

*Steve Silver:* We are talking with Mr. David Parker for the Bryce Harlow oral history project. Thank you again for talking to us about Bryce Harlow.

*David Parker:* Thank you Steve for being here.

*Steve Silver:* Why don't we start by having you tell us a little bit about your background in Washington and then how you got to know Bryce?

*David Parker:* Okay. Briefly, I was working for the government in the Department of the Interior out in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and got connected with doing some national park and outdoor recreation planning for the federal government when they got into that business as a result of the Wilderness Act and the Land and Water Conservation Act in the mid-60's. I was pulled into Washington to help work on the legislation that ultimately created some of the national parks as well as the Wild Rivers and Scenic Trails System. It was at that time that had some limited exposure to the lobbying process and had the opportunity to work at the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee and found out that the policy making process was where I really wanted to be. So when I had the opportunity to stay on in Washington to work for the Secretary of the Interior in the first Nixon administration, I seized it. After working for the Secretary for about a year and a half I was pulled over to the White House to become the president's scheduler.

It was at that time that I met Bryce. Bryce had by that time become an institution. And so I endeavored to make his acquaintance, and Bryce was one of the people that always had time for young people and constantly would coach us in terms of what was going on and how to comport ourselves.

I had an opportunity to get to know him better over a period of time, particularly when we would travel down to Key Biscayne or San Clemente, because he was a tennis player and I attempted to be a tennis player of his caliber, which was a laugh because as an older fellow, I think at the time he probably was in his late 50's or early 60's but he could still play tennis as he did when he was in college and of course I was an aggressive, quick young buck but he'd run me all over the court. But, through playing tennis with him I had the opportunity to spend more and more time with him and learn from him, hear his stories, and find out how important one's word is in Washington, if you wanted to survive in Washington. And now, thirty-five years later – well, actually forty years later, almost – I'm still in Washington; I still survive and my reputation is intact in spite of leading three trade associations.

Over the years I've had lobbying responsibilities on many policy issues and while managing trade associations, so a lot of the wisdom that I was able to glean back in 1971 and 1972 has profited me very well in my subsequent career. I'm very pleased to acknowledge Bryce as one of the important people that gave me some good guidance and I think that his credo, so-to-speak, in terms of "your word is your bond," will be equally applicable in the years ahead as it was in the years past.

*Steve Silver:* Let's back up a second and just talk a little bit about when you joined the White House staff and you saw Bryce there. You said you were looking for sort of a mentor figure. Did you ever have any conversations with him about that, or did you just ask little bits and pieces of advice here and there?

*David Parker:* I didn't work beside him because I was the scheduler and my job was to receive all the requests for meeting with the president. In that role I would receive all of the requests for the president's time. I would then staff out the requests that seemed to be reasonable and fit with what the president had indicated that he was willing to consider. One thing people might not know about Nixon is that he would dictate every night his thoughts of the day and literally produce a page of direction as to what things he wanted the staff to pursue, and that included a lot of schedule items.

I would take his direction and fill in the blanks with other requests that the staff would make, particularly with congressional requests. These requests were staffed out to make sure that all the interested component parts in the White House had in fact had an opportunity to comment on whether or not he should participate in "x" event with "x" people, whether it was in the Oval Office or in the Rose Garden or on a trip somewhere. The idea here was not only to enhance the opportunity for doing the right thing, but also to not step on any mine fields.

And it was during this process that Bryce would occasionally comment and provide some historical perspective about people wanting to see the president. It was through this that I developed a connection with him and then, because I came to respect what he had to say so much, I really then frequently sought him out on other scheduling ideas.

*Steve Silver:* Did a lot of the other younger staffers in the White House at that time look at Bryce in the same way – look to him as a mentor?

*David Parker:* I think I could answer that by saying yes; at the same time I can't speak for them. But certainly his reputation was such where most everybody recognized that, and I think that if you were to talk to Dwight Chapin in particular, I think Chapin would underscore that along with Tom Korologos and some of the other folks that were in our peer group.

*Steve Silver:* Let's talk a little bit about Bryce – Bryce's ability to bring business and government together after he left the White House. Why do you think he was so successful at bringing the business community and association community with government?

*David Parker:* Well, mainly because his reputation preceded him. I mean his background with Eisenhower, with Nixon and later with Ford. He was a bridge to these leaders – one that people could trust. He was very low key and he was always very respectful with whomever he was dealing with. When Bryce brought the business community to the table, you could count on them to be constructive.

In the 60's and 70's when major U.S. corporations got together and collectively spoke, they got a lot of attention on both sides of the aisle. Republicans as well as Democrats sought Bryce's advice.

*Steve Silver:* With all of the advances and technologies now, considering also the fact that Congress operates differently than it did at Bryce's time, the power seems to be more concentrated with committee chairmen, that sort of thing. How has lobbying really changed? Is it more complex, more technical, more knowledge-based, relationship based? Basically, how has it all changed since the time that Bryce was involved?

*David Parker:* Well, the fundamentals still haven't changed. I mean it's still based on relationships and trust and that's what Bryce personified. You know Bryce was able to deal with the committee chairs and of course the committee chairs even today still have a great deal of credibility and the ability to basically develop, as well as stop legislation. One might say, well, there's more partisanship today than there was during the time Bryce was lobbying. That's probably true but at the same time, remember that the Congress from the mid 50's until the mid 90's was totally in control of the Democrats.

During the Nixon Presidency, I maintain that Nixon conceded the lot of the domestic policy development to the Democrats on Capitol Hill in recognition that they had such legislative strength. But for that they gave him carte blanche for foreign policy making

and of course, I think Nixon's track record and history will show that he had a very successful presidency when it's related to foreign affairs. But on the domestic side a lot of that was driven by the same chairmen of the Democratic Congress and Senate that were in place during LBJ days. They were in place in the 60's and 70's until the Republicans took over control of the Senate in 1981.

*Steve Silver:* And I guess Bryce by virtue of his position within the Nixon White House – was he involved with helping shepherd a lot of that through Congress or helping with relations to allow all those things to happen on foreign policy?

*David Parker:* I really can't address that, because I wasn't intimate in those matters.

*Steve Silver:* Sure.

*David Parker:* I assume that he had some input. I mean he had influence with whomever he talked or wherever he was. But, I don't know whether he was ever designated to be the spokesman for the president on Capitol Hill on foreign policy matters.

*Steve Silver:* Some people might say that the lessons of Bryce Harlow are a lot of common sense. Integrity, you know; loyalty; keeping your word – do you think that times today have become too complex, or are those lessons still relevant today? In other words, has the world changed or have we just lost sight of it, do you think?

*David Parker:* Well, I think the lessons are still applicable today. You find other elements today. I think what's kind of classic and you'll see this in today's – literally in today's news, some individual with a title, it doesn't have to be a high title, for that matter it can be a blogger, can make an accusation today and put it out on the web and the insatiable thirst of the news media is such where any kind of an accusation, truthful or untruthful, gets media play. And it has to be immediately knocked down if it's untruthful.

At the same time it still gets out into the American – the great American airways – whether ten people hear it or ten million people hear it, consequently there's a lot of misinformation that's being peddled in America today and I think there's a huge interest today on the part of a lot of people trying to find out where we can get really truthful facts. Of course, one might argue that my true facts might not be their true facts. This is really one of the challenges that we have. But I think where Bryce really excelled – when Bryce spoke, you could take his work to the bank.

Now, I'll bet there are some people you will interview who will say that there were times when Bryce probably was undermined by events or by maybe some of the leadership that he dealt with in terms of his word, but my guess is he would have been the first one that would have immediately gone forward and not only apologized, but would have basically explained why he misled somebody based on the information that he had been receiving.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think integrity can be learned?

*David Parker:* I hope so. I hope so. I would say so; I don't think it's inbred. I think you've got to learn that. And I think you really learn it by observation by how your parents and your peer groups conduct themselves. We've seen that over the years – various elements in society, so much, some people brought up in some elements in society and have no integrity at all, others that have been brought up in the worst possible circumstances have in fact developed a great deal of integrity and exactly how they learned I'm not really quite sure. I think most of us, probably, at least get a good portion of it from our parents.

*Steve Silver:* I just want to go back a quick second to what you had said earlier about how Bryce may have felt at times he was misled. Of course, Bryce was not an essential figure in Watergate but he was, you know, certainly in the White House, in the administration, without getting into the specifics of Watergate, what do you think maybe bothered Bryce the most about that?

*David Parker:* Again, I can't say; I don't know. I never had any direct discussions with him about that and my sense is that he probably having been around politics a long time, he knew how the political machines operated and how deals were made and the politics of the 60's were entirely different than the politics of the 70's.

When Watergate started to break I'm going to guess that he was as troubled as everybody else was in terms of reading what was going on. At the same time, he probably was very aware of prior presidencies and what had taken place, whether it was in the Eisenhower or Kennedy or Johnson years. Some of the things that were reported, many people knew were not accurate. Whether they were misreported purposefully or accidentally, a lot of things weren't reported that went on in politics, simply because it was "politics as usual". And what happened when Watergate broke, my guess is that there probably were some suspicions of the fact that maybe the Committee to Reelect the president had something

to do with the break-in at the Democratic Committee. At the same time, no one thought that the ultimate consequences of that would bring the president to resign.

My guess is Bryce was troubled by what he started to see coming out of the White House as not being truthful. And I think we all know on reflection, if Nixon had rooted out the individuals that were involved in the original Watergate break-in, he would have served out the rest of his presidency and would be revered today for what he did, not only in China but he'd get credit for the domestic policy achievements that occurred during his period of time, which would have included the creation of EPA, minority business efforts, Title IX, and many of the other positive things of that era. Most people aren't even aware of Nixon's involvement in many of these events. Watergate kind of overwhelmed everybody.

*Steve Silver:* You mentioned Bryce having that big historical perspective which I thought was interesting because he was such a big history guy and you're right – I'm sure he knew and he could sort of put it in context a little bit.

*David Parker:* Sure, and he probably put it in the context of what that really meant to the presidency. Because of his relationship with president Ford and a lot of the Ford advisors, my guess is that he and Mel Laird and some of his close friends probably started saying, "Yeah, this president's going to go down." And remembering this would be the first time a president had resigned. The news media had changed during the period of time. We had three major television networks at the time and every night there was thirty minutes of Vietnam and Watergate. And when Vietnam ended, remember - Nixon brought all the troops home in April of '73 and there was this huge void for these networks who had posted people in Vietnam to cover the war and all of a sudden there was a big void.

*Steve Silver:* They needed something to cover.

*David Parker:* So they came back to Washington and what happened during that period of time, the Watergate thing started to unravel for Nixon. In early '73, Hoover died, John Dean was visiting with the president many, many times during the day and obviously something was going on and Bryce was aware of that. I was aware of the meetings that Dean was having and it made no sense that it involved anything related to what had occurred back a year before in June of '72. But we later learned that they were trying to get their story together in terms of what had taken place and who was involved and what the coverup was and all that.

So I'm sure Bryce, seeing the news like everybody else, hearing some inside rumors in terms of what was going on, started to be very concerned about the survival of the presidency because the credibility of the president was now at risk. I remember Nixon when he won reelection, he won 49 of 50 states – won it overwhelmingly over George McGovern in '72. I mean 49 out of 50 states and still to this day I think it's the largest plurality of victory any president has ever had in terms of the popular vote.

I'm sure Bryce was aware of all this and then started talking to his closest friends that this president might not survive. And then of course when Agnew was brought before the Justice Department and ultimately resigned in October of '73, then you were confronted with who would be positioned to be president if Nixon went down, and this is where I think probably if you get to some of the people that knew Bryce very well, my guess is Bryce had a much stronger role in Ford's selection than we know publicly, even today.

*Steve Silver:* In the transition role you mean?

*David Parker:* In not only the transition but also the lobbying for Ford, so that Ford would get the nomination. Because I know for a fact that within the White House, when Nixon polled the staff officers – keep in mind at that time, there were only thirty-three of us who were commission officers (now there are a hundred and twenty commission officers) – that about 80% of the internal staff thought that Nixon should nominate John Connally for vice president.

At the same time, remember, Connally had just gone through a trial about the milk fund scandal and was acquitted. Could Connally have been approved by the House and Senate, particularly a Democrat House and Senate, even though he had been a Democrat?

*Steve Silver:* Of course it's hard to speculate. You know it's always going to be speculation. We don't know what Bryce was thinking, but do you think he was honestly concerned about the survival of the Presidency as an institution?

*David Parker:* Oh, definitely.

*Steve Silver:* Watergate.

*David Parker:* Sure, I mean I don't know that for a fact, because I never talked to him about that directly, but I'm sure he was.

*Steve Silver:* Going back to today, do you think that Bryce Harlow and his colleagues cared as much about winning as lobbyists as people in the administration do today?

*David Parker:* The answer is yes. But you know the tactics are entirely different today, perceived to be different. There are winners and losers, but they're competitors. Yeah, I mean winning and losing, not winning for who and losing for who, I mean, you know look at the amount of information that we have about everything going on today whereas in those days, limited amounts of information was disseminated about anything going on. We've got more channels of information than before; that it overwhelms most us.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think it was in Bryce's time – do you think it was less of a zero-sum game than it is now, more about compromise or do you think that's just always how it's been in politics?

*David Parker:* My guess is that there's always been compromise on all of these issues; deals have always been made. We didn't know all of the details of them as we know today and therefore a lot of the special interest groups, whatever side of the avenue they're on, no one's ever satisfied because they're trying to perpetuate themselves. Did you get enough? The most recent thing I've been involved in is the energy legislation. People say, "Well, did you get enough?" Well, how much is enough, you know? It was a good policy document. There's some good things in there; there's some bad things in it.

*Steve Silver:* As sort of a final thought, what do you think is Harlow's most important contribution or his legacy that people should be aware of?

*David Parker:* Well, the mere fact that we remember Bryce Harlow, are not only so fond of him, but think of him as being the epitome of what a good Washington representative is and should be. I think that that's his legacy.

*Steve Silver:* That it's very easy to get people to talk about him?

*David Parker:* Yeah, and I suspect and from his perspective, it's his family. I don't know, I've met most all of his family but I don't know them in a personal way. I suspect, I know that his son Larry has been very successful and I'm sure has followed in his father's footsteps.

*Steve Silver:* David Parker I just wanted to thank you again for your thoughts and insights about Bryce Harlow and for talking to us on the oral history and for all your support too.

*David Parker:* Steve, thank you, I wish you luck.

*Steve Silver:* Thank you.

*David Parker:* Thank you.

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