

Steve Silver: We are here with Mr. Wayne Smithey with the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. Mr. Smithey, thank you so much for joining us.

Wayne Smithey: You're welcome. I'm glad to do it.

Steve Silver: Why don't we start by having you tell us a little bit about your professional background in Washington and then we'll get into the stuff with Bryce?

Wayne Smithey: Alright. I was a professional staff member, counsel, if you will, to the Senate Judiciary Committee from the period of December of 1948 until December of 1958 when I went to work for Ford Motor Company in the Washington office and I occupied a succession of titles in that office until I became the vice president for Washington Affairs of Ford Motor Company. And I served in that capacity for approximately ten years. Overall, I had worked for Ford for a period of more than 28 years.

Steve Silver: How did you first meet Bryce Harlow?

Wayne Smithey: Well, I met Bryce first, I think, when he was working for Procter & Gamble. It was one of the intervals in which he was with private industry as opposed to being in his government office. But I can't give you the details with respect to the first time I ever met him because that isn't clear in my mind. But any rate, I'll tell you some more about my impressions of him as we continue the interview.

Steve Silver: Why don't we take a step back, then, and for people who are not as familiar, why don't you tell us what is involved with being a Washington representative for a company like Ford?

Wayne Smithey: Well, it's varied between companies but with Ford, the principle occupation there, the principle purpose of our being there, was to make sure that the Congress understood what was of interest to Ford and to understand what Ford's position was on current issues of the day; to take information to the members of Congress so they could comprehend the meaning of those positions and so that the Congress could understand the effect of the legislation that they were contemplating.

One of the advantages that I had having been on the Senate Judiciary Committee was that I could know what the law said or what the bills were saying because I'd helped to write them and I'd helped to interpret them and I'd helped to write reports about them. But I recognized when I was there that a lot of times – by “there” I mean on the professional staff of the Judiciary Committee – a lot

of the times, we couldn't comprehend the effect of that language on a particular segment of our economy or a business and therefore, it was really incumbent upon that kind of a business or labor union or other endeavor to come before us and to tell us, in their best way, what that would do to them if it were passed or if it were rejected or whatever.

The important thing is to have people in the legislative branch understand the impact of the matters that are before them, of the effect that it would have on them and the economy. And that was basically our responsibility. We always considered ourselves to be responsible for making sure that Members knew the impact of what it was they were trying to do and to understand what they were trying to do and then to try to match the two sufficiently so that they could accomplish their objectives without impairment or with benefit even, sometimes, to our company or our industry.

Steve Silver: Did you find, every now and then, where people on the committee would not realize the impact? In other words, that you changed peoples' minds?

Wayne Smithey: I think there've been ample indications that at times, we've changed people's minds but, in many cases, we also, having understood what the Member was trying to do with his legislation, we've been able to arrive at a proposal that carried that out without detrimental effect on us or on others like us.

Steve Silver: When you started at Ford, was that around the 70's, approximately?

Wayne Smithey: Oh, I started with Ford in 1958. I think my date that I gave you, first, was '49 when I went with the Judiciary Committee and then '58 when I left. And I left to go with Ford and served in a variety of positions. And then, as I said, the last ten years, I served as the vice president of Ford Motor Company for Washington Affairs.

Steve Silver: Why did so many companies like Ford and like Procter & Gamble feel that they needed representation in Washington at that time?

Wayne Smithey: Well, there are a variety of reasons. One is that the Congress was increasingly receiving legislation which had a direct impact upon their methods of doing business. This was the age – particularly when I was the vice president of Ford Motor Company – this was the age of regulation. It was increased regulation of business, increased consumer activity, increased environmental protection activity, and increased safety activity. All of those elements

interacted with our product and as a consequence, we had a – and “we,” by that I mean Ford – had a clear indication that they needed to understand the effect of those proposals upon our business and to understand why we thought they either should not be passed or should be passed in an amended form.

Steve Silver: What was the Business-Government Relations Council? I understand that was an organization that you started or you were involved with.

Wayne Smithey: Well, I didn't start it. It started well before me but I was its president at one time. My predecessor at Ford, Rod Markley, had also been a president of that group. And it was both an effort to get better public relations for the business representation in Washington, but it was also an effort to try to get business representatives together sufficiently so that they could work cooperatively, particularly on matters that were inter-industry rather than intra-industry.

Steve Silver: So people working across different industries.

Wayne Smithey: That's correct.

Steve Silver: OK. And was Bryce Harlow involved with you guys?

Wayne Smithey: Oh yes, certainly. Bryce certainly was on several occasions. If you want more of a bill of particulars I can cite the Consumer Protection Agency as one piece of legislation that you probably heard of before, one that Ralph Nader was actively pressing and pushing. And, up to that point, he had had a great deal of success. And Bryce had just left the White House to go to Procter & Gamble. I remember one session where we had had a business meeting in one of the restaurants down there. We had just had a vote in the House of Representatives on the issue and I think there was something like eight or nine votes against the proposition, so it looked rather bleak. And Bryce came over, talked to me, and he said, “Wayne, I think that we can beat this.” And he began to explain to me what he thought we ought to do. I listened to him and generally agreed with him, although I was not as hopeful about the outcome as he was (I have to admit that) because this proposal had a lot of steam behind it.

But in the ensuing months, there were a number of things that happened that caused that legislation to get stalled in the House of Representatives. And then in the following year, Nader wrote his

book in which he was critical of a number of members of Congress.

Steve Silver: Was that *Unsafe at any Speed*?

Wayne Smithey: No, that was the automobile industry. This book centered on Congress and he was very critical of a lot of members of Congress who had actually sided with him and voted with him on prior occasions and thought he was an effective advocate. But his criticisms offended them and they began to see him not so much as the sparkling crusader they thought he was. So when the bill finally came up in the succeeding Congress, it didn't pass. One additional reason it didn't pass was that those of us in opposition to the Consumer Protection Agency embarked upon an educational effort to convince the business community that this agency wasn't just another federal agency, but the granddaddy of them all.

Bryce, Emmett Hines of Armstrong Industries, Don Goodall of American Cyanamid and I, along with some others in the business community, put together a presentation alerting the business community to the implications of the legislation and its prospects for passage. Companies and trade associations assembled industry leaders and general counsels in New York and Chicago, and other places, where we made our presentations. My role was to present a depiction of what life would be like for a corporate executive trying to make business decisions and the ability of the Consumer Protection Czar to interfere in these day to day decisions and the disruption that would create. I took an everyday situation in a corporate executive's life, using each decision he had to make and showing the unfettered ability of the Consumer Advocate to delay or derail it. I called it, for lack of a better title, "An Unfair Tale." All of this was possible because the Consumer Advocate's decision as to what constituted a matter of consumer interest was not subject to judicial review.

These presentations helped to create an awareness in the business community of the threat this represented; how it could disrupt judgments, delay getting critical products to the market, increase the cost of doing business and interfere with the flow of materials and supplies. We also showed how the agency's pernicious effects could extend to others, such as farmers, in acreage allotments. All of these activities could be encompassed within the breadth of that proposal.

By creating this awareness, we were able to get enough people in the business and agriculture communities to oppose that proposal.

The Washington representatives did the work of talking to members of Congress and their staffs, generating letters and phone calls from corporate offices in opposition to the bill and coordinating a widespread lobbying effort.

By the time we were through, we were able to convince enough members of Congress that creation of the agency would confer more power than they wanted to vest in a single individual.

Steve Silver: Right. Did you meet a lot of resistance in the business community along this road tour?

Wayne Smithey: We encountered some resistance but we also encountered some splintering on whether to compromise or not (which is quite often the case in the business community). People would try to strike off and make deals on their own, "If you amend the bill this way then we will back off and not oppose it anymore," or they would, in effect, say, "We're not troubled by this because we don't see it in that light." So, there was some division within the business community. The Grocery Manufacturers Association, for example, was one that had a different idea about the approach. Rather than outright oppose the proposal, they wanted to try to rewrite it in a way that would make it more palatable from their point of view. But Nader was absolutely adamant that he wasn't going to permit those kinds of amendments. So, in effect, that effort didn't go anywhere. It wasn't so much that it wasn't warranted, it was rather that it never got off the ground.

Steve Silver: I understand that you and Bryce and other corporate reps had a series of regular meetings. Was that separate from the Business-Government Relations Council?

Wayne Smithey: Oh yes, sure.

Steve Silver: Could you talk about that a little bit?

Wayne Smithey: A lot of them were ad hoc relationships. They depended on whether Bryce's firm, Procter & Gamble, had a common interest with an automobile company like Ford Motor Company, for example. And if it were legislation of broad impact like the Consumer Protection Agency then, of course, we would meet. If it were labor legislation, that would have a broader impact, obviously, than just the automobile industry. It might not cover the grocery manufacturers the same way, so we would have been working separately. But we met in both social ways and business ways, but I think you're aiming at the business ways.

Steve Silver: Right.

Wayne Smithey: And the Business-Government Relations Council represented a good opportunity to get to know people on a social level as well as on a business level. And so it served a useful function. But it was more a seminar type of group than it was a lobbying type of group. Occasionally they would go and work with other organizations, but it was more of a public relations effort than a lobbying effort.

Steve Silver: Was the business-government relations community, I guess – the community of Washington reps – was it a lot smaller back then than it is now? Was it more intimate?

Wayne Smithey: It's hard for me to judge the breadth of it now because I've been away from it for 18 years. But it was a growing institution at that time. It was still small and staffs did grow during that period. Remember, I was serving for a period of 28-29 years and, in that time, the staffs did grow. Later there was the recession that hit and that's when job leads began to taper off in the Washington offices, just like the offices back in the home office, which suffered an attrition of sorts. Consequently, the numbers lessened at the end of my career but they were still substantial.

Steve Silver: So, a lot of companies during a recession time would close their Washington offices?

Wayne Smithey: Well, some of them closed, some of them just reduced the size. Some of them, then, decided that they could cover their interests in Washington through trade associations rather than through their own lobbying office. And that depended on the degree of the involvement by the government in their business. The automobile industry maintained a fair-sized staff throughout that whole period because of the depth of the intervention in the business.

Steve Silver: Right. How did Bryce Harlow treat his adversaries, people on the other side like the Ralph Naders?

Wayne Smithey: With dignity. With Nader I think it was with an appreciation, for example, of the force that he was, the fact that he had captured the public imagination. And that was one of the things that was remarkable about Bryce; that he didn't fail to appreciate the abilities of his adversaries. What he always tried to do was to look at proposals analytically, logically, see whether they, in effect, move in the direction of better government, better business, better relationships between the two, and then to decide the course that he

ought to pursue. But he wasn't disdainful of them. He might treat them with humor from time to time – he had a great sense of humor. The man was a keen analyst, he was a person of just unbelievable integrity, and I think his depth of knowledge was evident when you spoke to him. But it was his analytical ability; his ability to take the subject, and analyze it, to put it in a context that was understandable and, if I can use the word, saleable, that was remarkable. He was a great advocate.

Steve Silver: When Bryce moved back into the White House – I know he had kind of moved back and forth, as you mentioned – was he less accessible to you guys? Did he intentionally close himself off?

Wayne Smithey: No, he was accessible but he was careful to make sure that he never trespassed that line that troubles so many people that go through the so-called revolving door. We would meet him and when the White House wanted something and they would often call people in the business community if they thought they were natural allies on an issue. And in those cases, we'd go over to the White House and see him or the legislative people at his instance, maybe, and sometimes not at his instance. But no, his integrity was such that he would never transgress that line of division between the people he represented in the White House and the people he represented in business. He kept those separate and distinct and apart and I never heard, really, any valid criticism of Bryce in all of my career on that score.

Steve Silver: How did the rest of you guys look to Bryce? Did you see him as a mentor? Did you see him as somebody you can learn from or just a regular colleague?

Wayne Smithey: No, we saw him as a mentor; we saw him as a colleague; we saw him in all of those roles. We saw him as a person, a lot of times, whose breadth of experience was such that we needed to draw on it; to get insights. But, again, those insights would come when he was in the business community, but he would not transgress nor, in effect, violate any confidences that he had gained as a result of his White House service. A nice thing about Bryce was that he had been in the role of a House staffer, he'd been an associate of General Marshall's in the military, he'd been, even, in the House Library. And so he had the Hill experience, he had the business experience, he had the Executive Branch experience, which gave him an appreciation for the inner actions of all of those groups. And then when he'd put that experience in the context of his ideas of what would constitute an advance for the general public, it was

sound; it was logical. And I think that he was probably, in both breadth and depth, as impressive a person as I've ever met.

Steve Silver: What did he teach you the most? What stands out as to be an effective Washington representative?

Wayne Smithey: Appreciation of what the Members are trying to do and then to try to design what you're doing in a way that will further their objective as well as yours; to be a person of integrity, never to supply them with information that wasn't 100% reliable; not to be silent in a meeting where decisions were being made and there was a consensus being formed and you sit silent even if you didn't agree with the consensus. He was always one that said, "Look. If you sit silent in that kind of a situation, they have every right to believe that you agree with them. And it's just as damning, as far as they're concerned, if you don't speak up as if you went and lied to them."

Steve Silver: So you had an obligation to disagree –

Wayne Smithey: You had an obligation to disagree if you did disagree. Those were the things that I think stand out in my memory. But I think, as a social person, he was so enjoyable. He had humorous stories that related to his experiences over the years. When he retired, we were up at his place up in West Virginia where we enjoyed his company and he had a lot of stories to tell.

Steve Silver: That's a great segue. I was just going ask you about visiting him in Harper's Ferry and what it was like in his retirement years.

Wayne Smithey: Well, his health was poor in those years so that he could not be as active. He had to carry that oxygen tank around a lot.

Steve Silver: He was a heavy smoker, I know.

Wayne Smithey: He had been a heavy smoker. His first wife had passed away and he'd remarried and he thoroughly enjoyed, I think, being sort of a landed gentry up there in West Virginia. It was a kind of a remote area. You had to go through a dirt road to get up to his place but there were a number of us that would go up to visit him just for the pleasure of being in his company. And we'd sit out on the porch and remember things that we had participated in and enjoyed about one another's company and that sort of thing. I don't have an individual recollection right now of a story that he told about any particular incident. I wish I could supply you with an anecdote on that that might help you but I just don't recall right now.

Steve Silver: Did he make an effort to stay involved, to stay on top of what was going on after he retired?

Wayne Smithey: Yes, Bryce was very well read and he never stopped being well read. After he left the White House, there were still people who respected his judgment. And that's another issue I probably should've mentioned a while ago, how sound his judgment was because that's what people admired in him, too. But they respected his judgment so they would seek him out on issues. And that was true whether it was in the business community or the government.

Steve Silver: Even after he retired.

Wayne Smithey: Even after he retired because they knew that he was just sound in his analysis and, at least, he would give them a perspective which they needed to consider whether they wound up agreeing with it totally or not.

Steve Silver: Do you think he tried to leave any kind of an imprint on the field of corporate representation?

Wayne Smithey: I don't know that I can answer that directly but I'll answer it indirectly. It was the rest of us that came to him after he retired and said to him, "We'd like to form the Bryce Harlow Foundation and one of our purposes would be to see if we could not improve the public relations image of lobbying professionals." And it was after some persuasion that he agreed to lend his name –

Steve Silver: I was going to ask, what was his initial reaction to that?

Wayne Smithey: Well, there was some reluctance to it because he didn't think that it would have any endurance behind his life and maybe the lifetimes of those that had known him best. And it's interesting to me that the Harlow Foundation is still continuing and most of the members of that board of that foundation now didn't know him personally. But they still know of him. They still know of us that did know him, they still know of the person that he was and the image that he presented as a Washington lobbyist and as a government servant. And because they admire him so much, they want to see that preserved. And so, I'm delighted that the foundation is continuing and that, annually, we still not only have the dinner but we have the scholarships that we advance.

I was one of those that started the so-called college roundtable or flying faculty, we used to call it.

Steve Silver: What was that?

Wayne Smithey: We went out to colleges and universities, maybe four or five of us to each place, and we would talk to students. And what we were trying to do was to tell them something about business, what businesses' objectives were, and then discuss with them the issues of the day and we let them ask any questions that they wanted to. And we had been to a number of institutions. We were at the University of Oklahoma, for example. We were at, well, my alma mater out at Nebraska State Teachers College in Kearney, Nebraska, which is now a part of the university system. We took a group out there where we held very interesting sessions. The format was modeled after a program that Ford had had for years before we hit on hard times in the early 70's and had to discontinue then.

But nonetheless, we found a great deal of interest, not only in what business was active in, but how to become a lobbyist. And it always used to surprise me that, given the newspaper and media images that were given of lobbyists, there were still lots of students out there that wanted to know how to become a lobbyist. That was evident when we went on these sessions.

Steve Silver: So you were very well received by the students.

Wayne Smithey: We were well received. We also got critical questions; don't misunderstand me. We asked for them. And because, if it was just a case of talking to people who were in the business relationships in the first place and coming into business, it wouldn't have been as meaningful to us. We thought that we got something out of these sessions, too, because we began to understand the thinking of the future leaders of our country. They were coming out of these colleges and universities and what they thought now was an image that we needed to understand. We needed to know what their ideas portended for our business futures.

Steve Silver: Why do you think Bryce Harlow is seen as such a unique figure in Washington? Why did he stand out?

Wayne Smithey: Well, he stood out because of the attributes that I spoke about a while ago; his integrity. He stood out because of his experience; the fact that he had been in the presence of presidents, for example, and that he had dealt with figures of key significance. And it's

interesting that some of these key figures have come before the Harlow Foundation to speak at the annual awards dinners. They remembered Bryce and they spoke in glowing terms of their relationships with him. But I think he stood out primarily because of his integrity, because of his analytical ability, and because of his general wisdom. He was a very wise man.

Steve Silver: Do you think that corporate representation today, or even just over the course of your career, do you think it's moving in the right direction? Do you think there are things that could be improved?

Wayne Smithey: Alright, I want my comments to stop with the end of my service. I hesitate to characterize it now, because I'm not as intimately involved in it and I think it'd be an unfair analysis for that reason.

Steve Silver: Just go, then, to when you were –

Wayne Smithey: I think that business was improving in its efforts to serve as a source of solid information to the members of Congress, to the regulators, to the Executive Branch. And the recognition that we were being successful, there, I think, is in the fact that we were approached not only by Republican administrations but by Democrat administrations to try to assist them in either understanding what courses of action should be taken or in implementing those courses of action. It took a long time, quite frankly – and I'll speak specifically of my own industry, here – it took a long time for people in our industry to understand that the people that were actually making proposals that were so inimical to their interests could be people of real integrity, people of depth, people of sound purpose, until they were actually able to get in a relationship of interaction with them. And then they began to appreciate not only their sincerity, but their capability, as well.

I know of no better illustration of that than when Congress first passed the automobile safety bill. And our engineers said, "They don't know anything about producing automobiles," and the truth of the matter is, they didn't. They came up with some proposals that were very oddly phrased and very impractical. But as their relationship continued over a period of years, our own people began saying, "They know what they're talking about and we know, now, what they're trying to do and we think that we can accommodate the two objectives (ours and theirs)."

Steve Silver: As a final though, what do you think are the biggest lessons or contributions that Harlow made that students, today, and aspiring relations professionals should take note of?

Wayne Smithey: Well, I think the first thing that stands out is that Bryce is an example, a good example, that you can be in a lobbying relationship, a representational relationship, and still maintain your integrity. You are able to perform a service. One of the tapes that I'll give you shows a quote from Tip O'Neill when he was the Speaker of the House of Representatives that says that we need lobbyists, we need to understand how our efforts interact with the interests of others in our economy. And as a consequence, he's saying, in effect, nobody did it better than Bryce Harlow. Nobody did it better than Bryce Harlow primarily because, A) he was a source of real knowledge; he was a source of integrity. You could rely on what he gave you. He would put his information in a context where you could see, as a legislator, if your interests and your philosophy fit that context.

So the best thing that I think Bryce left with young people who would aspire to be lobbyists is, A) be honest; B) be knowledgeable; and C) consider that what you're doing is a real public service, be proud of it, and maintain its integrity. I think those are the real contributions that he has made to those that want to come after us, if you will.

[End of One, Begin Two]

Wayne Smithey: You were asking about vignettes. This one involves not so much Bryce Harlow but it involves the foundation dinners. And at the one that I was responsible for – and that was traditionally the responsibility of the vice president of the foundation who then later acceded to the presidency – but at one that I was responsible for as vice president, we had Bob Strauss, the former head of the Democratic National Committee, as our speaker. And Bob was respected certainly by Democrats but also by a lot of Republicans for his wisdom. He had known Bryce Harlow well and thought very highly of him. So when I called him, he said, “Yes,” he would agree to be the speaker at the dinner.

Then everything went swimmingly up until the day before the dinner and Bob called me and he said, “Wayne, I'm in trouble.” He said, “I just found out that I have a conflict and the conflict is that I have to be at the Democratic Senatorial Campaign congressional dinner at a hotel up on Connecticut Avenue.” And he said, “I've got to be there,” but he said, “I think I can work it out.” So he said, “I will try to be there as promptly as I can but

I'm not gonna be there for the reception. But I'll see what I can do."

So we went into the dinner the next night and we had two empty chairs at the table just below the dais where the speaker normally sat. When we had a reception and sat down for the appetizers and still no Bob Strauss, I was beginning to sweat profusely. But just as I was getting up to make the introduction, in strides Bob Strauss. And so I introduced him around and then when I questioned him, "How were you able to do this, Bob?" He said, "Well, when I was on the dais at the hotel," he said, "there was a break and I excused myself to go to the men's room. Then I grabbed a taxi and came on down here to the Capital Hilton on 16th Street. I'll give the speech and when I get through I'll go back up there and I hope no one will've missed me." But that's how we close we came to having a disaster that not with no speaker for the Bryce Harlow Foundation dinner.

Steve Silver: Because of what Bryce Harlow meant, probably, to Bob Strauss.

Wayne Smithey: That was the reason that he made the extra effort; not for me but for Bryce and his regard for Bryce.

Steve Silver: Great story.

[End of Two, Begin Three]

Wayne Smithey: I spoke to you about the tour that we took in connection with the Consumer Protection Agency legislation. And we also used to have Bryce when he was with Procter & Gamble be the speaker who introduced the program and almost uniformly he'd get up behind the podium and he was so short that you could barely see him over the top of the podium. And he would say two things. He said, "Now, somebody, probably back in the back, yelled, 'Stand up!'" He said, "I want you to know I am standing up. Secondly," he would say, "I want you to know that I was six foot tall when I came to Washington and now you see what they've done to me." It usually started things off on a relaxed basis with a self-depreciating comment – that's another thing I should've mentioned about how self-effacing he could be. He was always poking humor at himself more than at other people and, in doing so, he usually made a point by doing it. And you'll see in those tapes that I've given you that there are some good examples of that.

[End of Three, Begin Close]

Steve Silver: Wayne Smithey, I just wanted to thank you very much on the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. It's been great.

Wayne Smithey: Well, you're certainly welcome and I'm glad to do it not only for the foundation but I'm glad to do it for Bryce Harlow whom I admired very, very much.

Steve Silver: Thank you.

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