

Steve Silver: This is an interview with Mr. Bill Timmons for the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. Mr. Timmons, thank you so much for joining us and talking about Bryce Harlow.

Bill Timmons: Thank you for coming.

Steve Silver: Why don't we just start by having you tell us how you first came to know Bryce Harlow?

Bill Timmons: I was in Washington during the Eisenhower Administration working on Capitol Hill when Bryce was in the White House with President Eisenhower, but I did not know him at that time. I became acquainted with him probably in the mid '60s when Eisenhower would often use Bryce, who was then at Procter & Gamble, and would call him whenever he was coming to town for some event, and Mr. Harlow would advance the trip, look at the site and entrance, and I think draft the speeches for Eisenhower. He was quite close to the former president having served with him in the White House.

Sometime in the mid 1960s, maybe '65 or '66 along in there, a group that I was involved with called the Bull Elephants, Republican staff members in the House of Representatives, invited Eisenhower to speak to us at a lunch. And obviously Ike called Bryce to advance it and see how he gets there and back and what he should say and all that. Bryce, being a professional, talked to a number of people about the kinds of things they wanted to hear, and what the former president should talk about that would be of interest, and how he gets in the back door and out, where he parks the car, and all that. So I was involved and got to know Bryce in that capacity, although I had been here when he was in the White House but didn't have a chance to meet him then.

Steve Silver: How did you first get to work for Bryce Harlow?

Bill Timmons: In '68; actually it was before that, in '66. Former Vice President Nixon was trying to help Republican candidates around the country win their elections, and I was called on to help identify some races that might be appropriate for Nixon to go to. A man named John Whitaker contacted me, and so I met the future president in 1966 on these trips around the country where he was going to speak for local candidates. I didn't travel with him, but I met with him and we talked about the different venues that might be appropriate.

Then in '68 Nixon asked me to be his convention manager in Miami. Many people forget that there were three candidates at that convention – Reagan, Rockefeller, and Nixon. So it was a contest. It wasn't one like now.

Steve Silver: It was a real convention.

Bill Timmons: Yeah, all the primaries take care of that now, but in those days you could have a real fight on the convention floor, and also in that time many governors ran as favorite sons, which meant of course that they were not serious candidates for the presidency, but they wanted to hold their delegation for trading purposes, and so that made it all the more interesting.

At any rate, in '68 I of course had known Bryce for several years off and on, mostly through the Eisenhower connection, and then after the convention, Nixon named me the head of congressional relations for the campaign, Nixon/Agnew Campaign.

Steve Silver: For the campaign?

Bill Timmons: For the campaign. I labored in that capacity for a few months through the election. And then, I wasn't seeking the job in the White House. I was working for a Member of Congress, and Bryce called me from New York's Pierre Hotel and said that he would like for me to join him in the congressional staff. The way he put it was the president-elect would like for me to join, but it was Bryce that really asked; that was his method.

So I went to New York and was interviewed, and I talked to Bryce and the president-elect and came back and I talked to my wife and talked to my boss, Congressman Bill Brock then, and we all decided it would be a good career opportunity. So I called Bryce back and said I'd be happy to accept, and I went to New York and worked with him during November and December in the transition period in '68, and then came down here in January. Bryce and I set up an office in the—what was then called FOB7. It's a federal building on the corner of 17th and Pennsylvania Avenue, and we worked out of there from January up to the Inaugural. So that's the genesis of that.

Steve Silver: I want to ask you in a second about what it was like working congressional relations in the White House, but you mentioned you did it for the campaign too. What's involved in congressional relations for a campaign?

Bill Timmons: Well, a number of things. One is that you try to keep the message – keep all the Republican senators and congressmen on message – about what the campaign was saying about various issues. So while the congressional relations staff didn't develop the issues, we were given the issues and we had to sell them to the members of Congress, which was not difficult.

Second thing, we wanted to try to help members of Congress get re-elected, and that required consultation with those that were in some jeopardy on whether the candidate should come in their districts and states, and what he should say if he came in, and that sort of thing. So it was two-fold: It was giving the message to them so that they could use it, and if it would help the campaign to assist them in their races for re-election, those that needed help.

Third aspect that I felt kind of important was that we tried to solicit from them ideas that the presidential candidate could use. They live with all kinds of minutia up there on different issues - budget issues, health policy and so forth. So we actively sought their input in position papers and ideas that could be used in the campaign. And many of those carried over into the transition and into the new administration if they were worthwhile recommendations. So those are the kind of things that the congressional relations team did, although it was just a couple of us in the campaign.

Steve Silver: And then what about when you got into the power into the White House? What was the nature of the job then?

Bill Timmons: Well, Bryce Harlow was the Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs, and I was a Deputy Assistant responsible for the House of Representatives. And Bryce had recruited Ken Belieu, who would work in the Senate. So we were kind of the brawn, I guess, of the operation, not the brains, and spent a lot of time on Capitol Hill talking to members of Congress about what they expected out of the administration, what the president was going to do, when he would come to the Hill, make his State of the Union Address, different things. So we were kind of communicators and also sales persons, because by the time he made proposals, we had to try to get the votes. Under Bryce's leadership, Belieu and I and several others that were involved in the congressional relations shop had to go out and try to convince members of Congress to support the president.

Steve Silver: What kinds of things did Bryce Harlow teach you about doing that job well? What did he say is important?

Bill Timmons: Well there are a lot of attributes that Bryce had that you will find in interviews with people – his integrity and so forth – but the thing that I recall that he had taught us was a valuable lesson in life, but also in working with members of Congress, and that is know the motivations of Members. Now, by that he meant what makes them do the things they do, whether it's a vote, whether it's introduction of legislation, whether it's speaking on the floor on some issue. What motivates them to do that? And he pointed out some lessons that they may be representing their constituency back home whether it be a senator in the state or member of the House in his congressional district. It may be philosophy – liberal, conservative, moderate, whatever it is. It might be some personal interests about family, disease or something that influenced his actions. It could be party related. "I don't care what the issue is. I'm going to be Democrat or Republican." It could be the leadership of the Congress, what they persuaded Members to do. It could be something coming out of committee where one specializes in certain issues and once he feels that he knows it all, that will make him vote that way regardless. Sometimes it's supporting the president, or opposing the president; kind of knee-jerk reaction that, "I don't have a strong feeling but I'm going to support my president or I'm going to oppose this turkey." So Bryce was an expert. He had that innate ability to know what motivates people, and one thing he said was never get involved in an institutional fight, whereby you have all the administration versus all of the Congress – Republicans and Democrats. The War Powers Act would be one where Congress wanted to put limits on what the executive could do to start wars, so-called wars.

Steve Silver: So stay away from those?

Bill Timmons: Stay away from institutional battles because you have no core to work with. Bryce had this ability to know what motivates people. So when we had a vote coming up, he could pretty much tell us what the votes were going to be, because he knew what motivated most of the people or many of the people depending on the issue, and of course it varied.

Also he taught us that the intensity of feeling on some issues are greater, depending on the background of the person. For example, you may have these factors, five or ten factors we've talked about, and nine of them may go your way and one doesn't. So you say, well, that's a slam-dunk when you've got nine to one on these motivational factors. But if one was so intense, so strong, so deeply felt, that would override the others. So it's looking at

motivation that he taught me and others, I think, in our shop, that's been very valuable because it's true outside of Congress. I mean you can walk down the street and talk to somebody and try to figure out what their motivation is.

Steve Silver: That's a pretty broad political lesson.

Bill Timmons: It is a broad political lesson and personal lesson because, for example, at home your wife wants to go to some movie and you want to go to a different movie – well, what's the motivation? And I think that aspect is overlooked by a lot of people. I guess we kind of do that naturally and some respects, but to look at it as a science was something new and a very valuable lesson that Bryce taught us.

Steve Silver: Was there a lot of tension among different parts of the staff that Bryce had to work through, like for instance, the downtown staff versus the Hill staff or stuff like that?

Bill Timmons: We were all, I guess, frustrated in a way as government got bigger more and more Members depended on Hill staff for their views, and so we not only had to work with Members, which we did, but then we had this other element of working with the staff. And if we went over the staff to a Member, that may cause some friction and problems. On the other hand, if we talked only to the staff, he may never relate it to the Member, and so that was a bit of a problem. But of course the biggest staff problem was in the White House itself in that the people that came in with President Nixon in the White House – talking about Haldeman and Ehrlichman and Ziegler – and those people had no previous federal government experience. They were good politicians, I guess; they got him elected, but they really didn't know Washington. And so Bryce was always confronted with the problem of getting ideas over through the senior staff there, and that did cause some friction.

Steve Silver: Whether it was working for the White House or working for Procter & Gamble, what do you think made Bryce Harlow so effective and so respected on the Hill?

Bill Timmons: Character and personality. He was straightforward. I mentioned earlier his integrity, and he didn't play games and slip around and try to sandbag somebody into saying or doing something that wasn't right. He would tell them the pluses and minuses of an issue. "Look Mr. Congressman, here's what I want you to do, and here's why, and here's why it's in your interest" and so forth. "But you should understand that some others will say" and then give the

negative side and let them make a judgment. So he had the respect of Democrats and Republicans and liberals and conservatives because he was straightforward and honest. But then I said his personality; you can be straightforward and honest and have a lousy personality and not be able to accomplish much, but he had a really great personality. I mean he always had a quip; he always had something he could say nice, he'd always have something personal to say about somebody or their spouse, or times past, or some little story or something that would put people at ease. And I must say, I think that his demeanor helped him because he was short in physical stature; he was a giant in mental stature, but that put people at ease, too. He was not threatening. If he had been seven foot tall and weighed 300 pounds, well, when he came into the office, it's a whole different thing. So character and personality were two attributes that were really good for his career.

Steve Silver: I wanted to ask you since you yourself have had a long career in corporate representation as well as working for government, how did Harlow see – and then I want to get your views on this too – the balancing act between serving the client versus serving the public interest or can the two things go together?

Bill Timmons: You mean outside of government?

Steve Silver: Correct.

Bill Timmons: I can't speak for Bryce. I didn't work with him at Procter & Gamble much; I saw him some. That's why I have to speak for myself in that most issues can be argued two ways, and when a client has a view you're obligated, if you're taking his money, to try to represent that view to policy makers, both in the Congress and the administration. And if there comes a time when you can't in good conscious carry that message, then you should tell the client, "I just can't do this for ethical reasons or moral reasons or some other kind of serious reasons, and you need to get somebody else or let us work on some other issue." That seldom comes up though, because most times our clients have a position that we can whole heartedly support, and we would not take a client that had views diametrically opposed to what we believe. But I say that almost never comes up, because in communications, as an example, we have issues on broadband or on cellular telephones or something that's not a public interest issue, and so we are obligated to represent our client.

Now sometimes we think the client may be wrong, and we tell them, "Look, this isn't going to work, and here's why it isn't going

to work” and if they must go ahead, fine, we’ll try to sell it, but we put them on notice that based on our experience that it’s not going to fly. But that doesn’t cross into the ethical or illegal side, because we couldn’t do that, it would hurt our own reputation, and as Bryce taught us, reputation is really important in this line of work.

Steve Silver: Well, you just actually led in to my next question. I wanted to ask if Bryce talked a lot to you guys, sort of the younger up and coming corporate reps, about ethics and about reputation and integrity.

Bill Timmons: No, he didn’t in the sense of a formal lecture, but he did in the sense of what’s right and wrong, saying that it would be wrong to do this, or it would be right to do this, or I can’t understand why they can’t do that. So in working with him we picked up ethical considerations, but as far as a formal laid-out lecture where he’d sit you down and start – no.

But by the way, the congressional office, unlike the others in the White House, were all experienced Washington hands – not only me but others, too. I had had twelve years of working on the Hill, and Belieu had worked on the Hill, and eventually we brought other people in that had worked in the Congress and had been around town. So in that sense, we didn’t need a lot of training. We knew where the Congress was located and where the bathrooms were up there, and that was before the current security situation, so you could walk in everywhere. He had that advantage, I think, in the White House in that he didn’t have to worry about most of us. We’d been around the track a few times and recognized the limits.

Steve Silver: What was the partisanship like back then? Was it pretty much how it is now, or was it really different?

Bill Timmons: It was really different. I think that Congress is much more partisan now than it was then. Bear in mind, President Nixon, I think, was the first president to come into office without control of either House or Senate. Eisenhower had the Senate, but Nixon had neither. So here you’re confronted with a Democratic controlled House and Democratic controlled Senate and a Republican who had the image of being a partisan back from his Senate days and House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee. So he was seen as kind of partisan Republican, and here we’re confronted with a hostile Congress, so called. So Bryce had his work cut out for him and I must say we did not view ourselves as

partisans, although my own background had been Republican working in the Nixon campaign and in other campaigns and conventions.

Still, we had to get along with a Democratic Congress and Bryce knew that, and in fact, Ken Belieu, my counterpart in the Senate – I'm not sure he was Republican. He was a career military guy, colonel, lost his leg in Korea and had an artificial leg, but if he was a registered Republican, he certainly wasn't an activist. Later on, I hired a Democrat, Gene Ainsworth, in my congressional office. He was compatible with the president's philosophies generally, but he was a Democrat and he worked the Democratic side up there for us very effectively. So it was not as partisan; it was more issue-oriented. We divided the Congress into conservatives and liberals and moderates. We tried to appeal to the conservative element mostly, and that worked well because in those days the Democratic conservatives had most of the chairmanships in the Senate and the House.

Steve Silver: It was a little bit easier then.

Bill Timmons: It was easier to work with them on the issues, not on the politics, but we had problems, too, because some Republican Members said we're not paying enough attention here, saying, "I thought we elected a Republican president, and here you are doing all these things with Democrats." So we had to say, "Well, it's important to get the legislation passed so we have to do that," but there were some people who were upset over this kind of bipartisan approach.

Steve Silver: So it definitely had to play into the strategy of how you –

Bill Timmons: That's right, and where we get the votes and so forth, and if we had White House tours for constituencies we played them equal. I mean we didn't just give to Republicans, had dinners at the White House, and President Nixon was much more active socially at the White House than certainly the current president. So we'd have Republicans and Democrats in equal numbers to the White House for events.

Steve Silver: With that, I didn't really want to get into the specifics of Watergate and everything, but I wanted just to sort of get your opinion on what do you think bothered Bryce Harlow the most about that whole chapter?

Bill Timmons: I think he felt he was lied to by the president directly. I mean, a lot of people felt they were misled, but he felt that he was lied to by

the president, and that really upset him personally. I think he felt he had a relationship with Nixon that went back to the Eisenhower days, and that maybe he should have been straight with him.

Steve Silver: Do you think he had any personal regrets of things he could have done differently?

Bill Timmons: No. I don't know of anything Bryce could have done in that situation. If he didn't know the facts and he came in really after all of this happened, there's nothing he could do.

Steve Silver: How has corporate representation changed in the time from when you started doing it with Bryce and up until today?

Bill Timmons: Well, 31 years ago when I started Timmons and Company, and while it may not have been the first kind of independent lobbying firm, it was certainly one of the first where a firm would take multiple clients, different clients with different issues. Clearly the companies like Procter & Gamble had their own Washington representatives, vice presidents of government affairs or something, and some law firms did a little lobbying on the side. And some public relations houses had a component for lobbying, but I think we were one of the first to get out into representing different clients on different issues.

Since then, the supply of lobbyists who do this independent consulting has grown tremendously, and the demand has not grown consistent with that. So it's really a good market for those people who want Washington representation because there are hundreds, maybe thousands of us, in town doing the work that one or two of us did back 30 years ago. So the competition is greater now.

That's one big change, but the second big change is that government has grown over the years, and that has caused more and more companies to seek Washington representation, or set up an office in Washington when they didn't have one. And even the staffs of corporate America in town here have expanded because government has grown so much.

Steve Silver: The media of course likes to harp on the negatives sometimes of any profession, and lobbying is certainly among those, but can you think of any sort of either people or organizations that you would consider modern day Bryce Harlows?

Bill Timmons: Timmons and Company. *[Laughter]* Well, there are really a lot of organizations, and in fact, I would say most of them. While they

didn't know Bryce and didn't have the benefit of his wisdom, they are playing by the rules and trying to represent their clients in the best way possible. Charlie Black over at his BKSH operation is good and ethical and understands the game. Ken Duberstein's firm and Ed Gillespie with Quinn and Gillespie are examples who follow the rules and don't cut the corners, and try to give good, decent representation. The Walker-Wexler firm is really good at all of this. So, most of them are professional. Occasionally you get some bad apples who give us all a bad name, but I would say 95% of them are those Bryce Harlow, if he were here, would say they're doing it right.

Steve Silver: What do you think are the most important contributions that students today or aspiring corporate representatives should learn from Bryce Harlow?

Bill Timmons: Well, when we started this conversation, I said character and personality, and I think those are the most important ingredients. Obviously you've got to be smart, and you've got to have some talent and you've got to be hard working, as Bryce was really hard working. I mean the hours he would put in, the labors he would put in, and that's all important, but character and personality. And character is the ability to know right from wrong, and to follow a path that will lead you to victory in a decent, honest way, and personality is the attribute of conveying that. And so those are two at the top of my list of attributes that students and young people entering into this business can follow, but that's good in any business. I mean, if you're aspiring to be a CEO of some big company you still need to have character and personality, seems to me. Although, I must say, in reading the papers I wonder about the personality side of some of these guys that are in jail now.

Steve Silver: This was great, Bill Timmons. We appreciate you talking to us as part of the Bryce Harlow oral history.

Bill Timmons: Good luck. I hope this is successful, as I know it will be. Your subject was an outstanding person, and he deserves a recognition that you're going to give him through this project.

Steve Silver: Thank you.

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