

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
SAUL/ZILKHA ROOM

BIT PLAYER: MY LIFE WITH PRESIDENTS AND IDEAS
A BOOK DISCUSSION WITH STEPHEN HESS

Washington, D.C.
Tuesday, November 13, 2018

Welcome:

JOHN R. ALLEN
President
The Brookings Institution

Discussion:

STEPHEN HESS
Senior Fellow Emeritus, Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution

SUSAN PAGE
Washington Bureau Chief
USA Today

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P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Good morning. It's wonderful to have you with us this morning. I want to welcome everyone to Brookings and today's celebration of Steve Hess' new memoir, "Bit Player: My Life with Presidents and Ideas." If you've not seen it, it is available nearby and it is a terrific read.

I'm John Allen. I'm the president of the Brookings Institution and it is really a pleasure to greet you all and to welcome you to the Institution today.

Having spent more than six decades behind the scenes with American presidents and other political leaders, few individuals are better poised to provide rich, meaningful insight into the world of Washington, D.C., than Steve Hess. As a 25-year-old recently discharged Army private in 1958, Steve suddenly found himself as part of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's speechwriting team. I would say that not many privates find themselves on a president's speechwriting team immediately after discharge, so that in and of itself was a remarkable moment.

Over the next two decades, he would fill various roles, assisting Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan, among others. His work brought him in contact with such American luminaries as Jacqueline Kennedy and a teenaged Oprah Winfrey. I'm sure they were both charmed at the encounter. (Laughter)

In 1972, Steve joined Brookings and has been an integral part of the institution ever since. Over the course of his second career here at Brookings, Steve has established himself as one of the foremost authorities on the media and the government. He's published 17 books with Brookings Institution Press, and I have to tell you 17 is only part of the full 24 books that he has published. I will take advice from him when I get to my first book. (Laughter) And he has so many stories, really classic stories, that the

Brookings Cafeteria Podcast once featured a long-running series of “Steve Hess stories.”

Today, Steve is a senior fellow emeritus and he remains a regular fixture around these halls, an essential fixture, actually. But I do have to tell you, Steve and ladies and gentlemen, I do take serious issue with Steve’s book title. Given all he’s done at the White House and for our presidents, he’s been anything but a bit player on the world’s stage. And he has made Brookings immeasurably better for his presence among us.

For this event we’re joined today by Washington bureau chief of *USA Today*, Susan Page. Susan has covered six White House administrations and has won every journalism award for coverage of the White House. And I also understand, Susan, that your soon-to-be-published biography of Barbara Bush entitled, *The Matriarch: Barbara Bush and the Making of an American Dynasty*, will be coming out in April. Congratulations on that and I’m certainly looking forward to reading it.

And, Susan, let me also say as a member of the American media and the precious Fourth Estate, let me tell you how important you are to America today. So permit me to thank you for your service in these perilous times for our journalists and for the American media, and to tell you how welcome you are at Brookings today.

So next, let’s have our discussion this morning with Susan Page and Steve Hess. Thank you very much for coming today, ladies and gentlemen. (Applause)

MS. PAGE: Good morning, everyone. Thank you all so much for being here. John Allen was too modest to mention this. This is a big day for him. It’s the one-year anniversary of him taking over the Brookings Institution. Happy anniversary, sir.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thank you. (Applause)

MS. PAGE: It’s wonderful to see such an illustrious audience here of many people I’ve interviewed in the past, and I know that Steve Hess is the draw. Here’s

the question. What do Oprah Winfrey, Richard Nixon, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Spiro Agnew, Jane Fonda, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Lanny Budd have in common? And the answer would be Steve Hess. (Laughter)

He brings new meaning to the word "bipartisan." He is polypartisan. He is pan-discipline. He knows everyone. He knows everything. He's worked everywhere.

When I arrived in Washington in 1979 as a reporter for *Newsday*, I began calling Steve Hess for comment on all kinds of things. And I tried to find an early example and a recent example.

In 1989, I called Steve Hess and asked about the political ramifications of improving relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. And he said, "For Republicans, this is like having a three-legged stool and having one leg suddenly cut off. You've got to do a little balancing," which is a pretty good quote.

And a quarter century later, I called Steve Hess, working for *USA Today* then, and asked him about Jeb Bush and political dynasties, which is a subspecialty for Steve Hess. And he said, "The secret to building a dynasty is to have a lot of kids." (Laughter) Also true.

He's written a wonderful memoir, *Bit Player: My Life with Presidents and Ideas*. We're going to go to questions in the audience after a bit, but first I'm going to pose some questions once again, as I have so often, to Steve Hess.

Okay, I mentioned Lanny Budd. Who is Lanny Budd?

MR. HESS: Let me say, my worry about being here this morning was I was going to hear a lot of nice things about me and I really didn't know how I was going to take it. It's fun, I like it. (Laughter)

Lanny was a hero in Upton Sinclair's novels that came out in the 1940s and '50s. And he was not a famous person in that he was not a general or cabinet officer

or anything like that, but he always was there. Whenever anything important happened, he seemed to be there. And as I tried to put together my memoir it seemed sort of familiar.

From the time I was 19 years old at the Republic Convention in Chicago between Dwight Eisenhower and Robert Taft, which was the most exciting convention of my lifetime, there I was on the floor. Quite by accident, I should say, because I had a job in the motor pool driving the delegates back and forth from their hotel downtown to the convention site. But I didn't tell them that I had no sense of direction. (Laughter) And it was about a 45-minute trip and my first drive I got lost. And the delegates got out and thanked me and fired me. (Laughter) And gave me a set of tickets to the convention. And at that time security was a very modest thing. So I was inside and I could wander around and be on the floor and that's why I was there.

And it was the sort of thing where I realized I had a certain degree of luck, or maybe every does, but the door opened one day and the person who had just been chosen to be Vice President, Richard Nixon, came in and I was standing there. So he shook my hand and so I became the first person to shake the hand of the future Vice President. A story I never told him again when I was his speechwriter.

So there I was. I was always seen to be there in odd things. Another example would have been in 1960, there was a so-called Treaty of 5th Avenue. Anybody remember? How many remember the Treaty of 5th Avenue? One hand, two hands.

Okay, the Treaty of 5th Avenue was when Richard Nixon went to New York to meet Nelson Rockefeller and work out what they wanted in the platform. I was the White House liaison then on the platform, so I was -- and Chuck Percy was the chairman of the platform, a businessman from Chicago. And we were waiting to have the platform mimeographed so that the next morning they could be handed out to the

delegates who had been working on the platform. And then this call came in and it was clear that it was an unusual call. And Percy was on one phone and Rod Perkins, who was Rockefeller's representative, was on another, and then several of us were on a third. And we were listening to Nixon and Rockefeller settle what the platform was going to be, which started a massive fight at the convention. And there I was on the phone listening to all of this, which was really quite exciting.

So that really is why I compare myself to a Lanny Budd figure.

MS. PAGE: You know, you had a long relationship with Richard Nixon. And one of the most devastating things that happened to Richard Nixon was when Dwight Eisenhower as President was asked can you name some decision you made that really reflected the influence of the Vice President and he said, if you give me a week, I might think of one.

MR. HESS: Yeah.

MS. PAGE: This was not helpful to Richard Nixon's presidential ambitions.

MR. HESS: No.

MS. PAGE: You were at the White House then. Why did Eisenhower say that?

MR. HESS: Yeah, I think that was the most devastating thing that happened to Nixon in that campaign because it pulled right out from under him the label of being the experienced President against Kennedy, who was not considered the experienced President. At that time, the President had a press conference, a radio conference, in the Executive Office Building, televised, but they weren't heard live till that evening. So was as the staff would then gather in the White House mess and listen to this. And we heard Eisenhower say this and I was quite stunned by it. Nobody said

anything.

The next day, I asked John Eisenhower --

MS. PAGE: So no one said -- people sat there and listened to this statement.

MR. HESS: Just sat there. Sat there, listened to the statement.

MS. PAGE: Understood how terrible it was for Nixon, yeah.

MR. HESS: I assume so. I did. And listened to the statement and didn't -- and the next day, John Eisenhower was the assistant staff secretary, very good guy. The President was his father. And I said why did the President say that? And John said to me, well, you see, these press conferences had to end as Eisenhower liked it, in a half-hour, and he said it was to be the last question. And what he really meant was I will be back in a week and will answer your question.

Quite frankly, this wasn't going to ring. It was not -- and came back in a week, nobody asked the question. And the more I thought about this, and I loved Dwight Eisenhower, was that he did a mean thing. He did a mean thing to the man who had been his loyal Vice President for eight years. And I think he regretted it. I found he later said that not fully supporting -- appearing to support Eisenhower [*sic*] was a serious mistake on his part.

What happened in part, why he didn't support Nixon and the campaign, was that the President's doctor and the First Lady were worried about Eisenhower's health and asked him if he would not campaign more fully. This was very, very bothersome to the President who really wanted to campaign. And as his speechwriter, particularly the speechwriter who did the political speeches, we were geared up to go. And suddenly, we didn't know why this happened.

He gave some speeches, three or four speeches, at the very end which

were very powerful speeches. But clearly, the things he could have done in the right places in a very, very close election would have been important.

So these are things you're around when you're there. We wrote about this, Earl Mazo and I wrote a biography of Nixon, and we then wrote about this. This came out in '67, '68, eight years later when Nixon was running again. And so Earl Mazo, my co-author, who worked for the *Herald Tribune* in New York, was writing a series on the election, the '60 election, in which he had gone carefully into Texas and carefully into Illinois and was absolutely convinced it had a lot of data that that election was stolen; that Nixon lost the election states that he should have won if there was an honest count. And he was going to write this series.

And Richard Nixon called in Mazo and said I've been reading your series and I would like you to stop. It was to be a 12-part series and he had done I think 4. He said nobody steals the election of the American presidency. And he explained why the American President had to be vital and whole in relations around the world, which he had explained to me. So the *Herald Tribune* stopped the series.

I say that in part because Nixon was a very strange man. I mean, that's not exactly the way you think of Richard Nixon, stopping an election where he could have been President of the United States. I didn't know Nixon, even though I worked in the Eisenhower White House, because it was very different then. It wasn't until Walter Mondale, Jimmy Carter's Vice President, had an office there. We didn't see Richard Nixon in the White House. We saw him when he showed up for a National Security Council meeting.

But Eisenhower actually thought of Nixon in the way he learned in high school, as part of the Legislative Branch. He was the president of the Senate and he got his paycheck from the Senate. He had his office at the Senate. So subsequently, later,

when I was Nixon's speechwriter, I started with really the Herblock view of Richard Nixon.

And gradually, in a whole series of events that I tell, I learned another Richard Nixon. That didn't negate the earlier Richard Nixon, but suddenly there were two Richard Nixons. So Nixon was very complicated and got more and more complicated when we get to the question of Watergate if you want to talk about that.

MS. PAGE: So Eisenhower, who we do not think of as being mean, did a mean thing.

MR. HESS: Did a mean thing.

MS. PAGE: And Nixon, who we do not think of as being gracious, did a gracious thing --

MR. HESS: Did a gracious thing.

MS. PAGE: -- both to Eisenhower not campaigning and also in stopping --

MR. HESS: I should have written it that way. (Laughter) That's exactly the way it was.

MS. PAGE: And did the newspaper series just stop at four?

MR. HESS: Stopped at four.

MS. PAGE: Was there any explanation, like, oh, we were going to do 12, but --

MR. HESS: No, I don't think so. It stopped at four. And when the book came out with this story it got a lot of publicity. It had a 1,200-word editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* on what a great guy Richard Nixon was. The *London Times* has a headline about Kennedy should have lost the election and so forth. It didn't do Nixon much good by this time. But yes, that's what happened.

MS. PAGE: So Richard Nixon then wins the presidency. We've got the

Watergate scandal. You had seen these two Nixons, the Herblock Nixon and this more appealing Nixon that you had gotten to know. Were you surprised by the revelations that came out about Watergate?

MR. HESS: Oh, I was shocked. I was shocked. In fact, I had even given a talk at Harvard Business School explaining all the ways that I figured that Nixon would not have known about Watergate, and they were logical reasons.

MS. PAGE: Prescient.

MR. HESS: Yeah, and so forth.

MS. PAGE: Not exactly.

MR. HESS: And then with the hearings, of course, and public television started MacNeil and Lehrer, they had two people within them as two sidemen: myself doing politics and a lawyer who rotated on that side. And I sat there day after day listening to what was going on and the tapes were released, and it was awful. I mean, I got nightmares. I really did. And I finally went on the air and said I'm not coming back tomorrow, I can't take this, so I didn't.

And so in the memoir I said, okay, this are the reasons that Nixon knew. Well, I was just dead wrong.

Nixon had been very good to me in a lot of ways. For one thing, this again, this is a Nixon that you don't know, he was exceptionally generous. We would do a speech, we would do an article for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and maybe it was \$10,000, which was a lot of money. And if I had done it myself, maybe I'd get \$1,000. And he's just split the fee with me. And finally I said, Dick, that's too much. And he was embarrassed. And he said, oh, it would just have to go to the IRS and so forth. (Laughter) But that was sort of typical things that I didn't know about Nixon that I ultimately learned about Nixon.

So I reacted very strongly. I never saw Nixon again.

MS. PAGE: After when?

MR. HESS: After I left the administration. And I said I would -- I never saw Nixon again. Pat Moynihan said you really have to have closure with him. I said, okay, Pat. Pat said I'll arrange it, the two of us, we'll go up to New Jersey and have lunch with him. By the time that happened, Nixon's memoirs had come out in which he admitted nothing about Watergate. He merely said he was sorry. That seemed to be good enough for David Frost, but it wasn't good enough for me.

And then he sent me a book one day, an autographed book. Beth and I were at the arena and there was an intermission, and Helene and Bill Safire were there. And I said to them, you know, R.N. sent me a book today. What does it mean? And Helene said it means he's forgiven you. (Laughter) I said really? I thought this was (inaudible).

So I didn't even go to his funeral. Instead, I did the analysis on C-SPAN. I regret this. I do regret this. I'm still not sure I did the right thing. He deserved a type of closure that I didn't give him. He had done many nice things for me and some that weren't so nice.

MS. PAGE: So let's talk briefly about a giant you worked with in the White House, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and another figure may be less giant dimensions, Spiro Agnew. Talk about working for Spiro Agnew.

MR. HESS: Oh, god, Spiro Agnew. (Laughter) All right. In the '68 campaign, I had nothing to do with it by the time we had the convention in Miami. I was actually there promoting the biography, the Mazo-Hess biography. And so I was sort of sad not to be involved in the campaign. I'd always been involved in the campaign. And then suddenly, I did get a call from Haldeman saying the boss wants you on the plane

with Agnew. By this time Agnew had said some awful things, some really dumb things.

And so I did one thing that I don't do usually. I knew the *Wall Street Journal* had reporters in Towson and I knew them. And I called, and Maryland can be a dicey state, and I called them to make sure that I wasn't boarding a plane with a crook. And they assured me that they had nothing on him. (Laughter) And so I got on the plane; we traveled 60,000 miles.

And typically, this was -- he had a speech I don't know who had written for him when I got there, which was about population dispersal. We have a lot of people, but they weren't spread out in the right places. It's a nice idea. And we're flying from Dallas, where I had written the first speech, to Cheyenne. So I walked up in the place and sitting next to him and you look out the window at night and there's one light there and another light there. And I said, Governor, I don't think this is the best place for the population dispersal speech. (Laughter)

So we got into the auditorium, the high school auditorium, and it's just the way it's supposed to be with the drum majors and the band and the colors and so forth. And he gives the population dispersal speech. (Laughter) I don't know whether they were gasps. In my own mind maybe they did. I said, oh, my god, what have I joined?

So we went back to the hotel and his aide came and said the governor wants to see you. So I went into his room and he's sitting in a chair like this and there were papers all over the floor like that. And he looks up and he said, Steve, I picked up the wrong speech. (Laughter)

I'm very sorry for him, but that's not his job to pick up the wrong speech. And after that, I wrote a speech for him every day. He didn't use it, but it went out in his name. He couldn't fire me; I wasn't going to quit. And, well, that was the end of Spiro

Agnew.

I never did say anything bad that I deliberately said about anybody, but I did say something once that a reporter overheard me say when he was being introduced by somebody who said this man has something. And I said, god, I hope it's not catching. (Laughter) And somebody picked it up and it was in the paper and then I had to (inaudible).

MS. PAGE: You were surprised by the revelations about wrongdoing by Richard Nixon. Were you surprised by the revelations of wrongdoing by Spiro Agnew?

MR. HESS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that whole thing came out much later when he was being squeezed in his own state by developers that told that they had been paying him.

MS. PAGE: Cash in envelopes.

MR. HESS: Yeah. No, I don't think any of us knew anything about that.

MS. PAGE: So happier topic, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, such a figure and an odd figure, too, in the Nixon White House, was he not?

MR. HESS: Yeah. Yeah, Pat was wonderful. He was a dear friend. And, in fact, I wrote a previous book about Pat in the White House, *The President and the Professor*. And I think the first line is something like I was the only person perhaps in the world who was a friend of Richard Nixon and Daniel Patrick Moynihan before they knew each other.

And his being chosen for that job was a total surprise for me. It tells the story in the book, or certainly in the Nixon book, in which Pat called and said the President-elect, who was at the hotel in New York, where they had their headquarters on Fifth Avenue, has called me down to see him. And would you come up and meet me right after I've seen him?

And Pat came into the dining room and he was just elated. The man had offered him the job that he always wanted. Unfortunately, it was the wrong man who offered him the job, but it was to be the domestic counterpart to Henry Kissinger in the White House. And he asked me to join him there. We had a bottle of Beaujolais, which was more than I usually drank. And he said, join me, be with me.

I had actually not -- I knew I was owed a job after being with Agnew, but I didn't want to go back to the White House. That was a great experience, but I had had it. But, of course, I had to say yes for two reasons.

One, the joy of working with Pat Moynihan was something that nobody should be able to turn down. And the second was I thought he needed me. I mean, the only Republican he knew was me. (Laughter) I was about to walk into that.

And Pat thought he had a job, but it turned Nixon gave the same job to somebody else, and that was Arthur Burns. So within days of arriving in the White House, we had an Ivy League liberal from Harvard and an Ivy League conservative from Columbia in conflict and it was real conflict. It was the way things are supposed to be done in the White House, two very smart men in conflict. I see Chester Finn there, he knows it all. He was right there.

And so the strange part about it was Moynihan was the winner. And the story of how Moynihan is the winner, first of all, even before he got there he started to send, as he would, the President-elect these long, detailed, interesting memos. And I think it was the first person that had ever treated Richard Nixon as an intellectual and he loved it. And they had a bonding that was really very serious.

So that was a marvelous year being with him. And at the end of that year, he made Pat sort of a cabinet officer without portfolio. And then the question is what the hell do they do with me? And that becomes another story in the book.

MS. PAGE: You eventually end up here at the Brookings Institution.

MR. HESS: Yeah, I didn't get to Brookings until '72. By that time, what they did with me -- I have to go back to what Nixon did, yeah, they had a hard time knowing what to do with me, I gather from material that has been declassified.

(Laughter) And in which Haldeman says to Ehrlichman, you know, how do we get rid of Hess? Should we send him back to Harvard? That sort of thing.

But at any rate, instead, they sent me over to HEW, where Bob Finch was the Secretary. And Bob Finch was really the only cabinet officer that Richard Nixon loved. He had been his campaign manager in 1960. And he said to me and was in despair that he can't do the job. Go over and see what you can do.

And it's one of those you read about in novels, but you say, yes, Mr. President, you walk out the door and say how the hell can I do that? I can't go over and tell Bob Finch that the President thinks he's failed. For one thing, Bob Finch was a real friend of mine.

So I get there and we're all sort of looking at each other. And they said would I be chairman of the White House Conference on Children and Youth, something Teddy Roosevelt had started and had been going on every 10th year. And they hadn't even bothered to have a chair. Awful job. And I said, okay, I've got to do something.

So within a couple weeks I realized in 1969 and '70, there was no way you could have a conference of children and youth at that moment in the middle of that war. So I went back to the President and I said, Mr. President, we have to divide it. We have to have a conference of children, have to have a conference on youth. Otherwise, the youth part is going to overwhelm the important things that have to be done with children. He said okay. So this awful job that was going to take one year is now going to take two years.

And then a lot of the book has to do with how I have these two awful experiences. (Laughter)

MS. PAGE: And yet this is where Oprah Winfrey comes into your life.

MR. HESS: Oprah Winfrey, okay. The children's conference, I found out in Kitty Kelley's book of Oprah that she had been a delegate, a 17-year-old delegate, at the Youth Conference from Tennessee. And I didn't know it. Oh, I wish I had known it. (Laughter) And I wrote her a letter. I didn't know where to write it, just to her TV show. I never heard from her. So it says in the book if anybody knows how I can get together with Oprah, I'm really curious to see how this might have affected her.

Because the Youth Conference was held at Estes Park, Colorado, and was quite a donnybrook. And what made it even more complicated after my staff had worked all over the place to hold it and we had all the weather reports and so forth, you're right at the divide, the Rockies divide, and we got there and we wake up, we're in a snowstorm. We're in a blizzard. And these poor delegates from Guam and so forth, it was awful. We had such a good staff. They ran out and bought every Glad bag they could find to put on people's feet. And finally the Army came in and gave them jackets and whatnot.

So it was always complicated. Life is complicated, you know.

MS. PAGE: You know, Oprah has a book club. You might think about trying to -- (Laughter)

So before we go to the audience, let's talk a little about current events.

MR. HESS: Okay.

MS. PAGE: You wrote an op-ed for USA Today in 2016 and the headline on it was, "Trump Has No Idea How to Be President." Is that still true?

MR. HESS: Oh, boy. (Laughter) Yeah, yeah, that was when he was

running for the nomination. And there was sort of a second line, he has no idea, but he had no interest. It wasn't as if he had pursued all the things that people do when they want to be President. He didn't. He had no interest in it.

So then he got the election. It shows how much of an influence I had. And then I did another column, and this one was geared for Republicans. It was, okay, fellow party members, this guy's not a Republican. He doesn't stand for the things we stand for. Still, he gets elected.

January 20th, I always had been invited by some TV channel to be a -- to comment on the Inaugural Address. And it was my favorite speech. I loved -- it means when a person stops talking campaign talk and starts trying to talk to be President. And I'm sitting there and I am shocked. It sounds like my life is just a series of shocks.

(Laughter)

I was shocked. It's a shout-out. It's America first, America first. Remember that? And I said to myself, given my history of always spending my life talking to reporters, I'm not going to say anything about this President. I'm not going to answer. The only time we spoke was once we had a conversation about Barbara Bush, that's all. I turned down all conversations because I knew very well that the system is you tell one correspondent, they ask you a question, and you say the President is a pathological liar, and then the next one picks it up and the next one, and before you know it you're consumed by Donald Trump. So I didn't do that.

And then I had to do something. That's my job is to write. And it was at that point that I decided to write a memoir for various reasons. Henry Aaron convinced -- I didn't want to because memoirs are written by generals who are in important wars. They're not written by -- you know, *The Bit Player* came from a line that I love from John McCain.

But Henry Aaron said, look, look, there are more bit players than there are generals. There'll be more people that'll be interested in this.

And then my wife, a social worker, put me on to a theory of reminiscence, which says it's a pretty good thing to start remembering your past and whatnot. So I had an absolutely marvelous year writing this book. And I really do think I learned things about myself in writing it. And I hope I told stories that others will like.

MS. PAGE: But it was President Trump propelled you to do this --

MR. HESS: Oh, absolutely.

MS. PAGE: -- so that you would not be talking about him.

MR. HESS: Absolutely.

MS. PAGE: And so your memoir's now done.

MR. HESS: Done.

MS. PAGE: So let's talk about Trump. (Laughter) You know, some Republicans say I don't like his rhetoric, I don't like his Tweets, but I like what he's done. He's been a good President. Look at the economy. Would you hold (inaudible)?

MR. HESS: No, no, no, no. Trump to me is a disaster in which -- and the question is how do you get the poison out of the system ultimately? I feel that way. And it needn't be long.

Richard Nixon destroyed himself, but not the presidency. And so the day he stopped being President, Gerry Ford took over and the presidency went back into shape. And something like that could happen, but I think it's less likely to happen in that way. So the question is, do I go back into business, my old business, of saying things nasty about the presidency?

If you go back to a book I wrote called *Organizing the Presidency*, and one of my co-authors is there, it starts with a chapter which is a composite presidency in

which, again, I'm very lucky to be able to write this because I had been on the White House staff for the first two years of one President and the last two years of another. And the first thing you realize is first years don't look like last years.

So my composite presidency is the presidency as it appears to the President in year 1, year 2, year 3, year 4. So let's take this into as we move into year 3.

Year 3 is a rough year for presidents. Usually, not always, but usually they have just lost a midterm election. They have problems with their own employees. Katie Dunn Tenpas is here and she has traced this over time and, boy, is he having his problems with his employees. And you have a situation in which cliques and factions are happening within his own workers. So all of these things are happening.

And there are other things happen. And now I've become not an analyst, but a half-baked psychology. This is a man who is not going to be very happy with losing anything and he's going to make a -- and he's going to lose a lot. We have the Mueller report coming out. We have the House who are going to go into his taxes. And the only he seems to save more than his taxes are maybe his family. I mean, they are significant.

All of these things are coming along and I think we already see him becoming more and more outrageous. What will this outrage mean? And I think at some point he goes over the edge and there's reason to do something that is legitimately impeachable. Remember, I was around when -- I don't know if there's any Barry Goldwater who's going to go to this President and say you don't have the votes in the Senate. But I think with the right bet, I will bet that he doesn't last four years.

Now, of course, I'm knocking wood and saying silly things, but that's about where I come out at this point. Something is going to happen and somebody is going to be able to stop him at some point as, fortunately, I think the military has up to this point. And that's how I would read the future if you're willing to just speculate.

MS. PAGE: You think that he will either be impeached or resign before the 2020 election?

MR. HESS: I do. I do. I don't think he can take the brutal beating he's going to get with the way he has responded to everything. And I think it's either going to force him to do something even more ridiculous than he's already done or just pass it off, I mean, go elsewhere.

MS. PAGE: Do you consider yourself a Republican?

MR. HESS: Yes, I do, but I hope maybe some of what I said will make a difference. But again, where am I going? There's no reason I should become a Democrat. I've got my own problems with the Democrats. Independents stand for nothing. So I feel, if anything, I'm sort of stuck there. (Laughter) In political terms, I'm really sort of stuck there.

For example, I mean, I've voted for a lot of Democrats over time. I fell in love with Obama's first memoir. I don't fall in love with books or politicians, but I love that book and I wanted him to be President. And I can remember in the primary in the District of Columbia wanting to cast a vote for Barack Obama, but the Republican ballot didn't have a place for a write-in. The Democratic ballot did, but the Republican ballot didn't. And I wouldn't leave the polling place until they allowed me to write in his name, which was quite a standoff. (Laughter) And finally a nice woman who ran it grabbed it and threw it in the can and said we'll count it, don't worry about it.

So I guess I don't know how -- I don't really have to. I'm 85 years old. I mean, I don't really have to be at the forefront of every issue that comes along. But this is when I would like to be there. Because I so deeply respect the presidency, not necessarily the people who are President. And I guess it's now time for me to get some oars and go into the water again.

MS. PAGE: Let me turn this over to this very distinguished audience for your questions. George Condon. Wait for the microphone and please identify yourself. Thanks.

MR. CONDON: George Condon with the National Journal. Susan and I can fight about which one of us has quoted you more often, but I think I hold the record on State of the Unions since we've talked before every State of the Union since 1983. And you've always had something fresh or new to say about it, amazingly.

But you have written -- you were the first one to really study Washington correspondents in the '70s and then revisited the book later. Since today CNN filed suit against the White House and the Secret Service and so on, two questions. What do you make of that development? And secondly, can you imagine Dwight Eisenhower stripping credentials away from a reporter?

MR. HESS: You know, Eisenhower's best moments were not in press conferences, frankly, but he had to do it. He was always there. And we prepared him for it and he went in there and had them and it was very important to him, even though he knew this was not his finest hour.

Nixon hated the press, too, but he understood the press and understood, if anything, how to take advantage of them. I mean, he knew he could get a better press if he gave it in Toledo while he was on the road than in Washington. That sort of thing.

Neither one would have ever handled the press the way this person did. I mean, if you listen to that last press conference -- and by the way, I thought there was some reporters who were pretty damn rude. I'm not forgiving the CNN guy, who I thought was quite obnoxious. But the way he talked to the press was so outrageous. And then beyond that, goes ahead and removes a legitimate reporter's press credentials and then sends out a release that's phony that shows him ripping the microphone away from a

young woman, an intern, which he didn't do, I think the suit is viable. And I will be very interested to see if it goes to the Supreme Court, whether we get a 6-to-4 -- oh, I don't know. I don't know what the Supreme Court will do with it, but I'm for that suit. I think the press has to stand up to this.

I mean, the two elements that he had deliberately undermined was the media, and Marvin Kalb, who's just written a book for Brookings on the enemy, the press, and the judiciary. We will see if he tries the same thing now that he doesn't control the Congress.

These are vicious things. These are things I've never seen a President do before. There have been lots of presidents I've disagreed with, but I've never seen them undermine the Constitution of the United States.

Richard Nixon could have destroyed those tapes. He stood by the Supreme Court and went down with it. Do you think if it went to the Supreme Court that Trump wouldn't burn his tax records? No, but seriously, yeah, my answer to your question is let's take this to court.

MS. PAGE: Yes, sir.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much and particularly to Steve I would say -- I'm Garrett Mitchell, I write The Mitchell Report. And I want to say that I love this book. I think it is not just a memoir. I think it is also a wonderful travelogue through about a dozen presidencies and it's really wonderful. And somehow, even though it's a memoir, Steve has this way of sort of keeping himself in the background, yet he's there.

Anyway, when John Allen said this morning, was describing the fact that Steve has probably known more people in the press and politics and policy than anyone, I was thinking about one of the things that I love to do on Sunday morning is read the *New York Times* Book Review. And the last question that is asked of the author of the

week is you're giving a dinner party and you're allowed to invite let's say three people or four people. And so what I would be interested in knowing is if John Allen said to Steve, Brookings is going to host a dinner party and you can invite three or four or five of the people that you've worked with over time for whom you have the greatest respect and you think would make for wonderful conversation, I'd love to know who'd be at that table.

GENERAL ALLEN: We're going off the record here. (Laughter)

MR. HESS: Yeah. I was going to invite the whole room. How are you free on Sunday? (Laughter) Some of my best friends are out there.

And, of course, sometimes in those *New York Times* things they choose people who are not living. They choose people who are even fictional. And I'm in the midst of a lot of books at the moment. Now that the baseball season is over I have nothing to do. And gosh, I'm reading some good stuff.

Michael Ondaatje, oh, boy. Tana French, the Irish mystery writer, what a wonderful writer. The woman who wrote *Manhattan Beach*, quick, quick, quick, Jennifer Egan. Gosh, there are some wonderful people that I've been reading lately that I would love to have around me.

On my desk right now I have the historian, Ellis, Joseph Ellis. Gosh, he's got a wonderful new book, Joseph Ellis. I would recommend Michael Lewis' new book. It's not a wonderful book, but it's a good book. There are so many people, but you get the idea. Writers to me are special. Did I give you enough?

MS. PAGE: It's a big dinner party. Let's go back a ways. Yes, sir.

MR. MOSETTIG: Mike Mosettig PBS Online NewsHour. It used to be MacNeil/Lehrer.

MR. HESS: Yes, indeed.

MR. MOSETTIG: A couple Eisenhower questions. I don't think you

wrote this speech. It was probably written by Ray Price, the 1964 San Francisco convention speech. A lot of people say the anti-press stuff started with Fox News or Trump. I think it really started when Eisenhower at the podium talked about sensation-seeking columnists and commentators, and this very conservative group of delegates bellowed with a roar, shaking their fists at the anchor booths, so on, and so forth.

But then my second question is, did the White House press corps ever really understand what was -- every time I read a book about Eisenhower, I'm increasingly humbled by how little the press covering it at the time really understood and knew, A, how smart Eisenhower was and what he was really accomplishing.

MR. HESS: Yeah. I thought it was quite -- the one thing that people didn't realize that's so unique is that Eisenhower was a great politician. If you remember, in 1962, he was the non-politician. They put Nixon on the ticket because he had to be a politician. They had a politician and that was the ticket. Boy, did they have that backwards.

Eisenhower was a brilliant politician. He knew how to keep quiet. He knew how to take advantage. And Nixon was not a good politician. I'll give you an example.

After Eisenhower left office and I was once more out of a job, I went to work for a senator and realized that I was much more of an Executive Branch person than a Legislative Branch person. And along came Bryce Harlow, who some of you may remember, who was the go-to person for all things Republican in Washington. And he came to me and -- oh, excuse me, go back a step.

At that time, there was absolutely nothing that an ex-President of the United States got. He didn't get a staff. He didn't get housing. He didn't get security. He didn't get cars. Eisenhower got in his old Chrysler Imperial, drove to Gettysburg, one

Secret Service trailing. When they got to Gettysburg, the Secret Service did a U-turn and came back, and there he was all by himself in Gettysburg.

Harlow came to me and said we, the Republican Party, to keep him alive politically somebody has to answer his mail. Would you do that? And I was working for a California senator and I was getting tired of defending the date and nut industries in California. (Laughter) And I said sure, that sounds better than what I'm doing.

We had no idea how many letters there would be, so we simply did a piecework contract. Every letter, I'd get \$3, blah, blah, blah.

MS. PAGE: Three dollars a letter?

MR. HESS: Three dollars a letter at first. Three dollars a letter. I hired one of Mamie Eisenhower's secretaries, Anne Parsons, who was great. I found some space in a Republican PR firm for us. I wrote a little three-ring notebook which told Anne what she should answer each person who wrote in and said what does he think about the 18-year-old draft, blah, blah, blah, and so forth. And then I had nothing to do because she had all of the answers and she did all of these wonderful things and I was getting all of this money and I was feeling a little guilty.

Oh, excuse me, when Harlow left that in my lap, he said, oh, by the way, if you can help Dick Nixon, you know, he's got nobody here in Washington. He's out as a rainmaker with a large firm in Los Angeles. Okay.

So the first thing I did, anytime I saw something in the paper that I knew related to them, someone they knew had become the Republican Woman of the Year in Virginia, somebody's daughter had gotten married, somebody had received an honorary degree, I would write a little note and send it to Los Angeles or to Gettysburg.

Eisenhower, the non-politician, loved it. All over Washington I would get -- at that point, by the way, he wanted to be called the General; General, not President. I would get little

people say, boy, I got the nicest note from the General.

I heard nothing from Nixon until he finally came to Washington. At that time, at a great big L.A. firm, didn't have a Washington office. He borrowed a room in Bill Rogers' office. And I was meeting him, in a sense, for the first time to see what he wanted to do. And he said to me he liked the little notes, the little newsletters sorts of things. And he said don't send me those letters. I don't want to be remembered as somebody who remembers people's birthday. (Laughter) What? I mean, this was Richard Nixon. But again, I was constantly surprised by him in that way.

So we went on and I went through all of life with Richard Nixon. And he ultimately asked me to come to New York with him and I said, well, no, Dick, I now have enough money to write all the books I want to write. He was very hurt by this. And we did it on the tarmac in Buffalo when we were going someplace. There was some person on the plane with us, a guy named John Whitaker, who was a geologist, but a great supporter of Nixon. He was on the plane as the advance man.

I got back on the plane. John said what happened? I said, well, Nixon asked me to go to New York to be his assistant. He had no assistant. And what did you say? I said I can't do it. He said that's changed your relationship with him. I said what do you mean? We're friends, we had a good relationship.

He understood Nixon better than I did and people like Nixon. I suddenly dropped out of the top circle. We were still friends, but of a different level, and that was clear.

More to the story. There was a young man in St. Louis who was desperate to be Nixon's assistant. He was on the *St. Louis Globe*, Democrat. His name was Pat Buchanan. And he kept writing Nixon and so forth. And finally Nixon had him to New York and he got the job. I don't think Pat knows to this day that he got the job

because I turned down the job. (Laughter) But more significantly, it did things for everybody involved.

Pat Buchanan in the '68 election or building up to it moved Nixon closer to the right wing, and he writes a book about it, which was very helpful to Richard Nixon. If I had taken the job I would not have been moving him in that direction, so everybody gained. I gained and got a life writing books and at Brookings. Pat gained because he did what he's always wanted to do. And Nixon was helped in getting the presidency, and so it goes.

So there was a question somewhere, but I've long forgotten it by now.

MS. PAGE: Doesn't like sound like a bit player. We're out of time, so I'm going to ask you a couple lightning round questions, which you must answer with only a word. Okay? Best politician you've met?

MR. HESS: I already described.

MS. PAGE: Eisenhower?

MR. HESS: Dwight Eisenhower.

MS. PAGE: Worst politician you've met?

MR. HESS: It's written all over.

MS. PAGE: Nixon?

MR. HESS: Yeah.

MS. PAGE: Okay. Most underestimated President in modern times?

MR. HESS: That's a good question.

MS. PAGE: It doesn't have to be the greatest President, but the one who doesn't get the credit that he is due.

MR. HESS: Well, Harry Truman was very special and he sure wasn't loved in his own time, so if you put that as underestimated there was Harry Truman.

Should add one thing. The two most satisfied presidents I've ever had anything to do would have been the two men who didn't run for the presidency: Gerald Ford and Harry Truman. And the reason is something happens to these people, it's happening today as you see each one getting on a plane to go to Iowa, in the course of which there's something that goes out of their real life and into this pseudo-life. And Truman and Ford didn't have that experience and they were made real people.

MS. PAGE: Most overestimated President in modern times? It doesn't have to be the worst, but the one who gets more credit than he's due.

MR. HESS: Well, probably the second Bush because the enthusiasm he got out of his response to 9-11.

MS. PAGE: Most consequential President in modern times, the President for good or ill leaves the biggest footprint?

MR. HESS: Well, certainly FDR left the biggest footprint, there's no question about that.

MS. PAGE: And final question, rising stars, who are you watching?

MR. HESS: There's a young guy who lost an election in Texas. Keep your eye on that guy. (Laughter) He's a comer.

MS. PAGE: Steve Hess, we could stay here all day and listen to your stories. Thank you so much for writing this wonderful book. (Applause)

MR. HESS: Thank you.

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 600
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190