

TOM PUTNAM: Good afternoon. I'm Tom Putnam, director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. On behalf of John Shattuck, CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation and all of my Library and Foundation colleagues, I thank you all for coming. And I want to acknowledge the sponsors of the Kennedy Library Forums, including lead sponsor, Bank of America, Boston Capital, the Lowell Institute, the Corcoran Jennison companies, and our media sponsors, *The Boston Globe*, WBUR, and NECN.

Today's forum is part of a sequential series, first launched here in 1998 to chronicle the individuals who've held our nation's highest office throughout the 20th Century. This afternoon, we'll examine the life and legacy of Gerald Ford, our nation's 38th President.

Let's open by hearing from President Ford himself, speaking at a remarkable occasion held right in this room in May, 2001 when he was awarded the *Profile in Courage Award*. We'll watch a few excerpts from those proceedings, beginning with the actual award presentation by Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Caroline Kennedy.

[video]

During President Ford's visit to the Kennedy Library, like others, I was struck by the integrity of the man. As David Broder described in a column in 1973, as he was being considered to replace Spiro Agnew, "Gerry Ford is one of the most decent human beings in Washington. He is not a hater, nor is he under a constant compulsion to prove his own worth by dominating and downgrading others. What Ford would bring to the Vice Presidency is the honesty and openness that have been missing for so long from the White House."

To discuss President Ford's leadership qualities and his presidential policies this afternoon, we've assembled a distinguished panel of those who knew him best. Steve

Ford was a teenager when his father assumed the Oval Office. He quips that he left the White House at age eighteen to pursue his dream of being a cowboy on a Western cattle ranch only to be followed by his ten Secret Service agents. He's gone on to a successful acting career, appearing in over thirty movies, including *Contact*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *When Harry Met Sally*. Mr. Ford is a member of the board of directors of the Gerald Ford Foundation, which supports the Gerald R. Ford Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the Gerald R. Ford Museum in Grand Rapids.

As President Ford just mentioned, he recognized women for their talents and appointed Carla Hills to be his Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development in his Cabinet, the third woman to hold a Cabinet position in the U.S. government. She went on to serve as U.S. trade representative from 1989 to 1993, and was a principle advisor to President George H.W. Bush on international trade policy. She's currently chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Hills & Company, International Consultants.

Benton Becker was a special advisor and legal counsel to Gerald Ford throughout his career, and played an integral role in a number of areas, including President Ford's confirmation as Vice President, his decision to pardon President Nixon, and the handling of the former President's papers after he resigned from office. In his career, he served as a special assistant U.S. attorney in the Department of Justice, as deputy counsel to the Republican National Committee, and as a close campaign advisor to President Ford during the 1976 primary and general elections. He is currently a professor at St. Thomas University Law School in Florida.

Richard Norton Smith has the distinction of having served as Director of four presidential libraries, covering the presidencies of Herbert Hoover, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan, and Gerald Ford. He assures me he's not after my job. He was also the director of the Robert J. Dole Institute and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, and served as a speechwriter for Presidents Reagan and Ford. In fact, he had a

hand in writing the remarks we heard President Ford deliver just a few minutes ago. The celebrated historian who has written biographies of Thomas Dewey, Herbert Hoover, and George Washington, he appears often on C-Span and PBS, and is currently at work on a biography of Nelson Rockefeller.

Our moderator this afternoon is Bruce Schulman, professor of history at Boston University. He's the author of a number of books, including *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture*, and *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism*. Professor Schulman participated in our 2005 Forum on President Johnson as part of this series, on a panel with Robert Caro, Jack Valenti, and Tony Lewis.

I want to thank each of our panelists for their willingness to participate in today's proceedings. We're deeply honored by your presence. Now, to discuss the presidency of Gerald R. Ford, please join me in welcoming Bruce Schulman, Richard Norton Smith, Benton Becker, Carla Hills, and Steve Ford.

[applause]

BRUCE SCHULMAN: Let me begin by expressing my thanks to the staff here at the Kennedy Library, to this distinguished panel, and to all of you for coming out here to have the chance to revisit this often overlooked but pivotal presidency in the history of the modern United States.

I thought we'd begin just by noting that President Ford entered the White House in an extraordinary way, under extraordinary circumstances, and ask you all, how did the President approach his time in the White House? And what things in his character and experience do you think prepared him for the role that he was going to play? Richard, why don't we start with you.

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: There are many ways of looking at the Ford Presidency. One is, there's a conventional wisdom that suggests that he suffered in some ways from being a congressman, that he took a congressional outlook with him to the office. And the other half of that argument is that in fact by the time election day, 1976 had rolled around, he had, in many ways, outgrown that congressional outlook, that he had learned to be an executive. He had learned what differs leadership on the Hill from the Oval Office. And indeed, he would spend most of his presidency fending off his former colleagues on Capitol Hill, particularly after the 1974 election.

I think, as most such theories are wont to be, that is an oversimplification. I don't think you can separate the congressional Gerry Ford from the presidential Gerry Ford. And I'll give you one example. The first day-- Steve knows better than anyone. The Nixons left town so hastily that the Fords actually remained in their home in Alexandria for a week or so. I hope Steve will tell the story about his mom's reaction, because the story of Gerald Ford is absolutely inseparable from the story of Betty Ford.

But that said, a week or so after, they-- Finally, they moved into the White House. And the first day that Gerald Ford went into the West Wing to go to the Oval Office, he walked down the driveway and there was a Marine standing at the door, holding it at salute. And the President walked over and he stuck out his hand. He said, "Hi. My name's Gerry Ford. I'm going to be living here. What's your name?" Now that's the congressional Gerry Ford. That's Gerry Ford.

BENTON BECKER: Gerry Ford coming to the White House precedes Gerald Ford as the President. There are some nine months from December of '73 to August of '74 when he serves as Vice President under Nixon following the Agnew resignation. During that period, there's some stressful times for the Vice President. And there's a concern of-- Every day's news stories, if you recall that period (those, the audience are old enough to remember that time period) every day's news stories brought a new revelation with

respect to Watergate, with respect to White House involvement, with respect to aides and more speculation with respect to, what was going to go-- ultimately occur with President Nixon, a resignation, an impeachment, what.

The Vice President was very concerned with his behavior during this period so as not to make it appear that he was interested in any kind of coup to depose Richard Nixon. On the other hand, he is and had been for all of his lifetime, a team player. And his every instinct said to be a team player to President Nixon while he was Vice President, and to do all her can to help on this particular crisis.

But there came a point, a moment in courage (I recollect watching the tape this afternoon) during the Vice Presidency that history doesn't talk about too much. I want to share this with you. This is Vice President Gerald Ford in office approximately five months. The man who nominated him for that position, Richard Nixon, is the President. And the news stories have now brought forth unedited tapes of the White House of March of '72 and '73, and the so-called smoking gun tapes, where the President of The United States is making statements that arguably constitute obstruction of justice.

And this Vice President, this career team player, this Vice President, this man who was appointed by the President, attends a Cabinet meeting in that fifth month of the Presidency. And Richard Nixon's Cabinet meetings are very structured, very agenda-ed. And when the agenda concluded, the Vice President surprised the President by saying, "I would like to say something to the Cabinet off the agenda."

And he was given the floor. And Vice President Ford spoke of the stories in the paper with respect to his surprise and the surprise of the American people, of the comments made by President Nixon in the Oval Office. And the Vice President simply stated, in very clear language that he could no longer publicly support the White House's position with respect to the production of tapes and the production of other records with respect to

Watergate. I thought that took a great deal of courage. There are other stories of courage that evolved from Vice President becoming President, and the decision to pardon Richard Nixon, which I trust we'll have an opportunity to talk about later. Thank you. And it's a great privilege and great honor for me to be here with my wife. And I have a long-time, never ending regard for President Kennedy, and it's a great honor to be here.

CARLA HILLS: It's a great pleasure for me to join you as well. I think that the President's twenty plus years in the Congress shaped his presidency. First of all, he earned the respect and trust and credit-worthiness, if you will, of his colleagues in the Congress, which was a Democratic Congress, both the House and the Senate.

And secondly, he knew government. He knew where every dime was spent. He was the most knowledgeable President in my lifetime with respect to government. Indeed, he briefed the press on government's budget across every department and agency. My heart was in my mouth. I thought HUD was pretty complicated. And he not only briefed the press on the budget in January of 1976, he took questions, any question they wanted to ask. So that this congressional experience, particularly on appropriations, shaped how he dealt with his government.

And he strongly believed in the era in which we were, which was with the nation reeling. You have to remember that we not only had Watergate, which made people cynical, we had the Vietnam War that most people then opposed. And we had an economy that was reeling. We had double-digit inflation, high unemployment, and the oil shock with problems in the Middle East. May sound a bit reminiscent of what we face today.

But this President believed firmly that the way to deal with inflation, which was the ill of the day, was to watch spending. And he believed in the dream of the middle class. And he felt if inflation were to climb, that would rob Middle America of their dream. So he told the Congress on his first State of the Union, "I'm going to watch expenditures and veto

any non-necessary expenditure.” And interestingly, he had 66 vetoes, if my recollection is correct. And he sustained 54 with a Democratic House and a Democratic Senate. And that’s because he was watching where money was spent. And it made all the difference in the world. In twenty-nine months, that period that he called a time to heal, he brought inflation down from double-digits to five percent, increased jobs, and lowered interest rates, and got the country back on a course, where had he stayed in office I believe we would have continued to make progress.

STEVEN FORD: First of all, it was hard for me to actually see Dad on TV. I’ve kind of avoided those things for the last two years since he’s passed away. And it sort of brought a tear to my eye, because that was Dad. And he was a great leader of our family, and a great husband to Mom. So that was touching to kind of see that.

But Carla, you were talking about his fiscal responsibility. And you were talking about how he was shaped and formed. And I think it goes back-- Let me take it back just a second. When he became Vice President, my mother had convinced him to retire from Congress. He’d served thirteen terms, twenty-six years. And she wanted to go back to Grand Rapids, Michigan. And he’d be a lawyer and Mom did not want the political life.

So he was retiring. And along comes Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew, and Agnew has to resign. And dad gets picked to be Vice President. And my mother, she was ready to go through the roof, you know? She’d spent twenty-six years trying to get out of Washington, D.C., and here she is going to be-- you know, the Vice President-- you know?

But I remember my father saying to mom, he says, “Betty, don’t worry. Vice Presidents don’t do anything.” And that didn’t turn out to be true. So fast-forward to-- And, as Carla spoke there, it reminded me of standing on the South Lawn of the White House, as Richard talked about, the President leaving. I think we all remember that picture of Nixon

saying goodbye on the South Lawn of the White House and waving from the helicopter. And we as a family stood there. I was just an eighteen year-old kid. And we saw that helicopter leave.

And Carla, you're exactly right. This was a constitutional crisis. You had a man who was going to become President of the United States, go into the East Room of the White House, take the Oath of Office that had not been elected by the American people. He'd been appointed Vice President, assumed the presidency when Nixon resigned. He had a war in Vietnam. He had a Cold War with the Russians, double-digit inflation, unemployment, eight percent. Dow Jones, six months before Dad became President, was over a thousand points. In the next six months leading up to his presidency, it dropped over 45%. This country was in shambles.

And here Dad walked in, took the Oath of Office, and had not been elected by the American people. We went home-- And Richard's exactly right. We did not get to move into the White House. We went and took a picture in the Oval Office. And that night, we went back to our little three-bedroom house in Alexandria, Virginia, suburbia. And I will never forget my mother cooking dinner that night and looking over at my father. And she's standing at the stove there, and she says, "Gerry, something is wrong here. You just became President of the United States and I'm still cooking."

But I think that answers a question of who Dad was. And the next morning, he walked out of our house and literally our neighbors from twenty years were shouting, "Great new government job, Gerry!" I mean, that was literally how-- He commuted to the office. And you had a country (I think it was very refreshing) that went from a presidency, Richard Nixon, an enemies list and secrecy and things like that, to Gerry Ford. And I think it goes back to his Midwestern background, growing up in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And he was willing to expose his life to everybody. That's what was good.

You're talking about the fiscal responsibility. I'll never forget the day my dad-- And I was just a little kid. My dad came home and announced to the family he'd paid off our mortgage. And that's the kind of guy he was. And he was so concerned about deficits and debts. It was, I think, his Midwestern background that gave him that kind of policy.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: And that humility was even on display in the speech here, where he thanks the committee that chose him for their courage. Let's continue on the subject with the way that President Ford had to deal with the situation the country was in at the end of the Nixon presidency. What was President Ford's relationship with Nixon, with the Nixon Administration? How did he decide that the healing that was necessary also required the pardoning of Richard Nixon?

CARLA HILLS: I know that this President, President Ford, made his decisions, all of them, based upon principle, not based upon, as he put it, polls. And the pardon was definitely based on principle. Every advisor to him, I learned subsequently, told him this was political suicide. But he always did what was right in his view for his nation.

And you take the tough decisions that he made, like granting amnesty to those who avoided the Vietnam War, very unpopular. He thought it was the right thing to do, to draw a line and move the nation forward. The Helsinki Accords, he thought it was the right thing to do because he thought it would bring-- help liberalism in Eastern Europe.

All of his decisions-- In my area of housing, he was keen about the principle. We had an emergency. And I recall one particular bill in 1976. Congress came up with an emergency middle income housing bill, which would have subsidized interest rates for Middle America down to six percent. Secretary of Housing was to provide that subsidy. And it came to the President's desk. He said, "This is much too broad. This goes way beyond what we need." And so he vetoed it. That was one of those vetoes.

This was a very popular bill because there was something for everyone. This was called pork. And he vetoed it. It went back. We overrode that veto the very next week, working with the Congress and got a new bill called the Emergency Housing Bill, which focused on those who had lost their jobs, those who were in foreclosure. And it was to sunset, that is, to end and be reviewed at the end of one year's period. Again, it was always principle, not politics. He would have gotten more votes on any one of those measures from the pardon of Nixon to the amnesty for Vietnam, to the Emergency Housing Bill of '76 by doing the opposite of what he did. But he wanted to do what was right for the nation.

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: Benton could obviously take us through the pardon itself better than anyone. Just a little bit of background. You mentioned Nixon. You know, the relationship with Richard Nixon was a very longstanding one. Gerald Ford came to Congress two years after Nixon. One of the very first people he met on that day was a young congressman who had his office across the hall from him named Jack Kennedy from Massachusetts. And they became very good friends. They used to ride the subway over. And often, they both would cancel each other out on domestic policy, but not on foreign policy.

Jack Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford were all part of the new generation, the World War II veterans. In Ford's case, as he said, he'd been an isolationist. He went away and fought in the war. He came back a confirmed internationalist like his fellow Grand Rapidian, Arthur Vandenberg. They all had these close personal relationships which transcended their political differences.

And so in the case of John Kennedy, for example, it was particularly difficult for Gerald Ford, who was, at that point, by the way, not in the Republican leadership. When Lyndon Johnson called him the weekend of the assassination and basically told him he was going to be on the Warren Commission, it was particularly difficult because they had this friendship.

The Nixon relationship had been longstanding. He had become Vice President because of Richard Nixon. He was not Richard Nixon's first choice. Nixon wanted John Connelly. Connelly could not be confirmed. The one person who could be confirmed (and that tells you a lot about the man) was Gerald Ford.

So he became President. He had no transition. He couldn't even let on that he might become President. He couldn't even tell people on the staff, "Think about an Inaugural Address," because if it had leaked out-- anyway.

So what does he do? Very quickly, this is someone who was not thought of as a-- He was the least self-dramatizing President. The theatre of the presidency I don't think he ever quite got. It wasn't in him genetically. And he suffered as a result. But his instincts, that first few days, when you were living out in Alexandria, he understood what the country needed. He invited the Congressional Black Caucus to come to the Oval Office. I invited a group of women who were campaigning for ERA to come to the Oval Office. He had George Meany come to the-- people who had been in the Oval Office in some time.

He understood instinctively that this was what he could do to begin the healing process. And what Carla refers to, the Vietnam-- I've always thought the two actions are inseparable. The pardon of Richard Nixon should not be seen in isolation. Two weeks before that occurred, he announced an amnesty program for those who had evaded the draft. Most people would have put that out on a Friday afternoon in a press release. He went to tell the VFW Convention in Chicago that it was his intention. And he said-- Going in, he said, "Well, at least I won't have to worry about applause."

And he was right. He didn't get much applause. But in any event, that's-- All of this was part of his attempt to try to begin the healing process, which leads us to Nixon and the Nixon pardon.

BENTON BECKER: Well, understand that when Richard Nixon decided to resign, Gerry Ford was given 24 hours notice of that resignation. The entire transition period for his presidency is that period of 24 hours. And beyond that, he acquires, when he walks across the street from the Vice President's office to the Oval Office in the White House, he acquires the Nixon staff; all of the staff of Richard Nixon suddenly become the staff of Gerald Ford.

And it doesn't take too long to realize that the loyalty of that staff, by and large, rests with the former President, not with the present President, and that the advice given to the present President, Gerald Ford, is really advice that is in the service of, not the nation and not in the service of President Ford, but really in the service of Richard Nixon.

The most dramatic example of that would be the events that occurred out of San Clemente, California within 48 hours after the Nixon resignation. The former President picks up the telephone and calls Alexander Hague, who was the Chief of Staff for Richard Nixon at his resignation and the Chief of Staff acquired by President Ford. And Richard Nixon tells Alexander Hague, "Send to me immediately, send to California immediately all of the records, all of the papers, and all of the tape recordings accumulated during my presidency. They're all in boxes in the executive office building. Ship 'em to me immediately."

And that task is about to be undertaken by the Chief of Staff without any knowledge of President Ford. Ultimately, we learn of that and President Ford halts the transition of those papers to San Clemente. But the Nixon request continues and continues. The President undertakes a very reasonable next step with respect to the records and papers. He asks the Department of Justice for a legal opinion, "Who owns these things? Whose property are-- The government of the United States? Is it Richard Nixon's property? Who owns these things?"

And a lengthy, very learned kind of legal opinion is returned from the Department of Justice, who's-- incidentally drafted by a young staff lawyer named Anton Scalia. And it accurately, very quite accurately walks through the presidencies and the records and documents of the presidencies, and historical standpoint of it, and concludes that by custom and tradition and practice, as opposed to by statute, the records, papers, and tapes accumulated during the Nixon presidency are to be owned by and the property of Richard Nixon.

Therefore, the Attorney General, Bill Saxbe, urges President Ford to send them to California. This is a man who now has been in office maybe all of seven days — *all of seven days* — and is now being asked to make a decision with respect to the man that nominated him for the office of Vice President that became elevated to the presidency, and the records, papers, and tapes.

President Ford listens to Saxbe, listens to others and says, “No. Under no circumstances are they to go California. These documents and these tapes belong to the American people.” And it is that decision — that *decision* — ultimately that becomes part of the negotiations in San Clemente with respect to the pardon. But it is that decision that affords to everyone in this room and their children and their grandchildren, an opportunity in years to come and tomorrow if you like to go to a Federal records center and put a microphone on your ears. And you can hear the actual tape recordings of the Nixon presidency. Because, as President Ford was instructed and told at that point in time, “If these things are sent to California, Mr. President, there will be one hell of a bonfire out there in California.” And, to his courage, he said no. And that's why we have them today.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: Steve, do you have any memories of that period?

STEVEN FORD: Well, I would agree with all. It's amazing to me, here you had a case where Dad went against his own Justice Department, which was actually Nixon's Justice Department. But I look back and Dad's presidency was not that long, two and a half years, under a thousand days. And if you think about it, when he took over, the Vietnam war, Cold War, all those, the economy. When he left office, we were out of Vietnam. We had gotten all the troops home from Vietnam. The Dow Jones was back over a thousand points. Inflation had been cut from 14% down to about five percent, created four million new jobs. The economy was rolling again.

But what's the one thing he's remembered for the most? The Nixon pardon. And I go back to-- I think it's all summed up with Tip O'Neill, who brings back a different type of politics. Dad and Tip O'Neill, former Speaker of the House, were great friends. And Tip O'Neill wrote in his book, he said-- I'm going to paraphrase it, but it'll be very close: "God has been very good to America. During the Civil War, he sent Abraham Lincoln. And during Watergate, he sent Gerald Ford, the right man at the right time to heal the nation."

And I think that's what Dad looked at, is the Nixon pardon so encumbered Congress. It encumbered the presidency, Nixon himself (there were still criminal charges pending) that he had to clear the deck to get on with the business of the country. And the only way to do it was to pardon Nixon.

I remember, I raised my hand when this whole thing came up and said, "Dad," you know, "...people are going to kill you. They're going to crucify you. You can't do this. I mean, Nixon, he was wrong." I think that's the one thing that Dad probably would tell you today if he was here. He did a very poor job of explaining to the American people why he pardoned Richard Nixon. It may have been the American people were too angry at the time. They couldn't have heard it even if he gave a good explanation.

But I remember sitting with him and talking. And he explained that a President was like a father of a family and had to lead a family. And I remember him looking at me. I caused a lot of problems in my household. He looked at me and he said, you know, "Steve, if I prosecuted you for everything you did to divide our family," you know, "...carried it out to the letter of the law, our family would be ripped apart. But I, as your father, give you grace and mercy at times for the betterment of the family."

And that's what we do at home. And that's, I think, the way dad looked at it with the American-- the country. It was for the good of the country to pardon Nixon, get him out of the way so that the nation could heal. And trust me-- We were discussing at lunch, you know, I don't think when Dad pardoned Richard Nixon, he'd ever think he would be up here with Senator Ted Kennedy years later, and they would be congratulating each other on the pardon. And time heals things and gives you a new perspective.

BENTON BECKER: Let me just jump in for a second, Steve. It seems appropriate time to talk to this audience about this. And that is that, about two weeks, three weeks before the issue into the pardon in September (the pardon is September of '74) I had occasion to meet with Leon Jaworski, who was the special prosecutor. We talked about, what is the Ford Administration going to be doing if anything with respect to Richard Nixon and the papers and the tapes? Jaworski wanted the tapes for the criminal prosecutions.

And Leon told us, Leon told Phil Buchen and myself, told us that, number one, the grand jury that was meeting in Washington was, in his words, very, very anxious to vote and indict Richard Nixon. Every day that he would go into that grand jury meeting, the grand jurors would say, "When are we going to vote, Mr. Jaworski?" And he said, "They're very anxious to do it." They wanted to charge Richard Nixon.

Secondly, and most, we thought, very, very important, Leon told us that when and if the grand jury charges Richard Nixon, so long as he, Leon Jaworski, was the special

prosecutor, he would not, under any circumstances, walk into a courtroom to try Richard Nixon for the criminal charges, at least for a minimum of two years, probably three. He said, he needed time for all the dust to settle before he would even consider walking into a courtroom to try Richard Nixon.

Now, you take what Carla has told you about the state of affairs in the country at that time, the pressure on the new President to direct himself to foreign affairs, to economic issues, the domestic issues that had been virtually ignored, and within that same time period, to live within the two- to three-year period of the pending Watergate trial of Richard Nixon. That played an important part on President Ford's mind in giving consideration to the pardon. It was a very wise way of approaching it.

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: I also wonder whether there was a triggering, maybe one of several triggering events. Again, Gerald Ford had been an Eagle Scout. And he remained an Eagle Scout after thirty years in politics. And there's this wonderful human quality which, you know, might be termed a certain naïveté, because he believed the best of people. I think the thing about Watergate that shocked him the most was that his old friend, Richard Nixon, lied to him. He never really could accept that. I don't think he ever got over that.

But anyway, August 28th, he's been President for less than three weeks. He's about to have his first East Room press conference. And he, naively, having spent three weeks immersing himself in all of these problems, believed that the press would want to talk about Greece and Turkey and the war over Cyprus and inflation. Do you know what the rate of inflation was in July of 1974? For one month, it was 3.7%. That's what he found on his desk when he became President. And there were a whole host of these, foreign as well as domestic.

And he believed that's what the press would want to talk about. Well, guess what? The press only wanted to talk about Richard Nixon and his tapes and his papers and his legal prospects. And frankly, Ford didn't handle it very well. And he was upset with himself afterwards. But I think he was also upset with the press corps. I think he was upset with the universe in general, and probably most upset that Richard Nixon had put him in that situation. But I think it was a triggering event that illustrated to him, if not now, when?

BENTON BECKER: That's interesting. Because immediately following that time, just prior to the Labor Day weekend, I met with-- He asked me to come upstairs and [audio cut-out] 7:00, 8:00 at night. And he had four or five questions with respect to his presidential pardoning power that he wanted me to take a look at in a very quiet way with no one else knowing about, wanting to know if his presidential pardoning power allowed pardons pre-indictment, pre-conviction, allowed-- a presidential pardon, what would the effect of a presidential pardon have on a possible subsequent state prosecution in California or something of that nature. He wanted to know whether a pardon could be refused if offered, and what were the implications of all of that.

And so I did undertake, during that time period, shortly after that press conference, to sit down with the law books quietly somewhere and come up with some answers to that. And the answers were, of course, presidential pardons can be given pre-indictment, pre-conviction. They technically do not affect state prosecution, but as a matter of relationships between the sovereign Federal government and the sovereign states, comity, they allow-- the states would honor a presidential pardon.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: Could I just ask a question? What was the role of Al Hague during this period?

BENTON BECKER: I was thinking-- I was wondering what the defamation laws were in Massachusetts.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: I guess that's an answer. Can we step back from this [simultaneous conversation]--

BENTON BECKER: Very active — General Hague was very active.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: I mean, we heard a lot about President Ford's relationship with prominent Democrats like Tip O'Neill. I was wondering about Gerald Ford as a member of the Republican Party and how he dealt with what was happening inside the Republican Party at the time. He, of course, would be challenged for nomination as President in 1976 by Ronald Reagan. He would initially appoint, the subject of Richard's biography, Nelson Rockefeller to be his Vice President, and then in the 1976 campaign replace him with Robert Dole. And so I was wondering if you maybe want to comment about Gerald Ford, the Republican Gerald Ford, the presidential politician as well.

CARLA HILLS: Well again, I think his approach was driven by principle. Now, as has been said, he had no transition. And yet he assembled, in a very short period of time, one of the really great Cabinets. He appointed two presidents of universities, one from the North, one from the South, Ed Levy from Chicago, Ed Matthews from the South, great Civil Rights leader, Bill Coleman, graduated first in his class at Harvard, was law clerk to Justice Frankfurter--

__ : --first African-American law clerk--

CARLA HILLS: --first African-American law clerk and then Secretary of Transportation--

BENTON BECKER: --second counsel to Thurgood Marshall in Brown versus the Board of Education.

CARLA HILLS: I mean, if you read Bill Coleman's resume, we wouldn't finish today. His Secretary of Labor was John Dunlop from Harvard who was dean then of the School of Industrial Relations. He brought in-- He kept people like Henry Kissinger who had been with President Nixon. He kept Bill Simon, who was Secretary of Treasury, and came out of Wall Street, and knew about economics. He assembled a really extraordinary Cabinet that made a difference. And I think he had the capacity to listen and to talk.

It was a very different White House then than it is today. President Ford, when there was a debate between two Cabinet officers on a policy issue, would bring them in and hear first from one, and then from the other. And he always had good qualitative questions because he knew government, and he knew government very well. And he would decide from the bench.

And as an old lawyer, I had never been before someone who had the capacity to make a decision, in my view a right decision, but also time was of the essence. This garnered appreciation. I mean, we could spend the whole time talking about the pardon. But the fact is, President Ford was a spectacular president in terms of his governance. He was a firm believer in Federalism. The first piece of legislation that he signed was the Housing and Community Development Bill of 1975. It was signed on the day he was sworn into office or the day after.

This changed government. In the housing arena, we gave localities the choice of new, existing, or rehabilitated housing because the Southwest, a newer community, they didn't have old housing that needed to be rehabilitated nearly as much as, say, in Boston where there's a lot of old housing stock. That choice had never been given before. It was dictated from Washington. And on the community development, we had, before President Ford, seven categorical programs. Now I'll tell you, it takes a brave mayor to keep his

hands in the pockets when he knows he can get money for parks, eradication, and so forth.

President Ford's legislation said to the communities, "We will give you a block of money and you can spend it as you see fit. You will have a hearing at the state or local level. It will be publicized. And we will distribute the money, not on who you know, but on the basis of population, poverty, and age of infrastructure." And believe me, those funds were efficiently used in a way to, in those old communities, fix curbing and lighting, in the new communities, to put in a park, what the community really needed.

And it not only was more efficient, but it tended to work against the cynicism that the electorate can develop when they see the mayor spending money, not on the community's first priority, but on the nineteenth priority because that's where the money was. So as a man who knew how to govern a nation, and knew how to work with the Congress and change programs, he could not get less than an A-plus-plus.

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: It was a different White House and it was a very different Republican Party. That fact cannot, it seems to me, be overemphasized. Go back to the mid-1970s. Ed Brook represented the state in the United States Senate. You had what were called Rockefeller Republicans. They didn't meet in a phone booth; they had a whole wing of the Party. And indeed, they had to be taken into consideration on Capitol Hill and in the White House.

The center of gravity of Gerald Ford's Republican Party was in the Midwest. It was not in the South, as is the case today. It was not-- He was, arguably, the most conservative President since Calvin Coolidge. But he wasn't a talk radio conservative. When John Paul Stevens-- When he had a vacancy, when Justice Douglas resigned and President Ford had a search for his replacement, and he settled on sheer intellectual brilliance-- He

read his opinions, but it was sheer academic skills that persuaded him to nominate Judge John Paul Stevens.

At Stevens' confirmation hearings, nobody asked him about abortion. That's a last in American history. Gerald Ford was of the generation of Midwestern conservatives who harbored a healthy skepticism about the ability of government overnight to bring about utopia. However, he had also lived through the Depression. He had known hard times himself. He had benefited from the generosity of others. He was strongly pro-Civil Rights. He believed very much in the Party of Lincoln. And he also, I think it's safe to say (and this became clear later in life) along with that healthy skepticism about government as social engineer, he believed consistently, as a conservative, he didn't particularly want the government in the boardroom. He didn't particularly want it in the classroom. And he certainly didn't want it in the bedroom.

And there were a whole host of what we call social issues which we were simply not on the agenda because they were none of government's business. And when President and Mrs. Ford became increasingly marooned in the Republican Party in the last years of their lives, leading the pro-choice faction, they hadn't changed. The Party had changed. The culture had changed. The President went to his grave believing he was the same Midwestern individualistic conservative that he'd always been.

STEVEN FORD: It's interesting, because I can remember growing up as a kid in our house. From a very young age, we thought of Dad as a moderate, middle of the road Republican. And you found the answers on both sides, and you met in the middle. And there was compromise. Answers weren't found on one end or the other; the answers were found in the middle.

And I can always remember him saying-- As a young kid, he'd say-- He was so against big Federal government. And around our dinner table, there was a statement that was said

all the time. Dad would say, “A government that’s big enough to give you everything is big enough to take everything away from you.” And that was just where he came from. And I think, Richard, you’re exactly right. He would not recognize the Republican Party today as he sees it.

That also caused a problem, I think, in the Convention in Kansas City for the election of ’76 where he barely beat Ronald Reagan for the nomination for the Republican Party. It was hard to get the conservatives of the Republican to come campaign. And that was a problem. It happened.

You know, when we came out of the Convention in August, 1976 in Kansas City, Dad was behind Jimmy Carter 31 points in the polls. And everything said, it’s over. You can’t make up that much difference in a couple months. We all know history, and Dad lost by about one percent of the vote. So he did close the gap. But it was very hard to-- We were talking to get the Reagan people to come work with us, campaign for us. The conservative right of the Republican Party at that time kind of abandoned Dad, thought it was over, he couldn’t beat Carter.

So it was a very different time. And Dad would not probably fit into the Republican, particularly the last eight years, the fiscal conservancy of keeping budgets and deficits down. He would be rolling over in his grave right now, I hate to tell you. But that’s the truth.

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: In this building, it makes sense to bring to the attention of-- President Kennedy initiated the Office of Economic Opportunity, OEO. In fact, Sargent Shriver was the first administrator of OEO. Richard Nixon, in ’68, campaigned against OEO: “As President, I will get rid of OEO. I will gut it. I will zero-budget it.” And that’s in fact what Richard Nixon did. He zero-budgeted OEO after Congress had passed a budget allotment for it. That case had to go all the way to the Supreme Court.

And the Supreme Court had to tell Richard Nixon, “You cannot zero budget something that Congress has budgeted.”

When Gerry Ford became President, within the first month of his presidency, he told the Congress to pass a budget for OEO, a new budget for OEO. And he would sign it. He saved OEO, the entire agency, which was allocated to helping disadvantaged people, people who had no funds, no money, and were in need of government assistance. That was the fiscal conservative in action who was really feeling his Midwestern goodness toward the American people.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: In a few minutes, we’re going to open the floor to questions. So I thought before we get to that, I would give you a chance to just think about President Ford’s legacy. And what is it that you think that we today in The United States of 2009 could learn from him and from his time in office?

STEVEN FORD: I’ll start. And I’ll approach it from the sort of personal side. About four months before Dad passed away, I was down in a Federal prison in Beaumont, Texas giving a talk to about two hundred prisoners. And these were men that were recovering from alcohol and drug addiction and everything. And I have fifteen years of sobriety. I’m a recovering alcoholic.

So I was down there trying to cheerlead them on and let them know what, you know, my mom’s leadership in my life, good 12-step program, grace of God in my life had done for me. And we were talking. And one of those men asked me, you know, “Tell us about your father and who he is.”

And I thought about it. I didn’t know when, but I knew that at some point very soon, I would be at a state funeral for Dad’s life, and didn’t know if that was two months, four months, a year. And I said to that young man, I said, “You know, someday, I’m going to

be standing on the steps of the Capitol. And they're going to have a state funeral for my father." And I said, "At that time, most important thing to me as his son is not going to be what he did to get us out of Vietnam or get the Dow Jones back over a thousand points or cut inflation or any of those things. It's going to be how he led our family, how he showed us how to be a great father, how he showed us how to be a great husband to Mom."

And one of those guys got up and asked me, "Tell us a great story about who you thought your dad was." And the story I gave him was a story I'll give you right here. I think it spoke of him. It happened long before he was President. He was at the University of Michigan playing football. We went back about fifteen years ago. They retired my dad's jersey there at the University of Michigan.

And after the ceremony, hundred and ten thousand people in the stand, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Dad's got a tear coming down his cheek. A man pulls me aside and says, "I want to tell you a story about your father's life when he was here at Michigan." And he says, "Your dad and I-- You know, your dad played in 1932 and '33 on Michigan's team. And they were undefeated national champions, ten and oh."

And he says, "In 1934, Michigan was supposed to play a team, Georgia Tech. And Georgia Tech was an all-white school at that time" This is 1934. And Georgia Tech said they would not take the field, they would not play the game if one of Michigan's players (their only black player, a man named Willis Ward) suited up for that game.

And the man telling me the story said, "Your father was so incensed as a young twenty year-old kid at the University of Michigan"-- he was captain of the team; he was an all-American-- that his good friend, Willis Ward, could not play in that game that your father quit the University of Michigan football team to make a stand for his friend, Willis Ward in 1934.

Now, Willis Ward found out about it. And he went to my dad and he thanked him for the stand he was going to make. But he convinced my dad to go back on the team. He said, “You’re captain of the team. You should play. I’ll sit down.” And, you know, this isn’t a story about Georgia Tech, because there were a lot of other colleges and universities doing the exact same thing at that time.

So my dad went back on the team. Now, think about this — Michigan had come off two undefeated seasons, ’32 and ’33, ten and oh, national champions. In 1934, their record was one in eight. They won one game and lost eight. The only team they beat was Georgia Tech, nine to two. And I remember standing on the field. I’d never heard that story about my father’s life.

And this man looks at me, standing there, 110,000 people in the stands. He goes, “Do you know what character is?” And to be honest with you, I couldn’t speak. I had tears running down my face. I had not heard that story. Said, “Character is what you do when nobody’s watching. And nobody was watching your father’s life as a young twenty year-old kid, the University of Michigan, willing to make a stand for his friend, Willis Ward, this black man,” who went on to become a Federal judge, if I remember right. But that is a story that speaks to who Dad was. And that was long before he became President, so.

CARLA HILLS: I think that he demonstrated that leadership capacity in government. I think back on the books that have been written about him. John Osborne, who wrote *The White House Watch*, commented immediately after his presidency that Gerald Ford had left the office in a manner that his successor could either benefit from or only build upon. Nothing would have to be changed.

And Jim Cannon wrote a wonderful book about President Ford, wherein he said, you know, “For all the good that he has done, he must be remembered most for the manner in

which he built up his trustworthiness with those with whom he had to deal.” I look back on it and I think he really contributed much more than building trustworthiness and bringing dignity back to the office. He really gave us a primer on government, a primer of what the government, the Federal government can do and what it cannot do well.

And if you look at it, from the time he served to today, had we more regularly followed his primer, in my view, we’d have been a whole lot better off. So I regard him as a real expert in governance and a man of enormous human qualities of honor, trustworthiness, and unassuming personality, the most modest of people. To have given his nation so much is really quite remarkable.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: Let me thank the panel very much. Can we thank the panel? We’ll now invite questions from the audience.

[housekeeping remarks]

QUESTION: Mr. Smith, what is the history behind President Johnson empanelling Gerry Ford on the page(?) that you mentioned? And secondly, did the President, President Ford, have anything in his Congress and presidential times with David Stockman?

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: Okay, let me tell you about the-- The Warren Commission was actually the latest in a series of, if you will, recognitions by his congressional colleagues. I remember the President used to talk about, as a young congressman (he’d only been there a couple terms) and he was told by one of the old bulls, “Be outside such-and-such committee room, 10:00 Wednesday morning,” nothing other than that.

And it turned out that he was being initiated into what then passed for congressional oversight of the nation's entire intelligence operations. In those days, five or six congressmen would meet once a year in order. They'd meet with the head of the CIA and basically all of the various intelligence agencies behind closed doors, no staff, no notes were taken. It would go on as long as anyone had any questions.

And the interesting thing about it was, this was bipartisan. Obviously the Democrats ran the House. And they had decided that this un-flashy young congressman from west Michigan, who did not suffer from presidential fever-- his great desire in life was to be Speaker of the House, not anything at the Executive Branch-- was trustworthy, that he wasn't weak. But more than that, he had established a reputation early on-- Steve mentioned this earlier-- This was a guy who took home work on the weekend. This was guy who knew his stuff. He asked the best questions. He'd read everything. Basically there are workhorses and there are show horses. And Ford, from a very early point, made it clear that he was a workhorse, that he was someone who could be trusted, who wasn't going to grandstand.

So later on in the late '50s when the first Commission is created to oversee NASA, the space program, naturally Gerald Ford is asked to be part of that. Years later, when his museum was built in Grand Rapids, he made it very clear he did not ... (inaudible) wouldn't want to put a statue of the President. He said, "I don't want any statues of myself." ...(inaudible) "Well, there has to be a statue of something." So if you go there today, there's a statue of an astronaut, which at least reflects his interest in the space program.

So by the time that the Warren Commission became a necessity, in that context, it's perhaps not surprising that Lyndon Johnson should decide that Gerald Ford would be an appropriate member. I'm not aware, as far as David Stockman, I'm not aware of any association that he may have had.

QUESTION: You mentioned your father's football career. He was also a skier and I know a strong swimmer, arguably the most athletic President we ever had. But he was portrayed by comedians and the press as kind of [simultaneous conversation]--

STEVEN FORD: --Chevy Chase--

QUESTION: Yeah, was Chevy Chase a dirty word in your-- How much did that portrayal hurt him politically? And did it hurt him personally? Was he offended by it?

STEVEN FORD: I can tell you, in our family, I think it hurt the kids and Mom more than anybody. And he used to take us aside and said, "Look — if you're going to be in politics, you've got to have thick skin." He would laugh right along with it. And actually he and Chevy Chase became good friends later. He knew that you had to have a sense of humor. You couldn't take yourself that seriously. He loved to ski. He's an all-American football player. He just didn't think that much about himself, to be honest with you, that-- He thought what he did in his life, how he led his family and what he- - you know, they would judge him someday for that. But you had to keep a sense of humor about the whole thing.

QUESTION: One of the few passions I've had in life has been studying the American presidency. I have to say, President Ford shaped my view of public service more than any other President. I regard him as-- In viewing different legacies of Presidents, there are only two — Abraham Lincoln and Gerald Ford. And I think that many people now are comparing George Washington to Ronald Reagan in terms of creating a persona that is very similar when you compare the two. And of course President Ford said, "I'm a Ford, not a Lincoln." Certainly remember that.

I was just wondering what, Mr. Ford and Mr. Smith particularly, the relationship that he formed with Jimmy Carter, which we now see as-- We have George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. We have the relationships of the former President and the incumbent, whatever. But the people that competed against one another-- I know Mr. Ford and Mr. Carter, "Whichever one of us passes first, the other will give the eulogy at the other's funeral." And that was a really remarkable thing. But just also his-- one last thing-- what President Ford thought of George W. Bush. Thank you.

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: Well, Carter is, you know, easy to answer. It took awhile, first of all. One of the great blessings of Gerald Ford was he lived a long time after he left the White House. I mean, poor Lyndon Johnson, you know, died two days before the Vietnam peace agreement was announced. President Ford had the great blessing, among other things, of living long enough to see, for example, that most people would come around to his way of thinking on the pardon and to develop a really good friendship, very close friendship with the man he'd run against in 1976.

Now, as I said, it took awhile. I've been working for the last almost year on an oral history project about the Ford years. And without naming names, I can tell you that on the morning after his defeat and for some time thereafter, he was angry with himself for losing. And he said, on more than one occasion, "I can't believe I lost to a peanut farmer." And it took awhile for him to get beyond that.

Now, during the Carter presidency, the relationship began to develop. It's not well-known, but the basics for the Panama Canal Treaty were actually negotiated during the Ford presidency. And President Carter inherited that and spent a lot of political capital to make it happen. He asked President Ford if he would lobby Republican members of the Senate. And the President said he would be glad to do that.

The relationship really began, though, on that long plane flight back. Remember when the Presidents went over to the Sadat funeral? And Richard Nixon skipped out of town in Cairo, leaving Ford and Carter to make the trip back. And it was a long flight. And they discovered they had a whole lot of things in common, and that what they had in common transcended their differences. And they became increasingly close. And it extended to their wives. Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Carter, for example, testified jointly on Capitol Hill on behalf of mental health issues, and drug and chemical dependency issues.

And I think it really came full circle. I don't know how Steve felt, but I will never forget at the funeral in Grand Rapids-- I happened to be one of the eulogists. And Jimmy Carter had preceded me. And I will never forget looking up. And you're in a fog. And you look over, and Rosalyn Carter is weeping. Now, you know, you don't make that up. And it is true. They had an agreement; whichever went first would eulogize the other. But there is a sequel to that, in that President Ford did write something before he passed away to be shared with the audience when Jimmy Carter's time comes.

STEVEN FORD: I'll expand just a little bit on that. It does go back to the Sadat visit and they spent a lot of time together. And I think a genuine friendship was developed there. And dad just had such respect. I understand it now. I've been reading Jimmy Carter's book about his childhood. I look and I read that book, and I can see how the two of them coming from the roots they came from — Dad from the Midwest, Carter from a farm in, you know, Plains, Georgia — just the family structure and everything, I can see how they would get that bond. They may differ politically in areas, but he sensed Jimmy Carter was such a genuine man about his desire.

Dad loved being a public servant. I mean, he didn't do it for the glory. He didn't do it for the salary. He loved being a public servant. And he always told us kids, if it's not in your blood to be a public-- don't do it. It needs to be in your blood. And I think he sensed that about Carter, too, his humanitarian ways. It was a great relationship.

QUESTION: What if Ronald Reagan had won the Republican National Convention in August, 1976? What would have happened then? Would he have won the presidency then?

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: I think Jimmy Carter would have-- Ronald Reagan, 1980 was the perfect year for Ronald Reagan. The fact is that I think if it had been another year, a majority of the electorate would have said, "He's too old. He's too California. He's too Hollywood. He's too right wing." But by 1980, in many ways, the electorate had become, in some ways, radicalized by what they perceived to be a country that was adrift.

People forget, you know, double-digit inflation, record high interest rates. There was a sense both in terms of the domestic economy and of course the drama of the Americans being held hostage in Tehran, that set up a situation, I think, in which it was almost tailor-made for the challenger. And if you remember, there was only one debate that year. And, you know, in the course of that [simultaneous conversation]--

BRUCE SCHULMAN: Exactly one week before Election Day.

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: One week before the election. In the course of that what one debate-- What Ronald Reagan had to do in 1980 was not dissimilar to what Barack Obama had to do in 2008. There was a critical mass of people who wanted something different, but they had to be persuaded that this particular agent of change was someone who wouldn't be too radical an agent of change, someone with whom they would be comfortable. And Reagan did it in the course of that one debate, as I think Barack Obama did in the course of the three debates and other events as well.

BENTON BECKER: There is a body of thought that suggests very strongly that the '76 election was lost in large measure because of the lack of participation and energy of the conservative wing of the Republican Party. And to some extent, that's really quite true, I think. That of course would not have been the case if Ronald Reagan had been the nominee in '76. And I think going one step beyond that, picking up on the theme that President Ford was traditionally a team player, President Ford would have, I believe, after a Convention maybe lost to Ronald Reagan in '76, would have gathered all of his troops together, and they would have worked just as hard for Ronald Reagan as they did for Gerry Ford. Consequently, I think Ronald Reagan might very well have won that election.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: Another way of thinking about it of course is, what if Ford had eked out the victory that he so narrowly lost in 1976? It's hard to imagine Ronald Reagan ever becoming President. And the subsequent history of the Republican Party and the country would have played out a long a very different path.

STEVEN FORD: I was thinking about, you know, when Reagan got the nomination in 1980 to run against Carter, President Carter, if you remember, his first choice of Vice President was my father.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: They called that the dream team before there was a dream team.

STEVEN FORD: I can remember, you know, Dad getting that call. And he talked to Mom. I think he turned it down a couple days later. I'm not sure if anybody really thought it would ever go through. But I think my mother was the one that really put the 'no' on it. She wasn't going to go back into political life. And so instead, he picked George Bush, Sr., and then the other George Bush came along later, so. Maybe I would have been President. That's the new history right there.

CARLA HILLS: We're making news.

QUESTION: Thank you, and thank you so much to all of you. This has been really wonderful and fascinating history for me as a Democrat to know more about this presidency. I would like to ask several of you. There have been some strong intimations of the relationship, that powerful relationship between Betty Ford and President Ford. I remember being quite young and having so much admiration for her when I would hear of the things she would say and stand for. One of you mentioned that that relationship, they were truly inseparable, their history together. Clearly, that's represented by the fact that President Ford invited the members of the proponents for the ERA to come to his office, and also that he appointed you, Ms. Hills, to be on his Cabinet. And so I would love to hear a little bit more about that relationship, how much of an influence Mrs. Ford was on her husband during his presidency. And maybe, Mr. Ford, you're maybe the guy that knows that the most. But I am curious--

__: Called pillow talk.

QUESTION: You don't have to share personal things. I'm just curious about her influence on his work and his philosophies, his growing(?) philosophies, from any of you. Thank you.

STEVEN FORD: Well, I would just say, Dad just so loved Mother, I mean, and she really blossomed and was-- It was not-- They weren't separate-- She was part of that presidency. The thing I can't forget is, early on, the first month or two of his presidency, my mom came up with breast cancer. At that time, 1974, mastectomy for a woman, that was a closet disease women didn't talk about. There was a great deal of shame on that. And I will never forget my Dad, Mom standing out there, doing a press conference, and

Dad holding Mom's hand, and them talking to the press, saying, "We are, together, going to take the shame off this disease," and supported her, stood right by her.

And that carried-- You know, and that was the first cause that she championed, and Equal Rights Amendment also. But then the alcoholism came along after Dad got out of the White House and when they were back in Palm Springs a couple years later. Mom went through alcoholism. And I guess the best way I would describe it is, it's like a climbing team trying to climb Mt. Everest together, and one of your partners gets sick and has to stop at, you know, 24,000 feet.

It's not a victory if you go to the top by yourself. And Dad never would have felt any victory if he hadn't had Mom with him on all of that. And so whether it be the alcoholism or the breast cancer, he always went back and stood by her side and waited for her to be ready. And they moved together and they were a couple, so.

But she-- You know, listen — she stirred things up quite a bit. And he allowed her that independence. He thought it was wonderful. She was not a quiet First Lady. And she did not always agree with him.

QUESTION: That speaks to him, too, I think. I mean, that speaks to who the man was. Thank you.

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: Betty Ford is a watershed First Lady. In that first month, she also let it be known that-- She said, "Okay. If I have to go to the White House, I'll go. But I'm too old to change." And, for example, the Fords intended to go on sharing the same bed as they had for a quarter of a century. And there were actually concerned Americans who wrote the White House to protest. But that was nothing compared to the famous *60 Minutes* interview. If you go back and read the transcript of

that interview, Betty Ford said things that I do not believe Hillary Clinton could have said as First Lady.

She talked with astonishing candor about things that lots of mothers, no doubt sitting around the kitchen table worried about and thought about and sometimes talked about with their children, whether it was the use of drugs or her support for the Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* decision, or, yes, what would she do if her daughter said she was having an affair. And Betty Ford was constitutionally incapable of fibbing or finessing when a straight answer was called for.

And the immediate reaction was, as you might expect, all of these good gray political advisors around the President said, “Oh my god,” you know, “...you’ve just lost us a million votes. And Ronald Reagan’s going to run against us,” and so on, so on. And my favorite one-- Maria von Trapp, remember Maria von Trapp from *Sound of Music*? Well, Mrs. Ford was not one of her favorite things. She wrote a letter to the President saying that, “Unless you get your wife to shut up, you have no chance to win in 1976.”

But guess what? America was changing. In the wake of Vietnam and Watergate, candor was in. And all of a sudden-- This was a presidency that was defined as an attempt to restore trust by being open and honest. No one was more open or honest than Betty Ford. Her poll ratings went to 75%. She said, “I wish,” you know, “Gerry could have my poll numbers.” But by 1976, there were campaign buttons that read, “Betty’s Husband for President.” And we’ve not gone back since back.

STEVEN FORD: In Dad’s end of the White House, there was a great deal of talk by his advisors saying, you know, “Can’t you go quiet your wife down about the Equal Rights Amendment,” and things like that. And he challenged all of them, sitting in the room there. He said, you know, “If you’d like to go tell her that, go right ahead.” And his comment was, “No one got up from their seat to go tell Mom, so.”

QUESTION: I was wondering, how do you think he handled the swine flu epidemic back then?

BRUCE SCHULMAN: The swine flu epidemic — how did the President handle the swine flu epidemic. It just started in [simultaneous conversation] the end of 1976--

RICHARD NORTON SMITH: ...(inaudible) Ft. Dixon, New Jersey, military base. This was discovered. Now the President had a meeting in the Cabinet room with Dr. Salk and Sabin and other giants in this field. And the question was, you know, what should the government be doing? Should we in fact, be administering this vaccine that had been, I guess, developed. And they all told him to go ahead. And lo and behold, people started dropping like flies.

In some ways, we lucked out because it never became a pandemic. It, in fact-- My god, you wonder what the media would have done in those days. But it actually sort of snuffed out very close to where it began. But the criticism has been made over the years that this vaccine was in fact administered to people and, in some cases at least, it turned out to be fatal.

QUESTION: It just so happens, I had the privilege of working in the Ford White House. So everything that you've said today, I just take to heart and can agree. From a worker-bee level, it was a privilege to work under your dad. And just so happens, I have a picture here of the group of people who gathered in the room to talk about the swine flu epidemic in '76. Your dad is in this picture, as are Drs. Sabin and Salk. And the funny thing is, I worked in the domestic policy staff for the guy who headed up the health. He was the liaison to Mr. Matthews in the Department of Health and Human Services. And so when the swine flu broke, they gathered all these medical experts to try to figure out what to do.

But the point of what I want to say is, in this picture, in the corner around all these experts in the field, there's a picture of the swine flu virus — no statistics, no data, just a huge blown up picture of the virus. And I think they felt that maybe that would be inspirational to try to figure out how to handle the problem. But anyway, it was quite a privilege to be there. And thank you for all the kind things you've said about him. Every one of them are true.

QUESTION: You've spoken a lot about Ford kind of healing the nation. But considering how controversial his pardon of President Nixon was, how much do you feel that really helped heal the nation instead of ignite it into controversy?

STEVEN FORD: And Benton might be a better person, but I would say this. What they saw was the importance of-- The nation had to get onto more important business — the Vietnam war, the Cold War, the economy. And I think what Richard and Benton and Carla were all saying is, this Nixon in the headlines (there was still criminal trial pending, things like that) was distracting from the real issues of the country, to heal the nation, to going to people jobs again, to get inflation down. And you could let it string on and on and on. And, as Leon Jaworski, the special prosecutor said, "This could take years."

You had to get it off the table and so you could go work on these other issues. And in my opinion, that was the right thing to do. It did get the focus on the real issues. You know, healing doesn't take place like that. You have to refocus the energy of the country. And the energy of the country was so much anger about Richard Nixon, that it wasn't directed towards these other areas.

BENTON BECKER: The healing process, I think, the patient is cured or begins to be cured the day after the Carter election when so many of the newspapers around the country that editorially opposed the pardon back in September of '74, write editorials

about the Ford presidency and the pardon that's 180 degrees different than what they wrote two and a half years earlier.

The other part of that curing process, not to be ignored is, the Congress of the United States, the House empanelled a special committee to investigate the background of the pardon. The subcommittee of the judiciary committee of the House chaired by Congressman Hungate who later became a Federal judge. And they issued subpoenas left and right. Everybody within a five hundred mile radius of the pardon was going to be called before that committee and testifying. That was going to go on and on and on.

President Ford said, "No, we're not going to have that. We're not going to have it. This pardon is to try to put Watergate behind us. We're not going to extend it and extend it with more of this kind of testimony."

And what he did was something that no President had ever done before, ever, ever done before. He went up to the House Committee himself when they convened to investigate the pardon, sat down at the witness chair and said, "My name is Gerald Ford. I'm the President of the United States. I issued the pardon to Richard Nixon. I have cleared the tables of every appointment I have for the rest of this week. And I'll do it for as long as you want. I'll answer every question you have, and I won't leave until you're fully satisfied." That really is quite remarkable. There is some [simultaneous conversation]--

___: ...(inaudible) happening today?

BENTON BECKER: Well the comparison that I've made (and I don't mean to be political in any way) but the comparison I made is, as opposed to Bill Clinton's pardons the day of his departure from office, Bill Clinton wrote a piece for *The New York Times* rather than responding to these kind of questions. And the questions were not easy questions. There were some tough questions in there. And he stayed and stayed and

stayed, satisfied them. And that was the end of it. So I think it clearly did have a healing process. Perhaps the patient is ultimately and fully cured in this room when Gerald Ford receives a *Profiles in Courage Award* from the Kennedy family.

BRUCE SCHULMAN: Well thank you very much.

[applause]

BRUCE SCHULMAN: And thank you all for coming out on this beautiful Sunday afternoon to join us in this discussion.