he was such a man to work for and admire.

And I have to also say about Sherman Adams. Despite adverse allegations, past and future, Sherman Adams was also an inspiration. He was a hard worker and strong leader. I admired him immensely. Hauge came back once from some meeting, came back to the Executive Office Building where we were, and I remember him saying about Adams, "That man could run anything."

Adams had a facility for combining substantive smarts with political smarts. In other words, he could contribute to the substance, but he could also contribute to the politics, both meaningfully. When Nixon ran in '60, he had Fred Seaton. He'd been on our staff. Fred was a good guy, been a senator from Nebraska and a defense assistant secretary, as I recall. And then he came to the White House. But Fred, during the 1960 campaign, tried to be substance and politics to Nixon. And my impression is that he didn't do that very well because he had a briefcase and in that briefcase, things would get really lost. In other words, they would go in there and they wouldn't be read by him. They should have been moved out into whatever the next channel was, but they stayed there. So Adams had a real gift that way, I always thought.

*Steve Silver:* Were he and Bryce close?

*Roemer McPhee:* Adams, some summers, went to Europe with his wife and with Andy Goodpaster and his wife. Bryce never did that. But Bryce, I think, was well respected by Adams. Adams was kind of

managing the ship, so I give him some credit, too. He didn't brook any nonsense or anything else. His job was to serve the president. A lot of people thought he was the alter ego of the president or the president-in-waiting or stuff like that. It was all utter nonsense, he stood in awe of Dwight D. Eisenhower and served him and served him well. I can tell you that. But, Bryce; I never saw even a trace of conflict between him and Adams. I think Adams realized his value and was very happy to have him on his staff.

*Steve Silver:* One of the things that has come out in some of the other interviews that I've done is the idea of anonymity. People say that Bryce believed in anonymity; that a lot of other people take credit for a lot of the things and especially for speech writing, but not him. I wanted to ask you, did you get a sense of that, too, working with him and just being on the staff?

*Roemer McPhee:* I would tell you that I think that most of his staff operated that way because it wasn't our job to be self aggrandizing in any way. We were working for the president or for Sherman Adams or, in my case, for Hauge, and later, Jerry Morgan. I think we all had a sense of place that pretty that much uniformly and universally kept us in check. Bryce would have been one of these. There's no question, Bryce was not blowing his own horn. But, I don't know, in one instance, maybe, somebody blew his own horn. But he was sort of a maverick. This was Bob Gray. I don't know whether you'll find him or not. Bob Gray? Bob Gray left a lot to be desired. Most of which was not realized until after the second term was over.

*Steve Silver:* How important would you say reputation is for those who work in Washington?

*Roemer McPhee:* Huge. Lobbyists are far more effective if they have a reputation for integrity and for playing it straight all the time and never misleading a congressman or a senator. It's very important because if you want to have the confidence of somebody you really have to have that.

*Steve Silver:* I want to ask you why you thought Bryce Harlow was so effective in dealing with the Congress.

*Roemer McPhee:* He was so respected up there. He knew many, or most of them. He was enormously well regarded in any quarter as far as I could see. He always was very straight and truthful, but of course he was representing Dwight D. Eisenhower. It was not as though he was representing Warren G. Harding. So, he had a lot going for him,

and then he had a lot more going for him in the fact that he was there for the president.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think that it's possible to teach how to have a political instinct that Bryce Harlow had?

*Roemer McPhee:* Well, you could try to teach them, you know. We've spent time in the Eisenhower Institute trying to come up with things like that. And you certainly can lay them out as you would the parameters of a course and talk about them and give examples. Whether it's going to "take" with people who are listening to you is the paramount question. It's not that they aren't interested, sincere or listening; they are. But, maybe, it depends on the individual, whether that is coupled with a true sense of integrity which shines through. I think that's what probably was particularly so of Bryce. He was dealing with major figures. He was dealing with senators and congressmen and they knew him well and he made his way with them, very well, I think, from what I saw.

*Steve Silver:* Right. Why do you think he was so respected by Democrats, too?

*Roemer McPhee:* Same thing.

*Steve Silver:* Same thing?

*Roemer McPhee:* Played it straight. Didn't try to mislead them, didn't give them what was overly partisan and political. And of course this was an Eisenhower characteristic. You know, that's another thing that affected this. The president himself was not an intensely politically person. He was political. He wasn't unaware but he wasn't a political animal. You know, he had only gotten into politics in his 60s.

*Steve Silver:* And both parties tried to recruit him, as I understand.

*Roemer McPhee:* Yeah, yeah, Truman tried to recruit him, offered him the presidency, quote unquote. And he – have you run into Steve Saulnier at all?

*Steve Silver:* No.

*Roemer McPhee:* Steve Saulnier was chairman

*Steve Silver:* Saulnier?

*Roemer McPhee:* S-a-u-l-n-i-e-r. And Steve is not his name. Raymond J. Saulnier. He was on the Council of Economic Advisors, first term. And he was chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, second term. He lives on the Eastern Shore. His mind is as sharp as a tack; 96 years old.

*Roemer McPhee:* And has anybody mentioned Doug Price to you?

*Steve Silver:* No, I don't think so.

*Roemer McPhee:* Doug Price was one of the younger members of the staff. Doug lives on the Eastern Shore. He sees Steve all the time and if you wanted to see Steve, I would suggest you call Doug Price. And Doug Price is amenable. He's always been a bachelor. But he lives over there because he has a beautiful piece of land over there. And Doug is a very good friend of mine and he would be more than happy to have you meet Steve. Steve is a little deaf now, so he talks too loud but doesn't know it, you know? But there would be somebody who probably would have some thoughts on Bryce. Steve is marvelous, I mean to this day, he is holding forth for us whenever we're together. He even has done some writing. He was the person who probably first divined or was with Eisenhower when Eisenhower first divined that he was a Republican. Somebody asked him to see General Eisenhower in the Pentagon – Army chief of staff, and he went over there and they talked for four hours or so.

He's written about it. Eisenhower was just quizzing him about economic issues again and again and again, and that's when Steve began to sense that his interest was more than just casual. He pumped Steve, and a lot of back and forth. And I think he said at one point, "Well, I guess I'm a Republican." And that was in, I think, '44.

*Steve Silver:* He ran in '52, yeah.

*Roemer McPhee:* But Steve knows that story. Doug knows it and I have it. There's a very senior person on the White House Staff who is very much alive and so sharp that you wouldn't have any problem working with him.

And there's more reason for it now, that we've had this conversation.

- Steve Silver:* Just to sort of finish up, then, why do you think that Bryce was such a unique figure in Washington? What made him different from everybody else in your experience?
- Roemer McPhee:* Well, his manner; he was very courtly and very sincere and very gracious, never failingly so. And he was about 5'1" and he had come from Oklahoma and he'd had some big responsibilities which then led him to all these things. I think people saw him as what he was – just a person of huge integrity who could be trusted and relied upon and whose counsel would be definitely worth listening to, whatever party, you know.
- Steve Silver:* It was a, well, he initially came to Washington to work on his Master's thesis on Ways and Means, I'm not sure if he came with somebody then, but he ended up working for somebody on the Hill, I think it was Disney? Congressman Disney.
- Roemer McPhee:* I don't know that, but there was a diminutive guy with I think a congressman from Oklahoma.
- Steve Silver:* I know who you're talking about. We have him in the records. I have to go back and look, but, yes.
- Roemer McPhee:* But he was a – Carl Albert. That's who it was, and he was a major player and Bryce was, I don't know what his connection was, but anyway, I'm pretty sure I've heard him talk about Carl Albert with admiration and I would say that had something to do with Bryce's standing.
- Steve Silver:* Yes. As sort of the last final thought, to sum up, what do you think are some of the bigger lessons that future generations and lobbyists and people who work in the White House should learn from Bryce Harlow?
- Roemer McPhee:* Well, I guess really, all the things we've talked about. I mean, character, which is not limited to ability; I mean to persons of ability. Anybody can have real character. But he had real character and he had real ability. So he was sought after accordingly and I think he valued and burnished his reputation. You want to keep your reputation so people have this high regard for you because it makes you more effective, whatever you're doing. But, how do you translate that into learning to someone else? It's what we said at the outset. You can teach and design a course magnificently, and people can take it in, but the question is what do they do with it? But every little bit helps, so, it's probably a very good experience.

*Steve Silver:* Yeah. Well thank you, again for sharing your thoughts on Bryce Harlow.

*Roemer McPhee:* Well, you're quite welcome. Bryce was a marvelous person. I'm happy to be able to talk about him.

*[End of Audio]*