Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the House

Taped November 21, 2014

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I: The Gingrich Revolution (0:15 – 26:08)

KRISTOL: Welcome back to CONVERSATIONS. I'm Bill Kristol, and I'm very pleased to be joined today by former Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich.

GINGRICH: Good to be with you.

KRISTOL: Thanks for being here. Let's get right into one of the high-water marks of my time in Washington and my time following politics, which was the Republican victory in the House, both houses of Congress in 1994, something that was very unexpected at the time. People have sort of forgotten that. A real inflection point I think in American politics. For 40 years, Republicans had never controlled the House and what for 18 of the subsequent 22?

GINGRICH: 18 of the last 22 years.

KRISTOL: And until 2016, Republicans will have. So it's a real moment, you know and young people kind of assume when Republicans control the House, that's kind of the way things work. But it sure didn't look that way to those of us who grew up when I grew up or when you grew up.

GINGRICH: Yeah I think even the night before the election, most reporters and most analysts thought, well, they gained 20, 30 seats.

Karen Tumulty who's now at the *Washington Post* covered me for *Time*. I was her first big assignment, and she spent a week with me on the road. And at the end of it, the editor said, "We're pulling you off because you've gone native, you actually think they can win." She told me that day, she said, you know, she said, "When you're out there and you saw it, you had this feeling this was going to be different but nobody inside the establishment had any clue."

KRISTOL: And so when did you think it was going to happen, and let's talk about the two years before and how you made it happen.

GINGRICH: Well, on September 17, Joe Gaylord who was designing it said – we were in a planning session on an airplane with Dan Meyer, who was my Chief of Staff, and with Dick

Armey's Chief of Staff, Kerry Knott – and I said, "Okay, are we planning Minority Leader or are we planning Speaker?" And Gaylord said, "Well, you better be planning Speaker because you're gonna be." And Dan Meyer, we were literally just taking off from National on a private plane to go on a circuit of fundraising. And Meyer said, "Wait a second, you know before we go a step further, tell us what this means." So Gaylord started in Maine, went through 435 districts by memory and was off by one seat.

And it was the decisive moment and probably one of the mistakes of my Speakership was not stopping at that moment. It was probably because of the sense of jinxing things. I mean, we had not won in 40 years. You didn't want to lift your eye up off the ball and assume you're gonna win and be Thomas Dewey. And so we didn't bring in the level of talent we probably needed to. We were jumping from Minority Whip to not just Speaker but leader of a national movement winning a decisive election. And that was too big a jump for the level of experience we had. And it's one of the things I look back that clearly was a mistake.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's interesting. One forgets. I kind of think of you as, of course, you were the Leader before you became Speaker but you were Whip, you were number two.

GINGRICH: Yeah, Michel was still – but he was very generous.

KRISTOL: So Bob Michel had been leader for 10 years.

GINGRICH: Michel became leader in the fall of 1980 after the election, so he took over in '81.

KRISTOL: So longtime leader. And then you got into the leadership in –

GINGRICH: Well, yeah, what happened was two-fold. One was that I had never planned to be leader. I had always assumed I'd be the chief planner. And I worked with Lott and with Cheney and with Kemp. And Lott went to run for the U.S. Senate. Kemp went to run for president and literally and Cheney was clearly the heir apparent, was going to become leader.

KRISTOL: So Michel is number one and Cheney is number two.

GINGRICH: Right, and Cheney was the Whip. And on a Friday afternoon, Rich Wolf of *USA Today* called me. I was in my Griffin, Georgia office. And he said, "What do you think about Cheney becoming Secretary of Defense?" And I said, "Well that's crazy, I mean he's going to be the next leader, why would you leave to become Secretary of Defense?" He said well – this was like 3:15 – he said, "Well, the press conference is at 4."

And literally as I was hanging up the phone, I realized that I had to run for Whip because none of our guys – we had a whole group of great guys coming up – none of them were quite ready to run for Whip, none of them would have run for Whip. And as a result, the establishment would have put somebody in. And as long as it was Lott, Cheney, or Kemp, they had the drive, the energy, the toughness. I didn't mind being their planner. But I didn't want to get somebody who had no interest in becoming the majority to be the next leader.

KRISTOL: So this – I think people don't know exactly how these internal competitions for leadership work. So it's the spring of '89 and so Dick Cheney is nominated by the President, he gets confirmed as Secretary of Defense, he, of course, leaves the House, and you just say, "I want to run?"

GINGRICH: Well, there's a leadership race.

KRISTOL: Like an actual high school class election.

GINGRICH: It's exactly like a class election. It's a definable universe. It's about 180 members, 178 members. And it was interesting because I literally was able – I had a very good team that time. Mary Brown was our administrative assistant. And I called her about quarter of four on a Friday, I said, "We need to reach every member we can reach this weekend."

KRISTOL: Wow, as a Republican member of the House

GINGRICH: She called all the staff in and said, "Drop everything else you're doing." Broke it up alphabetically and said, "Find out where they'll be."

KRISTOL: Now at this point, you are, as I remember, being in Washington and knowing you pretty well at the time, I mean, you're very prominent, you're the leader of the kind of conservative resurgence in the House but you're not actually a member of leadership, right? So –

GINGRICH: No. I had never won anything. And so in effect, Novak wrote at one point this was the biggest jump, to go from back bench to the second-ranking leader in modern times. But it was very –

KRISTOL: So you decided right away to run.

GINGRICH: I literally decided as I was hanging the phone up. And so by Monday morning – I was very lucky I had people like Joe Barton who – and Tom Bliley – who were very loyal and who said, "I'll go get more votes". I think Barton personally called 35 people that weekend.

And by Monday morning at 8 o'clock, we had 55 votes committed. Nobody else was running yet, and the establishment made a mistake. Michel had asked, Bob had asked Madigan who was the ranking member on Energy and Commerce, he asked him to step down and become ranking on Agriculture to block Jim Jeffords who was from Vermont and who was very liberal for a Republican. Well, so Michel felt he owed Madigan a shot, and Madigan called in an IOU.

If they had picked Henry Hyde, they'd have beaten me. But by not picking Hyde, you now have an Illinois Minority Leader picking an Illinois Republican who doesn't have any particularly good ties on the right. And it set up a moment when the pro-Hyde people could say, "Well if you're not, if Hyde is not allowed to run, I'm for Newt." But they would have been for Hyde. And if you'd combined the Hyde conservatives with the establishment, they would have beaten me probably, oh, 100 to 75 or something like that.

KRISTOL: And so I can't remember. How fast does the actual vote come?

GINGRICH: It's about two or three weeks.

KRISTOL: Yeah, pretty fast.

GINGRICH: And it was a very brutal campaign. At one point, Steve Gunderson had the courage, he took 17 members over to see Michel and say, "Look, you're going to literally split the party if you and the President keep doing this."

KRISTOL: They were against you?

GINGRICH: They were deeply opposed.

KRISTOL: Publicly? I can't remember, was Michel?

GINGRICH: Well, it wasn't – I mean, it was publicly inside the House. It wasn't – it's not how White Houses operate in these kind of things. And Michel was semi-neutral except every person – for example, I had a very good friend who would have been for me but Michel had put him on Intelligence. Michel said, "Look, you owe me." This guy said, "What can I do?" And it was that level of rough and tumble.

And I was told a great story. Literally, it ended up being a one-vote margin. You know, if one had split, it would have been tied. The day, the afternoon before, Bill Broomfield was a Michel loyalist, very traditional Republican, senior member ranking on Foreign Affairs. Got in a public fight with the Democratic chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee who humiliated him in public in a meeting, just ran over him. And after the committee rose, Broomfield turned to his staff director and said, "I'm for Newt." And the guy said, "You're with Michel," he said now, he said, "Newt is the only guy who will stand up to these people." And so it was that kind of stuff where we were picking up sort of votes of desperation.

KRISTOL: Yeah, one forgets just how much the Democrats controlled the House and how strongly, let's say, they controlled the House. I mean –

GINGRICH: When we won, Jim Nussle was put in charge of the transition. Nussle went around with the architect finding offices. Because if you look at the Capitol, it's a much bigger building because it's so symmetrically designed and the windows are so perfectly matching the size of the building. It's a huge building. I think 2,500 people work in it. Well, we –

KRISTOL: And a lot of hidden –

GINGRICH: We kept finding more and more spaces we didn't know existed

KRISTOL: Is that right?

GINGRICH: Because nobody had been – we hadn't had a Republican in power in 40 years. And the Democrats, if you were a senior Democrat, you got a little cubby hole in the basement, didn't have to go back to your office, could hang out. You know. And so Nussle went around literally saying, "Now what was this one for?" We discovered all sorts of junk that nobody knew existed.

KRISTOL: So you won in the spring of '89 I guess it was –

GINGRICH: The spring of '89 I became Whip.

KRISTOL: You became Whip. And you get along okay with Bob Michel?

GINGRICH: It's better than that. I mean, Michel, I tried once or twice, I got out of bounds, and he jumped on me, and he was right. I mean, I am the Whip to the Leader, I'm not the co-leader.

And we worked together reasonably well. And I think he was a little bit uncomfortable but he was a professional and you know this was the conference's choice. And he protected me some against the White House and sort of communicated, "Look, you've got to deal with Gingrich."

And the White House staff, the legislative staff actually worked in my office in the Capitol, so, which is something I wanted them to do so I could keep an eye on them and they could keep an eye on me. It made for an integrated team. And then frankly we got to the budget negotiations of '90 and it all blew up.

KRISTOL: Yeah, let's talk about that because people, I think again in the blur of 25 years ago and you have people today who weren't around.

Well, you were a leader and then you became – then we won in '94 and you became Speaker – but there was this huge intervening moment in '90 when I think you went from being an important figure in the conservative movement and in Washington and the House to very important, I mean really, don't you think a level of national fame and leadership, it was a leap?

And so talk about the whole budget deal. So President Bush convenes the leadership of both parties to discuss the budget?

GINGRICH: Well, what happened is, look, I mean to be fair to them and I've tried to describe this one to Bob Woodward when he was trying to write on this stuff. I said, "Look, if you were Dick Darman, who was the Director of the Budget, and you were John Sununu – Governor Sununu was the Chief of Staff of the President – and you came to me and you said, 'Will you come in the budget negotiations?' And I say to you, 'I'll never vote for a tax increase.'"

KRISTOL: President Bush having pledged – read my lips – no new taxes.

GINGRICH: And you say, "Well, of course, we really don't want to get to a tax increase." And I say "Well, I'm not going to vote for a tax increase." Then in the Washington tradition, if I walk in the room, I've just signaled that, of course, in the end I'll vote for a tax increase.

And so in a sense, they had a legitimate gripe that by Washington standards, what I should have said to them is it's obvious you guys are going to sell out and I won't participate. That would have been honorable, okay. And they would have said, "Gingrich is going to fight us." Instead, they kept saying to themselves, "In the end, he's going to cave."

And so the last weekend, they called and they briefed me and I said, "That's crazy, I can't be for that." And it was a very eerie moment. I mean, we went around all the Republican leadership and the President sitting in – and remember troops are in the desert, the whole routine is going on here, Bush is relatively popular at this point. And –

KRISTOL: What is this like September of 1990 or August?

GINGRICH: No. This would have been in, I think – the fight is in September, you're right.

KRISTOL: Yeah I think so, because the troops already are there and on the way.

GINGRICH: And it's already gotten, just gotten steadily worse, okay. And the truth is, in retrospect probably I should have left and said, "I'm gone, and this is crazy." But they kept saying, "It'll really be balanced by the time we're done." And I kept saying, "If it isn't, I'll vote no." And so they thought we were dancing. And it was a pretty eerie moment to go around the room starting with the House and Senate leadership was there together. I was literally the newest person at the table.

KRISTOL: This is Democratic and Republican?

GINGRICH: No, no, just Republican.

KRISTOL: And this is at Andrews or at the White House?

GINGRICH: This is at the White House. Everything has been done, the deal has been cut.

KRISTOL: At Andrews Air Force Base.

GINGRICH: And we're now sitting there with the President and he makes his pitch, and the Secretary of Treasury makes his pitch. And then they start with, I guess, Senator Dole who was the leader at that point. And they go around from the most senior, Bob Michel, and so I'm the last guy. And when they get to me, I just say, "You know I can't do it, this breaks your word, it is a huge mistake and I won't do it."
And so CNN, which was the only news channel at that time, has this split screen and so does CSPAN, and you have all the Republican leaders and the President walking into the Rose Garden and me walking out of the front door.

KRISTOL: Wow.

GINGRICH: And up on the Hill where they'd be watching all this, Bob Walker who was my deputy at the time, had assembled our Whip operation. And so when I walked in, they all knew exactly where we were. And I said, "Look, this is if you want to side with the President, you can, it's legitimate." And I think nobody in the Whip organization sided with the President. And we beat him in the Republican conference by something like 109 to 70.

KRISTOL: I remember that so vividly because I was Dan Quayle's Chief of Staff, and they were so confident in the White House. I was, of course, against the deal, I mean, not that anyone cared what I thought. Dan Quayle was very publicly loyal but was very skeptical and worried about the deal.

GINGRICH: Well, my favorite moment was Cheney called me. Kemp wouldn't call me although he was Secretary, he just wouldn't, he wouldn't argue for the tax increase. So Cheney called me. I said, "Dick, I'm so glad you called. I was just re-reading your speech against the Reagan tax increase of '82."

KRISTOL: That's funny.

GINGRICH: And he said, "Good speech wasn't it? Talk to you later." And that was it. That was the total, the total amount of lobbying that went on at that point because just we're old friends, it's just obvious.

KRISTOL: But they thought they were going to win and they just didn't appreciate, I think, what –

GINGRICH: No and it created a permanent break with both the President and with George W. I mean, there's a sense of Gingrich is a guy who when it really mattered – because their theory was if I had taken a dive, it would have been over in two days and we go on to the next thing. And by fighting, it became a two-week national story, and it heightened the awareness that he had broken his word.

KRISTOL: Right. And it somehow kept alive I think the Reagan/Bush split from '76 and '80 sort of then got – which people might have thought had been put –

GINGRICH: Which was frankly a Bush split in '89 when they fired all the Reaganites. I mean –

KRISTOL: Right but it kept that alive and visible, which then led to the subsequent insurgent versus establishment kind of –

GINGRICH: Well it probably was – yeah, it's probably a part of why Buchanan could run in '92.

KRISTOL: Very much so, I think that's right, that's right. Not that you supported him.

GINGRICH: No. In fact, I remember at one point I was in Florida on Spanish radio for President Bush in the primary with Jeb Bush as my interpreter.

KRISTOL: Oh, that's good. That's good. So you led – and so how much, what does it mean when the White House sort of puts pressure on you or on members? Many people don't really understand from the outside how that works, so –

GINGRICH: Well, it's everything from they're not going to sign any more fundraising letters for the NRCC, which ultimately collapsed. They won't come and campaign for you. You ain't going to ride in Air Force One.

To really serious things. I mean they're cutting out a project or they're – your two friends aren't getting the appointments you thought they were getting. There's a fair amount of muscle in any White House. And it depends partly on how ruthless they are and how willing they are to play hardball.

I mean, I think when you have – I was always fortunate that Michel really saw himself as the leader of the conference, not the dictator. I think a Nancy Pelosi would have been a totally different kind of person to deal with and would have been infinitely more ruthless. And Michel just wasn't. I mean, Michel is a very effective minority leader. And if you look at the Reagan victories, they all involved getting one third of the Democratic Party to vote with us and Michel did that. I mean, he was very good at that. So Barone once wrote that Michel was probably the most important minority leader in the 20th century because he got so much done in the minority. But part of the way he did that was that he was a genuinely nice man. And so he wasn't going to turn and say, "I'll destroy you."

In fact, after the fight was over, we had about two weeks of the White House being jerky. And then Michel called Sununu and Darman down, and we had a meeting in Michel's office, and he said, "You know you can't do this." He said, "You're going to split the party and lead to a civil war, and you guys got to get over it and just got to work with Newt because he is the Whip, and that's a fact."

KRISTOL: And I suppose if you hadn't the majority of Republican support in the conference on that key vote when the first budget deal went down, I wonder if there would have been an attempt to remove you, or that the fact that you took a solid majority of the members meant what are they going to do?

GINGRICH: Well, the fact was that it was a psychological transfer of power from Michel to me. And Michel couldn't take me head-on. On the other hand, I didn't want to take him head-on. I mean it wasn't – you know by '93, we had been around long enough, we knew each other well enough. He was – and I think this has not really been reported enough – he was extraordinary. Starting about July of '93 in basically saying, "Look, you're the next leader."

KRISTOL: So let's walk back. So he had announced at that point he was going to not –

GINGRICH: No. Just the two of us talked.

KRISTOL: Quietly.

GINGRICH: We talked quietly.

KRISTOL: So you go through ’91, ’92. Bush loses the presidency in ’92. Suddenly, the dynamic changes of 12 years of a Republican President. And now you guys are the leader of the Republican Party in the House and the Senate.

GINGRICH: And then the question is how can you be effective against Clinton and I’m getting – I mean, and our system is getting bigger and bigger.

I mean, part of the reason that we were able to do all this is that starting in ’78, we got more of each entering freshmen class than the old order did. And so there was just a gradual transfer of energy and drive and talent that made a huge difference. And Michel was very, I thought very generous and very statesmanlike in saying about July of ’93, you have a real shot in ’94 and it wasn’t this formal because Michel didn’t talk formally. But it was the essential understanding was you run the politics of the place and I’ll back you up, I’ll run the legislative side and you’ll back me up. And so we had a division of authority, if you will, that was really good.

And an example was I really insisted against – started against the Bush White House, I said in ’92 we have to have a health task force, we’ve got to get ahead of the issue on health care. And Michel agreed despite real opposition from the White House that did not want this. But he then said, “Hastert is going to run it,” he said, “You’re not going to run it, you’re already the Whip, I want somebody else running it.” And Hastert was his protégé. And that’s a step towards Hastert ultimately becoming Speaker.

KRISTOL: I hadn’t thought of that. Both from Illinois –

GINGRICH: But frankly that really mattered because when HillaryCare came along, we’d had two and a half years of the team working on health care and we were prepared to debate her on the facts and we would not have been had we not had – had Michel not agreed to that.

KRISTOL: So I can’t remember. So when did Michel announce he wasn’t going to run for reelection?

GINGRICH: Sometime in July, August of ’93, he indicated he would not run in ’94. And there was a very brief flurry of – Jerry Solomon who’s a friend of mine from upstate New York announced for about 24 hours. But –

KRISTOL: That he would run for Leader for –

GINGRICH: But the way legislative bodies work, the first ground rule to remember is, let’s say you have 200 members and 101 is the majority. The minute you get 101, you get 160 because people just get it.

And if you are the Whip, you have an enormous advantage because you’re the one person who has an organization that counts every day. So you have every single member of the conference already in the system. And if you’re also the most active political figure, that means you’re going to have the maximum impact with freshmen. And so the combination of the two makes it a real uphill battle to beat somebody who’s the number-two person.

KRISTOL: And I want to come back to ’78 and all the groundwork you laid from when you first came to Washington and even before that. But in ’93/’94, I was a little involved in – we worked pretty closely together on some of those things, fighting HillaryCare.

But what do you think were the key moments when it was Clinton who came in – after all, one forgets, with great hopes, promise, praise – you could have made a lot of money betting in January of ’93 that after two years of the Clinton presidency, the main thing that’s going to

happen is Republicans are going to win both the House and Senate for the first time in 40 years. That was not the mood. The mood was Republicans exhausted, Bush collapses to 38 percent, fights within the party, Buchanan. When did you really realize that it could become a huge –

GINGRICH: Well, you know it's very interesting because both Clinton and Obama suffered from the same problem. Both won talking about being in the center, bringing us together. In Clinton's case, I think the key deciding point was around Thanksgiving when he had Greenspan and Foley and Gephardt and Mitchell down to Arkansas. And they basically said to him, "Look, all this stuff's been pent up for 12 years, if you'll stick with us, we'll pass all this liberal program, we can get all of it through the Congress. We'll be happy, you'll be happy, the country will love you." And he bought it.

And so he really moved from a centrist Democrat, you know, "We will change welfare as you know it, we've got to get to a balanced budget" to "Let me ram through everything the Left wants," forgetting that huge chunks of the country are deeply opposed to this stuff.

KRISTOL: He had only gotten what 43 percent of the vote actually, and the Perot voters were not wild liberals.

GINGRICH: That's right. And I think frankly the crime bill was the final blow because it guaranteed that all of the rural NRA voters would swing against the Democrats. And we wiped them out in much of rural America and they've never recovered in Congressional races.

Obama did the same thing. I listened to Obama's first inaugural, which really built on his Grant Park speech on election night and on his speech in Manassas in Virginia on the Saturday before the election. And Callista and I were at the Capitol for the inaugural and I turned to her on the way out and I said, "If he'll govern the way he just spoke, he'll be Eisenhower. He'll split the Republican Party, he'll dominate the country." And within six weeks, Pelosi and Reid had convinced him to go to the Left, write totally partisan bills, close out the Republicans. And he just threw away the chance to be sort of the great re-unifier.

But in his case because he's very different than Clinton, Obama is a genuine ideologue. I mean, if he had to choose between a unified America that was center-right and a totally fractured America in which the Left had executive power, there's zero doubt which he wants. I think Clinton is much more complicated, and Clinton actually wanted to govern and if that meant he had to be a centrist, fine, he didn't care.

KRISTOL: Well, and he adjusted. I mean, this is the huge difference it seems to me just obviously after '94 – after 2010, President Obama didn't go to the center. After '14, it will be even less, it looks like. Whereas President Clinton, I mean, you never heard a word about HillaryCare and the radical overhaul of the taxpayer system.

GINGRICH: It took about six months.

KRISTOL: I guess it did but –

GINGRICH: It was in June of '95 that Clinton finally turned and said to the White House staff, "If I do what you want me to, I'll be a one-term president, I'll be like Carter." And that's when he brought in Dick Morris, which Hillary insisted on. And Morris said, "Look, you've got to triangulate."

There have got to be liberals over here, conservatives over here, and you're here, and that's how you end up with school uniforms in the State of the Union which is a very deliberate rifle

shot to Catholics, and you'll end up with "The era of big government is over" and a whole range of –

There's a great scene which is captured on CNN, I know has a good – we've used it and I think it was captured by CSPAN by the pool feed. But in, I think it's in '96. I don't think it's '95, it's '96. Clinton wanders in. And you always hand the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate who's there as the Vice President, who's there as the co-host, you always hand them a copy of the speech. And so he walks in and he hands me this little, this document which is clearly not the speech. And I open it and it's a letter, and it says from William Jefferson Clinton to Speaker Newt Gingrich. "You are right, I resign. William Jefferson Clinton."

KRISTOL: Is that right?

GINGRICH: And I look at it, and I'm showing it to Gore.

KRISTOL: This is as you're sitting up there in the State of the Union.

GINGRICH: Yeah, you can actually see it on the TV. And I'm looking at it, I'm showing it to Gore, and we're both laughing and Clinton says, "I gave you the wrong document."

KRISTOL: That's fantastic.

GINGRICH: He takes it back.

Now there is a sort of childish frat boy humor that is really helpful. Arthur Link wrote about Woodrow Wilson that he never understood "the sinews of good fellowship which bind men unbound by any other tie." And a friend of mine wrote that down for me when I was in graduate school and said, "If you want to be successful in politics, think about this all the time."

And I think Clinton understood it. That if you and he could laugh, you were halfway to a deal. And I don't think Obama has a clue about the human side of the business.

II: Beginnings in Politics (26:08 – 42:09)

KRISTOL: So you came to Washington in 1978 as a freshman Congressman from Georgia. How did that happen?

GINGRICH: Well, I had – to actually start, I was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. My dad was a career soldier in the infantry, and we were at Fort Riley, Kansas, Orleans, France and Stuttgart, Germany before we got to Fort Benning where I became a Georgian in my junior year in high school.

And while we were in France, the French were fighting the Algerian Civil War. And in a very brief period in the spring of '58, that would be the end of my freshman year in high school, my dad took us to Verdun the largest battlefield in World War I. And where about 600,000 people were killed in a nine-month period in this one giant big valley. And we stayed with a friend of his who had been drafted in '41 and sent to the Philippines, served in the Bataan Death March, and spent three and a half years in a Japanese prison camp and was physically so broken that the Army basically gave him a sinecure. He was a captain and he was going to retire as a captain but they had taken care of him because he'd been through all this. So as a kid who was going to be either a vertebrate paleontologist or a zoo director, I'm walking around this gigantic battlefield and then we're talking with him.

And then in the summer of that year, the French paratroopers land in Paris, kill the Fourth Republic, and bring Charles de Gaulle back and create the Fifth Republic, which still exists, the longest living post-monarchy government in French history. And we go to Stuttgart the week that the army lands in Lebanon with nuclear weapons offshore and the first Berlin crisis occurs.

So in August of '58 having thought about all this stuff and prayed about for about five months, I decided that first of all, that societies can die, that you could see that things were fragile, and a dictatorship could happen. Second, that some people had to be leaders. And that leadership was really three things. And this is what I've done since 1958. What does the country have to do to survive? Wow, would you explain it so the American people would let you do it? And how would you implement it if they gave you permission? And that's all I've done basically since for 56 years.

So we got to Georgia. There was no Republican Party.

KRISTOL: Was your family particularly political or this was you –

GINGRICH: Well, I had an uncle who'd been a precinct worker in central Pennsylvania, and central Pennsylvania was very Republican, had been carried by Landon in 1936. I mean, it was. You know, and I had been really mentored by a local newspaper editor who was a moderate Republican in the sort of Theodore Roosevelt tradition. So a lot of my background.

And I remember he gave me one point, the famous little clipping about Lincoln who gets elected in '46, then can't get reelected, can't become senator, can't become Oregon provincial Governor – territorial Governor. And finally then loses the Senate race in '58 and then becomes President. It's one of the best arguments for perseverance in American history. So I was in that sense preconditioned.

But if you were in Georgia in 1960, and you were, you know, a national person, and you know, you were really in a society which was out of sync with its time. And Georgia uniquely had a county unit system which gave the smallest county in Georgia like 350 times as much power per voter as the biggest county. And so you can imagine how much it was tied into the past and tied into ruralism and corruption. They had a governor who running for reelection was accused of buying boats that had no bottoms, and he said that was for the parks that had no lakes. And you know, people thought that was funny but it was just, you know.

So it made a lot of sense, it felt like the right thing to do to become a Republican and build a two-party system, which was a long march. So I had done a lot of stuff, and I ended up studying history and both at Emory and then got a Ph.D. at Tulane as sort of steps towards preparing myself. I thought it'd be nice to, useful to actually know something.

KRISTOL: But you were always interested in public life and politics when you were getting your degree, you didn't think you'd be a professor?

GINGRICH: No. I think part of the decisive moment actually, a sign of the power of books, was my senior year in high school reading Theodore White's *Making of the President* in 1960, which I think is still one of the greatest introductions to American politics. And he makes the point that Nelson Rockefeller had had a series of very senior appointments and learned that power comes from the people and you have to win elections, and then ran for governor. But that and I read that, and I thought there was something very profound.

And listening to my father's friends gripe in the Army about President Eisenhower, about the Congress, it began to occur to me they were griping about the guys who had power. And the

guys who had power weren't the guys who were in the Army, they were the guys who passed the appropriations, set up the laws, structured them. So I was deeply into it.

In '62, I helped the party as executive director of my – during my sophomore year in college. In '64, I dropped out of college for a year to run a Congressional campaign. And typical of my luck, we picked the only district in Georgia that Johnson carried as a northern TVA rural district. And we were running against the dean of the Georgia delegation, and it was a great lesson in life.

I mean, the guy who got me to drop out and run his campaign was a very bright modern young guy who had married the daughter of the largest chicken producer in the United States at that time. And he wanted an excuse elegantly to quit working for his father-in-law. And so running for Congress was the excuse. And if he won, that'd be cool. But either way, he was winning. So that was, you know. And that was my first trip up here to see the Congressional Campaign Committee of '64. In fact, he and I were up here, we went to see *Dr. Strangelove* while we were here trying to organize the campaign.

And so I went back to school and then I got, was very fortunate to get some scholarships and go to Tulane. And that was a great experience because I had three or four places I could have gone for graduate school, and I thought, you know, the most unusual would be New Orleans. And there's a great line in T. Harry Williams' biography of Huey Long where he says that New Orleans only resembles Beirut and other eastern Mediterranean cultures. You know, and so three years in New Orleans was a really broadening experience about life and people and thinking about things.

Came back to Georgia after I spent a year in Belgium writing my dissertation. And got immediately involved in politics in 1970. And by '74, Sam Nunn had won, and it was pretty clear if you wanted to be in the game, you had to get in the game. You know, that there was a generational shift starting and that early starters would have an advantage because they would occupy the space.

KRISTOL: And Jimmy Carter is governor, I guess.

GINGRICH: Jimmy Carter gets to be governor that year.

KRISTOL: Young, insurgent –

GINGRICH: Yeah and who had spent four years. I mean, the model I hope that Ed Gillespie takes in Virginia which is Carter came very close to getting in the runoff in '66, came back, and spent four solid years in the state and won in '70. And –

KRISTOL: I forgot that he had lost in '66. It fits my thesis that – not my thesis, the thesis, the true thesis that everyone who becomes prominent and certainly the President, loses at some point.

GINGRICH: Yeah. I always tell people cheerful persistence is the most important single characteristic of an effective politician and, I think, of an effective leader at any level.

And in Carter's case, he had run as a young, reform state senator and was really came very close to making it on the first round and history would have been somewhat, I think, significantly different. And people tend to forget and in '72, Carter has all these people come by – you know, John Glenn, Mondale, Gary Hart, etc. who are running for president. And Hart at that time is running the McGovern campaign. And after they've all come through, he says to his staff, "If these guys can run, I can run." I mean, that was the sort of breakpoint. And when he does announce for running, the *Atlanta Constitution* headline is "Jimmy Carter is running for what?"

KRISTOL: Is that right?

GINGRICH: Because it was a joke. It was as much a joke as my becoming Speaker. I mean, one of those – you know, you ought to get serious and be realistic things.

KRISTOL: Carter is governor. Nunn is the newly elected –

GINGRICH: So I run in '74 because I felt intuitively my speech, which is still available in the local newspaper is a reform speech. It says the lesson of Watergate – I was very tough about Watergate. I had been a Nixon loyalist but I said very early if you don't clean this up, it'll kill you, and I said it very publicly. So I actually ran as a college professor who taught environmental studies who was a reformer against the semi-segregationist dean of the delegation who was very close to big business. A guy named John Flynt.

KRISTOL: And this is outside Atlanta.

GINGRICH: It's in Griffin, it's in south – if you think of Atlanta as a clock, my district at that time was basically from 9 o'clock around to about 6 o'clock, that section.

KRISTOL: So you're the insurgent, young reform Republican against the dean –

GINGRICH: And I get 48.5 percent.

KRISTOL: Is that right, in '74?

GINGRICH: In the middle of Watergate. One of the great moments is the morning we lost Jerry Ford's district in a special election because Ford had been picked to be Vice President. I go in to see the head of the CNS Bank who says, he says, "You're a very fine young man, you are someday going to hold major office but it ain't going to be this year." He said, "If your party can't hold a seat it's had since 1905, you are not going to beat the dean of the delegation."

KRISTOL: And this seat has never been – I assume it had never been Republican in modern times.

GINGRICH: Never. And in fact, we lost the last Republican federal seats that year. You know, and so we were down to – we had gone from no elected Republicans in '60 back to no elected federal Republicans by '74. So anyway –

KRISTOL: So you're like 30 years old at this point?

GINGRICH: Yeah, and I'm 31 at that point. I get 48.5 percent but it's a good race. And my opponent makes the most funny mistakes.

WSB was the dominant TV station at the time. And on election night, I'm walking to John Pruitt who was the most important newscaster in the state. Pruitt actually has Congressman Flynt on the line and says, "Gosh, Newt Gingrich just walked in. Wouldn't you like to say something to him now that you've won?" And he says, "Actually, no." And hung up. And it was seen as so discourteous that even some of Flynt's supporters sent me notes and said, you know, he shouldn't have done that to you. And Pruitt became a friend from that point on. I mean, it's just very interesting the way these little things create dynamics.

So I come back to run in '76. And I'll never forget in April of '76, I'm watching I think the *Today Show*. Jimmy Carter is coming from behind to win the Wisconsin primary on rural dairy farmer

votes on the grounds that he's a farmer. And he's beating Mo Udall in Wisconsin. And Udall is at that time the liberal candidate. And I'm thinking he's going to be the nominee. It's April, I have to run again in order to keep the momentum up. And he's going to be the nominee.

KRISTOL: The Georgia governor.

GINGRICH: And I'm going to lose. And I've got to figure out how to run well enough to lose well enough to run again. And we didn't have any real money. I was a college teacher. You know, it was very difficult at that point. I think I ran my best campaign technically that year.

And by election day – and this is what happens to candidates – by election day, most of the people you see are nice to you, you begin to think you can win. And I often tell audiences I went to the Neva Lomason Library to vote about 4 in the afternoon. And I'm standing in line, I'm pretty optimistic. I realize that the three people immediately ahead of me are senior citizens who have come from a nursing home in order to get revenge for Sherman's march through Georgia. And I think to myself, "What are the odds that they're going to split their ticket for a Yankee-born Republican with a weird name and a strange voice?" And I thought this is going to be a really long night.

Well, I went from 48.5 to 48.3. In Carroll County, I was ahead of Jerry Ford two to one. I got 52 percent, he got 26. And I remember the Saturday after the election. I actually broke the pencils I was working the numbers because you can't do much better. I mean, two to one ahead of the head of your ticket is about as good as you're ever going to get.
So I ran a third time. And Flynt retired. He had beaten me twice, and he had enough fun, so he quit. The seat was open. They had a very lively Democratic primary, a multimillionaire woman reform senator won the runoff, so she'd had the publicity of the primary, the publicity of the runoff, she could outspend me endlessly.

And in mid-September, we were behind 51-37, after five years. And Bob Weed was my consultant and came in, he said, "We have two votes that she cannot survive." One was on welfare reform where she killed it, and the other was on a tax cut where she voted against it. And we have two ads that we believe will break her. But you've got to make two decisions. One is, because we can only afford two, we can't send more than two messages, we don't have enough money. Are you prepared to gamble your career on these two? And can you be positive while the ads are attacking her?

And so for six weeks, we ran a campaign which just drove her crazy. At one point, she called my ads clinical pornography, and the reporters came running over and they said, "What do you, how do you react?" And I said, "Well, I've never had a candidate describe their own record as pornographic before but, you know, it is her record. Go back and ask her why would she describe her own record as pornographic?" I mean, it was that kind of thing, it was a running brawl.

And we won. We went from 51-37 behind to winning 54-46, which also taught me by that stage having running three times, I knew a fair amount about the dynamics of politics. And Guy Vander Jagt who was the campaign committee chairman, a Congressman from Michigan, to his credit, backed me all three times. And the third time against the pressure of the establishment which had decided: A. I was a loser, and B. I was noisy and unreliable. I was with Reagan on the Panama Canal and that sort of thing, and I was big with Kemp on tax cuts and supply side.

So when I won, I went to Vander Jagt in December of '78. We hadn't been sworn in yet. And we had a very big class in terms of the total size of it because the House Republicans had decayed so much. And I went to Vander Jagt and I said, "You know, we've not been in power for 24

years, and shouldn't we have a plan to become a majority?" And he said, "That is a terrific idea, why don't you chair the planning committee?"

So I had not been sworn in yet, and I now had a title, which enabled me to go do all sorts of things and spend a fair amount of the NRCC's money. And then – ultimately in a totally different story I won't go in right now – but I ended. Because Bill Brock was from Chattanooga, was the Republican National Committee chairman, former U.S. Senator, he now had standing to work with me because I was the chairman of the planning committee. So even though I was a first-term freshman, I could go over to the RNC.

So when Thatcher won in May of '79, I could be part of the group that worked to bring Thatcher's ideas into the 1980 campaign. It's just an interesting example of how very small changes can become leverage points for lots of other things.

III: Gingrich Comes to Washington (42:09 – 51:59)

KRISTOL: But you had the notion and the ambition really from getting, from the moment you got here, before you got here, I guess, to make Republicans the majority. I mean, that was sort of your – your policy priorities, too, of course, I mean –

GINGRICH: No. But I basically had three goals. Defeat the Soviet empire, replace the welfare state, and replace the Democrats as the majority party in the House. And that's what I arrived with. I spent my day on those three goals.

KRISTOL: And so you're there in '79/'80, and I can't remember exactly. So you get involved with Kemp early on and with the Reagan campaign early on –

GINGRICH: I was very involved with Kemp. And I was with Kemp –

KRISTOL: So Kemp has been there since like '70, and he's already a big spokesman on tax cuts. I mean –

GINGRICH: He's really, he's both, I mean, he's the quintessential outsider because the Republican establishment despises him. He's a football player. He's noisy. He talks about satiric ideas like supply-side economics, he reads books. He develops tax policy when he's not on Ways and Means.

I mean, his next-door neighbor in New York, Barbara Conable, was the ranking Republican in Ways and Means, just hated the idea that Jack Kemp was the tax guy because Conable knew that Kemp didn't know anything about the tax cut, which he didn't. He had a large general theory but he was a brilliant, charismatic leader and was the one sign of energy and hope in the House Republican Party.

I went to see Nixon at one point to get his advice. And it was very funny. He said, "The House Republicans are boring. The House Republicans were boring when I was there in the 40s, and unless you quit being boring, you're not going to attract enough energy to become a majority." So what I would do is I'd get a group together every week and I would try to think about how to be interesting.

And, you know, so here you have this genuinely happily boring party and Jack Kemp. It was an amazing thing to watch. And Kemp by dint of energy, personality, power of ideas was gradually moving the system. And Brock helped him. I mean, Brock paid for the tax cut clipper in '78 that took Kemp and Senator Roth around to talk about tax cuts. So I mean, because again Brock,

whether he totally believed it or not, it was at least an idea. I mean, it beat the normal boring nothingness which is at the heart of the Republican Party.

KRISTOL: And made the Republican Party a forward-looking and sort of populist and inclusive party as opposed to – I mean, wasn't the standard Republican position on taxes that the business community needed faster depreciation or something and that was the only thing they should worry about, right?

GINGRICH: Republicans opposed the Kennedy tax cuts. Yeah. I used to tell people that Kemp showered with people most Republicans have never met, and Kemp had an appreciation for a very diverse Republican Party that was healthy for our future. So in many ways, I'm a combination of a Reaganite and a Kempite. Those are the two great formative personalities that I worked with.

KRISTOL: And so then you worked with Kemp. Reagan, you both work with Reagan. Reagan signs onto the Kemp supply-side agenda in '79.

GINGRICH: I was with Kemp before he went out to the ranch.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

GINGRICH: And Kemp said to me, "I'm going to go see Reagan. If he will agree to take up the tax cut, I'll agree to chair his campaign. If he won't take up the tax cut, I'm going to run."

KRISTOL: Yeah. People forget. I mean I remember my dad, who was interested and friendly to Kemp, obviously, but not in Washington and certainly not involved in day-to-day or week-to-week politics, thinking, you know, is Reagan really up to it?

And '68, at that time, what 67, 68 years old, had run and lost in '76, kind of an old-fashioned conservative. We think of Reagan now with the Kemp agenda but that wasn't really the way, you know, Panama Canal, which was fine but that had already, they lost and so that wasn't really you couldn't really run a 1980 presidential campaign on the Panama Canal, you know.

So I think people forget how important that Kemp, that Reagan adopted Kemp's agenda, was to Reagan becoming Reagan really. I mean and that was – I kind of remember that, yeah, Kemp flew out there, right, to –

GINGRICH: Kemp went out, and again Reagan was smart enough to invite him out but Kemp went out to say, "Look, this is what we believe in." And again he had the huge advantage dealing with Reagan that Friedman liked him.

I mean, Milton Friedman is really important, not in the House Republican Party because who knows who he is, but out there he really mattered. And Reagan as governor of California knew thoroughly who Milton Friedman was. And so there's an intellectual layer to Kempism that isn't just this guy, this football quarterback. Plus Kemp had been, I think, an intern in the Reagan governorship years earlier. I mean, Kemp had a long, active interest.

KRISTOL: He went to school in California and played on the San Diego team, I think, before –

GINGRICH: So there are a lot of ties that go back and forth there.

KRISTOL: Right. So Reagan becomes President, and you're a leading –

GINGRICH: Well, let me tell you one quick early Reagan story.

KRISTOL: Please.

GINGRICH: 1974, Reagan is out campaigning. Not running for reelection. Early October, he comes to Georgia. The Georgia GOP is so grateful to have a candidate that they say, "Why don't you go back to the airport with him after the event?" So Reagan – this is a different time and place – Reagan is traveling with one California trooper commercially.

KRISTOL: Though he's governor.

GINGRICH: He's governor, he's still governor, and, you know, he's leaving office, he's not running for reelection but he's governor. He's got one trooper, and he's flying commercially because it's a political event. And so I go out to the airport with him, and the plane is delayed an hour so I get a chance to sit and talk with Governor Reagan.

And after about five minutes of listening to me, he decides that's enough of that stuff. So he says, "Would you like to know how I do my speeches?" And I said, "Yeah, that's be pretty cool." So he opens up this briefcase and he says, "I take one idea for each 4x6 card, and I collect 60, 70 ideas. And before a speech, I pick the ones I want to talk about that day and I shuffle them. And the reason I shuffle them is I don't know what the next one is, and I know I've got to build a bridge from card 7 to card 11, which means I'm leaning forward and I'm paying attention, so I'm not bored."

KRISTOL: Is that right?

GINGRICH: He said, "Now, if I gave exactly the same speech at every stop, I would get bored, people would intuit that I was bored and they would be bored at my being bored. But because they know I don't know, they're kind of curious what's going to happen next and so am I." And that was the base of – from that point on, how I did my speeches. And to this day, I do every speech at the last possible second in a very simple outline. I have a series of one lines. But it started in 1974 with Ronald Reagan.

KRISTOL: That's amazing.

GINGRICH: Now here's the other side of that story. A couple years ago, I read a book by Tom Evans called *The Education of Ronald Reagan*, a very small book about Reagan's years at General Electric, which anybody who wants to understand either Reagan or the power of persuasion should read.

Despite all the years I knew Reagan, I knew his speechwriters, I used to go down and have lunch with him and we used to talk about ideas, after I read that book, I went back and reread several major Reagan speeches and they were totally different in the context of *The Education of Ronald Reagan* because you realize he really wasn't a great speechmaker in the charismatic sense. He was a great speechmaker in the didactic sense. His speeches are designed to give you information in a structure which moves you so that you will then move the Congress.

And it's – so from '74 till a couple years ago, I've been studying Ronald Reagan. And I would say Reagan ranks with FDR and Lincoln and a handful of people where you can go back again and again and you're always going to learn new things every time you do it.

KRISTOL: I went back and looked at a couple of his speeches – I don't know, for some reason I was looking up something and then I got distracted and read the whole speech and I was looking for a sentence to quote. And I was struck by how one thinks of Reagan as this wonderful orator, you know, Hollywood and the presence and all that's sort of true. But he's very

conversational in the speeches, and I almost think purposely not overly fluid or overly – I don't know – slick. And if you read the speeches, you're sort of struck that there's a little bit of haltingness, he'll go back and say, you know, he almost goes out of his way not to appear, I think, beautifully crafted speeches.

GINGRICH: FDR gave all of his speeches to an illiterate farmer in upstate New York who was deaf but who was a guy he'd known in his childhood. And he said, "If I can write this speech so he would understand it, then the American people will understand it."

And I adopted that and I had an Aunt Loma who passed away in her 90s. And I sort of used Aunt Loma as my – the same benchmark because it hit me it's a really great test of your talk, can you take an important idea and communicate it so it's intellectually legitimate but it's so clear that a normal person can get it and say, "Yeah, that makes sense?"

And that's where Reagan – the other thing he had and if you read his farewell address, which is one of the best statements of his entire presidency – he says at one point, he said, "People said I gave great speeches but I actually gave speeches about great ideas." And I think it's one of the reasons why people like Clinton and Obama can't figure out the Reagan formula because you have to have the Reagan ideas in order to have the Reagan language in order to dance with the American people, who are, in fact, instinctively Reaganite.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's a good point.

IV: Educating Washington (51:59 – 1:16:14)

KRISTOL: Now, it seems to me by the time I get to Washington in '85, you already were disseminating your ideas and influencing each generation of Republicans running for Congress, some of whom won and ended up in Congress. Now, remind me how did that happen?

My image of you is that you were much more than a backbench congressman, and there were tapes of you that people were listening to in their cars. But I'm sort of foggy on how that –

GINGRICH: There are three components to it. First of all, because Vander Jagt had created this committee, and I was very careful to get everybody to bless it and all the leadership to bless it. And you know, to embed it as orthodox. "It's okay, this is an okay committee, Gingrich is not too risky."

I had the ability to do almost anything I wanted to, and I could get into any issue area I wanted to because I was involved in planning the majority. So and I was eclectic and so I did a lot of stuff. And I had been probably more than most freshmen, I had been preparing my whole life to come and do this stuff. So I had been practicing a long time.

And a couple things happened that are sort of… this why I'm an historian and not a social scientist. I think anything which has a line on it is inherently false because it's not how history occurs. So I get here. The first big break is we have a chairman of a committee who has stolen $70,000 from 29 different employees and he's voting. And I arrive as a reformer because in my mind, I'm a reformer. Now, in the mind of the Republican leadership, I'm a Georgia conservative. And it turns out the guy who has been convicted is a black Democrat from Detroit. So how can you have a Georgia rightwing conservative who's white take on a black? I thought actually it was about somebody who was honest taking on a crook. So while the first motion to expel since 1917 is made by me in the summer of my first year in Congress, so that was – but it was made after a lot of conversation with people like Cheney signing on, etc. That was a sort of a first step towards being different than the norm.

The second thing was truly an accident. Pat Buchanan and Braden had a radio show every afternoon for three hours, “Drive Time.” It was the most popular talk show in Washington.

KRISTOL: I forgot that. So that was like the precursor to *Crossfire* which they ended up –

GINGRICH: And it was a three-hour show, and Buchanan got into a contract fight. And so the radio station, I think it was WMAL, but whatever station it was, needs to get right-winger to debate Braden. And so somebody calls me and says, “You’re pretty articulate, would you – we can’t pay you because you’re a member of Congress, but would you like to come out occasionally and cohost the show.”

So I go out, and I start cohosting this show. Well, your typical Washington bureaucrat, lobbyist, reporter, you’re driving home, and you’re listening to Braden and Gingrich. And I have a distinctive voice and a weird name. So within about three months, my staff began to get their calls answered faster.

And a good friend of mine who was the – Art Pine had been a reporter when I was a college student, had actually taken me to dinner before I went off to graduate school, ended up at *The Wall Street Journal* and then *The Baltimore Sun*, took me to dinner one night. And he said, “Look, here’s what’s happening. The minnows and the whales are gone.” The famous idea that you had a handful of really powerful people who were whales, everybody else was a minnow. He said, “Nobody has any idea who hierarchically matters right now. So noise becomes a replacement. And because you’re so noisy, you must be dramatically more important than the people who aren’t noisy.” So you have this sort of continuous process under way.

And then the third thing that really made a huge difference, I think, was that in the summer of ’83, we had understood – Bob Walker probably and myself, were the first two people to really understand that CSPAN – one of those historic accidents, I’m sworn in January of ’79, CSPAN starts in April. And so I figure out very early on. I’ve always been a big fan of television. I went to my first TV station when I was like 12. I did a part-time thing on television between my junior and senior years in high school. And I’ve always had an interest in broadcast media. And so we figured out you could go over and do a special order for an hour. You had to walk from your office to the Capitol, and you could address somewhere between 10,000 and 500,000 people. You had no idea; at that time, there was no ratings.

KRISTOL: So that’s just speaking on the House floor.

GINGRICH: Just speaking to an empty floor.

KRISTOL: There’s no legislative business.

GINGRICH: Yeah, and as a college teacher, I didn’t – you know I was perfectly happy to do 55 minutes. And so Walker and I began doing these things.

KRISTOL: And CSPAN is now telecasting the House, which has only recently begun. I mean –

GINGRICH: Yeah, that’s right. It began in April, and by summer, we were beginning to figure this out so that – One of our favorite stories – By, oh gosh, ’82 or ’83, there were groups of people who would watch us. There was one group in, I think, Sioux City, Iowa, of Republican women who would all watch our special orders and then call each other and talk about it. And so Walker began to be famous. And one of the great moments with Jack Kemp who had a huge ego and earned it and was a great guy, but Kemp is in Puerto Rico. And this woman comes running up to him and she says, “Mr. Kemp, you’re in the House, right?” He says, “Yes, I am.” She says, “Do you know Bob Walker?”

KRISTOL: Yeah, I'm sure Jack loved that, yeah.

GINGRICH: So Kemp came back. And at one point, we gave him a T-shirt that said "I know Bob Walker" – we said, "We just want you to feel like all you can be." But so that's all working.

So we take on the Boland Amendment, which is a – in terms of what's happening in the city right now, fascinating, is a spending limitation amendment on the Reagan Administration effort to defeat the Nicaraguan Communists, the Sandinistas, offered by Eddie Boland, who's a perfectly decent guy, who is Tip O'Neill's closest friend and roommate. And we're on the floor just beating up this amendment.

Well, O'Neill gets enraged. So I'm home over a weekend and on Monday afternoon I get this call from Trent Lott who tracks me down. This is back when you're doing it by pay phone, I mean, nobody had cell phones yet. And Lott says, "You better get your butt back here. The Speaker of the House just defamed you on the floor." So I go back up and on Tuesday, I rise to a point of privilege. I've been personally attacked by the Speaker, which means he has to get out of the chair. So he then appoints Joe Moakley, who is his other roommate and close friend to sit in the chair. And you can get the footage of this. It was an amazing moment and it changed a lot of things. So, my job –

KRISTOL: When is this, this is like '83?

GINGRICH: This is '83. Now, there's one other side story. I had gotten beaten by Steven Solarz on *Crossfire* the previous week because we were talking about letters and signing letters to the Sandinistas, and Solarz in a take-off on McCarthy says, "I have here," and he reaches into his briefcase, "a letter from Newt Gingrich to Brezhnev the Communist leader of Russia." Well, it was, it was a letter asking him to release some Jewish refuseniks. You know, but it was, he did it so well that I was just stunned.

And so I had actually sat down on that Saturday with the debate coach at West Georgia, a guy named Chester Gibson, was a great national debate coach. And he had been walking me through certain things.
So I arrive back on Tuesday. Now I, point of personal privilege, I'm in the well of the house, I own an hour of time. Thomas P. O'Neill's closest friends are all saying to him, "Get off the floor." But O'Neill is a great Irish saloon politician, so he ain't getting off the floor. This kid's not going to push him around. And finally at this moment when he gets so angry that he's standing there, I've yielded time to him. And he says, "You did the most," I think he used the word *despicable* or something, "you did the most despicable thing I have ever seen a member do in my time in the House." Okay. And of course, this huge guy who's really angry. And Bill Pitts who was the Republican staff guy turns to Lott and says, "Take his words down." And Lott, to his credit, jumps up – this takes, given the psychology of the House at that point, this takes real guts – Lott gets up and says, "I move to take the Speaker's words down."

What that means is technically that the parliamentarian has to rule, whether or not what he just said was so inappropriate that he has to sit down and say nothing and loses the privilege of speaking for 24 hours. Okay, which means everything stops and they have to wait until the clerk can write it down, can transcribe it, have it read back by the chair and then have the parliamentarian rule. Okay, so I'm standing here in the well of the House. The whole thing, of course, has drawn a huge crowd by this stage. All of it's on TV. And Ben Weber comes down and says to me, "Stay calm. You're winning," which we were. So here's poor Joe Moakley, a ruling about his roommate who's trying to defend his other roommate, right? And they read back the words and the parliamentarian says, "There's no question."

For the first time since 1793, the last time a Speaker had his words taken down, he had actually spit tobacco in the face of a member. So they took down O'Neill's words, at which point, Lott jumps up and says, "But, of course, I ask unanimous consent that we vacate that ruling and allow the Speaker to continue," by which point, of course, they had gotten O'Neill off the floor because… Well, what happened was that night on all three television networks, you have the Republicans on the House floor in a brawl with Thomas P. O'Neill. And a friend of mine, Bo Calloway called and said he had never, ever before seen the House Republicans matter enough to be covered. You know, so these seem like small things. But each of these is a building block.

Then the last thing I did by '84 was I wrote a book called *Window of Opportunity*, which was actually designed in what has still been forlorn effort to move the party into thinking about the future, talking about the future. And with the help of the Reagan people, we used the book for the platform committee, we used in Dallas, we taught courses from it because we figured out there are lots of people who come to the convention. The last time we did this was in '12 in Tampa. There are a lot of people who come to the convention who during the daytime have nothing to do and they're really interested in politics. And if you say, "We're going to talk about ideas tomorrow morning, would you like to come?" you can get a couple hundred people.

KRISTOL: But didn't – I can't remember – in the '84 convention, weren't you part of a group that actually, very unusually I would say, pushed against the incumbent and extremely popular president of your own party?

GINGRICH: I would rather say we were in silent alliance –

KRISTOL: With him, against –

GINGRICH: With the President against his White House staff.

KRISTOL: Yeah, fair enough. But you did actually get the platform changed on a couple things, right?

GINGRICH: Oh, yeah. There were two –

KRISTOL: People do forget how much, what trouble-makers you guys were, I would say. These days, everyone is so – everyone is so kind of concerned about you can't rock the boat, it's your own party, you know.

GINGRICH: Part of it was we were following Nixon's advice and we had the Conservative Opportunity Society, which met every Wednesday morning. Your staff couldn't come unless you came.

KRISTOL: This was members of the House.

GINGRICH: This was members of the House. We had a total of 15 members. We used to working – Arnaud Du Pic was a French general who said one time, "If four strangers meet a lion, the strangers will run. If four friends meet a lion, they'll kill the lion." Okay, so part of it was just team-building. Creating small-unit cohesion, people who understood each other.

Walker and Weber and I went out to do an event for Weber in the spring of '84, and we realized that Darman and those guys were going to try to get taxing – they were going to try to write the platform in a way which made it plausible to have a tax increase. And we got in a fight because Reagan had had two tax increases after the tax cut. And there was a desperate effort by Stockman and Darman to roll back the tax cuts, which they deeply disliked. And which was part

of what happens with Darman again with George H.W. Bush. And so we, the three of us collectively decided we would pick a fight.

Part of our reasoning was we didn't want to fight on abortion. And we said if we could pick a fight on taxes and keep it going all the way up to the convention, we can get the press to cover the tax fight and not cover the abortion fight and only have one or two days on the abortion fight. So it was partly a keep-the-press-chasing-the-rabbit strategy. Lott bought into it totally, and Lott was really the organizing genius of this thing. Kemp, of course, was totally enthusiastic. And Bob Kasten in the Senate was enthusiastic. So that was the core group.

So we get in this running fight. And, of course, if you think about the makeup of a Republican platform committee, this is, you know, this is a group that is not for raising taxes. Poor Drew Lewis is hung out to dry. He's the guy who's coordinating with the platform committee. And about two days out –

KRISTOL: On behalf of the administration. Is he in the Cabinet at that point?

GINGRICH: On behalf of the administration. No, I think he was in the Cabinet. He may have just left but he had been Secretary of Transportation. And two or three days out, Baker figures out – who's the Chief of Staff at that point – that they don't have the votes. Now –

KRISTOL: They wanted language that gave them more flexibility on the tax –

GINGRICH: And all of the sudden, Lewis can't get his phone calls answered because they just take a dive. And part of the reason they took the dive is they knew if they went to Reagan – because obviously Reagan could trump us, I mean, if the President personally said, you know, "I want this." Reagan was mad about the two tax increases. I mean, Reagan had said to Baker, "If you really believe that stuff, why are you in this Cabinet?" I mean it was a very tough – And so they knew that Reagan was with us.

But it was again one of those – it was one of those building-block things where across the country, anti-tax-increase conservatives saw suddenly in the House younger House Republicans, a team that they could identify with and support and be part of. And that was part of, I think, building our identity.

KRISTOL: And the tapes – am I making – I have this memory of the tapes?

GINGRICH: What happened with the tapes was –

KRISTOL: This is pre – I mean, explain to people what tapes were, I suppose, since no young person today has ever seen a tape.

GINGRICH: Yeah, we're actually trying to build an app for elected officials right now because we figured out that you couldn't send out cassette tapes anymore. Nobody has a player.

What happened there was interesting. It's two parts. One is Pete DuPont wanted to run for president, and he had founded GOPAC, he was governor of Delaware at the time. And he had been a member of the House. And had founded GOPAC in '79 in order to encourage state legislators. And by the way, this year, we were at the highest number in the history of the Republican Party. We have more state legislators in any time in 156 years or 160 years. And we had 56 percent of all the legislators, which means we're beginning to decimate the Democrats' farm team. This was a project that began in '79 with DuPont.

So DuPont comes to me and says, “I want to run for president. I’d like you to take over GOPAC, you have the energy and the drive, and it fits what you’re trying to do at the NRCC because you need a farm team in order to have enough candidates.” So I go out and do a Monday morning breakfast with John Engler who at that time is the Minority Senate Leader in Michigan. And we’re doing a breakfast for his members. And after the breakfast, John says, you know, “These guys, some of these guys drove in from 3 o’clock in the morning to get here.” And as a member of Congress because the country is so big you fly. And I looked at him and I said, “They all drove?” He said, “Yeah.” He said, “They drove, some of them drove from the upper peninsula.”

I suddenly had this image of all of these, including myself – I mean, candidates spend endless hours in the car. And I thought, wow, what if we could offer a training tape so while they’re driving home after the last event, they could learn or on the way to the event the next day. And so we ultimately at our peak were doing 75,000 tapes a month, which meant that by ’94, you had a cadre across the whole country that understood the language, they understood –

KRISTOL: These were on issues –

GINGRICH: Yeah, I mean Bret Schundler, for example, was a very reform mayor of Jersey City, did a great job really thinking about urban problems. So we did an hour-long interview with Schundler and send it out, here’s how to think about urban problems. You would do Kemp, you would do J.C. Watts. I mean, there was a real effort. And the tapes, some people still have them. Rudy Boschwitz, a former senator, told me last year that he still listens to the tapes driving around Minnesota. I mean, Pataki when he was governor still listened to the tapes, which he’d gotten as assembly member. So it was a conscious effort.

I started to work in the spring of ’79 as a volunteer advisor to the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command and I had looked at how they had redesigned the battle doctrine and then redesigned the training for the entire Army. And I took a lot of those kind of ideas and migrated them into if you really want to move the party, how do you get enough people to have a common language? What Kemp had started but Kemp didn’t have mechanisms, he didn’t think about mechanisms. He thought about constant repetition. And so we built a system that really by ’94 had moved, didn’t move the party far enough but it had moved the party a significant distance.

KRISTOL: And it does seem to me that a large part of your strategy was using the media. There was no conservative media then to speak of, so let’s say the mainstream media, partly by persuading them and partly by provoking them.

GINGRICH: Well, there are two examples. There’s a brand new book out by Harold Holzer on *Lincoln and The Press*, which I recommend to anybody. Harold was the press secretary for Bella Abzug. Then, he was the press secretary for Mario Cuomo.

KRISTOL: I remember the Cuomo connection, yeah, sort of a liberal version of Lincoln, I think. Holzer, is that – Holzer, I think is his name.

GINGRICH: Holzer, you’re right. Yeah, Harold Holzer. I’m sorry, I got his name. But and he’s now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But it’s a brilliant book on Lincoln’s use of the media.

KRISTOL: I should look at that.

GINGRICH: And he wrote I think one of the most important books for understanding politics strategically and about Lincoln’s speech at Cooper Union, which is a very strategic speech that Lincoln spends three months personally researching. And it’s really worth reading to get the sense of how do you move a country? So, anyway, so that’s a model.

And the other model I would say that one of my favorite lines I think it's something about morning and sunrise. It's a biography of Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt goes to Tampa, a tour with the Rough Riders to go to Cuba to fight the Spanish-American War. The camp is chaos. So Roosevelt just commandeers a ship and takes it over and then notices that the two most famous war correspondents of his generation are on the dock because the Army won't let them go to Cuba. And so he says, "Well, I've got a ship." And the chapter closes, "And so the greatest self-publicist of the 19th century sailed merrily off to war with his own pet correspondents."

And I've always thought that sort of captures anybody who is really successful in leading a political system, whether it's Julius Caesar who invents the daily newspaper and who writes the *Gallic Wars* as propaganda. Remember, it's a report to the people of Rome on how Caesar had made the people of Rome richer. Okay or whether it is Lincoln who brilliantly, you know, he got the Lincoln-Douglas debates published. You know, he understood the daily newspaper rhythm, he understood the telegraph. I mean he was – you know, FDR who understood radio, Reagan who understood television.

And so I've always believed, and this is partly because Paul Walker, the editor in Harrisburg, had taught me when I was 10, 11, 12, 13. I wanted a zoo in Harrisburg. And there's an article because I think I was – I was either 10 or 11. And what happened is another reason why I'm a historian and not social scientist. My mother lets me go to – my dad is serving in Korea, so it's '53, so I guess I'm 10. I was born in '43.

And so my mother lets me go an August afternoon to a double feature that includes African jungle movies. And I come out of the movies, and I'm all excited about animals, and I see a sign that points through an alley to City Hall in Harrisburg. And I was supposed to get on the bus and go back to Hummelstown where we lived. But I think my grandmother always said you should do your duty and we needed a zoo. So I walk through this alleyway, I walk up. And you can imagine the receptionist, the 10-year-old kid goes, "I'm here to see about a zoo." And she said, "Well, I guess that must be parks and recreation. They're upstairs."

So I go upstairs. This is one of those great accidents of history. And the lady in charge up there greeting people says, "Well, you know the director is not here today. I'm sure he'd love to see you. But the assistant director is here." And the assistant director was a civil servant who at the time looked old but, in fact, is 10 years younger than I am now. And so I go in and he said, "Oh, you want a zoo." And we talk. He said, "We used to have a zoo at Wildwood Park." He pulls out the records from before World War II and he shows me the records. And he says, "Now, the way you do this as a citizen is you come back Tuesday and you talk to the City Council and tell them why we should have a zoo." He then picked up the phone and called my grandmother who he had dated 40 years earlier and said, "Newtie is here. I've been explaining zoos. He has to come back on Tuesday. Make sure he gets here. I'm putting him in a cab." I mean, that's so implausible.

So I go back on Tuesday. You know, I remember still the people just before me are complaining about garbage collection. So here the *Harrisburg Patriot News* daily reporter covering the City Hall and you have two choices – really bad garbage collection, cute kid talks about zoo. Guess which one made the paper? Six weeks later, my mother gets a letter from my father saying, "Keep him out of the newspapers."

KRISTOL: Oh, is that right?

GINGRICH: But what happened then is the guy at Harrisburg, the City Hall, said, "Go see a guy named Ziegler who's a state representative who's going to run for mayor. Tell him why you want a zoo." So Ziegler saw me twice because I had relatives who could vote, showed me he'd gone to the Tear Garden in Hamburg in the 30s and all that stuff.

And then he got tired of me, so he sent me to Paul Walker who was running a – had been a columnist and now was running a giveaway weekly newspaper called the *Harrisburg Home Star*. And I walk in this office and Walker says, "I understand you think we need a zoo." And I said yeah. He said, "Well, there's a manual typewriter. Write the column, I'll print it." And I said I can't type. He said, "Well, then you can't get printed, can you?" So I sat down. I still type with two or three fingers, and I typed up a message to the people of Harrisburg, which and then Walker took me under his shoulder or under his arm, and he began teaching me.

The reason I tell you that background is everything in my career assumes that you have to be involved with the media. I once got a letter from a senior Republican because I had sent him a note about talking to David Broder, this was in '79. I was a freshman. And I talked to Broder about something. And he said, "Why would you talk to Broder, you know you can't talk to the news media." And I said, "Well, how do you think they're going to know what you're doing?"

And but that was gap. I mean, the Republican model was these guys are dangerous, you shouldn't – you're better to hide than you are to be covered by people you can't trust. My model was you go out and you swing for the fences, sometimes you pop out, sometimes you hit a fly ball to left field, every once in a while, you get a home run.

KRISTOL: Absolutely.

GINGRICH: Very different models.

KRISTOL: And is there a zoo in Harrisburg?

GINGRICH: No. Lost. Failed.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

GINGRICH: Yeah, we were sent to Fort Riley. But I've visited over 100 zoos since then. I personally have done pretty well.

V: Gingrich on the Presidents (1:16:14 – 1:46:49)

KRISTOL: You're a historian. You've thought and read a lot about the presidency and about particular presidents, and you've met and worked with and, I guess, against a ton of presidents. So let's just go through.

I'm very curious about your judgments, insights, stories about the different presidents you've known or at least seen up close. I guess, Eisenhower, you were a kid but I'm sure he was a big figure for you.

GINGRICH: Well, he was a big figure both because he was so large in my parents' world, because of his impact on the Army, and also because, I think, it was the Eisenhower reelection when I was 13 was the first time I was active like in the student mock election and I was a Republican for Eisenhower. We were stationed at Fort Riley, so I was at Junction City, which was a good solid Republican area, as Pat Roberts proved recently. And so Ike in that sense was a big figure.

And one of the people I most admire because of the range of his achievements. When Eisenhower, like Washington, can't be measured only as President but you have to look at his whole career in the Army and everything he did. And he was a very stunningly competent person. It was one of the first places that taught me to deeply distrust the liberal establishment,

which totally misunderstood Eisenhower and has had to go back and do lots of revision because he was so vastly smarter than they thought he was. And also taught me about the academic elites. Sam Lubell wrote, who's one of the great political scientists of the 40s and 50s, wrote that he was in an election night in '52 in which no one had voted for Eisenhower, they had all voted for Stevenson. And he said, "Do you have any idea how out of touch with America this makes you?" It's gotten worse since then.

One of the longest nights was 1960, and it's hard in retrospect because of Watergate to realize a fascinating alternative history. Richard Nixon was the modern young Republican. From 1946 to 1960, he was the person who was the most dynamically trying to create a modern party. As Vice President, he was extraordinarily energetic. He was an amazing debater. Probably one of the people who in sheer ability to organize and speak – and Pat Buchanan has a terrific new book out which talks about his comeback, which is really worth reading, I mean, because Buchanan was there. He gives you an insider view.

So I actually was a Nixonite before I was a Reganite. Nixon was the dominant figure in that period. And election night, watching, listening to us lose, and watching the Democrats steal Illinois and Texas was a very deep part of my experience of American politics. And I think there's no question, without theft, Nixon would have been the next president. There's also an interesting test about television. Had Nixon used makeup in the first debate, he probably would have been the President.

KRISTOL: It's amazing, isn't it?

GINGRICH: Yeah, and you have to understand the mediums of the – the technologies of the time you're involved in have to be mastered by senior politicians because they have to live in that technology.

KRISTOL: But on Eisenhower, I'm struck by what you say because, I would say, I mean, liberal academics I agree totally misunderstood him, they then, they now have sort of covered that up, though I think it was just one or two books that broke through that exposed how much Eisenhower was running things behind the scene – scenes and used the sort of bumbling press conferences to just not answer questions he didn't want to answer and so forth.

But the conservatives, I mean also I think you're different in some ways from the pure orthodox movement conservatives, who after all, started out in a certain way against Eisenhower. They were Taft guys in '52, *National Review* was very disgusted with the Eisenhower presidency. It seems to me you sort of straddled those two, I don't know parts of, you know, what was split apart in the 50s, in a sense you've tried to bring forward and bring together, I think, in some ways.

GINGRICH: Yeah, I think you also have to recognize that different people have different jobs. Eisenhower didn't become President, didn't become active in elective politics until he had already been Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, the head of NATO, the president of Columbia University. So to suggest that he is going to have the transformational impact politically that a Roosevelt who was a full-time professional politician, or even a Reagan who had been studying it since 1946, '47. I mean, it was implausible.

On the other hand, as a guy who consolidated American power, managed a worldwide competition without a nuclear war, had a very shrewd sense of – he thought a little bit like Reagan. He thought if he could balance the budget, keep spending down, liberate the private sector that the American economy would grow so rapidly. And this was a key part of our strategy in the Cold War was that we would grow both in technology and in economic power so

much faster than the Soviet Union that at some point they'd break. I mean, it's very explicit in NSC 68 published in 1950. And in fact, it pretty well describes what happened.

So Eisenhower thought his job was defend freedom, including against the military-industrial complex, be very cautious in the use of power so you don't get involved in long, difficult wars. I mean, he would have regarded the last 12 years as an irrational use of American power because you either go in and win with such force and so decisively or you back out, which is what he did in Lebanon. He said, "If we defend your capital and you can't take care of the interior, we're not going to be there because we're not going to send American forces into the mountains of Lebanon."

And I think he had a very cautious sense of managing the planet and did it pretty well. And after the '58 election, he managed things well enough, which '58 is the disaster from which the House Republicans don't recover till 1994. They were very competitive from 1942 to 1958. In '58, the bottom fell out and we just literally never recovered. But he comes back well enough that Nixon comes within a very small percent of winning.

With Nixon, it is almost unbelievable. Nixon goes to California, loses in '62. And again, by this stage, I am in college, I'm reading his book on crises, and I'm watching Nixon. And everybody sort of thought when he had the press conference and said, you know, won't have Dick Nixon to kick around anymore and he moved to New York. But that really was over. And so watching him come back in '65, '66, '67 is one of the more amazing performances of sheer ability. And Watergate in that sense is an enormous tragedy, although for conservatives, it may have actually saved us because Nixon and Kissinger were consolidating power in what they saw as a defensive position. And they didn't think that they could replace the welfare state and they didn't think that they could defeat the Soviet Empire. And Kissinger, who had been a great student of Metternich, was really applying Metternichian style of managing what he saw as a decaying America.

Reagan comes along, and in the vacuum created by Watergate, and without Watergate, I don't think you get Reagan because you don't have a big enough disaster, there's not enough space for Reagan. Reagan comes along, and says, you know, you can liberate Americans domestically from the welfare state, and, by the way, you can liberate everybody in the Soviet Empire from tyranny. And so he is leading an offensive, we-are-the-future model, where Kissinger and Nixon are managing a defensive how-do-we-manage-the-decay model. And it's interesting.

Before Watergate, I think Broder had written a book in which Nixon is given very favorable treatment because he is consolidating the Left, you know, he is a genuine centrist, with some conservative instincts. But Reagan is very different. Ford, I think people underestimated, in retrospect. Not because he wasn't a great leader per se but Ford was a guy who really understood the legislative branch and with the lowest number of Republicans since the Depression, Ford sustains more vetoes than any other president in modern times and he just stops the tide of liberalism, fights it to a stalemate.
Jimmy Carter comes along in the first of the three great Democratic campaigns in which people pretend to be somebody they're not. And he says, basically, I'll be whoever you want, I'm a Rorschach test. You know, and so he is a Wallace-ite in Georgia and he is a progressive in Wisconsin. Gets elected and brings in a team who completely misunderstand the country. And it's one of the great moments in American history. They are totally in over their heads and over a four-year period, they prove it to the country and the country throws him out and replaces with Reagan by – people forget how big the Reagan margin was in 1980 and how many things. In the first Capitol Steps event I helped put together, is actually in 1980.

KRISTOL: Yeah, talk about that because people forget that. And I remember what an impact that had on me. I guess, I was then assistant professor at Penn watching that and suddenly in September was, I think, in September of '80?

GINGRICH: Yes, in September of '80, Broder gave us a very nice column the Sunday before it happened explaining it, which was important because you had to explain it for people to understand it. And it's a great minor story.

There's a guy whose name I always forget who had been a Nixon loyalist and who had worked at AT&T and helped develop the Newport Jazz Festival, a very active Republican, came to Brock and said, "Why don't we get all the House and Senate candidates together with the presidential ticket and stand for something?" And Brock said, "That's a terrific idea, go see Newt." So he came over to see me. And I said I think that would work. I mean, it was a way of making vivid what we were doing and getting us to be idea-oriented. So we agreed to do it. The Reagan people agreed to do it. We put together five principles we were going to be for. Everybody was going to come in.

I was doing it in part because Mack Mattingly was running against Senator Herman Talmadge, and I didn't think Mattingly could win unless he got another three or four points. I thought he'd get to 46, 47. But he needed something, you know, a rising tide to lift him up. So and I thought coming to Washington, signing this document, being next to Reagan, communicating he could be a Senator would give him a significant advantage and get a lot of media.

So we have this all done and about a week out, two Reagan staffers – this is great lesson in systems – two Reagan staffers come to see me and say, you know, "We've thought about this, and we've decided we don't want to sign anything. We'd like them all to come in, and we'll use them, and the governor will give a speech, and that will be terrific." And I said, "Wait a second," and I said, "First of all, we're not going to have every House and Senate candidate in the country come in to be props. You can't take them off the campaign trail for two days for nothing." I said, "Second, the five principles come out of Reagan's speeches and the Republican platform, they're all things Reagan is for." They said, "Yeah, but we don't want to take the risk of doing it that way." So I called Vander Jagt and said –

KRISTOL: The principles are general, right – strong defense and –

GINGRICH: Exactly. Yeah, exactly what we're campaigning for. And so I called Vander Jagt who was chairman of the committee and I said this is nuts. And he said, "Well, it's your project, what do you want to do?" I said I want to cancel it. So I had somebody on my staff call over to the Reagan campaign and say as of tomorrow, this event is cancelled and we'll notify all the candidates not to come in.

Well, a few hours later I got the only call I got all year from Bill Casey who was the Reagan chairman and who was a great SEC lawyer and had been in the OSS with Bill Donovan in World War II. And he has this craggy voice. And he says, "Young man, I assume you wanted my attention." And I said, "Yes, sir. This is what's happened. This is what we're doing. This is why we should do it this way. It ain't going to happen unless it's done this way." And he said, "I think in an hour or two, you'll be very happy." The same two guys come in a couple hours later and go this is a great idea, we are totally for it. And of course, we ended up winning six U.S. Senate seats by a combined margin of 75,000 votes.

Nobody thought we could win the Senate. We picked up 33, we picked up 33 House seats. But as Broder said in his column, it was an act of enormous courage by Reagan, not to do the five principles but to say to the whole country, yes, I am part of this team, you're not just voting for

me for president, you're voting for a team and we're going to do things. Which if you go back and look at that event and look at the Broder column, all of it is the forerunner to '94.

KRISTOL: The degree to which the party was after '74 just considered dead and disgraced, and including the conservatives who were talking about new parties and Bill Rusher in '75. And they were at their lowest point in '74, I suppose since –

GINGRICH: We went down in December '74 to 17 percent identity in the country. They actually ran ads that said Republicans are people, too. I mean, the level of despair was real.

KRISTOL: I mean, it's amazing. It shows you how fast politics can turn though if you hit the key inflection point.

GINGRICH: I always try to tell people history turns and then smart politicians follow. I mean, you have to have the Carter failure with the Iranian hostage crisis, the economic disaster of both inflation and unemployment, you have to have Teddy Kennedy's insurgency, which people forget how easily Carter beat him. But all those things have to be coming together and then you're in a different world.

And I try to people that the next two years, you know, you tell me what's going to happen and Iran, Iraq, Crimea, Ukraine, Syria, etc., the European economy, the Japanese economy – then we'll talk about the 2016 campaign.

KRISTOL: Right, right. So you helped pull together this event for Reagan. It does lead to Reagan wins big and they win the Senate, which I remember watching on election night, again sitting in Philadelphia as assistant professor at Penn and our little TV in our little place with a couple – the other two conservatives on the entire Penn faculty, I think, are there.

And we sort of felt Reagan, we thought he could win. We weren't so sure he would win. I guess insiders knew that the polls had broken the last 48 hours but just what do we know? And so we thought it was 50-50. But I remember the unbelievable surprise of winning the Senate, which Republicans hadn't won since '54 I think, 26 years, and they'd been as you say, ever since the blowout in '58, they'd been way down and it wasn't close. And people weren't talking about it as I recall. I remember when they called Al D'Amato as winning in New York, I mean, I remember just being so amazed that gee, Reagan will not only win but he's going to have a Republican Senate.

GINGRICH: Which was vital to what they did. And you know, and in the House we gained enough seats that combined with – one of the things that happened in the 80s that was interesting was that you saw by '88 we didn't have as much support in the House over time from Blue Dog Democrats because they became Republicans and there was a steady erosion.

And Bush was behind 50 – he was behind by 19 points in May of 1988, and Steeper and Teeter had done focus groups in the South and what they had discovered was that the Reagan Democrats who were left were really Democrats because the soft Reagan Democrats were now Republicans. And the Reagan Democrats who were left really wanted to vote for a Democrat. And this was why Bush was doing so badly.

And they went through a couple of focus groups where they would put out facts. You know, Dukakis belongs to the ACLU. Dukakis vetoed having teachers say the Pledge of Allegiance. I mean they went through like 6 or 8 things. And they had this one woman in Birmingham who said, "Well, if that was all true, I couldn't vote for him, he'd be a liberal." And they came by and they saw me. This was in early May. And they said – and I said to them, "Well, this election is over because you know exactly what you have to do." And the whole campaign was then

designed to communicate he's a liberal, we're not, and given that choice, guess who wins. And it was a very un-establishment campaign.

KRISTOL: Yeah, for Bush especially and Baker.

GINGRICH: Yeah. Well, I imagine Bush running around saying he's in the ACLU.

KRISTOL: Yeah, Pledge of Allegiance, Willie Horton but.

GINGRICH: You know it was, it took to win in a Reaganite world.

KRISTOL: And it was all true. I mean he did veto – that was what so ridiculous about all the media getting upset about that. He did actually, he was proud of his policy of prisoner release, he was proud of vetoing the Pledge of Allegiance. What was the issue?

GINGRICH: It was beautiful because they put the attorney general of Massachusetts on the *Today Show* explaining why the veto was technically correct. Now, it's the kind of issue where there's no place in normal America where vetoing the Pledge of Allegiance can be explained. I mean, you have to be at the Harvard faculty.

KRISTOL: And Reagan is President. I mean, how much was – there's all these stories he was, he let the staff do a lot of stuff, but he always pulled the strings.

GINGRICH: That was a huge, no, that was a huge misunderstanding. Reagan, I always tell people, Reagan understood being a hyper-carnivore. Lions have to hunt antelope and zebra because if they hunt chipmunks they starve even if they catch them. And Reagan got up every morning. And he only had three goals – defeat the Soviet Empire, rebuild the American economy, and renew belief in American civic culture. And he micromanaged those three goals.

And then there was everything else, like having Cabinet officers. Well, he had Jim Baker as Chief of Staff. If we needed a Cabinet officer, Baker would get one. You know, that wasn't. But I always tell the story, which you know personally, of Reagan writing Mr. Gorbachev, "Tear down this wall," having the State Department censor "take it out," Reagan writing it a second time. Having the guy "take it out" a second time. Writing it in a third time and calling Shultz who told me the story and said, "Georgie, tell your guy I'm the president, he's not. It stays in."

In Berlin, at breakfast, every senior advisor begs him to take it out. Points out the wall is going to be up for 30 or 40 years, that it makes him look silly, it irritates Gorbachev to no advantage. And Reagan says no. Now, this is micromanagement at the level of one sentence but it was a sentence designed to help defeat the Soviet Empire. And at that level, Reagan understood exactly what he intended to do.

Shultz said to me one time when they went to Reykjavik – no not Reykjavik, the first time they met Gorbachev in Geneva. Which Callista and I did a 90-minute movie on Reagan called *Rendezvous with Destiny*. And we have this great scene in Geneva where Reagan comes out of the little house which we visited – not in Geneva, in Iceland, it's a different story.

In Geneva, Reagan comes out of the house on a very, very cold day only in his suit coat, trots down the stairs. Gorbachev pulls up in a big Soviet Zil, gets out with a huge Russian-style coat and a huge Russian style hat. And you have this image going worldwide of the athletic, young American President helping this old Soviet bureaucrat. Now, Gorbachev was 20 years younger than Reagan. But Reagan understood staging brilliantly.
And Shultz said to me they began preparing for the first meeting with Gorbachev, and he said, "I think it should be Reagan and Gorbachev and a translator." And all the senior staff was just

stunned and they said, “You can’t let him in there.” And he said, “Look, he knows what he believes, he has been studying Gorbachev for six months, he used to be a very successful labor union negotiator and he will take him the cleaners. Just relax.” This is Shultz’s version, you know, you have to decide from others how true it was.

But there was a lot to that. That when it mattered to Reagan, he could be extraordinarily controlling. And when it didn’t matter to Reagan, he was a movie actor. You know, he didn’t worry about makeup, script, cameras, lighting; he worried about being Ronald Reagan and assumed competent people around him got the other stuff done. But on the three things he cared about – you read his farewell address, and you’ll see this is him personally.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that’s amazing. George H.W. Bush.

GINGRICH: You know, he’s a very decent human being and was very patriotic and very courageous. He also, I think, never understood the rhythm. He served eight years with Reagan without ever having understood the rhythm. He for some, for a variety of reasons, his staff went after every Reaganite they could get the day that they took power. He identified at with, at a time when we were in the process of driving Jim Wright out of the House, if you go back and look at his inaugural, he’s making a big gesture of working with Wright.

And I think – and he didn’t understand, I think, the power of the Presidency to define reality. When the Democrats said to him in the summer of ’90 if you don’t agree to a tax increase, there won’t be a budget deal, he could easily have said to them, “I’ll tell you what, we’re going to go to the country in November and I’m going to tell the country right now that your price for a budget deal is a tax increase on them and if they reelect a Democratic Congress, I will sign the deal because they will have sent me that message.” They would have caved that afternoon.

And there was something about – there’s a certain, there’s a certain kind of power which requires you put all the chips on the table. And the Republican establishment, the heart of the Republican establishment is to get as much as it can without being disruptive. The heart of the Republican insurgents, whether it’s Goldwater or it’s Reagan or it was Gingrich, is to be as disruptive as necessary to get what you want. They’re really fundamentally different psychological relationships. And Bush was, I think, a very legitimate representative of the traditional. You know, he’s going to Kiev to beg the Ukrainians not to leave. I mean, that all fit this model of an orderly world where things can be reasonable. And it’s not an orderly world.

KRISTOL: How fast – I can’t remember any more if we talked about it at the time – how soon did you think, how early did you realize that Bush was likely to lose in ’92? Were you pessimistic from the budget deal?

GINGRICH: In August of ’91 because his staff was reassuring him about the economy. I mean, we had one leadership meeting. And by then, of course, I was persona non grata because I had fought them on taxes. But they still had to let me in the room. And I just said, I just said, “Look, I have a brother-in-law who just got laid off. If he had heard this conversation, he’d be furious.” And they were just – again it’s a question of rhythm.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Dan Quayle tried to tell them this, I remember this in the White House so many times and because we had the sense it was much worse than President Bush and Dick Brady, the Secretary of the Treasury realized and they just wouldn’t – I don’t know, it was hard to get them to listen.

GINGRICH: Well, they had designed a deal with Greenspan where they were going to raise taxes, Greenspan was going to lower interest rates, it was all going to come together beautifully. And so they had a lot – you know, C.P. Snow wrote a series of interesting novels about this.

They had so much of their egos riding on the deal that cognitive dissonance set in and they couldn't hear information that suggested that the deal was in fact not going to work.

KRISTOL: Bill Clinton. You tangled with him repeatedly there and –

GINGRICH: Well, I mean Clinton is probably the most extraordinarily engaging person I know of in the sense that he said to me one time the night of the treaty signing between the Palestinians and the Israelis, we had a reception at the White House, and we were out standing on the balcony looking down over the Mall. He said, you know, he said, "I'm like a clown you had when you were a kid that has sand in the bottom, it goes down, but then it always comes back up." He said, "I'm not pretty but I always come back up." And I think that was as true a statement of how Clinton had lived his life as anything I've ever heard.

He loves life. He loves people. He loves the game, the game of life, not just the game of politics. He is irrepressibly energetic and will be till the day he dies. And we spent 35 days negotiating to get to four balanced budgets and welfare reform. And I always tell people this is one of the great challenges for Obama. If you don't like people and you don't want to be in a room with them and you're not willing to engage them and you're not willing to listen to them, it's very hard to run a free society because ultimately a free society requires the voluntary support of a wide range of people. And Clinton got it.

He also learned from some of his mistakes. I mean, in 1980, he got beat because he had raised taxes on driver's licenses and because Hillary at that time was going around the state as Hillary Rodham. And it was too radical for Arkansans. And the two of them came to grips with what they had done wrong. He told me one time he spent a year going around apologizing to people. And finally some old man at this little county store said to him, "Son, we've all heard that now for a year, just relax, go back, you'll win the governorship next time. Get over it."

But they also learned, you learned, you lose the governorship, you lose the state police car, you lose the state airplane, you lose the salary. And so when '95 came around, you can lose, something which Obama doesn't understand. And that losing is really bad. And so they were prepared to adjust to reality. Now, they'd also shown unbelievable toughness. I mean, you go back and look at the '92 campaign and Paula Flowers and, I mean, all the different things that are going on, and – it wasn't Paula Flowers.

KRISTOL: Gennifer Flowers, it's like a blur.

GINGRICH: Yeah, the whole series. Paula was somebody else. But you look at all the different things that are piling up on them and their capacity, and it goes back in part to the James Carville line, "It's the economy, stupid." But no matter what's going on out here, they keep coming. That's sort of a remarkable achievement.

KRISTOL: Right. I'm just curious all those moments you were in the White House with different presidents and any one like stand – when you wake up in the middle of the night and think about, gee, you spent an awful lot of time in this house that most Americans just visit. Any one moment, one moment in the Speaker's office, I mean, that was sort of dramatic or –

GINGRICH: Well, I mean for me, the most – probably the biggest moment was the morning I was going to be sworn in. I went out and stood on the balcony and looked down the Mall about 7 in the morning and thought, you know, I mean, for an Army brat to be loaned this level of authority was remarkable and that it was something to be very grateful for. Again, I see a lot of life in the context of having grown up in the Army.

You know, I think the times I've been in the White House over the years, there are a lot of different specific events. I think what people really misunderstand and you know this because you worked there, it's really a working building. I mean, you go down there to meetings, you go down there to see different people in different offices to do different things, including the President of the United States. I think because I was there so often with Clinton, it was demystified a lot from that perspective.

And different presidents have very, very different styles, I mean, a different feeling to them. Reagan had a confidence in himself. I'm not saying, I'm not using the right words. Reagan was a very settled person. The ranch was a part of that, and Nancy was a part of that. So Reagan was able to be very comfortable, no matter what was going on because he woke up every morning as Ronald Reagan. You know, and he had a very deep sense of that. And he didn't particularly have to – I mean, he wanted to convince you but he didn't have to convince you.

I think Clinton woke up every morning a little bit insecure. In some ways, Clinton is a little bit like Nixon in that there's a kind of insecurity and Clinton really needs your approval. That's how he ends up in a Houston audience saying, "You probably think I raised your taxes too much. Well, I agree with you, I did raise your taxes." I mean he had to say it. He had to find some way to bond.

And there are very just very different stylistic approaches to the presidency. Carter was always sincere. I mean, Carter is a very smart man. He always sincere but there was always something that you knew the words didn't quite get through, I mean, there was a synaptic gap in his ability to grasp whatever it is you were talking about and that was just very interesting. I mean, very smart, very complicated guy.

KRISTOL: Well, as you say, you're an historian. And I think it's very useful reminder, having been a professor of political science, though not really a political scientist, I have to say I totally agree that history is so much more contingent and things don't go in a straight line. And individuals matter so much more than sort of modern social science types think. You know, so that's a very useful –

GINGRICH: Well, and history occurs as a story. You know you, a friend of mine who's a great trial lawyer says, "You can get a jury to go from A to Z by going from A to B. You can never jump from A to Z."

Well, history occurs that way, which is why cheerful persistence is important because cheerful persistence is the application of your will to overcome all the different things that are going to go wrong the period where you're trying to get something done because it's the things that go wrong that wear you down, and if you let them wear you down, you're not going to get anything done.

KRISTOL: Well, thank you for your cheerful persistence over the years. Thank you for joining me today. And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]