Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Chris DeMuth
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: First of all, thank you for doing this. We're interested in knowing about AEI and President Ford's relationship with AEI. How it evolved over the years and things like the World Forum and other events. A little bit about AEI; how it existed before Gerald Ford was part of it.

DeMuth: The American Enterprise Institute goes back many, many years. It was founded in 1943, and was active, for example, in decontrol of the economy following World War II. That was one of its early missions. It pioneered the idea of the think tank, which has now become very common. There are lots of think tanks in Washington, but the basic techniques were developed by people at AEI in the 1950s. Which was to commission topflight academics to do serious research; not lobbying propaganda, but serious research on important policy issues; foreign policy, domestic issues, economics across the board; and then to take that work and produce it in a kind of brief, digestible, document that even a congressman can understand. And circulate them very aggressively around on the Hill, arrange for academics to give testimony before Congress on something the United Nations or farm policy or tax policy, or whatever.

It was a very small outfit, but doing serious work, getting attention in the mid-1950s, and it had a strong free-market, pro-private enterprise cast. And it sort of set itself against the establishment wisdom of Washington. It's never been a partisan organization. But Washington is a company town, everybody is enthusiastic for big government, more government, and AEI has always been: slow down, let's look at the virtues of the private enterprise system, private solutions to problems, and so forth.

I know that our work came to the attention of young Congressman Ford very early on. I can't give you the date, but when was his first election?

Smith: He was elected in '48.

DeMuth: ’48. It was within a few years. It could have started with a 4, it could have been the early 50s. We have in our files a letter from Congressman Ford. I don’t think it had been solicited. He’d read one of our studies and he found it very interesting and valuable and encouraged us to continue to work and try to make the debates more productive up on the Hill. So this is all way, way, before my time. But I know that he had warm relations with AEI going back a very, very long time.

Smith: And when did you come on board?

DeMuth: I came to AEI at the end of 1986, and I served as its president from ’86 through the end of last year, 2008. I’m now a Senior Fellow here.

Smith: Let me back up a little bit, because, clearly during that time you’ve also seen at once both the growth, and in some ways, the fragmentation of conservatism.

DeMuth: That’s right.

Smith: And when I think of Gerald Ford while he was in the White House, there were a number who thought of him as the most conservative president since Calvin Coolidge. Which didn’t obviously prevent him from being challenged from the right, and certainly by the time he died, many people thought of him as – or Bob Dole, someone else I’ve worked with – as being almost apostates to the…

DeMuth: Old-fashioned, moderate Republicanism.

Smith: Yes. Could you label them primarily, first and foremost, economic conservatives as opposed to social conservatives? Is that a valid distinction?

DeMuth: I think the conservative moment beginning in 1980 with Ronald Reagan became a much, much bigger movement, looking much more like we associate with the Democratic Party. When you become very big, you have lots of different schools of thought within the party, and things become more fractious. It’s not necessarily a bad thing. When you are successful, there are a lot of people who are trying to control the agenda, and some people want to

work on social issues, and some people want to work on business issues, some people want to focus on foreign policy.

And the conservative movement for many years now has had neo-conservative foreign policy hawks, pro-business deregulation, tax-reducing conservatives, and social conservatives. You see it throughout the last thirty years. Republicans are for tax reform, but when you talk about the details, the social conservatives want big exemptions for children. They want to use the tax code to give people incentives for good behavior, and the economic conservatives simply want to lower marginal tax rates. So you get these kinds of debates.

Gerald Ford, his coming of age in the Republican Party, was, for the most of his career, a minority party. He was a leader of the minority, and he was a legislator. He wasn't a governor, he wasn't a talk show host, he wasn't a crusading columnist. He was somebody whose job it was to forge compromises from a frequently pretty weak position in the embattled minority. And he had views that were different than those that dominated the party beginning in the 1980s, although, I think that by the end of his career, he was pretty happy. He was a social conservative in that he believed in strong families and he was a very ethical man and believed in the importance of strong cultural norms. But he was not pro-life on the abortion issue. He was pro-choice. Betty was very pro-choice, and they'd always been that. And that kind of, as it is for many people, sort of gave him a little bit of distance from the new conservative party, and he would see that.

Smith: It's fascinating you would say that. I think it is an excellent overview of where he came from and how he was perceived in his later years. I wonder, also – the older I get the more I think life is defined less by obvious ideological differences, and more by generational distinctions.

DeMuth: Yes, there was some of that.

Smith: And I think Ford's Midwestern conservatism, because he came into the party at a time when its center of gravity was shifting, but to the Midwest. There was very little of the Southern party.

DeMuth: The movement from the Eastern establishment westward. And, for a time, it kind of was right there over Michigan, but it kept moving and ended up in California.

Smith: Yes.

DeMuth: But he was not really a Rockefeller Republican either. He was his own distinctive brand, and there was a certain Midwestern, Herbert Hoover style, no-nonsense practicality to him.

Smith: Someone once defined him as Dwight Eisenhower without the medals.

DeMuth: Yeah, very similar.

Smith: But, going to the social issues, there is a sense of, again, generational *and* geographical coming out of the Midwest. A lot of what we debate today as social issues - basically people simply were too reticent to make part of the public conversation. There was an element of privacy about these issues. They weren't something for the government to address. I mean the consistency of his conservatism, a kind of a healthy skepticism about social engineering, about what the government could do. He wanted it out of the boardroom, he wanted it out of the classroom, and he wanted it out of the bedroom. And those latter issues really weren't even on the agenda until some ways after his presidency.

DeMuth: And of course, Barry Goldwater was also a consistent libertarian, pro-choice guy in the same way.

Smith: When we talked to Justice Stevens, no one raised a question about abortion at his confirmation hearings. Which seems remarkable, until you go forward and think of the Clarence Thomas hearings, when there was great skepticism voiced that, in fact, as he said he hadn't debated these issues. But then when you go back and think about the time when he would have been in school, if senators weren't asking nominees for the court about abortion…It just brings home how remarkably accelerated is this period of change.

DeMuth: I can think of a couple of episodes involving AEI that illustrate both the differences and the similarities. Abortion became a very, very hot issue pretty

much after even his presidential administration. It became much more salient because of the Supreme Court decisions and people really hadn't, I think, seen it coming before then.

But first of all, on economic issues, Jerry was a very strong traditional conservative and a very bold one. Ronald Reagan – I never worked for President Ford - I did work for Richard Nixon as a very young man. And I later worked for Ronald Reagan in the Reagan White House. I worked on regulatory policy; specifically deregulatory policy for Ronald Reagan, about which he had very strong views.

But the deregulation movement was actually begun by Gerald Ford. He had very strong convictions; he had a top team of people at the White House, such as the economist Paul MacAvoy, and some young people such as Paul O'Neil and John Snow. They were just kids at the time that later became very important. He appointed the first strongly deregulation-minded person to a major agency – John Robson – to the civil aeronautics board. He proposed very, very aggressive deregulation of motor carriers and railroads. And when he was excused from further duties by the voters in 1976, he came to the American Enterprise Institute and he was a Distinguished Fellow and remained here as a Fellow for the rest of his life.

But for his first year out of office he was actually right here. I'm not sure exactly where his office was, but he was here. And he brought with him a team of people that had worked on various issues, but most of them were deregulators, and produced several volumes of important work proposing very thorough elimination of government controls over prices, entry into certain industries, and so forth. And it still, in AEI's history, it's one of our proudest achievements – this volume of original research that was used by Jimmy Carter, who also was very, very good on deregulation and later by Ronald Reagan.

But it was Ford who really got it started, and he had strong convictions on the matter. You may have a tape someplace in your vast archives of Paul MacAvoy coming in to see him about a bill that the President had asked to be drafted for deregulating the Interstate Commerce Commission. And Paul

began by saying, "Mr. President, before we go through the details, I want to tell you that I've consulted with the leaders of all the trucking companies, and the teamsters and all the trucking unions. All of them are completely opposed to this." The President sucked on his pipe, took a puff or two and said, "Well, Paul. It must be a good bill. I'm for it." He understood how the interest groups get hold of policy and twist it around to their advantage. He was there long before Ronald Reagan was.

Smith: That brings up a fascinating question. The conventional wisdom sees the Nixon/Ford presidency – certainly Jimmy Carter tried to cast it as such – as an unbroken entity. And I've often suggested that, in fact, Ford is not a coda to the Nixon presidency in policy terms. But in many ways he was a curtain raiser, and deregulation is the classic example. In some ways, Richard Nixon is the last New Deal president; someone accommodating himself politically to the consensus that he grew up in as a result of the FDR coalition. And I think Ford really represents a break with that.

DeMuth: Nixon railed against the Washington establishment. He hated the bureaucracy, distrusted it and so forth. But he never really stood up to it. He accommodated it. The Nixon administration was a time of great regulatory growth. Nixon was the pioneer for affirmative action, racial quotas were born in the Nixon administration. He created the EPA. I was one of the junior bunnies in the White House working on that.

Smith: OSHA?

DeMuth: OSHA; Consumer Products Safety Commission. The effective establishment of the Highway Traffic Safety Administration, it had been around a little bit before, but it was created in the Transportation Department. It was a time of great regulatory growth, and in some cases, these are at the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency very different sorts of things.

Nixon actually was what I would call an immoderate environmentalist. In other areas, he wasn't an enthusiast for anti-trust, but anti-trust grew enormously on his watch, and he used it as a tool against the TV networks, who he hated even more than he hated the bureaucracy. So the bureaucracy

grew and Gerald Ford did not challenge it to the extent that Reagan did. But he was very, very different from Nixon. His term was so brief that we don't know what the record would have been. He came in under very difficult circumstances. The Nixon pardon, inflation was getting out of hand, not as bad as it would get under Jimmy Carter, but he was very, very constrained. But even given those constraints, when he made a decision, he was fearless in taking on the Washington establishment. So he was very, very different. And I do think he established a few beachheads that later presidents – in some cases Jimmy Carter, although Jimmy Carter was different in other aspects. But Ronald Reagan kind of took advantage of some of the early steps that had been taken.

Smith: Well, he's also – going back to his traditional economics – he is arguably the last president, even in a very weakened political stance, to use whatever capital he had, particularly in form of the veto, in confronting his old colleagues on Capitol Hill.

DeMuth: Right. I know. He was terrific with the veto pen. He loved it. He said, "You're president, one of the things you do is you read the Constitution, you veto stuff." And he would do that.

One area where thinking in conservative circles changed, and where he was a skeptic, began in the late '70s and early '80s, was on tax policy. And President Ford was a traditional Republican budget balancer, strict fiscal conservative…

Smith: It was almost a moral imperative.

DeMuth: It was a moral imperative. There were changes in thinking in the conservative wings. A lot of them begun right here at the American Enterprise Institute in the late '70s, and there was a strictly economic component to it, which was: in some cases, tax rates are so high that we can reduce the rates and actually raise more revenue. That was supply-sidism. There was another wing that was much more nakedly down and dirty political. And the argument went, "For decades now, the Democrats get in and they become very popular by all sorts of new spending programs. Then they run up deficits and things get to be a mess and they throw the rascals out. The Republicans get a turn. What do the

Republicans do? They raise taxes to pay for all these fun things the Democrats did to make themselves popular. The Republicans never get any credit for it; they get the blame for raising taxes. This is a bad program. Let's try something else. When we get in, let's cut taxes and maybe the deficits will lead to pressure for reducing spending."

Now, there is a lot right and a lot wrong in that argument, and I'm not arguing for or against it. There was simply a change. And I can remember my first encounter with the World Forum. As an academic I'd published things with AEI and I'd been involved with AEI, but it was before I came here as its president. I was working in the Ronald Reagan White House in Office of Management and Budget in 1982. We'd won some pretty big tax reductions in '81 and we were going after more. At the 1982 AEI World Forum held out in Vail, Colorado, it was in Vail or Beaver Creek that year, it later moved to Beaver Creek, it was the second World Forum where President Ford had gotten together with his three best friends and peers as head of state or government when he was in office.

Smith: And a motley group.

DeMuth: Philosophically diverse collection: Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of Germany, President Giscard d'Estaing of France, and Prime Minister James Callaghan of Great Britain. And he was there with them. And in those days they would have their sessions, but they would also hold press conferences afterwards. In June we were in the middle of some big budget and tax battles. In June of that year at the World Forum the President held a press conference and was fairly critical of Reagan's reducing taxes in the face of big deficits. Now this was really exciting for the *New York Times*. This is a way to really make mischief for Reagan.

I think it was the only time the World Forum ever got on the front page of the *New York Times*, and we were just furious at the White House because a former president, who was held in very high opinion, was criticizing Ronald Reagan. It was a difficult…but you see, it illustrated – he was from the old school. He said, "Why would you be cutting taxes? We have these deficits and we're going to be leaving this to our grandchildren." Now, I was on the

Reagan team then, so I'll say, we were taking some pretty big cuts out of government spending as well. We certainly ended up taking more reductions in taxes than we did in spending, and we not-knowingly ran up some deficits for a military buildup, which we think turned out to be a pretty darn good investment by the end of the 1980s.

Smith: Right.

DeMuth: But that was one illustration. And we would see these. When I got to AEI and we had newer generations of Republicans coming in like Newt Gingrich, people from the Reagan administration, you would see this tension. It wasn't an unhappy tension. It was a good tension. We had very, very lively arguments over these things and you could see the different schools on fiscal policy contending with each other.

Smith: Generational again?

DeMuth: It was very much a generational change, very much.

Smith: And then also, I imagine when you get to Gingrich, stylistic; the more confrontational approach as opposed to, for lack of a better word, the civility or get along to go along, or minority status, whatever.

DeMuth: There was a stylistic – there was that difference. You could call it generational. But also by this time President Ford really was an elder statesman and Newt Gingrich was a scrappy young congressman, and he ended up coming to really like New Gingrich. They got along quite a bit. Newt is quite brilliant, and Gerald Ford was somebody who could appreciate quality. You could tell at the beginning, when I was first bringing Newt out, that he was a little uncomfortable with this. I can remember on some occasion, Newt made some reference to something that he had done, I forget what it was. And President Ford allowed as how he thought that that was a little bit too aggressive. He was a little bit above the fray and everything. And I leaned over to him and I'm not sure if I said this to the whole meeting, but I said, "President Ford, am I wrong in thinking that when you were a young congressman, you led a movement to impeach William O. Douglass?" He puffed for a second and set back and roared with laughter. He remembered

what it takes to be a scrappy congressman. He could kind of remember some of the old days.

Smith: And people forget.

DeMuth: And that, I think, helped warm him up to Newt, because he could kind of see himself as a young man.

Smith: Exactly. He came to Congress by knocking off this entrenched, moss-backed, isolationist, and then, of course, he knocked off Charlie Halleck as Minority Leader. So, again, it's that escalator, you move up, you forget where you were at the beginning. But there must be, particularly at that time, now we've moved on, obviously – but there must have been a time when it was an article of faith for a lot of conservatives to draw a sharp contrast between the Ford White House and the Reagan White House. Both in terms of substance, policy, and political success. And that must have made for some awkwardness.

DeMuth: It did. And I don't think that he ever – I think that the competition between him and Ronald Reagan was a little bit too direct and constant for him ever to become completely emotionally reconciled. But I can tell you that by the end of the 1980s, and especially as it was clear that the Soviet collapse was for real, and was really happening, he came to have a genuine appreciation for that achievement.

They were alike on many things. Reagan was an adamant free-trader, and Ford was an adamant free-trader from the very beginning. So there were issues where he really appreciated Reagan, and as a firm anti-Communist, you never heard him say that the Soviet Union collapsed of its own weight. This wasn't anything that Reagan had to do with. He appreciated and admired Reagan's foreign policy achievements. And he was very proud, proud in the right sense of the word, that in his brief time as president, he had brought to the forefront of national politics so many people that went on to great achievement later on, after the Republican Party had changed. Not just Dick Cheney, but Carla Hills, Donald Rumsfeld, Alan Greenspan. Now the only one of them who was a big player in the Reagan years was Greenspan.

Cheney was in the Congress, Rumsfeld and Hills were off in the private sector.

Smith: And Jim Baker.

DeMuth: Excuse me, and Jim Baker, that's right. And some other lesser characters. Yes, of course, Jim Baker. And he enjoyed getting together with them. He enjoyed talking politics with them. And you could see that one of the things that gave him most gratification from his years in office was that he had been such a shrewd judge of talent. And, unlike many presidents, had never feared – he just wanted the brightest people around. The political calculuses – he never wanted yes men around, he just wanted extremely able people.

Smith: Which also tells you volumes about how comfortable he was in his own skin.

DeMuth: That's right.

Smith: And that gets to this unique relationship he had with the folks you were talking about. Lord Callaghan – forget the Lord – that old line labor socialist; Helmut Schmidt, who certainly wasn't on his economic wave length; and Giscard who may have been a "conservative" but who lots of people think of as French and aristocratic and top lofty. And they all seemed to connect with Ford.

DeMuth: They got along wonderfully. They did. Health interfered and they were not regular participants by the end of the 1990s, but for ten years they would be there every year, and it was a wonderful thing to watch. There was a certain amount of understandable – well, when we were in charge things went much better than that. But for the most part, it was providing to the people who were in office now, some of whom had known them, some of them had not, who were dealing with very, very, difficult, hard questions. Questions where there is no good answer. Very constrained. The stakes seemed very, very high. There was real wisdom in these gentlemen being able to remind people that they had seen problems that were just as bad in the past, and the world had survived.

Smith: Who came to and participated in the World Forum? What happened at these events, and when you mentioned current policy makers, would there be

representatives from the Reagan administration who would participate during the 80s?

DeMuth: Oh yes, and I'd have to go back and look. But you would find the president and the vice president – they never came – it's very hard for them to come. Although, Dick Cheney came for every one of his years as vice president. But George H.W. Bush did not, when he was vice president. But Alan Greenspan was a regular participant. And there were several Cabinet secretaries, top people from the White House, people from the military and defense establishment who would come throughout those years.

Smith: What kind of presentations, discussions went on?

DeMuth: The World Forum has a unique style. For about half the President's years we sat around a single table. It was a very big table, a very long table. You almost needed binoculars to see the other end of it. And the group consisted of four hosts. The host was really the President and Betty Ford and their three friends from across the ocean. There would be legislators and officials from the American government and from governments in Asia, Latin America and Europe.

After the Soviet Union came unglued, in the early days of Gorbachev and Glasnost we had a lot of important Russians, including Yegor Gaidar, who was prime minister, and some very important people that were part of the Yeltsin revolution and its aftermath. And younger legislators and government officials from Europe, from the UK, Brian Mulroney came a couple of times when he was prime minister. Always had a good contingent of Australians, and a good number of business executives. Some of them were people that had been long time supporters and pals of President Ford.

President Ford kept up a little bit of business involvement. After he was in the White House he was a director of American Express and some of those people. But we worked hard to bring in younger rising generations of business leaders. We would sit around the table and each session would be an hour and a half. We would have sessions on big, broad issues like the current state of the economy, international security challenges, reform issues in Washington. We would have things focusing on developments in Asia and in Europe.

Economic development issues in Africa. And we would always begin with three or four people who were real statesmen, currently in office, or people such as President Ford.

Actually, President Ford and Schmidt, Callaghan and Giscard, the way it came to be – people who were currently in office would talk about major issues and they were off the record. We eventually stopped doing press conferences. It may have been a little sore point for me from the times I was on the receiving end. But they were completely private, and there would be very candid presentations. There would be three or four set ones and people would have charts and slides and have some data to put out there. And then we would have an open discussion. And we would try to get people from different perspectives, people from the business community, people from foreign governments to talk about these things. And we would have very serious, substantial and quite candid conversations. The President was always the moderator. He would call on people and I would kind of be scurrying around and I'd ask you and I'd ask you, "Will you….?" And then I'd give the President a list and he'd say, "Well, why don't we call…" And so the two of us would handle it that way. He would, unhesitatingly, jump in and he was always very polite. But he if disagreed with something, he would disagree, he would argue.

He would often bring episodes from his own days in Congress, in negotiating a health care bill in the 1960s, or the Civil Rights Act, some of the big legislative issues when he was a congressman and introduce some reflections or perspective on the current developments. And he and Schmidt, Giscard and Callaghan, would usually wind up. They would summarize what had been said, they'd try to add a little texture of wisdom on top.

Smith: It was a council of elders.

DeMuth: It was, but we never wanted it to be an old man's club. We would be on the phone and he would always be pressing me to get new people. He'd read about such and such in the newspaper, and he knew so and so. What if he gave a call to this person. He was very active in recruiting, and very keen on trying to bring younger generations in.

Smith: When did the Forum end?

DeMuth: The Forum is still ongoing. We held the World Forum in Beaver Creek, Colorado in Gerald R. Ford Hall, which is the name of the hall where we've always held it, that they've now named after him, last month – July of 2009. The last Forum that he attended was 2005, and you'll have to correct me, I think he was 91. It was right before his birthday. He was speaking on his birthday. He didn't come to all the sessions, but he came to most of them. He was sharp as a tack and he gave a welcoming talk that was interesting, gracious, and there were lots of his old friends – the Cheneys, the Hills, Alan Greenspan, and a lot of people that had been coming to the World Forum year after year. So he was a wonderful host.

His health prevented him from coming in 2006, so that was the first one we'd held without him. He was in Rancho Mirage and I went down on Sunday afternoon when it was over and we spent a lovely afternoon talking about the World Forum. A man named Harlan Crow, the son of Trammel Crow, the long time close friend of the Fords. Harlan was the son and taken over the business. He'd gotten to know the Fords himself quite well. Harlan and I went down and we spent a long afternoon with Betty and Jerry and then we went out to dinner. That was the last time I saw him. He had gotten a little bit distant when you are talking about current affairs, but when we got into details with the Forum he kind of remembered people, and had questions about this. He wanted to know what Newt said about such and such, that kind of thing.

We tried the technique that you sometimes do with people that are quite old and not quite on top of current developments and we raised a couple of questions about his early days as a lawyer in Grand Rapids; about that famous war story on deck when he almost got swept off in a big storm out in the Pacific. We raised those issues and he became absolutely lucid, and energetic, and so more of the conversation was in early days in the '50s than it was about the World Forum. But it was a perfectly, great, great day.

Smith: I sensed that they were beloved figures around Vail and Beaver Creek. That the Fords were really more than first citizens, that they really had a profile and a presence.

DeMuth: They had lent their name and their presence and that had been very important to the strictly development aspects of Beaver Creek. At the first World Forums that were held in Beaver Creek, there was one hotel, there was this village hall, and there was one hotel and a few private homes, but it was really out in the boonies. And you look at it today and it is very, very highly developed; and they were part of that. But it was just not a development program; they were real citizens of the community. They participated in a wide range. They helped build the chapel – that was a project that was particularly dear to them. They worked on cultural welfare issues, they had opinions on this development and that development, and they were not above the fray. They were real participants. I don't think they were beloved anywhere more than at the American Enterprise Institute. But Vail was certainly up there.

Smith: And tell me, you must have gotten to know Mrs. Ford.

DeMuth: I got to know Mrs. Ford very well, an unfailingly gracious lady. At the World Forum we never just took the spouses, mostly wives, and had them go out for the ice carving demonstration with the chef. We always integrated them into that, but Betty was always kind of the leader of the ladies auxiliary, so to speak. And she spent a lot of time with them. She spent a lot of time with my wife and children when they were little, and would come. But they were part of the conversations, as well.

Smith: Including the spouses of the other leaders.

DeMuth: That's correct.

Smith: The Callaghan relationship is particularly intriguing to me. They seemed to be polar opposites in so many ways, and yet they maybe in some ways, they became closest. There's a story that Callaghan was in Grand Rapids, and wanted to be driven around town. Later on he said, "I wanted to see where

Jerry came from. Now I understand him better." Which is an interesting effort on Callaghan's part.

DeMuth: Their politics were very, very different. Their political viewpoints were very, very different. But they had both had very, very challenging terms in office. And they had both been retired earlier than they had wanted to, Callaghan by Margaret Thatcher, and I think both of them came to – I think if we were going to talk about tax policy or deregulation – they'd have very, very different views. But their personal friendship and the fact that their political experiences had certain things in common, led to a genuine warmth of friendship and affection. Callaghan was a man who, although he was a tough partisan when he was leading the Labor Party, he did have capacity, I would say more than that of Helmut Schmidt, to really transcend partisan differences, to put himself in the shoes of the other person; to understand different points of view and to argue with a real twinkle in his eye.

Smith: Lastly, how do you think Gerald Ford should be remembered?

DeMuth: I will remember him as a man who brought to office a great deal of personal dignity and genuine devotion to the public good, and much less of a political strategizer than any president after him, any president of either party. It could be that George H.W. Bush comes the closest, which is actually better in the long term as something that can be argued about. But Gerald Ford, when an issue came before him, he always asked what is best for the country. And he acted on it, even if it was politically risky, or something that was politically likely to fail or to redound against him. He was not a tactical president.

Now, he was a practical man and I'm sure that he made many political compromises as our chief executive. But he was a man of great fidelity; what he thought was good policy. To the general public he'll be remembered as the man who brought an end to Watergate and provided this respite from the very bad years that came before him. And I think that his historical, his reputation in history, will grow, and it will certainly outsize the number of months that he was in office. I think that the Kissinger memoirs were a pretty good example of that. When you see what he did to navigate U.S.-Soviet, U.S.-

China relationships during those years, there was a tremendous wisdom and [more] foresight than any of us realized at the time.

Smith: That's interesting, because clearly, Helsinki and the Helsinki Accords were seen in one light at the time they were signed. And, in fact, Carter, who ran against him from both the right and the left, attacked him, only to become a great supporter of the Accords over time. Would you agree that now, in the light of everything that has happened since, they are at least seen as a milestone on the road to the West's victory of the Cold War?

DeMuth: Absolutely. And in the early 1990s when we were all trying to come to grips with what had happened, and the collapse of the Soviet Union – and of course, all of the attention, particularly among conservatives, was on what Ronald Reagan had done. I had a couple of sessions focusing on the Helsinki Accords and I felt pretty strongly about this, but it was also a way to do a little educating of the conservative/triumphant/Reaganite/triumphalist. Because many of those people had been people that excoriated President Ford for the Helsinki Accords.

And if you go back, he actually knew what he was doing. It might have failed, but this idea that he got the Soviet leaders to acknowledge the importance of human rights inside their country – just as you can say Gerald Ford started the deregulation movement and Reagan ran with it – that move, which was so criticized by conservatives because the deal was something they didn't like, in retrospect, it was a brilliant deal for our side. And it really did – was the beginning of what later became known as Glasnost. I don't know the year, I think it was 2003 or 2004, after we'd had a few discussions of Helsinki, I made a point of attracting to the World Forum Natan Schransky. And Schransky gave a talk at the World Forum, which we have published.

It was opening night and I had him give a talk. He acknowledged that the beginning of what he was able to accomplish as a dissenter in the old Soviet Union, began with the Helsinki Accords. The President had never met Schransky. So it was the first time that they had met. And Schransky – that he could actually be there and share the podium with the man who had provided this wedge, this opening, in the domestic politics of the old Communist Soviet

Union. I know it was a moving moment for Schransky, and I think that it was – Ford at this time would have been 89 or 90 – but for him to have this living legend who had made the Helsinki Accords breathe and come to life inside the Soviet Union, it was a very big moment for him.

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