

JACK KEMP
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SYMPOSIUM

Jack Kemp, the Bills and Buffalo

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PANEL 3
CONGRESSMAN KEMP, POLITICS
AND THE BUFFALO OFFICE

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KONDRACKE: I'm Morton Kondracke, and this is the concluding panel of the Jack Kemp Oral History Program at Ralph Wilson Stadium, the home of the Buffalo Bills, co-sponsored by the Jack Kemp Foundation. This panel consists of four former members of Congress who knew and worked with Jack Kemp, and a reporter who covered them all. I'll have you introduce yourselves, please, starting with Jack Quinn.

QUINN: Thank you, Mort. My name is Jack Quinn, served in U.S. Congress from 1992 to 2004, after a short stint in Washington, D.C. with some public relations business, returned back here to Buffalo in western New York, and currently the President of Erie Community College for the last three years, a 20,000-student college here in the city of Buffalo, the suburbs of Orchard Park and Williamsville.

KONDRACKE: Bob McCarthy.

McCARTHY: Thanks, Mort. I'm Bob McCarthy. I'm a political reporter for the *Buffalo News* and have been since 1992, which was a little bit after Jack Kemp's time here in Buffalo, but Jack Kemp never really left Buffalo, as far as I was concerned. He was around here a lot and always a major figure for us to be covering, and certainly I was part of the team that covered him in that very important San Diego convention of 1996. So there's a lot of great memories that I have of Jack Kemp, along with everybody else in Buffalo, I might add.

KONDRACKE: Tom.

REYNOLDS: Tom Reynolds. I served in Congress from 1999 to 2009. I'm now a senior policy advisor for Nixon Peabody [LLP], both in

Buffalo and Washington, and I came up through the ranks of government while Jack Kemp was in Congress, from the town, the county, to state government before succeeding him in Congress and Bill Paxon.

KONDRACKE: Bill.

PAXON: Mort, thank you. My name is Bill Paxon. I looked back, preparing for this, and thinking what a great opportunity in life, what great honor. I was in high school the first year that Jack ran for Congress. I worked on his first campaign. I was there the day his headquarters burned in Williamsville, and then eighteen years later, had the chance to succeed him after he left the Congress, didn't run for reelection in 1988.

I served then for ten years in the House of Representatives, and it was then and I'm sure Tom and others who served in that seat would agree, it's still Jack Kemp's seat. I today work at a Washington law firm Aiken Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld.

KONDRACKE: John.

LAFALCE: I'm John LaFalce. I first ran for public office for the New York State Senate in 1970, and my district overlapped with the district that Jack was running for the first time, Amherst, Clarence, and Newstead, and I got to know Jack fairly well during the course of that campaign because we were at so many forums together. I then served with Jack for fourteen years in Congress. I was elected to Congress in 1974 and didn't retire until the end of 2002, so we spent fourteen years together in the House of Representatives.

KONDRACKE: So I'm going to ask in reverse order for you all to briefly describe your first contact with Jack Kemp, your first experience meeting him and getting to know him.

Bill Paxon.

PAXON: Wow. Growing up in western New York politics, Mort, as many of us did, it was all very politically transactional. It was all, to be quite candid, about jobs and offices and working your way up, seeing where you could go. Back in the early seventies, the Republican Party was on the skids. Watergate hit. Nixon lost. We were just down and out as a party. The party here in the state really didn't stand for anything. All at once, here you are, you're a young person who wanted to get involved, wanted to run for office as a Republican in the early seventies, and here's Jack Kemp. He's talking about the world. He's talking about freedom for Refuseniks. He's talking about American foreign policy, and he's talking about jobs, hope, growth, opportunity, a rising tide lifts all boats.

I remember the first time. It was that campaign in 1970, and to this day he still, to me, is the lodestar of the Republican Party. Everybody talks about Reagan, and I think he's the greatest President that's ever been, but Jack Kemp was the wind beneath Ronald Reagan's wings. I will never forget that meeting and every meeting since that time with Jack Kemp.

KONDRACKE: So when did you actually meet him?

PAXON: That campaign in 1970 in Williamsville, New York, at the campaign headquarters. We all went over there to volunteer.

Everybody in the world wanted to work in the Republican side on Jack Kemp's campaign. Everybody was exciting.

You know, we had a lot of great officeholders in this county. They weren't exactly dynamic. Here's Jack Kemp, coming off the football field a star, walking in the place, his enthusiasm—the previous panel talked about his passion, his ebullience. He was a happy warrior, and he made you feel good every day. It was always about looking forward, never back. It wasn't about jobs or patronage. It was about the future of the western civilization, at the very least.

KONDRACKE: John.

LAFALCE: I remember in 1970 Jack and I were running for the first time, and we both were elected, and I was a little concerned. I thought, "Well, he's a Republican and I'm a Democrat." I remember the very first few times that we were appearing together at different forums as elected officials, and Jack was unbelievably generous in including me in his remarks and including me in the efforts that he was undertaking. His was the politics of inclusion rather than exclusion. Whatever glory he had, he wanted to share that glory and bring you in as part of it, and that was a huge, wonderful lesson to learn.

KONDRACKE: Bob.

McCARTHY: I think I met Jack Kemp in a different kind of circumstance from this distinguished group, who has always been involved in politics. I started to meet him as a reporter, and it was before I worked in Buffalo. My first job was with the *Olean Times-Herald* in the southern tier, and he was speaking, I believe, at a

Cattaraugus County Republican dinner at St. Bonaventure University that night. I remember, I think, becoming acquainted with his enthusiasm, with his speaking ability, with his ability to convey these very serious ideas that he had in a way that he could connect with people. Of course, this was like red meat for this Republican group that he was with there that night, but they were thrilled with him. I remember he sat down with me and expounded on those ideas, and I thought, "This is a guy who's going somewhere." You could tell.

KONDRACKE: How accessible was he to you as a reporter over time, and was he good source for you? Could you call him on the phone?

McCARTHY: He was not somebody that I had a long relationship with, but he was somebody who every time he ever came into Buffalo, he would sit down and have a few minutes with me to talk about some of the ideas and the themes that he always did. I don't think there was ever an interview where I talked with Jack where he didn't talk and really hammer home his idea about including more minorities in the Republican Party. It was just one of his bedrock principles, I think. I could probably look at every story I ever wrote, and he would touch on that.

So he was always very good to me and always had a very good relationship with the *Buffalo News*, especially some of the guys who were before me, like George Borelli and Doug Turner in our Washington Bureau.

KONDRACKE: Tom.

REYNOLDS: Mort, I was just thinking about it. I was in high school when Jack Kemp was playing football, and I went because he came down to my hometown to speak off-season about some of the ideas and the issues of the day. Eddie Rutkowski and some of his teammates might remember, he used to drive them crazy on the bus while they were traveling. His extra energy, he would go out into the community and start talking about issues and candidates in the off-season. So he was in my hometown, and I wanted to hear him as the quarterback of the Buffalo Bills and get his autograph. When you think about accessible, he was great with kids. He was great with people back when he was in the glory of the Buffalo Bills as the star quarterback.

KONDRACKE: As time went on, what was your ongoing connection with him?

REYNOLDS: Well, I was a Republican, and he was, much like Bill said, kind of the guy that we were all just gravitating to. I mean, he was bigger than life in public office as he started running in 1970. So you think about some of us as young disciples of Jack Kemp, we patterned just the desire to be in public service, based on his energy in public service.

KONDRACKE: Jack.

QUINN: Thanks, Mort. I'm just thinking now, too, the first time I met Jack Kemp was not in a political situation. I started my career as a teacher here in the Orchard Park Central School District, and each year at the middle school we had a trip to Washington, D.C., where we took

three hundred eighth graders, almost the entire class, to Washington. And because I lived in Hamburg, where Jack and his family lived, the principal thought it would be a good idea if I tried to get Jack Kemp to speak to our students.

Now, you've got to remember it was Presidents Day weekend, and Congress was adjourned, I now know, and Jack Kemp had a lot of better things to do on his weekend off than to meet with three hundred eighth graders. But they told me to remind Jack that all those eighth graders had parents who voted. [laughter] And he always did well at Orchard Park back in those days.

Then flash forward, if I might, fellas, just to take a couple minutes. In 1981 I decided, with the encouragement of a fellow named Paxon and Reynolds and others, to run for the Hamburg Town Council, Jack's adopted hometown of Hamburg, New York. So I decided to make the run while I was still teaching, and these fellows told me, "Well, you can't run in Hamburg unless you get the blessing of Jack Kemp."

So we made the calls and we said, "Listen, we're going to run for council. Can you support me? Can you endorse me?"

And a letter came first, and I still—actually, I don't have it; my mother has it. But it was a two-paragraph letter from Jack Kemp to me that basically said in the first paragraph, "I know this guy Quinn," and in the second paragraph, "He seems okay to me." [laughter] But we copied it and gave it to anybody who answered the front door, that this was a ringing endorsement of Jack Quinn's candidacy, mind you, for the Hamburg Town Council.

Then, of course, he was in Buffalo and someone talked him into doing an event for me. It was at the airport at the Flyer Tigers Restaurant, because he was touching down, talking to Bob, probably,

and twenty-five other people. But here's the important part to us. My mom and dad were there, all my brothers—I have four brothers—big family event. Jack Kemp flies into Buffalo with a million different important things to do, and here's a guy that's thirty years old at the time running for Hamburg Town Council, a part-time job in a town of 55,000 people. He stayed the entire afternoon, posed for the pictures, started a lifelong relationship with my parents and me and our family, as we talked about education as a beginning issue.

But then, of course, from there I went to Congress and became really close with him and a real advisor in the sense of a parent, because when I made some wrong votes—maybe we'll talk about this later—and I made a few according to Jack Kemp in this district, but I heard from him. Unsolicited, I heard from him to find out what the heck I was doing.

KONDRACKE: Let me follow up on that. Tell us about your wrong votes and what did Jack say.

QUINN: Well, it usually started with the call would come into the office, and the rest of the staff would say, "Oh, my god, it's Jack Kemp calling for Jack Quinn."

Then he usually started like, "What the heck are you doing now? I read about his vote on the crime bill," or the tax bill or what have you.

But he understood the folks I represented here in Buffalo, and a lot of folks thought that I had the Jack Kemp district, Bill and Tom, because it was always "Jack Kemp (R) Hamburg," because that's where he lived. Then when I ran in 1992, they changed the district and I had Hamburg but nothing else. I don't think Jack had much of

the city. Of course, I had most of the city, and it was "Jack Quinn (R) Hamburg," and everybody just thought I had his district. So he thought for a while I had to keep his voting record intact when I filled in from Hamburg and West Seneca and Orchard Park and on and on.

But never a call—I kid that it started out, "What the heck are you doing?" By the time the end of the conversation was—I'm a teacher. It was a mini class. It was a mini lesson to say, "I know what you had to do. I know why you did it. But let's not lose sight of where we're trying to get with the country, with the district, with the people that you represent."

So I was lucky enough to know him early in two different situations in my career, and both really, really positive.

Reynolds: Mort, just following up on that. I think of how many times Jack said that after he retired from Congress, it took two people to replace him: Paxon and Quinn. So he enjoyed the fact that he needed two to follow his shoes.

KONDRACKE: Jack and Tom and Bill were all either state officials or local officials while he was a member of Congress. So what did he do for the area while he was a congressman? Bill Paxon, start.

PAXON: It's always said, "A prophet's never revered or known in his home kingdom." Sometimes I always had the feeling that folks in western New York didn't always appreciate Jack, because Jack would educate you. When he gave a speech, they'd say, "What's an hour?" Well, that's Jack's pre-oration. He would get up and he was so passionate. And I would say this, that he did bring projects home. He worked with John LaFalce on the rapid transit line. There were other

projects. But that wasn't what he really was about. He was about raising the level of discourse. It was about raising the economy of the whole country that would then benefit western New York. He was talking about the future of the country and relating it to this community. That was, in my opinion, his great legacy to western New York.

You know, there were a lot of us who followed. I mean, I was a full-blown, 100 percent Kempophile. My votes in Congress, I came from the perspective of where was Jack Kemp on this issue. I did that as a county legislator, as a state legislator, and I think there were a whole generation of us who came after, Jack Quinn, Tom Reynolds, myself, a lot of the other Republicans of this county and a few of the Democrats, who got a hold of that philosophy, inculcated it into where we were. I think, really, in a lot of ways that was his greatest legacy here in the community.

LAFALCE: Let me just follow up on Bill's remarks. First of all, Jack and I usually voted differently. I'm the only Democrat on this panel. Bob's an Independent, I think. But I still had tremendous admiration for Jack. Bill mentioned the rapid transit system as a local project, and that brings to mind this recollection. I was home on a Friday night, and my wife said, after the phone rang, "It's Jack Kemp. He says he has to talk with you."

So I went to the phone. He says, "John, we're having a press conference tomorrow announcing this big grant for the rapid transit system, and the Secretary of Transportation is coming in, [William T.] Bill Coleman. You have got to be there."

I said, "Jack, I've got a million and one plans. I don't know if I can."

He says, "John, you have got to cancel your other plans. You've got to be there."

There were a number of reasons for that. Number one, Jack was brought up to be a sharer. Jack was brought up to be a team player, and he wanted to exhibit to the world the fact that we were a team of congressmen in western New York. Even though it was a Republican administration, he was the Republican member of Congress, he was primarily responsible, he wanted to share the credit and he wanted to have the team take the credit for it. That made a big impression on me.

REYNOLDS: Even a little more than that, in the team spirit, and the delegation did work very closely together, you and [Henry J. Nowak] Hank and Jack. Remember, all of us served in the majority that sit at this table. Jack Kemp, eighteen years in Congress, never saw the majority, and yet he only had a small stretch when he had a Democratic President, and to my recollection, every single President, he was a confidante to the President and to that administration. When you look at what he was able to do to put a number of things for this community in that budget—and some of you will remember the heyday of UDAGs. This guy knew how to put together UDAGs and other types of pieces that—

KONDRACKE: What's a UDAGs?

LAFALCE: Urban Development Action Grants.

REYNOLDS: Right. So when you look at the piece, one, minority member; two, worked very well with the delegation both of the

western New York federal delegation but also the state; and his interaction with the administration brought added bonus when many people relied on Kemp to have that dialogue with the administration.

LAFALCE: Let me just augment what Tom just said. Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980. I think Jack came that close to being Ronald Reagan's running mate. Now, I can't document that, but based upon information, I believe.

But then Jack was in Congress, and Jack was viewed as Reagan's guy in Congress, which gave Jack extra added clout with both Republicans and Democrats. I remember talking with Jack once, because he had such tremendous clout, he says, "John, sometimes I think I'm running this administration." [laughter] And the fact of the matter is, to a certain extent he was.

QUINN: Mort, let me just answer your larger question. Bill started the response, that Jack Kemp had an opinion on the big issues of the day, UDAGs, both parties, Reagan's guy, and yet as a local elected official in the town of Hamburg for ten years, and he was our congressman at the time, he never ever forgot, Bob, to your point, where he came from. He always came back to Hamburg and western New York.

I had an issue as the town supervisor early in my career there in 1993, I think it was. We had a terrible storm on the Hoover Beach side of Lake Erie where houses were washed away, water up to about your waist, and we needed some help from FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency], and it was Jack Kemp who called me to say, "Do you need help with FEMA? Come on down here. We're going to help you out." It was a problem, with all these other issues, Bill and Bob, that he was dealing with at the time, and high-profile issues. We

had nineteen people flooded out in the town of Hamburg, and three days later I found myself in Washington, and it was Jack, John, who organized Henry Nowak to be in his office that day when I got there. When we were finished, I filled out the paperwork, and, imagine this, we got FEMA help [laughter] in the town of Hamburg for nineteen people for the properties.

I'm convinced it was a guy like Jack Kemp, who, while he's talking about the issues of the day and concerned about our country, also remembered that it was the six or seven hundred thousand people in Hamburg and Buffalo and western New York who put him there, who gave him the opportunity to have opinions about the issues of the day and the country, and he never forgot that.

PAXON: When you talk about project, I remember in '86 he was running for election, very tough race. I had the honor of being his campaign chair, and we wanted to get him around to a lot of towns and do things. In my hometown of Akron, New York, they needed a sewer treatment plant. So they mentioned it to him. Pretty soon they got the money coming, and we're going to have the dedication for the sewer just a couple weeks before the election. And Jack went out and they set up a big podium. Everybody in town was there. The plant had a big cloth like this hanging over the side, and we're up on the podium. It was the biggest turnout in Akron in probably fifty years, for all these people waiting, and he's standing there and the mayor is talking a big run about, "Jack Kemp got us this. We're so honored Jack Kemp got us this money. This plant would never be built without Jack Kemp, and we're going to just honor him."

And he says, "If he pulls that cord and it says 'The Jack Kemp Sewer Plant,' you're dead," to me. [laughter]

But, you know, the thing was, it wasn't just getting the plant. He used that as an opportunity to talk—I remember this that day—a good talk and enthusiastic about infrastructure, building community, creating jobs, and then took it to, "But we have to grow the national economy," and went right off to the core issues. He never strayed. And we're all politicians or observers of politics. There are very few politicians that during eighteen years or eight years or eight months can be that disciplined to keep coming back to the core message, which was all about rising opportunity for the country and everybody in it.

KONDRACKE: So, Bill, he was not a small government conservative, an austerity conservative?

PAXON: Not at all. It was a tremendous cause of friction in the Congress. If you think about it, when Jack Kemp got there, the typical Republican was, respectfully to John, just kind of Democrat-lite, you know, not spend quite as much, not cut quite as much, you know. We we really didn't have, in my opinion, much of a reason, *raison d'être*, that we'd lost it.

And Jack comes into this mix and there was a lot of ruffled feathers there, because he would say to Republicans, "I'm not going to be a root-canal Republican." He was the happy warrior. "We're going to find ways to lift this party and move it ahead." I'll tell you what, you think about, he took that party in the Congress and brought it 180 degrees to where they not only embraced but were enthusiastic cheerleaders for this quarterback taking that tax cut, economic growth, pro growth, hope, growth, and opportunity mantra. He changed the party in the Congress. He then changed a presidential

candidate, Ronald Reagan, who really didn't embrace those issues. That changed the direction of the country, and as was said on the earlier panel by Eddie, it went worldwide. I mean, that's what this man did.

So it was against the grain of the party, and he brought it along. For example, balance budget amendment, no. He was opposed. At one time I got a call when I signed onto it, "What are you doing? That's root-canal stuff. We've got to be against it. Don't worry about that. Just grow the economy."

REYNOLDS: He also was on the Appropriations Committee, and I remember when it was a big day to him that he came on the Defense Subcommittee, of which he wanted to spend ample time as a major subcommittee of the Congress. So when you look at what Bill shared about the platform, that he would always carry both in the halls of Congress and here, he also was an appropriator that knew how to use the tools of the government and the budget to deal with both national policy and back home.

KONDRACKE: So, Tom, what lessons does the Jack Kemp example have for the current Republican Party?

REYNOLDS: Well, I think we saw in the reestablishment of the Republican majority this year some of the fundamentals that Jack talked about with a number of other young backbench congressmen that became the leaders of the House and the leaders of the country. Many times, as we look at new names, Paul Ryan was a protégé of Jack Kemp's. He was a writer and with him with Empower America. So there are a number of people that not only served with Jack, but

now have looked at some of what he was about and what he brought to the Republican Party that launched the New Majority in '94 and brought back another majority now. I think Kemp earns much of that credit, as do others that were the pioneers of conservative and showing both Buffalo, western New York, and America you could be a conservative Republican, which Paxon and I, as disciples of the Kemp conservatism, believe to this day.

KONDRACKE: Jack, what do you think his attitude toward the Tea Party would be?

QUINN: Jack's approach to everybody in the Republican Party was a big tent. I heard him say it hundreds of time, so that even me, even Jack Quinn, a Republican who represented three-fourths of the city of Buffalo in a, I don't know, three-to-one Democrat seat at some point, even I had a place in his Republican Party. When we'd stray once in a while, he got us back to where we needed to be, either in a friendly way or a strong-arm way.

But I think today there'd be a place for this Tea Party in Jack Kemp's umbrella and tent for the Republican Party for sure, and he'd find out what they were doing best and he'd find out what was necessary for the rest of the country, and he'd make darn sure that the rest of the conference, and even his Democrat friends, hear about why that fit today. I think he'd absolutely have a place for these guys.

LAFALCE: Let me have just a little bit of a different perspective if I might, Mort.

KONDRACKE: Thank you. [laughter]

LAFALCE: I think Jack would be quite upset at the politics that exist today, which is so partisan, which is so uncivil, which is so confrontational. That was not Jack's way. Jack embodied everything that was positive about politics, not negative, and he would hate the negativism that has existed in politics these past many years.

?: No question.

LAFALCE: I remember it was, what, 1988 when he ran for Vice President—

KONDRACKE: He ran for President in '88 and [unclear].

LAFALCE: Ninety-six for Vice President, and he had to debate Al Gore. Tom Downey, a former member of Congress, was preparing Al. He was going to play Jack Kemp in the pre-debate rehearsals. So Tom called me up and he said, "Hey, you served with Jack in Congress for fourteen years. Can I come over and talk with you?"

I said, "Sure."

When he sat in my office, he said, "Okay. What can we expect from Jack that will be negative? How will he attack Al?"

And I said, "He will not attack Al. He will not go negative."

He said, "How can you say that?"

I said, "Jack Kemp is constitutionally incapable of going negative."

During the campaign, one of the moderators—maybe it was you, Mort; I don't know—threw a ball right down the middle of the plate for Jack to hit out and go negative against Al, and he refused to do it.

And Al Gore said, "I want to thank Representative Kemp for not taking advantage of that and going negative." That was Jack Kemp.

KONDRACKE: Bob McCarthy, let me ask this. Over time, as Jack Kemp became a national politician, was there a feeling around here in Buffalo that he was sort of distancing himself from his district? I just wonder if that wasn't evident in the '86 result where his vote margin went from 75 percent in '84 to 57 percent.

McCARTHY: Yes, I think, sure there was, and I can even remember writing a story with Congressman Reynolds when he was chairman of the party. I forget exactly what it was, but it was something about we would wish that Jack Kemp would remember the Friends and Family Plan back home.

REYNOLDS: Let me explain that. That's not quite that way.
[laughter]

McCARTHY: But there was a little—

REYNOLDS: It wasn't quite, but it was— [laughter]

KONDRACKE: Tell the story.

McCARTHY: Tom, you can tell it better, I think.

REYNOLDS: I'll just do it and then come back. Jack, very impulsive, I think we would all say, and so when he saw someone that was going to pursue a candidacy, he wouldn't bother figuring out, well, who's all

in this race. So for attorney general in 1994, he supported [Joseph H.] Joe Holland, who is from Harlem and a wonderful guy and one that he knew. What Jack didn't know, because he didn't check, was that one of his strong town leaders, we had a candidate who was his son, who was from Buffalo, New York, called Dennis Vacco for state attorney general. I'm not always so good with one-liners, but I said to, I think, Bob McCarthy, Jack Kemp ought to get a Friends and Family card and call home once in a while. And that was about three days after he did this endorsement.

So it was a message that not only did Bob McCarthy pick up, and he can pick up from there, but also Phil Gramm was in town shortly thereafter and saw that this comment was there. This was before many cell phones, and I remember that he was using a pay phone to say, "Hey, his county leader up here made this statement about Friends and Family being back in Buffalo once in a while."

But that was more on Jack Kemp having the passion of impulse, saying that, "Hey, I'm with you. You're going to run. Let's go," and then figure out what [unclear].

KONDRACKE: It's also that he was supporting an African American.

McCARTHY: That was a core principle with him, and he saw in this instance a very topnotch candidate in Joe Holland, and he was definitely committed to that campaign.

LAFALCE: I think a lot of that had to do with Jack's football playing, where he would rub elbows with so many black players, that they became his brothers, a band of brothers. His district had almost no blacks within it. It was only his first term that he represented about

six thousand from Buffalo, and then after that, none from Buffalo, all the suburbs. But he never lost that affection for minorities.

When he became Secretary of HUD, he had a special mission in life, and that was to improve the plight of those in poverty, primarily blacks, improve the plight of urban America, primarily blacks, etc. He was surely dedicated to that.

KONDRACKE: You were his '86 campaign manager?

PAXON: Eighty-six.

KONDRACKE: So why did his vote total go from 75 to 57?

PAXON: Probably because I was his manager. [laughter] Chairman. Not manager. Chairman.

Hey, look, Jack Kemp was running for President of the United States. He was a major figure in our party, and the Democrats nationally wanted to bring him down. If they could defeat him, they wanted to defeat him. They ran a very good candidate in [James P.] Jimmy Keane, who was a city councilman. He didn't live in the district; he lived in the city. But he was a tenacious, dogged campaigner. He was a local. He was one of, what, sixteen kids?

QUINN: Yes.

PAXON: A huge family, all in politics or government. So it was a real campaign. He was out running for President, running around the country campaigning, which he should, and this guy's out campaigning every day. The unions and the Dems are putting a ton of money into

the race. Jack ended up spending a couple million dollars back then on that race. He won comfortably, but it was designed to kind of knock him back a little bit, threw a brush-back pitch, to use the wrong sports analogy with him, and that was all it was about.

REYNOLDS: But in addition to the President, he was also the conference chair, and so he was across the country with the responsibilities of those House races all over America, something that both Bill Paxon and I know is a responsibility that does take you out of your district. So he had a formal campaign and he had the responsibilities of a conference chairmanship and looking at running for President.

PAXON: But, you know, even then, and he had to be all around the country, he did come back and campaign. He'd be back and was working.

I want to tell one quick story about that election. It says a lot about Jack Kemp. We're flying in a helicopter. I remember he come in and he'd go across the district in a helicopter, which was a little source of controversy. But we were flying over my district. Coincidental, I was in the state legislature. Flying over Attica, New York. He looked down and said, "What's that?"

I said, "Well, that's the Attica Prison."

He says, "I want to go there."

I said, "Yeah, you do." I was close to the Correction Officers Union, so I said, "We'll do it next time."

Next time he came back, Eddie [Rutkowski] and Marie [Shattuck] arranged it. Marie, I guess, was running the office. I can't remember. We go in, and I said, "Now, look, Jack, the goal here is

relation with the correction officers. We don't worry about the prisoners. We're going to take a quick tour of the prison, go across the street, there's a little bar, they're going to pack in there and you're going to talk to them about stuff, hopefully not the gold standard, but maybe a little about the Bills." [laughter]

All right. So we go into Attica Prison, which I'd been in a hundred times, and we're going down. Number one, it shows sometimes Jack didn't listen to you, but we're walking down what was one of the toughest rows, and I think Marie was with us walking down there, and it was lifers. Basically, you're just walking by and they're pointing out the administration.

Some prisoner called out his name, and Jack turned right around. We're going, "Oh, no." He went over and he talks to the guy through the bars for a while. Pretty soon he's pulling that paper out and he's writing some things down.

Go down, the next one and the next one and the next one, and we're going, "Oh, this isn't good. This is not what we wanted to accomplish here today. They can't vote. We want to talk to the COs."

Afterwards, we went over and did our thing, and he did end up talking about the gold standard to the correction officers, but it was the typical Jack. He made it work. The fact is, he cared about these men. They were lifers. They had tough times. A lot of it was, to be candid, probably BS that he was being told, but there was some element of concern. He had concern. When I say "BS," from some of the prisoners who had a chance to elaborate. But Jack saw it as men who were down and out. Regardless of why they were there, they deserved his attention and he gave it to them, and in a few cases, I think there was some follow-up to try to get some messages to the family or whatever. His compassion didn't stop in a neighborhood. It

didn't stop at a sewer treatment plant opening. It didn't even stop in really one of the worst places you could imagine with folks in terrible, terrible straits. So you can't help but come away and admire someone who has that kind of unbelievable passion. It always made you just feel so humble to be around him.

LAFALCE: You know, Jack had a couple of other wonderful attributes, too, but as a football player, he was in great physical condition and he had enormous energy. When I think of Jack, I just think of a man in motion. From the time he woke up to the time he went to bed, he was moving, physically and intellectually, and this movement was not lethargic movement. It was an enthusiastic type of movement, intellectually and physically. You could just sense it and see it in that energy and enthusiasm. That can carry you awfully far. If you don't have it, you're not going to go very far.

KONDRACKE: So, Jack, did you support him? Did all of you support him, but starting with Jack, in '88 for President?

QUINN: Yes.

LAFALCE: No. [laughter]

QUINN: Yes.

KONDRACKE: What role did you take in the '88 campaign?

QUINN: Bill was talking about this before when he was running the campaign and he had these duties outside the district. A lot of us

became surrogates for him back in the district. The guy who was in the town of Hamburg, where he still carried next to his name "Hamburg," we had an assignment, and that was to make sure that the home fires were taken care of. I usually heard from Jack personally, the office often, but he checked in with me every other week, "What's going on? What are the issues? How am I doing? How am I doing back there? What's this guy KeAne [phonetic] doing running around town with my address on South Lake Street in the village of Hamburg"? at the time.

So not only did we support him, but a lot of us—I'm one and I know many, many others—felt a responsibility to help him do the bigger picture of running for a major national office and yet pay attention to what's going on back home. And when he couldn't possibly physically be there—you can't run a national campaign and pay attention to the conference and be back; I mean, for some folks, it's hard enough just to get back here on regular weekends—a lot of us were surrogates, and with pride and enjoyment, to watch the home fires for him, to make sure folks knew he was concerned about what was going on.

So, oh, yes, supportive for sure. And while I wasn't on the national campaign committee and didn't travel with him around the state or around the country, he knew well enough that he had to check in with everybody who was back at home.

I can tell you some of our local elected officials, to John Lafalce's point, John and I served together a lot of years, make that flight back and forth almost every week to Washington and back, the surrogates for Jack weren't just Republican officeholders back here in this district. Now, for sure, many of them were, but not only Republicans. I think that when he reached across the aisle in Washington and he reached

across the aisle here, whether it be the sports analogies or otherwise, he had a lot of folks, let me just say, who were surrogates for Jack Kemp, not only running for office, but when he was doing all the great things that he's done, and they were surrogates by choice.

KONDRACKE: Tom, what did you do in '88?

REYNOLDS: Bill actually led a lot of the effort for recruiting delegates in New York, and we did some of that work. I spent a few cold weekends in New Hampshire in the early stages of his campaign, as many western New Yorkers did, to drive across our state into New Hampshire to make a presence. But as Jack said, all of us also pitched in just a little bit in our own little way back home and pretty much anything that people asked for help, many of us would just add that little bit of help as he was getting under way.

KONDRACKE: But you were running for his seat, right, in '88?

PAXON: In '88, yes.

KONDRACKE: So did you have any role in the national campaign?

PAXON: Not so much in '88, because I was running.

KONDRACKE: Did he endorse you?

REYNOLDS: Well, it's an interesting story. As I was thinking of this, I reflected back. In 1985 and '86, I made it clear I really wanted to run if he was going to run. He did a couple of wonderful things for me that

were so important. He told me in '86—first of all, he made me the chairman of the campaign so I could go out and campaign. And the other thing he did was, which I don't know if I ever said this before, and I was asking Eddie Rutkowski, it was in '87, I think, in November, the Executive Hotel here, there was a big dinner in his honor. I think it was in November.

After the dinner, he and JoAnne took me out in the lobby and sat down, had a glass of wine, and he told me, he said, "Look, everybody's going to say I'm going to run for President and at some point I'm going to lose. If I don't do well, I'm going to come back and run for the House." And he said, "I don't think that's what's going to happen."

Joanne said, "It is *not* going to happen. He is not going to come back and run. This is the last election, and we want you to be the candidate."

KONDRACKE: Joanne is the one who tells you?

PAXON: But he then injects and said, "You've been true to the cause. We want you to do this, and I want you to know that, that I'm not going to come back."

He didn't need to do that, number one. Number two, I would never ask him to endorse. You're running for President; there's people on all sides. But that leg-up they gave me was invaluable, and I have to tell you what, it's more than just about a public office. If I hadn't been elected to Congress, I never would have met Susan Molinari, who's a congresswoman, I never would have gotten married to her, and we wouldn't have our two beautiful daughters. I can thank Jack Kemp for my family, and believe me, I do every day.

KONDRACKE: Bill, why do you think he didn't do better, since he was sort of the intellectual soul of Reaganomics and so on, than he did in 1988? The campaign didn't get anywhere.

PAXON: It didn't get anywhere, but part of the problem was 1980. Look, if Ronald Reagan had made Jack Kemp—and the history books are clear it was a very close call in the back rooms in Detroit whether it was going to be Bush or Kemp the Vice President—I think then obviously would have had the chance to be President.

KONDRACKE: Let me stop you there. Do you know anything from Jack about Reagan's decision in '80?

PAXON: No, nothing more than I've read. Jack was one of those guys who didn't go back and relive it. It was, "Okay, that didn't work out. Move forward."

LAFALCE: Jack told me, he said, "John, I came that close to being Ronald Reagan's running mate," and he thinks that Reagan, who was opposed by Bush for the nomination, wanted to unify the party and went for Bush, not because he liked Bush more than Jack or respected Bush more than Jack, but because he thought this would be the best way to unify the party.

PAXON: And you know, John, also, look, let's be honest. There were a lot of the national leaders of our party, just like some folks in the community, who didn't like Jack's Republicanism. They weren't the hope, growth, and opportunity. They were the root-canal wing. They

didn't like the fact that Jack had really pushed these ideas in the Congress and had pushed them on Reagan, and I think that was part of it.

But the other part was, look, in 1988, George Bush had been Vice President for eight years. He had a chance to do a lot of favors and help a lot of people and build a national support network that was unbelievably strong and wide and deep. It's nothing against Jack. Jack Kemp was the under piece. Look, to his credit, George Bush, President Bush, gave Jack an opportunity at HUD to do some pretty incredible things there.

So I think it broke our hearts, because we all who know him really believe he would have taken that Reagan administration, the success, and taken it to a new level, but it wasn't to happen.

LAFALCE: Jack should be praised for how well he did in 1988. It's not that he lost the race for the presidency. It was the natural order of things for the Vice President to succeed the President. Whoever heard of a member of the House of Representatives defeating an incumbent Vice President for the presidency of the United States? I don't know if it's ever happened.

REYNOLDS: Mort, you've asked that question, and I think we have to go back and really look at what '88 was. The Vice President then, George Bush, was a loyal Vice President to the Reagan two-term government, and with that loyalty he had all of the infrastructure of the Ronald Reagan finance, campaign structure, everything. In addition, [Robert J.] Bob Dole, then the Senate Leader, was also moving into the campaign and ran a very aggressive campaign from being a former RNC chair, from being a senator, and from being a war

hero that the country knew. Then add also Jack Kemp and others that were trying to launch this.

But what I think is amazing, and Bill and I and Jack have all experienced this, and to this day if somebody says, "Well, where did you represent in Congress?" I held Jack Kemp's seat. When he spoke across the country, many people in western New York heard his speech on the gold standard and capital gains and dividends and could repeat it. Paxon and Reynolds did. But when you look across the country where they heard that young congressman, who at one time was a quarterback of the Buffalo Bills, come in and speak in Montana or California or Texas or Illinois, he left such an impression that when Paxon and I were traveling the country and said that where we came from, they knew Kemp from what they had experienced with the excitement of what his message was, ran it a little long [laughter], but they heard an exciting congressman talk about the future with optimism.

KONDRACKE: Let me ask you, Tom, why do you think that he decided not to challenge Jacob Javits in 1980 and move from the House to the Senate?

REYNOLDS: Because I think, first of all, I don't believe if you were to ask Paxon or Reynolds, maybe Quinn, if you would look based on your voting record in Congress and what you stood for as a conservative Republican, do you believe you should take that across sixty-two counties of New York? I know what Paxon would say, because I've heard him say it, and I will tell you what I would say, and that is, I'm electable in my district. I am not electable in a Democratic blue state as blue as this is. While in 1980, it was less, Jack had no burning

desire to be in the Senate. He may have had some thoughts about running nationally, but not for the Senate when he looked at the reality of what his voting record was, what he stood for. I just never saw him have the energy to do it.

LAFALCE: It would have been a terrible decision for him to run. Number one, he was a leader of the United States House of Representatives. If he ran for the Senate and won, he would have been the most junior senator with much less of a voice, and the probability is, is that he wouldn't have won because the state of New York was so overwhelmingly Democratic then as it is now. You need a split within the ranks in order to win. Now, [Alfonse M.] Al D'Amato turned out to be lucky because a split did develop, in fact.

REYNOLDS: He also turned down the opportunity and the request of his party to run for governor, to stay in Congress and to continue moving up into leadership. So the Senate, while it was 1980, many times party leaders asked him, "Will you look at running for governor?" And he had no interest in serving as the state's governor. He wanted to be a leader in the Congress.

QUINN: Tom, thanks for not including me in with you and Paxon. [laughter] My record might have been better to look at a statewide race. I'm not that sure about it.

REYNOLDS: If you could have gotten through a primary.

KONDRACKE: Jack, how did the Dole-Kemp team do in this area in 1996 with Kemp on the ticket? Did that help the Dole ticket?

QUINN: I'll just tell you when I walked out on the football field at [University of Buffalo] U.B. with him and Bob Dole that day, every campaign for me in the future was finished, and finished in a good sense. It was over with.

I don't know the numbers. I don't know what it meant for the campaign. The political experts probably could tell you that.

KONDRACKE: Bob, do you know?

McCARTHY: Clinton and Gore creamed them in Erie County, and it was very interesting because the whole thought while I was in San Diego was, well, maybe this will energize Democratic New York State, and maybe Jack Kemp on the ticket, maybe this will really make New York in play. As it turned out, it just didn't. And I guess it kind of proves that old adage that people don't vote for Vice President, but it doesn't mean that they didn't try. I mean, they came in and after they had been to U.B. that day, those two Protestant fellows went to Mass at St. Joseph's Cathedral

QUINN: I sat behind them.

McCARTHY: And they made sure they had their picture taken with Bishop [Henry J.] Mansell, in order to try to fire things up in Catholic Buffalo. So they tried, there's no question about that, but it just didn't work in the end.

KONDRACKE: One thing I don't understand is everybody describes this district as blue collar, union, Democratic, ethnic, and yet not only—

LAFALCE: But they were wrong, dead wrong. Yes, it wasn't at all.

KONDRACKE: Because you had four Republican congressmen from it, so I don't understand that.

LAFALCE: The definition was wrong. As I said, Jack only represented about six thousand people from the city of Buffalo in his first race in 1970. In 1971, there was redistricting and those six thousand from Buffalo were taken out, and then that district was spread out. Erie County was but a portion of it, and then it went out into Genesee County and Wyoming County and Livingston and Monroe County, the most Republican territory going. So it was not the district that you just defined.

REYNOLDS: He liked the fact that he was an urban blue-collar congressman as he was first elected. As the district somewhat continued to change, it reflected when you keep losing districts in New York. Just as you look back in 1950, there were forty-five House seats. In 2012, there's going to be twenty-seven. So each time I had a little piece of John Lafalce's seat.

LAFALCE: The most Republican portion. [laughs]

REYNOLDS: It just kept moving. Barber Conable's seat. So what's happened our seats kept going . . .

PAXON: What we should say in defense of Jack—and you're right, John, Jack always loved to be our Buffalo, the city, but the fact is West Seneca, Hamburg, Cheektowaga, the parts of the district were blue-collar, ethnic, Polish, Irish at first, and after redistricting it kept changing, it kept moving out, and people moved out from the city into those suburbs, is also the reason why Jack had a tougher race in '88 or '86, for a thousand reasons why I had a very tough race in '88 and then '90. Then in redistricting, Jack Quinn picked up those tough areas and I got more Republicans. So that was the part of it, but it still had a blue-collar piece in those first years.

But you know what's more important, regardless of what was in the district, was what was in Jack Kemp's head.

?: Yes.

PAXON: He considered himself a voice for working folk, and he believed that a Republican message could reach those people, and it's why he was successful, not just electorally successful, why he was successful in Congress.

I went there right after he left. John observed this, I'm sure, on the Republican side. When he walked into that Republican conference, he look out at a sea of faces of people who represented very rural parts of America, some suburban areas, but very few who had an urban identity. Jack said to those folks, "I understand that you can be successful in that environment, and here's the message that's going to make you successful." So I think more than anything it was where he came from mentally.

?: Good point.

QUINN: You know, Bill, just one last point on that. I think that's where he came from, but the demographics, the geography of it, Mort, to your question and John's first response, that while Jack represented outside the city and he lived in Hamburg for those beginning years, he played for the Buffalo Bills. So the connection to Jack Kemp all around the country and in the conference was that he's the guy from Buffalo, and that was fine with him. That was fine to be with the Bills and to be connected with Buffalo, New York. And while the votes, when the political experts here, other than me, at the two tables, figure this out, he had the suburbs to elect, but he played for the Buffalo Bills, not the Amherst Bills or the Orchard Park Bills, but the Buffalo Bills.

KONDRACKE: So, just as a matter of fact, you carried the district in '88.

PAXON: Narrowly.

KONDRACKE: Did Bush carry it or did the Democrats?

PAXON: I doubt it. I don't know.

McCARTHY: I don't remember either. I would imagine he did.

KONDRACKE: So Jack becomes HUD Secretary. Now, what continuing relationship did he have with Buffalo and western New York as HUD Secretary? Did he pay any kind of special attention to—John?

LAFALCE: Well, I was on the House Banking and Financial Services Committee, which had responsibility for all HUD programs, so Jack and I had a close working relationship while he was Secretary of HUD. I think he always had a special place in his heart for Buffalo, and he did bring most of his congressional district staff into the Buffalo HUD office and used them in order to help the city of Buffalo and the surrounding areas that he represented to the maximum extent possible as Secretary of HUD.

REYNOLDS: Mort, I took Bill's seat in the State House then and took a lot of the housing issues that Kemp had done both federally and in Congress but also was advocating as HUD Secretary. And as the ranking member of Housing my freshman term, I was in New York, including New York City, with him a number of times where as not only an advocate for housing, but also the opportunity of home ownership, he was working with a Democratic mayor and a Democratic administration of the city of New York for looking at both new public housing but also the opportunity of privatizing housing both in Buffalo, but particularly, as well, in New York. So he was pretty active in New York as a HUD Secretary on some of the agenda of what he was putting out.

LAFALCE: Poverty was a big issue for Jack, too, as I said. He had a special concern. The Catholic Church speaks of having a preferential option for the poor. I think that Jack had a preferential option for the poor in his thinking. Some people criticize Obama for not even using the word "poverty" in his most recent State of the Union address. You didn't hear Jack as Secretary of HUD give a speech without mentioning the poor, poverty, urban American.

KONDRACKE: I think we're nearing the end here, but let me ask some summing-up questions. So, starting with you, Jack Quinn, what do you think his lasting influence ought to be on, first, the Republican Party and then the country?

QUINN: That's an easy question for me, and I go back to my first responses as a local Amherst supervisor here when I first started my public service, that as big as the ideas were that Jack Kemp had an opinion on and he shared those opinions, he never forgot the people that put him there, the local elected folks at the supermarket, at the church when he was in Buffalo, at the prison when he was in Akron. And that's a tough balance sometimes. I mean, fellows, how many times have we seen our colleagues, some of them, get elected to the U.S. Congress and all of a sudden losing contact with how they got there and their friends where they started and other things?

Jack Kemp never lost the common touch, whether it's talking about the poor in Buffalo, New York State, or the country, whether it's talking about housing opportunities, opportunities for jobs, hope, all of those things. There was a national audience for it, certainly. Why not share those when you've got those kind of ideas. But he also always was able to talk the talk to somebody at the street corner, at a Bills game, somebody at the local top supermarket or Wegman's, that used to drag him down and take his time.

For Jimmy [Kemp] and JoAnne [Kemp] and the family, I don't know how many hours and hours he spent away. But, for me, somebody who's come up the same way and now back in Buffalo, here's a guy who went national, he went national and never forgot where he started from, and that's a lesson, I think, for anybody in

public office, from dogcatchers in Hamburg to the President of the United States. He taught the lesson by example.

KONDRACKE: Tom.

REYNOLDS: I think of Jack Kemp as a man of ideas, and many times those ideas were connected with passion and long speeches, but ideas and passion. But also I watched Jack as a parent of four kids, and he taught me something because I, like some of us, got elected at a very young age, and I had a young family. What Jack taught me was, "You make time for those kids."

One of the last times I saw Jack before he got sick, he was going up to see a javelin tournament of his grandson up in the upper Midwest. So Kemp not only, with all this energy, all this hustle about telling the story of a happy warrior, those ideas and the passion to carry them out, he always made time to see his kids' events and to participate in that, and it was a foundation to teach me you can do both. You can have that energy, but make sure you've got time for those kids and your family, and I think he lived it every single day.

KONDRACKE: I'll get to you, John, but let me ask Bill Paxon this. He described himself as a bleeding-heart conservative, an Abraham Lincoln conservative who wanted African Americans in the Party. Is there any future in the Republican Party for that kind of Republican?

PAXON: I certainly hope and pray there is. Unfortunately, there's really no one who's ever picked up that mantra. There's many of us who tried, fall way, way, way short in the ability to articulate that message. Even to this day, as John or someone said, talk about Paul

Ryan, John [A.] Boehner, we first met in campaigning for Jack in New Hampshire years ago. There's a lot of people who can sit down, talk about it, they understand it, they want to articulate it, but there's nobody like Jack Kemp to be able to do it.

And, Mort, I want to just say something. You ask about his legacy. We could talk about all of these pieces and all the officeholders who he enthused to get involved and be part of the process from dogcatcher to running for President. But, you know, there's not a single member of Congress—I think this is probably true—maybe in the history of this country who's ever had the long-lasting impact that Jack Kemp. He took an idea that was totally antithetical to where his party was, made them believers, took it to a President, made him a believer. It became the law of the land, and today in this country, I don't care if you're on the Hamburg Town Council, the Erie County legislature, or wherever, the first question is tax cuts. Everybody starts from that, where for generations it was always how high can we make that tax rate. Now it's how do you get it down low. And that's true in state capitals, county seats, at the federal level, and it's true in other countries, and that's Jack. I mean, that's an incredible legacy for one single member of Congress to be successful.

KONDRACKE: Bob, what do you think is the lasting legacy of—

McCARTHY: I agree with Congressman Paxon that he was a tremendous politician, from my standpoint, from covering him. He was able to excite people when he talked with them. People came away saying, "Wasn't that great?" And like few other politicians that I

have ever seen, much of it because he talked about ideas too. He was not negative.

KONDRACKE: So his constituents or the people that he was talking to here had a greater appreciation for him than much of our profession in Washington who thought that he was a blowhard, frankly, sometimes?

McCARTHY: I saw him when he spoke in front of groups, and maybe not even in his district, where people were hearing him for the first time, and they came away excited about what he had to say. Even if they didn't agree with everything that he said, they knew that he was making sense on some level. So I think that all of these things that have been mentioned here will be his legacy, but from the political standpoint, from the party standpoint, which I covered so often, again, that inclusion, that message of inclusion, the need for the Republican Party to broaden its base, and if he were here today, I know that he would still be talking about it.

KONDRACKE: John.

LAFALCE: Well, first of all, I disagreed with Jack politically, but personally and professionally, I was a great admirer of him. If people said, "What do you think of Jack Kemp?" the first thing I'd say, "A class act." I mean, everything about him was classy. He would not do or say anything that was negative about any human being.

And I want to piggyback on some of the remarks of both Jack and Tom. With respect to Jack's remarks, I'm thinking of the writings of Rudyard Kipling when he said, "Walk with kings, but yet retain the

common touch.” Jack walked with kings and yet retained the common touch. That’s tough to do. He did it.

Tom talked about the advice that Jack gave him with respect to his children, and he did the same thing with me. I remember him coming up to me and saying, “John, you’ve just had a boy. You know what I always used to tell my kids? That’s what you should tell your kids.”

“What’s that, Jack?”

He says, “Tell them be a leader, not a follower.” By that he meant do the right thing. Don’t go along with others when they’re going to do the wrong thing. Be a leader. And I think of Jack as a leader of men, a leader of ideas, a class act.

KONDRACKE: This has been wonderful. Thank you so much for your contributions. I think it’s been a great day talking about Jack Kemp, learning a lot of new things about Jack Kemp. I didn’t ask you about any driving stories that you might have but—

LAFALCE: I wouldn’t ride with him. I was frightened.

KONDRACKE: All right, one story.

LAFALCE: No, just once and only once, and I’ll never drive with him again. [laughter]

KONDRACKE: Okay. And we thank Ralph Wilson and Baron Hilton of the Hilton Foundation, which is a founding sponsor of the Kemp Legacy Project and Kemp Oral History, and we thank the Buffalo Bills organization, on behalf of the Kemp Foundation, for hosting us today,

and especially to Ed Rutkowski, who organized all the people who were here. Thank you very much.

[Conclusion of Panel 3]