

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
Rep. ROBERT GARCIA
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Interviewer
Morton Kondracke

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Morton Kondracke: This is a Kemp Oral History Project interview with former Congressman Robert Garcia. We're at the Venable law firm in Washington, D.C. It's July 8th, 2011, and I'm Morton Kondracke. Congressman, when you think about Jack Kemp what immediately comes to mind?

Robert Garcia: Full of energy. Just loaded with energy and a person who I gained a lot of respect for because of that kinetic energy he had. He was always going, always going. And I found him to be free of color. Just a guy free of color. Just no idea who you were, black, white, pink, or chartreuse. Just free of color. And I didn't feel that way about him at the beginning. All he ever talked about was what's his name, Laffer, Laffer, Laffer Curve this, and I considered him to be—you know, I came out of the South Bronx, sort of very liberal, shouting liberal, to say the least—and I see this guy from Buffalo, who I knew, because we were both from the same state, so I read a lot about him. But I always considered him, in my own sense, he turned out to be a very, very good friend. Even through the last of his days, I had a chance to chat with him because his wife, as you know, Joanne [Kemp] and I were on a board of the Christian Fellowship together and I served on that board for 15 years. And now I'm emeritus. But Jack was a guy who, I felt, would get things done. He felt very strongly about getting things done. Sometimes impatient in terms of, let's get on with it, let's get on with it. I think later on he turned out to be a fairly good listener. When I first met him he was just full of energy and as you have read in that *New York Times* piece you probably read once or twice. I met him when I offered a resolution on the floor of the House, through the former governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz Marín, who was sort of the first governor, the pioneer, the guy who

started to get all this—Puerto Rico listed jobs. One of the programs that he had really attracted me was jobs, a program that he called Operation Bootstrap. So when Kemp got up and I was eulogizing him on the floor by trying to get this resolution passed and Jack jumps up and starts to carry on. And my immediate reaction, Where is he coming from? But as he went on and on, he obviously knew a great deal, read a great deal about Muños Marín. So for me, I said, Wow. So after it was all over, either I walked over to him or he walked over to me. But I thanked him because I thought he was right on in terms of what he said about Muños Marín, and especially about the creation of jobs in Puerto Rico: the tax incentives that became available to bring manufacturers onto the island. So that was my first impression of him, and it was frankly a lasting impression.

Kondracke: So you talked first on the floor?

Garcia: First on the floor. The first time I ever talked to him was on the floor. I never talked to him in the New York State conference, and you know each state has their conference and they meet once a month. Never talked to him there, never talked to him any place, except that day on the floor when we passed this resolution.

Kondracke: Did he ever, when he was at the New York State conference, did he talk?

Garcia: You know, I don't remember him talking because I don't think he really went to many of those meetings—that's my own feeling. I used to go to all of them because I was new, I was brand-spanking new, I hadn't been in Congress two years, so I didn't miss anything

that involved the State of New York. But that's a good question. I don't know if I'd ever seen him there.

Kondracke: So, after your first meeting how did your relationship progress then?

Garcia: Oh, from that point on we just went full speed ahead. He talked to me about this English program, the Enterprise Zones, and I said to him let's talk about it. Of course I don't have to tell you folks that the district I represented was the poorest in the country. It probably still is. And our big issue is always housing, but particularly jobs. So anything that had to do with jobs I was really interested in. So, when he, we started to talk about that. We met with a fellow, whose name escapes me, from the Heritage Society. Believe me, that's the last place I'd want to find myself, but it really made sense.

Kondracke: Stuart [M.] Butler?

Garcia: That's the guy. Stuart Butler. So when I finally decide, and you're going to love this, my closest friend in Congress over the years has been and is [Charles B.] Charlie Rangel. It shows you how far Kemp was able to go. When I first got onto the bill it drew some mild publicity. You know, enterprise zones. But after it started to catch on I saw Rangel and he said to me, "You know, Bob, why are you sponsoring a bill with that guy? Vote for it if you like, but don't sponsor a bill with him." And as it turned out Charlie became the champion of the bill after both Jack and I left Congress. But he was able to do that.

Kondracke: But Charlie Rangel was not a cosponsor with you when you and Kemp...?

Garcia: No, no, no.

Kondracke: What was Charlie Rangel's attitude toward Kemp?

Garcia: Well, at first, he said what he said—what I just said to you. He probably doesn't even remember it, but I'm telling you because I remember it. As time went on, they became very good friends. He really reached out to the black community, in particular the members of the Black Congressional Caucus. And he didn't do it in any solicitous manner. He just, you know, let's talk, let's see what we can do. Always looking for the common ground.

Kondracke: So, enterprise zones was what he began talking to you about on the floor. Did he already have a bill?

Garcia: He didn't have the bill yet, but we talked about it. And we finally got a bill. This fellow Butler got a bill for us and we introduced it. And it was the Kemp-Garcia bill, and I said, "Never mind that, Jack. It's the Garcia-Kemp bill, and it ended up being the Kemp-Garcia bill. Then to draw publicity on it we went up to the South Bronx and pictures were taken for *Time*, *Newsweek*, *New York Times*, some other newspapers—tabloids of New York, and we started to generate publicity. But then I started to get hell from the AFL-CIO.

Kondracke: Why?

Garcia: Well, I have a 95 percent voting record as a labor person. They were adamantly opposed to enterprise zones. That's why it never went anywhere.

Kondracke: Why were they adamantly opposed?

Garcia: Because they said it would be nothing but transferring jobs from one part of the country to parts of the country where there's a high unemployment rate. So these manufacturers would take advantage of the tax breaks. That's why. I said, that's not going to happen. It can't happen. It won't be allowed. But they were adamantly opposed to it. That held us up. Let me say one thing to you. I thought about this. You know because you lived through the Reagan era so you know it. I think the enterprise zone bill that Jack and I put forth was very helpful to Reagan. It never went anywhere under his administration, but because he went to the South Bronx as a candidate, and had pictures taken because like Jimmy Carter and everybody else.

Kondracke: This was 1984?

Garcia: No, 1980.

Kondracke: 1980. Did Kemp get him to go?

Garcia: No, but Kemp tried to get me to go to be with him and I came close to going but decided I better not go.

Kondracke: So this is the 1980 presidential campaign and Kemp was Reagan's issues adviser. So did Kemp get Reagan to go to the South Bronx to campaign?

Garcia: Possibly.

Kondracke: Was Kemp there with him?

Garcia: I think so, but I really don't remember. I think that's somewhere in the archives. You should be able to find that out.

Kondracke: Who asked you to go?

Garcia: Maybe it was Kemp. Somebody asked me to go. I don't remember. I'd be telling you less than the truth if I told you. I'm just not sure.

[pause.]

Kondracke: So, what's the lead-up to the introduction of the legislation? Did you have lots of meetings with him, lunches?

Garcia: We had staff meetings, a lot of staff meetings. The staffers really took that over. His staff and my staff, and they really became very close. You would think they were one staff just working on the bill until we finally introduced it.

Kondracke: Do you remember who his key staffer was on that, or yours?

Garcia: No, but I can find that out for you. I'm still in contact with my key staffer.

Kondracke: Who was that?

Garcia: Paul Bartack. And he ended up working for Kemp when he was secretary of HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development].

Kondracke: So, the legislation basically would have given tax breaks, no capital gains tax, what was the essence of the bill?

Garcia: Essentially for me the key part was that in any district, if I remember correctly, that if a certain percentage of the people were below the poverty line, that people coming in would get certain tax breaks on every person that they hired coming from that community. In other words, if you came from New Jersey to get a job there, they'd probably end up getting an address in the district, but the fact is if they registered as from New Jersey that would not be part. So it was essentially giving them the tax breaks—the capital gains, but more important, the tax breaks on the people they employed. What the specifics were I don't know. I don't remember. That's easy enough to find the first bill. I could get that for you too. Let me see.

Kondracke: That's O.K. We'll get it. So, you introduced the bill and how many cosponsors did you have right away?

Garcia: At first we didn't do that well. But we ended up with close to 189 cosponsors if I remember correctly, which was a huge number of cosponsors. I mean, huge. And yet, we couldn't get the bill out.

Kondracke: What was the Democratic-Republican split on cosponsors?

Garcia: Pretty balanced. Interestingly enough, pretty balanced. But I spoke to [Robert J.] Dole in those days and he told me very frankly, "Bob, we'll get it out tomorrow. We have no problem with the bill." Now, I don't know if he was stroking me or what he was doing, but I thought he was telling me the truth. The problem was [Daniel D. "Dan"] Rostenkowski. He wouldn't move the bill. And he was a very powerful chairman of Ways and Means as you know. But he wouldn't move it and I guess it was because of the labor unions.

Kondracke: Did it go to hearings?

Garcia: We had several hearings, yes. I don't know where the minutes of that are but we had several hearings. I'm pretty sure we did.

Kondracke: How many congresses did you introduce it in?

Garcia: We started in 1980 and we kept introducing it. I started in the 95th Congress. The 96th wouldn't have been appropriate because that was '79 and '80. I would think it was the 96th, 97th, 98th, 99th and possibly the 100th Congress that bill was continually reintroduced.

Kondracke: And it never got to the floor?

Garcia: Never got to the floor.

Kondracke: Was there ever any discussion to try to push it through the Senate first in order to embarrass the House?

Garcia: No, not that I know of.

Kondracke: Was there a companion measure in the Senate?

Garcia: Yes, he was from Rhode Island. His son is now the governor.

Kondracke: John [L. H.] Chaffee?

Garcia: Yes, he was the Senate sponsor. And also a good fellow who really helped us a lot, but he was the mayor then. A guy by the name of [George V.] Voinovich, who is now the senator from Ohio. He was very helpful. He helped a lot in trying to get the people from Ohio to work with us. Most of the big city mayors—Cleveland, New York, Boston—all were with us.

Kondracke: So, it was basically the AFL-CIO that blocked it.

Garcia: Yes, for the most part. I mean, there may be other things that I don't know about. Because there are a lot of things that take place in this crazy city that you never know about. But my sense is the labor unions, yes. They gave me a hard time and I really gave them a hard time back because I was very clear to them, and I said to them, I had like 12-13 years in the state legislature. My voting record with labor was never less than 95, 96 percent. I said, you know, they knew

where I was coming from. I wanted to help the unions, but I wanted to help my district first. And I think Kemp had the same feeling about getting this thing started. If we get this thing started everybody will pick up on it. And, you know a lot of states passed the bill, an enterprise zone, long before we got the empowerment zones that Charlie Rangel finally passed. But a lot of states picked up on it. The states didn't have the same authority or taxing power and financial might to be able to make a big difference in the enterprise zones. A lot of people said enterprise zones were failing but the states didn't have the same power that we had to be able to generate the type of tax breaks that make it meaningful.

Kondracke: So, during all this time that you were working on enterprise zones, how often would you see Kemp?

Garcia: Oh, a lot, all the time. Even on things that had nothing to do with enterprise zones. I really got to like him a lot. We spent a lot of time together. I remember...

Kondracke: Did you have meals together, visit homes?

Garcia: No, we never visited homes. But I had met his wife. No, he never visited my home; I never visited his home, no.

Kondracke: What did you talk about when you met?

Garcia: Well, in general Enterprise Zones was always part of our conversation but things in general. You know, I'm a big sports nut, a big sports enthusiast, and he is a professional football player. We

talked a lot about sports. He told me that he was with the New York Giants, which I didn't realize. That same building where I had my congressional district office was formerly a hotel called the Concourse Plaza Hotel, on the corner of 163rd and Grand Concourse about a stone's throw, with a very good arm, of Yankee Stadium. And that was the hotel. And he stayed there when he was with the Giants and my office at that point was on the ground floor of that hotel, which is now a senior citizen home.

Kondracke: Did he ever visit the South Bronx—how many times did he visit the South Bronx?

Garcia: Well, I'd say, a good half a dozen times we went up to the South Bronx.

Kondracke: What would he do when he visited?

Garcia: He talked to the community, be with the community. Even after I was indicted and convicted he'd still go to the South Bronx.

Kondracke: Did you have the feeling that he was it as a prop or was he genuinely interested in what was going on there?

Garcia: I think Jack, you know, in politics we always do a little of this and a little of that, but I think for the most part to show a presence there, to show a presence. And also maybe to let them know that Republicans didn't bite; that Republicans were human beings.

Kondracke: Was he one of a kind among Republicans?

Garcia: Oh, yeah, I think so. I'd never met a guy like him before. Listen, I don't know where he and I were speaking—some place in Washington together. We had a least two dozen speaking engagements together. The vote was on. He had a Thunderbird—a light green Thunderbird. And I don't know where, some place in mid-town Washington. We had to get here for a vote, and I said, 'Jack, damn the votes. You're going to kill us.' I mean, wow.

Kondracke: Where were you going to and from?

Garcia: We were going to the Capitol.

Kondracke: From somewhere in downtown Washington?

Garcia: Yeah.

Kondracke: And, what happened?

Garcia: Well, he drove like a nut. He drove like a crazy man. We made the vote.

Kondracke: Tell me about the ride.

Garcia: Hairy. I was white-knuckled, and I'm fairly....

Kondracke: Speeding?

Garcia: Speeding.

Kondracke: And going through red lights?

Garcia: I have no idea. I have no idea, and if I did, I wouldn't tell you.

Kondracke: We've heard some driving stories about Jack Kemp.

Garcia: Oh, my goodness.

Kondracke: So, did you squeal up to the Capitol? And you could park in those days on the Capitol grounds, right?

Garcia: Yeah, you could park right in front.

Kondracke: So, squealing up and all that, top down?

Garcia: Not that dramatic. But we got there.

Kondracke: O.K. So, what other adventures did you have with Jack Kemp?

Garcia: Well, there was one time when we started to make some progress with some building of housing in the Bronx. My feeling was, whether you're black or Puerto Rican, whoever you are, once you own your home you become very conservative. Don't touch my home, it's mine, stay away. And people like that, they take good care of their respective areas. With him, I took him once on a visit to some new homes we built up there and I took him to, the New York Port

Authority built a big section to the South Bronx for manufacturing and we went up to look at it to see who was there, who took advantage of it. And then we went a couple of times to empty, vacant factories. These were all separate trips. On one trip we did five stops. They were separate trips. I would think he got a fairly good look at the South Bronx.

Kondracke: Did the idea of people owning their own homes originate with that kind of visit? Because he became a big advocate of selling public housing to the tenants.

Garcia: Yeah, I remember that. No, not when I was in Congress. I think maybe when he took over at HUD and became the secretary he came up with some of those thoughts. But that's not what.... He went up to see what these factories were doing and what Port Authority was doing, and then we head back onto the shuttle to and come back to Washington.

Kondracke: So, what was he like to work with?

Garcia: Well, you know my sense of Jack was that he was right a lot of the time so I really couldn't fight with him too often. There were some issues that he may not have had enough knowledge about and I would help him. I think that by bringing me into this enterprise zone legislation that he realized that there were things that he just doesn't know. He comes out of Southern California. Maybe in Buffalo, and Buffalo is a pretty rough city in terms of economic despair, but I lived it, was born and raised there and lived there all my life so I knew it well, and so I think he used me a lot for that. Then he would also

query me, "Hey, can we get this guy on a bill; can we get this guy on a bill?" And I would get other members, especially black members. And at first I didn't want to go on.

Kondracke: Because?

Garcia: Well, because there the AFL-CIO and all that stuff, but I'd like to think, and I'm not saying this in any sense bragging, by my being on a bill I think it helped a lot because I really wasn't the wise guy. People knew me for who I was. I was chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus when all this was going on, as well, so, even though the Caucus was only five or six members in those days as compared to 29-30 we have today.

Kondracke: Did Kemp ever address the Hispanic Caucus?

Garcia: I don't think so.

Kondracke: Did he reach out to your fellow Hispanic Caucus members?

Garcia: He reached out to everybody. But we didn't have that many. And the ones we had, [Eligio] Kika de la Garza [II], Henry B. [González], [Edward R.] Ed Roybal, they were much more conservative than I was. They came from the Southwest and I came from the urban center. I had a hard time with them sometimes. Just different backgrounds. It wasn't that I was Puerto Rican or that they were Mexicans, it was just we had different lifestyles—different styles. Ed Roybal was the better one but he was still...they plod along and I

was just like Kemp in that sense with the Caucus. Let's get going, let's do, do, do. I had a lot of energy, as did Jack.

Kondracke: I've seen you quoted as saying that he had a short attention span. Tell me about that.

Garcia: I told him, and he said, "Get out of here." [David S.] Dave Broder, when he [Kemp] was nominated, when he got the VP nomination, came to see me. And he says, "Well, tell me about your relationship to Jack, Jack Kemp." And I went on pretty much saying I enjoyed working with him and genuine in the sense of trying to help minorities and if he got elected he'd be a good vice president. I think he would be very helpful. I really, really thought if he got to be vice president he'd be dynamite, no question about it. But I said, "I have to tell you, every time I go into a meeting with him I say, 'Jack, how much time do I have? A minute? Two minutes? Five minutes? [unclear] I know what I have to do.'" And he looked at me and said, "Bang, get out of here." And I told that to Dave Broder and he said, "Oh, my God. Oh, my God." And Dave Broder printed it!

Kondracke: So when you had a meeting with him did he do most of the talking?

Garcia: Most of the talking. One of those articles you sent me, I have to tell you, [John V.] Vin Weber is absolutely correct. You know, I endorsed [Hubert H.] Humphrey in '68, when all the crazy liberals in New York were going with [Eugene J.] McCarthy, and I got to know him well. And you talk about a guy that talked a lot, and just kept

going and going and going. You know, when I read the article I had forgotten it. But Vin Weber had [unclear], it's pretty accurate.

Kondracke: That Jack Kemp and Hubert Humphrey had a lot in common.

Garcia: Oh, yeah. I mean, you put Hubert Humphrey to speak and he'd go on for a half hour for something that could be said in two minutes. And the same thing with Jack—on and on and on.

Kondracke: Did you ever talk about your basic philosophical differences, political differences?

Garcia: Yes, I guess we did. I don't remember it, but he knew where I was coming from. I think he welcomed the difference. I don't think there was any way that he—I think he enjoyed the fact that I was who I was and that we were working on this together.

Kondracke: He never tried to convert you?

Garcia: One thing few people know is that when I ran for Congress, because I was such a—I'd never worked with the regular Democratic organization. They wouldn't give me the nomination. So when I was elected to Congress I was elected as a Republican. I had the Republican line and the liberal party line. My opponent had the Democratic line and the conservative party line and I thought it would be very close. But we won pretty well. We got 60-70 percent of the vote. One other thing I should say is that I was the minority leader or

the deputy but I ran the floor of the House and the Senate from '75, when I was elected, to '78.

Kondracke: This is the state Senate.

Garcia: State Senate, yes. And I worked very closely with the Republicans. And I also want you to know that I really felt very strongly about Nelson Rockefeller. I really liked him. I thought he was a special human being. And I worked closely with him. I was really sad when he passed away. He was the only politician I ever met who, when you proved him wrong, he would publicly say he was wrong. So sure of himself, so comfortable with himself. So working with Republicans was nothing new to me because I constantly bartered back and forth sitting in a minority leader's chair seeing if we can cancel debate on some. I learned a lot then. So coming to meet and working with Jack was not a big deal in terms of working with Republicans. Same with Frank [R.] Wolf, who's my congressman now, when he was on my committee.

Kondracke: How effective would you say Kemp was as a legislator or somebody getting some stuff done in Congress?

Garcia: Well, because he was who he is and in the Democratic Party you have people similar to Jack, people get nervous within the same party. You know this business as well as anybody, I guess, but as soon as you start to straddle your wings and start to move out, there are lots of people within your own party who give you a hard time. And I think that Jack may have been friends with a lot of these people but I think some of them probably didn't like him because of his

aggressiveness. He didn't follow the lead. He didn't go along with the party. I always felt, myself, maybe that's why I felt so close to him because I concerned myself more with the issues in those days with the Hispanic community than I did with the Democratic Party. The party was okay to get elected, but that wasn't enough. And I'm sure that Jack felt the same way, not with Hispanics, but in his own thinking.

Kondracke: Was he able to get Republican cosponsors on enterprise zones?

Garcia: A lot. I've got to pull that bill up for you.

Kondracke: Leadership? Did he get Republican leadership?

Garcia: I think he did, he probably did. I mean, we had 189, a lot of cosponsors. This was not in the first year, in the 95th. It was probably in the 96th, 97th when everyone started to realize, hey, what's going on, what's happening, what's going on? But I've got to get the highest number.

Kondracke: Did you ever get an enterprise zone in the South Bronx?

Garcia: Yes, we did. We have one now except the South Bronx portion is an Empowerment Zone.

Kondracke: A Clinton zone.

Garcia: Yes. It was coupled with Harlem, and Charlie was the congressman. So he wasn't about to give out too much. The only reason why the Bronx got a small piece of it was because a couple of people fought for it and my name kept coming up, and Charlie and I get along. But the Yankee Stadium portion along the river there, I don't know if you're familiar with it, that piece became the Empowerment Zone. So the Yankee Stadium was included in the Empowerment Zone and [George M.] Steinbrenner needed an Empowerment Zone like we need a hole in the head. So I don't really know what tax benefits they've gotten out of that. With the tax lawyers they have they probably got something out of it.

Kondracke: So did Empowerment Zones do any good for the people of the South Bronx?

Garcia: Yes, it did some good. It did a lot for Harlem. Charlie worked that like a maestro. Harlem really came out so well with that. You should really get to talk to Charlie about this if you can, about the Empowerment Zones as they were in Harlem, what happened to the Empowerment Zones. Because they did a lot and they got a lot of money—a heck of a lot more than the South Bronx ever got or saw.

Kondracke: In general, there were a lot of Empowerment Zones or Enterprise Zones around the country and states adopted them. What's the bottom line judgment on whether it was a good idea or not?

Garcia: I would think that it probably runs about 50-50. Some people probably think that it didn't go, didn't work as well as they'd hoped it to. But I'm sure there are some places. Like everything in

Washington there's an Enterprise Zone association, some lobbying firm for Enterprise Zones that if you look it up in the lobbyists book you'll probably see it somewhere. Maybe you should talk to the director. I don't know. I don't where it is today. What they want to do in Puerto Rico, to give you an example, is make the entire island an Enterprise Zone. Because we lost the tax benefits, the pharmaceutical tax benefits, about three or four years ago, and Puerto Rico is really hurting.

Kondracke: What other stuff did you work with Kemp on?

Garcia: Not very much. I can't think of much else that we worked on together. Honestly, I can't answer that because I don't know.

Kondracke: You were the chairman of the subcommittee that worked on holidays and memorials and stuff like that, so you were the sponsor of the [Martin Luther] King [Jr.] holiday, right?

Garcia: I was.

Kondracke: O.K. Where was Jack on the King holiday?

Garcia: Ah, good point. On the first bill, when I was chairing the committee, I think he voted against it. And we had Coretta Scott King and everybody sitting in the gallery watching. We lost by about four or five votes on the unanimous consent calendar.

Kondracke: Was this after you were friends with Kemp?

Garcia: Yes.

Kondracke: What did you say to him?

Garcia: You know what, I don't remember what I said to him, except that I probably voiced some disappointment. If I didn't say it to him I probably thought it. I guess the best example I can give you of that is on the second time it went around and the Democrats ran a very—we had no lobbying, no whipping operation at all. We just went to the floor. I was a kid legislatively. I didn't know. And I wanted to get this thing through so badly because I had a black constituency as well as a Hispanic constituency and I really thought it would be nice if I was able to get it. Because I held all the hearings, at least three or four hearings, when I had everybody come it, Coretta, I had all the stars come in. All the famous black entertainers to come in to testify. We got it to the floor. On the second time around, and I don't really know how to say this but I'll say it, I'm pretty sure that they were a little disappointed that I didn't get it through. And then they figured that maybe they'd get somebody black to do it. So they got this Katie [B.] Hall from Indiana, who was the second on the, became the chairman of the committee. I gave up the committee chair so that she could become chair. And I think that when you look at the pictures I guess it's appropriate, you know, King, somebody who's black, is the lead sponsor, even though John Conyer [Jr.] should have been the lead sponsor. He was, because he introduced the first bill, the second bill, the third bill, but nobody liked John Conyer. They wouldn't give him the time of day. But when I became chairman I let him stay as the first name on the committee, even though I should have been first.

Kondracke: What committee is that a subcommittee of?

Garcia: Interesting. It was Post Office and Civil Service and it was Census and Population. Great committee. Insignificant little committee. And let me tell you about it. It has nothing to do with this but let me tell you anyway. Every member of the House who wanted to pass a resolution had to go through that committee. So they would all come to me. So we did set up where you had to have at least 218 cosponsors on a bill to get it through. And so everybody in the House was indebted to me. I was passing those things three and four a week. The donkeys in Tennessee, the opera house in some place in Mississippi. So it all came through me, and I had the authority to hold hearings on anything I wanted to based on census. And I did. Housing census, transportation census, anything I wanted. But it was interesting that I was able to do so much with that little committee and I enjoyed it so much. But now it's with Government Ops.

Kondracke: Did Kemp come around on King?

Garcia: He did, and very well, like a champion. He really took it over. He really took it over. And if I was smart I should have started with him. But there were some Republicans who were really opposed to it—not to the holiday. They wanted to make it on a Sunday. We didn't want it on a Sunday because in those days the National Football League, their Super Bowl really ran—they have the 16 weeks; they only had 12 weeks in those days and the Super Bowl was right smack square in the middle of January as opposed to now it's in February I guess. I'm not sure when it is.

Kondracke: Did you ever go to a Super Bowl with Kemp?

Garcia: No, I never went to one Super Bowl in my life. Never had an interest. And I like the sport, but just too much running around. I'd rather watch it on TV and get the replays. I still do it to this day.

Kondracke: So what did Kemp do about the King holiday later?

Garcia: Oh, I think he got together with [Richard A.] Dick Gephardt and I think Dick was the one whipping the Dems, and Kemp, I think, was in charge of whipping the Republicans. They got a substantial vote on that. And if you look at the bill, the signing bill, when Reagan actually signed it—we took Reagan, dragged him kicking and hollering to sign that bill but he signed it. You see, I'm standing next to Kemp, and [Edward M.] Teddy Kennedy was there. It was a good array and I still have the picture somewhere. When Reagan signed.

Kondracke: So Kemp became the leading Republican champion.

Garcia: I think he did, yes. No question about it. But you know Kemp learned something too. Let me say this to you. I think Kemp, I said this to him a couple of times. 'You know, I know why you're so friendly to the blacks. Because they protected, excuse the expression, but they protected your fanny. They were out there protecting you while you were running around. So, obviously, here's a guy who bathed with them. When you're on a team everybody's equal. The good thing about sports is if you stink you're out whether you're white or black. In the private sector you can be good but if you're a certain color you're still out. But not in sports. And so Jack said, "Sure they

protected me.” I was always comfortable talking to him about race. Always comfortable. Even later on when I’d meet him at the prison fellowship dinners we had and he would always come up on Thursday nights before the board meetings and spend time with them. I met him a couple of times. I was trying to find some clients, asking him if he could give me a hand making a call or two for me. Because even though I was exonerated, people still think you’re indicted. They have no idea, because the story came out on page 37, when you’re finally exonerated and everything is thrown out. But that’s life.

Kondracke: Was he supportive around your troubles with Wedtech [Corporation]?

Garcia: Not only that. When I was incarcerated, in prison, I’d get mail from Jack—different pieces of mail every now and then—keeping me posted on what’s happening in Washington. And I had members of Congress visiting me in jail.

Kondracke: Did he visit you?

Garcia: No. He never did. [James M.] Jim Inhofe, for example, you know, Jim is a very good-sort of a guy.

Kondracke: Jim Inhofe?

Garcia: Inhofe.

Kondracke: Really?

Garcia: Yes. The week they kicked me out. It was hard, kicking me out, they were treating me when I first got there [unclear] He was coming down to visit Eglin Air Force Base. Jack Kemp and Charlie Rangel and Jack [B.] Brooks and all these people, and the prison didn't like that at all. They hated that—that these congressmen were staying in touch with me. But Jack Kemp would always send me—he was at HUD at the time now and he would always send me material from HUD and legislation and stuff like that. Yes, I always remember that. Because most people just say "I'll see you later." But Jack never did that with me. He just remained my friend.

Kondracke: When the Wedtech trouble started, you were still in Congress before you resigned, so was Jack supportive? Did he talk to you about it?

Garcia: Oh, yeah, he talked to me. I talked to Jack. I used to tell him, 'We're going to be all right, Jack. Don't worry.' And you know, the one thing you have to realize is that, as it said somewhere in an ad, you know, I converted. I gave my heart to the Lord when this happened. I always knew Jesus Christ was my savior. My dad was a minister, Pentecostal, Holy Rollers, you can't get any more, dancing the spirit up and down. This is the way I grew up. So Jesus Christ was never a stranger to me. What happened was, when this happened I just realized I had the foundation and I better get with the program.

Kondracke: You had a re-conversion experience?

Garcia: Yes, I think that's fair to say.

Kondracke: What stage? When you were in prison, or before you were in prison?

Garcia: Oh, no. Long before. You know there are things about these things and I think it's fair to say that you get a sense something's happening. And I got the sense something is happening. And I realized, I said, "If something is happening, I'm not going to be fortified. I'm not going to be able to handle it." I wouldn't have been able to handle it. I don't know what I would have done. But I wouldn't have been able to handle it.

Kondracke: This is the ordeal of scandal, trials and all that?

Garcia: Listen, I left the Senate, no, they didn't eulogize me, they said, "The conscience of the Senate—my state Senate—is leaving." That's the way I was thought of. So then to find myself here with this stage of the first page of the *Daily News*, lead stories on every network, really hard. Really, really hard. But, as Frank Wolf says to me, "You know, Bob, you're always smiling." I said, 'Yeah, I'll be all right.' But Jack was always there, always supportive. But Jack left, I think Jack left Congress . . .

Kondracke: To run for president in '88.

Garcia: . . . in '88, yes. So, when I got into the schmear there at the end, he was gone, because my trial didn't start until '89. Even though the investigation went on from '87—all of '87, all of '88, and I was tried at the tail end of '89. So it was three years before I went to trial.

And he was always there, sympathetic, I never had a problem feeling I couldn't call Jack.

Kondracke: Did you?

Garcia: Yes, I think I did.

Kondracke: During those trials?

Garcia: Yes, I think I did, and not only that. I had his private number. I didn't call him when he was at HUD. But you know, a lot of people came up to me in '88, talking to me about him, but they figured I had it made now, because everybody associated me with Kemp, even though he was a Republican. And when he took over at HUD, people who were in the Democratic administration, who had jobs or wanted jobs, better said, they all called me. "Hey, can you call Jack?" You know, the usual stuff. That's the way it is in here.

Kondracke: So, did you make any calls?

Garcia: Yeah, I tried once or twice for a couple of guys. A guy by the name of...who became the head of a small business in Puerto Rico; a couple of people from Puerto Rico wanted help.

Kondracke: How did Bartack get the job?

Garcia: He didn't do it through me. But he worked, he was the contact between Kemp's office and my office throughout the entire procedure of Enterprise Zones. It didn't do him any harm.

Kondracke: So he got hired at HUD on his own.

Garcia: I would think so. I don't remember placing a call for him, that's for sure.

Kondracke: How did you get involved with the Prison Fellowship and with Joanne Kemp then?

Garcia: I got involved with Prison Fellowship. Let me go back. I've always been interested in prisons. Don't ask me why. When I was a state senator I was the ranking member on the Prisons Committee and so I would visit prisons all over the state of New York. I got to know them quite well, got to know the people well, interview inmates all the time. Picked inmates at random to talk to, not selected by the administration. So I got very familiar with prisons. There was a prison in New York called Attica. A good number of hostages were taken. I was called by the governor's office if I would go. And they sent a special plane for me. A fellow by the name of Herman Badillo, who was a former congressman; John [R.] Dunn, who was a former congressman and then worked for the administration at Justice, he took over Civil Rights. John Dunn. He was white, also a state senator with me. And one or two others and we flew up to Attica. I lived in Attica for those three days during that period of time. We had to view the bodies. So then what happened was they formed a commission on Attica after that. And as I told you, I come out of a—my sister, my father—very involved with a group called the Assemblies of God in Springfield, Missouri, in the Ozarks. And I noticed that all the chaplains that they had in these prisons all had these many letters

after their name. They all had to be, well many of these people out of communities. And what we had were churches with pastors who didn't have all those letters after their name but I felt . . .

Kondracke: You mean degrees?

Garcia: Degrees, right. But they were good pastors and they ran good churches. So I worked very closely with the Assemblies of God just to finally start getting chaplains into these prisons. And we did, we got quite a few. So the question of prisons and the question of the relationship with the Lord was not something, even before I got to Congress I was working on that. And so what happened was then we had the other prison at Long Island City. I went with Shirley [A. St. H.], Chisholm and with [Louis] Farrakhan, which was most interesting, and you'd see the inmates black with the hoods, looked like right out of the Middle East as we know them today. They'd just talk, just talk and talk and talk. There's always time to die. You just have to talk. And we were able to, Farrakhan was smooth as silk. We got the hostages released. When we got into Prison Fellowship, and [Charles W.] Chuck Colson, when he was indicted and convicted, there were people who said to me, they said use strong language. They'd say, "Look at that S.O.B. He gave his heart to Jesus. Yeah, big shot now, right?" Well, I want you to know something. I was one who said I knew that could be true, that's true. I have seen junkies, stoned junkies, used drugs for 20 consecutive years, 20 consecutive years, gave their heart to the Lord, and never went into withdrawal. I've seen it; I've witnessed it; I've worked with these people. So Chuck was no.... I told this to Chuck, you know? And all these high-faluting priests and other people I used to know who'd say, "No." I always

knew that . . . And Chuck turned out to be probably a living Jeremiah. Just a wonderful human being. So that's how I got involved. But I was involved long before with prisons and with church, long before I got involved in any of that. Just so you know.

Kondracke: So . . .

Garcia: I got involved because, when I got out, and I was living in New York City, and we had no home. We lost everything. We lost our home here, we lost our home, we had a place Upstate New York. We lost that, that my wife had gotten. We lost that. We lost our apartment in the South Bronx, right square in the South Bronx but it was a beautiful apartment, we lost that. We lost everything. We didn't have any money. But Jane's mom had a place just north of West Palm Beach. Her husband was a retired Texaco executive and so we went to live with her. Took all we had, stored it and went to live with her.

Kondracke: So that's when you joined the Fellowship when you got out of prison?

Garcia: Well, I had to come to New York because I had to try and make a living. I was still commuting. I had to make a living. I had no money except the \$700-800 pension I was getting from the state of New York. I wasn't old enough for Social Security. I didn't have health insurance. I had nothing. Just zip. So, what happened was, I would then start working with Prison Fellowship, going into the New York City prisons—the Bronx, the Detention Center, the Queens Detention Center, in Manhattan. We'd go in on weekends—Friday

nights and Saturday mornings. I did this for months. And then I became the head of the New York City Prison Fellowship group. And then they asked me if I would go on the board. They had no Hispanics. You know, in many instances, even with the Salvation Army, I'm on that board. I'd like to think it's because of my relationship with Jesus Christ but they have no Hispanics. Lots of blacks, but just no Hispanics, you know? So I was more than willing to join Prison Fellowship when they asked me. So I did, and JoAnn and I got back in touch, and we became good friends.

[interruption]

Kondracke: How long were you on the board with Joanne?

Garcia: Fifteen years. I'm emeritus now, not on the board anymore. And I don't think she is either. But Chuck Colson.... [coughing] You know, I was hospitalized, you know, I have emphysema. You probably gathered, the way I breathe. And I was hospitalized for it. Really something. I think it holds. A little bit here, a little bit there. My mother-in-law used to say, "Patch patch here, patch patch there." Then she would sum it up by saying, "It's not for sissies. Being a senior citizen is not for sissies." You asked me a question, I'm sorry.

Kondracke: Through Joanne Kemp did you reconnect with Jack?

Garcia: I knew of him, and I knew he had a place over here with former secretary of education.

Kondracke: [William J.] Bill Bennett?

Garcia: Bill Bennett. And I went to visit him there a couple of times. America something or other.

Kondracke: Empower America.

Garcia: Something like that, yes. Jack was always out of his way. If he saw me someplace in a crowd, he always introduced me. For what it's worth. In the business of recognition it's nice.

Kondracke: Did you ever talk to Jack about religion?

Garcia: I don't think so. I don't think I had to. I think Chuck Colson. You know, when they had the luncheon for him after he died, here at the Woodward, what hotel is that? any rate, I'll think of it in just a second . . . after the luncheon they asked if anybody wanted to say something about Jack. So about 150 people went in. [Daniel R.] Dan Coats was there. He was not a senator; he was a lobbyist. And he spoke, and a few others spoke, and I spoke, and I said, (and I have to eulogize another friend tomorrow whom I loved very much and I have to prepare for that), I said, "For the short time that we're all granted life, our time is so short, so little. But during that short time that I had and the short time that Jack had, there was a part that we interceded, we got to know each other, meet each other." And I said, "What a nice gift that was." And I meant that, because Jack gave me a sense that, he made me in the eyes of a lot of people a celebrity somewhat because of our association. That is, they didn't think less of me; they thought more of me because I was associated with him. And then I saw him at the end. He was always there. In Prison Fellowship we meet Thursday afternoon and Friday. Thursday night we have a

dinner with all the members of the board and spouses, whoever wants to come. And Jack would always come. That always gave me a chance to catch up with him. Joanne I saw all the time. And then I called Jack, I didn't realize how bad he was, and I called him at home. He never called me back but I left a message. But I think at that particular point he was really pretty far gone.

Kondracke: So you don't know a lot about his own personal faith?

Garcia: No, I don't really, but I do know that he spent a lot of time with Chuck Colson, and anybody who spends time with Chuck Colson, you know, he loved Chuck. And they spent time talking. Dan Coats is another one who spent time talking with him about his relationship with the Lord. Dan is an interesting guy. I like Dan Coats a lot. I don't want to get into that since you're talking about Jack, but I'll say it anyway since it's all part and parcel of this.... Dan Coats was a congressman from Fort Wayne, Indiana before he took Quayle's place, and predominantly white, upper-income district that he had. And he used to have the kids come in once a year in this Close-up Program. But he'd always have me come in to talk to them about the South Bronx, which I thought on his part was really something. Because these kids sitting around the table at night are not talking about the South Bronx. That's the last thing on their mind. You give them a different perspective about what life is all about. I know that Dan Coats went to talk to him not too long before he died, and they had a chance to spend time together. And I know that anyone who's close to...and I even called Chuck Colson when I was under fire as a congressman, and he came and visited with me when I was a

congressman going through my trials and tribulations. So I was very appreciative of that.

Kondracke: You said that you thought that Jack would have made a good vice president. Do you think he would have made a good president?

Garcia: You know, the thing about presidents, whether you like it or not. You've seen enough of them. You become one whether you want to or not. You have to. No way are you going to dodge all those advisors and all public opinion. And I think that Jack would have been a great president, great president, if he was elected, because we knew where his heart was. And for him, you know, I'm glad that Barrack Obama was elected, but I'm not pleased with him in terms with his relationship with the communities. Jack would have been terrific. Jack would have been welcomed all over the place. I had no doubt about that. And you know what? He would have slowed down whether he wanted to or not. He wouldn't have had a choice.

Kondracke: Was he impulsive?

Garcia: Yes, no question he's impulsive. Boom! Impulsive!

Kondracke: But you think he would have slowed down.

Garcia: Oh, no question. You have to. You have to.

Kondracke: Why do you think he didn't get elected in '88? I mean nominated?

Garcia: Nominated?

Kondracke: Nominated. He was obviously a successful congressman but was just a congressman. And then he ran for president and he went bust. Why?

Garcia: Well, I think again, there are a lot of Republicans who didn't like him, they couldn't control him, there was no way they could be sure how he was going to respond to them. I think that's why he didn't get it.

Kondracke: Two other things. You said that he didn't participate very much in New York.

Garcia: That's really not fair. You know, I shouldn't say that. That's really not a fair statement but I don't remember. You're asking me if I remember and I don't remember.

Kondracke: Do you know how he got along with [Mario M.] Cuomo and [Alfonse M.] D'Amato and [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan and the others?

Garcia: He got along very well with them, I'm sure. I'm sure he got along well with D'Amato and Cuomo and all these people. Positive.

Kondracke: Okay. So how do you think Jack Kemp should be remembered in history?

Garcia: As a man who tried to bring people together. As a man who tried to bring people together. He wasn't afraid of diversity. He was not afraid of it. He welcomed it. And I think that if he was a Democrat, he probably would have been elected.

Kondracke: Did he have any particular weaknesses that you know of?

Garcia: Yeah, and I think that as I say, impulsive, you know. Shooting from the hip sometimes. But as I say, all that's curable. That's all curable. And I think, as he progressed on and on and on, listen, I heard stories that as he's sitting in the president's Cabinet Room and he's fidgeting and everybody's, you know.... Jack, we wouldn't be talking about him if that wasn't the case. I mean, that's the man, that's the who he is, as we say in the Bronx. "That's the man, that's the man." He would have been a good president.

Kondracke: Congressman, thank you very much for spending time with us.

Garcia: O.K. I hope it was helpful.