Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ROBERT S. STRAUSS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: This is Tape 1 Side 1 of an interview with Ambassador Robert S. Strauss. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Mr. Ambassador, can we start at the beginning? When and where were you born, and can you tell me a little about your family?

STRAUSS: My mother was from Hempstead, Texas. Her father came to Hempstead, shortly after the Civil War. Her grandfather, who would be my great grandfather, was the first Reform rabbi in Texas. He came about 1862, -3, -4, -5. Civil War time.

Q: I take it the family originates in Germany?

STRAUSS: Germany, yes. My father was a German immigrant. He came to this country at the age of about 20 or 21. He had been educated in France. I think his father had died and his mother had remarried, and I don't think he had much use for having her children around there, and they put him in a private school in Switzerland. They could afford to; apparently they were people of some substance. So he came to this country at the age of about 20. He was a musician. He met my mother in south Texas, where she lived. Her family then moved from Hempstead to Lockhart, Texas, where her father had a little store. As many of the immigrant families did, they'd go to these little small towns. They went to Lockhart, and that's where my mother grew up.

Q: Lockhart is where?

STRAUSS: Lockhart is about 25 miles south of Austin, Texas. I remember going there frequently enough to have a recollection of the house where I was born.

Q: You were born when?

STRAUSS: In October 1918, so I will celebrate my 84th birthday this month.

Q: Congratulations.

STRAUSS: And I still work five days a week pretty hard.

Q: I'm glad I'm taping you.

STRAUSS: You may not have many more years to do it. I don't think I'll make over 10 or 15 more years.

Q: Your mother's family actually were shopkeepers?

STRAUSS: Yes, yes.

Q: Your father was a musician?

STRAUSS: A musician and a salesman. He was selling pianos when he met my mother traveling in south Texas out of San Antonio. I don't think he lived in San Antonio; he'd center when he traveled to sell his pianos in that part of the country. He'd stay in San Antonio and go to these little towns.

Q: That was the era when every respectable person wanted to have an upright piano in the parlor whether they played it or not.

STRAUSS: Everybody wanted one, exactly. And my father, he loved pianos. I guess my grandfather probably helped him and my mother start a little store of their own. He wanted to quit traveling, and she wanted him to because they had just married and they wanted to settle down. They moved to west Texas then, to a little town called Hamlin and later to a town called Stamford, Texas, which is where I grew up.

Q: Where? I'm not a Texan.

STRAUSS: These are in west Texas out near Abilene, Texas.

Q: You grew up there? How old were you there?

STRAUSS: It's Stamford, a town of about 3500 people.

Q: What was the principal occupation in that area?

STRAUSS: Farming, cattle and cotton.

Q: Were your family running a store then?

STRAUSS: They ran a little store then, yes.

Q: Did you get involved in that?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, I would work after school sometimes, but most of the times I didn't. I was out playing. My parents were not much in the way of taskmasters, and my mother was scared to death I would spend too much time around that store and end up at the store. She wanted me to be a lawyer. One time when I was 10 or 12 years old she told her family that Bobby is going to be a lawyer and he is going to be a diplomat and he's going to be the first Jewish governor of the state of Texas.

Q: What happened?

STRAUSS: As a matter of fact, I had a couple of opportunities to run for governor after that, but I didn't have any desire to be governor, and may or may not have been successful. But it was sort of a standing joke among my relatives.

Q: Your mother had the right idea.

STRAUSS: She had the right idea.

Q: How old were you when you moved to Stamford?

STRAUSS: I was ready to start the fifth grade.

Q: What was it like growing up in the town?

STRAUSS: It was a nice life. Doors were open; no one ever locked a door. My brother and myself, my father and mother: there was nothing particularly different about us than the other families in town, I guess. People ask me what it was like being Jewish, and I say, well, I really had no Jewish background, except my mother insisted that we know we were Jewish and have some respect for our faith and a feel for it.

Q: No Bar Mitzvah?

STRAUSS: No, no, I couldn't spell it. I couldn't spell it when I got through high school, much less then. But my mother convinced me that I was one of God's chosen people as a Jew, and I can remember being kind of embarrassed walking around town realizing I was one of God's chosen people, and I couldn't say anything about it. Instead of feeling a sense of inferiority, I rather had a sense of superiority and kind of hated the fact that I couldn't mention it, it would be in poor taste.

Q: Your mother sounds like a very powerful woman.

STRAUSS: She was a very powerful influence on me and on my brother.

Q: What did your brother do?

STRAUSS: My brother was a successful businessman.

Q: What about school? How did school grab you?

STRAUSS: Well, I was never a student, and my mother didn't encourage me to be a student. It used to drive my father crazy when she used to say, "Don't study too hard, Bobby." My dad would say, "You know he isn't studying too hard. He doesn't study a damn bit. That's the most idiotic thing, Edith. Why do you keep telling him not to study too hard?" She said, "Well, it gives him ulcers, and it'll upset his stomach. What you need to do," she'd say, "is just learn to live with people and like people." And I swear to goodness that I think that that had an impact on my ability. I've always liked people and they've always liked me, and I've never been a successful student of anything except people and what motivates people.

Q: Your career shows this. When the going get tough and they need a nice guy to go in and take care of things, you're the guy they send.

STRAUSS: Frequently! It's very interesting.

Q: So your mother had the right idea. Did she feed you a lot of chicken soup?

STRAUSS: She fed me very well. She was a hell of a cook and she also ran the store. My father was not a businessman. She was the businesswoman of the family.

Q: Did you have any music in your background?

STRAUSS: None whatsoever, and it drove my father crazy. He must have brought home every musical instrument at one time or another for us to try, and nothing took. He'd pick up that damn saxophone - he'd never seen one, I guess, or never held it - and he'd fool around and could make music with it, but not me.

Q: You know there's school learning and what you really learn, you know, reading and all that. How about reading?

STRAUSS: I was a voracious reader. I guess I was until I became Chairman of the Democratic Party, which changed a lot of things for me in a lot of ways both positive and negative. I haven't had any extra time since then. If you look at my career, every so often I changed the dimension of my career dramatically and I'd find myself in a job I'm ill prepared for and have to get up and start reading at 5:30 in the morning to be able to attend the meetings and be informed enough to hold the meetings at 8:30. I still read a lot; I read four or five newspapers a day, but once you read the New York Times you can read the other three or four pretty quickly. And I'm reading Caro's book now on Lyndon Johnson and I just finished David Rockefeller's book.

Q: Oh, yes, Master of the Senate?

STRAUSS: Yes, that's what I'm reading now. I've read the others. I don't like him very much, but he surely can write. I've never met him and if I did, I'd probably end up liking him.

Q: He really didn't like Johnson.

STRAUSS: He didn't like him at all. I kind of skimmed through the first two.

Q: I must say, I read the first, but then he got me so annoyed. With all his faults, Johnson is a powerful and very positive figure, I think, in the American political scene. He got things done. And the idea of somebody just not liking him as a person and writing a biography, I think, doesn't come out very well.

STRAUSS: This fellow made up his mind, it seemed to me - Caro did - that by the time Johnson was 12 or 13 he had no character, and he set about in three books to prove that he had no character.

Q: This is Robert Caro, C A R O, who's written some books on Johnson. Now, was there a library in Stamford?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, there was a Carnegie Library.

Q: Carnegie, he's a god.

STRAUSS: He's a god to me. When I think of the people who had access to real books in that dusty little town of Stamford, which is so poor, but they had a Carnegie Library and it was just simply wonderful. My only problem was I would sometimes forget to turn in a book, and then the fines would get bigger and bigger and then I'd be tormented on what to do about it as a kid.

Q: Was there any particular kind of reading that you did? Did you do the usual Tom Swift...?

STRAUSS: All that stuff, yes, and Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn and Tom Swift. I guess that's what I got out of the library, that sort of books then.

Q: In school while you were in Stamford do you recall any teachers that particularly stick in your mind or were influential on you?

STRAUSS: No, I really don't. They were nice people, and I thought they were adequate as teachers. I was never much of a student, and I always did just enough work to get by. As I said, it pleased my mother and displeased my father. He had no patience with me.

Q: How about as a kid playing around? We're sitting here in an office with a picture showing you at a very early age with your .22 rifles. What were the sort of kid things you were doing?

STRAUSS: Well, I did the things kids do. We built scooters with little wheels taken off of our skates...

Q: Orange crate for the...?

STRAUSS: ...yes, that sort of thing, yes. We built wagons that way. When I was about eight or 10 I had my first BB gun, and we hunted birds with BBs but rarely hit one. When I was a little older I had a .22 and we'd go out and shoot cans and try to shoot rabbits but rarely hit. And we got into the kind of trouble kids get into. My mother used to take the position with my father that I was just a wonderful, perfect youngster but sometimes I had a tendency to run with the wrong boys, and it was their fault, anything that I was involved in - never mind. And I was happy to go along with that. My father was hard to persuade, but he wasn't much of a taskmaster either and my mother really ran the family.

Q: What about the mix of Stamford? Was there a Mexican...?

STRAUSS: There were a few Mexicans and a few blacks, a number of Mexicans and blacks. In the fall the Mexican cotton pickers would come in and harvest their crops. They had to start in one part of south Texas and they'd work their way up, where things came to bloom later, in central Texas where I lived and west Texas. In cotton season they'd pick the cotton - they pull cotton bolls, not pick cotton, which is a different thing - because they had short staple cotton out there, you'd pull those bolls.

Q: It sounds like you'd cut your finger.

STRAUSS: Yes, and they would pay you. They paid, I think, 25 cents a hundred-weight for your bolls if you pulled them, and that was without the cotton pulled out of the boll. The whole boll would be there and it would be a big part of the weight - I remember that. But things were very poor. Cotton was eight or 10 cents a pound less.

Q: By the time you were around 11 or so, the Depression started. How did the Depression affect you and the town of Stamford?

STRAUSS: Just before we moved to Stamford, my mother persuaded my father that the family should go to Europe, because her father and mother wanted to go back and visit some of the places they were from. So my father and mother, my four- or five-year-old brother, and I, the six of us, took this trip to Germany and other places. I think the trip cost my father $3,000 for our share, for the whole thing. I don't know why I have that notion it was $3,000; I've always had it in my mind, because they must have said so.

Q: Well, it sounds logical.

STRAUSS: But when they came back after being gone six weeks visiting relatives and other places, things really were bad, and my father and mother never really recovered financially from that trip. My dad used to say, which irritated me and my mother, "If I hadn't taken that goddamn trip, if your father and mother hadn't insisted on it, we wouldn't have spent that money and we wouldn't have closed our store." They just locked the damn store; they just closed the door for three months. They never recovered from that.

Q: Do you recall where in Germany or did you ever hear where?

STRAUSS: I know we went to Brussels Island and I know we went to Durenfurth and other places, Berlin, but I don't recall. I was just too young to pay that much attention.

Q: This was part of the Hitler time?

STRAUSS: Earlier, in the early thirties.

Q: The real Depression started to hit in the 1930s. By that time you were just getting close to high school time.

STRAUSS: Yes, I finished high school and entered the University of Texas at the age of 16. I was going to be 17 the next month. I enrolled in September. Some of my family before me, an uncle and aunt had attended the University of Texas.

Q: You were relatively close to Austin.

STRAUSS: Yes. As I grew up it had never occurred to me that I'd have any interest in going east to school. I wasn't even impressed by it. No one in my circle, the people I knew, no one out of west Texas went to Harvard or Yale, to my knowledge. So going to the University of Texas to me was the ultimate. It never occurred to me to go anywhere else. I was probably the only person in my class that went to college - that didn't go to business school or go to one of the little, small colleges in Abilene, Texas.

Q: Sort of like a teacher's school or something?

STRAUSS: Abilene Christian College and Hardin Simmons' a Baptist School. But I went to the University of Texas, and I was the exception, I think the only person in my class that did.

Q: What was the high school like? It must have been rather small.

STRAUSS: Yes, it was small. I don't remember what my graduating class looked like, but I suspect 50 people probably were seniors when I was. I did a little of everything in school except I wasn't very good in sports, but I tried them all. I was not an athlete, and it just crushed me. I wanted to be. But I was popular and I was happy.

Q: Often in high school the political bug bites people. Did you run for office and that sort of thing?

STRAUSS: Yes. As a matter of fact, the summer before I went to college, I helped a fellow my dad knew - his name Travis B. Dean - who was running for the legislature in Stamford, Texas. I handed out a few cards for him and circulars for him. Mr. Dean told me, "When I get elected, Bobby, and you go to Austin, I'll help you get a job. I know you need one. I'll help you get one in the Capital! I'll have some patronage." Sure enough, he got elected, and he had $120 a month for the patronage and he gave me a third of that patronage. He gave me a committee clerk's job. Didn't have to do much of any work; it was just almost pure handout. But it helped me for two or three years. It was enough, and with the $10, $15 or $20 of checks I'd write monthly on my family account, I lived like a king.

Q: During the Depression in Texas at that time, money went a long, long way.

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, I lived like a king. An older friend of mine, a fellow that I had known, went to the University of Texas and belonged to a very nice fraternity and was socially well placed - people talk about joining fraternities - and I thought, well, when I go to school I'll join this same fraternity Tom Buckley belongs to. I had a cousin who told me, "You've got another thought coming" - she went to the University of Texas - "because the only fraternity open to you will be a Jewish fraternity." I thought she was crazy, but I got there and I found out she was dead right in that the Jewish students had a couple fraternities and one sorority and that's where you went if you wanted one. So I joined one, but it offended me terribly. I found that the Jewish students primarily ran with each other and didn't broaden their acquaintance, which was just contrary to the kind of life I'd lived. I found it a traumatic experience, very traumatic. The fellows in my fraternity were very hesitant to ask non-Jewish girls for a date, and I took a dim view of that. But in a year or two I worked myself out of that because I got interested in other activities and other things at school and before long I had a broader acquaintance than most of my friends did at the fraternity, which I enjoyed. I made a lot of good friends in that Jewish fraternity, have never regretted it at all, but the process that delivered me there offended me then and still does..

Q: What years were you at University of Texas?

STRAUSS: From 1935 through 1941. I graduated with a law degree in 1941.

Q: Looking back, what was the impression of the education you were getting at the University of Texas?

STRAUSS: To tell you the truth - it's kind of embarrassing, but I've told my children and grandchildren the truth, so I might as well tell you - I did just enough work to get by.

Q: You got what is known as a gentleman's C.

STRAUSS: Yes, that was me. I didn't fail courses, but I don't remember ever making very many As and Bs. When I got to law school, I didn't have enough sense then or the judgment to study hard and I again did just what I needed to do to get by and graduate on time. I never failed a course, but I was in the bottom quartile of my class, I can tell you that.

Q: At the University, were there any activities...?

STRAUSS: The University of Texas was a very important part of my life - and still is, I might add - with various activities and honorary societies. Again, I was popular. I liked a lot of people there and they liked me. I met John Connolly, who came to play a very important role in my life, there. He was the most attractive fellow on the University of Texas campus probably. He and I developed a pretty good friendship, which later became a very important friendship for me and for him. I met my wife, who had had two years at Wellesley, when she transferred to Texas, met her there the first day she was in Austin, and I have been with her ever since, and it's almost 70 years.

Q: What was her background?

STRAUSS: She came from a well placed Jewish family in Dallas, and she went east to school at Wellesley and lived two years in Boston. It was too far from home and it was cold and she decided she wanted to go to school back at the University of Texas.

Q: Your mother had been pushing law. How did you feel about law?

STRAUSS: It appealed to me; strangely it appealed to me, I guess, because it seemed to me that with a law degree you could to do anything you wanted to do. And that has proved to be the case. I have a law firm here that I started myself with a fellow named Dick Gump, who retired quite some years ago. We started out in Dallas with a clientele of $50 divorce cases and collection matters and, as I used to laughingly say, several smaller items. Now we have been 900 and 1,000 lawyers scattered all around the world. I have been extremely successful, a productive lawyer. We just had an important article in a publication called Corporate Board Member: they took a poll of about 3,000 corporate executives, directors and executives of law firms, and this firm I started in Dallas, Texas, in 1945 right after the war - October 1945 - was picked as the 11th or 12th best law firm in the United States. I tell you that with a great deal of pride. I have a hard time being properly humble about it.

Q: I think a little pride is necessary. With Texas law, was there a different cast, would you say, to it?

STRAUSS: As a matter of fact, Charles, there's sort of a theory down there that if you're going to practice law in Texas, you're a hell of a lot better off going to the University of Texas because the 100 or so people in your class would be the 100 or so lawyers that you will be practicing with, among others, the rest of your life. Some of them will be in south Texas, others will be in Amarillo or the Panhandle, and another will be in El Paso and on and on, and you would each know each other and you'd help each other. It turned out to have some basis.

Q: I'm sure it did.

STRAUSS: It didn't occur to me, frankly, that they were getting a very superior education at Harvard and Yale, but what I was looking for was available for me right there. I knew more people on the University of Texas campus probably than most other students did and probably would have run well in some sort of popularity contest. My father left us no financial inheritance, but he left my brother and me his personality. My father always was a popular man and I had an appealing personality as a young man and a respectful one for my elders. Older people liked me and my contemporaries liked me, and I liked all of them, I liked people.

Q: It strikes me that there are almost two types of lawyers - sometimes you can combine both - one, the ones who really know the law and are well educated - I won't call them bean counters, but they know all the intricacies - they eventually will end up in the back room supporting the people who can get out and deal with people, which is law.

STRAUSS: There's no question about that having some basis. I just finished talking to one of the nicest lawyers we have in this law firm, one of the brightest. We had a serious conflict matter come here, and he handles conflict issues, and he convinced me that we had a conflict and we shouldn't take this engagement. That comes up constantly, but I just hung up talking to him. I was talking to him when you came in, as a matter of fact, and I said, "Dan, I want to tell you that I do a lot of dumb things, as you know, but one thing I don't do is fail to listen to you fellows in areas where you know so much more than I do. And while I was heartsick with your ruling that this very important person that brought his problem to me, we had a conflict and I just couldn't represent him. And I just want to tell you that you were right and I appreciate your standing up and telling me I couldn't do that." Of course, it pleased him, and it should have pleased him, but he deserved it, and I would have erred there had I not relied on someone who knew the conflict law better than I did.

Q: This is, of course, part of the mix of law. With a solid law firm you can get both. That's what you pay for.

STRAUSS: Yes, I haven't drafted a contract in maybe 30 years and, good Lord willing, never will have to. I could do it. I did a lot of them and I did them fast and did them well, but they were not quite as scholarly, I suspect, as usually drafted. I can dictate a 15-line memorandum to people in one area of the law or the other and tell them what I would like to say and "Give me an op ed piece on that," and they'll turn out beautifully drafted op ed pieces. It's what I said to them, but it comes back crafted beautifully.

Q: Did you get any taste for the Texas legislature? Every once in a while I read these articles by Molly Ivins, I think. She has a wonderful time poking fun at the legislature.

STRAUSS: At the lege, as she calls it, the lege.

Q: Could you tell me what your impression was? You were in Austin and you had this patronage job. Did you get any feel for it at that time.

STRAUSS: Yes, you didn't have to be around the Texas legislature very long to know that it couldn't be at that stage of the game a more embarrassing institution, I guess. The lobbyists who had the money controlled a lot of it. There were a lot of nice people in the legislature, but I used to say that these lobbyists in Austin, with a bottle of whiskey and a steak or a woman could get some member to vote that two and two was 13. We used to kid about it, but it made you a bit cynical about things, except there were enough good people that you could tell, you could make a difference. My parents were having such a terribly difficult time economically, when Roosevelt came along, he was the first light that we could see at the end of the tunnel. People wonder why I'm such an ardent Democrat. I don't know that I'd be a Democrat or a Republican, but I knew that I was for Franklin Roosevelt and whatever he was for I was for.

Q: You'd go to places and in so many homes you'd find a picture of Roosevelt; almost a shrine.

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, exactly. That's what he was to me, almost to a fault. I never recognized his faults when others did. I just wasn't interested in recognizing his faults. I defended him top, side and bottom, and as my state became more and more Republican and more and more conservative, while I'm a pretty moderate Democrat, I never considered switching. I was always proud of being a Democrat, but Roosevelt captured my imagination in an unbelievable way.

Q: You graduated in 1941 from law school, which was an interesting year to come out of the womb, I'd say. What happened?

STRAUSS: Well, a very interesting thing happened. A fellow came through, a fellow named Maurice Acers. He was a high-ranking FBI official, and he came through Austin recruiting selected young men. He interviewed, I guess, 40 or 50 of us out of my law class, knowing he was going to recommend one or two. I think he recommended two people in the class, and I was one of the two, for the FBI. Acers was to me then an impressive man, because he had a style and a manner. You wanted to get in the FBI or you wanted to get a commission, and this FBI opportunity was the first one that came up, and he recommended me, so I graduated from law school and I went to a law firm and got a job at $50 a month in Dallas. After a few months there, six months there or less, Pearl Harbor came along, and I got a wire from John Edgar Hoover saying I had been accepted as special agent of the FBI at a salary of $3200 a year. Well, $265 a month was big money compared to the $50 a month I was making. And, furthermore, I had married in the meantime, and you were not only deferred, you didn't have to worry about the military. You couldn't get out if you wanted to; Hoover had that arranged. So I spent four years as an FBI agent.

Q: Could you talk a little about the training.

STRAUSS: I trained about a third to half of the time at Quantico, Virginia; in the Marine base there. The other half of the time it was books and techniques at the Department of Justice in Washington. So Helen and I moved, or I moved and she joined me for much of the time, in Washington during the first three months of the war. Then I got assigned to various places, several places, and ended up, I guess, a year before I got out transferred to Dallas, Texas.

Q: In the FBI in that time, did they divvy it up as far as enforcement, sort of getting out there and arresting people or investigating or doing legal work? What sort of things did you do?

STRAUSS: I was a field agent. I was never in a supervisory capacity. Most of the best agents werl wasn't among the best. When I entered the FBI, I think I was the youngest agent in the FBI, and I was among the greenest. I had probably less experience, was less mature, I would say. The truth of the matter is in my four years in the FBI, I frequently said, the FBI did more for me in those four years than I did for it. I didn't necessarily like it; there were many things about it I didn't like. But I matured a great deal, and I came out of there for the first time a very solid, mature, young, married man with a wife and child, and my career just sort of took off.

Q: Later he became very controversial, but at the time you were in there J. Edgar Hoover was considered one of the demagogues and could do no wrong. It was a very button-down organization. Everybody had to wear and suit...

STRAUSS: And a hat and a white shirt.

Q: ...no sport coats.

STRAUSS: Oh, God, no! You'd look like a Communist to Hoover. I was so intimidated, I was intimidated by John Edgar Hoover, by that whole operation. And I grew out of that intimidated posture during my FBI time. I'm pretty sure that's when I really matured, as I said earlier. I didn't have enough sophistication to know just how narrow, or enough experience to know just how narrow, Hoover wanted your thinking to be. He really wanted to turn them out with cookie cutters. Everybody looked the same and acted the same.

Q: He was a very odd person in a way when you think about it.

STRAUSS: Yes, he was a cruel man, I think, as I look back. I'll say one thing though: In those days the FBI was a system invented by a genius to be executed by fools like me, is what I thought, and that's not far from the truth.

Q: What sort of things were you doing, and where were you doing them?

STRAUSS: I did a little bit of everything. Mostly in those days we did things relating to the national defense, although we had regular criminal work too.

Q: Before, he'd been hunting down gangsters, as they were known in those days, but it had switched by the time you got there?

STRAUSS: No, that's not true. We had those responsibilities. You have to keep in mind they had a lot of agents who were career agents, a hell of a lot more able than I was. I had a style and manner that served me well then, and then the agent in charge would frequently call on me to do something public, because I was pretty good at it, making a speech somewhere and that sort of thing. I might be in a group of 15 to 20 agents working something, kidnapping cases, a lot of national defense cases on down to personnel investigations of sensitive Presidential appointees, and things like that, but I don't know that I ever drew my gun but once or twice the whole time I was in the FBI. I had a wonderful experience there. Earlier in my FBI career, we had had a few days' leave, as I recall, over the Fourth of July, and Helen and I went home to see our families. I had just been transferred to Cincinnati, Ohio; I was stationed at the time in Iowa and I got transferred to the Cincinnati field office. In those days you had to carry your gun at all times or they'd fire you if caught without your gun, and you had to let the home office or D.C. headquarters know where you were at all times: "departing Dallas by car, spending night one in Saint Louis, arriving in Cincinnati," that sort of thing. When we got transferred to Cincinnati, I had heard from other agents about this great gambling place, the Beverly Club, run by the Mafia, across the river over near Covington, Kentucky. I just had never seen anything like that in my life (they didn't have a lot of such establishments where I grew up in west Texas) and I was determined I was going to see it. I liked gambling anyway, always had. I busted my tail and drove that car like crazy to get to Cincinnati three or four hours before I told them I would be there. I think I told them I'd be arriving and eight or nine o'clock, and I got there earlier and I said, "Helen, let's get over there, register in the hotel, and go to the Beverly Club" I think that was the name of it; it was a Mafia operation. I got in - I forget how, but I'm sure one of the agents who'd done it himself told me - and when we got in there I got a table and we sat done for a nice dinner. We were going to have a nice dinner and dance. I couldn't wait to go upstairs and gamble. We went upstairs and I bought $20 worth of chips, which was all I was going to lose. It was a lot of money to me then. I hadn't been at that table 10 or 15 minutes until I was shooting the dice - they came around to me as they went around this dice table - and I leaned over and was throwing the dice and as I finished, a man tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Will you step over here a minute, please, Sir?" I said, "Yes, of course." My wife was there with me and I said, "I'll see you in a minute, honey." She was watching me gamble. I went over there and all of a sudden this guy kind of lightly pushed me a little into a room. In there, there were a couple other people, and this fellow said, "What's the idea of the gun, buddy?" I said, "What?" He said, "What are you doing with that gun, bringing it I here?" I had forgotten about the gun on my hip. When I leaned over, it showed. I had to make a quick decision. I figured if Hoover found out I was in there, he was going to fire me, and if they didn't know who I was, they were probably going to kill me. I'm exaggerating, of course, to make the point of how petrified I was. So all of a sudden I said, "Well, to tell you the truth, I'm an agent of the FBI." Now, Charlie, nobody ever looked less like an FBI agent than me. I was green, weighed about 120 pounds, looked like I was 18 to 20 and I was 22 or 23. I thought, well, I'd better tell them, so I said, "I'm a special agent of the FBI," and I reached in and showed them my credentials. They obviously thought I was looking the place over to raid it because they just figured that's the kind of sap-looking guy that Hoover would send in as an undercover man to get information on them. Now they were as concerned as I was. They couldn't be nicer. "Well, you go right out gambling. Dinner's on us. Have a good time. We're always glad to see fellows like you in here." I was so terrified about my job, I went back and said, "Helen, let's get out of here." We had ordered dinner, we ate a few bites since I had quit gambling. They insisted on paying my check. I insisted on paying it, so I paid my check and we went out. I'll never forget that experience as a 6-month old FBI agent.

Q: Speaking of Mafia, you know, later Hoover was to deny there was a Mafia, very reluctantly. He was concentrating on Communism at that time. Did the Mafia or that sort of organization ever come across your radar?

STRAUSS: There were a considerable number of German and Nazi sympathizers in this country. You're too young to recall, but I think it was four to six saboteurs that landed on the East Coast, for example.

Q: Oh, I remember. They came in on a boat on Long Island.

STRAUSS: They came in on a submarine, came into Long Island. As a matter of fact, when they tried to turn themselves in in New York, the FBI took credit for catching them, but the truth of the matter is they caught themselves. A couple of them got scared and tried to turn themselves in to the New York field office, and that agent there who took their call sent them down to Washington. He didn't pay much attention to them. They had to come down to Washington and turn themselves in again. They didn't get caught. As I recall, that's the way the story went. But they had all kinds of things with them that were used for espionage worphony passports, cameras, etc.

Q: Did you get involved in finding agents or anything like that?

STRAUSS: Yes and no. What would happen is that they would call the office from a field office, let's say, in Washington and say that Mr. Hans So-and-So and his traveling companion So-and-So will be arriving by train from Washington at such and such a time, and agents from the Washington field office will be turning them over to the Columbus, Ohio field office. On arrival, you would meet him there. You would meet this party, and the agents would kind of turn over the surveillance to the new group, and you would follow them from Columbus to Dayton or Dayton to somewhere else. They were people suspected of being espionage agents. During the time work was going on at Los Alamos and the atomic bomb was being worked on by the Oppenheimer group, we had a lot of that sort of work. There was considerable activity of that sort. Let me make it absolutely clear that I was, at most, a minor player on a very good team of agentmost more experienced and able than me.

Q: I imagine you were close to them. What were they doing?

STRAUSS: A lot of these were just people who were suspected of being involved in espionage, and they could be traveling anywhere and each agent in each office would have a limited time to be with them. One field office would turn them over to the next field office at the first convenient time. Sometimes you'd stay with people for a longer period of time.

Q: I was just wondering. Sort of the outfit that agents wore was rather distinctive. Were you allowed to sort of go into...?

STRAUSS: You could do anything you wanted to do.

Q: I mean you could change your clothing and that sort of thing.

STRAUSS: I remember one of the most petrifying experience I had. I just mentioned Dayton, Ohio. I remember following a fellow in, I guess, Columbus, Ohio, and his next stop was Dayton, Ohio, and the guy had on a plaid coat. I followed him and kept my eye on that plaid, and I damn near missed him because when he came out of his hotel he no longer had a plaid coat. He had an altogether different one, and I was looking for that plaid coat. He'd been wearing it for two days. I didn't think he'd change then, but he did. That kind of thing. I was a pretty good agent. I wasn't a star by any means. They had older and more able people who had been there 30 years or more.

Q: Did you get the feeling that Communism was as much a target as Nazism?

STRAUSS: As a matter of fact, we used to kid each other. We'd plant people into those cells, and we used to kid each other that we had more people in the Communist Party than the Communists did. There were so many agents that would place people in the cell to penetrate it. In each large city of consequence they'd work their way in. My recollection is there were a couple of times the FBI agent, or the informant for the FBI agent - he was not an FBI agent, he was just an informant for them - would be elected the head of the damn thing. I haven't thought of those instances in 40 years, so I'm straining my memory now.

Q: Were you getting any feel for the American Communist movement at that time?

STRAUSS: I was, I guess, liberal enough in my thinking - maybe today we call it progressive enough - that I understood the appeal of the Communist Party to people, I thought. I couldn't understand how any American could be involved with them or would buy into that, but yet I understood that these principles they were enunciating, if they could deliver, then had a lot of appeal. There's no question about it. But I would not have said that in the Bureau. Hoover would have castrated me. He wouldn't have killed me; he would have castrated me.

Q: Were you getting any stories about Hoover? Or were people very careful not to talk about the idiosyncrasies?

STRAUSS: There were already rumbles back there about there being something strange about him, and it wasn't long that you began hearing - I don't think they used the term 'gay' then - that he had that tendency, because he was always with Clyde Tolson constantly, morning, noon and night.

Q: Well, they lived together.

STRAUSS: They lived together and traveled together.

Q: And they also went to the horse races together. They would have been prime suspects if you were looking for homosexuals, and then the government thinking here they were.STRAUSS: And they ate every meal together, I mean every meal, not most meals.

Q: It was a very odd relationship. He never married, and I think he lived with his mother.

STRAUSS: Yes.

Q: Being in the FBI at this time, was this something you thought about as a career or was this a wartime thing?

STRAUSS: This was a wartime thing. As a matter of fact, had I just had a little more guts, I would have tried to get out of the FBI after about two years. By then I realized I was sorry I wasn't in uniform, because most of my friends were. The Bureau's position was you're doing more for your country right now, and that's what they'd say when you'd talk to them about getting out. Everybody on the outside thought you were more important in the FBI than you were. I didn't think I was very important and I was uncomfortable not being in the service.

Q: As a practical measure as a lawyer you probably would have ended up in the Pentagon going over contracts or something like that.

STRAUSS: I would have. There's a fellow named Arno Nowotny who was the Dean of Student Life at the University of Texas. I lived with him in his home the last couple of years I went to the University of Texas. I just loved him and I'm still emotional when I talk about him. As a matter of fact, I named one of my sons Arno after him. So he was very fond of me, and I him, but a couple of times I told him that I was thinking about trying to get out of the FBI and get myself in the military. And he called Helen once, and said, "Helen, don't let Bobby be a damn fool. He'll listen to you. He's a damn fool if he leaves what he's doing. What he's doing is important. It's just as important as any job he'll have in the Army. He's not going to be dropping bombs." So I was pushed both ways. I don't have any regrets today, but I did at that time. Two or three years after the war I realized that I was just fortunate.

Q: I think it's excellent training to have gotten the feel of a government agency. Well, did you have the feeling that maybe we were a little too intrusive? I was to talking to Jim Jones - this was somewhat later - who was saying that Hoover was sending this stuff over, which was kind of salacious, particularly about Civil Rights leaders, and they were using Marvin Watson's office would filter this out. He said, you know, no prosecutor would have sent this on. Did you find you were picking up stuff about people that was maybe out of bounds?

STRAUSS: I was never asked to do but one thing out of bounds, and I didn't have the courage to resist. But after I got transferred back to Dallas - we had a fraud-against-the-government case that the US Attorney was trying in Abilene, Texas, and the agent in charge sent me and another agent whose name was Miles Hall. Miles Hall and I went to Abilene, Texas, and on the instructions of the Justice Department - at the request of the Justice Department on the instructions of our agent in charge - got a room next to where the lead defense counsel for these defendants who had been charged with fraud against the government. The purpose of that was to eavesdrop on them, and we put a microphone - we didn't invade the room; I remember that vividly - but we put a microphone on the wall where the telephone jack was located. You could take that connection between the two rooms and without invading the room, pick up some of their conversation. To be crude about it, eavesdrop on this defense lawyer talking to his witnesses during this trial. Now, Miles Hall and I were both embarrassed about it. We talked about how it was an outrage. He was an accountant, and I was a lawyer so I was even more sensitive to the fact that what we were doing was, if not illegal, damn close to it and improper to eavesdrop on the defense lawyer talking to his witnesses. I felt dirty but I didn't have the courage to pick up the phone and say, "Get somebody to do this. I won't be involved in this." But that was wrong and I knew it was wrong at the time, but I didn't face up to it. Fortunately, the mechanism didn't work very well, so we quit the effort after a couple of days. I've had experiences in my life that made me learn to face up to things as I matured. As we go further in this, I'll tell you several stories of how I developed a bit more courage to tell people, even presidents, the unvarnished truth, even though they might get mad or angry with me. I think I have that reputation, and I've done pretty well at it. But I wasn't born with it.

Q: This is, I'm sure, the sort of thing that you used as a point of reference and say, "I'm never going to let that happen again."

STRAUSS: Exactly.

Q: It's a learning thing. Good God, you're around 22 or 23.

STRAUSS: Yes. We might as well take a few minutes now and let me tell you a story, because it's right on point with this. In 1968 when Hubert Humphrey was running for President, I was, I guess, co-chairman of that campaign with a couple other people in Texas. I think finance was my primary responsibility for the Texas campaign for Democrats. And Lyndon Johnson called me to Washington. I saw him on October 9, 1968, at 7:30 a.m. in his bedroom. Marvin Watson was there - I think it was Marvin Watson; it could have been Jim Jones, but I think it was Marvin Watson who was there then. I know Tom Johnson was there then.

Q: Tom Johnson being the President's brother?

STRAUSS: No, Tom Johnson was the head of CNN and just recently retired, but he was on Johnson's staff at the White House. That's not really relevant to the story; I shouldn't have strayed into it. But President Johnson gave me hell about the way the campaign was going in Texas, and he said, "Goddamn it. You know how to run a campaign; you know how we run them. This is not being run that way. We've got to carry Texas. It would be embarrassing if we'd lose it to this guy. And whether Hubert makes it or not, Texas has got to go with Hubert. Go get John," talking about then Governor John Connally, "and get him involved and tell him I said this and this and this. And quit running those damn fool ads down with your name down there as co-chairman or whatever it is so you can see your name in the paper," he said. Talk about being intimidated. He's the only one person who really could intimidate me more than anybody in the world.

Q: He's a big man, isn't he?

STRAUSS: Oh, he's a big man. Even after he was old and sick, when he called on the phone, I was still intimidated, and I was strong and young and successful. He had my number and knew it and I knew it. But as we finished 30 minutes up there in his bedroom, as I was leaving he said, "Bob, what do you think about my policies?" This was during the Viet Nam war, and I told him what I thought he wanted to hear, not 10 percent of which I believed, but it's what I knew the President wanted to hear. I felt so dirty about it and ashamed of myself that I called my wife and told her what I had done. I said, "The comforting part of it is that I know Johnson doesn't give a damn what I think, so it didn't affect his judgment at all. He just wanted to hear what he wanted to hear. He wanted somebody to agree with him. It won't affect his judgment one way or the other. He has enough sense to know enough not to rely on what I said, so I didn't hurt anything except myself. But I'll tell you one thing. I'll never forget it. I'll never do that again if the Lord ever gives me another chance." Since that, I have been in the White House in the President's quarters with other Presidents that have asked my advice, the most notable one being Ronald Reagan when I had to tell him he was dead wrong when his people were giving him advice just to the contrary. When I met with him, Mike Deaver had asked me to come up, that Nancy Reagan wanted me to meet with him. I said, "Why? Does he want to hear the truth? If not, I'm not coming." Mike said, "Yes, she wants him to hear the truth. That's why she wants you here. She thinks you'll tell him the truth, and I've told her that you'll tell him the truth." I did tell him the truth, and he didn't like it one damn bit, but he later did exactly what I suggested to him he do, as she knew he would. But I wouldn't have done that, I wouldn't have said what he needed to hear if I hadn't been through the Johnson experience. And I wouldn't have been totally candid with Jimmy Carter on a couple of things when I was at the White House, arguing with him, if I hadn't had those earlier experience.

Q: You left the FBI in '45, I guess.

STRAUSS: Yes.

Q: Did you know what you wanted to do?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, I was going to practice law, and I had run into a fellow named Dick Gump who'd had been my law school class, been in the FBI. We both got out at the same time, and we decided we'd open an office.

Q: What was his background?

STRAUSS: He was a Dallasite, a marvelous fellow, my partner for many, many years, and we never had a cross word.

Q: There's a Gump Department Store in San Francisco.

STRAUSS: He has no relationship.

Q: And, of course, there was Andy Gump too. Did he get called Andy?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, everybody mentioned that to him.

Q: For the people who read this, there was a comic strip that was quite well known.STRAUSS: Very well known in that Gump was sort of a fool and Gump hated it but he never let it show. But we were partners for many years, and he retired as my partner. I talked to him a few weeks ago. I don't know where we were in this story?.

Q: How does one start a law firm?

STRAUSS: We opened our office and sent out announcements, and somebody would tell somebody else that Strauss and Gump started this law firm. It was a little tiny office. I think we paid $60 a month rent, maybe $50. We flipped a coin and said if it came out heads it would be 'Gump and Strauss,' tails it would be 'Strauss and Gump,' and whoever's name came out second in that would take the larger office. There were two small offices, but you could get into the larger one without squeezing around. I guess Gump won, 'Gump and Strauss,' and I took the little-bit-larger office, and we settled everything. Never had argument in all our years together.

Q: When you hang out your shingle, do you just sort of wait?

STRAUSS: No, you send out announcements.

Q: Where do you send out announcements?

STRAUSS: To friends, all your friends. You say, "Richard Gump and Robert Strauss announce the formation of Gump & Strauss for the practice of law at 520 Republic Bank Building, Dallas, Texas, telephone number so-and-so," and sooner or later some damn fool will call.

Q: I suppose the first people you get are people who say, "They just started so they'll be cheaper." Isn't that it?

STRAUSS: You get some of that. What happens is that somebody who would think of using you, his maid wanted a divorce and he wanted to help a little, so he'd call up and say, "Bob, we've got a maid out here who wants a divorce. Would you handle it for us?" "Oh, yes, sir, be glad too." That would be 50 bucks. And then some of our friends would come by and we'd talk to them about a will, and they needed a will, so we'd draw up a will for them for $15 or $20. And we met people in the community, we knew them, and before long... Gump had $15,000 or $20,000 inheritance from his parents who were killed in an automobile. I didn't have that, but I asked my father-in-law if he would guarantee a note for $10,000.00 for me at the Republic Bank, and he said he would. Gump and I each figured that if we had $10,000 we could take care of our personal living requirements for our families - we each had a couple of children - and we could live and operate our office until we got in the black. I guess that note got up to about $6,000 or $7,000, and by that time I was getting enough income to make ends meet. We lived very modestly, and Gump did the same, so I never had to go all the way to $10,000.

Q: What was Dallas like in those days?

STRAUSS: It was a small community compared to what it is today, but it was still the second largest in the state, Houston being the largest, and it was banking and insurance where Houston was oil and gas. It was a very nice, pleasant place to live, an insular place, but I liked it. I did well there and made a lot of friends and built a successful smaller law practice.

Q: But it had the reputation and used to be called Cowtown, wasn't it?

STRAUSS: That was Fort Worth.

Q: Oh, excuse me, Fort Worth.

STRAUSS: Dallas was just the opposite. It was where Neiman Marcus was, in Dallas.

Q: You know, later you got very much involved in international affairs. Did this cross your radar screen at all in these days?

STRAUSS: No. As a matter of fact, that's sort of a fluke. I was always interested in what was going on around the world but not in trade issues; I was very interested in politics. I started a modestly active political career, marginal political career, part-time at best, while I was practicing law in Dallas. Then my friend John Connally, eventually who became Secretary of Navy when Kennedy was elected President, we decided, several of his friends, he ought to run for governor. The Republicans were trying to take over the state, and Connally was attractive and we thought we could win it with him and he thought so too, and he desperately wanted it. In fact, he had wanted an appointment for the U.S. Senate that he didn't get, that we tried to get for him, tried to help him get and he tried to get. So Connally decided to run for governor, and when he did I played a very significant role in that campaign and during his six years as governor. It's hard to remember that John Connally was a very attractive Democrat who was moderately conservative, not conservative but moderately conservative. I was moderately liberal. There was a difference between us politically but not to amount to anything. No one thought of him as the hard-line conservative that he later became, and no one thought of me as being a liberal. But I guess they did, because as a Democrat in Dallas they might have, but no left-winger, a progressive sort of Democrat. At that time Democrats controlled the state, all offices, everything. I began my local career from Dallas.

Q: In Dallas when you were first starting out - because when you talk about Connally, you're moving back into the '60s, but let's start in the '50s - when you arrived on the scene, did you get your feet at all wet with politics? This was in '52.

STRAUSS: When Adlai Stevenson ran in '52, a fellow named Bob Clark was a prominent Democrat and I was a Democrat of no prominence. They did know that I liked to help out, and he asked me to and was glad to have me involved, and so in that campaign I did a few things for him. I forget exactly what it was but maybe tried to help raise a little money and probably made two or three speeches in small, little meetings and things like that for him. It was something I enjoyed. When Stevenson ran a second time, I had a more important role. No one wanted to be involved in his campaign. He was running against Ike Eisenhower for reelection. But I did, and that got me more established with the Democratic Party.

Q: You say talk to a few groups - I'm trying to capture the flavor - how would you get a small group together and talk to them?

STRAUSS: Well, what you do is you ask to speak to the Rotary Club, you ask to speak to the Exchange Club, you ask to speak at the PTA. Or the PTA would want a Democrat to come out, or the Rotary Club would say, "We're going to have a program," so they'd have a Republican or a Democrat or Eisenhower personally or Stevenson personally. I would do a little of that. I was a pretty fair speaker.

Q: What were the parties like in Texas in the early '50s?

STRAUSS: The Republican Party was nothing. The Democratic Party was two parties. There was Alan Shivers', Governor Alan Shivers', wing, Shivocrats - you may remember that name - and the other was the opposite, more loyalists, and I was in that crowso was Connally because LBJ was in that group. I kind of bridged both groups, to tell you the truth.

Q: What about the Shivocrats?

STRAUSS: They were more hard-line conservatives. Johnson was in the other camp. There was a constant struggle between the Shivers people and the Johnson people for control of the state party, and I was in the Johnson crowd with Connally. Alan Shivers became a friend of mine, but there was no question about where I stood in those fights. So there were really two Democratic Parties; that's what I'm trying to say.

Q: Where did the, you might say, big oil money and what would be considered conservative, where did they fall in this?

STRAUSS: Well, they played both sides, but Shivers had more of that than the other group of Democrats did, but the Democrats had people that were some of the richest people in the state, and Shivers ran as a Democrat. He wasn't a Republican; it was just a wing of the Democratic Party.

Q: You talk about the governorship. I've heard that the governor really isn't that important in Texas.

STRAUSS: I think that's an understatement you just made, Charles. The governor is the governor without any real power. He has the power of appointment, he can fill a number of boards, but the lieutenant governor has the power in Texas. The way it's set up, he controls things, and the governor has to get along with him if he's going to get his program done. That's what our present President, Mr. Bush, did successfully. He took over and captured the imagination of the Democrat who was lieutenant governor and with a lot of power, and he used that and he used him skillfully.

Q: Why would people want to be governor? It sounds like a cosmetic thing.

STRAUSS: Well, you wear a cowboy hat in the parade, you make a lot of speeches, but you don't have a lot of power, and it's a distinguished job, it really is. I never had any aspirations to be governor. I suspect there were times I might have been elected governor of Texas, but it never occurred to me to ever want to hold elective office. It never had any appeal to me.

Q: Did you get involved in being Texan? I'm thinking of the big hat and the boots and that sort of thing.

STRAUSS: I didn't specialize in that. No, I had a little different image, I think. And Dallas had a different image than that. Dallas looked at New York and they wanted to be another New York.

Q: When one looks at Texas, this is a real state with all sorts of conflicting interests. Were you feeling the Northerner coming in to Houston early on, or did that come later?

STRAUSS: No, that came later, but when people were coming in there, we were pleased and happy our state was growing, just like they were in California. It was an attractive place to live and work and prosper. I was very proud of being from Dallas, still am, although there are a lot of things about Dallas I do not care for. The Dallas establishment never took to me too much. The Dallas establishment in those days really controlled things through a group called the Citizens' Council. I didn't want to be against them; I wanted to be for them, but they didn't want me. I tried very hard to get the Citizens' Council that represented the business community to endorse me as their candidate and put me on their slate to be on the City Council. I'm almost embarrassed to say that the height of my political ambition then was to get on the Dallas City Council as a member of the establishment. I didn't want to run against them because I was trying to make a living practicing law. I wanted to be a part of them; they didn't want me. When John Connally ran for governor, I knew what I wanted. I wanted to expand my horizons beyond Dallas. Interestingly, in that regard, after Connally got elected governor, he said to me before he took office, "Strauss, what do you want out of this? What can I appoint you to?" and I said, "Well, you're not going to appoint me to the Board of Regents, I know that, because you've got other commitments, other ideas, and we've discussed them, but that's something I'd like to have someday, but I don't expect it now."

Q: That was for the University of Texas.

STRAUSS: Yes. I said, "What I really want is not an appointment. I just want when these Dallas businessmen come to you, this establishment here, and suggest names of people they'd like appointed to this commission or that commission or this board or that board, insurance or banking or whatever it is, that you say to them, 'Well, I'll certainly consider that. Let me talk to Bob Strauss about it.'" I said, "If you'll just promise me you'll say that, that's all you have to do for me. Just say that two, three or four times: 'I'll talk to Strauss and get back to you,'" because by then everybody knew I was Connally's man in Dallas. He did, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I remember George Christian, who was his assistant. Connally and I by then had become very, very close; we were more than just good friends. When I started out with Connally, if he had 15 people to an important meeting, I would have been in the 15; and then if he had half that number, I might or might not have been in that cutoff; but by the time he left the governorship, if he had had two people I would have been one of the two. So we were very close. I remember one time a half dozen leaders in the Dallas business community came in to see him on something, and John said, "Why don't sit in on this meeting? You've got some of your Dallas friends in here." I sat in the meeting for a while, and Connally and I got in the kind of a good humored argument we frequently got into about something or other, and I said, "Well, I think that's a lot of damn foolishness," or something like that to him. One of these men hung back and thought he'd get in good with Connally, and he said, "Governor, I just want you to know that I personally resented the lack of respect that Bob Strauss showed you." George Christian later told me that Connally kind of grunted and, after the guy left, said to him, "George, let's don't let that fellow back in my office again." So instead of endearing himself to..., but it's a story I liked. I was just petty enough to really enjoy the story.

Q: I think we've got to stop. I'll put at the end where we are so we know when to pick it up. We've really talked about your entry into local politics, really in Dallas, and then we'll pick it up from there.

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Today is October 25, 2002. Mr. Ambassador, you started in local politics when in Dallas?

STRAUSS: The truth of the matter is I never really was involved in local politics in Dallas. I wanted to be, but they didn't want me. I don't know whether I went into that earlier or not.

Q: I think you did a bit.

STRAUSS: I think so too. That's the reason I came into national politics. First I went into statewide politics, and I think we probably have gone into that...

Q: We talked about the legislature.

STRAUSS: ...and Connally becoming governor and me being active in that campaign. I think I was Co-chairman - Finance, when Humphrey ran in '68, for the state campaign in Texas. A fellow named Will Davis was the Chairman, and he was a good one. When that campaign was over, we had carried the state for Hubert by, as I recall, around 50,000 votes. I had raised enough money to pay all our bills, which was very unusual for the Humphrey campaign. They owed everybody in the world, everybody in Texas where I had control of the spending, along with Will Davis and, of course, the Governor

Q: Talk a bit about your initial impression of Hubert Humphrey.

STRAUSS: I had known Hubert Humphrey quite well because, when I came to Washington after he became Vice President and I would go by the White House to visit my friends from Texas who were on Johnson's staff, Hubert was frequently around. He and I would spend time together, and he would invite me to have lunch with him or he would say, "I'm having lunch with So-and-So and we're eating down in the mess. Why don't you come and have a bite to eat with us," or one of them would say, "I'm having lunch with the Vice President. He'd enjoy seeing you. Why don't you join us." So I got to know Hubert pretty well. Hubert and I also had a friend in common; his name was Dwayne Andreas. He was a big donor and Hubert's closest friend and put up a ton of money for him. He loved Humphrey and he loved Muriel. They both came from Minnesota. During his campaign, I'll never forget that they were so broke, they called to see if we couldn't put together a group of people in Houston that might contribute some substantial funds to him. Dwayne Andreas flew down in his plane - he was really responsible for finance because he was having to pay everything himself that he couldn't raise. He came to Houston and had asked if I would get several people together for him. He had also asked a fellow named Jake Jacobsen, who had worked in the Johnson White House, to get a couple of people, and we got a number of important, well-to-do people to meet with him at the airport when he flew in, when Andreas flew in, not Hubert. Hubert wasn't there, but Andreas came down. I'll never forget that a fellow who was in the Italian food business - Gino Paulucci was his name and he's a very successful businessman. Made his fortune in selling Italian canned foods and packaged foods - and Mr. Andreas and I were meeting with George Brown, who is one of the well-to-do men of the state, the country, with no interest in the oil business. Lloyd Bentsen, later a U.S. Senator, who had no real interest in the oil business but had other interests, was also there, and two or three others. And Mr. Andreas he said they would like them to contribute, to sign a note for a quarter of a million dollars, and they'd borrow it at the bank and then they'd get it paid off later. They resisted it, and finally Dwayne said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll sign that note, be liable for $125,000, I'll be responsible for the other $125,000 myself.

Q: This is Tape 2 Side 1 with Robert Strauss.

STRAUSS: They were just about to come to a deal there when Paulucci, who was very excitable, said, "Now, if you don't do this, I'll tell you what we're going to do. Hubert's going to be elected President. When he's President, we're going to cut off the benefits the oil industry gets, all these special benefits, and you're going to suffer from it." Well, you don't threaten people like that. Mr. Brown turned almost white, and he just quietly said, "Thank you, fellows, for coming down to see us, but I don't think we'd be interested in participating any longer." Paulucci had no idea what he was talking about. None of our political contributors were in the oil business, and they were all offended, and there went a quarter of a million dollars. I'll never forget that.

Q: Where did Andreas' money come from?

STRAUSS: He was and is very successful, primarily in the food processing business, Archer Daniels Midland, and he still is a very big supporter of political causes on both sides, as a matter of fact. He's really a Democrat.

Q: Because you've been involved in money raising, I've never been quite sure why people who give money to political parties, unless there's obvious just plain interest - "I want to get such-and-such a bill passed"?

STRAUSS: I really think that the biggest money comes from special interests that have a cause, not necessarily special interests in an evil way. Some of the biggest money that's been given has been given by people who care a great deal about conservative or liberal issues, who care about the pro-abortion or anti-abortion issue, for example. A lot of it comes from just people who give a damn about issues in general. A great deal of it comes, as you know, from people who want to be associated with the next President. They don't care what he stands for. They want to be known as a friend of his and hope they'll get invitations to the White House if he gets elected. Most of them are disappointed. And a lot of it comes from people who have special selfish interests that aren't benign but they really are special economic interests, and a great deal of it comes from there, whether it be the drug industry, the oil industry or any other industry. So it's a mix of all of that.

Q: I would have thought that in '68, Johnson being Texas to the core, this would have aroused all sorts of support, both voting and financial. Were there also forces that were really very strongly anti-Johnson in Texas?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes. You have to remember Texas was not really a two-party state yet, and the Democratic Party was two parties. There was a liberal wing of the Democratic Party, which Senator Ralph Yarbrough represented and spoke for, and there was the more conservative wing which John Connally and former Governor Alan Shivers and people like that spoke for. All these people just fought like cats and dogs. I wasn't a conservative. I think I was looked upon as more liberal than anything else in Texas, but I belonged to the John Connally wing of the party. To move on to how I got out of Texas, John Connally and his wife and Helen and I and others were the guests of the President of Mexico at his home in Acapulco. I guess we stayed in his home. I forget where it was. It was a long time now. He wasn't there. I remember we used his yacht and went out on the ocean and things like that. I was down there with Connally and with Eugene Locke and his wife and others when Hubert called me in 1970 and said, "Bob, I want you to be Chairman of the Democratic Party. Fred Harris had failed to make it and he had resigned."

Q: We were talking about how you got to Washington in 1970, but I wonder if you could go back. You had run this successful campaign, particularly on money, in '68. What did you do afterwards? Did you just sort of slip back into legal work?

STRAUSS: In those days each state had one National Committeeman that was male and one National Committeewoman, a female, and I was the male from Texas, Mrs. Lloyd Bentsen and I were the National Committee people from Texas, which made 100 of us on that Committee then and it was important. Today it doesn't amount to much. In those days it was a place of power and importance, and I was active. When I got on the National Committee, it was pretty obvious to me, and a friend of mine named Frank Erwin who had served said, "Strauss, unless you're on the Executive Committee, there's no point in being on the National Committee, because you just rubber-stamp what the Executive Committee does. Do your best to get on there." So Fred Harris called me and asked me to support him for Chairman. I said, "Well, I'll tell you what, Fred, Senator Harris..."

Q: He's from Oklahoma.

STRAUSS: Yes. I said, "If you nominate me to serve as the southern seat, let me fill that, on the Executive Committee, I'll give you my support and bring you the support of some other Southerners." He said, "That's a deal." I said, "Now, Fred, Senator, you say that's a deal. When I say a deal, I mean it." He said, "Well, so do I." I said, "Fine." And I liked Fred Harris. Johnson didn't like him and Connally didn't like him, and they thought I was making a mistake.

Q: Why?

STRAUSS: They just didn't think there was much to him, and they were right. There was nothing to him. He was a nothing. But I was wrong and they were right, because I made that deal with him, and just before we were going to vote - a couple of months later we had the election of the Chairman - just before the vote came, Fred Harris, then Senator Harris, came kind of sneaking down the aisle and came up behind me about a half an hour before we were supposed to vote and said, "Bob, we've got a problem." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Governor McNair wants that southern seat," and I said, "Well, Fred, Governor McNair has a problem. You and I don't have a problem because we shook hands on the deal. I was going to have that seat, and if I don't have it, I've got enough influence with these southern delegates to assure that you ain't going to be Chairman, so you won't have a problem because you won't have responsibility for picking the Executive Committee." He said, "You mean that?" and I said, "I damn sure do, Senator." He said, "Well, then, all right, you'll have it." I said, "Fine." So he put me on the Executive Committee, and I was very helpful to him. I raised a lot of money for him, for the reforms the Party was trying to put in then, the McGovern reforms, if you will, and for better or for worse, it required a lot of staff work, travel expenses, etc., and Harris couldn't raise any money, so I raised most of it during his term as Chairman.

Q: What were we talking about for reforms?

STRAUSS: We were talking about delegate selection process and other things I forget now with specificity but primarily had to do with the delegate selection process and the nominating process.

Q: In the '68 thing there had been this problem, a terrible mess, in Mississippi and other places like that.

STRAUSS: So this was to reform all that and be assured that there was minority representation and that there was male and female representation. Most of those reforms, half of them, were of negative value and damaged the Party, and half of them were very good. Like most things, the pendulum never stops in the middle; it swings too far one way and then too far the other. But I had raised the money to pay for those reform commissions meetings. There was a delegate selection committee and there were some other committees, two or three of them, and we had good staff people.

Q: But just to get how it worked, you had to have money in order to arrange for these committees?

STRAUSS: Well, if you were going to have 25 people come in from across the country every three weeks, most of them are working people and the National Committee had to pick up the tab for that, their travel expense, and they had to have staff. Everybody has a staff, and they had to have a staff. That means you have a staff director and then you have an assistant and you have a secretary to the assistant and the assistant's assistant - you know what happens in politics - so the first thing you know, you're spending a lot of money. And Fred was a money spender anyway. He didn't have to raise it, so he was happy to spend it.

Q: And you were Mr. Moneyraiser?

STRAUSS: I helped him a great deal.

Q: Well, now, you were working the southern side. Johnson was pushing civil rights, and this was the time when civil rights was a major, really major, issue, and, working the South, I would think this would make it difficult for you.

STRAUSS: No, not at all, not at all. I was a strong civil rights man. As a matter of fact, my recollection is that I signed on to one of the early briefs in federal court filed in Dallas County on the side of petitioners in a civil rights case. I forget what it was. These names skip my mind, they're so long ago. I had relationships with people in the North and East but, coming from Texas, the southern seat was what was available for me on that Executive Committee.

Q: I was not thinking of you personally on civil rights but trying to raise money within the South.

STRAUSS: Oh, no, we raised a lot of money in the South, a lot of money in the South.

Q: At that time within the Democratic Party and within the apparatus, were there African American leaders that were influential at that point?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, it was a little different type of leadership. The ministers had most of it. They had most of the influence. But the reason I think I became Chairman and the reason Humphrey asked me to be Treasurer - he asked me to be Chairman and I ended up being Treasurer of my own choosing - Fred Harris was broke, he couldn't raise $100, and he put on a fundraiser in Miami, Florida, a big national Democratic gala that was supposed to raise maybe half a million dollars, which was a lot of money in those days, maybe more than that. He had a fellow named George Bristol who was an administrative assistant of his, and Bristol was talking to me about helping to raise money in Texas. They had what was obviously going to be a big failure, because they couldn't raise any money anywhere in the country. I put together a planeload of people and charged them, as I recall, $1,000 a head to fly over, spend the night at the hotel in Miami, go to the dinner, and fly them back. I think we charged them around $1,000 or $1,200 a person, and I got better than 100 people in that plane, and the $100,000 was about all they raised. They didn't raise $50,000 in the rest of the country, and they raised $100,000 out of that, less the expenses which were about 25 percent of it. That was a big story there: "Strauss Brings Rich Texans to Florida for DNC Gala." That night after that gala, Harris had been so severely criticized that he called and asked me to his room. I went there and he'd been drinking and he's about half crocked. He and his aide George Bristol and I were there, and he said, "I'm going to resign tomorrow. I'm a failure." He said, "I want you to be Chairman. I'm going to recommend you." I said, "Fred, I don't want to be Chairman." But he did resign the next day. That's when the opening came and that's when Humphrey called me in Mexico and asked if I would be willing to be Chairman, and I said, "No, I'd like to be Treasurer." So that's how I got into...

Q: This was about 1970 or so?

STRAUSS: Yes, I would say this was late in '69. Harris became Chairman early '69, or late '68, after the Humphrey defeat. So this had to be in '69.

Q: With the Humphrey defeat, how was it viewed from your perspective? What brought this about?

STRAUSS: Well, there were a lot of reasons. One is he stayed loyal to Johnson's Vietnam policies, and they were unpopular and he didn't abandon them until he made the Salt Lake City speech in which he called for withdrawal and other things.

Q: We're talking about Vietnam?

STRAUSS: Yes. That was a turning point, but the Humphrey-Muskie campaign had no money. I traveled on that campaign plane some with Hubert, whom I liked very much, still do even though he's deceased, of course. I'm trying to think what I was going to say.

Q: We're talking about why he lost the election.

STRAUSS: Yes, he was late getting his campaign going. It was very disorganized, it was poorly run, and everyone knew it. He had his hangers-on from Minnesota around him, and it was tough getting it straightened out, and his biggest supporter, Dwayne Andreas, knew it and it almost drove him crazy, seeing the lack of organization in that campaign. But the truth of the matter is they finally got it straightened out.

Q: We're still talking about the '68 campaign. What about the convention? This has become sort of a cultural icon or something in American politics.

STRAUSS: The Democratic Convention was taken over by... It's hard to convey the hatred that Johnson aroused with the left of the Democratic Party. They gave him no credit for anything that he had accomplished in civil rights and other areas. Johnson brought a lot of it on himself. Half of it he brought on himself and the other half was brought on by people who were totally irresponsible. The venom in that convention was incredible. I don't know whether I told you the story about McCarthy wanted to talk to John Connally, Governor Connally.

Q: I don't think. It doesn't ring a bell.

STRAUSS: On the Saturday night...

Q: This is Eugene McCarthy?

STRAUSS: Yes. Let me back up and put it in better perspective for you. Eugene McCarthy was trying for the nomination, and Hubert Humphrey was trying for the nomination. Humphrey was way ahead and was going to be nominated. The question was who would he take as vice president, and one of the people being considered was John Connally, who was very annoyed because he knew that Humphrey wasn't really considering him. Humphrey thought he was too conservative. My guess is if John Connally had been on that ticket with him, Humphrey would have been elected. Anyway, Eugene McCarthy on the Saturday night before the Convention opened on Monday was with Dick Goodwin, Richard Goodwin, who is a speech writer and a very gifted fellow who was sort of the right hand of McCarthy. And they called Walter Jenkins in Texas, who had been Johnson's administrative assistant but had left that job. He had some problems; a problem came up, a personal thing. But McCarthy and he were friends, and McCarthy called Walter Jenkins in Austin and asked him if he'd help him reach John Connally, he had a proposition for him. Jenkins said, "Well, call Bob Strauss. Strauss and Governor Connally and his wife are sharing a suite in Blackstone Hotel." We weren't; we had adjoining suites, but I remember he said that. He said, "He'll put you in touch with John Connally if he wants to, but that's how you reach him." When Walter told me he had had that call and what he told him to do, I said, "Well, what does he want?" He said, "I don't know but he has a proposition for Connally and he wants to tell it to him straight." So sometime that next morning, I guess, it was six o'clock when the phone rang in our room. My wife and I were awakened by it, and it was Dick Goodwin, who said, "Strauss, I'm calling for Gene McCarthy. He and I have a suite up here two floors above you. Senator McCarthy wants to talk to Governor Connally. Can you set it up?" I said, "Yes, I'd had the call from Walter Jenkins." Jenkins had called at 11 o'clock at night, and this was six the next morning, so I said, "I haven't had a chance to even mention it to Governor Connally. He and his wife were asleep and they are now, and I'd be if you hadn't called me. But when they wake up, we usually have coffee in his suite, and I'll see what he says." So Helen and I went to the Connally's' suite for coffee, which we did in the mornings during that Convention, and I told him McCarthy wanted to talk to him and about the calls I'd had. He said, "I'm just kind of curious to see what it is. Tell him to come on up." So it turned out - I had notified them - about an hour later a knock came on the door at the Connally's' suite and it was Dick Goodwin, not McCarthy, and he said, "The Senator asked me if I would come up and explore what he wants to talk to you about with you." So we talked to him a couple hours, during which he said, "McCarthy wants you to endorse him instead of Hubert Humphrey. It'll startle this Convention and it'll bring the South along and others, and we can stop Humphrey. McCarthy will be the nominee, and the quid pro quo on that will be that McCarthy wants to assure you that if we pull this off, he will name you as his Vice Presidential choice, and he thinks you can win the Presidency. He will commit to splitting the patronage with the Vice President 50-50 right down the middle, starting with the Cabinet and Supreme Court and right on down. You'll always have 50 percent of the patronage of the White House! This was about as cold-blooded and bad a scheme as I've ever heard. In the meantime, while we were talking, there were kids for McCarthy out there getting their heads beat in in the park by the cops clubbing them, and they're being "sold out" in a luxurious suite in the hotel across the street from the park. We talked to Goodwin about two hours. It was an interesting two hours, but it wasn't very constructive, it was just interesting. He told us how they'd run McCarthy's campaign in New Hampshire and other things. After an hour and a half to two hours, Connally said he wouldn't consider a thing like that. That ended that. I had recent occasion in the last year to talk to Dick Goodwin about it. He remembers it precisely as I do. McCarthy, who I've asked about it, says that he has no recollection of it. I don't blame him for not remembering it. I like Gene McCarthy, and he and I see each other at the Palm Restaurant for lunch once a week. But that's one of the worst stories I've ever been involved in.

Q: What about the relationship with Mayor Daley? He became a major figure in helping frankly to stir up the mob. Did you all get involved with him at all?

STRAUSS: No, we really didn't have any involvement with the Mayor. He was running his business in the Convention. Daley was for Hubert Humphrey, so to that extent we were involved with him. Later in my political life I had a good deal to do with Mayor Daley and his two sons, present Mayor Daley and his other son, Bill, who was in the Clinton Cabinet. They are good friends whose friendship I value. Interestingly, I don't think people in Chicago thought it could happen, but the son is, in my judgment, an even more successful Mayor than the father.

Q: While you were there, sort of in the eye of this storm around the Convention, Democratic Convention of '68, did you realize that this was turning into almost a disaster as far as...?

STRAUSS: Oh, sure, there was no question in our minds. We were frightened to go out without police protection. The lobby was filled with smoke from people throwing smoke bombs in there into the hotel, and it was dangerous. Remember the big fight over that was the unit rule had a lot to do with Texas, as many other states did, particularly the Southern states. They built their delegations around the unit rule. You probably don't know what the unit rule is precisely, but the unit rule meant that a majority of the delegates would vote as a unit on an issue. So you could have blacks and browns and greens and environmentalists and anti-environmentalists and males and females, everything in the world, so long as you controlled it enough. If they had 100 delegates, if you had 51 of them, you could make up the delegation anyway you wanted to because nobody's vote counted. They would vote as a unit. The Convention was called, and the terms of it permitted the unit rule. After they got [inaudible] to Chicago, the left wing of the Democratic Party voted to disband the unit rule. A number of states, primarily southerners again including Texas, resisted that and said, "We're prepared to vote to get rid of the unit rule, but you don't change the terms in the middle of the game. We came here thinking our delegation could be made up with the unit rule, and now we're not going to give it up for this convention. We'll do it the day after the convention. There will no longer be a unit rule. And that was a fight. The pro-unit rule forces won. That was at the heart of this, because that's the only way they thought they could stop Humphrey, by getting rid of the unit rule. So all the Humphrey people were for the unit rule, too, even though their people were not. They wanted it because under the unit rule they knew they would control, they'd lose no delegates.

Q: When you look at this, you look at Hubert Humphrey - he's been sort of a liberal's liberal, and yet you had the left going against him - and Eugene McCarthy, who never struck me as being very sound.

STRAUSS: He was never responsible; he was irresponsible. Later, he became a popular fellow around town and, as I said, he and I have a very cordial relationship which we both enjoy.

Q: I ended up voting for Nixon, and I couldn't believe myself that I did this. Had Nixon been nominated before the Convention?

STRAUSS: Yes.

Q: So you had Nixon, who turned out to be...

STRAUSS: Nixon, Nixon, Nixon. If you look at what was accomplished by Nixon in his Presidency, if you look at the good side, he was a splendid President; if you look at the negative side of him, he was a terrible man. But he had a good record as President on a number of important issues.

Q: Yes, and in foreign policy first rank.

STRAUSS: And in domestic policy, he had liberal policies, far more progressive than his party.

Q: But at the time it seemed pretty clear. If you happened to be of even a modestly liberal persuasion, you had the forces of evil on the Nixon side and the forces of good on the Humphrey side, and maybe McCarthy, but still, if you had to choose... And yet here these people were essentially working to hand the election to Nixon.

STRAUSS: And they did.

Q: But were the people, you say, on the left, were they reachable? How did this work?

STRAUSS: Well, Hubert represented what I thought was responsible liberalism, and McCarthy, I thought, was irresponsible liberalism, and I thought he cared nothing about the Party and nothing about the election. It was all about Gene McCarthy. He had a tremendous ego, and he despised Hubert Humphrey. He didn't dislike him; he despised him. They came from the same state and they had competed with each other, and he was determined to stop Humphrey and hopefully get it himself. I guess that's the way Humphrey and I became friends. I helped him in that struggle.

Q: How did Humphrey feel about McCarthy?

STRAUSS: He had no particular use for him.

Q: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but was it more visceral on the part of McCarthy and less visceral on the part of...?

STRAUSS: I think it was the nearest thing to a draw in the world. It was about a tie, because keep in mind that happens frequently in states. You have two prominent politicians in the same party who compete with each other at every level. There are people that dislike the other side's people. The staffs cause more problems than the principals do usually. But it was very intense as is frequently the case. For example, if a state's two Senators are of the same party, they rarely have a good relationship. They distrust the other, but if one is a Democrat and the other a Republican, they usually have a pretty good relationship.

Q: The McCarthy supporters later came to considerable prominence, including President Clinton. Did you get any feel for sort of this very bright group of people who seemed to be trying to tear the edifice down?

STRAUSS: Yes, that's exactly what people thought, but I would remind you that Bill Clinton went to work for Humphrey's campaign - no, it wasn't Humphrey's campaign, it was somebody else's. But I'm sure he helped in that campaign too. He wasn't so pro-McCarthy that he was anti-Humphrey, I don't think.

Q: It just seems very difficult to be anti-Humphrey.

STRAUSS: Yes, but we couldn't get the left to turn out for him till the last week. I'm a little prejudiced, I'm sure, but I have little doubt that if that campaign had gone on two more days Humphrey would have been President. Humphrey closed a tremendous gap. We began to put the party together down there in Texas. We had Ralph Yarbrough and John Connally traveling across the state together - I think we spoke of that earlier - and that carried the state, not what people like Bob Strauss did or even what Humphrey or Muskie did, but what Connally and Yarbrough getting together did. It was a big national story.

Q: Were you working to get these two together?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes. When Humphrey arrived in the state to start the cross-state joint appearances, I met them in Texarkana, as I recall.

Q: At a certain point was there a realization that we'd better get this together?STRAUSS: Oh, no, they just were together for that campaign, and Johnson saw to it. We all worked together.

Q: How about the use of Johnson in the campaign?

STRAUSS: He didn't do much. He didn't do anything till the end. At the end he campaigned in Houston the last two days before the election in south Texas with Connally and Hubert, so he had obviously much to do with our carrying the state. But he really didn't do anything until the last few days, and Humphrey didn't want him involved. You forget how unpopular Lyndon Johnson was at that time, that he caused such negative, visceral reaction of people, and he knew it. You couldn't take him into a crowd without the crowd being aroused with anti-Johnson attitudes.

Q: Was it the war?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, that's all it was, Vietnam.

Q: What was sort of in the heart of the Democratic Party where you were about the war at that time?

STRAUSS: Well, most of them were about like I was. You start off where Johnson was, and as it went along you began more and more to realize it was a lost cause, that we ought to declare victory and go home, Senator Aiken said. As I said, it was about 10 days before the election that Hubert spoke in Salt Lake City and renounced a good deal of the Johnson Vietnam program. He'd stayed with Johnson till then. If he had made that speech a week or two earlier, he would have been President.

Q: Were you and others saying do this?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, a lot of people were saying that then, mostly only to each other. We didn't have the guts to say it to Johnsoonly about him. HHH had made a commitment when he accepted the Vice Presidency that he would remain a loyal supporter as long as LBJ was Presidenand he kept his word until almost the very end. It didn't take a rocket scientist to know that you had to get out of that trap if you were going to have any chance to be elected President, and it was wrong.

Q: During that election were you aware of the Nixon people - the term was 'dirty tricks'? Were things going on?

STRAUSS: No. Things were going on, yes. There's no question that Nixon's people were in touch with the Vietnamese. They weren't interested in seeing this thing resolved until after the election.

Q: There was sort of the story that there were those who were connected to Nixon.

STRAUSS: Madam Chiang Kai-shek, for example. I remember she delivered a message from Nixon to the other side and vice versa.

Q: Mainly "Hold on and don't do anything" - and we're talking about the North Vietnamese. "You get a better deal with me if you hold on,"

STRAUSS: Yes, that's what they were saying, those kinds of messages.

Q: ...which comes close to treason.

STRAUSS: Yes, it does.

Q: Then after the loss, what was the feeling, despondency?

STRAUSS: Well, of course, yes. We thought at one time that night of the election that Humphrey was going to make it.

Q: It was very close.

STRAUSS: Very close. In fact, people didn't realize until the next day that he wasn't going to make it. We knew it. I remember calling Hubert at, I think, Dwayne Andreas' home. They called me for something, and they were together, Dwayne Andreas and Humphrey, and at that time it looked like we could make it. But Hubert came on the line and told me that he was worried because he'd lost - I forget what state it was - and it didn't look good at all. The public at that time still thought... He missed it by a couple votes in each precinct. The country would have changed had he won, in my opinion and the opinion of many others..

Q: Then you got on the feeling that the Democratic Party, the organization, has to reform itself.

STRAUSS: Yes.

Q: And so this was sort of your hand. Had you been essentially taking notes and saying, "Gee, we've got to do this"?

STRAUSS: No, I was no reformer. I don't want to try to hold myself out as a reformer. I got elected Chairman, but as a Treasurer I had supported the reform movement in the Party to a reasonable extent. But I couldn't support some of the nutty things that were being suggested. I had raised the money, as I said earlier, to pay for the reform program. But I wouldn't hold myself out as belonging to the reform wing of the Party. I belonged to what was the Connally wing of the Party, and that was not looked upon in any way whatsoever as a reform wing. We were old politics. I think that's a fair statement.

Q: After the election was there a feeling that you've got to reach out to the left?

STRAUSS: You had to assure - and this was only right - you had to assure a better participation on the part of the black community and the Hispanic community and the women, and these reforms were calculated to do that. Some of them were very constructive and helpful, and some of them were foolishness and not helpful in any way. I don't remember precisely what they were but some of them were ludicrous and some of them were very sound. That's about the time I was Treasurer as these reforms were being dealt with by various committees. By the time I became Chairman, which was in December '72, the reform movement was well underway. Barbara Mikulski, now a first rate Senator, was prominent in it, and former Governor and Senator Terry Sanford of North Carolina also were prominent and each chaired commissions. I was the Chairman of the Party and funded them and worked with them.

Q: How were you looking at the Nixon Administration as it started? Were you having to produce a mirror image of the Republican Party?

STRAUSS: Well, I don't quite know what that question means.

Q: Was there a different focus than the Republicans?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, very much so, and Nixon wanted to make it as pronounced as he could, but he also wanted to broaden his appeal in any way he could. And Nixon, if you go back and look at his record - whether I liked him or disliked him is not the issue - he had a number of very progressive programs that he passed and put in place, and he certainly did a number of good things on the foreign policy side. He had a very able Secretary of State in Henry Kissinger, and he supported him.

Q: Did foreign policy matter other than the Vietnam War?

STRAUSS: I don't think at that time it did. These were domestic issues after that. Keep in mind Nixon had been President for a couple years before Vietnam moved off the stage, and those scars lingered for a long time.

Q: There were so many people who should have been good, solid Democrats who felt betrayed, wounded or anything else after the '68 time. How could you could get to them?

STRAUSS: They were gone earlier than that. I think I said to you earlier in this; if so, it's worth repeating it. Lyndon Johnson said to several of his staff when he passed the civil rights legislation, "This will be the end of the Democratic Party as we know it in the South. I don't know how we'll ever elect a Democrat again once we get through doing this, because we'll lose the South." He turned out to be so far ahead of all the rest of us, it's amazing.

Q: So by the time the '72 election came up, you were the Chairman?

STRAUSS: The '72 election was McGovern's year. People were pretty fed up with McGovern, who was simply a first-rate fellow but, as I said earlier, I didn't think so at the time and neither did many others. After his defeat - I think I may have mentioned to you, or I may not have, earlier in this - at that '72 Convention, during which I was Treasurer, a number of people like Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson, Senator Fritz Hollings, and later Speaker Tip O'Neill and a number of that group talked with me about running for Chairman. George McGovern had named a woman from, I think, Iowa or something like that. I forget where she's from. Jean Westwood was her name, very nice lady, but shouldn't have been Chairman of the Democratic Party at that time. So with their help, Vera Murray, my colleague then and now, mounted a campaign for my chairmanship. By then the committees were much larger. Instead of two from each state, they had eight, 10, 12, 14 from some states. There were 400 people on the National Committee probably. So it was not an easy task. When I sought the chairmanship, it was 45 days after the election or less; it was in December after the November election which McGovern had lost so badly. During that election John Connally had come out and ran Democrats for Nixon. Here he is, my closest friend, running Democrats for Nixon, which was a terrible thing to do. I was trying to be elected Chairman of the Democratic Party and everybody thought it was a fool's errand. They didn't know that I had a great many relationships that were not necessarily pro John Connally. I had more liberal support than anyone knew. The Democratic governors all supported me with one or two exceptions, and I had support from Averell Harriman to the Labor chiefs, and I managed to get elected Chairman in December of 1972, and my national political career took off dramatically at that time.

Q: What happened with John Connally?

STRAUSS: John Connally became disenchanted. I never saw John Connally make a serious political misstep in his life until he switched parties, and I never saw him make a good step after that. It's the damnedest thing in the world. Whether it was in the field of economics, his personal economic security, or whether it was his political career - he ran himself for the presidency and spent a ton of money and got one delegate. He never understood that when he made that switch the Republicans would never trust him, because he looked like the fellow who'd come to steal the chickens out of the hen house, and the Democrats despised him for running out on them. Strangely he and I remained very close friends. He had been very helpful to me in getting involved deeply in state and national politics, and I never forgot that. He and his wonderful wife, Nellie, appreciated my loyalty, I'm certain, and it was easy for me to do it because I was one of his greatest admirers.

Q: Was this one of these things where he just felt it was a better thing...?

STRAUSS: I think that he thought that was his one chance to be President. While Nixon was President he named Connally Secretary of Treasury. Later, Nixon tried to deliver the Vice Presidency to Connally, did his best but couldn't get it done. When the office became vacant after Agnew resigned, Nixon suggested John to the Republican and Democratic leadership on the Hill, but they both told Nixon that neither side would support the nomination and that he was too weak politically to fight for Connally, so when he asked who they would suggest, I've always understood that Carl Albert, then Speaker, suggested Jerry Ford as a person who could be easily confirmed.

Q: One of the themes that runs through American politics is this Presidential bug which seems to destroy an awful lot of people. Once they get on to it, they begin to look... Howard Stassen's a particular egregious case but there are others. Somehow or another, once they got onto it they lose perspective.

STRAUSS: They never get over it. It's a terrible drug; affects them like a drug.

Q: Did you have any talks with John Connally?

STRAUSS: Oh, I had a lot of talks with him. The only falling-out we had came at that time, because we were very close personal friends prior to that and up until his death, and his wife and I are still very close. She disapproved of the change. I do remember when John decided to run for the Presidency, the night before he announced, Nellie Connally, John Connally's wife, called Helen, my wife, and said, "Helen, John and I are so unhappy that you and Bob won't be a part of our life during this exciting new adventure we're getting into," and Helen said she too was sorry but it wasn't to be. I remember her telling me that, and I said, "Honey, it's going to break her heart when she sees where this damn fool decision ends up, because both sides are going to dislike him," and they did. He was a very talented fellow, one of the most impressive people I've ever known, but he got too far to the right.

Q: Were there forces within Texas that sort of pushed people towards the right?

STRAUSS: I think Texas became more and more conservative obviously, and now there's not a Democrat holding a statewide office. We went from a one-party state, Democratic, in a period of 20 years to a one-party state, Republican, and the state is very Republican-oriented now, of course, with a Texan and a Republican in the White House.

Q: Was this a demographic change or an attitudinal change?

STRAUSS: Oh, no, it was a demographic change. The South was more and more conservative all along and the Republican Party more conservative than the Democratic Party. You know, I've always had a very strong feeling that the two-party system served this country extremely well, and splinter parties only hurt, and the best kind of two-party system is one where the Democrats tilt just a bit from the center towards the left and the Republicans tilt just a bit from center towards the right, and that the extreme left wing of the Democratic Party and the extreme right wing of the Republican Party sort of serve as anchors out there but you just don't want to let their voices be too strong or they'll push the parties one way too far to the left or the other way too far to the right. I think I have it about right in my mind.

Q: In the '72 election was there a feeling that this isn't going to go anywhere?

STRAUSS: No, in the '72 election we came within a handful of votes of making a President.

Q: That was '68.

STRAUSS: Oh, I'm mistaken, you're talking about '72, the McGovern election, oh, yes.

Q: When McGovern was nominated, what...?

STRAUSS: Well, let me tell you what I thought at the time. At the time I thought I didn't know how long it would take the Democratic Party to recover from McGovern's defeat. The truth of the matter is it didn't take very long. I wondered how the Republican Party would ever get over Goldwater's defeat. Both parties recovered and elected presidents the next election.

Q: How did you feel about McGovern?

STRAUSS: At that time the McGovern people, his staff people, disliked me, detested me, and I returned the feelings with enthusiasm, because I took them on at every turn. It was obvious that, as fine a man as George McGovern was, they were weakening the party. They couldn't believe I was going to be elected Chairman in that climate, that Bob Strauss, who was a John Connally or a Dick Daley or a Lyndon Johnson Democrat, could be elected Chairman of the Democratic Party. I always thought I could. What they never understood was that I had support from all wings of the Democratic Party, because they all knew me, knew I was honest and knew I gave a damn about the Party and knew I was pretty well in the middle. I certainly wasn't a liberal and I certainly wasn't a conservative. I used to say, "Tell me the issue and I'll tell you whether I'm liberal or conservative on that issue."

Q: You're talking about some of the staff that hangs around a candidate, and this is true in Congress, the staff and all. These often have a focus or an ideology of their own, which is not necessarily that of the candidate.

STRAUSS: Well, a lot of these candidates are staff-driven on issues, no question about it. Vera Murray, whom you were just talking to, my assistant for over 30 years, watches over me like a mother hen and she sees that I get straight information from my staff. I'm not staff driven. I may be Vera Murray driven but not staff driven.

Q: I would think somebody like George McGovern's staff would be so almost ideologically driven that they would be very difficult to deal with because they were true believers.

STRAUSS: Yes, they were true believers is right. They had a very bright guy whose name was Alan Baron, and he was George McGovern's number-one man, and he was a true believer. In later years he was at the Democratic National Committee when I got elected Chairman. I couldn't wait to fire him. I got elected on a Saturday night, and I just hated it that the next day was Sunday because I wanted to fire him the next day and I had to put it off till Monday. When I got to my office on Monday I had his resignation he wrote out. He was smarter than me. He had written it out on a Sunday and left it on my desk, so I didn't get to fire him. Later he and I became more than casual friends, good friends. I took him and his mother to lunch, as a matter of fact, just a few years before he died, a year or so before. He was very much on the far left, but he was smart and a lot of fun to be around.

Q: What was the reason that you couldn't get along with him at that time?

STRAUSS: I couldn't then because he was so ideologically driven. He didn't know me personally. He'd heard about this right-wing ogre from Texas who had taken over the Party and he was resisting that.

Q: Where was the ideology coming from?

STRAUSS: Well, I guess there's always been a strong voice of liberalism in the Democratic Party, as there should be, just as there should be a strong voice of conservatism in the Republican Party. He was a very good politician, Alan Baron, but he was so ideologically hung up he wasn't very effective, but he was an attractive guy and bright as he could be. I kind of liked him and we became, as I said, good friends. George McGovern turned out to be, I think, one of the great citizens of this country. If you had told me that I'd ever say that back in 1970, I would have said, "You're out of your mind, Charlie." This man was a great war hero, but he never used that, for example, in his campaign.

Q: Yes, I just finished reading Ambrose's book The Wide Blue Yonder. He's really a remarkable man.

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, he is a very remarkable man, and I am devoted to him and, I think, he to me. He has come to me a couple times when he's had problems to share them with me and see what counsel I might have, and I'm very fond of him. But, you know, you mature and those things that caused you problems in the past were created by the environment and created by people around you, where you stand, and change as situations change. I suspect McGovern and I agree pretty well on most of the major issues of the datoday!

Q: Just one last question on this, talking about the '72 campaign: Was there anything that could have been done by McGovern that might have won...?

STRAUSS: Nothing. He was positioned. He positioned himself terribly. He had a great line he used. He spoke at the Gridiron dinner the following year and he said, "You know, I wanted to run for President in the worst sort of way, and I did!" It was a great line and brought the house down.

Q: Was the problem the ideology of the left really?

STRAUSS: It sounded good if you said it real fast, but when you looked at it, so much of it was totally impractical, and George McGovern knows that better than anyone. But on many of the issues, he was right, but he was positioned too poorly to be effective, even on those issues. He's a very popular man in this country today. There are still people who say to me, "Strauss, were you ever a McGovernite?" as if it was a nasty word.

Q: We'll stop at this point. We're still talking about the '72 campaign. Did Watergate intrude? I'm just going to put this in, and we'll talk about Watergate and some of the turmoil that went around it and maybe any contacts while you were Democratic Chairman about dealing with the Republican. Do the Republican and Democratic Chairmen get together and divvy up the pie or do anything like that? I'll ask those questions next time.

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Today is October 28, 2002. Mr. Ambassador, Watergate?

STRAUSS: Well, I had an interesting experience with Watergate. I guess I had the rarest view of anyone I know. While I was Treasurer of the Democratic Party, Larry O'Brien was Chairman, and there was a fellow named Bob Schmidt, who was with ITT Corporation - he represented them down here, and his assignment was to cover the Democratic Party. He called me one day - we were friends, casual friends; he was a younger man and a nice man - and he said, "Bob, I really need to see you." I said, "Fine." He came over and said, "I've got a serious problem. I'd like your advice on what to do about it. I trust you and you're honest." I said, "Well, I hope so." He said, "There's a story being worked by a reporter of the St. Louis Post Dispatch," I think it was then, "and she has a story she is working on that says that the Republicans took a $400,000 contribution from ITT and for that they got an agreement from the White House that they would let a big acquisition that ITT was trying to make go through instead of the Justice Department blocking it on antitrust grounds." I forget what the merger was. I had known but now we're talking about 30 years ago or more, so I forget that. And he said, "Now that this story's coming out, they're claiming that it was a contribution for the Republican Convention to help pay for it and that was why we gave them $400,000." I said, "Well, is there any truth in the allegations that there was some kind of quid pro quo?" He said, "I'd rather not answer that question, Bob." I said, "I'm not going to withdraw it, but I'm going to remember what your answer was." I said, "I guess the only thought I have is if you're smart you would make an equal contribution to the Democrats," me being Treasurer of the Democratic Party, "and earmark it for the Democrats' convention expenses to help them. Then you would have some evidence that bolstered that story of yours a good deal." He said, "Damn, I don't know why I didn't think of that. That's an expensive way out," he said, "but a good way out." I said, "Now, let me tell you, I don't think we'd take it. We don't have anything going for us much, and I'm not sure at all that Chairman O'Brien, who has the final say on this, would want to take it or not, because this story could grow into something and we have so little going for us right now." Keep in mind this was Nixon's reelection campaign and we really were not in the race.

Q: And McGovern was the candidate who was seen as a loser.

STRAUSS: That's right, so we had nothing going for us, and I said, "I think Larry may say that we'd pass up this contribution, because, with your permission, I'm going to tell him precisely what our conversation was." He said, "Well, I understand that." So we were over in the Watergate building, as a matter of fact, where we had our offices, and O'Brien and I went downstairs to a club the Democratic Party had and had lunch. I called him for lunch. He had an engagement. I said, "Break your engagement because I really need to talk to you about something," and at lunch I told him this story of my conversation with the ITT representative. I said, "I have an opinion on whether we ought to take it or not, but I'll wait till I hear yours." He said, "Can you pay for this convention? Can you raise enough money to pay for the damn thing if we turn down money like this?" I said, "Yes. We can use it, and we can spend some money we couldn't otherwise, but we can pay for the convention and can have a good convention. I'm raising enough money to see us through if we're careful." He said, "Then I think we probably ought to turn it down because" - he said the same thing I did - "we have nothing else going. This could be a big story." I said, "That's my thought. I fully agree. I don't want to take it." He said, "Let's turn it down. Tell him to go to hell." I said, "I will. I'm supposed to meet Bob Schmidt and the vice president of ITT," whose name I ought to remember but I don't right now. I said, "I've got a date to meet him at six o'clock in the Madison Bar, Madison Hotel Bar, and Schmidt's going to give me his answer, and I'm going to give him mine, and he's got this vice president with him." I went in the Madison Bar, and as I was getting seated, Schmidt said, "You've got no deal. So-and-So here" - I can't think of his name no"says he went to the old man" - who is the guy who was chairman of IT"and he turned him down cold. I took it straight to Geneen." He added that Geneen said, "I'm not going to let anybody shake me down for $400,000." When Bob Schmidt, who was a very good guy and very embarrassed, told me this, I replied to him, or his Vice President, "Well, that's good, because I'm sorry I didn't get to tell you to go to hell before you told me you were turning it down, because I had lunch with O'Brien and he said we didn't want the money." I said, "I just have one comment to make, then we can finish our drinks." This fellow with Schmidt said, "What's your comment?" I said, "I don't know where this is going to end, but I have a hunch that's going to be the most expensive $400,000 ITT ever saved if they could have spent it." That was the first break in that story. This reporter out there was working on this story and they couldn't shut her up, and that was the beginning of the Watergate story. I've thought about it many times. Later I was in Texas one weekend and O'Brien called me and said, "Bob, we've had a break-in at our offices, and they have found that one of these burglars had in his notebook the White House switchboard number written down, with no name but he had an extension number. And I think there may be something to this." I said, "Well, it's awful strange he had that number." Both of us suspected there was skullduggery going on anyway, and he said, "I'm going to go ahead and blast them right now." And again he said, "You know, we just don't get any chance to get any real publicity." So O'Brien jumped on the story. I did say to him, I'll never forget, I said, "Larry, keep my name out of this damn story, because I think it's probably a wild goose chase. I think we ought to blast it, but I'd just as soon, since you're going to do it, leave me out of it." He laughed and we laughed. So he kicked the hell out of the Republicans with that story, and everybody was enraged that he made a suggestion that the Republican National Committee or, even worse, people representing the White House could be involved in a burglary. Well, you know what happened. They were deeply involved and it eventually brought down a President.

Q: Do you think this ITT episode may have helped trigger the desire of the Republican campaign to get inside the Democratic Party to find out what was going on?

STRAUSS: No, I don't think that. I think what they were looking fothey were so stupid, I'm certain now and I've talked to too many people involved, the Nixon White House was paranoid about Larry O'Brien, not about me. I wasn't prominent enough then; I was significant but not prominent. O'Brien was prominent and far more visible than me. After all, I was the Treasurer. Nixon was almost certain that O'Brien was on the payroll of what was his name, very strange millionaire...

Q: Howard Hughes.

STRAUSS: ...Howard Hughes. O'Brien did have a public relations office, and I think one of his clients was Howard Hughes. They thought they could find a contract over there between O'Brien and Hughes, and that's what they were after. There's no question in my mind about that. It's also stupid when you stop and think. McGovern was already terribly behind and the Democrats had nothing going for them, and there was no reason for any of this. By the way, Larry O'Brien was not only a good guy to work with, but also a very, very smart politician and I learned a great deal as his Treasurer that served me well after I became Chairman.

Q: You know, you look at these things and there is almost something like the Greek tragedy. People are brought down by their own weakness, which in this case was essentially paranoia.

STRAUSS: That's right. Our trouble was, both Larry O'Brien and I, we couldn't believe that these stupid acts were taking place, because there was no reason for any of them. If we knew what bad shape we were in, they had to know even better than we did what good shape they were in. But they kept compounding their crime. Q: What do you do, a national committee, when you've got some weeks to go before the election and you realize you really have a losing battle? Do you make calculations: All right, our guy can't win but we'll try to do this or we'll try to do that, or we'll position ourselves for the next one? What are you talking about?

STRAUSS: You try to cushion your losses as best you can. That's what I always try to do, and try to save as much as you can. If you know in time, you can save a lot of things, some Senatorial and Congressional seats, House seats, for example, and your image and other things you can keep in a state of repair for the next go-around. What's that old line? There are no final battles in politics.

Q: I would think there could be battles between the Presidential supporters and you might say the Congressional supporters. You're sitting there with money, and at a certain point I would think there would be a calculation: Our guy at the top isn't going to win, but let's get our guys who are in Congress and siphon more money there.

STRAUSS: Well, that's what you do.

Q: But the McGovernites would say, "The hell with that. We want all the money." Did you have battle royal with this?

STRAUSS: Well, yes, except that by then they had taken over the National Committee. It was their show, and we were out. They ran the campaign and they had taken over the National Committee in that case. The interesting thing is, as I've said earlier, George McGovern is an extremely sensible man, but when you get caught up in Presidential politics, it's a terrible drug and it affects your judgment. I'll guarantee you that George McGovern thought that they could pull this out until the votes started coming in, and his people did. They thought all these young people were going to come out and vote. Well, they didn't.

Q: At this point what was your feeling about Nixon and his crew around him?

STRAUSS: I thought they were a bad lot, I really did. The interesting thing is in my case I developed a more favorable impression of Richard Nixon after his disgrace than I had before. I may have gone into this earlier, but he and I agreed on China and several other issues that there wasn't much support for. When I came out to support George H.W. Bush when he was President with China policy early in the game, publicly, where few people were, Republicans or Democrats, Richard Nixon called and congratulated me on that and said, "You know, I think you and I are the only two people who have spoken up on this issue. I want to thank you." I think I may have mentioned earlier that he invited me for dinner, and we had several nice dinners together at his request, although I must say that I don't think any better of him nor do I think any worse of him, but I had a better relationship with him than most people, and I appreciated several things about him. See, I think Richard Nixon could have made a first-rate President. He understood the Presidency. He was right on some very big issues, he was right, and he was ahead of his time on those issues. They were progressive issues. His was not an arch-conservative administration. And he just blew it. It was that paranoia that got him.

Q: It's interesting because I've talked to many people in the Foreign Service who dealt with Richard Nixon when he was Vice President and President,, and, you know, they came away from that with a great deal of respect for the man. He listened carefully. He obviously thought hard. He was really very good in foreign relations, yet he detested the Foreign Service. I think he thought they looked down on him when actually the people I know who dealt with him did not. They appreciated having somebody who knew the terrain.

STRAUSS: I would think so. But you have to remember one thing about Richard Nixon: He was uncomfortable around people. He was an uncomfortable man, and he was uncomfortable around people. One or two friends was about all he was comfortable with, and his wife. I'm not even sure how comfortable he was with her. With his two daughters he was very comfortable.

Q: Bebe Rebozo.

STRAUSS: Bebe Rebozo and one or two others, Robert Abplanalp or whatever his name was, but that was about it. He just didn't like people, and he didn't like small or social talk.

Q: What was the feeling at this time from your perspective towards Henry Kissinger?

STRAUSS: I liked Henry. Henry and I were friends, and he used to kid me because I spoke before the Democratic Convention in I guess it was '72 and I took on Kissinger and one or two others and tied them all up with Nixon. But I liked Henry then and he me, I think, and I like him now. You talk about people in politics. Do you realize how long it's been since Henry Kissinger was in office, and he has more power, I think, today because of his position and his posture before the American people and the world maybe than he did when he was Secretary of State. It's an amazing performance he's turned in.

Q: He is extremely intelligent and analytical, which has been not in the mold of the normal apparatchik.

STRAUSS: That's right, no question about it.

Q: After the '72 election, did you have any views or get in contact with as the Watergate thing? As a Democrat, we're sort of watching the Watergate thing going on where you're kind of nudging things along or figuring out how this is going to come out.

STRAUSS: Well, we filed suit against the Republican Party, and I ended up meeting with John Mitchell...

Q: Who was then Attorney General.

STRAUSS: ...yes, and eventually settled that lawsuit. They paid us around $700,000, $650,000 or $700,000, money we badly needed. Some people criticized me for taking their money; some people criticized me for not getting more. Some people thought it was good. I was frankly glad to get it behind us and move on to something constructive, and I needed the money. I wanted to use it in that campaign coming up. I guess I've answered the question you asked.

Q: As the Watergate thing developed - this really kept going; it was a slow fuse - what were you doing at that time? Were you still associated with the Democratic Party?

STRAUSS: Yes, I was Chairman then. I was elected Chairman in December '72, and we pursued it, and we had good help. Joe Califano helped and Larry O'Brien helped and Edward Bennett Williams helped. Everybody was interested in that.

Q: Did you get involved in the investigation?

STRAUSS: Not in the investigation, although the interesting thing about it, I learned my house was broken into. I think it was during that convention or when the convention planning was going on.

Q: We're talking about the '72 Convention.

STRAUSS: It was, I think, while I was in Florida for the convention itself, or during its planning. Florida is where we held the convention. It was shortly prior to that there were stories in the paper Strauss was in Florida planning the Convention and my home was broken into. I later learned, a year or so later, as I recall, that it was the Watergate crowd that broke into our home in Dallas. It was a strange burglary because Helen's jewelry drawer was pulled out and the jewelry box was left on the floor and no jewelry taken. I always keep anywhere from 20 to 100 one-dollar bills just to have at my home in Dallas just to give to people who knock on the door and need a couple of bucks here and a couple bucks there, and they left the money, so they weren't after money. We had morphine or some drug, something, I remember in the medicine cabinethey weren't after drugs; the police were telling me all this stuff - and they didn't take any of that, so they said, "This is a strange robbery." We had a wonderful black woman who worked for us. Jeweldine Nelson was her name, and Jeweldine said, "Mr. Strauss, I'll tell you who it was. It was them Watergate burglars." I said, "Jeweldine, don't say anything like that. That's crazy. It makes us sound dumb. You can't blame everything on them." I'll be damned if that's not what it turned out to be. So Jeweldine had more sense then me.

Q: As Chairman of the Democratic Committee after losing big to Nixon, but the Democratic Party still controlled Congress, what did you set yourself out to do at that time?

STRAUSS: I set myself out to try to bring the Democratic Party back together. We were split so many different ways. It was hard to put two Democrats in the same room together without starting an argument.

Q: It's the old story: "I don't belong to any organized party. I'm a Democrat."

STRAUSS: That's exactly right. So the first thing I did when I was elected Chairman was fly to New York to see the very distinguished black Congresswoman, Shirley Chisholm. I left Shirley Chisholm in New York after I saw her very publicly, and I flew to Alabama and I saw George Wallace, and both trips were well covered. And then I came back to Washington and I made a speech about we were going to take this Democratic Party and put the pieces back together. The press asked, "What are your goals?" and I said, "My goal is instead of trying to deliver a candidate to the Party, my goal is to stay totally neutral and deliver a party to whoever turns out to be the candidate," and that's what we accomplished, and Jimmy Carter made it easier. I thought we were going to have a brokered convention.

Q: This would be the '76 Convention?

STRAUSS: Yes. About '74 or '75 I started talking with a very able political fellow from Minnesota, Mike Berman - he's a very good politician and a very nice, smart fellow. I said, "Mike, we're going to have a brokered convention just as sure as Hell. This party's split and we have so many candidates out there. I want you to help me figure out what kind of room we're going to put together, what kind of crowd we're going to put together in a room and try to bring this split party...

Q: Excuse me. I don't mean to interrupt, but a brokered convention, what do you mean by that?

STRAUSS: By agreement we decide, in a "smoke filled room" who's going to be our nominee. If one of them had 25 percent and another one had 30% and another one had 35%, you'd put them together and try to deliver a consensus out of that. Those people who have delegates, let them choose how they're going to...

Q: This is not on the floor but this is in the smoke-filled room?

STRAUSS: This was to be a smoke-filled room where we would put these various elements together. At one time, I forget who the players were, but I thought we were going to have a brokered convention. I thought that Scoop Jackson was going to be strong and I thought that Hubert Humphrey was going to be strong and I thought that Lloyd Bentsen would have some votes, and there a bunch of people, and I thought, instead of going to a convention that tears itself apart, the Democrats need to show they can get together.

Q: Going back to the '72 Convention.

STRAUSS: Exactly, and so I was terrified of that, as were others, and the answer to it: I talked to a lot of people on the Hill about my notion of how we would handle a sharp division between two or three candidates neither of whom had a majority and all of whom were stubborn and how we'd get them in a room and force consensus among them who should be the top and who would have the second spot. It didn't happen because Jimmy Carter, to everybody's surprise including mine, won our nomination outright. When he did it, there was nobody left standing.

Q: How did you feel about the delegate selection process? That had been tinkered with. After each convention you tinker with that, don't you, the primary system?

STRAUSS: That's right.

Q: By '76 had you been working on the primary system?

STRAUSS: You remember prior to '76 we had a midterm convention in Kansas City. You've probably forgotten that. The first two years of that four-year period were devoted to preparing for a midterm convention, which we held in Kansas City. It had a deadlock, terrible deadlock. I don't know whether I said earlier I was a product of many different elements, but I was primarily a product of the governors. The Democratic governors wanted a winner. I got to know them all well when I was Treasurer, and they had confidence in me and I in them. They were my power base, together with the Hill leadership.

Q: This is Tape 3 Side 1 with Robert Strauss.

STRAUSS: The Democratic governors were my base; they were my power base, fellows like Senator Wendell Ford, Dolph Briscoe and Governor Ruben Askew. Those were the sort of governors who were great supporters of mine. Mayor Daley was a strong supporter of mine and others like that. At that midterm convention when we had a stalemate, I got the governors, called them all together in the back room, and said, "We've got to figure a way out of this," because the delegates were hung up then over rules, delegate selection rules. You had labor insisting on one thing, and you had the more liberal wing of the Party insisting on something else. I told the governors they had to step forward now and show their muscle and get us out of this. I'll never forget that they sent a couple of governors - I forget which ones - and I sat in a room with those different people, and we finally agreed on a compromise. It was what the governors thought would make sense. I'll never forget that Mayor Daley had had a little stroke a month or so before and he wasn't fully recovered but he came out to that convention because he knew I needed him and he gave a damn. He'd gone to bed already about 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock when we were winding this up, and I wanted to notify him of what was going on and, frankly, I needed his support to pass that on the floor. I got him on the phone and I said, "Mr. Mayor, we've got the following agreement. It's not everything I want and it's not everything you want." He said, "Well, how do you feel about accepting it?" I said, "Mr. Mayor, I feel like a second-story burglar who's robbing the house and he's got about two-third of the jewels in his pocket and he hears the police sirens coming and he has to decide whether to stay around another few minutes to try to get the rest of the jewels or get his ass out of there, scamper down the ladder and get off." I want to take what we've got and get out of town. Mayor Daley laughed and said, "Well, Bob, I'll tell you. If you feel that way about it, if you can live with it, I'll come over and hold the ladder for you. Give me a half an hour to get dressed." He came over and he spoke to the delegates. He had a man, he delivered a fellow - I think he was treasurer of his party in Illinois - and he spoke, and that brought the Mayor's constituency in and we had the governors working and we rammed it through that convention. As I said, it was about 65 or 75 percent or what I'd hoped for, but it was a compromise we could live with.

Q: The McGovern group were known for their dedication and their fire. Many of them were young and later moved into the political process. These were essentially quite young, dedicated people. They were kids, intelligent kids but full of fire. This is not a group that accepts compromise very easily. Did you find that by the time you were at the midterm convention - this would be '74, I guess - had the fire gone out or were they still a big problem?

STRAUSS: Oh, no, it was still a real problem, and we had to run over them to some extent. By the time the 1976 Convention was held in New York, we had rules that we'd passed with the Executive Committee, and to tell you the truth, I had it so tight by then that you couldn't hardly get a microphone to speak at that convention. The Chairman's people, my people, approved it, and they used to say that they had to get permission to ask to speak, and that's really about the truth. We kept the fiery element on both sides, both left and right, from giving this a repeat of earlier conventions.

Q: Where was the fiery element from the other side coming from?

STRAUSS: Well, you had Al Barkin, who was political director of the AFL-CIO, and he fell out with me early. He supported me for Chairman then because he wanted to dominate the Executive Committee, and I couldn't let him do that. I gave him so many seats and that was it. So he had no use for me, and stayed that way, I might add, until his death. But he was difficult and somebody had to deal with him, and it was me and I did. I was considered a strong Chairman; you couldn't be a chairman of that party then unless you were strong. We had a large group of supporters from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, whether they were the Carter people or Ann Wexler and Joe Duffey, who were prominent liberals, and Averell Harriman, a distinguished liberal, a former governor, and any number of people. So we had a lot of support from the liberal side, and we had a lot of support from the more conservative element in the South, but we didn't have any help from Labor. I always regretted that. But when we finally had a nominee, Labor, of course wasn't crazy about Jimmy Carter. They wanted Scoop Jackson. Well, I was a Scoop Jackson person in my heart. I couldn't show it anywhere, but I certainly was. I had a close friend in that Presidential primary for a while, Senator Lloyd Bentsen, who's one of my closest friends in Texas, and I basically went into that whole year hoping for a Scoop Jackson presidency. I though we could elect him President, and I think we could have. Jimmy Carter turned out to be a much stronger candidate than I ever dreamed he would be. Carter and I had no relationship much. He didn't care very much for me, and his people didn't care for me too much - I think I may have mentioned this earlier - until they got to the Convention, and when they got to the Convention, they saw that they didn't understand the convention process. If it hadn't been for the Strauss people, a fellow named Bob Keefe and Mark Siegel and people like that, Vera Murray, that Convention would have fallen apart. Carter and Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell, who worked for Carter, and Charles Kirbo, who was Carter's primary advisor, saw when they got there that there was a lot more to running a convention than they had any idea. When we left there, I'd say Jimmy Carter had respect for my skills and I had respect for his skills. Interestingly, while he intended and had papers that he was going to get me out as Chairman and put some long-time Carter person in as Chairman of the Democratic Party, before we left the Convention, he said to me, "Bob, I'm counting on you staying on as Chairman until after the election," and I said, "Fine, I'd like to see it through." Then a few weeks later he asked if I'd serve as chairman of the campaign. Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell had more influence with him than I did even though I was the chairman of the campaign, but we all worked together well and they're very close friends now. I guess I'm as close to Jimmy Carter as anybody in the country today.

Q: One of the things that one notices often - this has happened with other governors like Ronald Reagan and others - they come out of the governorship and they have a coterie around them, usually very dedicated, highly suspicious of everybody else, and then all of a sudden they're in the big time. This must have been quite a problem, always is a problem.

STRAUSS: Jimmy Carter ran as an outside, you'll remember, and the great mistake he made was he wanted to stay an outsider. Ronald Reagan ran against Washington as an outsider, but he had gotten his rear end warm on the seat and he said, "We want to get to the inside; we want to be a part of the inside," and the first thing he did when he got here before he took office was have a big reception for the insiders. He and his people started putting together a relationship with the political insiders, and they did it. They took Jim Baker, who was active, as you know, in his campaign and played a leading role in it. He said to me, "Strauss, all we had to do was look and see everything that the Carter people did and do just the opposite, because they had messed up the whole damn thing before they took office. They had already offended people, like Tip O'Neill and others. They started to offend them with tickets to the inauguration, and it never quit.

Q: During the election what were you doing after the Convention?

STRAUSS: Oh, I was chairman of the Carter campaign for reelection.

Q: What was the role - let's go back to even '72 - of Jesse Jackson and the black element within the electorate of the Democratic Party?

STRAUSS: Well, we had a strong, active black woman on our Executive Committee. C. Dolores Tucker was her name. She's still very active in politics generally and, I'm sure, in black politics also. I don't know if she's a force anymore but she was an active person, and we had a number of people like that. Shirley Chisholm was a strong personality. We had good black support, and they were active. Jesse Jackson was just coming on the scene. Now, in the '76 campaign, during '76 and then in the '80 campaign, which we lost, Jackson played a prominent role. I remember I had rented a Lear jet plane, and I said to Jesse, "Now, you've got to take this plane and this last week you've got to cover three or four cities a day. Call me every night and tell me where you are and where you spoke and what you did." He would sometimes call and sometimes he wouldn't, but he liked that plane and he was good at it and he worked hard. He knew it was a good opportunity for him.

Q: Was he a good team player?

STRAUSS: Yes, he was then. I don't know that he was such a team player, but as long as he had a big, visible role, he was very good, very bright, very talented. He and I understood each other and got along well. He did his best for the Democratic Party.

Q: What was the feeling about Gerald Ford as President when you were running against him in '76?

STRAUSS: We thought he was vulnerable, and we knew he was decent. I don't know whether we talked about it or not, but I knew that Nixon had wanted to make John Connally his Vice President. As a matter of fact, he wanted to eventually make him President, but when he tried to sell him to the leadership of Congress, the Republicans didn't want him and the Democrats didn't, and Nixon was shocked. I told you this story.

Q: I remember a bit about it.

STRAUSS: Yes, so I'll get off of that. When he asked who he should name to the vacancy, I think it was Democratic Speaker Carl Albert who said, "You ought to put Gerry Ford as Vice President. You're too weak; you can't confirm anybody controversial like Connally." They all agreed, Both Republicans and Democrats, and that's how Gerry Ford got on the ticket.

Q: During this time that you were Chairman...

STRAUSS: December '72 through the Convention of '76.

Q: ...what was the role of, say, the Congressional wing of the Democratic Party?

STRAUSS: They had a big role with me because I was a product of the Democratic Governors and Hill leadership. I was looked on by then as a Pol. The Hill related to me. Mike Mansfield and I were friends. Bob Byrd was glad to see me. I used my chairmanship to befriend these people all I could, and they in turn used their power on the Hill to befriend me as Chairman, so it was a very good relationship. I used the Congress as they like to be used. I was speaking in places for them, and I sought their advice. I sometimes took it, sometimes didn't, but we tried to help them out. We didn't have any money, but I traveled all over this country speaking for them, the governors and the Senators and the House members, in various districts and states. So I was an energetic Chairman and a rather popular one. I raised a ton of money for the House and Senate candidates during the '72 campaign.

Q: Did the Congressional wing of the Democratic Party have a particular agenda that might be different from the governors or Labor?

STRAUSS: No, they had priorities that were different, everybody had their own priorities, but they did a pretty good job. We had peace during that '76 campaign. You know, when you're out of power, you learn to get along. When you get that power, you begin to fall out.

Q: How about being out of the power? Was patronage out of the question, or was it still within the political system, an ability to use patronage?

STRAUSS: Well, sure there was. Senators were there whether they had the White House or not. There was a certain amount of patronage, and the same thing with House members. As Chairman I had patronage; I could put people on important committees where they'd have opportunities to make themselves visible in their own states as they would want to get more involved in the political process. I used patronage not as something evil, but it was just something good for the party and the individuals.

Q: Was there an element to bringing new people on board, training, particularly women and minorities?

STRAUSS: Keep in mind that we had a black caucus in the Democratic Party, we had a Hispanic caucus in the Democratic Party, we had these various caucuses. As a matter of fact, I worried we were balkanizing the Party it too much, but they all wanted their own root.

Q: Was there a women's caucus?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes. I had a woman as my executive director when I was Chairman and I had a vice chairman who was a black. He was from New York. I'll think of his name in a minute. Anyway, if anything, we were too Balkanized. It later became even more Balkanized after I left.

Q: Was there anything within the Democratic Party that was saying, "We've got to develop new talent," and all that?

STRAUSS: Oh, sure.

Q: How does one...?

STRAUSS: Well, we had a young people's group. As a matter of fact, Bobby Smith, the young fellow who ran that, as I recall, is now very successful. He's built a radio and television chain. He was a talented young man, and he ran our young people's group. We had state chairmen in that association, and they were a power block in the Democratic Party. And I got along with all of them, except I didn't get along with people who ran the state chairman's association. I had trouble with them, and I guess we each had a certain amount of distrust of the other.

Q: The state chairmen would be your equivalent except at the state level?

STRAUSS: Yes.

Q: Why would there be a difference?

STRAUSS: Well, there shouldn't be. To begin with, the chairman of that association, the state chairmen's association, and his executive director he had running it, neither one had much use for me and, in fairness I should add I wasn't too crazy about doing business with them. They had their agenda and I was trying to rebuild a divided party..Q: We'll have to stop here, but we're talking really about the organization of the Democratic Party during this. Why don't we next time come back to the campaign of 1976, the strengths, the weakness...

STRAUSS: Why Jimmy Carter won.

Q: ...why he won, and then we'll talk about the Carter period.

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Today is November 4, 2002. We are now the day before elections in 2002 and we probably will interrupt this to pick up something about the election as we go. Could you tell me something about how Carter first appeared on the horizon for you and sort of the early evaluation and how, in the '76 campaign as this developed, you felt about things?

STRAUSS: The Georgia Democrats had invited me to come to Georgia and speak at their Jefferson-Jackson dinner, which I did as a guest of the then Governor Jimmy Carter. I made a pretty good speech, it was well received, and he was gracious and I stayed with him in the mansion. He and Charlie Kirbo, who was a good friend and who was one of his political mentors, told me at that time that Carter could not seek reelection and was going to have some...

Q: This is as Governor?

STRAUSS: ...as Governor, and was going to have some spare time, and he would like to contribute to the Democratic Party and help me as Chairman. I asked Carter in what way, and he said, "I'd be willing to chair a committee of yours to reelect Democrats to Congressional seats across the country, and all the expense you would have would be the expense of an aide for me and my travel expense." I said, "Well, that makes sense." Carter was an energetic fellow and a good organizer. He was not a great favorite of the other governors, but he and I got along adequately, so I accepted that.

Q: Why wasn't he a favorite of the other governors?

STRAUSS: They thought he was looking after his own business more than the Governors Association businesthat he was too ambitious. When the Democratic governors would meet, he would always manage to excuse himself about three minutes before the meeting ended and step out where the press was waiting for all of them, and he would then have a private press conference before the others got there, and they resented it and complained about it. I said, "Well, you have to take care of your own business. I can't tell a Governor when he's going to leave a meeting." These were men who all later became good friends of his. I guess they were friendly then, but they weren't crazy about him. They kind of resented the conduct I just described. So he came to Washington, and I guess this was about 1974. I had been elected Chairman in '72. So he came in early '72, and we kind of hammered out a little deal. Bob Keefe, who was my assistant, the DNC political director, made the first trip with Carter. Then Governor Carter's early stop, if not his first stop, was Iowa. After Keefe spent a couple of days on the road with him, he said to me, "Bob, this fellow is running for President," and I said, "Well, that's interesting, Keefe, because I never would have dreamed it and I doubt that anyone is going to take him too seriously as a Presidential candidate. I guess we don't need to worry about it. If he can capitalize on helping the Democratic Party, we ought to be glad we're getting that kind of help." But it concerned me, and that's the first time it came to my attention.

Q: Why would it concern you?

STRAUSS: Well, that they would think that I was playing favorites.

Q: And you were sort of sponsoring his traveling around?

STRAUSS: He was traveling on behalf of the Democratic Party, and I was Chairman of the Party and I had permitted him to have that role. I don't think anyone objected to it at the time. No one took him seriously, including me, I might add. I remember when the young man whom he suggested I hire to assist him, whose name is Hamilton Jordan, who is one of the nicest fellows and one of the best political operators I've ever known, much later said to me, "Bob, I want to tell you that Jimmy's running for President," and I said, "Of what?" But he pulled it off. He did it in a way you couldn't do today. He had no money. They had enough money to start a little campaign for themselves when he announced for the Presidency. And there was space in between the states on dates of primaries, and he would win a primary or run well in one, then he'd have a week or two off and he'd raise enough money to get to the next state, and he would repeat that process. All of a sudden it became easy for him to raise money, because he was a very live candidate, and after New Hampshire he was a terribly live candidate.

Q: For the '76 campaign you were above the fray, but how did you observe the line-up or the developing line-up?

STRAUSS: When we first started, Scoop Jackson had so much support that I thought we were going to nominate him, and that appealed to me a great deal. I was sort of a Scoop Jackson Democrat, if the truth be known. I never advertised myself as that after I got to be Chairman, of course. I thought if anybody upset him it might be Hubert Humphrey who would get back into it. I guess that was the year Muskie also tried for that nomination, and I though he had a very good chance of getting it. I'm getting mixed up here.

Q: I think Muskie was earlier.

STRAUSS: Muskie was earlier, yes, that's right. So it was Jackson and Humphrey and several others including a very close friend of mine from Texas, a very able fellow, Senator Lloyd Bentsen. I tried to discourage Lloyd Bentsen from seeking the Presidency. I thought he was trying for it too early. He wasn't well enough known, but he thought there was a chance and you take a shot when you get it, and he was probably right, but his campaign didn't amount to too much compared to his enormous talent. I thought then that after a little while we had so many good candidates, I think I mentioned to you earlier that I thought we were going to have a brokered convention. We talked about that. But it turned out Carter just swept right on through, and well before the Convention he had it nailed down.

Q: Did you have any concerns as a Democrat for how a Carter Administration would operate?

STRAUSS: No, I really didn't. I assumed what we always assume, that if you're good enough to get yourself elected President, you're good enough to put together an administration that can survive two terms. That is not the rule anymore obviously, and Carter proved it wasn't a rule in his case. But Carter was a very bright man, a very able man, and a fine man and a very close friend of mine to this very day, but when we went to the Convention - I think I mentioned this earlier - the Carter people didn't have too much use for me. They knew that Carter was not my favorite, and I don't think any of them thought I cheated on them, because I didn't cheat and it was pretty obvious I ran it on the square. And it was pretty obvious, whether I wanted to cheat or not, I couldn't help stop him or start him. He had his own momentum and they had a very well thought-through and tactical plan for capturing the nomination, and it certainly worked. Now, when we got to the Convention was when I first made, I think, an exceedingly positive impression on Carter, because, as I mentioned earlier, they had no notion of how to conduct a convention and I did. I had planned that Convention carefully and had everything fixed about as well as I could, organized as well as I could and structured as well as I could to keep every nut we had on the far left or far right from getting their hands on the microphones and creating a bad image. I wanted to kind of control the message that we sent out, and we controlled it very well. Carter left that Convention with about a 30-point lead, so I knew we had a chance to beat President Ford.

Q: How did you view President Ford as it came up to the election?

STRAUSS: I was extremely fond of President Ford. I knew him not well but more than casually, and I liked him and his wife very much, and they liked me and we had a nice relationship. But I thought he was vulnerable. I had no strong confidence that we could defeat him but I knew we had a real shot at it.

Q: As Chairman of the Democratic Committee, does somebody there sit up at your level or something and say, "Okay, here's where our weaknesses are; here's where our strengths are. Here's how we can attack. This is what we have to defend"? Do you get into that?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, we would have senior staff meetings that I would call at regular intervals, and various people had various strengths. Some of them had press strengths, others had issue strengths, others had political strengths and knowledge around the country. Put them all together and it contributed a great deal to my own knowledge. My political instincts were very good. I was just laughing: I had lunch with Bob Keefe the other day, whom I hadn't seen in about a year, six months or so anyway. He always used to call me Oz. Once I asked him, "Where'd you get that crazy name Oz for me?" "Well," he said, "I used to tell people Strauss is the Wizard of Oz." He sent a note back to Vera Murray, my assistant, just the other day after we had lunch and said, "I sure enjoyed lunch with the Oz."

Q: Did you see, as Carter came to the fore, any of the problems that later seemed to dog him - correct me if you think I'm wrong - an over attention to detail, almost a certain self-righteousness, a certainty on things which can get into your way if you...

STRAUSS: Yes. He made mistakes he didn't have to make. He had very good help with Jody Powell and Hamilton Jordan, and he was good himself. He had good instincts. But he caught a wave just perfectly to defeat a rather popular incumbent President. When you've been only a moderately successful governor of a moderately large-small, somewhere in the middle, state like Georgia and defeat a sitting President who was not unpopular, it was a massive undertaking, and they did it very well. If I had to pick two people today with political skills, even though I never see them much anymore, Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell would be two of the first I would pick.

Q: How did you find Jordan and Powell? Later they became sort of isolated from Congress. Did you feel that there was much of a tie-in, an understanding that, you know, you have the campaign to win and then you have the next campaign which is to work with Congress?

STRAUSS: I didn't have an inkling, I had a certain knowledge that they were making mistakes. They ran against Washington, just as Ronald Reagan did four years later, but Ronald Reagan had enough sense the minute he got elected to forget that foolishness. They kept it up, and Hamilton Jordan, with all his skills, used to say, "If we end up with people like So-and-So and So-and-So in this Cabinet, then I'll feel that our whole effort to capture the Presidency was wasted, because we won't be able to get rid of the Washington crowd. So they managed to get rid of a lot of the Washington crowd including themselves.

Q: How much did you find that the Ford pardon of Nixon played? This seemed to energize a lot of people. To me I thought it was a great thing to get that damn thing out of the way.

STRAUSS: I thought President Ford made the right decision, and maybe he did, but I also think that that pardon offended the nation much more than I thought it would at the time it was done, and I thought it was the right thing to do also. I don't think the public ever made up their mind whether it was a precooked deal or not, and still probably hasn't to this day. The interesting thing in that, Charles, is that Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford today are two very, very close friends and stay in regular communication with each other. I never would have anticipated that.

Q: After the nomination, what happens to a Party Chairman?

STRAUSS: Well, normally he turns his card in and goes his way. Carter had intended to get rid of me as soon as he was nominated, but when he left that Convention, so his people told me, they saw that I had some political skills they needed and some knowledge of people around the country and commanded a certain respect and had credibility that they could use. So, much to my surprise, Carter asked me to continue on as Chairman of the Party during the campaign and to serve as chairman of the campaign. I think I mentioned earlier to you I had the title of chairman of the campaign, and while I was deeply involved in decision making as the chairman along with Powell and Jordan and Carter himself and his wife and our pollster, Pat Caddell, and a fellow named Charles Kirbo, Carter would listen to Jordan and Powell more than he would listen to me, and correctly so. They had been with him all his political life and got him to the White House, and he certainly didn't need to rely on them any less. What they did do is include me in the decision-making, and I had a chance to speak up. But when I expressed concerns about our relationship with the Hill, they didn't take that very seriously. They put a very nice man in charge of their Hill relationships who had been in charge of their state legislative relationships back in Georgia. He was a very nice and very bright fellow, but the Congress didn't think particularly highly of him. It was hard to represent Jimmy Carter and Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell in the Congress, because they ignored the Congress to a great extent. That didn't mean that the President didn't talk to Congressional representatives, Senators and Congressmen, with some frequency, but they knew he didn't care much for them. The truth is that Carter loved the substantive side of being President, but hated the political side.

Q: We've just been watching a debate on the Senate in Minnesota between Mondale and Coleman, speaking of which, what was your view of Senator Mondale at that time?

STRAUSS: I had a high regard for Fritz Mondale, did then and do now. We had a lot in common in the Carter Administration, because he understood why Carter was making life more difficult for himself with the inability of his administration to relate to the Hill. He and I spent many hours talking about it. I think well of him, and I was pleased when he went to Japan. As a matter of fact, my recollection is that I had thought he might go to Russia after I was there. Fritz Mondale would make a good Senator. I don't know about Coleman; he may or may not. I have nothing against him. He was a Democrat until a few years ago. About eight years ago he switched.

Q: You know, when you talk about a party organization that comes out of a relatively small state and rather insular running a major campaign, granted he won these primaries and did well on that, but was there a learning curve and were you sort of trying to help the process along of the Carter staff? You know, it's a big country and there are a lot of issues.

STRAUSS: I did my best. We all did, including his staff. I never saw people more devoted than his staff was to Jimmy Carter. Did we have differences from time to time? Of course, we did. I wouldn't call myself trying to serve as a mentor to any of them, although I was a senior member. Part of the problem that Hamilton and Powell had, they were so young that age difference hurt them in some respects, I think. Kirbo had tremendous influence.

Charles Kirbo was a lawyer from Georgia who had served as Jimmy Carter's lawyer when he was seeking the governorship. As a matter of fact, earlier than that, I think, he was counted out unfairly in a Senate race, and Charles Kirbo represented him in court and successfully so. I think that Jimmy Carter had more confidence in Charles Kirbo than he did in all the rest of us put together. His problem was he too had a rather narrow vision. We used to say that Kirbo never left Georgia. I don't think Kirbo had ever been to Europe, and he'd sit in on foreign policy discussions. Those were typical of the problems of his administration. I remember after the President had been in office about a year and a half, I guess, and obviously having a great many troubles, I suggested to Charlie Kirbo, who I knew had more influence with President Carter than I did or anyone else, for that matter, as I said, I suggested to Kirbo that he come up to Washington and I'd get together three or four people I thought were wise and sophisticated and dedicated to the principles that Jimmy Carter espoused and that the Democratic Party stood for. So I called them together. I think Clark Clifford was one of them and Jim Rowe was another. These were old-time, dedicated Democrat voices. Harry McPherson was another who was in that room. They'd all served in Democratic administrations in various capacities and were out practicing law. So I got them to come in when Kirbo came up, and I said to them, "Fellows, you know as well as I know that President Carter's having lots of problems. Give him your view of this administration and what they can do to improve their operation somewhat." And we spent about three hours talking about it, and they were very constructive, and Kirbo listened very quietly. He was a gentleman and he was bright. I thought we'd made real progress. I'd invited Charlie and his wife - she was in town with him - to come to our house and have a bite to eat for dinner and then we were all going to the Kennedy Center together and sit in the President's box. So after the meeting was over, Kirbo and I got into my car and were driving to my home to meet his wife and mine and go to the Kennedy Center after we'd have a bite to eat. I said, "Well, Charlie, what did you think of the meeting?" I thought it had gone very well and they'd given him tough love, if you will, good advice, very frank and candid advice. Kirbo said to me, "Bob, I think those boys" - they were each in their 60s or 70s - "I think those boys are just unhappy because Jimmy didn't offer them no job." I said, "Kirbo, are you out of your goddamn mind? You couldn't get one of these guys back into government for anything in the world. They've been in government 15 or 20 years apiece. They're trying to make a little money now." But Kirbo didn't see it. He thought I was dead wrong. I don't think he took a bit of the advice they gave, and it was good advice.

Q: What was the role of Rosalynn during the election, the primaries and up through, as your observation, the election?

STRAUSS: Rosalynn Carter, I suspect, had little use for me when we first started working together, because I had opposed and in her mind I was for somebody other than her husband during the primaries. That was their view of it. But I came to be one of her greatest admirers and am to this day and speak to her often. She was bright, she was a learner, she had all the right instincts, she's just a marvelous woman. And I saw her grow from a little Atlanta more-or-less housewife - and I don't say that in a deprecating way - into this strong, mature, forceful woman whose mind and instincts were splendid, and we worked together closely and well.

Q: Sometimes I've gotten the flavor of Presidential wives, particularly with Ronald Reagan's wife but others, that they get so possessive of their husband that all their political instincts are to preserve and resent bitterly any criticism of their husband rather than using the criticism to play on, developing, changing and all. How did you find Rosalynn?

STRAUSS: I think all these political wives are the same in that regard, and I think my wife would be the same too. They're very defensive of their husbands. You never know what's being said on the pillow. I remember one time during the second campaign when we were running against Senator Kennedy - he had challenged the President for renomination...

Q: This was the primary.

STRAUSS: ...in the primary - I remember that I had been out into Pennsylvania campaigning, and a couple days later Rosalynn was out there. She came back and called me - I was chairman of that reelection campaign also - to give me a report on her trip to Pennsylvania, and then she said to me, "Bob, what damn fool came out for so-and-so which turned off the steel people?" I said, "Rosalynn, reach over and pat that fellow you're in bed with on the rear end and ask him that question." She said, "Oh, thank you." She had a real sense of humor. I called her the other morning about 7 o'clock. That's the morning he received a call at 4:30 a.m. about his Nobel Prize. I called their home in Plains, Georgia, about 7:15 or 7:30, and she answered the phone. I said, "Rosalynn, is the ex-President in? May I speak to him?" She said, "Bob, he left here an hour ago." I said, not meaning to be disrespectful, "You mean to tell me the little bastard got up and left the house at 6:30 on a morning like this to run some errand?" She said, "Well, you know Jimmy. He's out doing something," and that was 6:30 or seven in the morning, and she giggled when she said it, and then I was ashamed of myself for using that term talking about an ex-President: "You mean that fool got up and left the house that early on the day he heard about the Nobel Peace Prize."

Q: You know, this whole oral history program we're working on deals with foreign affairs. During the election of '76, how would you see the role of foreign policy and the Carter people's knowledge and sensitivity to foreign affairs?

STRAUSS: Well, I think, as you probably recall, Jimmy Carter had very limited experience in foreign policy. He had joined the Council of Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, because he needed those credentials, and I'm sure he was interested in it, but he had no background in foreign policy, but he had Brzezinski and he had Cy Vance, who were his two mainstays in that area. Between the two of them they gave different advice but they gave good advice. They represented two different points of view, not only in the campaign talking to him, but also after he got in office there was a great of difficulty between the two of them, and Carter tolerated it. As a matter of fact, I suspect he rather liked sipping from two different cups.

Q: How did you personally up to this period, because we really haven't talked about it, feel about foreign affairs and interest in and all this, or did this play much of a role?

STRAUSS: Well, it did play a role but not much of a role in the race against Ford. Gerry Ford was not a foreign policy man when he was thrust into the Presidency, although he had experience, to a great deal larger extent than the then challenger, Governor Carter, and he did in that campaign, but I don't think foreign policy played a major role, except you remember that President Ford made that one major mistake.

Q: About Poland. You might explain what that was.

STRAUSS: What he said was that Poland was never under control of the Communists. He just drew a blank on that, and that came home to haunt him, came home to haunt him terribly.

Q: In this election, when did the Soviet Union fit into this?

STRAUSS: Well, I don't think there was that great a difference between them. The truth of the matter is more than any election I can remember this was a race won and lost on domestic economic issues. We were having difficulties in this country, and I think that was the major part, 80 percent, of the issue and, of course, President Ford suffered greatly because of the Nixon pardon, but it was probably the right thing to do..

Q: In your sounding around the country, what were you picking up about what was sort of the legacy of Nixon and Henry Kissinger?

STRAUSS: The truth of the matter is Henry Kissinger may be the brightest foreign policy man personally by two to one I've ever been exposed to. It's simply amazing when you stop and think that it's been over 30 years, I guess, since Henry Kissinger was in office, or close to 30 years, and he, I think, is a bigger figure in foreign policy issues in this country today than he was when he was Secretary of State at the peak of his power. He's lasted better than anyone I know.

Q: I was just wondering, during the '76 campaign and all, was there any sort of spill- over from a very active time. People who look at foreign policy look at Nixon and Kissinger, not just the opening to China but other things, as being probably a period when we were the most cohesive as far as administration looking at foreign policy.

STRAUSS: I think that Richard Nixon possibly had the best thought-out. It may not have been the most perfect, but he had a strategic sense of where this country ought to go and how it ought to get there in its foreign policy, and he articulated it well. I don't know of any President who really surpassed him and if any were equal to him in that regard. You can like or dislike Richard Nixon, but that was also his great strength and he served this country well in that area in my judgment.

Q: Did this spill over, though? Was this at all an issue, relations with, say, the Soviet Union during this election?

STRAUSS: I don't think so. I don't have a recollection. I guess as a Democrat we had to be on the defensive to show we were strong enough on foreign policy. If you will recall, when George Bush was put on the ticket with Ronald Reagan, there was some talk then that Kissinger was trying to get Gerry Ford back on that ticket in the vice president's spot, and his strength in foreign policy was considered the reason that that might make sense. But I don't recall that either of those elections were won or lost on foreign policy.

Q: During, again, the '76 campaign, looking at it sort of from the strategic overview, any particular states or areas that gave you particular concern?

STRAUSS: It's hard to think of any that didn't give us concern. We couldn't take anything for granted. But, strangely, you know, we left that Convention with a 30-point lead in the polls and we finished up by about one or two points. So Jimmy Carter, as I say, caught the wave just right to get elected to the Presidency, but even though he was a pretty good candidate, a fairly good candidate, we went down constantly, every week saw us dropping in the polls. If the thing had gone on another week or so, who knows, we may have lost.

Q: Was this a natural thing, or was there something about the campaign or Carter?

STRAUSS: Carter was not a great candidate. He didn't like politics, and he was not a great candidate. He was an adequate candidate, and I think that the fact that he didn't like politics came through. People could tell that. That wasn't his bag. He would have rather been sitting down working on an issue than out campaigning, and it showed. Take this present President: George Bush loves campaigning. He may act like he doesn't, but he likes being out with people. He knows that's his strength. Jimmy Carter didn't care for that. It was a chore for him. He wanted to work on the serious issues he saw facing this country and the worlthe rest was just a waste of time in his mind. That's, of course, admirable, but it doesn't get you re-elected.

Q: What about the Senate and House? As Chairman of the Democratic Committee, how involved were you with those elections?

STRAUSS: Well, I was fairly well involved. The Hill had sources of strength for me when I sought the chairmanship of the Party, and I stayed in close touch with them. I used to kid and say it's very hard for Tip O'Neill or Mike Mansfield to get out of their office to have a picture snapped without the Chairman of the Party rushing over to get in with them, because that's the only thing I had going for me. We didn't have a lot going for us then, the Democratic Party. We turned it around, of course, with the Carter election, we thought, but it was only for four years.

Q: Then the election took place, and what happened to you?

STRAUSS: Well, Kirbo asked - I forget the job - he asked if I was interested in being Secretary of Commerce, and then he said, "Would you be interested in HEW?" - that's what it was called then. I said, "Charlie, I've been three years Treasurer and four years Chairman. I'm interested in getting back to my law firm." And he said, "Well, you'd better hurry if you want a job. Everybody wants a job. Don't you?" I said, "I do not. I want to go back to my law firm, and I'm going there the day this thing's over. I'm going back to the law office as quick as I can get out, not the day it's over, as soon as we get the inauguration over." I returned to my law firm and I had been there about three months when Hamilton Jordan called me and said that the fellow that I had suggested, an ex-Congressman named Green from Philadelphia. For some reason, that suggestion didn't fly. Others had been suggested for Special Trade Representative, which had been elevated to a Cabinet-level job under the new legislation, that job was open and the President would like for me to take it. I said, "Well, let me think about it." I thought about it for a day or so, and I talked to a number of people who thought I ought to go into the Administration if I could get that particular job. It was Joe Kraft, who was a great columnist, who convinced me more than anyone that it was a good job and I'd like it, I'd be good at it, and it didn't have a big bureaucracy to deal with. That I could really get something done, and we needed to get trade legislation negotiated and then passed. I took the job, and it was in that time that we negotiated and passed the Tokyo Round, known as the Trade Act of 1979.

Q: Just to get a feel for your career and all, what happens? You're involved in Democratic politics. What happens to your law firm? How do you eat?

STRAUSS: To begin with, when I came to Washington I had already had some economic success in Texas, and that's something I tell people all the time. These young people want to talk about going into politics, and I tell them that's great but do it as a part-time thing and get yourself a little economic stability and security. You'll be a better public servant when you get there. You'll have a sense of independence and you can do the things you truly believe in and not worry about making a living, and you'll have economic security for your family. So when I came to Washington, I had economic security for my family or I wouldn't have come here. I left my law firm and they gave me, as I recall - in those days you could get paid out over a period of time - they gave me two years' pay, which is what I'd asked for, what I'd been earning, my pay as a partner. We arrived at the sum, and they paid it out over a couple or three years, which is the way I requested it, so that took care of that. Today you can't do it quite that way; you have to act differently. Today is better public policy than it was before. People object to the revolving door and, well, the idea of people going from the private sector to government and government back to private sector. I think I'm a product of going in and out of government a couple times - in a Democratic administration and then later in a Republican administration. I think it made me a better executive when I was in the government and it made me a better lawyer when I got out of there. I see nothing wrong with it. If a fellow's dishonest, he's going to be dishonest wherever he is, and if a fellow's honest, he's going to be honest wherever he is and straightforward, and I've never had any criticism of my integrity. Experience is invaluable whether one is in government or the private sector.

Q: During the time, just to wrap up this particular part, that you were with the Democratic Committee and up to the time you became Special Trade Representative, did your law firm have any particular focus, a specialty, or not?

STRAUSS: It was a growing law firm and it was a corporate practice. We represented business. We didn't represent Labor and we didn't represent plaintiffs. We were a business corporate law firm and a successful one, and I was very proud of it and we've continued it along that line. I've been blessed with good partners and I've been blessed with a good career. I guess that's about all I'd say about it.

Q: Were your partners ever saying, "Here you are on the Democratic side." One thinks of the corporate world as being more Republican. Did they ever say, "Hey, what are you doing? or something like that

STRAUSS: I founded my law firm, and they've never said no to me on anything. I don't know whether it's being polite and respectful or because they're scared, but they've been very supportive. Here I am, 84 years old, and when I went downstairs Friday they had a new car for me. I guess they thought me and the car were both getting a little old and at least they'd help with the car if they couldn't help me. They've always been thoughtful and I've tried to reciprocate.

Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop. The next time we're going to pick this up in 1977 when you have been asked to be Special Trade Representative, and we'll talk about the role of the Trade Representative and all that.

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Q: Today is November 19, 2002. Mr. Ambassador, we're in 1977. How did you see the role of the Special Trade Representative? It was a fairly new creature at that time, wasn't it?

STRAUSS: I had talked to Charles Kirbo - he had talked to me, rather - about whether or not I was interested in a job in the Carter Administration. Carter had just won the election but not yet taken office. I told him no, I had been away from my law firm seven years and I was very anxious to get back and needed to get back for a number of reasons, including financial but primarily for other interests as well. After Carter had been in office a couple of months, prior to that Joe Kraft, who was a distinguished columnist, you will recall, had talked to me about the Trade Representative job, and the truth of the matter is I had paid no attention to the Trade Representative office nor had I paid any particular attention to trade issues except as we came across them in our law firm, and I didn't really handle them in the firm, others did. But Kraft kept telling me it was the best job in the administration because you could accomplish something. Trade was going to become more and more important, and you didn't have to have a bureaucracy in that job. You could run the damn thing, and he said, "Bob, it's made to order for you. You couldn't tolerate a bureaucracy but you can handle the STR bureaucracy because you can run it with one hand tied behind you," which was an overstatement. Anyway, he had talked to me two or three times and I had paid very little attention to him. One day Hamilton Jordan called me and said, "Bob, the boss wants to talk to you about the Trade Representative job. The fellow you've been pushing is not going to get it, and others have dropped by the wayside. Carter's not satisfied, but he would be satisfied with you, and he's made this choice." I said, "Well, I'd like to talk to him about it. You know, I've just been back in my law firm two or three months." I just had gone on the board of the Xerox Corporation and had done other things getting ready to go back to my normal life. So I went over and talked to President Carter, and he told me why he thought I ought to take it, and he did the one thing that I asked him to do. I said, "Mr. President, I know enough about the bureaucracy and I've looked at this enough to know that if that Trade Representative is not going to be speaking for you and have your full support, it's a lousy job." I said, "It has Cabinet-rank level now, and if it's going to be treated that way and I'll be your spokesman on trade, then I'll take it. If not, I'd rather not, and I'll help you find somebody else." He said, "I will write a note to the members of the Cabinet today saying that you're coming in promptly and that you're the spokesman on trade." So I took the job, and he wrote the note - I have a copy of it still in my files - in which he said, "...will be my spokesman on the following issues and responsible for them," and he outlined Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Special Trade Representative, and a couple others in that memo. That's how I became Special Trade Representative. I started trying to build a staff promptly.

Q: Had there been a Special Trade Representative before, and was there a staff in place?

STRAUSS: Yes. You know, the Special Trade Representative's job was a legacy of Cordell Hull when he was Secretary of State, but it never really had the kind of muscle and authority that it needed, and a couple of people had failed to accomplish what they had hoped for because the job didn't have any muscle behind it. As a matter of fact my predecessor had entered into casual negotiations of the Tokyo Round, and those negotiations were dead in the water. The big Trade Office in Geneva, where a Deputy Special Trade Representative ran trade affairs for Europe, was kiddingly referred to as a place to go if you want to ski in the winter and water ski in the summer, because there's no work to be done and no negotiation going on. Carter had said to me, "I want to start those trade negotiations. The reason I want you to take this is not because you know the trade issues, but because you're energetic and you're aggressive and you'll pursue it vigorously, just as you did as party chairman." So I got started, and we started trying to light a fire and pursue an agenda vigorously. I had an interesting thing happen to me. I had been in that office 10 days, not much more than that anyway, and in that office we got intelligence briefings from the intelligence agencies on what was going on, and they, of course, intercepted a lot of international traffic, cable traffic and other things, wire traffic - wireless traffic, I should say - and when the man briefed me one morning, (an intelligence agent briefed me each morning at around 7:30), he said, "You know, one of your men who is in charge of so-and-so" - he described who it was - just said to his Japanese friends that they don't need to worry about this Trade Representative; he doesn't know anything about the job, and he'll just be another one who sits." So I thanked him for the briefing, and the next morning I had a staff meeting, senior staff meeting, and, while I was looking straight at this fellow who had uttered that the day before, I said, "Now, I want to tell you fellows something, every goddamn one of you. If there's any son of a bitch in here that thinks that Bob Strauss isn't going to pursue this vigorously, aggressively, and accomplish something, he's mistaken in his thinking and he ought to quit now before he gets his ass fired. We've got all be in this together or we're never going to pull this thing off. We've got to reinvigorate the Tokyo Round negotiations with confidence and toughness. I'm tired of hearing that the Europeans understand trade because they've been doing it for years and we just don't have the background to compete with them."

Q: What was the Tokyo Round?

STRAUSS: The Tokyo Round was a round of trade negotiations between 99 countries to adopt and bring up to date modern rules regulating international trade, trying to reduce tariffs, non-tariff barriers and reduce obstacles to trade. The Europeans were hesitant. The Japanese were negative on it; they didn't want any changes and reform of the rules. The Europeans were worried about their common agricultural policy which enabled them to protect their agricultural markets. And there were a lot of people in this country that were negative on the Trade Round. Textile industries, for example. They didn't want to get involved in open trade. And there were many other constituencies who were opposed to it, and many European constituencies. As I said, Japan was very timid. They didn't want to step forward and do anything. Anyway, we got started in the negotiations, and I made dozens of trips to Japan and to Europe. I spent a lot of time there. I had a first-rate deputy, Alan Wolff, who was my domestic deputy. He's a very respected trade lawyer right now in private practice, very able and very successful, and a foreign deputy named Alonzo McDonald who had a distinguished business career. He, too, was very good, and we made a good team. After a year, a very bright trade lawyer with a Hill background joined us. It was a good team. But anyway, that's how I got into the business of trade. We put trade front and center. The press always liked me, and they gave me good press. People like Elizabeth Drew did significant stories about the new Trade Representative busy all over town and all over the world. Before long, our office was known in Washington as a center of some power and the press, worldwide, was excellent Carter had trouble with his people, not serious trouble, but the staff was not structured well, and I was helpful in those ways. I was helpful to Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell, who were the two most important friends Carter had with him. They came with him from Georgia. I became more and more important in the Carter Administration, and I came to really enjoy my new job. I knew we had put together a strong staff, and began to get confidence that we could have a fairly successful negotiation and also saw the House and Senate begin to support responsible reform legislation..

Q: Particularly Jordan was noted for not returning calls to Congress and things like that. Of course, this was where Carter had a real weakness, in his relations with Congress.

STRAUSS: Yes, he did. The truth of the matter is, Jimmy Carter, whom I'm devoted to and was then, didn't like politics. He really didn't. He was good at it when he worked on it a little bit, but he disliked it. I would encourage him to have Senator Russell Long up and have him out on the Truman Balcony and serve him a drink and then have dinner, and I said, "Somewhere along the way, he'll tell you how to get your tax bill passed."

Q: Russell Long was the...?

STRAUSS: He was Chairman of the Finance Committee in the Senate, and he was known as a brilliant power in the Senate, or one of the most. There was Senator Abe Ribicoff, Connecticut, who was also on the Finance Committee and who represented that committee primarily in the trade area. He, too, was most helpful. As a matter of fact, I remember I took Ribicoff and Long to Geneva, talked them into going over there, and got our European staff, led by Alonzo McDonald, to put on a real dog and pony show about the importance of what we were doing and the progress we were making. Once those two Senators got on board, the job was a lot simpler.

Q: If you get them off the ski slopes.

STRAUSS: Then we had them working; by then they were working pretty good after I came in. Anyway, we began and we concluded a successful negotiation. By the time we finished that negotiation, it resulted in the Trade Act of 1979, and it was a big step forward. Tariff barriers were reduced, and Europeans bought in when I showed them we weren't trying to destroy their common agricultural policy. I knew they weren't going to give it up; they couldn't do it. I just said, "We just want to get our nose under the tent a little further. You've got to loosen your restrictive trade policy in the agricultural field." We all got along well. The European negotiators like me and I liked them. They understood, as did we, that you had to give something to get something in a trade negotiation.

Q: I'd like to talk a little about some of the details, if you don't mind, about how you found working with the Europeans, to begin with. In the first place, when you entered this - I think it was called the European Community at that point - were we concerned and were you concerned that this eventually was going to end up as a closed market, the European thing, you know, when what is now known as the European Union really coalesces?

STRAUSS: It was already closed to an extent. The purpose of the Tokyo Round was not to stop it from closing but it was to open it more. It was partially closed and trade was impeded by too many restrictions, too many anti-free and protected trade countries and anti-free trade regulations and other barriers. So that's what we were trying to do, open it up, open trade up, and we didn't do anywhere near everything that needed to be done. After all, there have been two or three Trade Rounds since then and they still have a great deal to do. But what happened to me along the way is I became a fellow that President Carter looked to for a lot of things other than trade. Helmut Schmidt was then Chancellor of Germany, and the Germans were always very interested in trade and supported the Tokyo Round. He and I became very good friends. He'd come to this country, and he'd go to Blair House to visit the President. The Secretary of State would greet him when he arrived. They'd take him to the Blair House, where he'd stay two or three days. After he'd get settled in, about nine or 10 o'clock at night, after he'd arrived, he'd call and ask if I'd come down and eat a bite with him because he was hungry. We would talk about it, and he would help me a great deal in working with the Europeans. These names all escape me; I haven't thought of them in so long. I had exceedingly cordial relationship, close relationships, with the trade representative of Europe, and that was a great help to me. A distinguished Japanese diplomat named Ushiba represented the Japanese, and he and I became friendly. He would bring his wife here, and my wife and I would entertain them and we would spend time together and we'd talk about these issues. We would return the visit to Japan. In those days we were trying to get, among other things, beef into Japan. It was almost impossible. I well remember on an early trip over there I took 12 sirloin strips, packed them - they were frozen - and Ushiba had a big press conference when I arrived. He was stunned as I got up to speak at the press conference and I handed him this box and I said, "Mr. Ambassador, Ambassador Ushiba" - he'd been the Japanese ambassador to this country also - "here's a nice package. I want you to open it and let the press see what it is." He opened this package and was surprised to see a dozen beautiful sirloin strips. I said, "I brought you that beef because I think that's the only damn way I'm ever going to get any beef in Japan, the way you're turning me down on these issues." Everybody laughed, and he got a kick out of it too.

Q: Back to Helmut Schmidt, from what I've talked to other people, Helmut Schmidt after a bit of time became very disenchanted and could hardly stand President Carter. Carter had pulled the rug out from under him particularly on the neutron bomb issue and things like that. Did you find yourself playing a role between the two men?

STRAUSS: Well, I'd like to say that I did, but I really didn't because it was impossible to play a role between them. In the first place, you couldn't influence Carter and you couldn't influence Schmidt. They each played their hand out the way they saw it. But the fact that I had a good relationship with Helmut Schmidt was very important to me in my job, and it was helpful. By the way, Cyrus Vance, our Secretary of State, also had a good relationship with Helmut Schmidt, so I wasn't the only one that did. I don't think Carter disliked Helmut; I think it was the other way around.

Q: That's what I gather.

STRAUSS: Schmidt really had little use for Carter. He didn't think he understood the world as he should and didn't think he was experienced and deep enough. They just didn't communicate very well with each other, although they were both highly intelligent and each decent and dedicated. That was just a fact of life.

Q: How did you find dealing with the French? The French are always the burr under the saddle in so many instances of negotiation?

STRAUSS: The French were impossible in this negotiation. Giscard d'Estaing was the head of that government at that time, and he was of little or no help. I forget where we were, whether the meeting was in Europe or in this country, maybe it was in Canada, but I had this agreement which we had worked our heart out on and I thought everyone would agree on it, but I couldn't get the French to move. Carter was there with me, and, in fact, he was at a meeting of the heads of government and I was the only non-head of government in there. Carter took me to explain the trade act that we wanted to present to the Congress and wanted everybody to sign off on. We had everybody but couldn't get the Europeans because the French were holding out. I'll never forget that I said to the group, "And I'll tell you, this is a damn first-rate balanced agreement. Every nation in the world can be proud of it." Giscard said, "Mr. Ambassador, do you think it's appropriate for one to speak so well of one's own accomplishment?" And I said to him, "Mr. President, we used to have a baseball player in this country, a pitcher named Dizzy Dean, and he once pitched two no-hit games in a row and he was bragging about his accomplishment, boasting of his accomplishment, and someone said, 'Dizzy, is it good taste for you to be bragging about yourself?' and Dizzy Dean said, 'It ain't bragging if you done it.'" And I said to the president, "And I guess I'll say the same thing to you. It is not boastful if we did it, and I did." Everyone caught it and they all laughed heartily, but Giscard d'Estaing didn't understand that joke, didn't get it, and he leaned over and said in French to the Canadian Prime Minister, "What's that about?" and the Canadian Prime Minister said, "Giscard, if you didn't hear it in English from Strauss, you won't get it if I give it to you in French." I'll never forget that.

Q: You know, some of our Special Trade Representatives are known in the slang as being junkyard dogs, in other words being very aggressive and difficult to deal with; in other words, they're out to put the American position first and all this. I take it this wasn't your style.

STRAUSS: I don't believe that's true. The truth of the matter is our Trade Representatives, especially including me, were not nearly as experienced in the field of trade as the European representatives, who were usually lifetime public servants who had spent their entire careers dealing with trade issues. We invariably had political appointees in the job, and most of them were like me and couldn't spell trade when they took the job. No, I don't think the Europeans thought that. I guess they may have thought we were arrogant in our demands. I just don't think that's been true of Trade Representatives that I've known.

Q: This brings up a point about the fact you're essentially - it's not the right term - an amateur, at least a first timer on this dealing with professionals, which sounds like the professionals would always win, but, as a matter of fact, they're usually part of a bureaucracy and usually unable to be flexible and move and all that.

[END TAPE 3 SIDE B]

This is Tape 4 Side 1 with Robert Strauss.

STRAUSS: I think that many of the people on my staff had spent much of their lives in trade issues, while I had had no experience at it and had to learn everything. I used to get up every morning at 5:30 and study for an hour and a half before getting dressed to go in the office so I'd be up to date on the things I needed to talk about or be informed on the things I needed to talk about that day; I'd read briefing papers. Alan Wolff was as good a trade fellow as there was in the country, and he put helped me put it together. He took the lead in telling me who he thought ought to do this job, that job and the other one, and they had a pretty good staff when I got there. Bringing in Alan Wolff was a great step forward, and getting him as my deputy was a vital step for me and this country.

Q: How did you get him?

STRAUSS: I took him to lunch and talked him into taking it. He wanted the European job; he wanted to be the deputy in Geneva. I said, "Hell, no, I need you right here. I can't make it without a fellow like you." He and I hadn't known each, but I checked his reputation carefully, and I liked him. We are still very good friends to this day. He is still one of the best trade lawyers in the world, and I never was and never intended to be. That's just a fact of life. But you don't have to be an expert on the issues and you don't have to know all the nuances of trade legislation if you have the right kind of staff. You give leadership, and I was always a pretty good leader and I was always a strong negotiator.

Q: How did you find, during the time you were doing this, the State Department and the Treasury Department? They had each had part of this action, and bureaucracy is a problem.

STRAUSS: That is an excellent question. To begin with, Carter always worried that I was going to give up too much, that I was not going to be aggressive enough in pursuing an open trade policy, that I would settle for less, that on a scale of one to 100, if the trade barriers were 70, he thought they ought to come to zero and I would sell out if we got them halfway down. That always worried him. The State Department's representative, the Under Secretary of Economic Affairs, was named Richard Cooper. Cooper was a very bright, scholarly man from Harvard. He's still there teaching, as a matter of fact, or was the last time I heard from him some years ago. He's probably retired now. But Carter thought Richard Cooper was totally honest, and he thought I would sell him on something that he shouldn't be sold. We were good enough friends that I could kid him about it and he could kid me about it. I used to say, "Well, let's get Richard Cooper over here," and before we'd get him over there, I'd get Cooper, get my hands on him, and I'd describe my problems and describe where Carter was, and I'd say, "Now, Cooper, I need you to come in there and sit by me and, when we're discussing this, nod and say, "Mr. President, Strauss is exactly right." Whatever Cooper said Carter took as gospel, and Cooper was gracious enough about working with me very constructively and had a lot to do with our success. The same thing with a fellow who now has a think tank here, a trade think tank, who represented Treasury, was also very helpful, although they would normally be more liberal on trade issues than I could afford to be. I had to give to get. We had too many constituencies that we had to satisfy. We had shoe manufacturers and we had steel manufacturers, agricultural interests and textile manufacturers - you know all those various constituencies - so it was give some here and take some there. We had to find something to give up. I gave up on some alcohol issues to the French. That's what got the French engaged. We had to buy their support by giving them something. You can't just take from them; you have to give something.

Q: How attuned was President Carter to not so much trade issues but the politics of trade issues? He came from Georgia, which is one of the Southern states and one always thinks of textiles.

STRAUSS: Carter was far removed from his background. He was a purist almost on the free trade issues and is to this day. He was always worried that I was not tough enough. "Toughen up, Strauss, don't give in to protectionist forces." As I was completing the trade negotiation, several things happened. The first thing that happened was that President Carter called me the night we signed the final agreement in Geneva. He called me in Geneva and told me that he needed an inflation czar. I said, "Hell, I don't know anything about inflation, Mr. President." He said, "Well, you have to get started. You just need to take this job for three or four months till Alfred Kahn," who was Chairman of the FTC - till he could get him freed from that. So I had to come back and be named Inflation Czar. It was embarrassing and it was almost a fiasco, but at least we made a noise about trade and made it sound like we were doing more than we were actually doing. I got a fellow named Lee Kling from Saint Louis to come in and run that office for me as deputy. So I did that. Then the President asked me to take over the Middle East Peace negotiations. While that was going on, a few months later Hamilton Jordan called for the President, as I recall, and said, "You've got to work your way out of these things. You've got to come in here and take over our campaign." That's when Teddy Kennedy took him on in the primary. He said, "You've got to come back. How quick can you get over there?" He said, "You've wound up the trade negotiations." I said, "Well, we haven't got it through Congress yet. We're just about through." "How soon can you finish it? How much time before you can you do this, that and the other?" So I ended up juggling two or three of those jobs at the same time. I began to think I was really important. My name was in the paper constantly, but it wasn't always for successes. There were successes and failures.

Q: I'd like to go to one other side that we haven't talked about. I've just come back from Tokyo, where they're talking about doing an oral history there. Can we talk about dealing with Japan during your time, because that's always been a real bone of contention?

STRAUSS: Dealing with the Japanese was very difficult, very difficult. The Japanese never take the lead in anything. They're timid, they're quiet, they sit back. If you've got six nations involved, they'd be the sixth to sign on if everything is settled. They have the most protective society, as you know, economic society around than any major country, and I found it very difficult. I was very fortunate in that Fukuda was Prime Minister then and he had a deputy, really his administrative assistant, that he relied on for everything, who was a man who now is father of the princess who married the crown prince. She was in school here at Harvard at that time, and I came to know her through her father and mother. He was very helpful and Fukuda was very helpful to me. The Japanese were difficult to deal with, but it was always constructive because our personal relationships were so good. That's always been a strength of mine, personal relationships. Some people say, "You can't personalize too much." I'm really one of the ones they criticize, but it has worked for me. It worked in Washington, in Japan, in Europe and it certainly did in Russia, with both Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

Q: How would you prepare for a negotiation round with the Japanese, for example?

STRAUSS: Well, it depends on what issue we were going to take up that meeting. I remember the first trip I made to Japan. I guess I'd been in office maybe six weeks, and then I went over there with four or five members of staff, and we had our first big negotiation. I guess I'd been in office four months. About the second day or third day, I told my people, I said, "Tomorrow at noon we're going to get out of here and go home. Everybody be packed up, because I want to march out of here." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "We're not going to make any progress today, and I want to begin tomorrow morning by saying, 'If we don't make some progress by noon, I'm going to take my crowd and go catch a plane back to the U.S. There's no point in wasting time here in this negotiation.'" Sure enough, we started off down the same tortuous road the next morning and we spent about three hours and made no progress. I said to my assistant who was with me, "Tell them to pack up and bring their luggage downstairs. Have the cars ready. We're going to the airport." We had the reservations already made. About a quarter till 12 I said, "Well, I told you gentlemen that if we didn't make progress there's no point in my keeping the staff over here. We have too many things to do other places in the world. We're going to get out of here. We haven't made any progress. We appreciate your time and your effort, but we can't negotiate this. This is no negotiation. There's no point in wasting any more time with you," and I got up - they were stunned - and walked out. People brought their bags down. We got the couple cars we had, and the six of us left. Well, we hadn't been back in this country 24 hours when the phone rang and they wanted to know, "Could we meet now in the U.S. and take up again this negotiation?" Those may have been just negotiating ploys, but we had to get their attention and let them know that we were serious about this, and we did with some modest success. The Tokyo Round has been written about consistently as a very successful round of trade negotiations insofar as the world was concerned and insofar as this country was concerned. We got a lot, and we gave up some.

Q: I interviewed - I don't know if you know her - Marge Searing, who was working with the Department of Commerce and the Special Trade Representative. This was much later. But she was saying that when she went to Japan for negotiations, she found the Japanese who worked for our embassy in Tokyo invaluable, because they were both on our team and they could tell people who was doing what and could give very good directions. Did you find this?

STRAUSS: I wouldn't have had that experience. My people may have, my negotiators. My people who had the same job as she had may have done that, but it wouldn't have been anything I would have done or had the time to do.

Q: Coming back to Jimmy Carter, I've talked to people who've worked with him and said he was a man who obviously paid great attention to detail. He'd listen to people, but once he made up his mind, that was it. He'd listen, and even if everybody would say, "Don't do this," he would go ahead and do it.

STRAUSS: Well, Jimmy Carter marched to his own drummer, still does - there's no question about that - but he never failed to give me a hearing on everything. He and I became close friends during his administration and are to this day close friends, better friends now than we were then. Everyone knew that I could get away with humor with Jimmy Carter when no one else could. As a matter of fact, when Jimmy Carter and I would travel around - I may have said this earlier - he would frequently tell the host, "Have Strauss introduce me at this meeting," because I'd do it with humor and kid him, and he needed somebody to warm the crowd up and get him warmer. I think I mentioned that earlier. I must confess I'm not objective about Jimmy Carter. I know he can be a pain in the ass, because I've seen him. He knows he can be a pain in the ass, and so does Rosalynn and the people who work with him. But he also is smart and he's bright and he gives a damn.

Q: But his administration made a difference.

STRAUSS: Oh, I think it did. Probably more than he gets credit for.

Q: No doubt about it.

STRAUSS: Yes, and I stayed in touch with Congress throughout the two and a half year process. A week never went by that I didn't go by and see the chairmen of the various committees that were involved in supervising our worthe oversight committees. That was my strength, the Congress. I had been Treasurer and then Chairman of the Democratic Party, and I worked with Republicans and Democrats alike. Everyone knew, when Carter put me in there, one of the reasons was I could deal with Congress. So my relationship with the Congress was very good, and I had Ribicoff on the Senate side and Russell Long as well. As a matter of fact, when Carter asked me to take this trade job, after we had discussed it for 10 to 15 minutes, I said, "Well, I'll let you know tomorrow, Mr. President. I'm just not ready to accept today." And he said, "I'd like to get it off my desk." I said, "Well, I can't do it today. I have to think about it and talk to my wife about it. I have to talk to my partners. I just rejoined my law firm a couple of months ago." After all, this was in April, I think, and Carter's inauguration was in January. So that night I was home, and Russell Long, Senator Long, and Senator Abe Ribicoff were having dinner together at Senator Ribicoff's home. The phone rang in my apartment, and it was Ribicoff and Long on the phone, and Ribicoff said to me, "I hear you turned down Carter today for the trade job. We told him you're the man to get, and you turned him down." I said, "Well, that's not right. I told him I had to think about it." He said, "Have you thought about it?" I said, "Well, I've been thinking about it, but I'll decide in the next 24 hours," and Russell Long said, "Now, Bob, wouldn't you like to be a real hero?" I said, "Russell, I sure would." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what you do. Take this trade job, and me and Abe will see that you get the Senate behind you and we'll see you get everything you need, and you'll get out of here and be a real hero. This administration's going to need a hero, and you'll be it." He said, "On the other hand, if you don't take it, we're going to run your ass out of town." I laughed and said, "Well now, Russell, you explained it much better than Carter did today when he asked me to take it." I've never forgotten that wonderful conversation with those two wonderful Senators.

Q: They kept loading you with jobs, didn't they?

STRAUSS: Yes I kept getting job after job after job, and I enjoyed it.

Q: How did you find the Cabinet meetings? Did you have a particular role at Cabinet meetings, or didn't Cabinet meetings mean much in the Carter Administration?

STRAUSS: Well, they meant something but not a great deal. Carter had them with some regularity. There were more important positions represented there than the trade job: the Secretary of State obviously and the Secretary of Defense for two. It's sort of immodest to say it but that trade office that I ran became a very important part of the Carter Administration, a very visible part, and the press was extremely kind to me. I really never had bad presmuch better than I deserved probably.

Q: How'd you deal with the press?

STRAUSS: I always dealt openly with the press, never misled them, never lied to them, always returned their phone calls. One time a very important columnist in this country said to me, "You know, Strauss, I called you last Wednesday and you called me from your car Wednesday night on the way home at nine o'clock. I was already home and you were in your car just going home and hadn't had supper yet, and you returned my phone call." I said, "Well, that's why I returned it. I hadn't had time all day, and I didn't want to leave one of your calls unreturned." He said, "You know, two days later I left the same call for So-and-So" - I don't recall his nam"and he hasn't returned it yet." Then he said to me, "And who do you think I'm going to screw in the next column, you or him?"

Q: Did you find the press, over your career but particularly at this point, was sort of a vital tool?

STRAUSS: Well, the press has been overly generous to me. That's what you have to know. You won't find a negative story on me. I don't recall but one negative story the whole time, a real negative story, and that was written by a fellow I never met to this day. He worked for the Washington Post, and then he went to Slate Magazine. Michael Kinsley, that was his name, Michael Kinsley. I remember he wrote a mean-spirited article about me. I must have gotten copies of 50 or 60 letters people wrote to the paper objecting to it, and they ran a whole page of letters objecting to that column. But the press was gracious and kind to me, overly generous, and I was always good to the press. I worked with them hard. I gave a chili party every year just for the press. We didn't have any help there, and Helen and I would serve it and I'd make the chili myself, and we'd have a hell of a good time. We knew the press as good friends. We had a social relationship as well as a professional one.

Q: It was an important part of the Washington scene.

STRAUSS: It was a vital part of the Washington scene. Carter never fully understood that. He never was willing to work the press. I enjoyed it..

Q: You mentioned you were brought in to work on the primary campaign against Senator Kennedy. How did you see the strengths and weakness of Senator Kennedy and Carter?

STRAUSS: Well, Carter was President then trying to get the nomination for reelection. It was my thought we could win it when we went in. People were saying Kennedy would knock off Carter because Carter was so unpopular then and his administration had not been a popular administration, as you recall. I had some differences with him when I came in as chairman of the campaign. Carter didn't want to debate Kennedy, and I wanted him to debate him and get it out of the way. I said, "Let's do it early and get it out of the way, so if we lose it, it will be all right." It was not a strength of Carter's, a debate, as was later proved with Reagan. You know, he lost that Reagan debate, and that's when he lost the election, as much as any other thing. I worked hard in that primary.

Q: Was Kennedy a plus or a minus in matters that you dealt with, or not?

STRAUSS: I suspect that Ted Kennedy didn't totally trust me because I was a Carter person and he was on the other side, so there was no reason for him to, but I always had a good personal relationship with Ted Kennedy. I do now and I did then. After all, I knew his brother. I was in Dallas when his brother was killed. But I thought Kennedy's primary campaign against Carter weakened Carter a great deal going into the general election. It split off support from the liberal wing of the party. They had no enthusiasm for Carter. They might have had if he hadn't had to defeat Ted Kennedy to get there.

Q: Were you involved in the time when President Carter addressed the nation with sort of a sour note about the great malaise? Could you explain what your impression of this whole thing was.

STRAUSS: I thought it was a disaster. I thought that whole thing of him asking for the resignations of members of his Cabinet and then reengaging some of them and not the others was a public relations disaster. I thought the malaise speech sounded like he wanted to blame it on something wrong with the American people, the reason we were having trouble and he was, when it was really his administration that was having trouble, not the American people. But you couldn't control that sort of thing. I don't think Jody Powell or Jerry Rafshoon, who were his primary people in that area, could control it. It did not go well. My recollection is that Pat Caddell, a bright, talented fellow had a good deal to do with the speech.

Q: Did you feel it was self-generated from Carter? What was bringing this about?

STRAUSS: Well, to begin with, it didn't make sense politically. I had little or nothing to do with the public side of the President and there wasn't anything you could do. I think what brought it out is the press exaggerated the negative side of Carter. They turned sour on his Presidency and it was easy to magnify his failing and minimize what he stood for. It was easy to do. He was his own worst enemy. Remember the killer rabbit story?

Q: Yes, the rabbit swimming towards his canoe, I think.

STRAUSS: And he killed him. It was a crazy story. Where that came from I'll never know. Those sorts of things haunted him, and then, of course, you know, he had the Iranian situation that he was just distraught over, and then he got advice, after holding off a year, to plan an effort to break them out of there but they didn't plan properly, didn't have sufficient helicopters, didn't go in with enough support to get it done. And that made him look terriblterrible planning, terrible execution and a terrible result. I've never seen a man look any worse than Jimmy Carter looked the day that he got that news with respect to what had happened in the desert. It left the White House looking as terrible as the result, and the President never recovered from it.

Q: Of course, there was the problem of gas and all this.

STRAUSS: We had gas lines at that time. You were talking about doing other things I was asked to undertake. He had also asked me to take over the Middle East negotiations, you recall. After Camp David he had told Sadat and Begin that the three of them would remain a committee of three to implement the Camp David Accords to the extent they could. Well, Carter found out three weeks later that he couldn't devote enough of his time to that responsibility. His phone was ringing and he spent all his time talking to them. He couldn't be President and do that. He asked if Sadat and Begin would accept me in his place, and they said yes. So I went to the Middle East as the replacement for Carter. While I was doing that, we had a gasoline shortage and long gas lines with the election coming up, and Carter sent me over to Saudi Arabia to talk to them about trying to get more oil from them. I'll never forget, we had an ambassador over there who was from South Carolina, former Governor John West, who had done all the work on getting...

Q: West, wasn't it?

STRAUSS: Yes, John West.

Q: Who had been the governor of South Carolina.

STRAUSS: Yes, and he was a very good man. He had really set the crown prince up. It was sort of like it is today. The crown prince is now the acting king because the king is ill. The then king was too ill, and the then crown prince saw me and we spent about four hours together, from 10 at night till two in the morning, which is when the Saudis like to negotiate, and he finally gave me 500,000 barrels a day for six months. That was a big story back here: "Strauss Brings Back Half a Million Barrels a Day." Those things were all good for the President, the country and me. John West deserved the credit, but I got it. The more I'd say John West did this, the more they'd say Strauss did it.

Q: I know you have to go, so this probably is a good place to stop.

STRAUSS: Next time, if we think of it, I'd like to get back into that part of the political story that led into Watergate.

Q: Yes.

STRAUSS: I really want to get into that. Dita Beard, do you remember that name?

Q: Oh, yes, I remember the name. Okay, we'll get that in, and I would like to ask you about dealing with Sadat and Begin.

STRAUSS: I'd like to do that, yes.

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Q: Today is December 16, 2002. Mr. Ambassador, you had mentioned you wanted to talk a bit about your family, and I would encourage you to do that.

STRAUSS: All right. I think I can cover that in just a few minutes.

Q: Take your time.

STRAUSS: Helen and I were, as I may have mentioned earlier, in Acapulco with Governor and Mrs. Connally when Hubert Humphrey called and asked if I would be interested in being Chairman of the Democratic Party. The Chairman had just given notice that he was not going to be able to continue; he was failing badly.

Q: Who was it?

STRAUSS: A Senator from OklahomFred Harris. Well, I said no, I would not be interested in being Chairman, I didn't know enough about national politics. I said I would be interested in maybe being Treasurer or something I could do two or three days a week a couple of weeks each month, be away from my family and my law practice. He said, "Anyway you want to do it, but I want you involved. I'm sorry you won't consider the chairmanship." I said, "I would consider being Treasurer if I had not a veto but input into who was going to be Chairman, almost a veto, because I don't want to be Treasurer unless I have the confidence of the Chairman that I would have absolute control over spending. That I didn't want to be a part of a national committee with no credibility..

Q: This was in 1968.

STRAUSS: Humphrey's pick for Chairman had failed miserably and Hubert had been defeated a year earlier, and the Party was rudderless, and he was looking around. Democrats were critical of him for not doing something about taking the lead, and so he needed to find a Chairman. I had done well and we'd carried Texas, as we've discussed earlier, so I was one of the logical people for him to look to. I just didn't know enough nor did I have enough time. Anyway, after we finished talking, Humphrey and I agreed that I would be Treasurer on the terms I mentioned. I then discussed it with my wife. Now, Helen was a young woman who had no interest in politics when I married her. She was interested in art and in music and in being a housewife, a mother. I liked that, but I also had in mind a broader career than just practicing law in Dallas. When I discussed it with her, as we did throughout our marriage, she said, "What you want to do is what I want to do. Our children are older now, and I can be gone when I need to be." As I recall, my daughter Susan, who was the youngest of the three, was in college or just out of college, I think in college. So that really leads me to say that I've been very blessed I have a family that's very supportive and very functional. There is nothing dysfunctional about my family. If anything, we're too functional. We love each other. We're in touch over and over and over. Whenever the phone rings at night, I know it's one of the children calling to see how we are, and they have the same trouble with me calling to see how they are. We talk almost daily. The same thing is true of our larger family. I have a very functional family, just as my law firm is not dysfunctional in any way. I've kind of given them the feel we have to all be one and all part of a family if we're going to make this work and become a great law firm. And it's done well in this large law firm. And in my personal family it's done exceedingly well. Helen gave up the things she liked as we got more and more into politics. She didn't have time, and I didn't have time to go to concerts with her or do other things I might have done. She pretty well changed her life. She moved with me to Washington half the time when I was Treasurer, which meant that she gave up her card games, bridge and other games, with her friends in the afternoon and things like that. So her life became intertwined in my political life, and her support had much to do with my success to the extent I was successful. I found that people in the Democratic Party, whenever I showed up anywhere without her, they'd say, "Where's Helen?" If I went to Columbus, Ohio, for a speech to the Party there when I was Chairman, Paul Tipps, the State Chairman, would say, "Where's Helen? Why didn't you bring her?" The same thing was true whether it was in New York or whether it was in Kentucky with then Governor Wendell Ford. So Helen played a major role, not just being supportive but she was a part of my political team although she couldn't stand on her feet and utter two sentences before an audience. But she forced herself to do those things and do them well. So much of what I've done throughout my career... When George Bush was pushing me to go to Russia - I think I've told this story earlier - when I said, "I want to talk to Helen," he said, "I'll call her." I said, "Mr. President, don't you dare call her. You'll talk her into it. She couldn't say no to you but she could to me. I'll discuss it with her." He laughed and said, "Anyway you want it." But when I told Helen - she was then 71 years of age - that the President wanted us to go to Russia for two years, that was the last thing on her mind and she said, "Well, when would we go?" I said, "Well, I don't know." She said, "Well, there's one thing I can't do. I'm not going to leave before Susan has her baby." Our daughter was then at the age of 40 having her first child, so Helen was not very hot about being gone then. I said, "Well, I'll negotiate with the President also if we do this, and we won't leave until after that baby's born in early September." She said, "Well, whatever you say, but I'll have to be here." I said, "I know you do." But anyway, she hitched her pants up and went to Russia for two years. It wasn't a pleasant life for her. We didn't have a social life. We didn't have any other kind of life except work all day, and usually several nights a week we had receptions in the evening and she would be the hostess for them. I'd tell her there were going to be 150 people coming for cocktails three or four nights a week or more often, visitors from out of town or Russians we had to entertain and other such things. She never backed off a minute. She'd say, "What time do I show up and where?" So my children really were supportive of me in every way, and of their mother, and their mother was certainly supportive of all of us. It had a lot to do with making all my experiences in politics happy experiences. I just wanted to get that in here.

Q: I think it's very important for people to understand what a burden it is and what a support there is with the family. One of the things is that when you get somebody in the diplomatic world, you get somebody as 'twofer'; that means you get two for the price of one.

STRAUSS: That's exactly right, and frequently the other one is a negative, is a draw against the principal, but Helen was a great asset. There was nothing negative about her. The negative things were about me. There was a joke told, I'm sure not altogether in jest, but my deputy was a young woman who used to get a big laugh out of the story of Helen and I being out with her when I made an important speech, a significant speech, here in Washington. Driving home from the speech I was thinking about all the standing applause I got. According to this young woman - she loved to tell the story - I said, "Helen, you know, there really aren't many real leaders in this country anymore," and, she replied, "As a matter of fact, there's even one less than you think, Bob." That's pretty much Helen's feeling about it. Happily, that story's apocryphal, not true, although it's been told so many times that it's become true. As a matter of fact, a number of Presidential candidates use it on themselves now, so it's become sort of standard lore for a fellow running for office. But anyway, that takes care of that side. Now, we were going to talk for a minute about...

Q: We wanted to go back to Watergate and leading up to it. You talked a little about it, but let's talk more about it.

STRAUSS: The first time Watergate came to my attention was when a fellow named Bob Schmidt, who worked for International Telephone & Telegraph - he was their man in Washington to the Democratic Party, their liaison to the Democratic Party; Bob Schmidt was a friend of mine - he called me one day and said, "I have to see you. It's an emergency." I said, "Well, come on over, Bob." He said, "Bob, there's a story breaking in Saint Louis that the ITT gave $400,000 to the Republican Party in return for getting an antitrust case out of the way where they could make the acquisition of a particular insurance company. The story was that it was nothing but a bribe, a $400,000 bribe, hidden in a so-called gift to assist them in putting on their Convention." I said, "What does that have to do with me?" He said, "I came for your advice. My headquarters wants to know what I think we ought to do about it, and I don't know what they ought to do about it." I said, "Well, I know exactly what they ought to do about it. I don't know whether we would do it." I was then Treasurer of the Democratic Party. I said, "If I was in your shoes, I'd give an equal sum to the Democratic Party to put on their Convention, and then no one could say that $400,000 was anything but what you said it was." I said, "By the way, how much truth is there to this story? I presume a good deal, or you wouldn't be here so nervous." He said, "Well, let me just say this. There's enough truth to it that we just can't have that story get out as it is." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll have lunch today with Larry O'Brien, our Chairman, and I will ask him what he wants to do. It's his call. He's the Chairman of the Party. But I must tell you this: I doubt seriously that we'd take that money." So O'Brien and I had lunch, and O'Brien was a very canny politician. He said to me, "Well, Bob, can you raise enough money to put on our Convention without that $400,000?" I said, "Yes. It won't be easy, but we can get along without it." He said, "Well, I don't think we ought to take it." I said, "Well, that's exactly what I told Bob Schmidt, that I didn't think we would take it but it was your call." He said, "If you want to take it, I'll approve it, because you're going to have to raise the money, but if it doesn't make any difference to you - we don't have a damn thing going for us - we might as well see if something comes out of this, this so-called scandal." So, sure enough, we turned it down and, sure enough, in no time it became a big story. A lobbyists for ITT called Dita Beard, who was in the middle of it, and the story got bigger and bigger. They were going to hold their Convention in San Diego, and I called a fellow, Dick Herman, who was putting on the Convention for the Republicans, who was an old friend of mine, a nice man from Omaha then who has since moved to the West Coast, who was a good friend of the Bush family, as I remember. Dick Herman was out there signing contracts for the Republican Convention in San Diego, and I told him that story. He said, "I can't believe it." I said, "Well, it's true, so you'd better be careful." He said, "Well, I just don't believe it. I can't believe it's true." I said, "Well, that's up to you. I at least told you what I know. You're an old friend, and you're entitled to know this." Sure enough, the story got bigger and bigger. John Connally was then Secretary of Treasury and just finishing up his Treasuryship or maybe he was still Secretary. About this time, the Fort Worth Bar Association gave a party for him in Fort Worth in connection, I think, with a Bar Association meeting, a big reception for Governor Connally, and Helen and I and fellow named George Christian who was in Dallas drove over with me and also Johnny Apple who's with New York Times and who was in Dallas. We drove over to Fort Worth. We were going through the receiving line and then Secretary Connally said to me, "Bob, as soon as this damn line is over, this receiving line, I need to talk to you." I said, "Fine." He said, "Slip over there in the corner, and I'll get over there as quick as I can." So the receiving line ended, I went over in the corner to see my old friend Governor, now Secretary of the Treasury, Connally, and I said, "What's on your mind, John?" He said, "Well, the Republicans can't have their Convention in San Diego because this story's getting too big about the $400,000 bribe. They're going to have to move their whole damn Convention out of San Diego. The $400,000 had been spent." I said, "What does that have to do with me?" He said, "Well, they now, at this late date, want to go to Florida, and Governor Askew said we couldn't go to Florida unless Bob Strauss approved it because the Democrats were coming there and he had made a deal with Strauss." Askew was a man of great character. He said, "If Strauss says okay, he'll be glad to have you here, would like to have you but not until he okays it." So I thought about it, discussed it with several of the members of our committee, and we agreed we should say okay to Askew and tell him we would not object. That it was going to be somewhere, and we could share some of the convention expense. And what I did was I then called my friend Dick Herman again, who was in San Diego making arrangements for the Republican Convention, and said "You're not going to have it out there." He said, "You're crazy as hell." I said, "Dick, take my word for it." He said, "Well, they've got me signing contracts every day. I've got $1,000,000 committed already, or some such number." I said, "Well, I can tell you this. John Mitchell called..."

Q: John Mitchell or...?

STRAUSS: ...John Mitchell, Attorney General, called John Connally and told him they couldn't do it and that Reuben Askew, Governor Askew of Florida, said unless Strauss approved it, said okay, he wouldn't do it. He'd like to do it but he wasn't going to do it, put the Republicans on top of the Democrats unless Strauss okayed it for the Party." I called Dick Herman again. He said, "I'll be damned. That son-of-a-bitch John Mitchell has misled me. I've talked to him twice a day for the last month and he's never mentioned this." I said, "Well, I'll tell you," and I told him the whole story."

[END TAPE 4 SIDE A]

Q: You were saying that you and Herman were very...

STRAUSS: Yes, we had gotten along well.

Q: By the way, Reuben Askew, the Governor of Florida, was a Democrat?

STRAUSS: Yes, and a potential Presidential candidate; sought the Presidency unsuccessfully. He was a very important Democrat and a very fine man and a very good friend of mine. He and a number of other governors were responsible for my being elected Chairman. Reuben Askew and governors like Wendell Ford were strong supporters and I turned to them often for advice and support. I was a product of the Democratic governors. If I don't have it in here earlier, might as well put it in now. I'm trying to think of the order in which this all came. I negotiated with Dick Herman that, where they would pay part of our expenses for the things we were doing that they would also use. There was wiring and there's construction and a lot of things going with the Convention that would work for both of us, so he and I negotiated it. If I would okay them coming in there, we'd share those expenses, so we picked up maybe $100,000 that we would have spent, maybe a little more, maybe a little less, I don't remember. But it worked out fine. The reason it worked out so well is that Dick Herman and I had this relationship. Today the relationship between political parties and between the leaders of the parties is acrimonious, or at least not friendly enough that you can do that sort of things. In those days there was a good deal more civility to the relationship between the various chairmen. Be that as it may, the ITT matter went on to become, as you know, a major, major event. It led to the Watergate break-in, it led to a lot of other things, and it was a turning point and, I think, was basically responsible for Jimmy Carter much later being elected President. He ran "I'll give you a government as good as the American people themselves," obviously talking about Watergate. I guess that's a pretty roughly told story of how that all happened.

Q: Well then, let's move ahead to when you were Special Negotiator for the Middle East. This was when about?

STRAUSS: In 1979 Jimmy Carter called me - I was his trade negotiator, Special Trade Representative - and said, "Bob, I agreed, as you know, with Begin and Sadat that I would stay with the three of them and we'd be a committee of three to try to move the Middle East peace process along. But I can't do that and be President. It takes more time." This was after Sadat's visit in a framework of...

Q: And also after Camp David too.

STRAUSS: Yes, after Sadat's visit to Camp David. But I said, "I don't know whether my being Jewish would have a negative impact in Egypt. You ought to think about that." He said, "It won't work unless Begin also will approve it. But I think they'll approve. They know you and I are close, and when they see you sitting there, they'll see me sitting there because they know you are going to repeat to me every word. The President said to me, "They know you're going to repeat every word to me, and they'll accept that. So," he said, "how would you go about getting their approval?" I said, "Well, I'll tell you what we could do. I'm the Trade Representative, so I'll put together a little trade mission to the Middle East, and while I'm there I'll spend some time with Sadat and Begin and they'll get to know me." He said, "That's a very good idea." So in a few days' time we organized a little trade mission and worked out with the Egyptians and the Israelis that we'd be coming over. I took 10 or 15 businesspeople with me, and I took a good friend of mine, Lee Kling, along to help me. He is a good Democrat and a business leader back in the state of Missouri, so he could follow through on this stuff because I was still tied up in the Tokyo Round, which we were negotiating in the Special Trade Representative's office. The trip went well, and I liked Begin much more than I expected to; and he liked me better than he expected to, I think. The same thing was true with Sadat. I just sort of fell in love with Sadat. He captured my imagination.

Q: This is what I gather. Sadat, at least to the Westerner, said all the right things, did all the right things.

STRAUSS: He had it all. He is one of the two or three most impressive men I've known in my political career. So when I returned, Carter contacted them and asked them how they'd feel about me coming into those negotiations and sitting in in his place. And they both sort of liked the idea. They knew I'd have plenty of time compared to him. They approved it, and growing out of that, I developed a rather fast friendship with each of them. And we made a little modest progress, not much but a little. No one has made very much. We did establish a basic framework for the future negotiations with the Egyptians and the Israelis.

Q: We'll come to the Palestinian side, but what were the issues between Israel and Egypt that you found yourself working on?

STRAUSS: Everything. Nothing had been solved out there except the very important basic agreement between the two leaders. As a matter of fact, it's probably worse. When I think of all the things that were troublesome, two things stand out in my mind. On the Israeli side, the settlement problem, particularly Sharon's role in the settlements and the way he was driving further every day, was a tremendous negative. And from the Israeli side, the fact that you had Palestinians who just had no interest in making peace and whose leadership would do everything possible to keep peace from being made. So you had hard-liners on both side, and you had negative things going from both sides. The truth of the matter is they're not much nearer solving those today than they were when I was out there.

Q: I think it's worse, much worse.

STRAUSS: Much worse, yes.

Q: On that particular issue, how did you view the situation that Congress had put us into where we promised we wouldn't talk to the Palestine Liberation Organization?

STRAUSS: It was a problem, it was a problem. I think I could have established some sort of speaking relationship with the Palestinians, because relationships have been my strength. There were a lot of things I couldn't do well out there because I didn't know the issues well enough, but I had very good people with me who did. I've never had trouble with interpersonal relationships, and it's been my strength. Any person with any brains knows you play your strength, and that was the strength I had I didn't get a chance to use. I tried to send subtle messages, back-channel messages, but that didn't work; you needed to be personally involved. We couldn't talk, as you know. Andy Young, who was our man out there, lost his job because he was accused of a secret dialogue with the Palestinians.

Q: This was one of those deals with the devil that, I think, Kissinger had gotten us into.

STRAUSS: I forget who got us into it. I would doubt that it was Kissinger. But it was there when I got there and it's there today.

Q: How did you find dealing with Begin? People I've talked to say one of the problems with Begin was that he would give you a half-hour or an hour lecture on historical Israel before you could even begin work.

STRAUSS: Well, I think that's probably a fair statement, but I'll also tell you that I was a Jewish fellow who had never had any formal or other education in Jewish affairs, rarely had ever been in a temple or synagogue. I was overly reformed: I have never been; I have never been Bar Mitzvahs; I never have been confirmed. I used a joke one time in a speech I made here, a humorous speech before the Alfalfa Club, and brought the house down with a line that I used, talking about being Jewish, that said, "Where I come from in west Texas, they though Hanukkah was a duck call," and it brought down the house. That's about where I was, and Begin was amazed that he liked a fellow like me. He'd never seen a Jew with my background. That intrigued him, and growing out of that came a very nice friendship. I was just discussing it the other day with a fellow from Israel that knew the story of my relationship with Begin, and he said, "I'm told that you were the only person Menachem Begin ever said, 'Call me Menachem,' because he was a very proper and formal man." I may have mentioned this earlier in this tape; I don't know. He was a very formal man, and everyone addressed him with formality; no one called him Menachem. What happened was I mentioned to his ambassador to this country how fond I had grown of Begin and didn't expect to, and I said, "I wish I was a little more Jewish. Maybe he would feel the same way about me." He said, "Bob, he couldn't feel any better about you. Everybody around him was shocked when he told you, 'Call me Menachem, and I'll call you Bob.'" Unfortunately, both Begin and Sadat used to pronounce Bob as if it was Boob. I used to say to people, "I'm not sure that's an accident." It was good for a laugh, anyway. Sadat also was a fellow who captured your imagination, much more than Begin. I don't know whether I mentioned this or not before, but I can remember negotiating with Anwar Sadat when he had me out to his summer home near the pyramids. I think I've told this story earlier.

Q: I'm not sure if you did.

STRAUSS: Let me tell it again. It doesn't take but a minute. He had me out to his summer place which overlooks the pyramids. I didn't get out there till about nine o'clock at night, and there was a beautiful full moon. We talked for three or four hours, and in the course of conversation he had placed me facing him and behind him were the pyramids. Between Sadat and me was a low candle flickering. When that low candle flickered on his face, that marvelous face of his, on a moonlit night with the pyramids in the background, it was a setting made to order for him and it just captured him in the most appealing way, and he captured me anyway. After this long discussion, the ambassador who was with me, the American ambassador to Egypt was with me in the car and we were riding back to the hotel, and he said, "What do you want to say in the overnight cable?" (On occasions such as this, it was customary to send an overnight cable addressed to the President, but it goes to the State Department, giving a report on what had occurred at the particular meeting.). My head was just full of everything that Sadat had been telling me, and I said, "Ambassador, I'll tell you what you do. You just send this cable. You describe the scene I've just described to you and say in that scene "I don't know what I bought except I bought everything Sadat was selling. More will follow tomorrow when I clear my mind on it better and can do it in an orderly way." I heard it caused quite a laugh back in the State Department when it was received, but it was darn near the truth.

Q: Was Sadat particularly interested in the Palestinian side?

STRAUSS: I don't know that to be true. I think he was interested in absolutely ensuring that he got that land back...

Q: You're talking about the Sinai.

STRAUSS: ...the Sinai, when he got the Sinai back and that the Camp David Accords were implemented. I don't think he gave a damn whether or not the Jordanians were involved or not, or the Palestinians were involved or not. I think he wanted to get his business taken care of. He would have loved to have gotten it all done, but mainly he nailed down his issue, and I will point out to you he got every inch of ground back from the Sinai that he was promised and to this day there's never been a drop of blood shed in that border between Egypt and Israel. It's getting tough over there now, and the President of Egypt is getting tougher to do business with. He's not the reformer that he was before.

Q: Mubarak.

STRAUSS: Yes, Mubarak. So it's far more difficult now than it was before. But Sadat got what he wanted and gave what he had to give, which, of course, later, not long after, caused his assassination by people who were afraid that he was going to bring peace in the region, and they didn't want it. Those bastards killed that wonderful man.

Q: Did you run across Sharon, Ariel Sharon?

STRAUSS: Oh, yes.

Q: How was he viewed? What were you getting from the State Department and from your own personal...?

STRAUSS: Sharon was viewed by everyone as a warrior, a military man and a warrior, and he took me on the same ride he's taken many others. He put me in a helicopter and took me over the settlement area and showed me how wonderful it was and how it was working out and how it would bring peace and enable Israel to defend itself and, because of that, it would enable peace to be made. Well, I didn't buy into that then and I don't buy into it now. I think the settlements have been a big, big negative.

Q: Well, it's the real issue today.

STRAUSS: It's the issue today. It's one of the real issues today, but I don't see it changing as soon as it should. I think in the next two or three years that will be dealt with, I think that will be dealt with. It's so bad now that I think it's going to get better.

Q: Well, it couldn't be worse.

STRAUSS: Yes.

Q: At that time did you have any sort of Israeli or Egyptian experts on a team?

STRAUSS: Oh, hell, yes. Oh, yes.

Q: Do you recall who they were?

STRAUSS: I don't recall names right now, but I can get them. I had the best the State Department had and I needed them.

Q: How did you feel about this?

STRAUSS: I felt the State Department, most of them in the Middle East section, were very anti-Israel, and I didn't trust them as far as I could throw them. On the brighter side, some of them were very goovery professional.

Q: Why did you think this?

STRAUSS: Because of the things they said and the things they stood for. I was very careful how I got briefed, and I didn't swallow everything I was fed. I talked to people who knew the Middle East, Europeans as well as Americans who knew the Middle East well, and Middle Easterners, and I got other input. So I had somewhat of a balanced view of it. I just thought of the fellows name who really was my right-hand man in the State Department, but he was way above that. He had too much character. His name is Hal Saunders, a most impressive public servant. But with most of those people over there the pro-Arab point of view was a good deal stronger than I thought was balanced. I didn't pay as much attention to people who warned me early of this bias that has existed for years and years. And I don't think I'm prejudiced because of my Jewish faith, because I'm certainly very critical of the Israelis also...

Q: At this point was there any sense of - the word is probably wrong - desperation on the Carter side because of oil?

STRAUSS: No, not at all.

Q: Because this was really beginning to bite towards that point.

STRAUSS: Carter sent me - I told this story to you earlier, I think, in this tape; yes, that was the last thing we talked about earlier...

Q: Yes, about getting oil, but I was just wondering whether, as you were doing these special negotiations between the two...

STRAUSS: Oil never came into it, just didn't. That wasn't Carter. It might have with some Presidents, but that just didn't cross Carter's mind. It may have crossed his mind, but he was looking for peace. Carter didn't get along with Menachem Begin very well. He did with Sadat exceedingly well. The Israeli ambassador told me in the middle of these negotiations when I was in this job - not in the middle of it, towards the end of my role - he said, "Bob, you and I are friends. Senator Ribicoff...

Q: Abraham Ribicoff, Senator from Connecticut.

STRAUSS: He said Ribicoff was very balanced on this subject. As a matter of fact, you know, Ribicoff had fallen out with the Israelis to some extent, really with AIPAC, because he approved the plane deal.

Q: This was the plane deal with the Saudi Arabians.

STRAUSS: Ambassador Evron, Israeli Ambassador Evron to this country, said to me, "Bob, get out of that job. You're killing yourself with all you're doing and you can't make any progress." He said, "I can tell you that the Palestinians and the Egyptians are not going to move anymore, and Begin couldn't move another inch if his life depended on it. He gave away more than he should, in the view of everyone in Israel, so he has no more maneuverability. He did that because Carter convinced him he ought to do it, and I'm sure he regretted it right after he did it, and he's not going to move another inch. He can't." So I was delighted when a couple months later Kennedy, who was making progress in his primary campaign against Carter, and Carter asked me to get out of the Middle East and take over his campaign for renomination.

Q: This is Senator Edward Kennedy.

STRAUSS: Yes.

Q: Before we move to that, how did you work during this time as special negotiator with Carter?

STRAUSS: Very well.

Q: How did it operate? Did you come back and brief him?

STRAUSS: Carter kept up to date weekly. Carter had his Cabinet members write him each week at the end of the week what they had done that week, what progress they had made, what failures they'd had, what issues they had dealt with. I had a good relationship with Carter, I'd go by and talk with him about things.

Q: I would think that you would find yourself playing sort of a mediating role, because from what I've heard of the two gentlemen, Menachem Begin was a very strong sort of fundamentalist on his side and Jimmy Carter was a strong fundamentalist on his side. I can see why they wouldn't get along very well.

STRAUSS: They didn't get along very well at all.

Q: Did you find yourself sort of playing the role of...

STRAUSS: Well, I told each what nice things the other said about him and how they were each trying, which was true. But Carter was easy for me to work with. He was tough and he was stubborn and hard headed, but he was honest and smart and I liked him. He knew I was honest, and we had a good relationship. National Security Advisor, Brzezinski was very smart and was a big influence on Carter's thinking and while he and I differed on many issues, he too, was a brilliant man and honest to a fault.

Q: Yes, National Security Advisor.

STRAUSS: Exactly. One time I was on a trip to the Middle East and got an envelope from the President that said, "Do not open until you get airborne." I was on a trip to go over for negotiations. I opened the envelope and it was Carter's little message in there that said, "Strauss, be strong and be tough and be this and do this and do that and don't get soft." I was so goddamn mad when I read that I could have had a stroke. I called the White House and asked to speak to him. I said, "Mr. President, Brzezinski dictated this damn thing, didn't he?" and he said yes. I said, "Well, maybe you ought to send Brzezinski over here instead of me, because I don't need this kind of instructions. If I'm going to get it, I ought to get my instructions before I get in the air." I was really annoyed. The press was on there with me, and they knew I was annoyed about it because they could hear some of the discussion, but nobody wrote it because I asked them not to. Carter was nice and said, "I didn't intend to offend you, but Zbig thought maybe you ought to have those very firm instructions." I said, "Let him come over and do it if you want to Mr. President, but I just can't work that way." By then I was doing a great deal for the White House. I had the Middle East and I had inflation, I had the regular trade business, I had Congress to worry about. That was a marvelous opportunity for me, because so many different things came to me when my job was really Special Trade Representative.

Q: How did you find Brzezinski? What was your impression of him?

STRAUSS: He's just one of the smartest guys around, but he's hard line in his own way and his interpersonal relationships were not great. His ability to create interpersonal relationships was not great, but he's a very able, very talented man. I was just saying this yesterday to somebody, that I wish one of these people on this 9/11 investigative committee they were going to have, I wish somebody would put Brzezinski on it because he'd be very good. He's a very able fellow.

Q: When you left the Middle East negotiations, had you felt you made some progress?

STRAUSS: Oh, we'd made modest progress, very little, but we made a few little bits of progress. I was just in that role for less than a year, and I had good people with me. I'm glad I did it. I didn't hurt anything, that's for sure, and Sadat got killed shortly after I got out of that, assassinated, and I was glad I wasn't in there when that happened.

Q: The Israeli lobby, AIPAC, American-Israeli Political Action Committee, did you find that intrusive or helpful.

STRAUSS: No, they're just like every other interest group. They make their case. They were effective on the Hill much more than most interest groups, but I was effective on the Hill myself. The Hill didn't give me any trouble ever in any negotiation I ever had.

Q: On the Middle East negotiations, who were some of your particular strongest allies on the Hill?

STRAUSS: Let me just think a minute. Senator Scoop Jackson, when he was in office, was certainly a strong ally, as was Humphrey, Muskie, Speaker Carl Albert, Lloyd Bentsen. I can't think of them all right now.

Q: Anyway, you're sort of the President's firefighter in a way.

STRAUSS: That's exactly what it was, and that's the way it was written up by the press.

Q: Then what about the Kennedy challenge? Could you talk about Senator Kennedy at that time.

STRAUSS: After I left my job, I took over the campaign for Carter, after I left my STR job and these other things. I took over the campaign and moved my papers over to campaign headquarters and started running the campaign to renominate the President. What happened there was I pushed Carter very hard to debate Kennedy early and get it out of the way. President Carter was uncomfortable debating Kennedy. He thought it would give him too much of a platform. But I was right in hindsight and he was wrong. He put it off and put it off and put it off, and finally had to debate him and, when he did, he did fine, but Kennedy had made a lot of progress by then that he shouldn't have made. So it was a difficult time.

Q: How did you define the issues between Kennedy and Carter?

STRAUSS: The issue in a primary scrap like that was who could win and who could keep the Democrats in control of the White House. Every time Kennedy would win a state, and he would, then people wanted to be against Carter for a lot of reasons, but they didn't want Kennedy for a lot of reasons. We'd do real well. If we won two or three states, you'd know you were going to run into a state you were going to lose because they wanted to send a message to Carter also. But we finally finished it off in California. I don't think it's ever endeared me to Ted Kennedy and his people, which I hate, because I'm a great admirer of Ted Kennedy.

Q: Did you feel in a way that Carter was running against Carter in the primaries?

STRAUSS: Well, yes, but Ted Kennedy made it awfully difficult. He was an attractive man and a hard candidate, and you remember when he finally lost at the Convention he didn't behave very well. He wouldn't endorse, wouldn't enthusiastically bring the party together, which he could have done. I think the Kennedy challenge had something substantial to do with Carter's defeat in the general election, but I think there were other factors as well including the fact that Jimmy Carter wasn't a particularly strong candidate. He had so many problems, and he hadn't been a particularly effective President in the public's mind. So he had his own vulnerabilities, and Senator Kennedy correctly played on them, as I would have done if I were him. We knocked him out of there, but it wasn't easy for a sitting President to have to do that, and it left the party split that went into that campaign against Ronald Reagan.

Q: How was Ronald Reagan viewed at the beginning when he was a rising candidate?

STRAUSS: Well, we viewed him incorrectly. I, among others, never thought that the Republicans would nominate him. I thought when it came down to it they'd nominate someone else, and I thought, when they did nominate him, that they couldn't elect him. The night that they put George Bush, who was also a friend of mine, on his ticket with him, it was late, you remember, about midnight, because Henry Kissinger had tried to get Jerry Ford on the ticket to sort of be a co-president, if you will recall. And that blew up terribly and the Reagan people had to do something in a hurry because all this was playing out on national television. That forced them to do something they didn't want to do and that was take George Bush, because the Reagans and their people didn't have any use for Bush but they needed a vice president in a hurry that night. Much to Bush's surprise, they picked him, and to a lot of other people's surprise. My phone rang about midnight that night - I may have told this story earlier but it bears repeating to be sure you get it in - and it was the White House saying, "The President wants to speak with you, Mr. Strauss, and Mr. Powell and Hamilton Jordan." So the three of us got connected and the President said, "What do you think, boys?" Hamilton or Jody, one of them, said, "You go first, Mr. Chairman," and I said, "Mr. President, I think they've nominated the only two guys in America I'm sure we can beat," and laughed. And the two fellows laughed, but the President didn't laugh one damn bit. He didn't think that was very funny. But that shows you how wrong I was. I never thought that Reagan would win that race until the last couple of weeks. At the last debate, I knew we were in trouble, because Carter handled it so poorly.

Q: At the time the impression was that Carter was not an effective President and wasn't getting anywhere. In retrospect one looks back on it and is really quite impressed by the accomplishments.

STRAUSS: Very impressed by the accomplishments.

Q: But at that time did you feel that Carter would be a hard sell?

STRAUSS: He was a very hard sell at that time. People felt like he sold them a bill of goods when he ran and couldn't deliver. He looked weak and ineffective. The truth of the matter is, if you look at his record, he had a damn good record. For example, several of us tried to convince him the Panama Canal Treaty was important but as a second-term issue to deal with, not the first term. You'd pay too high a price for it. As it turned out, we finally passed the Treaty in the Senate. But we squeezed so many Senators to get their votes, after that whenever you go to a Senator and say, "Senator, can you give the White House a vote on this issue or that issue or the other issue?" they'd all say the same thing: "Hell, I voted for you on that Panama Canal. I've got to take care of my own business now and get over that, because it hurt me in my state." So we paid a hell of a price for that, but Carter thought it was the right thing to do, and he never looked back on that kind of thing. Was it the right thing to do. It was admirable, but not good politics. I've got to run now, but after the first of the year I'll give you all the time you want.

Q: All right, fine. Well then, we'll pick this up next time. We really haven't talked about the 1980 defeat. We talked about leading up to it, but we'll talk about what went on and all and then after that.

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Today is January 9, 2003. Going back to 1980, during the election period, how did you view the setup? The Republicans and the Middle East. Let's take the Middle East first. Was there an attitude? How did you feel about the new team that was going to be coming in?

STRAUSS: Well, I'd seen enough of the Middle East to know that that was almost an intractable problem at that time. As a matter of fact, while I was in that job, during the Middle East, the Israeli ambassador to this country, Ambassador Evron, Eppy Evron, took me to lunch one day at the Senate Office Building with Senator Ribicoff, who was also interested in the Middle East, and he said to me then, "You ought to get out of that job. You can't make any progress." I think I have this earlier in these tapes, but I'm not sure, so I'll just plug it in here pretty quickly. We were trying to get a broader framework for the Middle East, but we couldn't make more headway. But he said, "You can't make any more progress. Institutions and interests in the Middle East are not going to move an inch. And I can tell you," he said, "Begin cannot move an inch. He went further than he should have gone at Camp David. Nobody on either side wants to see this thing move any further. They'd both just as soon see it sit where it is. It's tragic, it's sad, but that's a fact, and you ought to get out of this job before it kills you." Well, I took his advice very seriously, but was about 30 days after he gave me that advice, as I recall, lo and behold, President Carter called one day and said, "Bob, I want you to give up the Middle East - Kennedy's entered the campaign, the primary - and take over the political side now." I didn't let President Carter know how delighted I was to get that, because I was searching for a way to get out of that impossible situation without letting him down. This did it, and I recommended he take Sol Linowitz as my successor. He said, "Well, Sol's too old." I said, "He's not too old, and he's smart." Anyway, Linowitz took the job, and he certainly did as well as I would have donmaybe better.

Q: Did you see a change in attitude or approach towards the Middle East as this transition started working up? Were you talking to any people?

STRAUSS: No, nothing really of major consequence took place. They didn't spend any time on it. It was one of those things you just kind of handle like a low-grade infection, you know-maybe it isn't going to kill you, and what you've got to do is just see it doesn't spread and you kind of keep your hands on it, but you know you can't cure it either. That's about the way, unhappily, it was treated. No one has come as close to a real accord as Bill Clinton did in the last few days, week or two, of his government. He had a deal, and, unhappily, he squeezed the Israelis into offering a lot more than anybody ever dreamed they would offer. It was 97 percent of what the other side wanted, and they turned it down. I'm sure everyone regrets it, with the exception of the Palestinian leadership, and maybe only the man at the top.

Q: What about on trade? Was there a difference in attitude, or was it more of the same?

STRAUSS: I think the trade issues were pretty well the same on both sides. Each side, of course, might try to politicize a specific issue, whether it be in steel or in agriculture or in anything else, but I don't think there was a dime's worth of difference overall between the approach of the Carter Administration and then of the Reagan Administration and of later administrations. This country has pretty well maintained a progressive free market policy, although if you look at some of the things we've done, if you look at this most recent farm bill that came out of the Congress last year, it's disgraceful. Where we've really gotten in the last year, we've almost gotten to the stage of demanding people to keep their doors open to trade with us but we'll not open ours to them, whether it's steel or whatever. Our trade ambassador that represents this country right now in this administration is a first-rate fellow, very bright, very able.

Q: Who is that?

STRAUSS: I'll give you the name: Zoellick, Bob Zoellick.

Q: Bob Zoellick, yes. He was part of Baker's team.

STRAUSS: Yes, and one of the brightest guys around. He's done a good job on these trade issues to the extent that he's been able to and to the extent the administration would let him. He's aggressive and he's smart although he doesn't do particularly well on the Hill, so I hear.

Q: So January 20th, 1981, what happened to you? What did you do?

STRAUSS: I went back to my law firm. As a matter of fact, I went back a little earlier than that, and I stayed in my law firm for close to 10 years, a little over. A Republican President, George Bush, called me - and I've been through that - and sent me to Russia.

Q: Let's talk about those 10 years. Did you find yourself called upon as sort of a Democratic consultant to get involved, or were you ducking that?

STRAUSS: Oh, I did a number of things that I enjoyed. I was named Democratic chairman of a National Economic Commission to try to write an economic plan for this country. That was done prior to the election of George Bush, Sr., the year before he was elected. With help from the leading people in this country, whether it be Paul Volker or George Shultz - we had all kinds of distinguished participants and witnesses on the economic side - we came up with a pretty good program, but then President Bush's people didn't want to do anything. We kept telling them they ought to take that program of ours, even if they didn't send it up to the Congress then. It could come out in the spring of the following year. I and others on our commission, bipartisan commission, urged the administration to take a serious look at adopting it, if not now, put it on the shelf for adopting later in the year or the next year when they were going to need it, but their people didn't want anything to do with it. So nothing came of it, and they made a major mistake, in my judgment. It might have saved Bush, Senior's second term.

Q: Who were some of the key figures you felt who had Bush avoid this?

STRAUSS: I think Dick Darman, who was an economic advisor to Bush, took a dim view of it. Nick Brady, who was Secretary of Treasury, didn't have any confidence in it. So the people around him weren't interested in his getting into this sort of thing. They now believe that not having an economic program that made any sense was a significant reason for his defeat. So I spent a year and a half devoting a third of my time or more to that particular program.

Q: You know, there are these studies and these commissions that go on all the time and, well, they're not adopted. Do you have the feeling that these sort of enter the political bloodstream somehow anyway even when you do this and eventually something comes out of it?

STRAUSS: I think it all helps. We had a rather distinguished group of people on that commission. I don't recall all of them, but we had first-rate people in this country, by and large, on that commission. The present Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, was a member of it. Lane Kirkland, who was head of the AFL-CIO, a powerful man, was on it. Senator Domenici was on it and others of equal stature. I was also deeply involved in the Bipartisan Commission on Central America, which came to be known as the Kissinger Commission. The Kissinger Commission had good people on it also, we wrote a good report and it went nowhere.

Q: This was dealing essentially with Nicaragua, El Salvador, bordering problems there, sort of a civil war.

STRAUSS: Yes. Those issues were controversial, and they needed highly visible Republicans and highly visible Democrats who had credibility to serve on it. They didn't really want it, but they sort of inherited it whether they wanted it or not, and they got Kissinger to serve as chairman of it and they got me and others like Nick Brady.

Q: In this Central American task force, what were you doing?

STRAUSS: Well, we made one, possibly two - I recall one vividly - trip to Central America, went to talk to the various players down there, about a four-day trip, as I recall. Interestingly, on that trip the White House staff person that was sent to help this commission was Oliver North. I didn't even remember it, but people told me later it was Oliver North. He was nothing then and he's nothing now, but that was just one little interesting sidelight. That commission, thanks primarily to Henry Kissinger, wrote a damn good report, just a first-rate report. No one paid any attention to it.

Q: What was the thrust?

STRAUSS: Let me see if I can describe it in just a few words. The thrust was that we had to do something down there that we weren't doing and that we had to bring certain groups in and bring them together, and that there were certain undesirable groups that this country had to deal with down there and we were making a major mistake if we didn't go in and try to help establish real democracy in those countries, help them bring responsible people to come to power, in that part of the world. Kissinger did much of the work and frankly wrote most of the report. A number of us participated in it, but he was so good and he had a good staff - Henry always had good staff people - and I just think, as usual, things he does he does exceedingly well. You can like or dislike him, you can agree or disagree with him, but he's got an IQ and he uses it. When he takes responsibility, he discharges it. That's the reason here he is, it's been over 30 years since he's been in office and I think he's got more influence today than he did when he was Secretary of State. But he also used to jokingly say that, after we turned our report in to President Reagan, who had precious little interest in it, Henry said, "Well, this report has some use. We've got 50,000 copies printed, and no one's interested in reading it. Let's take it and drop them, use them as bombs and drop them; I think we can eliminate our undesirable elements in Central America, which was a sad but true humorous statement.

Q: During this 10-year period after you left the Chairmanship, what was your relationship, and what had been your relationship, with George Bush, Sr.?

STRAUSS: George Bush, Sr. and I have had a unique relationship for many, many years. We have the Texas background. We ended up Chairmen of our respective parties at the same time. We got along well; the Chairmen today of those parties don't have much of anything to do with each other. We talked with regularity and communicated well. As a matter of fact, I think I mentioned earlier that I talked him into going on one of the telethons I put on raising money for the Democratic Party. I told him to come on and say a good word about his own party and that people ought to all participate in some way, and see if he could raise a little money too on our telethon on our nickel. He did, and he was an asset to the program. It showed the parties were able to work together not just compete. So our relationship was good. When Reagan got the nomination, I called the hotel the night they picked George Bush, where George Bush was staying. I didn't think I'd get him on the phone. I was just going to leave word to congratulate him, but he answered the phone in his suite at the Republic Convention. I said, "What the hell are you doing answering the phone?" He said, "We're just on our way out. Bob, he's going to name me." I said, "Well, I heard it on television." I said, "I was surprised." He said, "I was shocked. Barbara and I were shocked." I think he said, "We heard it the same time you did." Anyway, he was going to rush over to be presented to the Convention. So later - I guess this was after he was President - I was going to say that we had dinner with him that first night in the White House, but that's after he became President. I just had a letter, a note, from him this week responding to something I wrote to him about. So we maintain a good...

Q: Yes, one of our interviews was interrupted when you had a call from him.

STRAUSS: I take a great deal of pride in the fact that, even though I'm a Democrat, I'm a strong partisan Democrat, I try to be reasonable and I try not to be mean spirited - I don't think I am - and I try to be credible. I don't make outrageous statements, as I did early in my career. Fortunately, it's given me a great deal of personal pleasure and a good deal of professional success. It's a good lesson we try to teach our young lawyers here. We've got 1,000 lawyers. Just before I came down to see you today I spoke to new partners we have that have just been admitted to the partnership this month, to tell about this firm and how we try to maintain civility in our efforts, in the way we compete with other law firms and the way we represent our clients, and that it pays off in the long run.

Q: This is a little off the subject, but while we're here I'm going to pump you for stuff. Have you noticed a change in attitude of the graduates of law school? Are they more pugnacious? Do they get along as well? Is there a different spirit?

STRAUSS: I think the first thing you notice is the percentage of graduates. It used to be when I started practicing law, in my law class of 110 people, I guess, we had one woman, and then we had two women for a while, and that was it. Today over 50 percent of the law students are women, so this firm has a great many women lawyers. I spoke today to this group of new partners - and half of them were women. That's the biggest change. I don't think there's really much difference. People say there is. But there was a time, even five years ago, when an awful lot of these young lawyers thought they ought to try to get into investment banking on Wall Street. They saw a pie in the sky. Today they realize what I used to always tell them: "If you want to go be an investment banker, that's fine, but practice law a few years if you like the law. Get that behind you. You can always make a living practicing law if things go bad." Well, it's hard to convince people things could go bad. They've never seen a depression. But these graduates have seen that, and now they realize they're fortunate to go with one of the 25 or so leading law firms, any one of them in this country today. There are a lot of good law firms in this country. I take great pride in the fact that our law firm was just selected as the 12th most admired law firm in the country, by about 3,500 corporate executives and corporate directors, by their vote. I guess five of them are New York law firms, which we're not, but we have an office there. My firm is an important thing in my life. Outside of my family this law firm has been one thing I've cherished. When I leave every now and then for an assignment in government or politics, some of the people always think I may never come back, but the ones that know me best know that, as quick as I can get loose from what I'm doing, I'm going to come back to the law firm. I just had a discussion about that yesterday, as a matter of fact, with some lawyers here.

Q: I was wondering whether there was a change in attitude at any point that you've noticed, because so much in American business has been focused on the bottom line recently. It's a win-lose situation. Good law really shouldn't be that.

STRAUSS: There's no question that the practice of law is far more commercial now than it was in past years. To some extent that's good and to some extent it's bad. We preach to our young lawyers that come here that there are several basic values we have in this law firm and you've got to measure up, and intellectual competence is not at the top of that list. There are other things that are; character, ethics, service to clients. We preach that constantly. That's what I spoke about this morning, before we started this interview, with the new, young partners here. Before you get to be a partner in this law firm, you must have at least seven years of non-partnership service during which period of time you're graded, and it's hard to eventually get to be a partner. We may take one or at most two out of one of our offices a year, so that means the odds are strongly against becoming a partner in this law firm, and it's hard to keep people when they see that the road is a long and difficult one.

Q: Sometimes competition or the desire to make a profit can make for bad decisions.

STRAUSS: What we have to do and what we do all the time is even tougher than that. What we really monitor all the time is most of our lawyers bill by the hour and put down the hours they spend on clients' work. They write that down themselves. It's on the honor system except that we monitor it because it's awfully easy for a lone lawyer who is striving to become partner to add two hours to this client and two hours to that client that he really didn't work on their business but it makes them look like they're more productive, more productive compared to the other young lawyers who are competing for partnership. One of the things we concentrate on very hard and monitor very carefully is the issue that that kind of practice doesn't take place. Section groups monitor offices by sections, the time spent and time charged to clients to be sure that it isn't abused. It's very easy for a young lawyer to think, well, this doesn't hurt the firm. They're just going to get paid for two more hours of work, and the client can afford it. They're a big, rich company, and I need it for my career. It's very easy to think that way. It doesn't mean that they're evil or that they're dishonest, but it is dishonest and that's what we preach. My judgment is that most first-rate firms do something similar.

Q: Before you were offered the ambassadorship to Russia and between that and the Kissinger Commission on Central America, did you get involved in anything else?

STRAUSS: I served on a number of boards of public institutions and private companies. But there was a long span. When I went to the Soviet Union in '91, at that time, keep in mind, I was in my 70s and I certainly thought my public career was over, long over, and I didn't want to go, as I told you earlier, but it turned out to be one of the richer experiences in my life and in my wife's life that neither of us expected. It opened many new doors for me. Some years ago, Charles, I said to people in the press, "Now, I'm tired of being the Democrat you turn to for a quote." I wanted to get out of the press, because I'm quotable and they know it, and I always return the press' calls and they know that, so I said to them after I came back, "I don't want to be quoted anymore." I also said to a number of reporters, "If you have an important issue that you really need, then call me and I'll do my best, if I have anything to say, to say it." So I cut back my public exposure dramatically and even hurt some feelings of some press friends of mine. I didn't not return their calls, but I'd return them and say, "I just don't want to talk about that," and I'd repeat what I just said to you. But, interestingly, within the last month of so, a number of things have come up, everything from the success the Republicans have had in the manner they've taken power and changed the whole power structure in this town. That is important, and so I found myself, I think the week before last, two days in a row on the front page of the New York Times with quotes. It's something I hadn't planned on happening, and I don't mind it as long as it doesn't look like I'm straining for it, and, happily, they turned out to be sensible quotes.

Q: This is always a problem. You can't tell what is going to come out.

STRAUSS: Exactly, and so I'm very careful, but they turned out to be very sensible quotes, and I had any number of people call and say, "I saw your quote. I'm so glad...," this, that and the other. What it really did, I think, was let a lot of people around the country know what happened to Bob Strauss, that he's still alive and kicking, and I like that. I don't want people to think I'm dead or that I'm not working anymore. So it turned out well, but now I'm going to shut it right down.

Q: We'll stop at this point. We'll pick this up the next time when you received an offer from President Bush to go to the Soviet Union, because it was the Soviet Union when you went there.

STRAUSS: Didn't we cover that earlier?

Q: No, we haven't covered that at all. It's a big story.

[END TAPE 5 SIDE A]

Q: This is tape six, side one with Ambassador Strauss. We are using a different tape recorder this time, so we will see how this works. Mr. Ambassador, we left the last time when you were in, could you tell us how this appointment to Moscow go, and when did this happen and come about.

STRAUSS: One day I got a call in my office from an old friend who was Secretary of State, Jim Baker. He said, "Bob, come over and have lunch with me today." I said, "Jim, I can't today. I have a date already." He said, "Well break it and come over here and have lunch with me. I need to talk to you." I said, "Jim, I don't break dates. If I can be with you, I don't like to break dates." He said, "This is important, very important. I promised the President that I would talk to you about a matter before he gets back in town from a trip he is on. He will be back in mid afternoon, and he is going to want to talk to you."

Q: This is President George Bush.

STRAUSS: George Bush senior. That piqued my curiosity, so I said, "Well I will cancel it and come over." I went over and sat down. We had a nice lunch. Before we got really started I said, "What the hell is this all about." He said, "Well, you know we have been looking for an ambassador to the Soviet Union for over a year, and nothing satisfies the President. He called me this morning about seven o'clock and said, 'I have got our man; now all we have got to do is land him.'" I said, "Well what can I do to help?" He said, "Well, you can accept. You are the man." I said, "Are you out of your damn mind, and is the President out of his damn mind." He said, "No, he said he had been thinking about it and didn't know why he didn't think about it earlier. You are a perfect person to go for him. You know Gorbachev." I said, "I couldn't consider that. I am in my seventies, as is Helen. It is just not something we can think about." He called in the woman who worked for him, did his press stuff.

Q: Margaret Tutwiler.

STRAUSS: Tutwiler.

Q: I have interviewed her.

STRAUSS: Yes, she is splendid.

Q: Boy is she professional.

STRAUSS: Yes, she is a real pro. I said to them after I, Bush knew, I mean Baker knew that Margaret and I were good friends. I had been helpful to her, and she has been helpful to me. So he had her come in as we were having lunch. The three of us talked about it. I just really didn't seriously consider it. I remember Baker saying to me, "At least you will go over and meet with the President about it." "Well of course I would. I didn't want to be arrogant about it. I just think I am the wrong person. I don't know much about Russia. I don't know anything about this. I am too old. Baker said, "Fine." So at three o'clock that afternoon I went over to speak with George Bush. He told me how much he wanted, he said he wanted me to do this. I told him I couldn't consider it. He pushed some more, a long meeting. I was uncomfortable saying no to a President. Finally I said to him, "Hell Mr. President," keep in mind George Bush senior who was president then, and I are old friends. We chaired our respective parties at the same time. We were very close, good close friends, very good friends. Anyway, I finally said, "Hell, Mr. President, I didn't even vote for you. You don't want me." He looked back and said, "I cannot believe you voted for that other fellow." I said, "Damn sure believe it because I did. I didn't have a bit of trouble. I never considered voting for you." I laughed and he laughed. He said, "Well you just blew it, Strauss." I said, "Why?" He said, "You are the only person since I have been president who sat in that chair at this desk and looked me in the face and said he didn't vote for me. Now a lot of them sat there and said they did. I know that, but you are the only one who had enough guts to say he didn't and do it with a smile." So he said, "Now I know you have to go over there. I need somebody over there who can do business with Gorbachev.' That would have been his theme. He needed it. He said, "The limit to what we can do over there now; we don't have a budget; we don't have this; we don't have that, but if you know, you have been in Europe a lot. You have worked in Europe, and you know the heads of the government in most of those countries. The signal that you are leaving at your age and stature in life, station in life, that you are going to Russia for me will send the right signal. We are serious about really helping the Russians. It will really send the right signal to President Gorbachev." So he said, "Tell you what. Why don't you and Helen come to Camp David with me for the weekend. We will talk about it." I said, "No, Mr. President, I wouldn't consider doing that. That place is too seductive. You get up there; you can't use your good judgment. There is no chance. I have got to stay here." We laughed some more. He said, "Think about it overnight. Let me call Helen. I will talk to Helen about it." "Don't call Helen; I will talk to her about it." He said, "Let me talk to Helen," and told his secretary to get her on the phone. I said, "Not now. Give me 24 hours on this." I was worried about Helen saying, agreeing to anything he asked her to do. But anyway we had a couple of meetings over there, and I finally decided I ought to go. Larry Eagleburger and Brent Scowcroft both had considerable influence on me. I ran into them in the hallway when I went in for my second or third visit with the president. Eagleburger said, "You know, Strauss, the main reason that you ought to go is it does send a signal. Nobody else is sending it as well as your going. People have more background more knowledge, but this sends a signal and it will be well received. So I eventually before that week was out, I called him and said that, told the President I would go. I said, "I just have two conditions. One is that Helen goes with me, and the second is that I can take Vera Murray as my assistant. She has done everything with me for so long." He said, "Strauss, if Vera won't go with you, I don't want you over there. You can't work without her." We laughed some more. That's how the appointment came about.

Q: Let me just go back a bit. you said you knew Gorbachev. Can you talk about up to this point, we are talking about what year now?

STRAUSS: Well, we had to be talking about this was very early '71.

Q: '81.

STRAUSS: '81 yes.

Q: What about, not '81, '91.

STRAUSS: '91.

Q: Boy, this shows our joint ages here that these decades sort of get, yes, '91. Prior to this in '91, what had been your contact with sort of European leaders, particularly Gorbachev. We are still talking about the Soviet Union.

STRAUSS: I had, Nancy Reagan had called me to get an invitation to sit at the table with Gorbachev when Gorbachev made his first visit over here. I have told you this story about going upstairs at the White House. We discussed Don Regan and the fact that she wanted to get rid of him and wanted me to convince the president he needed to do it for his own political survival. That is on tape here we have. She, you remember the last thing I said in there when I sat down at the table with Gorbachev with that big state dinner and all those Republicans in the room. I knew a thousand people in there who wanted to be sitting next to Gorbachev, one of the leading Democrats in the country, how stunned they all were. So I had met him then and I had spent a little time with Gorbachev on that visit. Later I had, the office had come over. No, I hadn't seen the office; I hadn't gotten to know the office then. So that was about the only thing I had.

Q: When you met Gorbachev at that time, was he at all interested in the American political situation?

STRAUSS: He knew a good deal about it form our conversation, mostly our dinner conversation that one night. I don't remember having any other...

Q: I was just wondering whether you had the feeling, as you say he knew, he understood. The fact that you were a Democrat was important.

STRAUSS: Oh yes, he understood very vividly. I had been to Russia and had dinner with him, a small dinner of about 12 people in connection with the Russian Business council. I had gone over with about a dozen business people who were doing business in Russia at the time or trying to. So I had that evening with Gorbachev, a small dinner. So I had limited experience, but it was something, and it got press. So President Bush knew about it. I liked Gorbachev a lot then. Everyone did. Gorbachev was real I think.

Q: I recall just being on the street by happenstance, and all of a sudden this limousine came by and there he was waving at everyone. I mean he seemed to be having a delightful time.

STRAUSS: An amusing the story, he stopped right, the traffic, got out and greeted people. It happened to be in the building where Duke Ziebert had his restaurant, Duke's. I used to eat in Duke's regularly, and the mob around there. I said later to Duke, "You know why he stopped here and got out and all the people got around him?" He said, "No, why?" I said, "They had planned to go in and have lunch there and all these people got around him and were saying, 'whatever you do, don't eat that lousy food in that lousy place.'" Duke didn't think that was as funny as I did, but we had a good laugh out of it. But anyway, I had another condition on that for the President. I said, "You know, my daughter, our only daughter is approaching the age of 40 or is 40, and she is pregnant. My wife is not about to leave here until that baby is born the first of September." I think I said the first of September, something like that. He said, "We can work that out. I know you are not going to go without her." I said, "No, I am going to stay here with Helen on that." So he didn't have any trouble with that. Strange that story didn't break. Bush called a press conference which he had out in the garden there and had a couple of hundred press people show up for it. They didn't know what it was about. I walked out. He announced that I was ambassador to the Soviet Union that morning. It was a big story for a lot of reasons. Number one, our relationship with the Soviet Union then, primarily here is a leading former Democrat, who was one, being offered and accepting a job as ambassador to the Soviet Union in this Republican administration. So it made for a good story. It was very well received. The press has always been kind to me, overly kind. I am about the only fellow I know in public life who never cusses the press. They have always been generous with me, overly so. Helen and I started to get ready, and one thing we needed to do was take some Russian lessons and briefings over at the State Department. So I started getting briefings with various people at the State Department on Russian, Soviet issues. I also started language lessons; Helen and I both did that with a very good man that they provided. The time came for our summer vacation. We always spent about a month, half of July and half of August, most of August out on the west coast in a little cottage we have out there.

Q: Where is that?

STRAUSS: Del Mar, California. So Helen and I had been out. I had the man, the language tutor, come out at my expense, not the government's, and stay there for two weeks to give us both some intense Russian lessons. Two or three hours in the morning. That is wearing.

Q: That is very wearing.

STRAUSS: And at our age it was even more wearing.

Q: That is one of the things we all learn. The older you get, the harder it is.

STRAUSS: Exactly. So we spent, we were in the middle of the lessons when the coup came in August.

Q: The coup in the Soviet Union.

STRAUSS: Soviet Union.

Q: When the military and other groups tried to oust Gorbachev.

STRAUSS: Tried their best, exactly. In fact they took him physically. I guess he was in his home on the Black Sea there when they took over the home and stayed a house prisoner of theirs. So the phone rang. We were out for dinner with our tutor as a matter of fact. When we got back the phone was ringing. It was the White House calling saying that this coup had taken place. The President wanted me over there the next day, to leave the next morning. It was 9:00 at night I guess, when the phone rang in California, so midnight here. It was Brent Scowcroft who said the President wants you to come in tomorrow and stop and pick up Jim Baker, Secretary of State Baker who is fishing in Wyoming or Montana. I forget which. They can pick him up and bring you all back here, and you can get the last briefing and get sworn in. I had been sworn in, I had already been confirmed by the Senate.

Q: I assumed there was no problem there.

STRAUSS: I had no problem at all. So we did that, but Helen didn't go over. I went over without her, and stayed about five or six or seven days. About that time the baby was born. I rushed back home to be with my daughter when she had her child, and stayed there a couple of days. Then Helen and I went back together. A funny story happened when we went back. We got there, and of course tanks were in the street. We flew overnight to get there, and then the drive in the morning, worn out. It was a sight, bombs everywhere, tanks still in the street, Gorbachev still in captivity. They call house arrest captivity, and he did. I remember I went straight to the embassy and met with the staff. Jim Collins was out there, my deputy. I hadn't known him before, but he was very highly recommended by everyone. I had just met him; I had no experience with him. They suggested that rather than stay at the residence for the ambassador I ought to stay in the compound at Collins' house which I did. We started to work. The first thing that happened when I got there, Collins said to me, "The staff is here. They have been waiting. They are waiting for instructions and advice. The White House has called, and they are waiting for your impressions." I thought to myself this is a nice start for a fellow who doesn't know anything about Russia and even less about the Soviet Union. I said to somebody there, Collins I think, I said, "Why don't you see, I am sure we won't reach him, but why don't you see if you can get through on the phone system and we can get Ambassador Dobrynin." Who you are going to call, and he was the longest serving ambassador to this country, represents the Soviet Union and was a key player I think. As a matter of fact, I think Ambassador Dobrynin had much to do with keeping Russia, the Soviet Union and the U.S. from coming to grips with each other. It was the kind of communication they our presidents had with the Soviet Union through Dobrynin who told each side what they need to hear to keep then from each other's throats. I'll be damned if two minutes later, you rarely get anybody on the phone in those days when you tried because the system wouldn't work, and the phone books, but I'll be damned if in two minutes they didn't have Anatoly Dobrynin on the phone.

Q: By that time Dobrynin had moved. He was part of the Politburo at that time.

STRAUSS: Yes he moved back. He had given up his ambassadorship to this country. He was very close to the government but not in it. I said, "Anatoly," and he started laughing, sort of chuckled the way he did. "I thought I would hear from you, and I am glad to hear from you. What can I do for you?" I said, "Anatoly, I have got to tell our government, give our government some advice on how to play this thing. You know, I don't have to tell you, I am going to have to get that good advice based on other people's judgment better than mine. I would like to know what you think I ought to do." He said, "Bob, the best thing to do is do nothing. I think in 48 hours this coup will all be over. It has no leadership. What little leadership it has, they are petrified and drugged." He just was very critical of the whole thing. He said, "I think the best thing you can do is nothing." That made more sense to me than anything. I went up and told Jim Collins that. He said, "I think he is exactly right." That is what we did. I called and talked to Jim Baker as I recall. It could have been Brent Scowcroft. I think Baker had gone back out on his vacation, maybe he hadn't. Anyway I called either Baker or Scowcroft or both. I remember talking to Scowcroft. I had a long relationship already, and gave him that advice, the best thing to do is nothing. He approved course B. The best advice I could give him, don't say anything; don't do anything. Let it play out.

Q: Well this is like the three ton elephant. If you start tramping around you often do more harm than good.

STRAUSS: Oh yes, no question about it.

Q: I would like to go back just a bit. When you got together, I mean here is a coup. You go to the White house. What was the impression? What was the mood and the analysis that you were getting from the people in the White House about what the hell was happening and what did this mean?

STRAUSS: They obviously were terribly concerned about it, and the best advice they had was that these people simply despised Gorbachev and his reforms, and would do their utmost to get rid of him. But they had serious doubts that they would end up successful, be a successful coup. As a matter of fact, that very day while we were talking, a group of people were going down and thought they could get access to Gorbachev to talk with him, people representing various institutions in the government including several ambassadors, a couple of ambassadors from foreign countries. I was to go. I hadn't been there, but I was on their list to fly down and see him. Jim Collins was to go, my deputy in my place. But there was - consternation is not a strong enough term. There was no panic. George Bush was very calm about it, very cool about it.

Q: Did you get the feeling that this was a, I mean obviously you knew most of the players, but did you have the feeling that here was a, in foreign affairs here was a White House with a president that really understood situations, when to let go and when not to. I mean you know, in other words, a White House that was comfortable with the crisis.

STRAUSS: Yes, I guess I would agree, that is right.

Q: I don't want to put words in your mouth.

STRAUSS: I think that is right. I think George Bush was, generally speaking, comfortable. You see, this was the second year of his presidency and going into his third year really. He was comfortable, and he had good people. Jim Baker he had tremendous confidence in. They both had confidence in Larry Eagleburger, the Secretary of State and the deputy secretary respectively. Brent Scowcroft had a world of experience and sophistication. So he had a first rate team at that time.

Q: Well now, during this time, I mean this is before you went out. There had been people in the White House, kind of within the staff who tended to put their money on Gorbachev and in doing so, this is a staff problem often sort of denigrating Yeltsin and all that. Were you picking up any of this?

STRAUSS: No question there was a great deal of that there. There were people in the Bush administration at the highest levels who did not want him to have anything to do with Boris Yeltsin. As a matter of fact after I was appointed, and before I served, went over to start my service, Yeltsin came to town. They didn't want him to see the president. They were concerned it would send Gorbachev. As a matter of fact Yeltsin couldn't even get in to, he was going in a space bowl in Houston. They couldn't get him permission to do that. You could drive in off the highway. If he had just driven in off the highway and not asked, he would have been fine, but he asked, and they turned him down. I had to call Brent Scowcroft. He said, "I'll take care of that. That is dumb." He arranged for it. So that was the time...

Q: I mean this often picks up in a lower level. Policy can sometimes be affected by people who are just closing doors and all that.

STRAUSS: Oh, not sometimes; frequently I would say, more often than that sometimes, no question about that. There was a negative reaction to Yeltsin from top to bottom, just sort of a left wing radical. You remember there was the press saying at the time, they began to say that Bush was staying with Gorbachev too long because Gorbachev is already beginning to get in trouble. Just about the time I arrived Gorbachev was getting into trouble, so it was just beginning that. There was no big story yet.

Q: Were you picking up before you went out there, was anybody at the State Department or National Security Council saying power may be moving you know. Don't discount Yeltsin.

STRAUSS: Yes of course that was there, but people thought Gorbachev was a lot more secure than Gorbachev was is a better way of putting it. And Gorbachev was not as secure as he thought he was. Yeltsin was a major player already. What had gone on after that, I think he had not shortly after he became president of Russia. He may have been already.

Q: Just put this, in the Soviet Union there were presidents of the various republics. Russia of course was the major republic.

STRAUSS: The major republic. Yeltsin and Gorbachev at that time still on the surface still had some semblance of cordial relationship, but it deteriorated quickly. Keep in mind I am talking about August. By the end of the year on Christmas Day, Gorbachev gave up his job. Yeltsin pushed him out of his job is a better way of putting it.

Q: Well Yeltsin had, I mean when you got there at the embassy you were finding a different mood than say in Washington about this Yeltsin-Gorbachev power relationship, because Yeltsin by the time you arrived had already stood up on top of a tank and said no. I mean...

STRAUSS: Yeltsin was the popular figure in the country, no question about that. An interesting thing happened about that. I guess it was about my third day there or fourth day there. They had a big memorial service for three young men who had been killed in the coup. One of them was Russian Orthodox; one was, I think, Baptist, and one was Jewish. They had people from three different faiths there at this big memorial service. When I went over there, Collins didn't go with me. But Jim Billington of the Library of Congress happened to be in town, and he went along with me.

Q: Quite a scholar in Russian culture.

STRAUSS: Great scholar, yes, and was very helpful in what to say when we had a chance. When we got there, there must have been, hell I don't know how many hundred thousand people. Biggest crowd I have ever seen. I would have estimated a quarter of a million people they had in this big place. They had all the ambassadors from various countries who were going to meet and sit together during this service to show their support for Gorbachev, who had been out of captivity now two days. When Billington and Vera and I and the security guys started walking toward where the ambassadors were supposed to meet, there was something way over towards the edge of part of that crowd, and I turned behind and I looked around. I saw a flat bed truck with some type of microphone on top of it. Just a flat bed truck out there, that was the stage. I said to Vera, "Vera I think that is the stage. I bet you that is where things are going to take place. I don't want to go over there and sit in the bleachers. The action is going to be up on that truck." I told the security people, "Let's go over there." I turned to some of the ambassadors and said, "Do you want to go with me?" The Italian ambassador said he would like to go. So he and I and I think Billington went with us, I am not certain. But we all went over towards that flat bed truck. We got within 50 yards of it, and there were ropes. The security people said, "These are ropes here, Mr. Ambassador." I said, "Well lift the damn rope up and let's go under it, or push it down and let's get over it." I turned to Vera and said, "Vera, this is just like a Democratic convention. Everybody is in charge, and nobody is in charge, so if you act like you are in charge, you will be in charge." She laughed. Of course I was exactly right, and we then got right up to the edge of the truck. There were a lot of security people there and heavier ropes. We had the same discussion. I said, "Lift them up and go on." So we did. When I got to the end of that flat bed truck, the whole Russian power establishment, what little there was left of it was back there. The first person I saw, one of the persons was Gorbachev. I went over to greet him, and he greeted me. Very warm, and he said he was glad I was there, that he had been expecting me and was glad I showed up. I said, "Well so am I. Who is going to speak here today, Mr. President?" He said, "Well, I am going to speak. The mayor is going to speak, and each member of the clergy is going to speak for two minutes. It will just be a 40 minute program," something like that. Less than an hour program. I said, "Well I would like to speak. I have a message from President Bush" He looked kind of stunned and kind of said no. I said, "Mr. President, let me tell you what is going on in this world and in your country. People are wondering about you, what is going to happen to you, senior people having just attempted a coup. Nothing could be as important to you as having a representative of the President of the United States stand up and give you his support for you as President of the Soviet Union." His eyes lit up just as if a light went on. He said, "You will speak just before me." I said, "Thank you. President Bush would like that. He wanted to show you his support and the world his support." So before a couple of more minutes had passed down came a kind of a rope ladder. I found myself helping the clergy one by one get up and down on the ladder and helping this one up and that one down. I laughed and said, "Vera it is just another, I told you about the Democratic convention. You never know what is going to happen next." After a half an hour or so, less than that, I spoke. I had a guy Hopkins who was my interpreter. He said he was a nervous wreck. He didn't have time to prepare for this, but we had it all written out. Collins had it prepared for me before I left the embassy. I had marked it up some as we drove over, so it was a fairly scratchy three minute remarks is all it was. Three or four minutes. But I remember getting up and looking over that crowed and thinking hell his crowd is three or four times bigger than I have seen in Times Square during the Democratic convention. We got through it, and it was played over and over on CNN and other networks around the world. It was very meaningful to Gorbachev. The White House was tickled to death. I talked to Brent Scowcroft. I don't think I talked to the President then. They were delighted that we showed this U.S. support. So my ambassadorship was launched in a very positive way.

Q: I wonder if something here, I wonder if you could talk a little about your working relationship with Vera. She is here today, and here I think it should be for the record.

STRAUSS: Yes, I thought we covered this earlier.

Q: I think maybe we have.

STRAUSS: Well, let's do it anyway. It will be covered twice. When I took over, became treasurer of the Democratic National Committee in Washington in 1970, it was a mess. Fred Harris had been chairman and had no discipline, none, and the staff had none. It was a shambles. They were poorly trained. They were nice people. Some of them were and some of them weren't, but it was obvious we had to get rid of a lot and better utilize and order what was there. About the second or third day I was there, this lovely woman whose name is Louise Roberts, had been Fred Harris' secretary I think, or she had been with Pat O'Connor who was treasurer, his secretary. She was my secretary and I said, "Louise, who is that woman on the switchboard out there? She is the only person out here I have talked to that has any sense." Louise came back in a few minutes and said, "Her name is Vera Murray. She is a temporary employee here; she is filling in." I asked her to come back. I said, "Miss Murray, I need to talk to several hundred people in the next weeks, important people, difficult to reach. I need someone who knows how to talk on the telephone. You are the only one I have seen around here that looks to me like you have a talent for that. How would you like to come back here and work for me?" She sort of in a suspicious way said, "Well what would be expected of me." That was about the time we had the scandals with secretaries who couldn't type. She said, "You know, I am not a secretary. I don't take shorthand. I don't type." I said, "You won't be expected to. It is probably not what you suspect would be expected of you. I would expect you to talk to people for me and get me in touch with them in a professional way." I said, "Why don't you try it for a few days and let's see if it works out." She said, "Well, that is fair enough. I can do that." Well then it was a few days job, and it is 30 odd years and we are still together, been everywhere together.

Q: Well now, when you got to the embassy, who did you find were the major players from your point of view in support and all at the embassy?

STRAUSS: Well, Jim Collins, my deputy, was in a different class than any of the rest of them. There was nobody in his class. I don't remember the other's names. There were staff people around there. If I took time I could dig them out. They were, there was a fellow named Ken Yalowitz I remember who went over and ended up being ambassador to one of the smaller republics after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Several of the fellows were very able. I had a lot of talented and able people around there. So we add names. We had a very substantial CIA operation there that kept to itself that we were responsible for.

Q: Talking about this, I mean obviously this is an unclassified entry, but various ambassadors have had various relations with the station as the CIA establishment is called abroad. In general terms how did you find your support there and its performance?

STRAUSS: Well I was unable to really pass judgment on their competence because I didn't have an opportunity to grade them carefully. I thought that they were fairly good. I never had tremendous confidence in them. I used to go back in their shop they had there, the offices they had in their place. I did it frequently and used to tell them the telephone system was so poor around there, they had a better telephone system... They were nice people. We didn't really monitor them. I got along with them fine, but they didn't ask for anything they shouldn't have, and I didn't volunteer anything I shouldn't have.

Q: I am just wondering, you are looking at this when you arrived there, was there a sense of God, I mean this whole structure that we have dealt with for the past 50 years or so was coming apart, or was this looked upon as well this is one of these glitches, and we are going to end up coming back to sort of the old Soviet-American relationship?

STRAUSS: I don't think there was any question in anybody's mind that it was going to be very tough to hold the Soviet Union together. There was a general feeling that Gorbachev's time was limited. There was criticism in this country that Bush was staying with Gorbachev too long, too close to him and trying to conduct personal diplomacy instead of nation diplomacy. Those were the kinds of things that were going around. I guess I saw Gorbachev every couple of days, which was amazing. No other ambassador did. I did for two reasons. The primary reason was I represented the United States of America. The second reason was he liked me. We got along; we spoke the same language. I came nowhere near a peer of his, but well a person of stature in his own country, and he treated me that way. As Bush said to me at the time he sent me over there, "I am sending you over there for a particular reason, to establish the kind of relationship, warm with Gorbachev, that he needs - that he talks straight to you and you talk straight to him, and that if he speaks to you, he is speaking to me. That is what I need desperately." He said, "We have had an ambassador over there who is a splendid ambassador, but he will never have the kind of personal relationship with Gorbachev that you will have." Of course he was a fine ambassador who preceded me, a career man who knew more about the Soviet Union in his little finger than I knew in my whole body, but he wasn't a particularly personable fellow in terms of relationship. Jack Matlock was his name. I don't know him very well. Whenever I saw him he was always courteous, and I was too. A disappointment came up. I called him. Of course, I had no background over there. I said, "You know my wife really doesn't know anything about this job. The call is to see what we need to take over there, sheets, food? What are the demands made on her?" He said, "Well my wife is very busy now and doesn't like, she is busy with her photography. I will have her call." I said, "Fine." She didn't call, and I called him again in Russia a few weeks later. He said, "I have talked to her, but she just doesn't have time. She is tied up with the fact that we are going to be moving in a month or so, and she has a lot of her photography that is taking a big part of her time." I thought to myself this is the nuttiest thing I have ever heard. She never talked to my wife or me.

Q: It is unfortunate.

STRAUSS: An interesting thing happened on that. Tom Watson who was head of IBM and was ambassador there for awhile...

Q: Yes, he had been put in there by Carter, I think.

STRAUSS: I guess he had, by Carter.

Q: I think the idea was somebody who was a businessman and maybe this is time to do business.

STRAUSS: That is exactly right. But anyway, I got a call one day from his wife that I knew had been with him. He and I talked and then she called and said, "Mr. Strauss, I just returned from Russia recently, and they insisted that we stay at the embassy." She said, "The sheets were torn, weren't clean. I hated to put my head on the pillow case. It was ragged and dirty. You better tell your wife not to count on much of anything over there. I think the ambassador's wife has let this thing run down there terribly. I was sorry we spent the one night there." So we bought a bunch of sheets and pillow cases, everything you can think of and brought them over. I will never forget that lovely lady.

Q: A question, sort of a broad one, but one of the things I have noticed in my interviews that often is lost, and that is a political, and I emphasize political, not just a career person who maybe sold automobiles but somebody who has been involved in politics can often establish a rapport with leaders, maybe quite diverse systems, but no matter how you do it, the leadership is political. Did you find when you were talking with Gorbachev, and later on that your political experience sort of kicked in?

STRAUSS: I think that is an understatement how important it was. It was important to Gorbachev. With Yeltsin it was of vital importance in helping Yeltsin plan his trips to this country and state visits, things like that. We will get into all that. I probably ought to move into that. A couple of stories. When Helen and I came back a couple of weeks later, after I went home and stayed about a week. The baby was born, and we came back.

Q: Was the baby a boy or a girl?

STRAUSS: A girl, thank you.

Q: I think we should allow you to get on, does it have a name?

STRAUSS: Yes, Natalie Strauss is now, I guess, 11 years old, Breen, and the apple of my eye I might add. She is the youngest of our seven grandchildren. Anyway, when we went over there, Helen concerned about the whole venture. Not frightened but concerned. We got to the Spaso House, the ambassador's residence. Before we could get across the threshold, one side, the big double doors swung open just like a scene out of an opera. There were about six or eight servants on one side and six or eight staff on the other side. The man greeted us in a tux. He said, "Mr. Ambassador, Mrs. Strauss, may I present the staff." He did, one by one. We still had the luggage and the security guy and everything behind us. We hadn't gotten in there yet. He said, "I am sorry I did this so poorly, but," his name was Angelo, he was Italian, but he said, "Mario," I think his name, "always did this. I have never done it before. That is why I did it so poorly." I said, "You did fine, but I expect to see Mario," whatever his name, something like Mario. "I expect to see him. Everybody told me he had run this house perfectly, and I didn't have to worry about it, and he would know how to do everything." He said, "He is dead." I said, "What happened to him? Dead?" I was stunned. I thought he was going to say he was killed in the coup time. He said, "Well he was playing cards and a man came in and accused him of having an affair with his wife and shot and killed him and the fellow he was playing cards with sitting next to him." Helen's mouth popped open, mine too. I turned to Helen and said, "There are two things. You have got all these worries. There are two things you don't have to worry about here. You don't need to worry about me gambling or running around with a wife.' That story cured me about gambling or running around with somebody's wife.

Q: Did when you initially got there, were you looking for a power center or was the idea that we were going to do everything we could to show our support for Gorbachev and all, or were any hedging of the bets looking at Yeltsin?

STRAUSS: None. As a matter of fact, the press was already beginning to say, would be critical of President Bush for being too supportive of President Gorbachev, for staying too long with him. What we were worried about was we didn't have any money to do a damn thing. President Bush was not prepared to go to Congress and ask for a lot of money. They needed help. They needed food badly. They needed other kind of support. We knew we couldn't give it to them, so we had to give them more conversation than cash is the way I used to describe it. That was our biggest problem doing something for them, making the Russian people feel like we were doing more. When we had once sent some food over there, we took the food that was left over from that Mideast Gulf War, all that canned food that had been shipped, was shipped to Russia and Moscow and distributed. We didn't have money to buy foodstuffs.

Q: Why was there this problem? Here we had been spending trillions on defending against the threat of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was beginning to look like maybe it was coming around to being, it had supported us during the Iraq invasion of Kuwait and all. Why all of a sudden was the spigot off, there was no money? What was the problem? How did you see this?

STRAUSS: Well keep in mind this was a Republican administration. They were goosey about the conservative wing of the party thinking they were doing too much for those communists. They weren't prepared to take on a fight to fight for that, and didn't, I might add. Our primary concern did not involve a lot of money. I mean our primary thing we could do for them had to be things that didn't involve a lot of money. We got legislation passed that didn't need much help from me, it did some, but Senator Lugar had enough going for him. The first thing we were interested in more than anything else was getting our hands on and getting control of nuclear weapons that were scattered around in four different republics over there, get them all in Russian hands, which we were able to do and, interestingly, the Congress were a great help in that. They helped, now we have trouble with them, but then they were our strongest supporters. But that was the climate in which we worked. No one wanted to go to Congress and ask them for anything of any consequence.

Q: Well was the feeling that the conservative wing was so anti communist that they couldn't envisage doing something?

STRAUSS: I don't think that is an overstatement. I think that is the responsive statement. I know President Bush was intimidated to some extent by his right wing as most Republican presidents are, just as the left wing intimidates Democratic presidents. The right wing is structured. They have money and organization and structure. They can crush you. In our party the left wing can drive you crazy. They don't crush you; they buzz around you and sting and end up as I said driving you crazy. They don't have the structure or the organization or the money that the Republican right has.

Q: This would seem to be that ideological cohesiveness.

STRAUSS: No not at all.

Q: During your early days there, were you getting any indications or contacts with the Congress? I am not talking about something beyond the presidency, but I mean this is part of your competence. Excuse me. I want to stop this now, we are really talking about the first few days you were in the Soviet Union at that time. So we will pick it up. I had asked you a question about did you have ties to the political system in the United States? We are talking about Republicans and Democrats, but Congress of trying to get them to come along and understand, Gee things are really happening here and let's not...

STRAUSS: That is a very good point. I came back to this country quite often to go to Congress. I had more credentials, more credibility on both sides of the aisle I think than others in this administration had. A lot of things we were working on getting done, a lot of problems we had been solved for ourselves, I came back and solved it. Whether it was a problem of Representative Snowe or senator this or that, I had those kinds of relationships, and I came back here and lobbied for various things. I forget what particular problem it was. I came back and went before the republican caucus and the democratic caucus. I will never forget when I faced the republican caucus Newt Gingrich came up to me and said, "I think you are right, and I will help you. Anything you need over there, you call me, and I will help you." Now I had doubts about Newt Gingrich, but as far as that went he certainly delivered for me.

Q: I have just one other question I want to put in, a sort of philosophical one. Often a bureaucracy likes things, and diplomacy is particularly bad in this form, likes the status quo. They know how to deal with it. With the fast breaking thing, did you find that people were really getting uncomfortable with things changing in something which we had been used to since the days of Stalin. and I'll leave it at that.

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Today is February 26, 2003. Mr. Ambassador, let's talk. First, would you like to talk about dealing with the political establishment in the United States because you know, most of these senators and congressmen had sucked off the teat of anti-communism for years? Russia was a great whipping boy and all this. Was this a problem for you?

STRAUSS: No question the statement you just made is 100% correct. But let me lead into this whole thing by backing up just a bit from the statements I just made about coming back to this country. To put it in proper context, while I considered myself to be more agile and sophisticated than the foreign service when it came to solving political problems in the foreign policy area with the hill, I also had enough sense to know that while I had uniquely splendid skills in that area, I did not have skills in foreign policy generally, and certainly not in Soviet Union affairs. I was hesitant as I think I said earlier in this tape some hours ago that President Bush sent me over there. His argument was, he had two or three arguments when I was hesitant about going initially. One was that he needed someone, when I was telling him I didn't know the issues, he needed someone with a background in Russian affairs. He said, "No, you are wrong. I need someone who for one can establish a real relationship with Gorbachev, because he needs someone on the ground. Most of these things we can help with from here, but the personal relationship I need with Gorbachev, you can establish for me and for this country. That will be your strength. And the fact that you understand the political process, that we won't get anything done over there, we are going to have to have some legislative support. There is no support for it right now to amount to anything." So that was kind of the setting in which I went over there. The truth of the matter is, simply stated is that President Bush was right. I was a non-traditional ambassador to the Soviet Union, and yet all the voids I had and all the negatives I had in that area, I had some unique strengths in areas that he thought needed attention, better attention than he could get with just another diplomat. So that is the setting for all this. I knew that people steeped in U.S.-Russian, U.S.-Soviet affairs wondered how in the hell he could turn it over to a rank amateur, or turn the embassy over to a rank amateur. The answer to that is very simple. He had some priorities where I had unique skills. Furthermore he knew that he could get good help for me. One of the things he did, for example, was assure me when I said that I would need the absolutely best number two man you have got, he said, "I will give you the best we have." That is Jim Collins who succeeded me later on with one person in between as ambassador and probably knows more about those affairs than anybody in the country. So with Jim Collins' help I did pretty well. Collins has in his office now, he has a picture with his hair dark. Now it is about the color of yours which is very grey. When I said, "Collins, is that your high school picture you have there with that dark hair?" He said to me recently his answer was, "No that was my dark hair before I met you, before you arrived in Moscow."

Q: Well I have talked to him and am going to get in contact with him in April. Now, what about this Congress? I mean who were some of the players and what did we want, what did George Bush want out of Congress, and who did you see were the key people you had to deal with and the problem people?

STRAUSS: George Bush knew, he felt like he didn't have any money to spend in that part of the world. As a matter of fact he and Brent Scowcroft who was the National Security Advisor both said to me, "One of the primary reasons for you going over there, Bob, is as a signal that we really give a damn about this country, because we are not going to be able to prove it with aid. We are not going to have an aid program of any consequence, nor did they really try for one I might add. But he said, "This had to signal people in Europe and around the world. Most of the leaders of the world you have met and done some business with over the years. They know I wouldn't send you over there, and you wouldn't go unless you thought you could do something. This sends the right signal that we care and we are going to be involved with you. I get more out of the signal this sends." I think it was Scowcroft once who said, "We will get more out of the signal by sending you over there and you going if you don't do another damn thing. It will be positive." So this was the kind of climate we were operating. Now keep in mind, my primary concern on the day I went over there was to first help stabilize the Gorbachev government. But even more important was to get our hands on the nukes, and get them gathered up. We had, I must say with practically no help from me, because Nunn and Lugar didn't need it, we had the Nunn and Lugar legislation.

Q: That is Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar.

STRAUSS: Exactly, and their legislation was aimed at getting the money and a program together that would enable us to get our hands on nuclear material scattered in four different countries including Russia and three other Soviet countries. We did that successfully, they did. Sam Nunn and Senator Lugar deserve a lot of credit for that. Jim Baker had a good hand in it, and I helped him, so we all contributed, but the two senators played the leading role.

Q: Well now were there groups within the government, well let's talk about first the legislature, congress, that saw everything saying well these are just communists under a different name. They are trying to snooker us. I mean were there some?

STRAUSS: Yes, there were a lot of them. Some of them were sincere, and some was just politics and thought it played well back home. You have to kick somebody, kick the dog, kick the communists. But generally speaking, Congress went along pretty well. We didn't ask for very much, and I think that is one of the failures, and I am a big fan of George Bush senior as you know, a good friend. But I think one of the things they could have done is they could have asked for more in terms of aid. They really needed aid; they were hungry over there. We didn't do a very good job of putting an aid package together. We put stuff that looked good but really didn't have much substance.

Q: Well I sort of have the feeling that no matter what we did, things were so chaotic at that point in the economic sense. I mean you sort of had the communist leaders running around turning into capitalists, absorbing all the money that came in anywhere and sort of looting essentially the system.

STRAUSS: I don't think there is any question that was done, but I also think that there were a lot of people hungry over there then and we didn't really have an aid program. When I am talking about aid, I am not talking about economic programs needed. There was enough structure there to get to build the kind of economic programs they needed, but in terms of just food, those people were hungry there. It was a terrible time. We could have done more, but I think the times didn't permit President Bush to do much more than he did.

Q: We talked about us, but what about western Europe.

STRAUSS: Germany of course. Germany did more than any of us I suspect. They had their next door neighbor. It was an easier sale for them. They had economic interests that were far bigger than ours at the time. They were doing a lot of business over there. I was always amazed when you would go to a hotel, I might have mentioned this earlier. If you go to a hotel in France, you can register in English or in French, but there is also a line in English that tells you what line to write on. The same thing is true in Italy. But in Russia, when I went to a hotel it was in Russian or in German, no English.

Q: Well you mentioned the Germans had economic interests. Of course one of the charges that is laid on us, I am not sure it is necessarily a bad one, but whatever we do is economically motivated. You as ambassador, did you find yourself driven at all by saying we want to get this concession or open up business here? How much was this a factor?

STRAUSS: It really wasn't a factor then. We were really, every day trying to get through that day without something blowing up. By blowing up I don't mean exploding. A program that we couldn't get started or a program that was started and abandoned. Little things like getting our American school going over there was almost impossible. We finally got it done, but that was just a little simple thing and that was something that we...

Q: Did you find either chaos or obstinacy in the Russian bureaucracy or were they at sort of a standstill. They didn't know what the hell to do and so if you don't know what to do, you don't do anything.

STRAUSS: Well you have to realize there was no rule of law. There was no legal system that amounted to anything. There was no judicial system that amounted to anything. There was no way to enforce a contract to try and do business. It was a terribly difficult time. Nothing we would have done would have helped that in the short run in my judgment. I was talking about aid. I think I told a story earlier about our sending in a lot of food that was left over from the Gulf war. I opened it in front of all the television cameras, peach pie or peach cobbler or something. They expected to see potatoes and beans.

Q: Those meals ready to eat, MREs.

STRAUSS: Yes.

Q: A question I put at the end of our last session that you know in the Department of State or anything, it is a bureaucratic thing and you are used to the way things are. All of a sudden after 50 years or so of dealing with the Soviets all of a sudden the thing is blown apart. How did you find people responding? I mean were they still sort of working on the old assumptions? Did you notice a change around in dealing with this?

STRAUSS: Of course there were dramatic interludes where there were dramatic changes. There was a basic change of communism slipping away. There was a basic change of the whole Soviet Union disappeared on us. There was a basic change of Gorbachev was destroyed by Yeltsin and we start all over again with new people and new initiatives. So to say it was complicated and messy is an understatement. But with all that going on, we established some good relationships. I don't know whether I mentioned this or not, but I was thinking the other day again about the communication system in this country, and telecom problems we have, the bankruptcies and big companies. I remember getting a call from the chairman of Motorola, I may have told this story.

Q: It doesn't ring a bell.

STRAUSS: He said to me, "Bob, there is," I had known him before. He is a fine man. He said, "I am calling on behalf of our whole industry. There is a communications conference. They are allocating spectrums in a big international conference in Spain that is taking place in Madrid as we speak. The spectrum have been allocated in this conference is not nearly big enough to take care of our needs. Can you help? It had to be done in the next 72 hours. This conference winds up in three days, to turn this around." I said, "Good Lord, I don't even know what you are talking about. I don't understand the issue, but I have people here who will, and I will talk with them and see." I said, "But I can't do this just for Motorola." He said, "No, I don't want you to do that. I want the U.S. to get a big spectrum, a larger spectrum than we have. We need that. Once we get the spectrum assigned to our country, we will fight it out among ourselves as to who gets what allocation out of that. You get us the United States to get the right allocation, a big enough spectrum. That is all you have to be for, not for any one company." I remember going to Yeltsin and taking a fellow with a technical background with me who could explain. I couldn't even explain what I wanted. I told Yeltsin what we needed. He had a spectrum much larger assigned to them, and they hated it. We had one much smaller, and we did need a bigger one, and he could get by better with a smaller one. He didn't understand what I was talking about any more than I did truth is. They sent us to his person, Yeltsin did, and told the fellow to try to help right there. Within two days, they agreed to switch spectrums with us, and Yeltsin personally caused that to take place. So in that sort of thing they were cooperative. Again, that goes back, Bush wanted a personal relationship to get some things done. That was my primary responsibility over there to establish that kind of relationship at the highest levels in his government.

Q: Well you were right there, the coup against Gorbachev had already taken place hadn't it.

STRAUSS: Well it was in process.

Q: You had to rush out there because of that.

STRAUSS: Yes. When I arrived, he was still being held by the coup plotters.

Q: By the time you arrived, was anybody that you were getting from our embassy, were we doing anything to thwart the coup?

STRAUSS: No. We hadn't even said what side we were on. As a matter of fact, the Russians settled that themselves. I think President Bush and his team wisely kept their mouth shut for a few days until we could see what to do. As a matter of fact, I know, I am sure I have told this story in here, but I will repeat it. But I remember arriving, being met by Jim Collins. As a matter of fact he drove me to his residence I think it was. No I know it wasn't his house, the ambassador's residence. I don't think it was even the main embassy, but whatever it was, when I arrived and walked in that room, Gorbachev was being held by the plotters. Jim Collins said to me, "I have gotten the staff together. We need to make up our mind. We need to give them some guidance. What do we do?" I said, I wondered to myself now, of all the people in the world to be picked to decide what our country is going to do, I am maybe one of the worst. I said to Jim Collins, "See if somebody can get Dobrynin on the phone." I knew Dobrynin back in this country, had dinner at the Russian embassy many times. He and I had become friends. The Russian telephone system never works. There are no phone booths. There weren't then. If you got through it was a miracle and it was usually a wrong number. I'll be damned if the Lord didn't help because in 30 seconds this young aide out there came back and said, "Ambassador Dobrynin is on the phone, Mr. Ambassador."

Q: He at that time was part of the politburo wasn't he?

STRAUSS: Yes, he had come back. I said, "Anatoly, Bob Strauss." He laughed. He didn't laugh, he chuckled, and said, "I have been expecting to hear from you where are you?" I said, "I am right here in Moscow, and I want to tell you that I have just arrived within the hour. My people and my government want to know what is going on and what to do, any recommendations we have at the embassy. It is rather strange for me to be calling on a Russian to help make this decision but I need you. What should we do?" He said, "I will tell you what you should do, Bob. Do nothing. I am privy to some things taking place, and I think if you can keep from saying anything and doing anything for 48 hours, this might blow over. These are irresponsible people who don't really know what they are doing that have our President." I said, "Thank you, Anatoly, that makes sense to me." I turned around to Collins and told him what it was, Anatoly said do nothing. Collins thought that was very good advice too. That is what we reported to Washington. That again is personal diplomacy, personal relationships.

Q: Which is very important at a critical time. I have to say that the Bush administration showed a great deal of restraint. At the fall of the Berlin Wall, George Bush didn't end up dancing on the ruins of it and all, which is hard because normally the White House wants to crow. We did this and all that which is always counterproductive in foreign relations. It is hard in a way to control and discipline your staff to keep them from running around and saying I caused the fall of the Soviet Union etc.

STRAUSS: As we are speaking, you and I today, in late February the Iraqi situation is coming to a total boil now. I wish we had, I would be more comfortable if we had Bush senior instead of Bush junior. Now there are things Bush junior can do I am sure better than his father can do, but when it comes to the world possibly going up in flames, I would like to have the cool, calm, cautious Bush senior playing the hand for our country.

Q: Well now back to, when Gorbachev came back shortly thereafter, the coup went down. you were sort of sent over at the time to establish good relations with Gorbachev. What was the feeling that you were getting from the people in your own sense? That Gorbachev was a finished figure or were you kind of waiting for him to come back?

STRAUSS: I think people thought generally that Gorbachev was in the twilight. By that I mean maybe he had two years or maybe three years, maybe a year. I don't think anyone dreamt that his fall would come as quick as it did. There is no question that that is what was thought. I thought he would last longer than he did, as did my administration that I was working for, the Republican administration. I remember when I spoke before this large crowd of people at the memorial service there two or three days after. I think we have discussed that already. I remember, I think I have it in our notes here. If not just put it in. When I said to President Gorbachev when he greeted me behind that sound truck or that truck they were using for a platform there. I remember when I said, "I would like to speak; I have a message from the President of the United States." He said, "You speak? Why would you speak?" I said, "Mr. President, I can't think of anything more important to you and the people of the Soviet Union and the world than a message to you delivered to you by your ambassador, by Bush's ambassador, a message from President Bush saying that the United States is behind you. That would be the thrust of my remarks." You could see a light turn on in Gorbachev's confused head then because he was terribly confused still from the captivity. I guess it was the next day or two days after that. You could see in his eyes a light going on. He said, "You will speak right before me." So that was the climate there. We really were worried about getting him. We wanted to be sure that he got re-established as head of that government. That was the first concern. But did he think he was going to last forever, no. Did we think we would lose him in six months, no.

Q: As a political observer, one reason why often professional politicians or people who are quasi professional - I don't know what you would call yourself - are better observers and able to deal with politicians better than say foreign service people who you know, this isn't their world. They report on it, but were you watching, looking at signs of change in the Russian system. Gorbachev is back; Yeltsin had performed splendidly at the time of the coup. How were you observing this power business, and what did it hold for us?

STRAUSS: You could see that Yeltsin, it was a very hard hand to play. Keep in mind that two months before this, two or three months before this at the most...

Q: This is tape seven, side one with Robert Strauss.

STRAUSS: President Bush strolled in the office informally, preplanned, of course, where he could shake hands with Yeltsin, then head of the Republic of Russia, not head of the Soviet Union of course, and greet him but not be caught with him. The press reported he went to the White House and saw Scowcroft, not that he went to the White House and had a visit with the President. President Bush, obviously properly, was concerned that if he met with him it sent a wrong signal to Yeltsin, to Gorbachev, because they were already jockeying for position. This is long before the coup. After the coup that jockeying became, instead of nuance, became open. Yeltsin started pushing and pushing for power. President Bush, of course, was concerned about that, his people were. They hadn't really established a relationship with Yeltsin. Jim Baker did a good job when he first went over and dealt with him the first time. He was Secretary of State when he went over. Yeltsin liked him almost from the get go. Yeltsin heard good things about Jim Baker, I believe, because I saw Yeltsin regularly, and it didn't take Baker long to show that he was even better than I was suggesting to Yeltsin. He handled it extremely well.

Q: How, I mean you arrived; you already talked to Gorbachev. We are concerned about the Yeltsin-Gorbachev relationship. Gorbachev was sort of our boy you might say. But when you arrived, how did you establish relations with Yeltsin, and how did that develop?

STRAUSS: Very loosely and very casually. I did not really have a relationship of any consequence with Yeltsin until he came to authority. I couldn't do that. We couldn't get involved in that game going on between the two of them, so the only thing I could do is nod in Yeltsin's direction from time to time. I was openly, and we were openly pro Gorbachev knowing that his days were limited. Keep in mind this coup was in August, and by Christmas of that same year Gorbachev had resigned. The new Soviet Union was in the process of breaking up.

Q: Well now, what were you getting from your staff, from Collins and others in the political section and all about where things are going when you arrived there. I mean were we beginning to take another look at Yeltsin, because you know, there had been this thing particularly from that Yeltsin visit of somehow if Gorbachev was our guy, Yeltsin was a drunkard.

STRAUSS: Radical.

Q: All this. I mean it was denigrating.

STRAUSS: I think erratic is a perfect term.

Q: So were we beginning You know, your staff saying hey we had better look at this guy.

STRAUSS: They of course, were looking at him before I got there. There was a big question about Yeltsin, you are exactly right. I used the term erratic. I think I told the story about Yeltsin visiting in the Seaview Hotel. Duane Andrews arranged for him to occupy one of his suites in that hotel. It turned out to be his daughter's suite who was not there using it. Yeltsin got drunk that night and went out in the water swimming at midnight the first night he was there and got a little publicity around, more than we wanted, so he was a difficult fellow to handle. That was before he came to power, before Gorbachev went out of power.

Q: Well I mean during this time August through December, what were you doing. I mean was there essentially a power vacuum at that time?

STRAUSS: No, Gorbachev, to all intents and purposes, he was the head of the Soviet Union. Now he was shaky, but he had me take the head of Kazakhstan who was a Gorbachev man. He wasn't a Yeltsin man. He later became a Yeltsin person, but many of the other presidents of those various republics were Gorbachev people. Some of them were beginning to be Yeltsin people. Some were beginning more and more to give up on Gorbachev as being the guy who could pull it off.

Q: During this Gorbachev period, you mentioned we were very concerned about disarming nuclear weapons in, actually at that point it was still the Soviet Union.

STRAUSS: Exactly.

Q: But still these were...

STRAUSS: They controlled their own nukes. They had their own nuclear programs in these separate republics.

Q: I mean these missiles were distributed as we had distributed ours through the states.

STRAUSS: Exactly.

Q: But these were under government, I mean these places as the Soviet Union began to fall apart, these elements within the Soviet system turning into independent states.

STRAUSS: That is correct.

Q: Now were you seeing Gorbachev about saying while there was still the Soviet Union in existence, were you seeing him about the disarmament?

STRAUSS: Yes, and keep in mind, more important than me seeing him was Jim Baker was spending a lot of time over there. It was far more impressive to have the Secretary of State making demands than the ambassador who was delivering messages from the Secretary of State, the head of our government. Baker had his hands all over that, and Yeltsin liked Baker as Gorbachev liked Baker. But the minute Gorbachev went, the pressure in the Soviet Union disintegrated.

Q: I think it was December.

STRAUSS: It was Christmas Day.

Q: On Christmas Day the Russian flag went up over the Kremlin.

STRAUSS: That's right, and at that time, I won't describe it as a mad scramble, but there was a great deal of additional intensity that went into the program that Jim Baker was leading. I went as ambassador assisting in getting his hands on those units and also getting Yeltsin to commit, which he did. He was very strong in his commitment. Jim Baker was very impressed as was George Bush with what he produced.

Q: Did you find that from Yeltsin on this issue, was he as concerned as we were about the proliferation, or was this trying to be nice to the United States during this?

STRAUSS: Oh I think he was some of both. Yeltsin knew he needed the United States. Yeltsin gave a firm commitment to Jim Baker that he had control and would keep control. I guess Baker relied on that commitment. He couldn't do anything but rely on it; it was the best thing he had was Yeltsin's commitment. I must say that to be sure there was no misunderstanding, Yeltsin, as Gorbachev before him, delivered on that commitment in terms of nukes, nuclear programs. They were gathered up properly. It took many trips by people back in Washington and efforts by me and others in our embassy, but we got it done.

Q: Were you seeing as this Gorbachev-Yeltsin thing, rivalry went and it was beginning to move over toward Yeltsin. Were you seeing a shift in the Soviet bureaucracy?

STRAUSS: Oh, sure.

Q: Who was the foreign minister at the time? Was it still Shevardnadze?

STRAUSS: No, Shevardnadze was gone. He stayed in all the way, I will think of his name in just a minute. He still comes over to this country all the time. He was the foreign minister is what he was. He was Baker's counterpart. He was most cooperative, very pro American by the way.

Q: Were you seeing a change in attitude in our embassy or staff there? This is too serious to play the Cold War business and let's get...

STRAUSS: I think what you saw there is what you see in any bureaucracy. There is a certain odor that comes before the death, and the odor was in his final year, final months. As a matter of fact, I was back in the States to celebrate Christmas with my family on the day Gorbachev left office and Yeltsin came in. I never would have left my post out there if we had had any notion that that was going to happen. As a matter of fact, very few of the heads of the republics knew it was going to happen. But it did.

Q: What was the sounding that you were getting about within Russia, well the Soviet Union at that time, about Yeltsin? Were there lots of reservations about nomenklatura about, because we mentioned this erratic business.

STRAUSS: He was a wild card as far as many of them were concerned. Keep in mind, he had a personality; he had an image of being a great reformer, so he had a lot of positive things about him as well as the negative aspect of somewhat erratic behavior. He was relentless in his drive for power. When he got power he used it. I say used it, that is a big term, but he liked that power and he had no hesitance about making decisions. He was a good decision maker. Gorbachev was far more a talker in many ways. I was and am a great admirer of him. He was no longer effective, let me say that, as far as the Russian people were concerned. So, though people had a question mark about Yeltsin, they were ready for a change. When things are terrible, you are always ready for a change. Anything would be better than what is going on.

Q: How did you sort of open up your initial contact with Yeltsin? I am talking about after December, he is in power. What were you getting from George Bush, Jim Baker about how to deal with him?

STRAUSS: They were cautious, but they knew they had to establish a relationship in a hurry, so I left my holiday in the States and went back to Moscow. I don't remember the details, but I remember the first thing I did was let Yeltsin's office know I wanted to come in and see him. Within no time it was granted. I had a lucky thing there I may have explained to you earlier in this - I think I did - that he came to this country shortly after I was appointed but long before I was confirmed, and so things he did, I was included in the things he was doing and got to know him pretty well. By pretty well, sitting next to him at two or three dinners and talking and relating to him as he related to me. I think I told you earlier in this he was trying to get into the Space Center in Houston. I had to call Brent Scowcroft. He was anxious to see it. Scowcroft was National Security Advisor. I called General Scowcroft and told him that it was the craziest thing in the world, a stranger could walk off the street and go in there, no security clearance of any kind required. We had this Russian who someday could be head of that government. That was before he became head of that government, but he was president of Russia, and he couldn't get into that program. Scowcroft said, "I'll take care of it right now," and he did. So that was a big thing in Yeltsin's mind that I had gotten that thing done. He was waiting, and almost as he brought up the problem, it was solved. He also was friendly with, he had come to know Dwayne Andreas.

Q: Dwayne Andreas being?

STRAUSS: At the time he was chairman of the company Archer Daniels Midland. They did a lot of business with Russia. He was reasonably well known in Russia. He was close to and friendly with them. When Yeltsin came to this country, I don't know, how he got in touch with Andreas or who recommended him, but Andreas, my recollection is, loaned him an Archer Daniels Midland plane to get him around. This is before he came into power, and Andreas provided him an apartment where he stayed for a few days at the Seaview Hotel in Florida. I went down and saw him there. So by the time he came to power, he knew Bob Strauss was a friend of friends of his and that sort of thing. When I called to see him of course the American ambassador is going to get to see him anyway. I could have been anybody, but I had the advantage of having a bit of a personal relationship with him. It grew. He was extremely fond of me by the time I left and I was of him.

Q: How did you find, you know, did he grasp the complexities of the situation? In other words you raise issues?

STRAUSS: Yes, he was very bright. He was very good at that, he really was. He was a good listener as well as a good talker. He had good people around him. He was a dynamic figure then. He was far more dynamic, I guess, at that time than Gorbachev who was worn out. People were tired of him. This is a new face, and this was the man who had saved the country from this coup. Remember the pictures of him standing on this tank and all this stuff. So he had an image of, a hero's image when he came into office. He knew how to take advantage of that.

Q: When you were there, how about the KGB? How did they, I mean, the KGB was the bï¿½te noire of the American embassy, provocations, enticements, you know the whole thing? I mean were you seeing a change?

STRAUSS: Yes and no. After came in, we saw the more dramatic change when he replaced a bunch of the older KGB types. There was a young reformer that came in with him whose name I forget, but he reminded me of a Midwestern governor in our country. He looked like it. He could have been governor of Indiana or Michigan, that sort of thing. He was a tremendous strength in reforming. I remember him saying to me after he and I came to know each other, talk some. I had fellow named Bill Reardon who was a CIA head for that whole part of the world. He was in an office in Germany. Bill Reardon, he is still around. He is not active in the CIA, but he was one of the colorful figures. When he came to visit, I introduced him to the head of the KGB. Bill said to me, "They really are trying to reform this agency to some extent, but you know, God only knows what is in those files, and I don't know when we will ever get to see them." Interestingly, that fellow who was head of the KGB, one day, called me to come over. He said that he decided he had permission of his government to turn over all the information on the wiretaps that they had planted while the building was being built - a six story building was being built on our land there for our embassy to occupy. He brought out what looked like two ordinary suitcases, old time suitcases. In them there must have been 30 different listening devices. In the other package were maps going everywhere. Every single one of those listening devices was placed in the concrete of the building we were building there by the Russian workers. They were KGB and were planting those things all over. I was stunned. I didn't know whether to take it or not. I came back and called Larry Eagleburger the Deputy Secretary of State. I said, "Larry," and I relayed this story to him. I said, "It seems to me I ought to take them," but I didn't want to take them until I got permission. He said, "Hell I don't know what to do. It seems to me we are better off taking them than not taking them." I told him that is the way it seems to me but I didn't want to get out of line here. So I called this fellow back. I can't think of his name, and told him I would be over the next day and pick it up. We picked up the two big boxes, big suitcases full of material. He invited me out to his dacha with my wife, and he had Shevardnadze and their wives. He said to me, "What did you think of the material we gave you yesterday." I said, "I was stunned by it, but I wasn't surprised that you had it, but I was stunned at what you did." He said, "We are going to turn this around, and that is a real demonstration of our efforts." I came back and went public with that.

Q: I remember it was in the paper. To me it was a great indicator things were changing. It is always hard to turn, as I mentioned earlier on, a bureaucracy does not respond well to sudden change.

STRAUSS: Exactly, and I was trying when I went public with that, it was because I wanted the American people to see. That was something they could really see instead of a theory that things are changing. This was something very constructive they could see and hold in your hand. I gave a speech at the press club when I was back on a trip. I told that story. That is when it got the publicity.

Q: What about, speaking of the embassy, where were you, I mean for years there had been this conflict over we knew we built a new embassy and we were sure the thing was bugged. We were talking about destroying it and all this. Did you have to wrestle with this problem?

STRAUSS: Constantly. We had trouble, you know, we were convinced that all those bugs were dead. They only last so long. We wanted to use the building. People in the Congress didn't want us to; there was a lot of objection to our using it. It was just sitting there wasting, going to rot and ruin, and all that money. As a matter of fact the head of the KGB, the new reformer said to me, "This will save your country many millions of dollars. You don't have to rebuild a building; you can use it. Here is a map of where all the bugs are placed. It will save you 50 million dollars. You are generous with our country, we can at least do this." So that was sort of the theme of that from the head of the KGB. I might add, they fired him about three months later. Somebody over there changed their mind I guess about him being so open. He had done it with Gorbachev's absolute approval.

Q: Well now, speaking of the embassy and running it, as an old hand who served five years in Yugoslavia, a communist country, what was the situation with what we would call foreign service nationals? In other words citizens of the country that worked in the embassy. These are usually a great strength even in a communist country. At one point we were replacing them with Americans. You know, to a professional foreign service officer it sounded like nonsense. It sounded like political correctness or something.

STRAUSS: It was Congressional demands. We couldn't employ locals. It cost us a tremendous amount of money to bring an American worker who worked for Bechtel Corporation, for Bechtel to bring a hundred workers over to work on our projects. The expense of that was 20-1 over the expense of using the Russians. One of the things we accomplished while I was there was I testified before the senate and house committees that we ought to reverse that policy. The government was willing, the executive branch was willing to do it finally, but the congressional committees were opposed to it. So we finally turned them around and we got permission to use in various non sensitive posts so to speak, non sensitive jobs, Russian nationals instead of imported Americans. It was a big savings of money, but I must tell you that within a month of the time that those Russians started taking the place of our Americans, the KGB people were pushing them to provide information. They were concerned what should they do. They were frightened. So it was an unpleasant situation.

Q: I mean those who have served in communist countries understand this, and you learn to live with this. I mean these are good solid contacts within the country who can give you ideas. They are not all that much tool. I mean these are ordinary citizens who understand the situation and have a certain loyalty obviously to their country, but also to their job. It is a strength rather than a weakness as long as you understand that you have got to be careful.

STRAUSS: Extremely careful. I can understand why there was hesitancy to let us use Russian nationals, but I must tell you the minute we started using them, and we were using them to mow lawns and keep the outside of buildings painted and things like that, but as I said earlier, within 30 or 60 days of them coming to work, the parties were squeezing these people over there for information. Happily they didn't have any. Several of them reported those efforts. They liked their jobs as you just mentioned. They didn't want to be involved in that kind of business. But we got it done; it was worthwhile, and keep in mind, we had tremendous budgetary problems. I think we had better quit.

Q: All right. We are going to stop at this point. A couple of questions I would like to ask, we are talking on the security side. I would like to ask you about during the time you were in the Soviet Union/Russia, did the KGB start picking up these provocations, tracking, following, you know generally harassing? I am talking about the Americans particularly, and our ability to get around and all that. We will talk about that. Also, could you talk about the decision that was made because of financial things that really fell at Secretary Baker's level, not to increase our State Department budget to take care of all these new embassies that we were establishing. To somebody like myself, this seemed like a horrible situation. Could we talk about that? And then we will talk about the post December when the...

STRAUSS: '91-'92 Christmas.

Q: Okay, then we will talk about what happened, issues you were dealing with and all that.

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Today is March 5, 2003. Let's start with the KGB. You have already mentioned the bugging of the embassy and being given that portfolio full of stuff. What about, you know, you had KGB operatives, they had been doing this for 50 years, in a relatively weak government. I find it very difficult to think that they would all of a sudden turn into nice guys as far as we are concerned. In your experience, how were they treating American diplomats and others? Were you running across provocations? I mean was it still sort of the old game going on by reflex or by intent.

STRAUSS: It was dying off, but very slowly. For example, I came back here and met with some Congressmen and Senators to get them to get over this idea that we could not employ foreign nationals in our embassy for security reasons. Our people in our embassy worked out a plan where we would use Russians for certain tasks, repairing windows, mowing lawns, painting houses, all within the compound, various types of work that didn't put them in touch with anything related to security. The last person I needed to get was Senator Snowe.

Q: This was Olympia Snowe of Maine.

STRAUSS: Yes. And she was helpful once I came back and talked with her. Her committee had been blocking anything on this, but she was exceedingly constructive. She promptly got on it and helped us work it out. So we then started, let me back up and say bringing these Americans over there to work on these tasks cost a fortune. First you had to pay them six times as much or ten times as much as you would pay a Russian. You had their transportation; you had their housing, all that. So it was a major budgetary item if we could save it. So we replaced maybe 50 people which is big money when you do it.

Q: Oh, yes. You consider I can remember way back, you consider $30,000 just to pay somebody to be overseas.

STRAUSS: Heck, I think it cost $100,000 for a person over there.

Q: Yes, well I was going way back.

STRAUSS: So we had, I guess, maybe 30 or 40, maybe less, Russians working within the embassy compound. We cleared them security wise the best we could. We had good people. They did good work. It hadn't been going on for about three or four months until we began to get information that the Russian security people were contacting them and trying to get this information, that information, the other information. Interestingly, two of those people, I don't know how many were contacted, but two of them came and brought us identical stories. They didn't want to lose those jobs. The committed to something and they wanted to fulfill their commitment. We had a heck of a time with that, but stayed on top of it, and I think we finally worked it out pretty well. Now there are a great many of the Russians working within the compound, and very successfully so.

Q: Well what about, it used to be on field trips or something we were concerned about officers, you had to have two going out so the blond provocateur and lady did not approach them at night and that sort of thing. Was that still going on?

STRAUSS: I don't think we had that going on. I don't know that the CIA, I don't know what their rules were or that they were in line. They were housed with the ambassador in the same building and I was responsible for them, but I didn't set their rules. They set that within their organization.

Q: Was the chief of station in Moscow announced?

STRAUSS: No he wasn't. His identity was theoretically undisclosed.

Q: Because often it just makes it simpler.

STRAUSS: They just called him. They didn't know he was an embassy employee.

Q: Were you finding say relations with the state security service beginning to change?

STRAUSS: Oh it changed a great deal. As a matter of fact, I have a picture in the next room of Bob Gates when he was head of the CIA meeting with Boris and the head of the KGB and others around a conference table. That was '92. Boris was in that picture. We had it when I, I think I mentioned earlier when the KGB turned over to me this, the new reformer that had turned over to me this all these two bags copies of where all the things were planted in our building. was trying his best to be helpful there. I remember he said to me, "I know it is going to cost you $75 million. You do your best to give us financial support and other things which we desperately need. Maybe we saved you a little money if we give you this and you can use that building rather than tearing it down." I think they did tear down must of it eventually, but they still saved several floors of it they were able to use. He thought he was making it easier for us to use that building instead of having to build a new one.

Q: Well, of course, you are running across the difference... There is the political side, and then there is the professional spy thing. Professional spies spy. The political types come in and go in both our countries, but the professional spies stay on and they keep doing their thing.

STRAUSS: Also in both of our countries. When Shevardnadze and I were in a plane together coming. I don't know why we were traveling together, but he was a good friend. I was complaining about the intrusion into my privacy by the residence I lived in as well as our offices all being bugged. He said, "Bob, I will tell you, if you want me to I will bring you a whole basketful of U.S. made bugs that we have taken out of our own buildings, so it works both ways." I said, "Well yes, I am aware of that." He kind of shamed me a little bit.

Q: Were we seeing, when did we realize the Soviet Union was going to dissolve?

STRAUSS: I think we knew that in the fall of '91. What we didn't expect was that Gorbachev would step down as early as Christmas, '91. I know our CIA people didn't expect it that soon. We certainly didn't at the embassy. But everyone knew Gorbachev's days were numbered. People thought they were numbered in terms of years, not in terms of days or hours which proved to be the case.

Q: When all this was going on, I mean at the time things were going through this massive change, what were you getting from your Russian experts at the embassy, Soviet experts, about what brought about this? Was it economics; was it American star wars pressure; was it ineptness of the government? I mean what was bringing about this change? I mean what was the conventional wisdom?

STRAUSS: Well all those things you mentioned had something to do with it, but it was a combination of all those things. If the truth be known, the internal pressure on the communist party, brought by Boris Yeltsin was what caused that more than anything else. Now obviously Reagan's, everything he spent on dealing with the Russians in a military way had to make them discouraged and make them ready to give up to get a way out of that thing. But the differences you recall between Yeltsin and Gorbachev was that Gorbachev thought, incorrectly, that he could reform this government within the framework of the communist party. Yeltsin thought he had to get rid of the communist reform. That is the reason he had to get rid of Gorbachev. He was driven by that, and he was driven also by his own ambition which was to be head of that government. He accomplished both of them. I think there was a place for each within their own time. My judgment is that history will make him one of the prime movers of change in the world in the century.

Q: What happened when the embassy was faced with the dissolution of the evil empire using Ronald Reagan's terms, in '91/'92. What was this doing to you?

STRAUSS: Gorbachev and I always had a very comfortable relationship. I saw him in an average week several times. I don't know of another ambassador that saw him once a month, but the U.S. ambassador has a different role, particularly one that he was comfortable with and he knew the President of the United States was comfortable with who sent him over there. So he and I would talk about his problems with considerable frankness. His problems with the government, his problems with accomplishing anything. We talked also about his political problems to some lesser extent. He wasn't totally candid with me there, nor I with him. We talked with some frankness about it. You have to remember that 60 days, 90 days after I got there, he was in deep political trouble. Yeltsin pushed him. Every time he tried to have a meeting - Yeltsin standing up and denouncing him before his own people and that sort of thing. That crowded him pretty darn hard. Their relationship became terrible. Before I left Russia, when I went around to say my good-byes to the various people I worked with and the various agencies, I saved him for the last. I even saw President Yeltsin to say good-bye before I saw Gorbachev. I saved him for last. I had tried to tell him the importance the world would place on the two of them establishing some kind of relationship. That he had a responsibility as being the senior statesman of the two to reach out and repair that relationship even more than Yeltsin did because of how well he was known throughout the world, respected throughout the world. But I had no luck, and the last visit I had with him I went in and I told his interpreter, who was a nice man I forget his name, has a mustache.

Q: A bald head, a mustache, he appeared all the time.

STRAUSS: Yes, real nice man. He had interpreted for me for so many hours, both in this country as well as in Russia and the Soviet Union generally, that he and I had a good relationship. I went in to see Gorbachev for that last meeting. He was working for Gorbachev then, not for the Russian government. I said, "Now, I have got an hour that I can spend with the President, maybe a little more. But what I want you to do is see that I get ten minutes without him interrupting me, if you can do that in your role as interpreter. Let me make my speech to him, because I have never been blunt with him as I am going to be today. There is a great deal riding on it." He said he understood. I said, "Just don't let him interrupt me." He said he wouldn't and he didn't. After I had been there for about an hour I said to the President, former president, "Mr. President, I have taken a lot of your time in this good-bye and I have listened with great interest to everything you had to say." He was going through a litany of problems he had, problems he had dealing with Yeltsin, how bad Yeltsin has treated him. With some justification I might add. I said, "Now let me, I want to talk to you and I have arranged with your interpreter that he is going to let me speak for five uninterrupted minutes with you," because Gorbachev was great for interrupting in the middle of everything. I wound up and started telling him that he and Yeltsin having this kind of fight was a luxury neither one of them could afford and the world couldn't afford, and the Russian people couldn't afford. If he had any sense of responsibility and fully understood how the world looked up to him and his place in the world which gave him that responsibility, that he would go the last mile to cure his problems with Yeltsin. He was so nervous that he had a big leather chair he sat in. I could hear his finger nails. His hands were on each side of that big leather chair, the arms there. He was scratching that leather with his fingernails so loud that I could hear it clearly, and it was driving me crazy while I was talking. He was that intense over it. But when I finished that long speech, about five or six or seven uninterrupted minutes, I ended up by saying, "Now Mr. President, I have had my say, and I couldn't be more sincere. I feel strongly that I am speaking as my government would wish me to speak. I hope you forgive me having said all that, I am ready to have you throw my ass out of your office if that would make you feel better." I laughed and he laughed and got up and smiled and put his arms around me and kissed me on the cheek and said, "I would never throw your ass out of my office, and I appreciate what you said. But just so you will understand this, I can't tell you everything, but you just don't understand what the situation is. You can't because you have to be in my position to understand that." I said, "I am sorry, but I hope you will think about it." He said, "I will." That ended it, and then I left.

Q: While this power struggle was going on, were you getting from your colleagues and from your own observation at your embassy and from others, watching the bureaucracy which was so important a nomenklatura, beginning to move towards? Was this an apparent, I assume this was a struggle within the apparatus?

STRAUSS: Yes. Well, at the bureaucratic level you didn't see that, at the lower bureaucratic level at all. At the top of course, you did see that. There were a few people that were strong cronies of Gorbachev who you just didn't see anymore. In their place you saw Yeltsin's people. On the other hand, the young man who was sort of a chief of protocol for Gorbachev stayed right on with Yeltsin. I was surprised when I went over there the first time after Yeltsin took over to find him doing the same thing that he had done for Gorbachev. Interestingly he became a friend of mine. I helped him get a job when the previous head of the UN, the Egyptian, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Boutros-Ghali came to Russia just before I left. I said, "There is a young man over here who works at the Russian headquarters. I know you have got a few Russian spots at the UN. If you can get him a job. He has got a young wife and a young daughter. He deserves better than the kind of a job he has here. He will serve you well at the UN." Butros put his name down and said, "I'll take care of it." I thought he never would. I swear I got back here, 30 days after he left from being there I heard from my young friend that he had been offered a job at the UN. He is still there. I heard from him this past week that now he is going to get transferred to Geneva. He is still with the UN, so things have a way of working out now and then.

Q: You know over the years, fifty or more years, we developed this corps of Kremlinologists who would look at who was standing on top of the Lenin Mausoleum etc., and figure out who was on top. Did this serve you? In a way I was wondering with all this concern when a real change was coming, did you find that this group, this expertise served you, or were you pretty well relying on things on the ground?

STRAUSS: I relied on things on the ground more than I guess most ambassadors would. In the first place I had confidence in my own instincts on what was going on and the people I was dealing with - the ones that told me the truth and the ones that didn't. The French and the German and the U.S. and the British ambassadors met every Wednesday for an hour to try to put together all the intelligence we had to see if we could make sense of what was going on. We frequently had that discussion of what you were just talking about, who is up and who is down. I may have told this story earlier, but it is a great story because the rumor was always out that Yeltsin was going to change his foreign minister, whose name I don't remember at the moment, but I will get for you. Each of those three were convinced that the foreign minister was going to be gone by the next time we met. That went on for months and months. I would always say you are as wrong as you can be. They would always say why? My answer would always consistently be, "You fellows have to learn to read body language. When you see Yeltsin with his foreign minister, the body language is perfect, even when they disagree. I would rather bet on that than all this great information we are getting." Sure enough, at the time I left he was still there, and he stayed on as long as Yeltsin was there I might add. The last meeting I had with that group, they poured a little glass of wine to toast my departure. For the toast they said, "To the man who taught us about body language, something we never heard of before," and they laughed.

Q: That is a great story. How did you find as somebody who has been nursed at the mother's milk of politics for your entire life practically, did you find yourself comfortable in the rapidly changing political situation in Soviet Russia?

STRAUSS: Oh I was intrigued with it, perfectly comfortable with it. As a matter of fact it is strange, but as uncomfortable as I was with myself when I arrived in no time I settled in because of the competence of the foreign service officers we had over there, and the judgment and expertise of my deputy, Jim Collins. I just felt like I was getting the best advice around a guy could get. In no time I became comfortable. When making a decision of any consequence I discussed it with the appropriate foreign service officer and also with Jim Collins. Collins was the very best, so I really had the security blanket around me. I liked my job, and I was comfortable with it. I was glad when it was over. I promised the President I would stay through the election. I did that, and I left without any discomfort. As a matter of fact, Helen wanted to stay a few more months.

Q: Well, one of the things sort of professionally that disturbed me was that when the Soviet Union broke apart into its component parts, you know, the "Stans" and all that came into being. Secretary of State Baker did not go to Congress and ask for more money. It meant that we were trying to do this on the cheap which really impacted rather heavily on our people who served in some of these small posts. Did you get involved in this at all?

STRAUSS: I was involved in it quite often. Included in the situations I was comfortable with, I was perfectly comfortable being a Democrat in a Republican administration, and had very few differences with Baker and Bush, really no difference of any consequence. I was working for them. But one thing I couldn't get them to do was go to the Congress and try for more money when they should have. But they were both timid about it. I am not sure Baker was, but I am sure George Bush senior was. I know he was very cautious about going to the Congress and getting money for food relief, for the embassy staffs and office staffing and operations. We were really on an exceedingly thin budget over there. As I recall, even the car I was driving broke down often. It was eight or ten years old and with those Russian roads, that is old. We had trouble getting money to repair the embassy residence when it needed it. We particularly, as I have said earlier, had difficulty with our food relief programs. I mentioned earlier in this, we used canned foodstuffs that came out of the Gulf War to feed people with, that sort of thing. With respect to the embassies, we had to move very fast. They made the decision in Washington that they wanted to staff every one of those new republics with an embassy officer, an ambassador. That took a lot of people. They didn't have any real estate. There were no places you could rent over there if we had the money. So most of those men and women who went over there would go into these communities they were transferred to and live in a third rate hotel room with no kitchen or anything. So they were pretty miserable basically. I thought we could do better, but we didn't have time and we didn't have money.

Q: Were there any voices, I mean, was your voice among those saying gee we better do more?

STRAUSS: Oh, no question about it. But when the administration decided they weren't going to spend the money on that right now, they weren't going to Congress for it, that pretty well made the decision. My job was to do what the President wanted and the Secretary of State. Jim Baker, who by the way was a simply splendid Secretary of State in my judgment, he probably knew, it didn't do him any good in fact with the president. They probably had other places to spend that money. They just handled their Congressional business that way.

Q: Well, did your role change at all when the Soviet Union became Russia?

STRAUSS: No, really not a bit. My beat was really Moscow and environs. I would get out to these other places, but not very often, not as much as I wanted to or should have. There just was too much going on where I was.

Q: How about St. Petersburg? Was this another power center? Did you get any feel for it?

STRAUSS: Yes, I went to St. Petersburg any number of times. We had a very strong embassy officer over there who was very able and very well regarded by the St. Petersburg power structure. He had a nice residence he lived in. He entertained a lot. He was a first rate fellow over there.

Q: Do you recall his name?

STRAUSS: No, I don't recall. We can get that. He was not a political appointee like I was.

Q: No, but was there a political power structure in St. Petersburg that was different than the one in Moscow? You know, we talk about the New York group and Washington.

STRAUSS: Yes there was a great deal of difference between them. Keep in mind that the mayor of St. Petersburg had been one of the few people to stand up during that three or four days that Gorbachev was in captivity during the coup. He is the one who stood up for Gorbachev and against the coup. He was a former professor and a very able distinguished man. The mayor of Moscow when I arrived there was a semi academic who was very popular, but with the changes, even before the change came, he had been replaced by a fellow Bushov who is now the Mayor of Moscow. He turned it into a very strong political power center in the Republic of Russia.

Q: What about the disarmament process, getting rid of the nuclear weapons?

STRAUSS: I'd say the State Department with the assistance of the Defense Department in my judgment did a simply splendid job. Secretary of State Baker did a simply splendid job because he dealt with the various leaders of the republics in getting their hands on nuclear weapons and getting them moved out of Kazakhstan and other places they were put in under Russian control. I think it was very effective. I give those people who, it seemed to be once a month we had a State Department officer who had responsibility in that area come in and spend a week traveling around the various places that were repositories of nuclear arms, work going on. They were good, and they worked hard, and they worked around the clock. They accomplished a great deal, and that is the reason we have done as well as we have done in my judgment. They set the pattern.

Q: Prior to the breakup and after the breakup of the Soviet union, what about the Ukraine and the leadership there, because Ukraine has always had this potential of being a very productive, wealthy, progressive area, and has had lousy leadership and all. Was this apparent during your time?

STRAUSS: It was as apparent as a big wart on your nose could be. No one could deal with it effectively. As a matter of fact I think it is all those things you describe. Interestingly, about two or three years after I came back, a fellow I knew in New York told me that he was investing with a couple of Ukrainians who were raising a fund to acquire interest in Ukrainian businesses. They thought it would be very successful. I said, "Well, I have my doubts, but you are a very sophisticated investor. I will put some money, not as much as you want me to, but I will make a modest investment." I did, because I thought it would work out well. I think that has been ten years, nine years, and I bet the investment is not worth what it was nine years ago. I always thought, I did think they were right. The reason I just put a small amount in was because the leadership at the top of that government, I thought it was corrupt; it would stay that way. It would hold back, and it has held them back.

Q: It has been one of the great disappointments.

STRAUSS: Great disappointments. Gosh, when you see the riches of that country.

Q: I have heard it compared the equivalent to France if it really got going. I mean, it has everything.

STRAUSS: I have heard the same comparison. It has everything. It could be a great place. It could attract tourists.

Q: Great agriculture.

STRAUSS: Oh, yes, marvelous agriculture.

Q: Did you find as ambassador to Russia now that the fact that you had these other countries that had broken off, the other republics and former republics around you, did that weaken or distract our relationship with Russia, or was Russia still the 300 pound gorilla at that table.

STRAUSS: That is an understatement. It was more than that, Russia was. The Kazakhs came in. Kazakhstan became more important because they had a head of government at that time by the fact he was going to be the prominent reformer of his era. It turned out not so. We have problems with him right now.

Q: Well let me ask a question on the cultural side. Culture plays quite a strong role in Russia as it does say in France, more than in many other countries. How did you find sort of on the cultural side?

STRAUSS: I would say that on most of these sides, or some of these sides, because of the people I had around me, I would give myself a grade in many areas of B+ to A. On the cultural side, I would give myself a failing grade. They were accustomed to the U.S. ambassador who had more interest in cultural affairs than I did. The cultural side has not been a driving interest of mine in this country, and it was not over there. I think I neglected that now. We tried to support the various things, theater, the Bolshoi, things like that, but I didn't do a very good job. I would go sit in my box and be seen where I needed to be seen.

Q: Try to stay awake.

STRAUSS: That is exactly right. I must confess I think when my grandchildren were there, I took them to the circus instead of to the opera. I probably should be ashamed of myself, but I really give myself failing grades.

Q: What about the intellectual class, the writers and all that? Again as in France, they play a major role.

STRAUSS: Yes, and we worked hard on that. I worked hard on that, and I made some marvelous friends over there in that area and enjoyed it. I didn't have the luxury of leisurely developing relationships and getting into other interests. Keep in mind when you get to work rather early at the office, around 8:00 and you are there until 7:00, and you go home and have a drink and supper. You do that six out of seven days a week, you don't have much time. So I tend to do the things I have to do and am really interested in doing and let the others go. It served me well at times of my life, and other times it served me poorly. I wish I could remember the names of some of the people that I developed very nice relationships over there in the intellectual community. I did a great deal of work getting the American school over there. I spent a lot of time locating land and forcing the Russians to let us buy it and get the school open and getting people there. So I had that sort of thing and I did well in that. School is very important to the American colony as you can imagine.

Q: Was it open to other embassies?

STRAUSS: Yes.

Q: How about to Russians, could they go too?

STRAUSS: I don't recall. I think a few of them could get in each class. We had a pretty good mixture, but it was primarily the American school for Americans.

Q: I might point out that some of our other ambassadors who have been there, such as Arthur Hartman, express a great interest in the arts and all, but in a way they had time. You were dealing in a fast moving political situation as opposed to the rest of the time where we have a relatively static relationship.

STRAUSS: The reason a number of people, for example Ambassador Watson, left and Hartman was frustrated was there wasn't enough for them to do constructively because of the relationship. I was blessed in terms of having challenges that I could do more about. They couldn't do disarmament. I had the heavy responsibility in that area, just an obvious difference. I was there when the new republics were born, and I could deal openly with leaders and people like that. They couldn't. The didn't have that freedom. So I had the best of that world, and I was sensible enough to know it.

Q: Was there any problem, did you see the Soviet army, I mean the Soviet/Russian army, as a problem being a different power center? I mean they were dissolving the Warsaw Pact, getting troops out of Poland and East Germany and all this. I mean was this a matter of concern to us that they might not be responsive to the political masters as we would like?

STRAUSS: Yes. That was a concern. One of the real concerns I had, on several occasions I went out to visit military installations, particularly where I remember vividly going out to spend three or four hours at their air force academy where they train their crack pilots. When you saw the living conditions those pilots were living in, you wonder when it is they are going to break away and say, you know, turn on the government. The same thing was true of all branches of the military. Maybe in the early communist days, the military got the best of everything, but while I was there, they were on starvation wages, not getting paid, and living conditions you wouldn't live, you wouldn't let your puppy live in those conditions. Horrible.

Q: I guess this is probably a good time to stop. We have in a way covered at least for the time, your time in Russia. Now if there is anything else, we will come back and revisit this at that point. Next time maybe we can pick it up what you did when you came back, how you saw Russia and our future with Russia, what you were telling President Bush and Secretary Baker, and again Congress and your contacts, because this is a continuing relationship. I am sure that when you came back you were active in telling what you saw and observed and using your prestige to do this. We will talk about this, and then we will talk about what you are doing thereafter, because we will continue sort of the political side of things.

STRAUSS: That's good.

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Q: Today is April Fools Day, April first, 2003. So we will see what surprises are in this for us. I would like you to talk a bit when you came back to the States. Normally one of the deplorable things about the Department of State is an Ambassador will return sort of in the regular service, and they will say thank you very much. here is your flag and the door is there. They really don't do much in the way of debriefing. But I would think that given both your stature and the situation you were dealing with, you must have been drawn on a lot for your experiences there.

STRAUSS: Well I'd say that statement is partially true, Charles. When I came back, Larry Eagleburger, you recall, had become Secretary of State before I came back. Larry and I were good friends. As a matter of fact, I just spoke with him five minutes ago today. But I couldn't have been received more warmly, Helen and I were. As a matter of fact, Larry had a little reception and gave Helen a little plaque making her hero of the year for having lived with me all those years and also going to Russia with me and putting up with me there. Also I had spent a lot of time that the typical ambassador does not get to spend in one on one conversations with the Secretary of State when it was Jim Baker, and with the same intensity when Eagleburger became Secretary of State. Not because I knew so much, but because I had a personal relationship with each one. I gave them my view on a number of things, some of which I think were useful and some may have been better on a day like today which is April Fools' Day maybe. The people who ran that section, I spent a few hours with the people who ran that section, the Soviet desk.

Q: The Soviet desk, part of the European bureau.

STRAUSS: That was about it. I also was blessed with getting a great many requests to speak. I was out of the government then. Instead of speaking for money, I would speak without fee, and do the speeches I wanted. So I talked to quite a number, a mixed bag of groups of people and enjoyed it as I always do, and got to give my point of view on where we were in Russia and how long it was going to be, the basic strength I saw in Russia, the unique educational system they had, and it was going to stand in good stead. I thought it would take more than a generation. I don't know how they would ever wring out of the system the sins of the system, the corruption. All and all that is sort of the way I would down and got back into the law firm. I was blessed when I came back to the law firm. Of course, I had been out before when I was chairman of the Democratic party, I was out, so the firm was used to having me go out and come back. But I was wise enough to change when I came back in 1980, I said to my partners no more management role for me. I have had that. That is not the highest and best use of my time. In the first place I am not a very efficient manager. I was somehow an effective manager in many ways, but not an efficient one or organized one. My strengths were in other directions, so it was easy for me to fit back into the law firm because the administrative management structure was there, and all I did was take a seat on the management committee. That was about it, and went back doing the same things I had always done which was fiddle around a little in politics, although I was trying to stay out of it. I really entered into when I came back from Russia in the fall of '92 toward the end of the year, I really entered into the private life fully and public life very little. For example, I told my friends in the press when I left to go to Russia, that John White who is a fellow here in town, a good Democrat and a wise and nice man of excellent judgment who is since deceased. I told my friends in the press would call, I said, "Don't call me anymore. You have been calling John White as I suggested for the two years I have been gone. Just keep calling others, because I want to stay out of this. I want to keep my name out of the paper," which I did pretty well. As a matter of fact it has only been in the last year that I have gone back and taken quite a number of press calls, although I have tried to stay out of commenting on this pre-war effort and the present war effort. If I couldn't see anything good, I kept my mouth shut. Frankly it was harder to speak and say good things when you disagreed with what was going on. It was easier just not to talk. When I did I tried to be supportive of the president as I have always been supportive of our presidents. So that is about my story.

Q: Looking at Russia as you moved somewhat away from it, looking back with your experience, You know you had a growing democratic electoral process and all. You thought the educational system had real strengths. There was also this corruption and so much became known as the Russian Mafia, buying up the communist controlled properties or taking over. How did you see this?

STRAUSS: I remember thinking that the Mafia is one thing, the Russian Mafia, and the front people who were acquiring assets for them in countries were another thing.

Q: What is the difference?

STRAUSS: One of them dealt, I used to think if you go back three generations in the early days of this country, and you see how any of these big rich families who have endowed things...

Q: The Vanderbilts, the Morgans.

STRAUSS: Yes, they were called the robber barons. Well they weren't the robber barons, they were I am guessing they bought Morgans because they were the only ones who had enough sense to know that they were there. They didn't do anything illegal to my knowledge, and I am not so sure these people who acquired these Russian assets did. Russia was practically giving away or selling very cheaply these tremendous assets, and they needed to get them, needed to get them in private hands. felt the same way, so part of it could have been motivation by that had been their motivation, to get it out of the hands of government and to get private money involved, private people involved who had some entrepreneurial skills. Was it a robber baron? Of course it was, but using a general term, not in a literal sense, but of course it was a giveaway of great assets that belonged to the country into these private hands. Some of them were terrible people and some of them were very good people I am sure. It sort of made me sick when it was taking place. I guess the answer is the same thing took place in other countries, although the Russians are uniquely gifted at that kind of conduct. They have seen it for so many years, particularly in the last 75 years. Despite all that I had considerable confidence that the Russians were going to make it. I had more I think than was justified having because I kind of admired some of them. Many ambassadors to countries, you sort of fall in love with the country you have gone to, with the people, and I certainly was guilty of that. I lost some of my objectivity. Unquestionably I liked the Russian people, and I related to them and they to me. Interestingly the fact that I was Jewish never seemed to have any negative impact at all over there. I worried that it might because of their record, but it didn't to my knowledge. I am sure it did in ways I didn't know at the time and still don't know, but my great blessing over there was that I was able to do what George Bush initially asked me to do, President George Bush the first, and that was establish relationships where he could have a personal relationship through me daily with the heads of government, and their senior people. As I said to you before, that was my strength and I played it and I did well at that. I didn't do nearly as well in other areas I am sure. The ambassador that preceded me came back from his tour and wrote a splendid book. He made, he went back on campus; he went back in teaching. I forget where but a distinguished university, and he is a distinguished scholar. He had other shortcomings. There was nothing distinguished about my scholarship or my knowledge about Russia. I didn't really have any unique understanding of what was taking place or going to take place. Most of what I knew came because I knew how to talk to the people over there who did know and get a feel for it. I forget his name, who was our ambassador?

Q: Matlock.

STRAUSS: Matlock, Jack Matlock was a brilliant Russian scholar and had his shortcomings as an ambassador, very obvious ones, and great strengths I might add. I think the same thing is true of me. I had great strengths and many more obvious shortcomings than Jack Matlock did.

Q: Well, basically sort of in your bones you are a politician. This was a political process which must have been fascinating to watch because in many ways the United States and Russia have been compared to the opening of the frontiers and all, the same sense of humor and things of this nature. How did you view the developing political process and particularly say and earlier on. Was Yeltsin a politician?

STRAUSS: It was fascinating. He was a great politician. He was a better politician than Gorbachev was in a narrow political sense. At least he was in the days when I first met him. Of course he deteriorated after that. Alcohol took a hell of a toll on him as you know. It wasn't just, that was not just rumor.

Q: This is tape eight, side one with Robert Strauss. Did you see a political process that was parallel? Is there sort of a basic political process that develops in any country in your experience?

STRAUSS: I saw it develop there. I remember the first day I met their first chief justice of their court about his third day in office. I thought to myself what a nice man this is, knows absolutely nothing about what he is going to do. I spent an hour or two with him, but with this kind of a fellow they have a chance. The truth of the matter is he turned out to be not so good. He was a rather weak appointment for the first fellow. The most moving thing, one of the most moving things I saw over there, I was present the first day the Duma met. I remember going over and sitting in that gallery. I wanted to see that and get the kind of feel you are talking about, and see the real beginning of grassroots democracy, people coming from all over that vast country to participate in that opening ceremony of the Duma. I think I may have told this story before, but we had a real bright young woman, who by the way I think is still with the State Department. She has been all over the world and has three or four children. I said, to her, I am trying to think of her first name now. I said, "I want you to go over there and hang around. Whatever you do every day, spend some time with that chairman of the judiciary committee or foreign relations committee." He may have become ambassador to this country for awhile. "Find out what is going on every day in this formative stage so we will know and we can report." Of course she did it brilliantly. I saw him after about three months of that process at some reception. I went over to him, shook hands and greeted each other warmly. I said, "Tell me what is going on." He said, "You are asking me what is going on?" He said, "With that beautiful girl you have talking to me, you know everything you know, you know everything she knows, and she knows everything I know, so why ask me? Tell me what is going on." He laughed, and I laughed. That was the beginning of the process at that level, and it was fascinating moving through.

Q: Did you see, did anybody call on you hey Ambassador Strauss, we want to start a political party. Nobody knows more about parties than you do.

STRAUSS: I never had that. I used to wonder about that. I never had that. Of course they had parties then, you understand.

Q: Yes, Yaboka.

STRAUSS: That was the liberal party. They had the party system. It wasn't perfect, but I might add ours isn't either. So that was those thing, all that was going on. It is incredible when you think about it, the transformation that took place as I was leaving. The last couple of months and the first couple of months after was simply fascinating.

Q: Did you have a problem with the State Department, I am talking about the higher people dealing with Russia as Yeltsin was taking over? I mean were there a lot of feeling that just wasn't up to it, because of his drunkenness and other things and thought oh my god they are going to end up with another coup or something like that?

STRAUSS: Yes, there were great reservations about, but he also had the ability when he got his hands on them, he captured them. For example, I saw Jim Baker who in my judgment was a simply splendid secretary of state. History has proven already, the short history we have had since he left how right he was. Baker came from an administration that had grave doubts about Yeltsin before he came there. Keep in mind, before he came, before the breakup, he came to this country, the White House, the President wouldn't receive him, President Bush. He was afraid it would offend Gorbachev and also he had his detractors. So that Yelstin had to earn his way, and he did. He did it with George Bush when we brought him to Camp David, and he spent a day up there with Bush. It wasn't a state visit, it was just a visit over here to see Bush to go to Camp David. I think President Bush would surely have preferred not to have to fool with it, but I was pushing to bring him over here. We got him over here. They related extremely well with each other. Jim Baker came to like him very much, as did I as I have indicated, and by the way, Vice Versa. He had considerable, great confidence, more that considerable, in Jim Baker as an impressive and astute man. Here is this guy who really has this political feel that is excellent and has the right instincts in terms of the democratic institutions we were trying to establish in that country.

Q: What about looking back on the role of other countries? I particularly think of France, Germany and Great Britain. The French always seem to be in a different angle from us. Did you find that?

STRAUSS: Yes. As a matter of fact it was interesting. I think it was just personalities more than anything else, but, I am smiling as I am speaking here because just a few days ago we talked about the French. I said that I remember when I was in Russia, the French, they were always the most difficult of the countries. The German and the French and the British, and the U.S. ambassador as I mentioned earlier would meet once a month or once a week and exchange our views on what was going on. The French were always a bit out of step then, and the Brits and ourselves were always very close. I'll tell you something that worries me. This notion that is spreading around here this crazy thing of the French who disappoint us terribly in this Iraqi situation, but we had better learn to get along with them because we are going to have to get along with the French and a lot of other people, and we have got a lot of work to do on that. The French more than most are going to need plenty of attention and concern to try to get those relationships re-established in the interest of the world.

Q: Well now, did you find the, what about commercial interests? You know, I mean when you look at Russia, China, when these places are opening up, I mean quite rightly so, every manufacturer, exporter, entrepreneur takes one look and says boy that is a big market, let's go for it. How did you find this played with you and say with the British and the French and the Germans?

STRAUSS: We in the American business community took a look at it and said we'll wait. The Germans who were close were doing a lot more business than we were and than were the French or the British. But they all three were doing more than we were doing over there. In the first place, they understood it better and were closer related to Russia, more familiar in an understandable way, an understanding way than our American business community were. We had a hard time capturing the imagination of people, Russian business interests in terms of their making capital investments in the country. I think I may have mentioned earlier that I had a story that I would tell. The Russians were very hesitant about the Americans acquiring Russian assets anyway. When companies would consider coming in there, they would need to buy land or participate at all in making investments, the Russians were very reticent to have that at that time. Later they were desperate to have capital. They didn't realize. They had a feeling that the American investor would take what they had and leave them and go back home with the money. I used to tell them that the American, I think I have mentioned earlier in this tape, the American railroad system, the American educational system our school buildings, all those things, our transportation, all those things are paid for by French and German and British and Dutch and other country's money. It came to America, was invested, and never returned back to those countries. It stays invested and it grows and grows, and it is great capital for the United States, and the same thing will happen in Russia. When American companies come and invest, they won't bring the money home, because the investment will be good, and they will keep their investment here. It will be here for generations, and you will have the benefit of that capital and we will all benefit by the fact that we are doing business together. That was sort of a simple way of telling the story. People would nod, but they didn't respond really.

Q: Was somebody in the embassy or somewhere keeping an eye on as you mentioned the judicial system, which in a way is the key. you know, I mean if you don't have a sound judicial system, you can't have investment.

STRAUSS: We had been pushing for that since the first day I was there, with marginal success. Compared to even three years ago, progress had been made, but the Judicial system still leaves a great deal to be desired in terms of people having the confidence in it they should, and in terms frankly of the character and integrity of they system still leaves a lot to be desired. But they made tremendous progress starting with nothing which they had. That has kept investment out as much as anything else. You can't have any confidence in a lawsuit. You go to trial over there with someone who defaults on a transaction or just a typical commercial one. A matter we would handle in this country privately or sometimes through the courts. American business felt they would not have the remedy of the courts.

Q: What about the Russian military? We have gone as the British have and some others, the French and the Germans I don't think have gone completely there, but gone to basically a volunteer force because we find that it works better than having mass conscription. Certainly the Soviet system was pretty horrendous. I mean what it would do to the young men who came in. I mean it is quite brutal and really didn't turn out very good soldiers. Were we looking at this and trying to say, look if you are going to get a better military.

STRAUSS: Well our military attachï¿½ spent a lot of time working on this, those sorts of problems. We had a particular interest in establishing our relationship with the military because of the nuclear threat and things we are dealing with. We had good people, and some of their people are very good, and some of them were very bad. And they had no money. That was our biggest problem, they didn't have the money do anything anyway. We had to pay pretty well for what we got done. So that is a continuing problem today. But the Russian military leaves a good deal to be desired as you know.

Q: Well, when you came back, did you find you were representing clients saying, should we invest, you know, I mean, was your law firm involved in essentially risk assessment?

STRAUSS: Yes, of course we were. I might add that we urged caution. We urged caution and still do I might add. But I know I think this war will be over in a reasonable period of time right now. I am talking Iraq.

Q: We are in the second week in the war against Iraq.

STRAUSS: Yes. I think it is obviously going to take a lot longer there than we were led to believe by the administration, military or what have you. When it is over and when we start bringing some stability to that country. I think we are going to see in the next few years increased U.S. investment in Russia.

Q: Well, turning away from, Russia may crop up, but let's talk about the political scene. You have been an observer, and I don't imagine you can turn your political observing view off. how did you view the campaign of '92 with Bill Clinton versus George Bush?

STRAUSS: Well, I was in Russia during that campaign, but I used to discuss it every day on the phone with somebody because I was just curious. I, like most people, thought that it was a fool's errand that Bill Clinton was on. It was not until six or eight months before the election that I realized that Bush was in trouble, getting in trouble. I told several of his friends he was. Bill Clinton surprised me by his success. I didn't think he and Gore would make it. I didn't have a feel for it until the last 60 days. It was obvious that Bush senior didn't seem to have his mind on getting re-elected to the extent that he should have.

Q: Where did you feel the, I mean the Clinton campaign sort of model was it is the economy, stupid. Also that Bush kept talking about he was uncomfortable with the concept of vision.STRAUSS: That vision thing.

Q: Do you think this was in shorthand times really was the matter of the campaign?

STRAUSS: Yes, I do. I think that Bush was burned out. I don't know why.

Q: Well he had been there a long time.

STRAUSS: Yes, keep in mind he had been eight years as vice president and four years as president, and he was burned out, and it showed I think. He never really took Clinton seriously. He never dreamed they were going to have the Perot problems they were going to have. Remember Perot was a major factor in that.

Q: What was that?

STRAUSS: Remember Perot was a third candidate.

Q: Oh yes, Ross Perot.

STRAUSS: If you ask George Bush senior today what defeated him, he would say Ross Perot, and he won't be all wrong. There is a lot of basis for believing that. So all those things came up and all of a sudden, boom, he is defeated. They were stunned.

Q: Did you feel that the Democratic Party and sort of the contrast with the Republican Party was very hard core constituency, and the Democratic party where the hard core constituency doesn't seem to be there as much?

STRAUSS: No you begin with the extremes. The extreme left, I may have mentioned this earlier in this thing. In my view, the extreme left of the Democratic Party buzzes around you, the leadership, and drives you crazy, stings you here and stings you there. They are tremendous pests and nuisances and they get in the way. Their rhetoric is foolish. That is not a very good word for it, but whatever it is, it is not very impressive. The right wing of the Republican Party is different. The right wing is just as nutty as the Democrat's left wing, or the Democrat's left wing is just as nutty as the Republican right wing. Ten Percent, or fifteen percent of the gauge is always a little off center. But the difference in the Republican Party is, Jim Baker and I used to talk about this a lot. Really this is his language. He would say, "Strauss, one thing you don't understand, the right wing of the Republican Party is different from your left wing. The right wing has money; they have structure, and they know how to crush you. They don't sting you like you talk about the Democrats buzzing around you like insects driving you crazy. In our party, they don't drive you crazy, they crush you and kill you. That is the difference between the two. Our right wing has structure and money. The left wing has neither structure nor money."

Q: Well, the Clinton administration in a way never really got much of a chance to show itself because it had two years in and all of a sudden they were hit with a Republican Congress. What was your reading on sort of this revolution, because again it seems to be a much more, much less cooperative type Congress president thing when they are in different parties.

STRAUSS: Well I think the whole climate has changed, the political climate has changed for the worse in this country. Politics, don't let people say it was always this way, because politics today is meaner. By today I mean current, modern, is much meaner than it was in the past. They whole system here is changed, Charles. Congressmen come to town and stay here several weeks and Senators, without going home. They are around here on weekends and got socially together. When you went to a dinner party, you would see party people there, and there would be 15-20 Democrats and 15-20 Republicans. So they developed a personal relationship. These people now go off and raise money. They leave here on Thursday afternoon or Friday and go home and raise money most weekends. They are not in town. There is nobody in the Congress to amount to anything around here over the weekend. They don't see each other, and they come back and they go into a combative situation or a contested situation with the other. They never develop personal relationships like they used to have. It has hurt the whole damn system in my judgment. There is very little. People think I am a freak because I have relationships with both sides of the aisle. I have always had relationships with both sides of the aisle, even in Texas which was almost a one party state. We Democrats were cordial to the Republicans, the handful that there were, and they the same. But that has all changed now.

Q: What about, I mean looking at it over the years, what about the money situation?

STRAUSS: Well that is what has caused most of this.

Q: Can you say how this developed? I mean what was it?

STRAUSS: Well, what was it is the laws forbade. Financing of campaigns took place in a far more permissive climate, and under far more permissive laws and rules and regulations than is now the case. Now there are some restrictions that don't mean anything because you can always get around them. They are going to mean something now. Hard money and soft money is going to make a big difference. The truth of the matter is, the recent legislations that the Democrats passed, caused to be passed, in my judgment, hurt the Democrats who passed it far more than it did the Republicans. This removal of soft money, the only way the Democrats had been able to compete was through soft money. Now it is not a good system, and I am not saying they shouldn't have gotten rid of it, but the Democrats reformed themselves into even a worse position than they were prior to that. I don't know how it is going to change. I know one thing, people will continue to find a way around the law. It is just like water seeking cracks in concrete. Money will find people, and people will find money.

Q: Well, did you find particularly the House of Representatives, the Newt Gingrich crowd, was this a different crowd than you were used to?

STRAUSS: Oh Certainly. Newt was a very bright, very able fellow who his own crowd didn't like, and the other side didn't like. He elected more than anyone, he elected these Republican majorities that we now face on this country for the better or the worse depending on where you stand. But as soon as he got it done, they threw him out. He was the first to go down the tube.

Q: Well did you find as a practitioner of this, I realize you now were some removed, but did you find this a different breed of cat that came in to the House of Representatives?

STRAUSS: Oh certainly. Yes, no question about it. You look at the, I don't want to be overly critical of the House and Senate, but the stature of the people who represent the people of this country in both the House and the Senate in my judgment are not of the quality in terms of just stature itself and background and accomplishment and breadth of vision and understanding of those who were in the same place 20 years ago and further back. I don't think there is any question about that. Now you may say that is a prejudice of an old man, you are not objective on it, Strauss, But that is more than prejudice looking at this.

Q: True, I am not impressed when you think about the old titans of Congress.

STRAUSS: Exactly.

Q: What about Clinton's agenda and his performance.

STRAUSS: Bill Clinton is one of the most attractive political people and certainly one of the brightest I have ever known. He suffered from a lack of personal discipline, and that lack of discipline is a luxury that you can't afford to have. The country is worse off because of it, and he is certainly worse off because of it. He continues, I think, to make mistakes of judgment that he shouldn't make. Now, he had a good eight years, and they accomplished some things. He left a lot on the table because he was so tied up in his personal involvements. I must say that he was tormented more than any president I have ever seen. He was so visible, he was everywhere, and his lack of discipline added to that made him a very good target for his detractors. He literally drove them crazy, and they literally spent zillions of dollars trying to destroy Bill Clinton. The hatred that is there is amazing.

Q: I am ten years younger than you, but I remember it as a kid growing up sort of as a rabid, my mother was a rabid Roosevelt mother in places like San Marino and New England prep school and we were surrounded by rabid Roosevelt haters. I never observed that same degree of hatred, I mean real visceral hatred until Bill Clinton came along.

STRAUSS: The hatred, there were many individuals who exhibited that hatred of Bill Clinton. But I never saw this actual bloc of anti anything compared with anti Clinton people. He was so good, and you could just see that people, all he had to do was open his mouth, you could see the hair rise up on their necks. It was not a healthy situation at all.

Q: Well one of the things that bothered me going back to compare the Clinton time and the Roosevelt time was with Hillary Clinton who obviously was an extremely accomplished woman. Talking about Hillary Clinton. I noticed this really visceral hate of President Clinton was almost intensified about Hillary Clinton. I immediately go back to Eleanor Roosevelt. What was your personal feeling?

STRAUSS: Hillary Clinton is, I don't need to tell you, is attractive physically and intellectually. The worst thing that happened to Hillary Clinton in terms of people hating her is that when she announced for the Senate, they couldn't wait to get their hands on her and destroy here, and lo and behold, she got elected. Then she gets over in the Senate and who does she take over but half of the right wingers over there. Jessie Helms was her biggest fan. She didn't waste any time, and she handled herself when she entered the Senate, I think, perfectly. She kept her mouth shut. She did her work, and she made personal relationships with the power senators of the Senate. It just drives, people who dislike her, it drives them off the wall when they hear that.

Q: Well did you feel that there is a force that doesn't like to see strong women?

STRAUSS: Oh I guess there is, I guess there has always been that, but I really think, frankly, I think there is an awful lot of money spent by these hate organizations, still being spent on hating the Clintons, not as much as when they were in office, but these hate mongers are out there. You listen to talk radio, these right wingers, you bring up the name Clinton, it is frightening.

Q: This talk radio, we don't really have it around here so much. We have quite good talk radio, very informed people. Sort of out in the hinterlands it seems to be designed for angry middle aged or older men.

STRAUSS: Yes, I think that is probably right. It is a shame, but that is not their fault. They have got a right to do that. The fault lies in the people who disagree with that who don't spend the money and the time and the effort dealing with it. If you have got a better idea, we have always believed in this country, you can sell it. Well if we have got a better idea, we have done a lousy job in selling it in my judgment. I feel very strongly abut that, that these people are all over the place. There is a lot of important money supporting them. I know that.

Q: Did you find that your identification with the Democrats helped, hindered, or made no difference in the law practice? We are talking after you came back form Moscow.

STRAUSS: I think being a Democrat is a negative in terms of being able to sell yourself to the business community. I guess 75% of the business community or 85% belong to the Republican party. An awful lot of them are true believers and believe there is a difference between Republicans and Democrats. When I speak, I always love to say what I believe, and that is I know you people won't like to hear this or believe it, but the simple truth of the matter is there is about the same percentage of horses' asses in the Republican party as there is in the Democratic Party and vice versa. You will never convince me to the contrary. Now people don't like to hear that. They like to hear the other side is evil.

Q: How did you view the election of 2000. This is Bush junior. In the first place, had you run across Bush junior much before?

STRAUSS: No, there was a big generational skip there. I knew him. His father brought him to see me. I think I told the story. It was when he was thinking about running for Congress. He was a nice man, but he had never done anything. That is not his fault that he got elected president. That is the Democrats fault in Texas and it is the Democrats fault in the United States that they didn't elect their candidate. I don't know whether Gore was a better candidate or a worse candidate or a better president or a worse president than George Bush. I know one thing. He was a worse candidate at the time he ran against him.

Q: What did you see that Al Gore did sort of wrong in the election of 2000?

STRAUSS: Well, I think damn near everything he did. That is an overstatement; I didn't mean that to that extreme. In the first place he is not very appealing. He is not comfortable with people. I was one of a group of about 20 democrats who were asked to meet with him throughout this campaign. It got more intense when Bill Daley took it over. His father was a friend of mine, and Bill Daley is a younger man than I am and to some extent a bit of a protï¿½gï¿½, although he is not a protï¿½gï¿½ of Bob Strauss but only of that generation. But you couldn't even get Gore to stay and meet with these people. We would go out to Gore's vice presidential residence for political meetings in the middle of the campaign, and if Gore was there he would be upstairs. He wouldn't even come down and say hello. I think they made it, they called one meeting I remember. It was set for 10:00 and they changed it to 10:30. I asked them why they made it later because it changed a bunch of people's appointments around. They said, "Well, the Vice President wasn't going to be able to get out here until just about 10:30, and he didn't want to have to spend time with the people who were meeting there on his business. Now that is, you had 20 people who were so angry about that in that room who were supposed to be supporting him. He was not a very good candidate. He didn't go where he should have gone, and he knows those things. They are why he is not running now.

Q: Just to finish up this portion, could you talk just a little about your impression, we are right in the middle of this situation but what led up to it sounds like we are mired in or at a pause in the war with Iraq, 12 days into it. But particularly as a former ambassador, diplomacy and all of this administration. In the first place when it came on board and what led them to this. What is your impression?

STRAUSS: Well I don't like to be critical of an administration in time of war. That is for damn sure, and I am not going to be. Even though this is private, it still will be public. But I think their diplomacy leaves a great deal to be desired. I don't think it is necessarily the fault of the Secretary of State. I think he has lost an awful lot of battles in the administration. I think that the hard liners have won time after time. They are all people I have known forever, and it saddens me. But that is not my opinion, that is the opinion of an awful lot of people, strong Republicans who find themselves unable to contribute anything. This White House has really shut out the leadership of the Republican party and to a great extent, the leadership that has experience. Whether you are talking about George Schultz or Jim Baker or Larry Eagleburger or Brent Scowcroft. These are very wise, experienced people who should be involved there and could help this President a great deal, but his people don't seem to call on them. The President has to have people around him to see that he is exposed to that sort of thought when he is making major decisions. I think that is one of the failings of this administration. I think Schroeder the Chancellor in Germany was never a very loved man anywhere, and I don't blame President Bush and his people for being very unhappy with him, that he ran for re-election against this country, but when the election was over, Bush and his people should have called on him and said Chancellor, congratulations. The past is over now and we have got to get together. You got elected and we were a good tool for you, but now we have got to get together. We have got real problems and we have got to solve them together. I think that would have had the Germans back with us which makes a whole different thing in putting a coalition together, and altogether different climate. Those kind of mistakes, that is just childish pique about shaking hands with the Chancellor of Germany and the Secretary of Defense not shaking hands with his counterpart or the Chancellor. That is crazy.

Q: Well I think we will end at this point.

STRAUSS: Thank you very much.

Q: Thank you. It has been fun.

End of interview