

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
Rep. PAUL D. RYAN
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Interviewer
Morton Kondracke

JACK KEMP FOUNDATION
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Morton Kondracke: This is a Jack Kemp Oral History Project interview with Representative Paul Ryan, 2012 vice presidential candidate for the Republican Party and former intern for Jack Kemp.'

Rep. Paul Ryan: Staffer, actually. I was paid.

Kondracke: Okay, good. Today is September 27, 2013. We're doing this in his office at the Longworth House Office Building in Washington, DC, and I'm Morton Kondracke. Thank you, Congressman. So when you think about Jack Kemp, what's the first thing that comes to mind?

Ryan: Enthusiasm, infectious enthusiasm is what comes to mind. Absolute, endless sense of optimism and the belief in the potential of people. That's what I get out of Jack Kemp.

Kondracke: What would you say, besides that, were his greatest character strengths?

Ryan: I had a chance of working for Jack for a couple of good years as his staff sort-of economics policy person at Empower America, his think tank. I traveled the country with him. I was drawn to politics by Jack Kemp. My own goal in life was to go on to grad school and study economics and work in the field of economics. And I was drawn to Jack Kemp by my old boss, [Robert W.] Bob Kasten [Jr.], who put in a good word for me, and Jack hired me, and I just wanted to learn from what I thought was the best economic mind in the conservative movement at the time, in the early nineties. What I guess I didn't expect was how he would draw me so much into public service as a vocation that I ended up going into politics myself, basically as a result of the mentorship that he gave me and the example he set. And so

what I got out of my experience with Jack, in a nutshell, other than deepening my understanding of economics and political philosophy, is how you can actually really make a difference in the world, how, if you really believe in what you're doing, you believe in ideas—he called it the battle of ideas—and apply yourself, you can persuade people to take a course of action, make a difference, and really improve people's lives on a grand, big, wide scale. He did that, and he made it fun, and he made it exciting. He made it interesting, he made it self-fulfilling. He basically showed me how you can take public service and turn it into a true vocation that not only brings you happiness, but it helps you change the world. That's what I got out of working for Jack Kemp. That's a pretty big gift to get from somebody.

Kondracke: How did he convey that to you? What kind of language did he use, and what kind of, what are the standout experiences of working for him, specifically?

Ryan: There are a lot of them. It's a combination of deep understanding of economic policy and political philosophy with just such an incredible sense of enthusiasm and an ability to relate to people. He had just endless energy, I mean just endless energy. But what was unique about Jack's endless energy is that I love the fact that he broke down every single stereotype. Every person was special, every life had human dignity and value, and he went out of his way—and I think it was probably the product of his time and the fact that he was a quarterback and his relationship with African-Americans—and how he went out of his way to break down those stereotypes and bring these great—he was so excited to bring these conservative ideas and tell them to people who hadn't seen them before and show how they would improve their lives. He was excited to bring this news to the inner city. He was excited to go to Cabrini Green [Chicago public

housing project]. He was excited to basically preach the gospel of pro-growth economics and limited government and equality of opportunity. I've never seen anybody do that before. I've never seen a Republican do that.

Kondracke: So you graduated from college and then you went to work for Bob Kasten right away, and how did then you get this—

Ryan: Bob lost to [Russell D.] Russ Feingold, a guy I grew up with. And I was working with a guy named Cesar [V.] Conda, who was close to Jack, and Bob was close to Jack, and Jack at that time was setting up a new think tank called Empower America and looking for a young economics aide, and so I did that for Bob Kasten.

Kondracke: Had you been aware or ever met Jack before?

Ryan: Yes, he had come over to testify at our committee a couple of times, so yes. Of course I'd read everything that he had done. And he was my favorite political figure, and I really was drawn—

Kondracke: From way back?

Ryan: From way back when, yes, from way back when he ran for president in '88. You've got to understand I was a pretty young guy at the time. So Jack Kemp was the guy I liked at the time in '88. He was my favorite person running for president then. He didn't make it through the primary by the time he came around to Wisconsin, but—so I always admired him from afar. Then when I went to the Hill to work for Bob Kasten I admired him from up close. Then when Bob lost and Jack was starting a new think tank, I jumped at the opportunity to go work for him. And then when I got to work for him

I got even more of it. He really turned my own life and the vocation I chose for myself from going down an academic route to going down the public policy, public service route.

Kondracke: What was your first encounter with him like? He must have interviewed you, right?

Ryan: Yes he did. He interviewed me and that was basically, we were talking about [Friedrich A.] Hayek and [Ludwig von] Mises and [Milton] Friedman and we talked about Jude [T.] Wanniski and we talked about economics. He would ask me little what I now know as sort of entrapping questions about economics: tax credits versus tax rates, and he would ask me certain questions to see if I was a true, "on the model," we used to say. If I was really on the model, meaning did I really understand and believe in pro-growth economics. They used to call it supply-side economics. He would ask me certain questions, which now I knew would reveal whether or not this person that you're talking to really understood pro-growth economics or not. Because at that time it was not the majority of the Republican Party. It was a movement within the conservative movement, and not everybody really understood it. Now I was sort of raised in it. I understood it from working with the likes of say [Lawrence] Larry Kudlow or Cesar Conda or Alan Reynolds, reading Paul Craig Roberts and all of these guys. So I sort of knew it, and he wanted to test me, so he kept poking questions at me to see if I actually understood pro-growth economics.

Kondracke: Do you remember any questions?

Ryan: Yes. If I can recall, at the time I think Heritage [Foundation] was pushing the child tax credit, I think was maybe the idea. He said, "What do

you think is a better policy: if we would just lower marginal tax rates, or do these tax credits for families and kids?" And I said, "Oh, lower rates, by far." "Why?" And then I would, "Growth." Because he could tell at the time most Republicans were just pushing tax credits, and they weren't pushing pro-growth tax policy, they were pushing popular, social-based tax policy. That's the fight that people are having with *National Review* right now, so this fight keeps going on right. I wouldn't say it's a fight; it's a dispute.

Kondracke: So you obviously passed the test.

Ryan: Yes, I passed the test. And trade as well was a big issue at the time, and I worked on quite a bit of trade.

Kondracke: So, you're 23 years old, and here you're working for the originator of supply-side economics or pro-growth. Were you intimidated?

Ryan: Oh, absolutely. Are you kidding me? I spent all my free time, I had three jobs at the time, I spent all of my free time reading, just catching up on all of these things. I dropped one of my jobs then. I waited tables, I was a fitness instructor at a gym, and I worked for Jack. But I worked so late and I read so much, so I had to drop my table waiting job and I just did the weekend fitness job, and I would just spend my time reading everything I could to catch up with it. What was neat was I was sort of his, I hate to say the word gatekeeper, but I was sort of Jack's gatekeeper to all the supply-siders, to all the economists. So I got to get to know all of these people extremely well because I was the one that would speak to them on behalf of Jack, or if they wanted to get a message in to Jack I would speak to him. So I spent all of the time on the phone with Jude, with Alan Reynolds, with Alvin Rabushka, with [Robert] Bob Mundell, with all of these folks. So I spent all

this time meeting these people, knowing these people, reading their things, and it was basically like graduate school. That is the way I would describe it. And then when we would fly around the country or go to events, which I did quite a bit with Jack, it was always just talking about these things. That was neat.

Kondracke: Specifically on Jude, was this the period when his relationship—

Ryan: It was just prior to that, I think. They started growing distant, and I would say Jude's emphasis on policy changed somewhere in that point. But in the beginning—

Kondracke: To?

Ryan: Well I just think not on economics, but on other issues. He had this weird [Louis] Farrakan [Muhammad, Sr.] fascination that was puzzling to us. So I think he—this was a long time ago so my memory's a little sketchy here—but I remember, Polyeconomics, I believe, was his firm, and so Jude would always call in with ideas, and I was sort of the guy who had to respond to those things. He had a lot of different ideas, like many people—this is what people say about [Newton L.] Newt Gingrich—10 ideas, six of them are way off, a couple of them are brilliant and two of them are, you know. So Jude was kind of like that. He pitched in a lot of ideas. But I think as time went on their relationship grew a little more distant, but people like Larry Kudlow and [Arthur B.] Art Laffer and [Stephen J.] Steve Entin and Norman [B.] Ture and all of those guys were still very, very much in keeping in the Kemp circle.

Kondracke: How often would he talk to people like that?

Ryan: Jack?

Kondracke: Yes.

Ryan: Oh, very frequently. He talked to people like that all the time. And he was a busy man, so I got to take some of these calls fairly often, or he'd want to know what someone's opinion on something is and I'd go out and get their opinion and then report back.

Kondracke: Besides being the gatekeeper, what did you do?

Ryan: I did all his immigration work, I did his tax work, his monetary policy work, basically his economic and trade work. So whenever Jack did or wrote something on those basic issues, I was his policy person who did them. Then if it was a big speech I would go work with [Michael J.] Mike Gerson or Kevin Stack on—I would do the meat and potato part of it and they would polish it up and add the rhetoric to it. I wrote all his immigration stuff, things like that. We got into this big fight called Prop[osition] 187 [1994] in California—

Kondracke: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

Ryan: —and I wrote a long statement on behalf of Jack and [William J.] Bill [Bennett] on immigration, which is the same views I have today. And then if I recall the *National Review* did a cover story and the cover of *National Review* was “Why Kemp and Bennett are Wrong on Immigration.” And then he'd go “Pablo,”—he called me Pablo. I don't know why he called me that—“Pablo, what are you going to do about this?” I spent the whole night

working on a rebuttal, a huge, long, long, long rebuttal to it, point by point. "What are we going to do about this?" "I got something." "Well, give it to me now." "Well, I haven't cleaned it up yet. I haven't given it to Kevin yet." "Give it to me now." He'd stand by the printer waiting for me to print out my rebuttal to the *National Review* guys, and he'd take it and go back to his office. "All right. We've got to publish this." And I said, "Well, I think Kevin and Mike might want to take a look at it." He was always enthusiastic, and "Let's get going. We're in the battle of ideas and we've got to do this and that." And the reason I'm doing this is because that's how he was. He was always moving. He was this constant force of energy, moving in all these different directions. The one thing that never seemed to change was his hair. [laughter] We called it his helmet behind his back. He had hairspray. It was pretty good hair, perfect hair, and it didn't move much. He was good at that.

Kondracke: On that Prop 187 thing, he took a lot of heat from the Republican Party because he was opposing a Republican governor.

Ryan: Right. Oh no, we at the time thought [Peter B.] Pete [Wilson], look, Pete Wilson is a friend of mine. I like Pete quite a bit. I've gotten to know him since fairly well. But we at the time thought that they were going to damage the Republican Party with the Latino community. And it was an issue about welfare benefits and immigrants, and our argument was let's go after the welfare state, the problem is the welfare state itself, it's not immigrants. And immigration, by the way, is a good thing for America. Immigrants don't come simply to consume welfare benefits. They come in search of a better life, and the American idea and upward mobility. These are all Republican values. These are the things we believe in, so they should naturally be allies of ours, and so let's watch what we're doing here, because

I think people will get the wrong idea about what we think about them and about immigration. And, lo and behold, look what happened to the Republican Party in California. I'm not saying it's axiomatic, it's exactly why the Republican Party lost its stride. Liberalism just sort of took over in California. But we just at the time were worried that we were sending the wrong signals as the party of opportunity, the party of growth, hope. We thought at the time that that was sending the wrong signals.

Kondracke: Besides the Prop 187 fight, what are your all-time other favorite memories?

Ryan: Probably the flat tax. I worked on, so this is when [Richard K.] Dick Armey, this is before [Malcolm S.] Steve Forbes [Jr.]. This is when Dick Armey, so we were good friends with Alvin Rabushka, who is an economist. He and [Robert E.] Bob Hall wrote the book on the flat tax, which is the natural outflow of Kemp-Roth [Economic Recovery Act of 1981], right? Kemp-Roth didn't have a singular rate. It brought the rates down. And then the '86 tax reform, you know all of this, the natural progression of ideas was a flat tax. So I did all of Jack's flat tax work, and we worked with Dick Armey on the flat tax and on promoting it as well. So I did a lot of his work on that.

Kondracke: Did you have anything to do with the Tax Commission?

Ryan: No, I'd left by then. I was over here in the Congress by then, as a staffer, by the time the Commission came around.

Kondracke: There was a debate, but John [D.] Mueller, particularly regards a flat tax as basically a tax on labor and a burden on working people.

Ryan: Right.

Kondracke: Did you get into that with him?

Ryan: I'm very familiar with that debate and I know John very, very well. John's a brilliant guy, a very good economist, who I would say takes a contrarian view, contrarian from the mainstream pro-growth movement on economic policy. Those views came out a little later, such as during that Commission. We, at the time, were very pro-flat tax because it taxed income once at its source and never again, and it took the taxation off of capital investment and savings, which is really what our goal was ultimately. So we worked with Dick Armev not only in developing it and in translating Hall-Rabushka into an actual plan, which was the Armev flat tax. Then we worked on helping promote it.

Kondracke: So Jack was a flat taxer?

Ryan: He was at that time, yes.

Kondracke: And stayed one?

Ryan: Stayed one, and then the Commission, I can't recall exactly what the Commission kicked out. It had options, but Jack was generally, basically a flat taxer, which from a supply-side perspective is get your rates down, stop taxing capital, tax income once at its base, and a flat tax is effectively a consumption tax because you're exempting savings and investment from taxation, therefore you're effectively taxing consumption. So just from an

economic growth and efficiency standpoint it's a very efficient tax, and it's very pro-growth. That's why Jack was enamored of it.

Kondracke: From Jack's perspective, if you care about the poor and you don't want to raise their marginal tax rates, if you're going to tax consumption and you're going to exempt—

Ryan: Major exemptions on families. Thirty, if I recall, this is 1992, we exempted a family of four on their first \$36,600 of income. "We," I mean the bill did. The other thing I worked on was enterprise zones. I did that for Kasten in the House, which was he picked it up after Kemp, and then I worked on that with Jack afterwards. We worked on enterprise zones for D.C., enterprise zones for just all the poverty-stricken areas of America. So we pushed, we talked about that idea quite a bit.

Kondracke: What was it like traveling with him?

Ryan: He was a pretty famous guy. He had so many people who just adored him. And what I enjoyed about traveling with him was that people from all walks of life, people from all backgrounds, all ethnicities, all races gravitated toward this man, and they really liked him. And they liked him because they knew he cared, they knew that he actually was trying to make a positive difference in people's lives and that he didn't have a racist bone in his body. He had ideas that really gave people a sense of optimism that they could make it. That's what was unique about Jack Kemp. How many people who are involved in politics travel around with that? That's what I found just amazing about Jack Kemp.

Kondracke: So did he still drive like a maniac?

Ryan: Yes, he was a terrible drive, he was an awful driver. That's why we always tried to make sure that he wasn't driving. He had a Lincoln, I think, a Mark VI or something. I forgot, one of those weird-looking Lincolns at the time. And yes, he was not a very good driver. I always was a little nervous. He was distracted too—not a good driver. And he'd hawk a lot of loogies and roll the window down [imitates]. He was a football player. Ever heard of a hawk a loogie? I'm not going to do it on TV here for you. He would clear his throat. He must have had a lot of sinus drainage or something. He'd clear his throat, roll the window down and go [spitting noise], and then roll the window back up. He did that all the time. It was very NFL [National Football League], I guess. He did that a lot.

Kondracke: What other quirks?

Ryan: Well he hawked a lot of loogies. That is the one I remember the most. He was very, very conscious about his hair, and if it rained and he didn't have an umbrella or something like that he was pretty put out about that.

Kondracke: Did he bark at you or bark at staff?

Ryan: You know, he did bark at staff. He never really did that with me. I don't know why, but I never really—I think the policy people he treated a little differently, the sense I got because we were always feeding him the policy stuff that he wanted and liked and needed. He would question us and test us a lot. He did that all the time, really tested you. But I think he just liked to make sure that the schedule and things ran pretty smoothly logistically. You might get a different story from [James R.] J.T. Taylor, for

example, or [Frederick L.] Rick Ahern, if you asked those guys. But as far as one of the policy, I was sort of his policy guy, he didn't really bark at me too much. It was more intellectual jousting, if anything.

Kondracke: Do you remember any particular jousts?

Ryan: Oh, sure. Immigration. I was very strong in advocating the course we took, and he agreed with that, clearly. But then when the going got tough, when we started taking a lot of incoming rounds from our own side, from the *National Review*, from Californians, it was stressful, I'll just put it that way. And since I was his point guy writing these things, I think he chewed me out a couple of times, only, "What did we get ourselves into?" or "What did you get me into?" Stuff like this sometimes, but he was fine at the end of the day.

Kondracke: When you were taking on the 187 fight, whose idea was it to do that, and how did it unfold?

Ryan: I don't remember how that exactly—

Kondracke: You didn't get him into it?

Ryan: No, but I was very enthusiastic for getting into the fight. I didn't get him into it. He and Bill Bennett decided to do that. I think what he and Bill were worried about was just a streak of nativism. You have to understand, [Patrick J.] Pat Buchanan was sort of on the rise at that time, and he was fighting NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]. And so I think Jack was just appalled that our party was sort of going down this isolationist anti-trade route. Then comes this immigration issue, and so he and Bill—

remember, Empower America was sort of to be the conservative shadow government to the Clinton Administration—and the Buchanan wing of the party started going down this very darker direction from Jack's perspective.

Kondracke: Sounds familiar. Anyway—

Ryan: So, they were very worried that nativism and isolationism was creeping into the party, and from a foreign policy perspective on isolationism. I worked on his NAFTA—meaning pro-trade agenda—and the immigration stuff. So I think he and Bill were really worried that they had to do something to try to halt the growth of that wing of the party, which was anti-trade, anti-immigrant, anti-interventionism.

Kondracke: Did the two of them decide that they were going to take on 187 and then they came to you to—

Ryan: Yes, I think we had a few meetings, and we said this 187 thing is the tip of the spear of this argument, this issue. Should we weigh into it? I did a big memo, if I recall, about 187, about what was wrong with it and what our stand would be. I think I was asked to look into it and do a memo. I did that and we all discussed it. Then, if memory serves, we just decided to do something about it, and so we put together a joint statement. I think we published an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, which was 1,400 words, but it was out of a larger piece we ran in all these Florida papers, like the *Orange County Register* and the [Los Angeles] *L.A. Times*. No, it was [Ronald] Ron Brownstein. Do you know who Ron Brownstein is? He was the D.C. bureau chief of the *L.A. Times*, I believe, at the time. We called Ron in and we basically took a position, Bill and Jack took a position against it. That got a lot of news. And then we sent out this op-ed and this other sort of treatise

on immigration, why Republicans are for immigration and all of this stuff. So we basically decided to make a case and a stand at that moment on 187 because we were worried about the dangerous trend of becoming an isolationist, nativist party.

Kondracke: So, besides *National Review*, what kind of incoming did you get?

Ryan: I don't think there was really a talk radio element at that time like you have today, and I have no idea where Rush [H. Limbaugh] was on that. Rush was the only one around. Remember at Blackie's [restaurant] they used to have the Rush Room? I remember we would go there sometimes. I went there with Bill Bennett a few times for lunch. He and Bill were really close. But it was mostly from just grassroots Republicans, Pat Buchanan and other folks like that. A guy named Harold [unclear], as I recall his name, was a chief opponent of 187, and I remember having to debate him a couple of times.

Kondracke: What kind of incoming did you get from California, from Wilson?

Ryan: What you would expect.

Kondracke: Did Wilson call up?

Ryan: Oh, yes. They were pretty upset. They weren't real pleased.

Kondracke: Were you there when Jack talked to Wilson?

Ryan: No, but I knew he was pretty ticked off.

Kondracke: So why did Jack say that you'd gotten him into this?

Ryan: It was just one of those moment. He would say some things like that when the going got heavy. Because just I did a lot of the research and a lot of the arguments. But they'd made the decision to go into this, so I helped implement the plan to do so. I just remember him being a little hot at one time, because he went to California for some prescheduled visit of some kind. I can't remember what he was doing there, and he had a bunch of people yelling at him and a bunch of people kind of blustering at him. So the blowback, maybe it surprised him a little bit.

Kondracke: What did he say to you exactly?

Ryan: Something like, "Well look what you got us into now. What do you say? What do you think?"

Kondracke: Kidding?

Ryan: Kidding. But everybody jokes in a way. But that's when I remember working to counter, it was Peter Brimelow, maybe, or John O'Sullivan, who wrote something in our, or both of them, I can't recall. It's a long time ago.

Kondracke: At that time did he think that his political career was over, or was he still thinking about '96?

Ryan: No, I don't believe so. I think we were still thinking about '96. That's what most of us thought when we started Empower America was that this was going to be eventually a Kemp for President organization.

Kondracke: Did you talk about that when you got hired?

Ryan: It was just implied. It was implied. Among the staff we talked about it quite a bit, actually, of course. I mean naturally you would think so. But I never personally broached that with him, I didn't think that was really appropriate. But no, we thought that that was what he was going to do.

Kondracke: Was there a political organization that was working on this as well?

Ryan: It was different then. No, Empower America was, no, I don't know the answer to that, actually. You'll have to ask [William] Bill Dal Col about that, if he had a PAC [Political Action Committee] or something like that at the time. I just know our rules now and I know they were different then. As a policy guy at the time I really don't know precisely what he did. I was just one of his policy guys, focused on that, thinking and assuming that he was eventually going to run for president and that we were basically putting the intellectual basis for a presidential campaign together.

Kondracke: When something like 187 comes up and you're taking a lot of flack, did he ever discuss it in political terms with his own political terms?

Ryan: No. I don't think he was like that. I don't think he cared about that as much. I think he knew what he was doing was right, he knew that it was the right place for the party long-term, and he knew that he needed to take a stand because if people like him didn't stand up then it would get even worse. What I admired about him so much is he really knew who he was, he knew what he believed in, and he stood up for it, even if the pressure was

hot, even if it wasn't popular, because he knew he was taking his country and his party into a better place. It was courage when it was being tested. Same with Bill Bennett. These two gentlemen exhibited, in my mind, a tremendous courage, and the best kind of courage is not just that comes from the left, that's pretty easy. It's the courage from within your own side, where you're fighting for the soul of your party. He used to say, "We're fighting for the soul of the Republican Party." He'd say that all the time. And when we were on these fights of growth or trade or immigration, you know, or whether it was cap gains and enterprise zones, he would always say we're fighting for the soul of the party, for the American idea. He'd quote [Abraham] Lincoln, you know how he was, and—

Kondracke: I understand the nativist or isolationist part of the fight for the soul of the party, but was he still fighting, was it [Robert J.] Bob Dole or—

Ryan: He actually became Bob's running mate, so I think he saw Bob Dole as sort of from what we call the green eyeshade wing of the party. What I see as the ticket having been was two wings of the party merging to have a unified front going forward, and Jack represented the growth wing of the party and Bob, the more establishment, green eyeshade wing of the party. Yes, he had been critical of Bob Dole prior to all of that, but in a respectful way.

Kondracke: So, Steve Forbes was his candidate, right, in '96, but not right away.

Ryan: No, because Steve was behind Jack. When Jack didn't run, Steve filled that void of a growth wing candidate. Remember, the Republican Party had these different wings, and we sort of have that now. But I would say

the schisms in the Republican Party were greater back then than they are now. You raise your eyebrows at that. We really basically believe the same things. Right now we're debating about tactics, but we all believe basically the same nature of economics, on trade we're still a pro-trade party, pro-growth economics, limited government. Okay, maybe on immigration and a few issues we still have some schisms, but they were bigger, I think, back in those days, in the early nineties than they are right now.

Kondracke: Not quite as loud.

Ryan: Correct. But there are just different amplifiers these days because of technology and talk radio and all the other things.

Kondracke: How did he decide not to run in '96?

Ryan: Well, I would ask Joanne [M. Kemp] that question, but I think from my recollection, what it took to run and the kind of fundraising and that it wasn't going to be an easy path to the nomination and the fact that he was already making a difference and he enjoyed his life with his family, he enjoyed his life—I'm trying to think if he had grandkids. I think [Jeffrey A.] Jeff [Kemp] may have—I can't remember if he had grandkids then or not. I know he had them soon after. But I think he was enjoying his private life. This was the first time he had a private life. I think he didn't like the idea of spending two years running around the country fundraising and that it wasn't going to be an easy cinch to the nomination is probably why he ended up not running.

Kondracke: Did you have any role in his '96—

Ryan: When he decided not to run a number of us left at that time, because it was pretty clear that we weren't ramping up for a presidential, that he decided not to do that. And then we took Congress, so a few of us left to go to this new Congress, because what happened was you had all these new freshmen members of Congress coming into town and there were no conservatives. There weren't many conservatives who knew how Washington worked, how Congress worked, how policy worked, and so we were getting all these job offers to come to the Hill because there was a shortage of knowledgeable conservatives about how Congress worked or how federal policy worked. And so a number of us left. And then Jack later got added to the Dole ticket.

Kondracke: You weren't in a position to—

Ryan: No, they offered me to come back to the campaign. Yes, they did ask me to come back to the Dole-Kemp campaign as I think the policy director or something like that, for Jack. But I had already, I was working for [Samuel D.] Sam Brownback at the time. Bob Dole not only resigned as majority leader, he resigned as Senator, triggering a special election, which Sam Brownback threw his hat into the ring, and I just felt, out of loyalty, I had to stay with Sam Brownback, who was in a fight of his life, and I couldn't just leave Sam and go back to work for Jack, so I stayed with Sam.

Kondracke: How did Jack's performance in '96 affect your performance in 2012? Did you reflect on his—

Ryan: I reflected. I called Joanne that day, the day I got picked, the day it was announced. And then I saw Joanne. She came to a rally we had somewhere in Virginia. I did so many things back then. Where was that?

Was that McLean? No. Great, Falls Church, maybe? [Willard] Mitt [Romney] and I did a whole thing through Virginia, a bus tour through Virginia the day I was announced down in Norfolk, and I was trying to call Joanne on the phone from the bus that day just to talk to her, because I thought about Jack a lot that day. I never planned on being a congressman in the first place, so it's not as if I had this plan for my life. I'd thought I'd go into the field of economics, so being elected to Congress was a surprise for me in the first place, let alone being put on a ticket. And so I couldn't help but have a lot of emotions. I called a man who was my campaign chairman's widow, because he had passed away; I called my aunt, because my uncle had passed away fairly recently, he was a real big supporter of mine, and I called Joanne Kemp. So I basically called three widows of mentors of mine. I lost my dad when I was young, so I always had these mentors, and Jack was clearly a mentor of mine at that phase of my life. So there are three widows I called that day just to say how much I was thinking about their husband. I couldn't get a hold of Joanne, but the reason I couldn't get ahold of her is she was leaving, she was on her way to this rally to meet us in I think it was Falls Church, and so I got to see her there. So yes, I sure thought about him quite a bit, especially the day I was picked. On the debate, I remember being very frustrated on the debate that Jack had, because I was working in Congress at the time so I knew there issues very, very well, and I just felt like Jack was not well-prepared against [Albert A.] Al Gore [Jr.] on the issues of the day, issues we were grappling with in Congress. So I found myself yelling at the TV a lot in '96 out of pure frustration. I got the back story later on: Jude got through and talked to him. You probably know that story, right?

Kondracke: No. Tell me what you know about it.

Ryan: My understanding is they'd been preparing all along, good game plan, and you know, debate's a chess game strategy, right? So you have your plan and you want to execute your plan. I had a plan and with my debate against [Joseph R.] Joe Biden [Jr.] and I executed my plan. For some reason, Jude got through and talked to Jack for I don't know, an hour, the night before or the morning of, or some time and kind of just scrambled it all.

Kondracke: Well there are various stories about that. [Edwin J.] Ed Feulner [Jr.] said that he just didn't prepare very well, that he just was sort of tossing it off, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I can do that." And then they showed him the tape and all of a sudden, "Oh, my God. Al Gore's a real debater."

Ryan: Oh, yes., Al Gore, yes.

Kondracke: So he didn't really prepare very well.

Ryan: What I understand is what I just said, which was that Jude said don't bomb before breakfast or some goofy line that he used. You remember that line?

Kondracke: What is it?

Ryan: Something about you don't bomb before breakfast. Remember, he had some clever zinger that was not a good clever zinger that Jack threw out there. And I remember following up with--was it Stack or Del Col, or Rick Ahern—I can't remember which one of my Kemp friends I asked, I said, "Where did that come from?" He's like, "Jude!" I remember that line, but the point to answer your question was, I could tell from being emotionally

involved in that vice presidential debate between Jack and Al Gore that vice presidential debates can have an impact. Especially if you're a challenger taking on an incumbent you can't lose a debate because you can really take momentum out of the campaign. So the emotional and attachment involvement I had in the Jack debate in the '96 was among the motivators I had to making sure that I did my job in the vice presidential debate. Now we had different people, I had a different character and personality and expectations than Jack, and Al Gore and Joe Biden are slightly different. But same stakes, same challenger after an incumbent, and so I went into that thing as prepared as I could have been.

Kondracke: The other critique of Jack at the time was that he didn't attack or even really criticize the Clinton-Gore record, which is a mistake you did not make. Was that part of your preparation?

Ryan: Yes, but it wasn't because Jack didn't do it. It was because that's what I was going to do. I was going to go after the record. And I wanted to do it in a thoughtful way, not a hack and slash, mean-spirited way.

Kondracke: What did Jack have to do with your deciding to run for Congress?

Ryan: I never necessarily planned on being an elected official. My predecessor, Mark [W.] Neumann, I don't know if you know who Mark Neumann is, he barely won his congressional seat. He won by two or three tenths of a point his first time. He won by six tenths of a percent his second time. He called me up and he asked me, "You worked for Bob Kasten. Will you get together Kasten's team, Bob and his team, who ran against Russ Feingold. I'm thinking of running against Feingold. I want to have a

meeting with them." So I said "Sure, fine." So I got Bob and all the, Cesar and Rick [A.] Dearborn and Kent Knutson and all the guys who ran the Kasten race with Mark. A two-hour meeting just to download what the race was like. Afterwards he asked to see me. He said, "I'd like you to run my race." I said, "I'm not a campaign guy." He said, "Yes, but Sam Brownback says you helped with his." I said, "Yes, but that was just necessary at the time, but I'm a policy guy. I'm not a campaign guy. That's just not my thing." He said, "Well, I figured you'd say that. Then I think you should run for my seat." He said, "The NRCC [National Republican Congressional Committee] is bugging me to get somebody to run for my seat, because I'm going to make this race, and you should go home and run for my seat." And I said, "Are you crazy? I'm 27 years old." He said, "No, you need to think about it." And so I talked to Mark Neuman again and I thought about it, and I wasn't sure that it was credible, a 27-year-old guy five years out of college. And so I went to the two people who I looked up to the most, Bill Bennett and Jack Kemp. Jack had been a congressman, so I went to see Jack about, "What do you think of this? Is this crazy? Does this pass the laugh test? Should I do this?" And Jack gave me a lot of good advice and basically told me to do it. He said, "Do you want to be an entrepreneur in the battle of ideas or do you just want to do somebody else's work?" So he gave me this pep talk, this, "You can do this."

Kondracke: How long was this and where was it?

Ryan: At Empower America. I think I went over to see him there. How long was the conversation? About a half-hour, 45 minutes, something like that. Then I think I talked to Bill on the phone, then I called Bill and he basically said more or less the same thing. But Jack gave me a lot of advice because he had run for office and all of that stuff. Jack gave me I'd say a

big motivational pitch, and he gave me courage to go do it. So I went home and went to my cousin's family business, and the rest is history, I guess.

Kondracke: Do you remember any, besides being an entrepreneur of ideas, anything else that he said to you?

Ryan: He basically said, "If you want to make a difference, and if you want to be your own person in public policy, either run a think tank or run for office. And if not, what are you going to do?" He basically said people like you need to do this, get involved, and he just basically gave me some self-confidence. What I remember the most was he said, "There's nothing more gratifying than actually making a big difference. There's nothing more gratifying than actually seeing a problem, taking really good ideas and applying them to it and seeing what it does to people's lives. That vocation, that sense, that feeling is something I'd like to see you have. Go do this, go get this." He basically gave me more of a vocational—kind of like a priest talking, a seminarian—you know what I mean? He was basically telling me the value of public service and how fulfilling it is. Like I said, I had all along thought I was still going to go off and do something else. And that's what kind of got me into it.

Kondracke: Did he go out and campaign for you?

Ryan: Oh, yes. He came to Wisconsin a couple of times campaigning for me. He told me about fundraising, because I was a policy guy, so he said "You've got to ask." So I said, "Okay, so can I have \$1000 then?" And he did, he wrote me a \$1000 [check.] I think that was as much as you could give at the time. So he and Bill Bennett both gave me a big check, and they

were like my first contributors. Oh, yes, he came and campaigned for me in Janesville [Wisconsin], he did a bunch of things for me.

Kondracke: There are stories that after you get into budget stuff, that he started after you about becoming a green eye-shade—

Ryan: That's right. This is where I say I'm a second generation supply-sider, not a first generation supply-sider. First generation supply-siders cared only about growth and tax rates and not about size of government deficits or debt. I actually always disagreed with him on that. A couple of us on the staff did, but we just sort of kept it to ourselves. So I was more on the Cato [Institute] side—Cato is a think tank—on the Cato side of these things where I actually cared about the size of government, thought it really mattered, and I thought deficits and debt mattered. They weren't a substitute for growth, but they were a key part of it. So when you become the chair of the Budget Committee, that's basically your job, is budgeting, right? We talked about pro-growth economics and taxes, but Ways and Means does taxes, and I finally got on the Ways and Means Committee. But when I became a big budget guy, what I was known for was entitlement reform, spending cuts, shrinking the deficit and the debt. I think what he was worried was my image was becoming more of just a budget cutter than a growth guy.

Kondracke: What did he say to you?

Ryan: Basically, "Watch yourself. You're going to become a green eyeshade. You're going to become everybody we fought in the movement. What's happening?" I said, "I haven't lost this." "But all I hear and read about you is you're just cutting budgets, you're just shrinking government."

I said, "Well, I agree with that." He said, "But don't let that be who you are. You've got to talk about growth. You've got to talk about these other things. You can't let that become who you are." And I've always had that issue, because the problem is at his time the debt was not the issue. It was growth that was the issue, the economy. In our time growth and the economy is the issue, but we didn't have 70 percent tax rates. We don't have, we didn't have stagflation when I started coming into Congress. It was a different era, and the era I came into was one where we had ballooning deficits and skyrocketing debt because of baby boomers. And so the challenge of economic policy in my time is different than the challenge it was in Jack's time, so sometimes I think he didn't maybe see all of that.

Kondracke: You've said a number of times that the welfare state is going to create a generation of dependency that we're going to be in hammocks and all that. How did Jack respond to that sort of thing?

Ryan: We never really talked about it in that way. I think I could have been better in how I chose my words. The problem I had in advancing these arguments is it came across the wrong way, like Makers-Takers. When people say that it comes across the wrong way. And I need to acknowledge that, because I think it was clumsy. And the reason I say that is when we're talking about people who are on welfare, who are dependent, those kinds of comments can suggest that we think these people want to be on welfare or that they're trying to live off the system, when really that's not the case. They want nothing more than to be independent, to be on a great ladder of life with a great future, providing for themselves and their families. And so I think I had to remind myself what would Jack Kemp say and do at the time? He wouldn't talk like that.

Kondracke: Does that roll through your mind?

Ryan: Oh, yes. Are you kidding me? All the time. So I am worried about the welfare state, I am worried about the trajectory of it because of what it does to people, but I think the words that some of us have used were not the right way to communicate these concerns. So I'm taking a different approach. Same principles, same ideas. A different approach to fighting poverty, to fighting for upward mobility, to working on welfare reform to promote upward mobility and less dependency. And I think the words we use have to be toward invoking emotions that are uplifting, that are aspirational, that are hopeful, versus invoking emotions that trigger thoughts of envy or anger or scorn and things like that.

Kondracke: What proportion of the congressional Republican Party would you say is Kempian?

Ryan: A lot more, because of him. A lot more than in the early nineties. So believe it or not, because people say "Tea Party." Tea Party people are pro-growth. Look at [Michael S.] Mike Lee. Mike Lee's a pro-growth guy. Mike Lee has given great speeches on fighting poverty, has given great speeches on subsidiarity and upward mobility. There is a perfect example of someone you would probably identify as a certain wing of the party who sounds, actually when you listen to him, very Kempian. Then go over and look at say a [Robert P.] Bob Corker [Jr.]. I'm just taking about a couple of senators. If you listen to my governor, Scott [K.] Walker, you probably think of Scott Walker as Act 10 [2011], took on unions, public employees, and a big fight. When you listen to Scott Walker, he's talking about fighting poverty, he's talking about upward mobility, he's talking about growth. So,

if you look at different people in the Republican Party, what I get out of that, if you listen carefully, is lots of Jack Kemp in what they say and do.

Kondracke: Final question, since we don't have that much more time. What are the lessons that Jack Kemp has to teach the contemporary—

Ryan: The lessons we have to learn better are don't impugn people's motives. Because people may disagree with you doesn't mean they're wrong or bad. They just haven't been sufficiently persuaded enough. And try to persuade people. Honey's a lot better than vinegar. And that's a message and a lesson we need to learn more, that we don't have these days. Also look at the glass of life as half-full, not half-empty. Don't be dour, don't suck on lemons, don't be a stick in the mud. Those are all phrases he would use all the time that I just said. We do a lot of that these days. Be a happy warrior, be spirited, hope, growth and opportunity. Be that kind of a happy warrior. That to me is the key. I worry we can become angry reactionaries in our party because we have a high anxiety about the fact that we lost this last election and where the country is going. And so the concern that a lot of us have is that we could just become kind of a reactionary Congressional party that doesn't offer a hopeful agenda. We need to think like Jack did, which is be an inclusive, expansive, full-spectrum conservatism that speaks to equality of opportunity and upward mobility and that is appealing to each and every person no matter who they are, no matter where they come from, no matter what station in life they are. That to me is what we so desperately need, and we are at risk of losing that mantle of the identity of our party because we are so anxious, or there's a competition for who can be more tough, more angry, more conservative. And it's a misconception of conservatism in some senses, I think.

Kondracke: Thank you. I appreciate it.