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ROBERT J. DOLE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

RICHARD NORTON SMITH

June 4, 2008

Interviewer

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[Richard Norton Smith reviewed this transcript for accuracy of names and dates. Because no changes of substance were made, it is an accurate rendition of the original recording.]

Williams: This is an oral history interview with Richard Norton Smith for the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas. We're in the Washington [D.C.] law offices of Alston & Bird, and today is Wednesday, June 4, 2008 and I'm Brien Williams.

Richard, let's start with the allure of Washington [D.C.] in your life after graduating from college.

Smith: I'm not sure how alluring it was. It's like most things in my life; it just happened. Really quite unforeseen. I was an intern at the White House in the summer of 1975. I had been chairman of the Massachusetts College Republicans, which is an even more exotic title than it sounds and, interestingly enough, the national chairman was an ambitious young Texan named Karl Rove, who I think had more than anyone else to do with the fact that I was part of the intern program. The intern program was a minor Washington scandal, characteristic of the city, in that everyone was there because of someone they knew. And in the case of the person I knew it was Karl Rove.

So anyway, I had gone to work there and, in fact, wrote about the experience for the *Washington Post* in what was intended to be a humorous piece. Not everyone saw the humor of it, and the program was canceled. I often had said that if Bill [William J.] Clinton had only read the piece I wrote in the *Washington Post* and had the program not been resurrected, history might have been very different.

But in any event, paradoxically, that's when I first met President [Gerald R.] Ford. Any other president, certainly Lyndon [B.] Johnson, would have not only remembered but would have nursed a grudge for a very long time. By contrast, I wound up running the Ford Library and becoming very close to the family.

Williams: What was your role as an intern in the White House?

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Smith: Oh, god, it was make-work. It was a bizarre but revealing experience, in many ways. I sat in an office in the Old Executive Office Building in the Presidential Personnel Office, basically winnowing the equivalent of the dead letter file, unsolicited résumés, truckloads of unsolicited résumés from would-be cabinet officers and the like. Basically, it was simply to pronounce a death sentence on these deservedly lifeless applications before they were sent off to central file, which is the graveyard of such things.

It was an interesting experience, but when it ended, I went back to Boston. The experience of writing the piece for the *Post* had sort of tripped a wire, and so I worked as a freelance writer, which means I starved, but had part-time jobs along with that. Anyway, I had a great time. It's very nice. When you're young, you can do those things and you don't have much thought for the future.

Then in the fall of '76, I had a job interview with Ed Brooke, senator from Massachusetts, then in his second, and as it turned out, final term, and was not hired immediately. But it's an interesting thing about Brooke. Brooke had an interesting way of approaching these things because I think he mentally filed people away. You might not fit into a particular slot at the time, but I think to his credit, presumably, if you'd made a favorable impression, he would bring you out of that, and that's what happened to me. I had originally interviewed for a job as assistant press secretary, for which I had no qualifications, and then I was hired, went to work in February of '77 in the Boston office, not Washington, ostensibly as a liaison to the small business community—basically, it was a constituent office—but very quickly turned into his speechwriter.

So it was a wonderful education. It was also an education in political adversity, which is best administered when young; you're more flexible and you can take a few hard knocks. It's also probably a good thing to go through the worst in your career at the beginning of your career, and by that I mean the Brooke divorce and the family squabbles that attended it. It was a messy year, and we now know what I only sensed at the time, which was that he was really ambivalent about running for a third term anyway. With the end of the marriage, which had really ceased to be a marriage for a very long time, I think he was looking forward to starting a new life, a new family, as it turned out. I think he was probably happier out of the Senate than he had been, certainly for the previous few years. So in a curious sort of way, I think life turned out well for him.

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For those of us who were young and inexperienced at this, it was a wonderful education. It tended to bond people. I used to say you'd open the door every day and you'd look down, you'd see your copy of the *Boston Globe*, and if the story was above the fold, you'd close the door and go back to bed. If it was below the fold, that was a good day. You'd go to work. But anyway, I made friends there for life.

It was interesting, because when we lost, which I predicted. We had a very tough Republican primary challenge from a right-wing radio talk show host, someone who in many ways came to personify a lot of the, in my view, unfortunate trends, not just in the Republican Party, but in the political culture generally. The Panama Canal treaties were the hot button issue that year, and Brooke really tried to straddle it. He ultimately voted for it and paid a heavy price. But in any event, I said on primary night, "We're going to lose in November, fifty-five, forty-five," which, luck of the draw, that's what happened against Paul Tsongas.

We then had six, seven weeks in which to try to find a job, and I remember organizing the staff. I said, "We need to go find people who are more depressed than we are to put all this in perspective." So at lunch we'd go off to the Suffolk County Courthouse to a murder trial and feel, at least, that we weren't in the docket. So that sort of excursion provided some perspective of its own.

But it's interesting, because quite soon—I'm trying to think whether it was November or December. I think it was before the end of November that I had an appointment set up with Bob Dole, which is revealing in a number of ways. First of all, that it happened that fast, but secondly, to learn that Dole and Brooke were good friends, obviously respected one another. It countered some of the media image of Dole that had been projected as a result of the '76 race. I remember going in to see him [Dole]. His AA at the time was Rich [Richard] Armitage—and went in, had, oh, I don't know, maybe thirty minutes, probably closer to twenty. Memory plays tricks. It was not a long conversation, perfectly friendly. And I remember going down to the cafeteria and, within a half hour, Rich Armitage summoning me back telling me that he wanted to hire me.

Ed Brooke had many fine qualities, but he could make Jack Benny look generous when it came to public salaries. I used to joke, and most of the time he would laugh, but it was a little close to the nerve occasionally. He would hire all these young Catholic girls just out of college who would work for a pittance, and I remember I was hired in

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February of '78 as a speechwriter at $13,500. I think by the time I was done I had gotten a raise; I think I was maybe 16,500, 17,000, which in Brooke-land was munificent.

So anyway, gosh, I think I started in the mid-twenties with Dole, so I thought, “My god, I'm rich. What am I going to do with all this money?” And came down, moved from Boston the week after Christmas, moved into an apartment in Southwest Washington, walked to work and, boy, in some ways, have stayed ever since. The first period that I was there physically and on the payroll ran from the beginning of January of '79 through June of '80, which took us through the aborted '80 campaign.

At that point, I had been lucky enough to sign a contract with Simon & Schuster to write a biography of Thomas E. Dewey [*Thomas E. Dewey and His Times,* 1982], and knowing only one way to do that, which was to move lock, stock, and barrel to Rochester, New York, for a year where the Dewey papers are located. I did that. I look back, and it was very generous of him because he kept me on the payroll. It was modest; maybe it was $5,000 a month, but it was—I mean $5,000—yes, I think it was like $5,000 a year, which, whatever, $400, $500 a month, it paid the rent in Rochester, and I would work on projects from time to time. But he didn't have to do that. It was characteristic. It was generous and obviously it cemented my loyalty.

I think one thing that I've heard him say to other people when, in later years, the press would talk to him about me, he would talk about my loyalty, which, with me, is an absolute, but I also say, he made it very easy to be loyal. I was grateful. Again, when you're young and you've just lost a job because the electorate doesn't approve of your collective performance, and then someone gives you a job, it would be churlish not to be extraordinarily appreciative. But he was also someone, as I say, who made it easy to be loyal. You didn't have to be around him very long to develop a profound sense of what this man had been through in life. You didn't know it because he never obviously referred to it, but one sensed that physical pain was a constant part of his life.

Williams: Let me backtrack just a little bit here. You, then, were a speechwriter for Brooke but stayed in Massachusetts. You didn't come down here.

Smith: That's right, in the constituent office in Boston.

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Williams: So you were mainly writing statements for him when he was back home?

Smith: No, no. I did all of his speechwriting. It didn't matter where he was geographically, but I think he also thought, with an election campaign coming up, it would be useful to have someone who could be a generalist, who could do both policy and politics, and that's what I did.

Williams: What qualities do you think in yourself keyed him to say, "This is the man I want to be writing my words for me"?

Smith: And who are we talking about?

Williams: Brooke.

Smith: I don't know. I suppose it's not terribly dissimilar from what I sensed later on with Dole. The Harvard [University] degree counted for a lot; it was a kind of shorthand. And it's curious, because I'm not comparing Dole and [Richard M.] Nixon, but for all of the cultural hay that conservatives have made over the years railing against the Eastern establishment and, well, what Lyndon Johnson called "You Harvards," and Nixon in a more virulent way, my sense is that both Brooke and Dole, and President Ford, I know, just had a kind of instinctive respect for what that credential implied. Now, obviously, maybe that gets you in the door, but then you're on your own. Beyond that, I don't know. I know that obviously you're very green at that age, and I know I made a lot of mistakes.

I remember Brooke being a very good and, I think, patient editor. Senator Dole is an excellent editor, and each would present their own challenges. Dole was accustomed, as often as not, to working without a text. I think he often felt, in some ways, hemmed in if you gave him a text to read, and I think there's some parallel—I don't know and I wouldn't explore it terribly far, but I think that's revealing and indicative of how un-handleable he was, certainly in terms of national political campaigns. There's a stubborn independence. And also, let's face it, God, he was the pro, not me. He had been doing this a long time and he had understandable confidence in his instincts about his ability to connect to people in an off-the-cuff, conversational way.

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I think he may have had some bad experiences—I don't know—previously with people putting words in his mouth, but what really struck me was how quickly and sort of—I won't say effortlessly, but looking back, it's a surprise how we seemed to click from the first, which is not, again, to say that he would read every word I wrote. But I think, over time, particularly—it's interesting, the big speeches, the set speeches, and particularly the speeches that had I guess what I would call a particular emotional content to them, they were in a class by themselves. You find out very quickly he doesn't do eulogies, because when he does, he tends to be very emotionally affected. I'm obviously jumping ahead, but probably the most memorable single speech was the Nixon eulogy, which was very emotional for me to write and, obviously, very difficult for him to deliver.

I've always believed, and will believe to the day of my death, Richard Nixon knew exactly what he was doing when he invited Bob Dole to eulogize, not only himself, but Pat [Patricia Nixon]. People forget, when Mrs. Nixon died the previous year, there were four eulogists. One of them was Pete Wilson, then governor of California, and one was Bob Dole. Well, who were Richard Nixon's candidates for '96? They were, in order, Bob Dole and Pete Wilson, and Nixon saw this as a showcase. But he also knew, because he did very few uncalculated things in his life, he knew for a fact that Bob Dole would not be able to get through a eulogy without displaying his emotions in a way, that although it made Dole uncomfortable, would be profoundly beneficial to him politically because it showed a side that very few people had ever seen and would humanize him in a way that nothing else could. Just as to this day, when people know of my connection with the senator, they express amazement at his sense of humor. Well, he's been funny in public for a very long time now, but people are still discovering that fact. One thing that all the people around him knew was that the emotions are very strong and they are very close to the surface. And as a speechwriter, you're put in the position of channeling those in ways that are not supposed to produce the for-Nixon-desired effect. But I certainly can admit now that I shared Nixon's attitude about that.

Williams: My guess is that you didn't take a speechwriting course at Harvard.

Smith: No, I never did.

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Williams: So how did you come to your craft?

Smith: It's instinctive, and by that I don't mean it's trial and error, but hopefully a willingness to learn from your mistakes, as well. Whatever talent you have has to be balanced by humility, and I don't say that in a self-serving way, because, let's face it, the talent is raw and unpolished, and unless you're willing to, as I say, acknowledge the error and learn from it—but it was just there.

Williams: Did you feel that the voice that you developed for Senator Brooke was different from the voice that you developed for Bob Dole?

Smith: Well, certainly the politics were different and certainly the priorities, in many cases, were different. I think a speechwriter, a good speechwriter, is more than a bit of a chameleon, and I don't know whether it's a kind of chicken and egg situation. Being a biographer and being a speechwriter I've found to be two sides of the same coin because in both instances you literally have a professional out-of-body experience. You absolutely put yourself aside and you climb inside someone else's shoes and, if you're good, inside their skin, and you inhabit their world, however briefly, because if you're not willing to do that—and it gets back to the notion of humility. It's not about you. It's not about your politics. It's not about your style. It's very much about subordinating those to whomever you're working for.

Now, the curious thing is—and I don't hang around a lot of speechwriters—Brooke and Dole and a number of other people, including Gerald Ford, I've heard from a number of people, including the principals, about my alleged ability to capture their voice. I was conscious of the fact, obviously trying to do that, but writing for them in a perhaps elevated way, using a lot of humor and some historical perspective along the way and so forth and so on, that would hopefully enrich their voice. So it was this curious sort of partnership, and it becomes unconscious. There are so many things that other people take for granted that I don't do. I don't drive a car and I was eight years old before I could tie my shoes. But writing a speech or slipping into a persona is like falling off a log.

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Williams: And in preparation, did you read a lot of his—like, when you came on staff with Dole, a lot of what he'd said before and so forth? Or do you just feel your way?

Smith: Yes, it's very intuitive; it's very instinctive. Of course you research subjects to death, and again, same thing writing a biography. You immerse yourself in as much material as possible. First of all, it's not rocket science. Most audiences want relatively little. They want a feel. From the political standpoint, they want to be flattered. They want to hear how important they are. They, most of the times, want to know that the speaker is in sympathy with them. But above all, they want to walk out of the room believing that they have just been given a privileged glimpse of the real fill-in-the-blank, someone they see all the time on the tube, someone they quasi think they know, and now in this personal exposure, they want to either have that confirmed or be surprised or something. It's much more an emotional than an intellectual experience. Now, at its best, it's both.

But Dole instinctively understands what a great many speakers don't, that the most important thing, first of all, the way you establish that kind of instant intimacy is through humor, and above all, self-deprecatory humor. And most of the time, you've only got twenty minutes to make a permanent impression on people, so there's a great economy involved.

Williams: So did you feel like you wrote laugh lines for Dole as—

Smith: I'll put it this way. He didn't need anyone to write laugh lines for him, but I was perfectly comfortable doing it. And as I say, he could do it himself, and when he had the time, he could do it all. But, yes, I was perfectly comfortable writing—

Williams: During those first two years when you were with him full-time, were you writing both for his legislative utterances as well as the campaign in '80?

Smith: Yes, yes. That really was a learning process because it would entail sitting down with the experts on the staff. You very quickly learn you are writing for them as much as you are writing for him, which is great because, again, they're the people who have a

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much greater depth of knowledge on many of these subjects. Any good speechwriter, I suppose even a bad speechwriter, aspires to be a generalist, but being comfortable with a wide range of topics is by no means the same thing as being terribly knowledgeable about any one topic.

Another thing that stood out about the Dole office and, for that matter, the Brooke office: I was lucky; I had two offices in which both senators were justifiably known for hiring first-rate people. There was a lot of talent around Dole and I think it served him very well, and I think it particularly—you have to remember that I was there initially when the Republicans were still in the minority. It was all a very different world after November of 1980 when I think he really came into his own on many levels, but he had this core of very talented, very dedicated people who were capable, as he was, of rising to the test and growing into responsible authority.

Williams: Describe the politics in the office under Armitage and that early period.

Smith: Well, I'm sure you've heard it from a number of other people. There was Jo-Anne [L.] Coe and Betty [Meyer] and everyone else, and Jo-Anne who, on the surface, was his [H.R.] Haldeman, I mean tough, no-nonsense, occasionally brusque. Jo-Anne was a true believer, I mean a true [Barry] Goldwater conservative. Her politics were several miles to the right of mine and I think closer to his in many ways than mine. I think anyone who comes in from the outside, particularly Ed Brooke's speechwriter from Massachusetts and Harvard, all this, they're going to be on trial. But that said, to earn Jo-Anne's respect, which by no means everyone did, it didn't happen overnight. I think it ultimately happened probably when I was away but on call. I think the most important attribute to her was loyalty. Bob Dole was her life, and she usefully kept an eagle eye out for people who were users or phonies or situationally loyal, and needless to say, it takes time to disprove those doubts. I think long before she died, I heard my name came up in a conversation and she said, "Rick Smith. Yes, good man." Well, coming from Jo-Anne, that's what you want on your tombstone, and I don't know how long it took to develop that.

She was irreplaceable. She was a chief of staff squared. She was the ultimate political operative. She watched his back. She was the ambassador to much of the Party,

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to much of Washington. She knew where all the bodies were buried. She, no doubt, had heaped a few shovelfuls herself, but she was the institutional memory. Now, given all of those roles, it also made it inevitable that whoever had the title of administrative assistant had the title and not necessarily much more. I think being Bob Dole's AA, particularly after '80, was in many ways a thankless job, because as the demands grew, as the visibility grew, as the opportunities grew, it really meant that Jo-Anne's role was all the greater. Jo-Anne really was a national figure, and it would take a very unusual kind of individual to comfortably accept that division of labor in the office. It was something of a revolving door. It's funny, Betty and Jo-Anne are spoken of like Lewis and Clark. In fact, Betty and Jo-Anne could have their own differences based upon their proximity and who was more loyal and who was more dedicated. Betty would get flustered and Betty would complain and Betty would voice her displeasure with something he may have done or not done. I don't think I ever heard Jo-Anne say anything critical, but in Betty's case, it was blowing off steam, because she was every bit as dedicated and she was there on weekends, and her life, too, was Bob Dole. They had this wonderful kind of running gag. I mean, she'd blow off steam; he'd crack jokes about it. Anyway, from what I could tell, at least, it was a very successful relationship. But clearly those two women were more than gatekeepers.

Now, that said, I don't think he would have wanted or settled for gatekeepers. He was someone who was constantly on the prowl. You never knew—you'd look over your shoulder and he was there, an inevitable "What's cookin'?" greeting. I often thought, had he ever gotten to the White House, he, I think, in a very unusual way among presidents, would not have fallen victim to the bubble. I suspect he would have spent as much time on Capitol Hill as he did in the White House, and in the White House he'd be prowling around trying to find new information that he could put to use.

So the press section, where I was located, was the last room in the office. There was his office and then Jo-Anne, and Betty had an outer office, and then a reception area with an AA behind that, and then one, two offices, I think, for the legislative assistants and legislative correspondents, and then what was called the press office; the press secretary, assistant press secretary, myself, usually an intern, someone working on mail and the like, probably a fairly typical Capitol Hill setup. Now, that was in '79 and the

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first half of '80, and then, of course, came the [Ronald] Reagan sweep that fall, and it was a very different world.

Williams: Before we move to that different world, how did Sheila Burke play in as another strong woman in this landscape?

Smith: I didn't see that much of Sheila just because there tends to be—I think it's unintentional but probably unavoidable—a kind of gulf between the personal office, the Kansas office, if you will, and the staff folks. I was certainly aware of Sheila and was very impressed with her every time I saw her, and sensed that she was a very significant figure on the policy side of things, I didn't know a lot about her background. But it did not go unnoticed that Dole—I got to know a lot about his mother [Bina Talbott Dole], and it was very clear to me, at least, long before I worked with him on the biography, that he had grown up with a very strong female presence, and indeed, in a way that's unusual, I think.

I don't want to sound deterministic here, but it's not difficult to trace Bob Dole's defining qualities to each of his parents. He clearly got his father's [Doran Ray Dole] sense of humor and the kind of comfort level with anyone. His father had to have been a people person, working in that grain and creamery, and earlier than that, the restaurant; it was very clear that Doran Dole was a campaigner without a campaign, and those qualities he passed on to his son. Bina Dole gave him her drive, her perfectionism, a kind of never-say-die quality. I remember when talking with him about his parents, and then when writing about them, it's sometimes difficult to describe his mother without inadvertently making her sound like a taskmaster. He jokes about it. The spotlessness of that house in the Dust Bowl was a defining quality.

I remember I always thought the most revealing story when I wrote about Herbert Hoover was him talking about sitting in an unheated Quaker meeting house as a boy whose feet didn't touch the floor, waiting for hours for the inner light to come into his life. And he said much later that he was ten years old before he realized he could do something for the joy of it without offending the Lord. In a very rough parallel, I will always carry with me the image of Bob Dole as a boy imprisoned in his mother's kitchen, sitting on a stool waiting for the floor to dry and then for the wax to congeal. That's just a

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very revealing image. He would joke about it, but I know for a fact—and, again, I'm jumping ahead, but one of the most telling experiences I ever had with him and something, curiously, that I think further bonded us, was how he handled the death of his mother, which came—oh gosh, before that, of course, there was the death of Dr. Kelikian. And the two were actually fairly close together.

When Dr. Kelikian died, I was no longer working full-time in the office. This was the mid-eighties; I want to say '83. I was back from Rochester. The book, I think, was about to be published, I was living in Northwest Washington and still working on projects for him, consulting, in effect. I got a call from Betty saying, "You've got to come in. Dr. Kelikian died and we've got to write something." And you could tell from the tone of her voice that it was a very tense time and she was obviously concerned for his emotions. I don't think she said, "He won't talk to anyone," but that was clearly the message communicated.

So I said, "Of course," and I grabbed a cab and came down. And to this day, I think maybe we were together maybe ten minutes; I think it was less than that. And, again, it was just kind of shorthand. A speechwriter has a very singular kind of relationship, which oddly enough, oftentimes the more successful it is, the more fraught it is with unexpressed resentment on the part of the speaker because the better you make them sound, quote, “you make them sound,” the more, at some unspoken internal level, they resent the fact that you're necessary. Now, I never sensed that with Dole, which, again, I think, tells you something about him. But we had reached this point where he didn't have to tell me much and I basically could imagine what he would want to say. I went in the office, I went out, sat down and I typed out something. It was one draft, made a few corrections, left it with Betty, left and by the time I got home, less than an hour later, the phone was ringing. I remember the staffer, who shall remain nameless, said, "Have you heard?"

I said, "No. What do you mean?" And this person proceeded to narrate what had happened. The senator had taken the statement; he had gone over to the floor. As it happened, I think Jesse Helms was speaking. I don't know whether he was filibustering, but he was holding forth, and he willingly yielded the floor to his good friend from Kansas, who got up and started speaking.

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I had concluded--being a New Englander, one loves [Ralph Waldo] Emerson and [Robert] Frost. Well, I didn't give Emerson very often to the senator to quote, but on this occasion I had a passage from Frost, a poem called "Nothing Gold Can Stay." And he got to the poem and he broke down, and started again and broke down, and it's at those times when you do realize the Senate is more than a club; at those moments, it's a family. It's interesting, because I think Howard Baker was sort of rushed in to help fill the void. Jesse Helms, showing extraordinary sensitivity for which he was not always credited, vamped, in effect, saying, "I never knew Dr. Kelikian, but he sounds like an extraordinary gentleman," and on and on, in effect delivering his own eulogy.

Anyway, the senator left the floor without completing the statement, and he went out and got into the subway to come back to the office. A staff person with, in my opinion, a singular lack of sensitivity went up to him at a time when I think he really wanted to be alone. I think he felt embarrassed, and this person complimented him on his remarks. And he said, "Well, you know Rick; he writes so well." Well, first of all, I mean, that was an incredibly gracious thing to say. It was also characteristically deferring his own emotions about this.

I remember then, very shortly thereafter his mother died, and I sent flowers, and the card read, "Nothing gold can stay." I just think it was one of those sort of bonding experiences that happened so that when, a decade later, the Nixon funeral came along, I don't think we talked at all about what he wanted to say. Wrote it and he pretty much delivered it verbatim.

I had been invited to Mrs. Nixon's funeral, which, of course, was much smaller, and that was a different kind of occasion. What I knew at President Nixon's funeral when I saw them come out of the library, the look on Elizabeth's [Dole] face said it all. She knew better than anyone how difficult this was going to be, and it turned out to be every bit as difficult as she imagined. But as I believe Nixon imagined, it also turned out, at least in the short run, to be a very positive experience for—there were 33 million people who watched that service, and I'm sure millions of them saw a side to Dole that they had not imagined was there.

Williams: I 'm always struck by how Ed Muskie's career was ended because he dropped a tear.

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Smith: Well, not only that, you're absolutely right. Muskie in the famous incident outside the—no, I guess it was in Nashua where he was criticizing the *Union Leader*, I think quite justifiably. Four years later, people forget, but Dole broke down in the wake of his selection [of vice president], and a couple days later, at Ford's insistence, they had this great homecoming in Russell, Kansas. Ten thousand people around the courthouse lawn. Dole got up and, as he told me, he saw someone in the crowd who had put money in that cigar box thirty years earlier, and he lost it.

You're right, the contrast between the political price that Ed Muskie paid, although I think maybe it's been exaggerated in the retelling, I think there were other factors at work undermining his inevitability, but nevertheless, you're absolutely right, it was commented on in a way that was markedly different, I think the reason—I don't think the culture changed that much in four years. In a curious sort of way, it was counterintuitive. Bob Dole was seen as this tough guy, some thought a hatchet man, so for Bob Dole to show this very human vulnerability was seen as a strength. It was seen as a positive. It was curious…for a liberal Democrat, it was seen, particularly to his adversaries, as confirming their worst stereotypes.

Williams: So, the '80 campaign for president. What was your role in that?

Smith: Well, the less said about the '80 campaign, the better. I 'm sure he feels that way. I remember when it came time to describe it in the autobiography, I think the phrase we used was something like "I sometimes have trouble remembering that I even ran for president in 1980, and I think probably most other people do, too."

Look, it made perfect sense on paper. You look around, and Muskie's a classic case. Ed Muskie was introduced to the country as Hubert Humphrey's running mate, and four years later had established himself as the preemptive favorite for that year's domination. The vice presidency itself was in the midst of changing. Vice presidential candidates were, in fact, seen as legitimate contenders for the top job, so it made perfect sense. He [Dole] had had his horizons widened considerably as a result of that [1976] campaign. In fact, the success that he would enjoy as chairman of the Finance Committee clearly indicated—conservatives hate to hear about anyone growing in office

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or out, because they think it always means they're becoming more acceptable to the left, particularly in this town--but the fact is, Bob Dole grew in the seventies and more in the eighties. That said, he would not have been prepared to demonstrate the leadership, or the bipartisan consensus-seeking, deal-making talents that he displayed at the Finance Committee in the eighties. That didn't happen on election night in '80. That was the result of a process, in my opinion, that had unfolded probably since the day he walked into the House of Representatives twenty years earlier. But I think the '76 campaign, in a paradoxical way, advanced it considerably.

In the short term, there's no doubt that he paid a price for that campaign. He told me about, I remember, Barbara Walters asking him if, in effect, he felt responsible for losing the election of Ford. And he never forgot—again, the Senate at its best—he never forgot the fact that Hubert Humphrey, on his own, called him right after the election and said, "Look, you're going to take some hits, but forget it. You did exactly what you were asked to do. You did everything and more that you could do for that ticket, and never forget that." And he never forgot Humphrey's generosity.

Williams: Of course Humphrey knew where he was coming from.

Smith: Humphrey knew exactly. The subtext of that was, "You're probably lucky not being vice president," although being Gerald Ford's vice president would have been very different from being Lyndon Johnson's. But clearly Humphrey bore scars for the rest of his life, and indeed, in talking to Walter Mondale, it became very clear. I would argue that Mondale was probably the most successful vice president of modern times, and he did it because the Humphrey experience had been so searing that he made it very clear that he wasn't going to be pawned off on the space agency or this project or that project; he was going to be a deputy president.

Williams: So you're off in Rochester researching the Dewey papers.

Smith: That's right.

Williams: Did that feel like outer Siberia or—

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Smith: No, but it's funny, again, when you're young, it's astonishing what you can force yourself to do. I would spend all day in a library carrel going through boxes of paper and making notes, and much of the night writing. That book was researched and written simultaneously. It's a seven-hundred-plus-page book, but we cut sixty thousand words with over fifteen hundred footnotes, and it was done in a year and a half, which is absurd. But you write on sheer energy and love of what you're doing. So it was a great obsession. I didn't hear from Washington very often, which, again, made it all the more generous that, in effect, he carried me on the payroll.

Williams: So you didn't feel like your reputation was slipping much because you were out of the picture for that period of time?

Smith: No, and I never worried about my reputation anyway.

Williams: And what was the allure of Dewey? Why Dewey?

Smith: Oh, gosh. Well, a number of things. First of all, no one had done it. I had a sense of—I don't want to say protectiveness, but my intuition told me that there had to be so much more to this guy than the little man on the wedding cake, so much more than the '48 election. I had done my thesis at Harvard on Dewey, not a word of which survived into the book, which is a good thing. But there comes a time when you almost unknowingly turn a corner, and the very sort of almost protectiveness and certainly obsessiveness that drives you, at least me—I only know one way to write a book. It takes over your life and at the same time, you realize you have obligations not only to your subject, but also to your readers. Somehow you have to be obsessive and objective at the same time. Again, in a curious sort of way, the speechwriting, I mean they're two totally different styles, but the speechwriting and researching and writing books in many ways not only reflected on each other, but each would afford a temporary escape from the other.

I do remember vividly on election night, 1980, thinking that this is one of the greatest nights of my life. I, like everyone else, thought that I would never live to see

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Republicans take either House of Congress. I was not particularly enamored of Ronald Reagan. I wasn't hostile to Ronald Reagan. My politics were to the left of Reagan's but hopefully, you're enough of a historian, even at that point, to realize this is a hugely significant turning point, just as I think the election this fall will be. In many ways, it marks the end of the Reagan era.

I don't remember what I first did after the election. Like everyone else, I was astonished that the Republicans made the gains they did, which were enormous, to take over the Senate, and somewhere around dawn I had realized that life was going to be very different for Bob Dole. That really was the making of him, I think, in many, many ways.

Williams: We need to stop there and change tapes.

Smith: Yes.

[Begin Tape 2]

Williams: Okay. Let's pick up the narrative here.

Smith: I was in Rochester for one year. I think June of '81 I returned to DC and was on the payroll, I guess you could call it in a consulting role, but also did some additional consulting for—I was writing some speeches for people at the White House and had a contract at the Republican National Committee. Gosh, there were a couple radio shows. I remember specifically writing—he had a kind of *Point/Counterpoint* [*Face Off*]with Ted [Edward M.] Kennedy. I don't know how long it lasted. I was involved, I want to say for less than a year. But again, revealing, because they obviously enjoyed each other. There was a little bit of, obviously, not only give and take, but one-upsmanship involved. But it was very clear that there was a really close friendship between the two men and that there's a certain amount of pose involved in setting each of them up as the prototypical liberal and conservative.

It was really only later—a couple things. Rose Kennedy and Bob Dole had the same birthday, and Senator Dole would send her flowers, and I know they had a number of very nice exchanges. I remember years later when I was working with him on a book

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of political humor, and someone—not me—had submitted a draft with a number of jokes about Teddy, and in particular about his weight. It was very interesting. I remember two things Dole cutting from that manuscript. There's a wonderful line, I think. Lyndon Johnson once talked about how ineffectual a former president was, and the classic Johnson line was, "An ex-president is as impotent as a cut dog in a screwing match." Now, I think that's classic Johnson. Dole cut it because he thought it was in bad taste. But equally revealing, he cut the Teddy weight jokes, and that told me something about his sense of what was appropriate, but more to the point, of the real affection that he had for Ted Kennedy and the sensitivity that he has for people.

That was a very special relationship. Clearly, they were on opposite sides of the pole, but in critical ways they were absolutely like-minded in their insistence that the point of being in the Senate was not simply to issue press releases or beat your breast or to declare your ideological purity. All of that went with the job but at the end of the day, you were judged by what you accomplished, by what laws you wrote, by what honest budgets you devised. You were there to get things done, and the political theater could be entertaining, it was certainly inescapable, but it should never be confused with why the voters sent you there.

I think if you look at Dole's career in Washington, it is fascinating on a number of levels, but above all because it spans the transformation in so many ways of how people run for office, of how they get elected, of how they communicate through the media, of how they define their job, and, obviously, the transformation of the Party, the redefinition of conservatism. I think, in many ways he was like his compatriot, George H.W. Bush; in other ways, so many respects, his cultural opposite. But they were both fundamentally serious about government, and they saw no conflict between being serious about government and being true-blue conservatives. It's the difference between a minimalist and a nihilist.

And I think by the end of his years on Capitol Hill, much as he loved the job, much as he loved the institution, it must have been extraordinarily difficult and trying of his patience for a man whose patience was limited to pretend to take seriously the [Newt] Gingriches and others of his ilk for whom political theater often took the place of legislating, for whom it was not simply a means to an end, but all too often, it appeared to be an end in itself.

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Williams: And it struck me, as we've gone through these interviews, that we really are chronicling that major transition.

Smith: Yes.

Williams: That's one of the themes that emerges so clearly. Looking back, with your experience in other eras, has there ever been one so marked by strident theater and so forth, do you think, in the past, or is this kind of a new phenomenon?

Smith: Well, the Senate has always been a theatrical place, and indeed, people who wax nostalgic about the good old days are recalling the endless filibusters and the melodrama. If you want to talk about the great triumvirate, there was no one more garish in their performances than Clay and Webster and Calhoun. The difference was that the theater was an inseparable part of legislating and you were playing to the galleries. What's changed are the galleries, and instead of a few hundred people in the room in their Sunday finest come to watch a show, it's the Internet and cable TV and people who confuse political analysis with shouting at the top of their voices.

There is an ugliness about the political process. It's not debate. It's often name-calling and posturing and people who succeed by their ability to exploit rather than bridge differences. Dole was the man as responsible as anyone for bringing cameras into the Senate. I've often wondered if you gave him a shot of sodium pentothal, whether he really thinks, in retrospect, that it was a good thing for the Senate. Because I think you can make a strong case to the contrary.

Williams: Just one footnote here. In terms of those nineteenth century people whose oratory was so magnificent and whatnot, do you think they had a sense that they were talking beyond the gallery, that their words would live on and whatnot, or was it very much quotidian?

Smith: Oh, no, no, no. They understood that everything they said would be in, if not the next the day's newspaper, the day after. They were speaking for effect. They were

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speaking to unseen crowds. There's no doubt about that and, in that sense, there's a parallel. The difference is that the unseen crowds, even those who disagreed with what they were reading, were all, in a sense, speaking the same language. They were all part of the same process. They were all observing the same rules. By the eighties, the nineties, and today, it's a much more anarchic environment. Blogs presume to speak with an authority which may or may not be earned and which is often more disruptive than constructive. So you have these parallel—I won't even call them debates, and in a curious sort of way, the echo chamber; it's those outside the chamber who aren't always listening to what goes on inside the chamber. If anything, it's been reversed. People inside the chamber are often reacting to what's outside the chamber, the external debate, some of it on TV, some of it on the Web. But there's a kind of role reversal in many ways, and much of it, by no means all, but much of it is trivial. Most of it, certainly in terms of the 24/7 news cycle, is stunningly superficial and all about black hats and white hats and oversimplifying. Campaign coverage is a scandal in this country. Obviously, the Senate is not a vacuum.

Williams: Let's pick up the thread. Dole is elected Leader in '85 and then becomes a bona fide candidate for president in '88. So where did you fit into that pageant?

Smith: Well, gosh, I was in the periphery. In the mid-eighties, I was actually working two, three days a week in Pete Wilson's office and doing consulting for other folks and writing books. The Hoover book was published in '84. I immediately started work on a book on Harvard for the 350th anniversary in '86; just made that deadline. So I was cranking out these books, and all of them major research works with lots of archival research. I've never used an assistant, so you'd go to a library for weeks. And in between books—I think it's curious, Dole said to someone once, my name came up, "He's always got half a dozen things going at once." And I sensed that that was not only meant as a compliment, but it suggested one reason for our affinity.

Anyone who knows anything about how Dole operated in the Senate, particularly moments of real decision-making, crunch time, knows that he was happiest walking from a debate in this room to a discussion in this room, to a numbers-crunching session in this room, to a strategy session in this room, and he could keep all of those threads both

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separate, but he also uniquely saw how all of those threads could come together. So I think, in a curious sort of way, I think that was one thing we had in common. He thought I worked all the time, which is something that he finds admirable, and so we had those qualities in common.

The other thing that I will say, and it really came to the fore in '96, because I'd never done it—and again, I don't want to sound like I'm patting myself on the back, I never thought to do otherwise, it wouldn't have occurred to me, but this is a town where it's been a long time since FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] said the formula for the perfect staff assistant was a passion for anonymity. And let's face it, for a long time now, speechwriters have been public figures. I was very old-fashioned about that. I thought that that was fundamentally disloyal, and I thought, more than that, it was totally self-defeating, because if you have a speechwriter out front as some sort of independent commentator on what he or she has written, it defeats the whole purpose and it intrinsically diminishes the speaker. I don't know how you get around that.

So I always kept a very low profile. Over time, people sort of got wind of the fact that I was involved. I don't want to suggest there was a rush to my door, but eventually, particularly by '88, the press would call. I tried to be polite and I would never talk. I regarded Bob Dole and Elizabeth Dole, for whom I was writing by that time as well, as friends, and friends don't divulge private conversations.

Williams: What were the press typically after?

Smith: Oh, gosh. Well, there were all sorts of things, anything from a particular speech and its genesis to campaign strategy or anecdotes. Just, you know, character study. It wasn't in the nature of headline-making news, but it was exactly the kind of "Let your hair down. Tell us what he's really like," which I wouldn't do under any circumstances.

It's funny, because it came to a head in '96. We might as well get this on the record because the story of the '96 convention is revealing of him in ways that I think are important. Now, he had discovered Mark Halperin, who had great success writing the formal speech that Dole delivered when he left the Senate,—and I'm being careful here—when he announced his intention to leave the Senate, and I thought it was revealing in a number of ways. First of all, that was a very, very powerful speech. Secondly, he read it

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word for word, which told me, again, not only how important the occasion was, but that when the occasion was important, Dole would discipline himself—he understood that every word was on a page for effect, and so he was perfectly capable of not only understanding that but playing the game.

So I think for a little while there, Mark Halperin was the answer to his prayers. So he started work on the acceptance speech. It was Thursday night, a week before Dole was to deliver that speech, I got a call. I was in my office at the Gerald Ford Museum in Grand Rapids, and it was the senator, and he wanted to read me the speech.

Now, back up a bit. They had just had a very unpleasant experience. Bob Woodward had published a book which basically was pretty positive in its portrait of Dole. Again, this is revealing that after all those years in Washington, he could be and she could be genuinely shocked. This wasn't Claude Reins shocked at Rick's Place in Casablanca. This was authentic astonishment and disappointment that people that they had trusted with the leadership of the campaign served as some of Woodward's leading sources. Never mind that—again, because I don't want to impugn their motives either—it may very well be that they intended and, indeed, they succeeded in helping craft a portrait of Dole that was more positive than might have been the case if they hadn't. Nevertheless, the thing that stuck in their craw collectively, the Doles, was that folks around them whom they regarded as political intimates and, in many cases, personal friends had spoken out of school.

So that's the backdrop to a touch of paranoia because, he said, "Well, I'll read you the speech."

And I thought, to make it convenient, I said, "Well, Senator, we've got a fax machine here. I'm all alone. Let me give you the fax number. You can fax it to me and we could talk."

He said, "No, I'd really prefer to read it to you." And I realized at the time vaguely, and then later on more fully, they were so paranoid at that point and they were guarding this so tightly, they didn't want to take the risk faxing it. Okay. Well, that's fine.

The other thing that you need to know is I had heard from her, and it was very clear—she is a perfectionist in her own right. Actually, I think she was immensely beneficial in impressing upon him that—I think I heard the exact phrase, "Writing a

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speech is only 50 percent. It's how you deliver it." She always understood that, and I think was a very useful one-woman Greek chorus reminding him of the payoff in that degree of preparation. Well, this obviously was the most important speech of his life and they had been working on it for months. It put me in an awkward position, because she called first and thanked me in advance for any help I could provide, and almost in the next sentence made it pretty clear that this train had left the station, that he had been practicing this text, he was comfortable with this text. So, never mind. Do you really want to be an honest critic, an honest broker? And how do you balance that against—you don't want to inadvertently undermine his confidence. And there's a week to go.

So anyway, he started reading the speech. It was a long speech. It was a long speech when he delivered it; it was longer as written. He started talking about the age issue. I had said earlier, "The way you address the age issue is the way you define your campaign as a reform presidency and the Nixon-goes-to-China analogy. You make it clear that you're a one-term president, that to do the difficult things that everyone knows needs to be done will, in effect, destroy your political capital. But make that an act of sacrifice, and that dovetails with a life of sacrifice. I mean, the whole story line comes together. You turn age to your advantage. You make the contrast with a Bill Clinton, who is perceived to be a political animal, and you actually diffuse the ‘He's been in Washington too long,’ by again using the Nixon-goes-to-China analogy.” He wouldn't have won the election, but I still think it would have given an intellectual credibility to the campaign and a coherence that it never had.

Anyway, he starts reading the speech and there's some lovely sort of high flown language about the advantages of age. And he talks about the serenity of age, and I almost gagged. I said, "My goodness." I played it for laughs, but I said, "Now, Senator, you don't want to lose your credibility in your first paragraph." I said, "You are many things, but you are not serene."

And he laughed; he said, "Yeah, maybe we have to change that word." Anyway, it went on, and as he read, I have to say my heart sank because it was a polished piece of prose, but it was also so backward-looking and so steeped in what I would call [Dwight D.] Eisenhower-era nostalgia. And it was apocalyptic. Halperin, in my view, has this kind of apocalyptic quality. He was sharpening the differences at a time when that may not have been the way to either accurately portray Dole, who is basically a dealmaker, a

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consensus seeker, I say principled pragmatist--someone who can make this place work. And I think most voters, broadly speaking, fit into those categories.

The problem, and it didn't matter who it was, there was a fundamental clash there between Dole's instincts as someone who wants to get things done, and the perceived need, reinforced daily by the hired guns and the pollsters and the spin doctors who are telling him that's not how you get elected. Well, those are the people who put, "Read my lips; no new taxes" in George [H.W.] Bush's mouth, and the rest is history. I think there's always a tension, which I think in some ways made Dole appear more tentative as a candidate than he might have been, between his instincts for governing, and what he was being told he had to do in order to get elected. Basically, those specialists in getting you elected would disappear, win or lose. They'd performed their function.

Actually, I think he was too responsible, so I think he tried to blend the two. Anyway, I can't pretend to say the moment I heard that speech, "I saw the bridge to the twenty-first century" analogy, but I remember thinking and telling Kerry Tymchuk, my co-conspirator, "This is a bridge to the past and you know what the Clinton campaign will do." Now, it may be intellectually dishonest, but it was politically hugely effective, because most elections in this country are about the future. And I said, "If you want to subliminally reinforce the age issue, no one will have to say, 'Bob Dole's too old to be president.' People will say implicitly, 'Bob Dole's living in the past.' So you're doing Clinton's job for him, handing it to him."

Now, the problem was I couldn't say that, certainly not the first time out hearing this. So I mumbled a few sort of noncommittal—I didn't want to lie, but there was a lot of good material there and I emphasized that, and I think he suggested that maybe I ought to talk with Kerry. Kerry was also someone he really felt had his interest at heart, someone who didn't have an agenda of his own. And in a curious sort of way, and this has been said before, when you're outside the office, you're Einstein. When you're in the office, you may be a goat. He [Dole] had a curious attitude. I don't want to exaggerate it, but I think there was a real sense of pride that he felt in people who went on to success, and I don't know whether it was an almost paternalistic feeling, but he really—and I hope he does, I hope he has taken, over the years, some real satisfaction in knowing how many Dole people there are in this town and elsewhere who bear his stamp and who, hopefully, make him proud. I think Kerry was someone about whom he felt that way.

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So, Kerry and I talked. I don't know whether we talked that night or the next day. We were of one mind, but we were in an impossible situation. This is classic Dole. I mean, I have to back up now, because the backdrop to this is probably the most important story I have to tell, and it concerns a memo, unsolicited, that I wrote in the spring of '96 contrasting his performance in that campaign with that of '88. If you remember, the folks around him, particularly Mari [Masing Will]—and again, I don't want to single her out. She clearly wasn't the only person who was making this pitch. And no doubt there were lots of reasons why they believed that this was the way to go, but they were clearly trying to position him as a social conservative, someone who could rally a party that was very different from what it had been in '76 when he was last on the ticket.

I always thought his greatest asset was his authenticity. He's not slick. He's not polished. He's not naturally eloquent, but he is himself. And almost always, in his own words, he could communicate everything he needed to communicate. He didn't need a speechwriter. He could communicate a command of any subject, the best of intentions, the knowledge how to get something done if people were willing to work together and all of that.

So anyway, I wrote this memo and I said basically, "You were a better candidate in '88 than you are now." I don't know the exact language, but I talked about feeding the crocodile, as [Winston] Churchill said, because you can throw one sacrifice after another to these folks. Obviously, there was a little bit of the Rockefeller Republican in me when I wrote the memo. "But they don't believe what you're saying. They don't believe *you* believe what you're saying. You're a Trumanesque figure. You're a Midwesterner, plain-spoken, unpolished in the best sense of the word, and I think the contrast, that's your greatest asset, particularly in contrast with someone like Bill Clinton. Your authenticity contrasts sharply with his polish." And I had a whole list of issues where, by taking the initiative and asking people to get real, he would create a rationale, not only for his candidacy but for his presidency.

I think one of the things you can never exaggerate about Dole—with him it wasn't just running for president; I think he was constantly thinking of, how would this affect my presidency? I think perhaps because he'd been through George H.W. Bush and he'd been in those budget negotiations and he'd seen the consequences of going back on this defining moment, maybe it made him reluctant to give hostages to fortune by having

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many defining moments himself. But in any event, Kerry and I—let's just say we were unofficially encouraged to review the text and make suggestions.

I could put myself in Halperin's shoes and I can understand his displeasure. I was invited, at one point, by someone, at the senator's behest, to come to San Diego, and I said, "Absolutely not." I said, "First of all, if word gets out that I or anyone else am there, Halperin might just walk out of the room and out of the city, and that would be very unfortunate for you. And secondly, to the extent that I can be of any value, it is that I'm absolutely invisible and that I'm two thousand miles away in a place that no one would ever look."

Anyway, Kerry and I did extensively rewrite the text. This is only second-hand, in some cases third-hand. I think there were knock-down, drag-out sessions that went on out there, and we did get some of the nostalgia out of the speech. It was more that than anything we put in, and we wrote a new ending. Now, the problem was, and I'll never forget because I said, I always thought what Dole needed to do, the whole synergy of biography and the future is, "Look folks, I understand you and I understand people who have it tough. That's where I came from. And without shamelessly exploiting it, my experience in the hospital after the War gave me an insight and an empathy that's unique." It was always implied, but they never—so the biography stood alone rather than exploiting the biography in the best sense of the word, to convey a kind of empathy.

The curious thing, Clinton is always talked about as the great empathizer, and the single greatest frustration of being around Dole is Dole is one of the most empathetic people I've ever known, and I'm not denigrating Clinton. I'm not suggesting it's a zero-sum game. But it's a side of him that very few people were allowed to see, and it seemed to me that that speech was the perfect opportunity to do so.

But at the end of the day, the other problem with the speech as originally drafted, in my opinion, it was an jeremiad against the twentieth century in an apocalyptic tone from someone who was morally offended by the direction that the culture had taken. Now, all of that is perfectly admissible, but if you have a reputation as a dark, brooding, not particularly sunny individual…. And I thought, "It's just a disaster waiting to happen. This is going to reinforce the worst of the stereotype."

Anyway, the ending which was tacked on and felt tacked on, but nevertheless is what got quoted—I finally got a few paragraphs at the end which were positively

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Reaganesque. And the line was, "I'm the most optimistic man in America." And that was a direct outgrowth of his life experience. Now, if we could have developed that even for a few more paragraphs. As it was, 90 percent of the speech was the most pessimistic man in America and then, all of a sudden, at the very end you announced that, "I'm the most optimistic man in America," and it was not much of a transition.

The interesting thing is the next day on the front page of the *Times*, the headline is, "Dole," quote, "the most optimistic man in America." So they picked up the line. By that time, I understood Mr. Halperin had, in fact, stalked out of San Diego angry, feeling probably betrayed. And I thought to myself, "You know, buddy, get real. Your name isn't on the ballot, and unless this speechwriting thing is a kind of ego trip, you need to understand what every good speechwriter understands on day one, which is it's not about you. You're a facilitator. You subordinate yourself and your ego."

In any event, that was the backdrop in terms of the Convention. The memo, before that, was something that he kept on his desk. He told me later on he read it every day and he sent copies of it over to the campaign, which—I'm telling this backwards, but you now understand why the campaign was loathe to have me involved in the speech or anything else. I'm sure from their perspective, along with others, I was one of these outsiders, these dilettantes who kept getting in the way of their perfectly laid plans.

The memo was leaked to Michael Kramer of *Time* magazine. This was about the time that Colin Powell was seriously flirting with the idea of running and, indeed, called a press conference to say he was a Republican but he wasn't going to run for president. And in that story, Michael Kramer told the story of Powell's decision, but really segued into what it meant, i.e. Dole as the prohibitive favorite. There had been a leak to Kramer, who contacted me at the Reagan Library, and I was naïve enough—I was astonished and I didn't want to talk. But Michael is a good guy, very professional. I got wind of the fact that it would be perfectly all right for me to talk. I said, "I'll talk, but it's off the record, and there's a whole lot of things I'm not going to talk about."

So anyway, we danced around all of this. It turned out that, in my opinion—I don't know. I've never asked him. I think Dole leaked the memo. He wanted to send a signal, particularly to Republican governors, in effect saying, "Look, I don't believe all this stuff that I'm saying. I'm still me," which, again, works in a legislative setting behind

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closed doors where the entire electorate consists of a hundred people, maybe fifty on your side. It doesn't work in public. You can't get away with it.

I will never forget the mixed emotions I felt the following Sunday. He was a guest on "This Week with David Brinkley," and George Will, who was married to Mari Masing Will, without disclosing that fact, brings this up and quotes from my memo and says, "This guy, Smith, says you were a better candidate in '88, than '96." Perfectly fair question. I think it would have been nice if there had been some full disclosure in terms of all of this, but anyway. And Dole minimized the memo and described it as free advice and then, of course, backtracked, said, "But he's a good friend of mine." It was so clear that he was trying to touch all the bases and send signals inarticulately. It was like smoke signals so that everyone would understand what they were supposed to understand, but it wasn't very effective. And he was cornered.

I didn't take it personally, but it was interesting that he wanted that advice and he was as responsive to that advice. He didn't want to run the campaign he was running, and he has subsequently volunteered that observation. I thought at first he was doing the political thing, sort of flattering me, but he did it two weeks ago at the Press Club out of the blue. He used the example of the check from the Log Cabin Republicans that they [the Dole campaign] noisily returned and afterwards he thought it was a mistake. It wasn't Reaganesque. As he said, "It's like Reagan. My attitude was, if you want to support me, then I'm glad to have your support and I'm not in the business of turning away supporters." Also, I think, it was the classic kind of wedge issue that he was uncomfortable with. There's a decency about Bob Dole, which I think is offended by some of the things that he was told he would have to do to win.

In any event, I always felt that there was a real cognitive dissonance about that campaign. It wasn't simply badly organized; I think in many ways it *was* badly organized. I don't think the rationale for that campaign was ever spelled out particularly to anyone's satisfaction, including his own, and he has subsequently told me he never should have run that year. His year was '88.

Williams: And you agree.

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Smith: Yes. I wouldn't presume to say he shouldn't have run in '96, but I do think that '88 was his year, which makes all the more remarkable the loyalty that he gave to George H.W. Bush. Not many people who had won Iowa and were told by their pollster, "At the end of the week, you're going to be president," going into the New Hampshire primary, only to have your rival's surrogate, in this case Governor [John] Sununu, who played the heavy very well. I mean, he took relish in sticking it to the Dole campaign, ran an ad of questionable veracity, which went basically unanswered and which certainly contributed to his defeat in New Hampshire. But given all of that, not many people would have been able to put it behind them, let alone give the man who beat them the kind of unquestioning loyalty, a hell of a lot more than Newt Gingrich and the House Republicans gave to Bush. But part of that's generational. Bob Dole is of a generation that believed if the President of the United States asked you to do something, you saluted and considered yourself fortunate to have been asked.

Williams: During the ninety-six-hour marathon at the end of that campaign—

Smith: Yes, it started in Grand Rapids; it started at the Gerald Ford Museum. They began in Grand Rapids, which was and to some degree is still heavily Republican territory. They had, I remember, President Ford, President Bush 41, and David Brinkley, and they were all good friends. They taped a segment for Brinkley's program in the Ford Museum. He [Dole] was very up. Some of it was adrenaline. It's all the more extraordinary because he knew he wasn't going to win, yet he was the chief cheerleader in the campaign. There had been stories, I think well authenticated, one in particular where, in the home stretch, not at the last four days but in the last month or so, he came into the office, and I think it was the only occasion when he, in effect, lost his cool.

Because people in the campaign had been leaking in a self-serving way, the classic Washington game. To be fair, he had hired these people. These were people for hire and basically you get what you pay for. But the unattractive side of this city is a talent for survival, which is often at odds with any vestige of loyalty. Let’s say self-loyalty tends to crowd out any other variety, and that's exactly what was happening. It happens often in a losing campaign. And he said, "You have no idea how tough it is to get these polls day after day, you're twenty points down, twenty-five down, and to go out

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there and put on a smiling face and assure everyone you're going to win." And in a lot of ways, that's Dole at his best. Yet it's something that no one ever saw.

Williams: That was one of the comments that was made at the end of that campaign, that finally they saw Dole as Dole because he wasn't speaking under control; he was doing it from the heart.

Smith: And the "Where's the outrage?" was authentic. That wasn't a line someone suggested to him, and indeed there were people who mocked him at the time. Again, this isn't Claude Reins; shock, shock. Bob Dole was genuinely offended to the point of outrage by the Lincoln Bedroom being turned into a fundraising device and some of the foreign money that was coming into the—and what people forget, the Republicans had decided to cut themselves loose from Dole in the last two weeks of the campaign. I'm telling you, I think it's an act of extraordinary generosity. He knew he wasn't going to win, but he was going to do everything he could, handed these stories about fundraising abuses, to try to narrow the gap, to raise Republican enthusiasm, and at the very least, to make sure that the Party did not lose Congress on his watch. He acquiesced in that strategy.

Williams: I think maybe we'll end with this question. As a presidential historian, how would you imagine a Dole presidency to have been?

Smith: It's a fair question, but it's an unanswerable question. As I indicated earlier, I think he would have been a very unconventional president. I think he would have spent—

[Interruption]

[End of interview]

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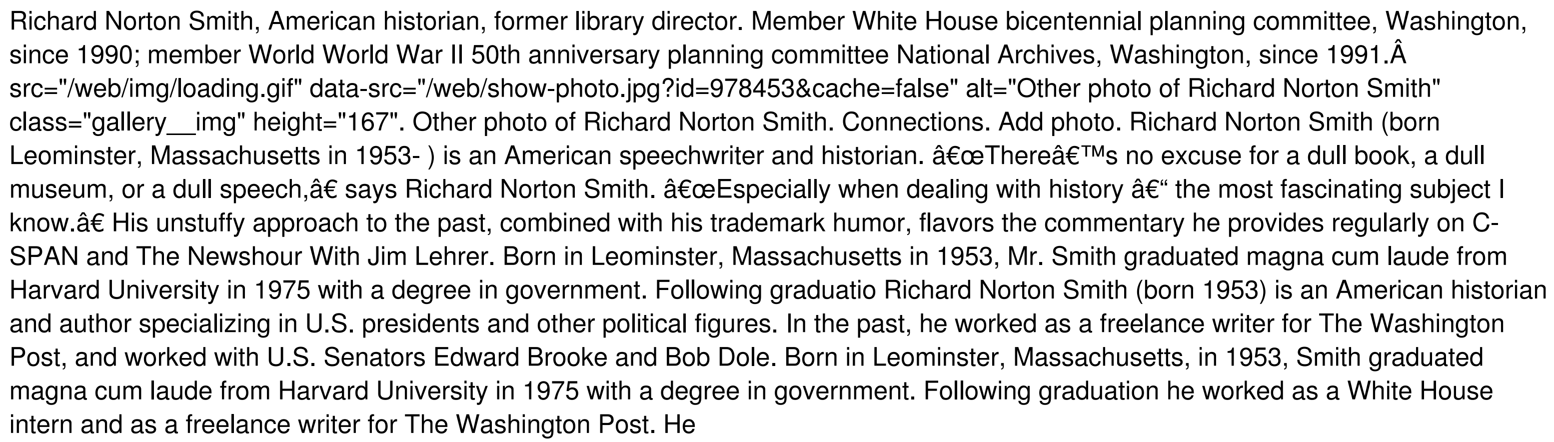
Richard Norton Smith, American historian, former library director. Member White House bicentennial planning committee, Washington, since 1990; member World World War II 50th anniversary planning committee National Archives, Washington, since 1991.Â src="/web/img/loading.gif" data-src="/web/show-photo.jpg?id=978453&cache=false" alt="Other photo of Richard Norton Smith" class="gallery__img" height="167". Other photo of Richard Norton Smith. Connections. Add photo. Richard Norton Smith (born Leominster, Massachusetts in 1953-) is an American speechwriter and historian. â€œThereâ€™s no excuse for a dull book, a dull museum, or a dull speech,â€ says Richard Norton Smith. â€œEspecially when dealing with history â€“ the most fascinating subject I know.â€ His unstuffy approach to the past, combined with his trademark humor, flavors the commentary he provides regularly on C-SPAN and The Newshour With Jim Lehrer. Born in Leominster, Massachusetts in 1953, Mr. Smith graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University in 1975 with a degree in government. Following graduatio Richard Norton Smith (born 1953) is an American historian and author specializing in U.S. presidents and other political figures. In the past, he worked as a freelance writer for The Washington Post, and worked with U.S. Senators Edward Brooke and Bob Dole. Born in Leominster, Massachusetts, in 1953, Smith graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University in 1975 with a degree in government. Following graduation he worked as a White House intern and as a freelance writer for The Washington Post. He