President George W. Bush
Oral History Project

BRIEFING MATERIALS
Edward W. Gillespie
January 24-25, 2012

Prepared by M. Joel Voss, Research Assistant
February 2011

Presidential Oral History Program
MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED OR CIRCULATED

Representative Andy Ireland (D-FL) hires Gillespie to work in his district office in Florida. Ireland switches from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party and Gillespie follows. (Gillespie, p. xi)


1996  Chairman Haley Barbour (R-MS) of the Republican National Committee (RNC) hires Gillespie to serve as director of communications and congressional affairs. (Gillespie, p. xii)

1997  Gillespie heads Policy Impact Communications, a lobbying and public relations firm founded by Barbour. (Gillespie, p. xii)

1998  Representative John Kasich (R-OH) hires Gillespie to work as a political consultant for his potential presidential bid in the 2000 election. (The Hotline, 02/07/1998)

March  Gillespie serves as president of Americans for Computer Privacy, a newly formed lobbying group which focuses on encryption use in America. (The Washington Post, 03/04/1998)

1999

July  Kasich drops out of the presidential race and endorses presidential hopeful George W. Bush. After the endorsement, Gillespie continues working as an unaffiliated GOP strategist. (The Dallas Morning News, 07/15/1999)

2000  Gillespie and Jack Quinn, a Democratic strategist with ties to the Clinton Administration, form Quinn, Gillespie, & Associates, a bipartisan lobbying firm based in Washington, D.C. (Gillespie, p. xiii)

April  On the 21st, Bush names Gillespie and five others as political advisors for his presidential campaign. All six, which form “the group of six”, are Washington insiders. Reportedly, Bush chooses these six insiders in order to quell supporters’ unease that he does not have enough GOP veterans to successfully win the

**June**

Gillespie, along with numerous other advisors, meets with Bush to create “an up-beat, issues-oriented” strategy for the Republican National Convention. The strategy highlights Bush’s positions while keeping partisan attacks against Democratic presidential hopeful Al Gore to a minimum. The meeting takes place in Kennebunkport, Maine. (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 06/10/2000; *The Dallas Morning News*, 06/12/2000)

On the 23rd, Andrew Card names Gillespie as the chairman of the program advisory committee for the Republican National Convention. Gillespie’s chief responsibilities include organizing speakers for the convention and general program administration. (*PR Newswire*, 06/23/2000)

**September**

On the 13th, Karen Hughes, Bush’s communications director, hires Gillespie as an advisor for Bush’s communications team. Gillespie’s job is to help turn around Bush’s slumping poll numbers after both the Republican and Democratic conventions. (*The Associated Press Online*, 09/13/2000)

**November**

Gillespie is tasked with monitoring parts of the Florida recount after the 2000 presidential election is too close to call. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/21/2000, Gillespie, p. xiv, 99-106)

**December**

Rumors circulate that Gillespie is being considered to lead the White House’s congressional affairs operation. However, Jeanne Johnson-Phillips, executive director of the 2001 Presidential Inaugural Planning Committee, chooses Gillespie along with Dirk VandeBeek to head PIC’s communications division. (*The White House Bulletin*, 12/20/2000; *PR Newswire*, 12/28/2000)

**2001**

**January**

On the 29th, Bush announces the National Energy Policy Development Group chaired by Vice President Dick Cheney. Members include National Economic Council Director Lawrence Lindsey, Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill, EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, Commerce Secretary Don Evans, Deputy Chief of Staff Josh Bolten, Director Mitchell Daniels of the OMB, FEMA Director Joe Allbaugh, Director Ruben Barrales of Intergovernmental Affairs, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Interior Secretary Gale Norton, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. The mission of the panel is to look at reducing U.S. reliance on foreign oil, including drilling in Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). (*The New York Times*, 01/30/2001)

**February**

On the 1st, Gillespie accepts a temporary position as public affairs advisor to Evans. (*The White House Bulletin*, 02/01/2001)
April
Enron hires Gillespie’s firm to lobby on their behalf. Reportedly, Quinn, Gillespie, & Associates end their work for Enron in November of 2001. *(The Washington Post, 01/13/2002; The Hotline, 01/24/2002)*

May
On the 30th, Gillespie is chosen to head a new coalition of conservative groups whose primary mission is to defend Bush’s energy policies from liberal groups who oppose Bush’s proposed policies. The group, 21st Century Energy Project (21CEP), consists of over 60 associations. *(The White House Bulletin, 05/30/2001)*

2002
Gillespie serves as a strategist for Elizabeth Dole’s senate campaign in North Carolina. *(The Charlotte Observer, 01/27/2002)*

2003

May-July
Rumors circulate that Gillespie is set to take over as RNC chairman if and when current chairman Marc Racicot takes the reins of Bush’s reelection campaign. On June 16th, the RNC names Gillespie as its national chairman. On July 25th, by unanimous vote, Gillespie is officially voted in as the new chairman. *(Roll Call, 05/05/2003; The New York Times, 06/17/2003; PR Newswire, 07/18/2003)*

June
On the 18th, Gillespie coins the term “Kerry-aoke” in *The Hill* in response to presidential hopeful Senator John Kerry’s (D-MA) appeal for more renewable energy resources. According to Gillespie, “He’ll [Kerry] sing from whatever song sheet his audience hands him.” *(PR Newswire, 06/18/2003)*

July
On the 25th, Gillespie contends that the Democratic Party offers only “protest and pessimism” instead of real answers to problems facing America. He also sends a memo to Republicans suggesting that they should not worry about current poll numbers for Bush. *(The Associated Press State & Local Wire, 07/25/2003; The Hotline, 07/25/2003)*

On the 29th, Gillespie posits that the Republican Party can attract African American voters without the explicit help of the NAACP and the Congressional Black Caucus. *(USA Today, 07/30/2003)*

August
Gillespie visit the office of the *Union Leader* in Manchester, New Hampshire, reportedly to talk about federal spending. His visit is a response to a growing frustration among Bush’s conservative base due to their perception that the president is not doing enough to decrease or halt federal spending. *(The Union Leader, 08/31/2003; The Dallas Morning News, 09/09/2003)*

September
On the 7th, during an interview on *Meet the Press*, Gillespie argues that Democrats are reaching new lows in their combative rhetoric against Bush. Gillespie’s appearance on *Meet the Press* is one of many recent appearances in the national media as RNC Chairman. *(The Washington Times, 09/08/2003)*

On the 23rd, Gillespie suggests that the Republican Party will consider passing an amendment to the Constitution in order to ban gay marriages. According to

**2004**

**January**  
Gillespie calls Moveon.org’s placement of an advertisement likening Bush to Hitler, “the worst and most vile form of political hate speech.” The ad was part of a contest by Moveon.org called “Bush in 30 seconds.” (*The New York Times*, 01/06/2004)

In mid-January, Gillespie challenges Democratic National Chairman Terence McAuliffe to sign an official statement protesting the dramatic increase of organizations now taking part in helping raise ‘soft’ campaign money for the elections. The official statement is to be cosigned by Gillespie and submitted to the Federal Election Commission. However, McAuliffe responds by asking Gillespie to also protest the increased use of “501” groups, which McAuliffe contends are used predominately by Republicans. (*The Washington Times*, 01/13/2004)

On the 15th, while visiting Arkansas, the home of Democratic presidential hopeful Wesley Clark, Gillespie argues that Clark flip-flops on issues including the war in Iraq. Gillespie’s comments come after a recent surge in campaign activity by Clark. (*The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 01/16/2004)

**February**  
After Kerry wins the Democratic nomination, Gillespie begins traversing the United States giving speeches to raise doubt about Kerry’s presidential credentials. Additionally, Gillespie suggests that Bush’s primary tactic against Kerry will be to portray him as a policy hypocrite. (*The New York Times*, 02/13/2004; *USA Today*, 02/17/2004; *The Washington Post*, 02/24/2004)

**March**  
Gillespie turns his attention to registering new voters including minorities in states that strategists believe are winnable, like California and New York. Part of the voter registration campaign includes using a “big rig” named “Reggie the Registration Rig” to help register and excite potential voters. (*The Hotline*, 03/11/2004; *The Associated Press*, 04/10/2004)

On the 18th, Gillespie and McAuliffe debate at Catholic University on “who’s to blame for the nasty campaign.” Both are graduates from Catholic University. (*The Washington Times*, 02/17/2004)

**April**  
On the 19th, Gillespie and McAuliffe join MTV on the George Washington University’s campus to encourage more young people to vote in the upcoming election. As part of the campaign, an essay contest is being held where the winners will be able to address the Democratic and Republican conventions during the summer. (*The Hotline*, 04/20/2004; *The Washington Times*, 04/20/2004)
June

Gillespie tours the United States with boxing promoter legend Don King in an effort to bolster support for Bush’s reelection campaign, especially among African-American voters. The tour is dubbed the “African-American Empowerment Tour.” (The Associated Press State & Local Wire, 06/02/2004; The Hotline, 06/03/2004)

On the 28th, Gillespie calls on Democrats and Republicans to be watchful for potential voter fraud. Gillespie suggests that both parties create bipartisan groups which would then go into polling stations to “watch for and investigate” potential voter fraud. (The Associated Press State & Local Wire, 06/28/2004)

July

On the 26th, Gillespie prepares for a constant stream of interviews to rebuff the Democrat’s message of “Strong at Home, Respected in the World” as their national convention begins in Boston. Gillespie is scheduled for dozens of interviews each day of the convention. (The Washington Post, 07/27/2004)

August

On the 30th, the Republican National Convention begins in New York City.

September

On the 2nd, during the convention, Gillespie and other prominent Republican Catholics meet with Catholics in order to help persuade them that Bush is good for Catholic voters. At the same time, Jewish Republicans are meeting with Jewish voters to help sway their vote. Both groups are seen as important votes for Bush’s reelection bid. (The New York Times, 09/03/2004)

November

On the 4th, Gillespie announces that he plans to leave his position with the RNC and return to lobbying. His official tenure ends on January 19th when Kenneth Mehlman is elected as the new RNC chairman. (The Hotline, 11/04/2004; The Frontrunner, 01/20/2005)

2005

April

Gillespie joins the National Republican Senatorial Committee as a communications consultant. His primary responsibilities include shaping “the Senate GOP’s message and communications strategy on judicial nominations.” (The Frontrunner, 04/14/2005). Gillespie’s responsibilities also include helping Senator Fred Thompson (R-TN) confirm John Roberts, Bush’s Supreme Court nominee, after Sandra Day O’Conner announces her retirement. (The Frontrunner, 07/06/2005; Roll Call, 04/14/2005; The New York Times, 07/04/2005, 07/06/2005)

July

On the 19th, Bush nominates Roberts to fill O’Connor’s seat on the Supreme Court. (The Washington Post, 07/20/2005)

September


On the 5th, Bush nominates Roberts to replace Rehnquist as chief justice of the United States Supreme Court. (The Washington Post, 09/06/2005)
**October**


After Miers withdraws, Gillespie helps Samuel Alito, Bush’s new nominee for the Supreme Court, through Senate confirmation. (The Washington Times, 11/01/2005)

**2006**

**January**

Gillespie forms an advocacy group, Americans for Border and Economic Security, in response to White House interest in solving problems involving immigration and security, like work permits for immigrants. (USA Today, 01/03/2006)

Senator George Allen (R-VA) hires Gillespie to work for his PAC in preparation for an unsuccessful potential presidential bid in 2008.

**July**

On the 10th, Gillespie signs “A Conservative Statement for Immigration Reform.” According to the letter, “Americans and immigrants share the same values of work and opportunity. There is no reason to fear the newcomers arriving on our shores today - if anything, they will energize what is best about our country.” The letter, signed by over 30 prominent conservatives, is published during a time of increased tension over immigration in the U.S. (States News Service, 07/10/2006)

**May**

The Senate passes an immigration bill sponsored by Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and John McCain (R-AZ) containing provisions to tighten border security, such as ordering the deportation of illegal immigrants convicted of a felony or three misdemeanors, building a 370-mile triple-layer fence between the U.S. and Mexico, and declaring English the U.S. national language. It also contains a guest worker program and a path for illegal immigrants to become citizens. The guest worker program would admit 200,000 foreign workers for U.S. employers who cannot find U.S. workers to fill positions. The bill also creates a second guest worker program for immigrant farm workers who can earn permanent legal residency. The path to citizenship divides illegal immigrants into three categories. Those who have been in the U.S. for more than five years can become citizens if they demonstrate employment for three years, pass security checks, pay fines and back taxes and enroll in English classes. Those who have been in the U.S. for two to five years have to leave the U.S., then apply for a work visa and return as guest workers. Once here, they can then apply for permanent residency. Those who have been in the U.S. for fewer than two years have to leave the U.S. without a guarantee of being admitted as guest workers. The bill also contains a worker verification system. (The New York Times, 05/26/2006; Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 05/26/2006)
September  
Efforts to reach compromise legislation between the House and Senate immigration bills collapse, as Senate leaders turn from comprehensive legislation to building a border fence. The collapse comes after House GOP leaders have spent much of the summer holding field hearings, which backers of the bipartisan plan label as delay tactics meant to drum up anti-immigration sentiments. (The Washington Post, 09/30/2006)

December  

2007

April  
Attorney General Alberto Gonzales meets his former deputy, Tim Flannigan, and Gillespie numerous times to determine the best strategy for Gonzales’s hearings over his role in the U.S. attorneys firings. (Roll Call, 04/16/2007)

June  
On the 13th, Gillespie announces that he will leave his post as Chairman of the Virginia GOP and sever ties with his lobbying firm to become the next White House counselor, replacing Dan Bartlett. He officially takes over for Bartlett on the 26th. (The Frontrunner, 06/04/2007; The Hotline, 06/04/2007; The White House Bulletin, 06/13/2007; The Associated Press Online, 06/13/2007; The New York Times, 06/14/2007; http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov)

July  
Gillespie arranges for a private meeting between Republican leaders and Bush in the West Wing to discuss their communication and political strategies concerning Iraq prior to a Senate debate in Congress. The debate, which is expected to last all night, surrounds a potential vote to pull U.S. troops out of Iraq by next spring. (The Associated Press Online, 07/17/2007)

September  
Gillespie’s responsibilities increase after the departure of Karl Rove. Reportedly, in addition to his role as counselor to the White House, Gillespie will also offer “broader strategic advice to Bush,” a role Rove once played. (The Washington Post, 09/10/2007)

2008

January  
On the 2nd, Gillespie tells reporters that Bush plans to pass numerous laws before his term expires at the end of the year. The agenda includes “making permanent tax cuts set to expire in 2011 and doing more to help stabilize the housing market, and to revise the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.” (The Washington Post, 01/02/2008)

On the 8th, Gillespie travels with Bush to the Middle East for an eight-day visit. Bush is scheduled to visit Israel, the Palestinian territories, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. During the trip, Bush announces
an arms deal with Saudi Arabia and discusses the price of oil with Saudi Arabia.  
(The Associated Press Online, 01/08/2008; The New York Times, 01/15/2008)

May  
On the 19th, Gillespie writes an email to Steve Capus, president of NBC News, 
requesting that NBC News play Bush’s entire answer to correspondent Richard 
Engel’s question regarding Iran, terrorism, and appeasement. According to 
Gillespie, on at least two occasions, NBC News played Bush’s comments out of 
context. In response, NBC News argues that Bush’s comments were not taken out 
of context and that the full interview is available on their website.  
(White House Documents and Publications, 05/19/2008; The Associated Press, 05/20/2008; The 
Washington Post, 05/20/2008)

September  
On the 23rd, Gillespie, Cheney, and other White House representatives meet with 
Republican conservatives in order to shore up support for Bush’s proposed $700 
million mortgage bailout plan. Reportedly, many conservative Republicans are 
unhappy with the size of the bailout.  
(CongressNow, 09/23/2008; White House Documents and Publications, 09/23/2008)

October  
Gillespie begins meeting with departmental heads in order to “compile the major 
accomplishments of the Bush Administration.”  
(The Herald-Sun, 12/07/2008)

2009

January  
On the 20th, Gillespie leaves the office of counselor to the president.

April  
Gillespie forms Ed Gillespie Strategies, a new solo consulting business whose 
mission is to provide high-level advice to companies and CEOs, coalitions and 
trade associations.  
(Roll Call, 04/28/2009; The Washington Times, 04/30/2009)

2010

April  
Gillespie, Rove, and others form a new 527 group called “American Crossroads,” 
whose goal is to raise over $50 million to help Republicans in the fall elections. 
(The Frontrunner, 04/06/2010; The Associated Press Online, 04/27/2010)
TIMELINES

- Edward Gillespie News Timeline, prepared by M. Joel Voss, Miller Center, University of Virginia, 02/15/2011.


- Timeline of the Bush Presidency, prepared by Justin Peck and Bryan Craig, Miller Center, University of Virginia, 04/30/2010.
SELECTED WRITINGS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY EDWARD GILLESPIE


2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND FIRST TERM


- David Jackson, “Connections Make the Lobbyist; Ed Gillespie Turned His Phone List into Big Bucks - and an Enron Affiliation,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 02/17/2002.
KEY ISSUES AND EVENTS AS GOP CHAIRMAN AND COUNSELOR

2004 Election


- Ann Gerhart, “Ed the Quipper; Armed with Razor Wit, the GOP Chairman is Out to Draw Votes and Blood,” *The Washington Post*, 04/05/2004.


Supreme Court Nominees


White House Message

EDWARD GILLESPIE SUGGESTED TOPICS
Prepared by M. Joel Voss
Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 03/22/2011

Early Relationship with Bush

• How did you come to meet George W. Bush? What were your early impressions of him?
• How did you come to serve as a member of the “Group of Six?” What were your primary responsibilities? With whom did you most closely work?
• When did you come to serve as chairman of the program advisory committee for the Republican National Convention? What were your primary responsibilities? With whom did you most closely work?

The 2000 Election and the Early Years of the Presidency

• Discuss your role in shaping strategy for Bush’s 2000 presidential election campaign. With whom did you most closely work? Who were the key players? Describe your working relationship with your colleagues. Was Bush active in shaping his campaign strategy?
• After you were hired to be part of Bush’s communications team in late 2000, did your primary responsibilities change? If so, how? Who were the key players on Bush’s communications team going into 2001?
• Discuss your role in the Florida presidential recount.
• Discuss your role as a public affairs advisor to Donald Evans at the Department of Commerce.
• Describe the president’s work style and how you adapted your own work style to best suit the needs of the president.
• Discuss your role in forming political coalitions such as the 21st Century Energy Project (21CEP). How do these coalitions differ from working inside the White House? Which do you believe are most effective for bringing about change?

The Republican National Committee

• Discuss your initial reaction to being asked to serve as RNC chairman.
• Describe your transition from private life to the RNC. What were your new responsibilities? How is the RNC different from working inside the White House or working as part of a non-profit coalition?
• How did your working relationship with Bush change? How did your working relationship with other White House offices change?
• Describe your responsibilities in the 2004 reelection campaign.
• Discuss your role in the RNC’s efforts to increase minority votes for the president. Do you believe you were successful? What would you change? What would you do again?
• Discuss your role in preparing Bush to face an unknown Democratic contender prior to the Democratic National Convention. How did your strategy and Bush’s strategy change after Kerry was nominated?
• Discuss the role of the press during your tenure as RNC chairman.

Supreme Court Nominees
• Discuss your role in helping shepherd John Roberts through the Supreme Court nomination process. With whom did you mostly closely work?

• Discuss the circumstances surrounding your selection by Bush to help shepherd Harriet Miers through her Supreme Court nomination process. Where do you think the Miers nomination went wrong? What, if anything, would you do differently?

• Discuss your role in the Supreme Court nomination process of Samuel Alito. How did Alito’s nomination process differ from Miers?

• Discuss the role of the press during all three nominations.

The Virginia GOP

• How did you come to serve as chairman of the Virginia GOP? How are the responsibilities of the office of Virginia chairman different from national chairman? As state Chairman, did your relationship with Bush change?

White House Counselor

• How did you come to serve as White House counselor? Describe your primary responsibilities as counselor. With whom did you most closely work?

• After Karl Rove’s departure, did your responsibilities change? Did Rove’s departure change your relationships in the White House? If so, how?

• Discuss the role of the press during your tenure as counselor? Did the press’s role change significantly between 2000 and 2008? Did you sense that the national media was biased in any way against the Bush Administration?

• How was press strategy developed in the Bush White House? What role did the president himself play in the strategy?

• What were some of the key challenges you faced in your relationship with the media? For example, comment on your need to walk a fine line between sharing information about the War on Terror and protecting national security.

• Describe how developments in communications technology (talk radio, the Internet, 24-hour news channels, social media) affected White House communications strategies. To what extent did you consciously seek to go around the Washington press corps to get the president’s message out?

• Did you help pass any legislation during your time as counselor? If so, what was your role?

The Bush Presidency in Retrospect

• Do you believe that Bush’s loyalty to his colleagues was a problem for the presidency?

• Did Bush’s managerial and decision-making styles change during his eight years in office?

• What do you consider your greatest accomplishments as RNC Chairman, counselor to the President, and as a lobbyist?

• What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Bush presidency? What features of the Bush presidency were overlooked or misunderstood by the press?

• How effective was Bush as a public leader and party leader? Can you separate the two?

• How should the Bush presidency be viewed in history? What were its most significant achievements?
• What episodes or events are especially instructive or revealing for the historian trying to assess this presidency?