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Interview with Stu Spencer
April 3, 2007
Palm Desert, California

Mieczkowski: Can I set these somewhere? Maybe here. I'll put this right up near you.

Spencer: Sure.

Mieczkowski: All right. Well, I'm doing this article on the '76 primaries and the election, so the whole schmeer that [Gerald] Ford faced, versus [Ronald] Reagan and then versus [Jimmy] Carter. Could I ask you, what was your precise title so that I could describe you accurately? You weren't the campaign manager. I know that Ford went through...

Spencer: Well...

Mieczkowski: You want me to pull this up for you?

Spencer: Political director.

Mieczkowski: Political director?

Spencer: And once upon a time I was deputy campaign chairman because we went through so many chairmen.... [chuckles]

Mieczkowski: Yes, I know.

Spencer:...that we had a point in time where I carried all the hats and I didn't want to be chairman, so....But basically, I was a campaign manager.

Mieczkowski: And....

Spencer: And we had a chairman above me.

Mieczkowski: At what point did Ford bring you aboard? Was it before Reagan announced in November '75, or...?

Spencer: Yes. I came in in September of '75.

Mieczkowski: And did you expect that Reagan challenge or did? I mean, Ford was trying to do things to try to prevent Reagan from going in, like dumping [Nelson] Rockefeller and...



Spencer: I expected Reagan to run, you know, before I even went back there in September. The people in Washington in the White House and the general grouping in town of the politicians, they didn't think Reagan would run. Number two, they didn't think he'd be tough. And to me this was a shock when I got there. Rummy [Donald Rumsfeld] was chief of staff for about a month. All those people felt that they were--they could block Reagan from running.

And, you know, my position was that—and I knew the man well—was that he felt he got cheated out of it in—he felt that he was the heir-apparent after Watergate. And in many ways, he was right, you know, when you look at it politically. And when Ford took the VP [vice president] thing, he [Ford] said he wasn't going to run and so, you know, Reagan's mindset was he wanted to be president, and everything that they were doing in Washington, in my judgment, knowing the man, wasn't going to stop him.

And when you looked at the polling data, and you had to have been, Reagan was a factor. I mean, our data showed Reagan was a factor. Certainly his data showed he was a factor. So yes, I expected him to run, and I expected him to be tough and I didn't have that sense at all of anybody else in Washington. And I was in a state of shock. And, boy, I really started pounding them. I was preaching, if you know what I mean and....

Mieczkowski: You really started pounding whom?

Spencer: The president's people. I mean, the staff, the people around him. And my position was simply this, you know. If he was a sitting incumbent, Ford, loses the New Hampshire primary and the Florida primary, you're dead. It's over with. The sitting incumbent. So I put all of my resources, not all of them, but 80 percent of my resources, into those two states. Got a lot of criticism for it from around the country by people, like state party apparatuses, who were supporting Ford. But my message was, hey, if we don't win here, boys, we're not going to get to you. And Ford bought off on it. I'm not sure all his people around him bought off on it, but he bought off on it. And I was proven right. I mean, we won New Hampshire by what?

Mieczkowski: A little over a thousand votes.

Spencer: A little over a thousand votes. And we put—it could have gone the other way, and it would have been over with. That gave us momentum. I put the same amount of resources into Florida. I even brought my former partner, Bill Roberts, in to run Florida because I wasn't happy with Congressman Louis Frey [Jr.], who was allegedly running it, but doing nothing. And we did very well in Florida. Momentum, which is important in



presidential—we go into Illinois, I think, or we go to another state, before we get to North Carolina.

Well, we won the first three , and they handed us our lunch in North Carolina. Because they got their act together, finally, in the end there, and it was a perfect state for Reagan, anyway, with Jesse Helms and so forth. So then the race was on. And, you know, every Tuesday night someplace we were in a fight. And the power we had with the incumbency was a big plus to us in a lot of those states.

But we'd have never gotten there if we hadn't won New Hampshire and Florida, and basically, the third state, I think it was Illinois. But, you know, after New Hampshire, the rest of the people watching him realized Reagan was a big gorilla, and this was going to be a battle for a long ways.

Mieczkowski: Ford was apparently very—despite the narrowness of the New Hampshire win—very happy about winning New Hampshire. He apparently was saying to his staff, “Well, I've finally shown I can win somewhere besides Grand Rapids, Michigan.” Do you remember his saying things like that or do you remember the state of affairs and emotions?

Spencer: Yes, yes, yes. I remember him saying exactly that. Yes, they were very happy because they were always all looking our polling data, too, and our polling data showed New Hampshire as a very close race. You know, we were getting down to the last three weeks of it. So it was a big relief to the president because he understood the consequences of losing New Hampshire, you know, in the big picture. Sure, he said that. And you know, nobody else in our modern political history ever beat Ronald Reagan.

Mieczkowski: Right.

Spencer: Pat Brown, a sitting incumbent governor, couldn't beat him, you know. He was a big, tough candidate. And for Ford to defeat Ronald Reagan, I think, was a hell of a feat.

Mieczkowski: Yes. The only other person besides Ford in certain primary states and for the nomination was George Bush, Sr. in that Iowa caucus in '80.

Spencer: Yes.

Mieczkowski: And that was it. Yes, you're right. You're right.

Spencer: Yes, but in the big picture, he went on to lose.

Mieczkowski: Yes.



Spencer: He put all his resources in there and that was all he had [laughs].

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: So they blew it.

Mieczkowski: Reagan did?

Spencer: No. Yes, in the Iowa caucus they blew it. [inaudible]

Mieczkowski: Oh, okay. Yes. Stu, you're in such a unique position, having worked with Reagan in California before and then in '76. And what did you see as a good—as Reagan's weakness, as a good strategy to try to beat him in the primaries?

Spencer: Well, there's another ingredient to that. I was fortunate enough to be the only bridge between Reagan, Ford, and Rockefeller. I worked for Nelson in '64, so I knew all three of those guys intimately.

My position in 1975, starting in '75, doing the Ford campaign against a guy like Ronald Reagan who I knew well, knew all his strengths, knew all his weaknesses, was simply his biggest weakness and the thing we had to get at in New Hampshire was he doesn't...there was two things. Number one, he spent five, six years running around the country giving speeches. I mean hundreds of speeches a year. And when you do that you get sloppy in what you're saying. You may get sloppy in a Q and A. You may get sloppy in your main text. When I mean sloppy, I mean say things that aren't in your own best political interest down the road. We researched all those speeches. Secondly, he's a rhythm candidate, Reagan is. He gets in a rhythm, a speaking rhythm, a thinking rhythm, a body language rhythm. He gets in a rhythm and he's tough when he gets in a rhythm. And when you knock him out of that rhythm, all of a sudden he's not THE Ronald Reagan anymore. He's got to go back and put it back together again.

I saw that happen to him when we were running for governor. I saw it happen to him in a primary race against George Christopher. We were in a gathering in Santa Monica [California] and some black guy gets up and asks him, the press is all there, and he asks him some question which in essence he was accusing Reagan of being a racist. And it was a ludicrous thing, but it was happening. And Reagan kind of came unglued.

Mieczkowski: Did he get angry, Reagan?



Spencer: Yes, he got angry and he came unglued. And I'm in the back going holy, gee, wow, here we go. And, you know, I got him out of there as fast as I could.

Mieczkowski: Stu...

Spencer: He didn't do anything wrong, but I could see he was shattered.

Mieczkowski: When was this, '66, Stu?

Spencer: '66.

Mieczkowski: Okay.

Spencer: Primary. George Christopher. Christopher was there, Reagan was there. It was a press debate. So he felt he'd been unjustly accused of something. And he wasn't a racist, but that happens, and he didn't handle it well. So I knew from those kinds of experiences that if you could get under his skin, if you can get him mad, get him off his feet, get him out of his rhythm, you bought yourself some time, anyway, to make your points. So in our research, there was a writer, and I can't remember his name now, for the *Chicago Tribune* who covered politics who had covered a speech that Reagan gave somewhere, say, three years prior to the '76, and he advocated a \$90 billion program. This reporter thought this was big news, this was out, and his editors didn't, and they put it on page seven.

Mieczkowski: Was it Walter Trohan by any chance?

Spencer: No.

Mieczkowski: No.

Spencer: No. I can see his face, glasses. But anyway, he—that always stuck in his craw, what his editors did to him, and I was talking to him one day because he was covering the campaign and he told me about it. I said, give me—send me the clipping. So he got the clipping and he sent it to me and I read it. And I'm not an economist, but I thought, man, that was a pretty broad statement. So I turned it over to Peter Kaye who was my press guy, a newspaper writer, had been, an investigative type. I said, "Run this through all the research, with the economists we've got." Well, it was, you know, the [\$]90 billion [dollar] program was pie-in-the-sky. But the big thing that I was able to grasp politically was New Hampshire was sort of a non-tax state. They don't pay taxes on anything. If the feds adopted this program, which might have helped Nebraska or Illinois or somewhere



else, it was going to crucify New Hampshire tax-wise. It's a whole different game. So we could sit down and extrapolate and say, tell you, as a person in New Hampshire, he's advocating a program that's going to cost you five grand a year. Dynamite in New Hampshire, so I staged it.

We had a complete kit ready for every press person, our press crew and his press crew, Reagan's press crew. And, you know, we're talking about eighty, ninety people, both press crews had in those days. This kit about the speech was to be given, the whole presentation so they could go evaluate it themselves, our talking points as to why it was bad news and what it would do to New Hampshire and a couple other states. And on a given certain day when our crew, press crew, showed up on the plane, that was sitting on their seat. When Reagan's crew showed up, it was sitting on their seat. So when Reagan had landed in Manchester [New Hampshire], you had eighty people yelling at him about 90 billion bucks. Well, the poor guy couldn't even remember giving the \$90 billion speech, probably. It was written by a guy by the name of Jeff Bell our of New Jersey. Does that name ring a bell?

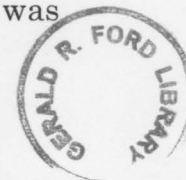
Mieczkowski: No.

Spencer: A very right-wing economist type person. And he couldn't answer questions, by the way. He didn't remember anything. And they kept pounding him, pounding him. And of course we were feeding the fire the whole time, dropping out new tidbits about what it would cost New Hampshire.

And what happened was what I wanted to happen. My goal happened. Reagan got out of rhythm. All of a sudden, he's stumbling through New Hampshire, trying to answer questions that he can't answer, et cetera, et cetera. And they had to get him out of there, get him back, and get him back in rhythm, so to speak. And that took ten days, two weeks, to get him back doing the good things that he always did.

But that was really the difference in that race. We got him off his feet. He screwed up. And maybe the other one was that they were so confident that they were going to win that they knocked off their get-out-the-vote effort for the last twenty-four hours, phone banks. We never quit. We never quit. That was really—all the money was spent, and this was the first federally funded campaign, as you know. So we were limited. But all the money both sides spent was at equal levels. The real telling difference was we were able to knock Ronald Reagan off his rhythm for a short period enough of a time to take advantage of it and get in there.

Mieczkowski: And did Reagan try to woo you over into his camp at all? In Ford's memoirs—and I apologize in advance for asking about this, but I'm just so curious—there's one line where Ford's writing about you and he said, he writes, it's something like, "I know Stu worked for Reagan when he was



running for governor, but he seemed to have had a falling out with Reagan." And Ford writes, "And I never asked why." Is that accurate or---?

Spencer: That's accurate. It's...when you look at it...you've got to know Ronald Reagan and Nancy [Reagan]. To know Ronald Reagan, you've got to know Nancy. We were in both the governor's races, and after the second one particularly, the campaign in 1970, he had a staff which was not a political staff. It was [inaudible] staff. I called them the "palace guard." I mean, I call them palace guard, I don't care who's in power because the differences to me between the political, usually, on the outside and the palace guard, there become differences. I had my differences with these people that were around him. His chief-of-staff insisted this guy, press, you know, I had no problems with him.

And the problems developed because the finance community that had gone to Reagan and asked him to run, and they were friends of his and put a lot of money into the effort. They'd see things happening in Sacramento [California] that they weren't happy with, staff things, usually. And they'd come to me, want me to go up, you know, to straighten it out. Well, I couldn't turn [inaudible] and trash in all these guys. I mean, they had created my business over the years, and they were basically right when they were bitching. But they were entrepreneurial types and journal types and wouldn't take no for an answer.

So I'd go up to Sacramento and tried to enlighten these guys, you know, you've got problems with Reagan's people, let's do this, let's do that, let's work around it. And of course they didn't like that. And they decided they were going to cut me off at the pass, and they systematically worked against me.

Reagan wasn't involved in this. He didn't know what was going on, and I'm not the kind of guy that would go say hey, governor, your staff's doing [inaudible]. I'm just not built that way. Most people would. I'll take them on head-on and take the consequences. So they went through all that and systematically tried to degrade me, ruin my business, take clients. It was terrible. And I fought back and, you know, walked away. Walked away. To go back, though, to the presidential thing: In '68 there were people who were trying to get in to run against Nixon, you know, in that primary. I went [inaudible] with a bunch of guys out in the east. I went to a couple of the early meetings and could say this ain't going to happen. I mean, I grew up in a Nixon operation. I knew how they operated. They were not going to beat Richard Nixon the way they were going. And so I went to Reagan, the governor, who'd been in two years, and I said, "Are you serious about running for president?" And he gave me an answer that always stuck in my mind. He said, "Stu, the office doesn't seek...seek...."

Mieczkowski: "The man doesn't seek the office, the office seeks the man"?



Spencer: Yes, that...yes! And I looked at him and said, "Are you nuts?" He said no, and he believed it. And I said, "Well, that's not the way it works." And I said, "Because of that, and the way with what's going on, I don't want any part of this." So I didn't go to any more meetings. That didn't make any of these people very happy. But, you know, they went through. He never admitted that he was running until the day he died, naturally.

But we went...they went to Miami [Florida] and I went with them. What I committed to was I would put the delegation together for you, and I put a delegation together that was balanced, Reagan and Nixon, the California delegation, because I knew where it was going to go.

So, yes, they made a run at it down there and, you know, there were a lot of southern states that were really wanting to go for it, Reagan, in that era, over Nixon. But they got Strom [Thurmond] and they got a few other guys. I mean, Nixon had a great operation and I knew what they were going to do, so we didn't go.

So that was a piece of it too, that alienated me from. So I just went out and was doing my own thing, making money, running races, and watching. And he started running for the presidency, you know, in '74, '75, Reagan did. And I wasn't around. I hadn't talked to any of them, and I was an observer. And then in September or August of that year, '75, [Howard] "Bo" Callaway got me. He was the existing chairman. He wanted me on the Ford team. I knew Ford. I knew him as a congressman. And I said, oh, I don't know. And then Rummy took a run at me. And finally I flew back there to talk to everybody and of course then [inaudible] took me and how do you say no to a president? You don't, that's the problem. I talked to Ford and I said okay. But I said, I will run the New Hampshire race and the Florida race, and I'm coming home. And that shows you how naïve I was.

But I didn't know that they had so much internal problems going on between Callaway and Rumsfeld, the staff. You know, there were just problems all over the place, and I walked right into the middle of it. Lee Nunn was there then. And so I walked into the middle of it, and the first thing you know, they canned Lee Nunn, next thing you know, they're going after Bo's scalp. And I'm sitting there. I'm basically running the New Hampshire campaign, watching all this stuff nationally go on around me. And then they brought Rog in, Morton, and Rog and I have no relationship. Of course, we didn't know at the time he was dying of cancer. But he was sick. Rog and I, we worked out a great relationship. He could handle the White House and I could run my campaigns [laughs].

Mieczkowski: He was a nice man from everything I've heard.

Spencer: He was a great guy, a great human being. And we finally got it all put back together and a pretty good team running and....



Mieczkowski: So it was chaotic when you got there?

Spencer: It was chaotic. Everybody was sniping at everybody.

Mieczkowski: Is that part of the remnants of the Nixon—the uneasy mix between Nixon, Ford and Rockefeller staffs?

Spencer: Part of it.

Mieczkowski: And with regard to Rockefeller, once when I was interviewing Bill Seidman for that book and it was about economic policy, Bill just started talking about Rockefeller. And he said he was in the room when Ford...and he made it clear to me, Ford asked Rockefeller off the ticket. Were you privy to that at all or?

Spencer: No. No, that happened just before I got there. But they also knew that I would have really fought that in some way because of my relationship with Nelson. My position on Nelson was, and I could have talked to him about this, you had to figure out how you were going to win a primary with Nelson because he would be a real plus in the general. But they just made the assumption there was no way, they had to get rid of him in the primary to have a chance. The biggest nemesis we had in the Republican Party was Henry Kissinger, it was not Nelson Rockefeller. You see what I mean?

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: And my logic was can Henry.

Mieczkowski: Yes, exactly.

Spencer: You'd be a hero, you know!

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: But Nelson was a trooper, and he was a good vice president and Ford liked him. And, you know, that all happened prior to me getting there, so I had to deal with what we had.

Mieczkowski: Yes. That was one of Ford's biggest mistakes as president, keeping Henry.

And that crucial North Carolina primary. One person who I interviewed after I wrote the book was Robert Orben, and he told me a story about Ford going to an elementary school, I think it was, to give a talk to kids and it just



went flat. The talk, the speech he gave, the media coverage and everything else. And Orben sensed that something was wrong, that Ford was in trouble after that talk. Do you remember that or did you have any sense that Ford was going to lose that North Carolina primary?

Spencer: Yes, but I think what Orben's talking about was Future Homemakers of America. It's a group they have, very heavy in the South. Young girls, teaching them how to be wives, homemakers. Very politically incorrect today. But those things existed in the South. It'd be like a Girl Scout or a Future Farmers of America type of thing. And this is really funny. We had a real problem, and Orben was a speechwriter. He was a good one, but he was a comedic speechwriter. He gave the jokes.

Mieczkowski: He's a riot. He's a funny guy.

Spencer: Oh, he's a riot, isn't he? And Hartmann was in charge of speeches. Hartmann would write one good speech a year. Off the record, he had a drinking problem.

Mieczkowski: Yes, I know. I've interviewed him.

Spencer: Okay, okay.

Mieczkowski: Even I could see, on his patio, a tray full of drinks. Yes.

Spencer: [laughs] Probably.

Mieczkowski: I interviewed him in '94 and then in '02 and he has Alzheimer's pretty bad. I can see it's pretty bad, yes.

Spencer: Does he? I didn't know. But anyway, I had a real problem with the product that was coming out of the White House speech office as the political figure in this thing. And [Richard] Cheney, by now, is chief of staff and Cheney and I had a great relationship. And there were a couple other people in there. I think Gergen was in there and he was having a problem with it. So a trip would be planned, speeches would be planned [inaudible], issues would be planned and then the speeches written. Well, what are we going to say here, here, here, here, here, consistent with the general status of the campaign? And it'd go into the speechwriter's shop and come out crap. And I'd go in and raise hell with Cheney. So I find we had—a decision was made. Every time that it was a final meeting of the speechwriters, either me or Cheney would be there to listen and read and say no, yes, no, you know, fight the battle. So the speeches got a little better, but they weren't quality. And I was fighting with Cheney the whole time about I don't want to bootleg



stuff in here for good speechwriters. I mean, there's a hundred of them out there. I want to get each one to write for me [coughs].

So, I couldn't get that done so I went to a speechwriters' meeting one day. There was a speech being prepared for the Future Homemakers of America. It was crap. Pardon me, offensive crap written by old men who didn't understand women or the emerging women's movement or anything. And I sat there and I didn't object to one word. I decided not to.

Poor Ford [coughs]. He goes into that meeting and he gives that speech and it bombed. And the media—I'm in the back of the room going, oh, what did I do, in the back of the room and they're all over me. And I'm going, you know, like this. Well, I did it because I had to get somebody's attention, and I figured I can throw away one lousy meeting, one lousy speech. This campaign's going to go on for another hundred days or more, you know. Every twenty-four hours, our news cycle is new news, so what the hell. So the first day we get back to the White House, the first thing that Cheney says is "Where the hell were you in the speechwriters' meeting?" I said, "I was there." He said, "Well, what'd you do?" "Nothing." He says, "Well, he bombed." I said, "Good." I said, "Now can I bootleg some speeches in?" And he said, "Tomorrow, start!"

And that's how I was able to do it. Start bootlegging speeches in for certain issues, certain times, certain places. Not that they—they kept writing speeches and stuff, but I always had two of them [laughs].

Mieczkowski: And Stu, that was right before the North Carolina primary, that Future Homemakers of America meeting?

Spencer: Yes. Yes, I think it was before the North Carolina primary.

Mieczkowski: And are there any other primaries that stand out in your mind as you move...?

Spencer: Texas. We got bombed.

Mieczkowski: Yes. John Tower worked for Ford and I know the Energy Policy and Conservation Act that Ford signed hurt him there.

Spencer: Yes, it was everything. It was fruition of right wing versus moderate versus liberals in the party. I can't remember the number. I think I spent \$800 thousand right there. A Texas primary is delegates at large, statewide, delegates by congressional district. In other words, winner take all. It's not a caucus state, it's a mish mash. And, you know, I kept saying to myself, politically, there's no way I can't win some of these congressional seats. I mean, let's think Houston, some of these urban centers, you know. I



mean, I'd lay in bed nights thinking about it. And we lost every delegate in Texas. They swept us. Now, we did...our polling data wasn't very good.

Mieczkowski: Meaning the quality or it was indicating a bad future?

Spencer: Quality. It didn't indicate what it should have indicated, that the future was worse than we thought it was. Now, you know that's...I found in those days that certain pollsters did better in certain regions because that's where they did all their work and they had the nuances down. And we had a guy from Michigan.

Mieczkowski: Robert Teeter.

Spencer: Yes. He's gone now, so I don't want to. He basically did good work, but I never felt that the study, as I look back in retrospect, we were getting out of Texas was very good. He didn't give us the right information. But Kissinger was the main issue. I mean, Joe Coors went out in independent expenditure and spent I don't know how many millions on ugly pictures of Kissinger on television, coming in on, you know...I mean, just turned on the whole state.

And I'll never forget that because of the fact that we got wiped out, the fact that I spent so much money. I consider it the biggest mistake I ever made in political life. It was an eye-opener, though. It reaffirmed everything I had been saying. This guy's a tough candidate, Ronald Reagan, and we got our hands full. So the rest of them were up and down--the California primary sticks out in my memory because I used it as my bypass election and everyone thought I was nuts. We weren't going to win California against Reagan.

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: So I said okay, what could we do that I can use in Ohio and New Jersey and other more moderate parts of the world? In California, that's going to be national press, what can I do to help that? So that's what we came out with, a great ad. We said, "Governor Reagan couldn't start a war but President Reagan could," and the place went crazy. He got mad, everybody got mad. Nofzinger was running his campaign—he was all over the news and--

Mieczkowski: What, did Reagan contact you personally at all?

Spencer: No, no. But they told me later. What happened was exactly what I wanted to happen. It was picked up in Ohio, it was picked up in Jersey, Illinois. Everywhere else it was picked up. And there was a little doubt,



there's still some doubt in people's minds, about Reagan, his stability, [Barry] Goldwater tendencies. There's still that. That's what I planned on. Well, we lost California probably by six points more than we should have because of that ad [laughs]. It was just terrible, which I was willing to accept if it had [inaudible]. Reagan lands in Columbus, Ohio, wherever he landed, you'd start asking him about it, right? Again we're back to \$90 billion. They're saying, you know, tell us about this Rhodesia situation, Governor Reagan. Well, you know, God, the poor guy was off his feet again. Knocked out.

And so I always remember that because I took a lot of criticism for that. I don't know how history's going to show it, but I don't care, because I know exactly what it did for us and it was a plus. It was a gamble you have to take sometimes to get something else that you want. It was funny.

Other than that, it was pretty...most of the other states, I forget, New Hampshire, Florida, Carolina, California, it was the normal push and shove, buying and selling delegates. We made great use of the incumbency, which, you know, my theory in politics is deal your strength. And that was our strength was the incumbency. In terms of cutting deals for judgeships, I mean, you know. I wouldn't...I had open shop for dealing and...

Mieczkowski: What kind of deals did you have?

Spencer: Oh, nothing big. Like, you know, support of the national committee from that state. That sort of thing. There was a lot of stuff came in down the pike that we just said forget about it. I mean, prominent people would ask for pardons and stuff. We'd always say forget about that stuff. But the normal thing of White House invitations, you know. We never used the [William] Clinton bedroom, we never used that stuff. But the power of it. I think a veterans' hospital was put in the north, up around Tallahassee, somewhere in Florida. I think that was it. There was a Democratic congressman there and I can't remember his name. We made a deal with him. We'd put the damn hospital there, but he helped us. You know what I mean?

Nothing like you see today, just the power of the incumbency. We'd arrive in Air Force One, they'd arrive in a charter. We'd have Secret Service, we'd have the trappings. They'd have little trappings and security people. All those things we milked as much as we could. Do photo ops and all that sort of thing. Those were sort of the things that I really remember. It was eighteen months of [inaudible], of absolute chaos. It was a tough, tough fight between two big gorillas and then it was over with.

Mieczkowski: And Stu, the one issue where Reagan seemed to get traction was the attacks on foreign policy and Ford's defense. And Ford, I know, was



infuriated at that. And they were inaccurate because Ford was big on having a strong defense and kept an internationalist foreign policy.

Spencer: That was, you know...those things are the give and take of any campaign. I mean, it's going on now. In any presidential campaign, you either understate or overstate what your position is. The big foreign policy thing that was giving him problems was the Panama Canal.

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: That was really—it wasn't a weak on defense accusation and things like that. It was the actual act of the Panama...giving the Panama Canal away, which was very harmful in the primary. In Texas, that was a big issue in Texas.

That was the biggest foreign policy problem he had, plus the fact that he was the boss of Henry. I mean, Henry would do things like, in the best interest of the country, I'm sure. But I remember having a big argument. Henry planned a trip to Africa before the Alabama, Georgia primary. And I'm saying, does this have to happen? So Henry and I get into a big argument. And, you know, I can't imitate Henry, he's so funny when he talks. The only German I know who's been here for fifty years and still can't speak English! He's—he makes his case to the president about it's in the best interest of the country. I make the case that it's not in the best interest to getting reelected to go to those states before those southern primaries. He went. I don't know if it made any difference.

But Henry was a great target for the right wingers. And Ford had to defend him because he was his secretary of state. And I'm not saying Henry was a bad secretary of state, it's just that, you know, sometimes, you know, the mixture of policy and politics becomes very tenuous sometimes. What do you do? And most politicians and public figures, like Reagan and Ford, want to do the right thing, even if it's politically wrong. So that creates a tension and a lot of decision-making.

I saw Reagan...Reagan was one of the few guys I ever saw who the politics of the matter really didn't affect him. He didn't care, more so than anyone else. I can only recall once in my life, gubernatorial and presidential, where—I went to him in the 1984 campaign and said, Mark Hatfield, the senator from Oregon, introduced a timber relief bill. The timber industry was in trouble. It was basically a boondoggle, there was no doubt about it. And Mark called me one day and he said I understand that people around the president down there are asking him to veto this bill. I said, I don't know, I'll find out.

Well, I think about it, and I said, God, that's political suicide in Oregon. I mean, timber is [inaudible]. And maybe Washington. So I go down and talk to Baker, his chief of staff, and he said yes, Ed Meese and these guys are trying to get him to veto it. I said I want to see the president. So I go in and see the president. I brought it up, I said, this Hatfield bill, I have to say one



thing to you politically. If you veto this bill, I will not guarantee you the electoral votes in Oregon. He listened. That was the end of the conversation. That's the way it went.

A week later, Baker made a call to me and he said, "You won one." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "He's not going to veto the timber relief bill." I just go "Oh, boy," and laugh. I mean, the only assessment I can make is he didn't veto it because he didn't want to lose the electoral votes in Oregon, right? So that's the only time I can remember him ever doing something for a political reason because if you read the bill, it was a boondoggle. I mean, it was a gift to the timber industry, you know what I mean? And....

Mieczkowski: Stu, what do you remember of the 1976 National Convention in Kansas City [Missouri] and the decision, Ford's decision to pick [Robert] Dole and the Reagan speech there and all the rest?

Spencer: Well...

Mieczkowski: I mean, that was a tough nomination fight.

Spencer: We knew—I knew, my people knew, we had it locked up providing they couldn't get any emotions going on the floor at that convention because we had people locked in as delegates, committed, who loved Ronald Reagan. They loved Ronald Reagan.

Mieczkowski: But they were committed to Ford?

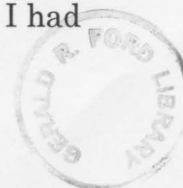
Spencer: They were our delegates. They were committed to us, they were voting for us, but they personally loved Ronald Reagan.

Mieczkowski: Really?

Spencer: Oh, there was a lot of that on that floor.

Mieczkowski: But they committed to Ford because of loyalty to him or the incumbency?

Spencer: Well, loyalty to him, the incumbency. You know, lots of different reasons, but they stayed there. So the thing that scared me to death was an emotional dispute, some kind of resolution, something getting on the floor of that convention, which Ford would basically have to be put on the wrong side of. Something about Henry, something involving the canals and something about foreign policy, something like that where they could really get a head of steam up. And I had people that, prior they have all these separate subcommittees dealing with issues and listing policy and all that stuff. I had



people in those meetings, listening, talking [coughs]. And John Sears came up with a procedural question. Do you remember that?

Mieczkowski: Sixteen C? Is that it?

Spencer: Yes.

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: A procedural question! There's no emotion in a procedural question. I'll give you the procedural thing, if you want it. And I sort of went [sighs]. They were going to fight us on the floor on procedure, not on an ideological issue. That was a hell of a—I'll never forget that. To me, that was a hell of a mistake on their part. They had a chance, in my judgment, of busting that convention open with a good ideological thing. And I can't tell you what it is now, it's been so long, but there had to have been some issues out there. But they didn't test us.

And so we, you know, went through the process of a procedural question, but it didn't mean anything. So he gets the nomination, and Reagan's speech was a great speech, great for him and great for Ford.

But the process of picking Bob Dole is fascinating. It went on for—it seemed like weeks, but we started meeting in a hotel [inaudible] and I don't know, somebody's got the list. But you know, Bryce was there, Harlow [coughs]. Rocky was...Nelson was there. Cheney was there.

Mieczkowski: Nelson was on the list?

Spencer: He was...

Mieczkowski: Oh, was there present. I see.

Spencer: In the meeting. But the group Ford was talking to about who do I pick, it was probably twelve. I think Seidman was there, but I'm not sure. But names had come up and we'd go for it. It had already been decided that Reagan was no, he'd said no. But there's a whole other argument that goes on there. Reagan didn't want it, I'll guarantee you and Ford didn't want it, I'll guarantee you [laughs].

[tape switch]

Spencer: I knew them both, and they didn't want it.

Mieczkowski: Okay.



Spencer: I mean, these meetings, they'd go on for hours, and then we'd go back to bed and it's like two o'clock in the morning, and the phone would ring and he wants us to come back. And I remember walking down the hallway, because Bryce Harlow was in the room next to me, he came out of his door. And I said Bryce, what do you think the president's going to do? And Bryce said, I haven't got the slightest idea, you know, because Ford's really so noncommittal.

But names, all these names, kept coming up and we kept dragging on and dragging on. And the merits of people were discussed and the political aspects of picking this one or this one. It got so boring and laborious. I remember one night I said why don't we just throw Nelson back on the ticket? [laughs] And Nelson's sitting there and he's going no way, I've been through that, you know. And at one point I said...I mean, because we were really behind in the polls. I mean, we were really behind.

Mieczkowski: Yes, thirty-two points.

Spencer: Yes. I kept saying we've got to do something dramatic if we can figure it out. And I said well, let's talk about Annie Armstrong, a woman, you know? Well, [makes choking sound]. A lot of those guys were in the group. They're on...so, I knew [inaudible], but I wanted to put it out there. So we went back in. I've always felt that he kind of had Dole on the top of his list the whole time, but I can't prove that. But Dole gets a bad rap. Dole did what he was asked to do. At the point we came out of there, we were losing Iowa, Kansas. We were losing the farm belt. My position was if you pick Dole, Dole's job's going to bring the farm belt back. Bob brought the farm belt back. He delivered the farm belt for us. And my logic was he delivers that part, Mr. President, you've got to deliver the urban areas, Illinois, [inaudible]. And Bob delivered the farm belt. I mean, he—I don't know why he got so much criticism. He did what he was asked to do and did a good job of it. So I don't know what process Ford...because I never asked him, what process did you go through to come up with Bob Dole? I don't know.

Mieczkowski: I asked him once about it and he said that he really wanted to win the agricultural states.

Spencer: Okay. A good reason.

Mieczkowski: Yes. But...

Spencer: And the other thing is the one he picks, the person wants to feel comfortable with the person he picks. And I'm sure that Bob being a senator, he was comfortable with him.



Mieczkowski: Yes. I think also the Dole pick was meant to be a bridge to the Reagan forces, to the conservatives. I mean, at that point in history and at that point in Dole's career, he was a conservative senator. I mean, you know, the party moved to the right so much that he is sort of a moderate by the time he ran in '96.

Spencer: Sure.

Mieczkowski: But even the mid-70s he was a conservative.

Spencer: Yes, he was...he made that quite clear. There was a funny anecdote that the next day and the first day after the convention, I mean, it was the day after [coughs]. Politically, the first events you do out of a convention are very important.

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: Where you go, how you do it, how you prepare for it.

Mieczkowski: Russell, Kansas.

Spencer: Yes. Ford and Dole sat in there and they talked about a half an hour before Cheney and I came in. They said, we've decided we're going to Russell, Kansas. And Cheney and I looked at him and we go, "Bullshit!" And you know, the president said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Do you know, our advanced team, you know, all fifty of them, are so strung out from what they've had to do the last [inaudible], we can't get into Russell, Kansas and put a show on, you know. We can't—the first big event out of this convention has got to be big. We're not bitching about the place, we don't have the people to do the job and do it right, et cetera, et cetera." And Cheney and I are going at him, and poor Bob's sitting there. And we really got into an argument. Ford really got...he lost his temper. He gets up and walks out of the room. Cheney and I looked at each other. I got up. I walked out in the hallway. And something like, he said to me, he goes, "Doesn't Cheney understand that I'm the president?" [laughing] You know, some really [inaudible]. I said. "Oh, yes, Dick understands that totally. We're just trying to—" "Bullshit!" you know. We really both thought we were going to get canned. I mean, that's how bad it got [laughing]. But in the end, we said that we would do it, we said we'll be able to do it and it was tough. But I always thought about poor Dole. He's sitting there and he's probably saying, "What'd I get into? [laughing] What I'd get into here, you know?"

Mieczkowski: He's...



Spencer: Because this was very unique. We never had those kinds of discussions. This was the only really emotionally charged discussion Cheney and I—only two of them I can remember I've ever had with the president. So we went back out and got on the phone and boy, the bitching we heard from our advance crews and...we did...we gave it the best shot we could, but it was such a big event in Russell for Dole that it really helped him. I flew back to Washington and Cheney went with him. And flying in, they bank, and every road was clogged for a hundred miles and all the things and Ford gives Cheney this [gestures, as if looking out a plane window and pointing down at traffic on the ground, laughs]. "See, what'd I tell you?"

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: It was funny.

Mieczkowski: Stu, the way Ford described that in his memoir is that you and I guess he must have mentioned Cheney also, but I remember his mentioning you.

Spencer: Oh, there were four of us in the room. Cheney, me, Dole and him.

Mieczkowski: And you apparently said something like, "Well, if that's what you want, Mr. President." And the way he describes it is he grabbed you by the arm and said, "I know a thing or two about politics!"

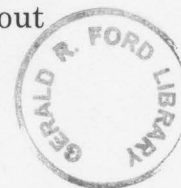
Spencer: [laughing] Yes.

Mieczkowski: Is that what...?

Spencer: Yes, that was accurate. I think that was out in the hallway. Because he was really pissed off at Cheney more than me at that point. Yes.

Mieczkowski: And then...

Spencer: It wasn't the politics as much as, you know, it's like having a hundred employees, and they spent two weeks working twenty hours a day to do something. They have a breaking point. We were just afraid that our troops, advance troops, were at their breaking point. He didn't know and realize how hard those people worked. He didn't know those guys go two, three nights without sleep, you know what I mean? You know, presidents just don't know that. So that's what we were fighting. We were afraid that's...when you get to that point, sometimes when you make your biggest mistakes. And that's what we thought might happen here, but it came out well.



Mieczkowski: So overall it did work, the Russell stop?

Spencer: It was fine, fine. It was a great stop for the first stop. Our press handled it well.

Mieczkowski: Yes. It was very emotional for Dole.

Spencer: Oh, very emotional for Dole.

Mieczkowski: He cried.

Spencer: Yes, yes. I mean, it probably helped in the farm states, being the first spot to go to.

Mieczkowski: So Stu, can I ask about Jimmy Carter now? What...you developed the, or somebody developed...it might have been Mike Duval or somebody developed the no-campaign campaign strategy, the Rose Garden strategy, when you were out in Vail [Colorado]. Was that you or Jim Baker or...?

Spencer: It wasn't Baker because he wasn't in Vail. He wasn't chairman yet. It was a—good campaigns have core groups that work well together and ideas are thrown out, exchanged, blah blah. And everything's kept internally. Mike's in that group. Duval has gone, you know.

Mieczkowski: Yes. Yes, I know. He had Lou Gehrig's disease.

Spencer: Tragic. Bright guy.

Mieczkowski: I interviewed him once, but it wasn't about the campaign. It was more about policy.

Spencer: Cheney, [David] Gergen too, sometimes, in and out. So it was always three or four or five people. And it didn't happen at Vail, that decision. The big decision in Vail was who's going to replace Roger? Roger had been canned. And, you know, we went through all these lists and Jimmy had been brought in by Roger and myself to take care of delegates. Otherwise, I'd run the campaigns and it got to the point that I couldn't take care of the delegates and run campaigns because half these delegates aren't committed. You've got to keep after them to stay committed. So I needed somebody, so Jimmy took on that job, handling all of the delegates up at the convention that we'd win. He did a great job, showed me a lot. Poised, ability to listen and ask the right questions and stuff. He had a presence, you know, senatorial-type presence, I thought.



So I kept saying I think Baker could do this job, and Cheney didn't argue with me. He kind of liked it. We went through this whole process, but Baker was very close to Rog, and Rog had been canned. So I called Baker and he said, I can't do that, Roger was my friend. I said, this isn't about Roger, this is about Ford. I mean, I love Roger, too. So he finally...I don't know what he did to the other side, you have to ask Jimmy. I don't think Baker or Roger's wife was very happy about it at all, but Baker agreed to be chairman. So that was a big decision that was made there. A little later [coughs], a couple weeks, we put Ford out on the road for five days. Our polling data were going like this [gestures downward]. Ford would go on the road, our polling data would go like this [gestures upward]. That's when we said, we've got to do something. That's when the Rose Garden thing--there was a consensus opinion that when he's being president, he goes like this [gestures upward], so let's be president. Stay here, make speeches, do edicts. Ford wanted to be out. He loved campaigning. He loved to be out there talking and convincing people like, you know, most. He liked to be congressional in his approach and so...

Mieczkowski: So he didn't like the Rose Garden strategy at first?

Spencer: No.

Mieczkowski: [chuckles]

Spencer: There's a quote from somebody's book. Dumont, Witclover, I don't know.

Mieczkowski: Jules Witcover. That book? *Marathon*?

Spencer: Maybe it's in *Marathon*. It's about the Ford campaign, isn't it?

Mieczkowski: Yes, yes.

Spencer: There's a quote in there where I'm sitting in the Oval Office with him and Cheney and we were discussing this. And I was tired and beat up, et cetera, and I said, "We're doing it because you're a lousy, fucking candidate."

Mieczkowski: [laughs]

Spencer: Which Ford and I had a relationship that was good. I mean, we...years later we [inaudible], and you know. So, the campaign's over and I'm reading that book one night and I saw this. I had a heart attack. There's only one guy that could leak that. That's Dick Cheney. He's the only other



guy in the room! And I call Cheney on the phone and I'm eating him up for it and a long pause and he says there was somebody else in the room. I say, you mean the president told them? He says, the president told them that. In other words, my quote came directly to them from the president. But doesn't that show you how secure an individual Gerald Ford was?

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: That told me a lot about the man, you know? Because it was true. And but that was sort of a conversation in the case. No, he didn't like the Rose Garden strategy and how we were reacting to it [laughs].

Mieczkowski: [chuckles]

Spencer: Oy. God, that was one of the dumb things I did. But that—it was the proper thing to help us, no doubt about it. Now, other candidates, like Reagan, for example, during the same period, it would have worked differently. Him going on the road would have helped him because of his ability to communicate and how he communicated, his presence, and all of the things that were his strength. So that was sort of the—yes, Mike was involved in that group, but the timing of it was Vail or just a little after Vail, after we realized that the polling data was giving us bad numbers when he was out campaigning versus being president.

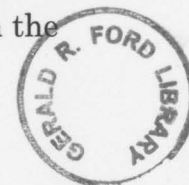
Mieczkowski: And what about Carter? I mean, what did you see as his weaknesses or ways to...?

Spencer: Well, [pause] I thought that his weaknesses might be he was so southern. Now, I think we miscalculated in some ways. I don't think we led a bad campaign, but I think we miscalculated in some senses. By this time, the South had become pretty Republican-oriented on federal elections.

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: And it was hard for us to envision the fact that Carter could carry the South, carry it all. [Inaudible] and then how was a southern guy going to do in the liberal, urban centers of the North? A southerner. All this mish-mash was hard for us to figure out. Well, they did go with the South. I mean, they went with, you know...boy, did they ever [inaudible] a mistake [laughs].

But he did fairly well, very close in those urban areas. But when you look at the post-election data in the urban areas, I think what hurt Ford was the pardon. It hurt him. It didn't hurt him in the South, but it hurt him. In the



key states, Illinois, you know, we felt we had the win of those big seven or eight, the ones that we wanted.

Mieczkowski: Ohio.

Spencer: Yes.

Mieczkowski: New York.

Spencer: Yes. The pardon was very telling with moderate Republicans. They were pissed off about it. I don't know. A lot of them stayed home. Not that they voted for Carter; they stayed home. We saw it happen repeatedly. We saw it in California. A 35 percent turnout in heavy Republican areas, stuff like that. And the post-election studies showed that basically seven percent of the Republicans in America couldn't forgive Ford for pardoning Dick Nixon. That's a big hunk of your base. I don't remember how many Democrats said that, maybe all of them. I don't know. But that hurt him in urban areas, so it was hard to have a strategy now that wasn't mish-mash. Now, pardoning him was the right thing to do.

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: Because if he hadn't pardoned him then, he'd have never got to where he was.

Mieczkowski: Exactly.

Spencer: You see what I mean?

Mieczkowski: That's what most people, I think, misjudge. They say that he lost the election because of the pardon. I don't think he would have won the nomination if he hadn't!

Spencer: You're right, in a way.

Mieczkowski: Because Nixon would have been on trial in '76. He would've been in the news every day.

Spencer: He'd have never had a press conference that question wouldn't be asked.

Mieczkowski: Right.



Spencer: And he couldn't have talked about business. He couldn't have been presidential!

Mieczkowski: Right.

Spencer: So he did the right thing. In the end, it hurt him, but he did the right thing. Now, if he hadn't done the right thing, he would've gotten wiped out, anyway. You know what I mean? So he did what he had to do and we couldn't turn it into something good.

Mieczkowski: Ford had such image problems, you know, the klutz image with Chevy Chase and everything else. Was there an image that you on the campaign staff tried to consciously craft for him or develop for him?

Spencer: No, not really. I mean, just little tidbits about the delivering of a speech, how to use humor, don't fall down the stairs. You know, like that. No, you have to...that's overrated because when a person gets to that stage in their career, they're pretty well-established in who they are.

It's just that, you know, probably the best athlete that's ever sat in that seat in the White House was Gerald Ford. Yet he bumped his head, he had bad knees so he fell down, injuries. And a guy like Chevy Chase, you know, they jumped on it and used it. And that left a big subliminal image out there, there's no doubt about it.

But, you know, you can't blame Chevy Chase. I mean, that's their job in our society, they use...this guy Jon Stewart now and, you know, comes up with some pretty funny stuff. But there's no doubt that there's some subliminal things left in people's minds about those people he's talking about. No, we had people...no, we never really worked with him on image. I mean, it was just content, speeches, humor. He had a great sense of humor.

And that's one other thing. He was better as a private pol than a public pol. I mean, he sat down with leaders of the world and congressional leaders and stuff. But one on one, he was very good.

Mieczkowski: I know, I know. I know that from being in a room with him.

Spencer: Yes.

Mieczkowski: Individually he was just magic.

Spencer: [coughs] Reagan could magnify himself to be bigger than the room. You know, externally. You know, being in the large crowds. He was very reserved, very quiet.

Mieczkowski: In private?



Spencer: In private, yes. Very, you know, just....

Mieczkowski: Boring, even?

Spencer: No, not boring because he had a great sense of humor. He was a great storyteller. A great, great storyteller. He always used stories to get out the answer to a question or something, you know. But [coughs] you were...an example when he first ran in '65 for governor. We took him out to a West [inaudible], a cocktail party fundraiser thing, a hundred people. [Inaudible] he'd go over to the corner, the people are over here. And I'd look around and I'd say hey, you've got to go over and shake hands and schmooze. Well, he was pretty reticent. I mean, he wanted all of them to come to him because he didn't know the political, you know. [Inaudible.] That wasn't Reagan's style at all. You kind of had to push him into the crowd. And Ford, man, he'd go right into the crowd.

Mieczkowski: Right.

Spencer: So it's different personalities.

Mieczkowski: Stu, I just had a few more questions for you. The debate preparations for Ford. Do you remember any of that in the White House Theater, turning that into a debate stage and television stage...

Spencer: Oh, yes.

Mieczkowski:...and practicing with Carter? Who stood in for Carter?

Spencer: God. God, I don't remember. [David] Stockman stood in in Reagan's, wasn't it? Stockman stood in.

Mieczkowski: Yes. Yes.

Spencer: So it wasn't Stockman. I think it was [inaudible]. Ask Cheney. He'll know.

Mieczkowski: Okay.

Spencer: I can't remember.

Mieczkowski: Do you remember anything? Does anything stand out in your mind about the debate preps?

Spencer: Oh, I remember when we were...I remember the preps, I remember the books and I remember the...I don't remember a lot.



Mieczkowski: What would you point to as the greatest factors in Ford's defeat? The pardon? I think the economy had much to do with it.

Spencer: I'd say it was two things, the pardon and the economy. That was it. I mean, throw those out, either one, he would've won by several thousands of votes. The rest of it was even. Carter campaigned, you know, in February of '75. Or was it '76? He got like 12 percent of the votes and he got that nomination. That primary campaign that Ham Jordan and those guys ran was a very good campaign. The Democratic primaries, they ran a great campaign [coughs]. And he was sort of a new face at the primary. The first time in, boy, in history, where that's important. People look for new faces and they've always seemed to like governors...

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: ...from the experience standpoint, more than senators, congresspeople. But I think, you know, you take away the pardon and the economy, and I don't think Carter would have beat him because he wasn't that sturdy a candidate. His southern sound was pretty foreign in the North and the West. And that's a factor not as prevalent today, I don't think, but it was then. So, but they ran a good campaign. They worked hard, kept their base, which I didn't think they could do, all the South

Mieczkowski: Ford expressed some bitterness and I think, not only in his memoir, but also in some of those interviews that were embargoed until his death, that Reagan didn't campaign enough for him, especially in Ohio. Do you think that was a factor? Or do you think that was true to begin with? I think there's some controversy about how much Reagan did or did not do.

Spencer: It's true. It's...the Reagan factor...the most important thing in the Reagan factor was the battle for the primary. The battle itself left scars for Ford. So if you take Reagan out of running in the primary and letting the sitting incumbent president, no matter how he got there, get the nomination and go on. There were some scars that were hurtful. The fact that Reagan didn't really campaign, I mean, I thought it was twelve appearances, if I remember right, at the negotiation.

Mieczkowski: Twelve?

Spencer: I think.

Mieczkowski: You negotiated that?

Spencer: Yes, we negotiated it.



Mieczkowski: At the convention?

Spencer: Yes.

Mieczkowski: Really?

Spencer: Cheney and Deaver negotiated. Reagan's position was he's going to go out and support the platform. He didn't say he was going to support the president, but he would support the platform. And he gave [inaudible] state and country and gave something like twelve appearances that he had.

Mieczkowski: It's not a lot, is it?

Spencer: No, he was—hey, Ford is legitimate in having him the concern that he didn't go balls-out. No, he didn't. I knew that was going to happen [laughs]. You know, neither one of them would admit that they didn't like each other, you know. And probably for good reasons. I mean there's people you don't like, and that I don't like, and they don't like me and, you know, because of situations that have happened, circumstances.

Mieczkowski: And chemistry.

Spencer: And chemistry.

Mieczkowski: Just physically.

Spencer: Yes. These guys were—they both wanted the same thing and only one of them could have it and that was the problem. So how hard Reagan campaigned, I don't think made a hell of a lot of difference. The fact that we had terrible primaries made a hell of a lot of difference. [chuckling] You see what I mean? From that standpoint. So, you know, that's why. We go to Detroit [Michigan] in 1980, and I flew back there with Reagan because I'd just—they had just asked me to come back on the campaign. And I'm in my room and I start hearing this "Ford for VP" stuff coming out, and I said this is absolutely ludicrous. I mean, neither one of the want it, I said to myself. I know these guys. Ford didn't want it, Reagan doesn't want it, so what are the games are they playing? Well, it was staff people playing games, you know.

Mieczkowski: But Reagan called it, apparently, a "dream ticket." Reagan seemed to want it.

Spencer: He didn't want it. Probably he put those words out. He was pushed by the Ford crowd. You know...



Mieczkowski: Some people in the Ford crowd?

Spencer: [Brent] Scowcroft and you know, those people.

Mieczkowski: Jack Marsh apparently.

Spencer: Yes, Marsh. And I knew all those guys, and I knew them well. I mean, to me, I envisioned it as a way to hang on to power. You know what I mean? Kissinger was always reluctant to give up power, you know. So I knew what's going to happen. I talked to Betty Ford. She said, "If he does it, I'll divorce him."

I had talked to Reagan on the way back. He had spent the first half hour we're on the plane, flying to Detroit, going to Detroit, dumping all over George [H. W.] Bush. He was pissed off at him.

Mieczkowski: Really?

Spencer: Voodoo economics, you know, the whole thing. I'm listening [to Reagan].

Mieczkowski: This was on the way back from Detroit?

Spencer: To Detroit.

Mieczkowski: Oh, I'm sorry. To Detroit.

Spencer: To the, and we're saying, which is normal in primary, post-primary periods [inaudible].

Mieczkowski: What kinds of things was he saying, Stu?

Spencer: Well, he didn't think much of him with his voodoo economics, I would say [inaudible]. Attacking anything that Bush had used on him in the campaign. So I listened to this whole thing. I didn't say a word. And then he changed the subject and said to me, "What do you think about a VP pick? What should I be doing?" And I said, "Well, I think you should pick George Bush." He said, "Haven't you been listening?" I said, "I've been listening to you." But I said, "You're going to a convention that they have written really a right wing platform, and you need someone perceived as moderate on that ticket with you. And he said, "Hmmm." He didn't make a comment. Then we went on to other subjects and we got back there and then this started. And I got a phone call in my room, and it's Reagan. He said, "You still feel the same way that you did on the plane?" I said, "I haven't seen a



thing happen here that changes my mind.” He said thank you and hung up. And that was...and I’m sure other people were talking to him about Bush, too, but he never took the Ford thing seriously. I knew him. He let them play out. And I know that Ford didn’t want it. [coughs] But, anyway.

Mieczkowski: Stu, can I ask one last question? Is there anything you would have done differently in ’76, looking back with the wisdom of hindsight, twenty-twenty hindsight?

Spencer: Yes. I wouldn’t have spend as much time and effort and money in Texas as I did in the primary.

Mieczkowski: Why? Because you knew you need to win it?

Spencer: Yes, now I know we wouldn’t have won. It was a waste of resources and I haven’t...those resources could have been put to some other state that we could have won.

Mieczkowski: Wow. What about the general election against Carter?

Spencer: I don’t know of anything we could have done, because what our problems were, we tried to attack in the best way that we could, you know. Any sitting president at the mercy of the economy, what can you do, you know? Other than, you know, and Ford did this, but boy, like Bush Sr. He had the same problem, but he never admitted we had a problem with the economy, remember?

Mieczkowski: Yes. Yes.

Spencer: All he had to do, to a degree, was say, hey, we’ve got a problem and we’re going to work our way out of it, and we’re going to do these things. Well, Ford kind of did that with his economic problems. Bush didn’t. I think it cost him the election, Bush. So you couldn’t do much there. What the heck could you do about the Nixon pardon?

Mieczkowski: Right.

Spencer: We couldn’t—we just didn’t say a damn word and that’s how we felt all we could say. We couldn’t revisit it and make excuses and say it’s the right thing, you know. Although when asked that question, he’d always think, refer to it as I did the best thing for the country at the time. And he was right.

But we had good troops out there, but you know, the Reagan primary cost us constituents. So we probably didn’t have the maximum troops out there we



could have had united because he had defeated [inaudible] Ronald Reagan in the primaries. And so [coughs] he had a lot of problems, and I think while really running a campaign to make him the president, the decision-maker, was about the only thing we could do. And I think we did a pretty good job of that.

Mieczkowski: You know, speaking about the economy, one argument that I make in my book is that Ford didn't advertise how well he had done in taming inflation. He brought it down. At the beginning of '76, it was running at 4.8 percent, an annual rate. And I didn't know this, but when I saw Jim Lynn, whom I got to know when I was writing the book, at Ford's funeral in January, Jim told me that he had proposed a slogan for a bumper sticker—"Inflation's at 4.8—whom do we appreciate?" And he said nobody every adopted it, but it would have been good to have some kind of a slogan to advertise how well Ford did in economic policy, especially against inflation.

Spencer: Well, I think the problem was prior to that, early '75, they came up with WIN [Whip Inflation Now].

Mieczkowski: Yes, in October '74.

Spencer: It bombed.

Mieczkowski: Yes.

Spencer: And I think everybody was just scared to death...

Mieczkowski: Right.

Spencer:...of anything coming up after that WIN thing because that was the joke of all time. All...[Johnny] Carson, all the shows were using the WIN thing as a ploy. So anything in the inflationary things, a slogan, a thematic or anything, I think probably scared people to death at that time.

Mieczkowski: I see.

Spencer: That'd be my guess. But the WIN thing bombed. They had pins.

Mieczkowski: Right. I remember. I have some WIN products.

Spencer: Exactly. So it might have been a great idea, but it didn't sell. Whip Inflation, what was it?

Mieczkowski: Whip Inflation Now. WIN. Yes.



Spencer: Yes.

Mieczkowski: Yes. And Ron Nessen once turned the button upside down to read "No Instant Miracles," you know, just so that people would have patience in the fight against inflation.

Spencer: I think [Robert] Hartmann had something to do with WIN.

Mieczkowski: Yes, Hartmann and Paul Theis. Yes, I've written...I have a whole chapter on WIN in that book.

Spencer: Do you? Okay.

Mieczkowski: I interviewed Russell Freeburg, who was the WIN director, and yes, I tell the whole story of WIN.

Spencer: Well, I hope I've helped you.

Mieczkowski: Oh, no. You've been great, Stu. Thanks a lot. I really appreciate all your recollections.

Spencer: Call me if you need anything else.

Mieczkowski: I will.

[end tape]

