



GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW 2 WITH JOSHUA BOLTEN

July 13, 2016
Washington, D.C.

Participants

University of Virginia

Russell L. Riley, chair

Barbara A. Perry

Rhodes College

Michael Nelson

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Riley: This is the Josh Bolten interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project, interview number two. We had a conversation before going on about the agenda. One thing that I didn't mention is a refresher about the ground rules, completely off the record. You'll get a lightly copyedited version of this and you can make decisions at that point about anything that you might wish to hold on to for some extended period of time. We can't release any of this until we have your written, express written permission as they say on the major league baseball broadcasts. We do this to encourage you to speak candidly to history.

For the reader of this transcript, be sure to look at the first one because what we covered was extremely rich, including Josh's biography and particularly the campaign and the transition.

One of the things we talked about, which you mentioned last time, was that the campaign had five big domestic priorities. As we ended the last set of discussions you were talking about the process that you went through for setting up the priorities of the White House, how you were going to spend your time, the President's time, the whiteboards and so forth, sort of the carrying over from the campaign.

What we didn't talk about was how that produced the result of what you were going to start with, which I guess were taxes and No Child Left Behind. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about—was it just a foregone conclusion after inauguration that taxes would be at the top of the agenda, or was there discussion that some of these other things might also go in?

Bolten: That was the likely best choice—that taxes would be at the top of the agenda for a variety of reasons, but we discussed it. It was an important issue of conversation from combining factors of substance, politics, legislative affairs, communications. So the group that I described the last time—which you tell me is now three years ago, and I can't believe it has been that long since we've spoken—the group that I described that sat in front of the whiteboard calendars is the principal one that dug in on what should be the priorities, what should be the sequencing and so on for recommendations to the President.

I think from the President's perspective there was no question that two things had to come first. One as you said was the tax cuts, and the other was his top priority, which was education reform—at least the priority from the standpoint of what did he want his Presidency to be about. He ran to be the education President.

All the other stuff, peace and prosperity and so on—those were all things that every President aspires to, but this was his passion. The tax cuts were especially important because somewhat

unexpectedly to most people, but it turns out not to our economic advisors, as President Bush came into office a recession got underway.

Larry Lindsey had been predicting that for many months; he was the chief economic advisor to the campaign and was head of our economic advisory group although not formally an employee of the campaign. His role as we came into the White House was to be head of the National Economic Council [NEC].

If I can take a small detour here, I don't know whether—did we talk about the establishment of the National Economic Council?

Riley: You had indicated that he had thought it was not a good idea.

Bolten: He was opposed to it.

Riley: You, based on your experience in the Trade Representative's office, had thought it was a good thing to keep.

Bolten: I was in the minority, but a very strong proponent of continuing to have a National Economic Council rather than revert to the system of a council led by the Treasury Secretary, which I thought would take it out of the White House direction that I thought was particularly important at the start of the administration. Not intending any disparagement at all of the Treasury Secretary.

Larry ended up in the job that he thought shouldn't exist. [*laughter*] He had been warning for many months—in fact probably for most of the preceding year—that the economy was softening, that we had been experiencing something of a bubble, a tech bubble. Both the economy and the federal coffers very significantly in the latter years of the [William J.] Clinton administration—and the President's agenda included a significant tax cut as wise under any economic circumstances—but it became particularly urgent as a tax cut because we were just on the front end of realizing that the economy had slipped into recession. You don't realize that until many months after it started. So it had started by the end of the Clinton administration.

This was clear by the way from a meeting that President Bush had with a bunch of business leaders during the transition period.

Riley: In Texas or Washington?

Bolten: I think it was in Texas. Somebody will know that. Kind of the leading indicator folks—like Fred Smith from FedEx said that things are slowing down pretty rapidly. We see it in people who aren't shipping as much stuff and so on. So the tax cut, which I think would have been the priority even in moderately stable economic times, because the economy had slipped into recession, became a particular priority.

Riley: Because of the stimulative effect?

Bolten: Because of the stimulative effect, right. The economy at that point needed the boost and the psychology needed the encouragement. So we ended up I think with an unusually well-timed

fiscal maneuver that as I said would have happened—I think we would have pursued it under almost any circumstances, but both the size and the speed and the effort we put behind it were accelerated by the economic circumstances. But that was all part of the conversation that we had in what I guess would be described as a scheduling meeting, but was really a strategy meeting. He used the calendar to give shape to the schedule.

The legislative affairs people of course had a lot to say about what they thought could be done in what time frame and what our supporters on Capitol Hill might be prepared to do to help. That's how it took shape to move first on the tax cuts while in parallel moving a more methodical process forward on education, which required a little more—I don't know the right phrase exactly—

Riley: Tilling the soil a little.

Bolten: Yes, on both the Republican and Democratic sides. On the Democratic side we needed to demonstrate our bona fides and draw Democrats of good will into working with a President who many people—many of the Democrats had said he had been illegitimately elected.

Riley: One of the other advantages, I guess, is that education reform is moving through a different set of channels, policy channels, within the administration and importantly on Capitol Hill, right? So that you're not—

Bolten: Yes, completely possible to do those.

Riley: Simultaneously.

Bolten: It's possible to till the ground in parallel; it's not always possible to harvest in parallel.

Riley: OK.

Perry: Explain that.

Bolten: The issues that were on our agenda, none of them was a slam dunk. So while you can lay the groundwork without it being the principal preoccupation of the President and White House, it's very hard to—I'm mixing metaphors now—but it's very hard to bring it across the finish line without it being the principal priority of the President.

Perry: Can you tell us about that partisan atmosphere that you came in with? How do you get beyond that and try to do things in a bipartisan way, particularly on No Child Left Behind?

Bolten: You know it's hard to place yourself back in that time and experience in part because I think President Bush came to Washington not assuming as politicians probably do today that they are entering into a bitterly partisan atmosphere that will have to be broken down in order to make any progress on anything. I think he came in with something of the contrary assumption, which is—I mean knowing how controversial his election was, he still came in I think with a sense that this is serious governance. There are people who disagree, but people of good will who are willing to cooperate. He came in with a sense of his experience in Texas, where he had governed as not a particularly partisan figure, and in fact had a good relationship with many

Democrats in Texas, including the Speaker of the House, who was his dear friend, or became his dear friend during the course of their association.

I don't recall an atmosphere going into those early months of the administration feeling *How are we going to break down this partisan gridlock?* I think we went in with *We've got a lot of persuading to do*—in the case of education on both sides. We had an expectation that it could be done and that we would ultimately get the necessary cooperation—which we did, as it turns out. I mean, the struggle over the tax cuts had a partisan tinge to it and it was a process of bringing over enough Democrats to our point of view to make it possible to put something through. But education was different. That was something where we knew we had to have real leadership from Democratic leaders in cooperation with the President. In the case of education that was Ted Kennedy in the Senate, George Miller in the House, and John Boehner on the Republican side. I'm thinking, would it have been Judd Gregg on the Senate side?

Perry: Yes, on the Senate side for the Republicans. He and Senator Kennedy worked together.

Bolten: These were people who weren't at the poles of difference in their philosophy, but they had different philosophies, and the President viewed it as his job to kind of bring everybody toward his position, which was not traditionally Republican nor traditionally Democratic. And succeeded.

Perry: Who identified those people who could be allies? Was it the legislative affairs shop primarily?

Bolten: Yes, and the lead in the White House on this was the head of our Domestic Policy Council [DPC], Margaret Spellings, who had been President Bush's education advisor as Governor. She knew what his principles were, she had good experience in it. She didn't have a lot of experience in working with the U.S. Congress, but she did have experience in the politics of education at the state level. She's an astute political animal. She was a good navigator of that. She put in a fair amount of her own time personally cultivating the key folks on the Hill who would be helpful in putting together the coalition.

Mrs. [Laura] Bush played a significant role in this as well, not—we tried to keep her a bit above politics. Most people had thought that the Clinton administration had made a pretty bad mistake by putting the First Lady sort of in substantive charge of an important agenda item in health care. So we tried to make it clear that was not her role, but she was coming in to provide momentum, support, to the issue. But she has an excellent way of integrity about her. People tend to trust her. She did a fine job in helping the relationships on the Hill, not least with Senator Ted Kennedy, in whose office she found herself on the morning of 9/11. She had gone up to appear at a hearing that was not held.

Perry: That's right; the famous picture of her with Senator Kennedy and Senator Gregg as they faced the cameras to talk about what is happening.

Nelson: In terms of the tax cut, I don't remember what it was that provoked this remark, but I do remember being struck when President Bush at some point said—of course it becomes a numbers negotiation—but he said, "I'm not going to negotiate with myself." Does that ring a bell with you as sort of a—?

Bolten: Well, it certainly sounds like Bush. [laughter] I probably heard him say that a number of times in different contexts. I don't remember the specific time.

Nelson: What I wondered is if it embodied his approach to dealing with Congress.

Bolten: Yes, it did embody his approach. He was disinclined to engage in a lot of nitty-gritty horse trading. He viewed it as his job to lay out the principles, lay out a plan that met those principles in the best way possible from his standpoint, send it up, and say, "You got a better idea, let me know. If you think something needs to be changed, you'll have to persuade me, of course, but if that helps bring along some of your colleagues, great." But he would be—in any number of negotiations he'd be consistently disinclined to have somebody say to him, "Well, there is some resistance on the Hill," to say, "OK, let's change this, let's dial this down" and so on. He'd say, "I put out what I'm for, you tell me what you're for, and then we'll see what we can work out." That's the way it ended up going.

Riley: During the period when those two are the major agenda items in the White House, is it the case that on the other issues that you mentioned, like Social Security, Medicare, faith-based, are those just put on the shelf, or is there some low-level churning in the White House and within the bureaucracy to try to tee up things for later down the road when the President is going to move that to the top of his agenda?

Bolten: Let's separate out faith-based from Social Security and Medicare, because faith-based is something that didn't require any substantial amount of legislating and so on; it was not—it didn't require the same kind of legislative push, it was stuff that the administration could do on its own with Executive orders and so on. So that element proceeded I think—again, in parallel. It got a fair amount of attention from the President all the way through.

We set up a separate office and so on. It was the kind of thing that you could make significant progress on promoting faith-based institutions and preventing government from discriminating against faith-based institutions and the provision of social welfare services, which was really at the core of the agenda. You could make progress on all of that without it having to be, as I described, with the full focus and weight of the White House behind it.

Social Security and Medicare were different. They were issues more like tax cuts, where you can do the work, you can lay the groundwork, you can begin conversations on the Hill. There is a lot of work to be done at HHS [Health and Human Services] or the Treasury Department and in the White House. You are crafting the details of proposals that would not have been fully fleshed out in the campaign. So there is plenty of groundwork to be done, but we also knew that we couldn't really push that at the same time that we were pushing huge agenda items in the form of taxes and education reform.

Riley: OK.

Bolten: So they were—Social Security and Medicare, prescription drugs—they were not part of the 100- and 200-day plans, other than to begin laying the groundwork.

Riley: But a part of your job is tending to those lower-level priorities to make sure that that's getting teed up in a proper way.

Bolten: Absolutely. And tax cuts are complicated; it's hard to get more complicated than Medicare or anything in the health care area. So we came out of the campaign with a—for a campaign—a highly articulated and specific plan, but still nowhere near specific enough to actually say we're close to being able to present legislation. So there was in fact a lot of work that needed to be done.

I think if you said, "In the first calendar year of the Bush administration you will be successful on taxes, on education reform, and in launching a different government attitude toward faith-based institutions," I would have said, "Great, touchdown."

Nelson: If 9/11 hadn't occurred, were you planning to proceed with Social Security and/or Medicare reform in the second year?

Bolten: Yes. Well, Mike, I have to admit I don't remember what we would have said, at the time, was the right timing. We would certainly have intended to take up both Social Security and Medicare reform in the space of the first term. We ended taking up only the prescription drugs during the first term. I think we probably would have been able to take both of them up had it not been for 9/11.

Perry: Can you talk about stem cell research funding, that debate? That's not something that is on your agenda as you're campaigning and talking about issues and policies, yet it becomes a very important part of the issue agenda for the President. But there must have been loads of other things coming through the fire hose that could have been chosen along with stem cell research. Why that one?

Bolten: That's one of the things that showed up in the in-box. It was not—that was not an issue where we said during the campaign, "Wow, we can't wait to dig in on this really wrenching, emotional, and practical issue that doesn't have a good clear answer and on which whatever side the President takes he will annoy or disappoint a lot of people." So no, it wasn't on our original agenda, but it ends up in the President's in-box because he has to decide. There were a number of issues like that.

One of the big things that was coming off of the Hill in the first year of the Presidency was the Patient's Bill of Rights. It was a hugely fraught intense political issue that really wasn't a part of the President's campaign agenda, but he needed to deal with it because stuff was happening on the Hill. So in my office as Deputy Chief of Staff we devoted a lot of time to some very personal negotiating with the principal proponent in the House, Charlie Norwood [Jr.]. Ultimately I found myself in negotiations that were being led by Ted Kennedy and attended by John McCain—I can't believe I'm missing the name of the Senator from North Carolina who was ultimately the Vice President nominee.

Perry: John Edwards.

Bolten: Yes, Edwards, to try and work out some compromise so that a Patient's Bill of Rights could pass. It was a priority for Ted Kennedy. He was, as in many things, very practical, really trying to find the common ground. He was, at that time, I think, promoting Edwards as something of a mentee. McCain was the principal Republican who was also interested.

As I look back on it, it turned out not to be a particularly important issue in the end. It ended up sort of running out the clock on something that I think was just more emblematically important to a lot of people than substantively important to the provision of health care in America. That's the kind of thing that shows up in the in-box, isn't part of the President's agenda, but you have to deal with it and the White House has to devote a lot of calories to it. So the Patient's Bill of Rights was in that category.

Riley: Energy is in that category.

Bolten: Energy was in that category in the first week of the administration when there was a shortage that suddenly appeared in California. I mean, the in-box just gets stuff in it. The challenge for the White House, which I think few Presidents have understood better than George W. Bush coming in—the challenge for the White House is not to let yourself get overwhelmed by the in-box and keep your eyes on the things that you have stacked up in your out-box, and stem cell was one of those things—it came in the in-box.

Nelson: Of these issues, why did energy end up getting handled the way it was, the Vice President, task force, criticism of the secretiveness, and so forth?

Bolten: That's a good question. You know, I think it just seemed to make sense at the time. We didn't go into it saying, "OK, we're going to give the Vice President what appeared to be—" not a crisis—sort of a low-grade energy crisis, which probably every administration experiences at one point or another. We didn't go into it saying, "The VP is going to do this."

I remember having a conversation during the transition with the VP's Chief of Staff, Scooter [I. Lewis] Libby—did we cover that in the previous session?

Riley: I believe so—let me tell you what I recall from reading and you can tell me if this is where you're headed—that there was a question about whether they would take on an issue portfolio sort of in the way that Al Gore [Jr.] had on environmental issues. Your response was that you didn't think that that was a wise idea because it tended to circumscribe what the Vice President could be involved in.

Bolten: It was actually the Vice President's view—with which I agreed—and the President was quite comfortable with that, which was that he intended the Vice President to be a collaborator, a counselor on everything. He didn't want us to send him off into the rabbit hole of government organizational reform or something like that in order to keep him busy. He thought, *You sit right here next to me. I want to hear your views on all the issues.*

Riley: Right.

Bolten: So that was a conversation I had in the waning days of the transition, although bear in mind I think our transition was something like 38 days long. So it's not like the beginning was that far from the end. We agreed that the Vice President and his staff would be integrated in the overall White House operation. The Vice President, at his own insistence, intended for his staff to take a modest approach, which was, they're to absorb, help, listen, but not to create a sort of separate policy center out of it. So we went into the administration not particularly intending,

“Gosh, what special project can we assign to [Richard] Cheney?” So it didn’t arise out of that; it didn’t arise from, “What do we do with Cheney?”

I think it just kind of made sense at the time, Cheney having had a background in the energy industry, the energy challenges being an issue that cuts very broadly across departments and expertise in government. So it required a coordinated interagency approach. I mean, you can’t just give the energy problem to the Secretary of Energy; there are way too many issues involved, and energy is far too important to the economy overall. So it sort of made sense to have the Vice President step in and play a leading, coordinating role and give some sense to the public that the administration was concerned, setting priority on this. If I’m remembering correctly, people were anxious about it in ways that it’s kind of easy to forget. There’s nothing like an energy shortage all of a sudden to make people anxious about it. So there was an emblematic factor there as well.

The secrecy stuff, that came from the Vice President and the way he felt that the government ought to be run. It was actually—it wasn’t contrary to the President’s instincts or instructions, but it—had it not been the Vice President running it, it probably would not have had the controversy over secrecy it did. He and his staff were very attuned to protecting the prerogatives of the executive and often attuned to making a point of principle in circumstances where other people would just say, “Let that go.” The energy task force was one of those situations.

Nelson: Somewhere in the first interview you described Cheney’s influence as at its peak during the transition and then during the first few months of the Bush Presidency, which is a shorter period than a lot of people think it lasted. Is this a good time to elaborate on that?

Bolten: Sure. I don’t remember what I said before, but in saying that the Vice President’s influence was at its peak in the transition and the early months of the Bush Presidency—that’s not to suggest he wasn’t influential thereafter. But because of his experience, he was, I think, filling space that had not yet been filled by other people or by the President’s own experience. So I don’t think it should be regarded as surprising that he was more influential in the early days, and that that influence waned without him becoming not influential, but his influence waned over time as the President learned to trust a larger group of senior advisors. As the President got more experienced and as the other players in the administration got more experienced—I don’t remember if the example I cited was the—I think we did talk before about the example of carbon as a pollutant. Did we talk about that?

Perry: I think so.

Riley: Yes.

Bolten: I won’t retread that ground. That was the one circumstance in which I thought the Vice President’s intervention was dispositive on a significant domestic policy issue. It’s a very different story in national security affairs, but in domestic policy I cannot think of any other circumstance in which the Vice President’s engagement was dispositive to the outcome. He was always influential, but on that one issue, but for the Vice President, I think we would have taken a different course.

Riley: You said in the first interview that Andy Card spent 90 to 95 percent of his time with the President. I don’t recall what the time frame was, whether it was the first year or during his run

as Chief of Staff. Do you have any recollection about the relative level of frequency of the Vice President being in the President's company during this period of time?

Bolten: I do, I have a sense of it. I don't think that changed very much over time. The Vice President—the President made clear at the beginning to the Vice President that he was welcome in every meeting.

Riley: Right.

Bolten: In the Oval Office—I mean, except for—there were a couple of things where it just wouldn't be appropriate.

Riley: Sure.

Bolten: The Vice President took advantage of that, which I think the President welcomed. So any time there was a policy conversation. Sometimes the Vice President had something he needed to do separately on his schedule—he might be traveling or that kind of thing—but if he was around and had even a passing interest in the subject matter, sometimes even no interest at all, he came and he sat next to the President in the Oval Office. So he was there for the vast majority of policy conversations, political conversations, most personnel conversations, although if the personnel book is Ambassadors and Assistant Secretaries, the Vice President probably doesn't care that much and probably doesn't show up.

Riley: So in the Oval Office—

Bolten: By the way, that lasted through the entire administration. As to alone time between the President and the Vice President, they had a regular lunch, and if the Vice President had something in particular he wanted to say he would just wander in. But they didn't hang out like buddies. If the Vice President was with the President, it was usually because there was a meeting going on or they had a scheduled lunch.

Riley: I guess what I'm trying to do is get an impressionistic portrait of how this President is becoming President, his operating style. It seems that you indicated that it was highly common for his Chief of Staff to be at his side, with the Vice President maybe more than not, but in important meetings to be at his side. Is there anybody else who would have been in that core group, certainly in that first year as the President is getting his sea legs and figuring out how he wants to run this enterprise?

Bolten: Yes, Karl Rove would have been present at a large portion but not at all meetings. The President was very concerned that his national security judgments not be considered tainted in any way by politics, so he actually banned Karl from attending national security conversations. That probably rubbed Karl wrong and I don't blame him. He's a brilliant mind and a great contributor on a whole range of issues, but his public profile was such that the President was rightly concerned that it would taint the perception of his decision making. So he was out of those meetings, but almost everything else Karl Rove would be around for. Maybe we can go through some examples of who would be in the room for this and that will refresh my recollection, but Karl was always around and Karen Hughes was very often around as the head

of communications. Her deputy Dan Bartlett took that role eventually and he was around a fair amount.

The press secretary, who technically worked for the head of communications, always wanted to be around. The press secretary always wants to be in the room so that they can say and report. They don't necessarily say what's going on to the reporters, but they feel that they need to know. Bush was not as receptive to that. Ari Fleischer would have been around a lot, but not nearly as consistently as Karen Hughes was around.

If it was a policy discussion, I would have been present in all of them as Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy.

Riley: Only on the domestic side, or domestic and international stuff?

Bolten: I occasionally absented myself from the national security discussions just as a time-management maneuver, because Andy participated so extensively in them and because while we informally considered it under my aegis to manage all of the policy processes in the White House, that really didn't include the National Security Council. That was a policy process that was being managed by Condi [Condoleezza] Rice and Steve Hadley. I was kept informed and I was welcome at all meetings, but I was not playing a management role on that side. There were national security conversations both outside of the Oval Office and in the Oval Office, where I would choose to absent myself.

It's interesting, we rarely had problems of people jostling for position or saying, "I should be in this meeting and I wasn't." The Chief of Staff's office had pretty good control and respect within the White House over who was going to come to what. Occasionally somebody would complain; it's sort of endemic to the press secretary to complain. But for the most part the people who needed to be in the room were in the room. Bush was very receptive to that. He didn't like a lot of hangers-on being around, but he liked having different perspectives reflected. He was pretty good in the Oval Office at drawing people out and saying, "What do you think, what are the folks on the Hill telling you about this?" to the legislative affairs director and so on.

Riley: Was there a counselor at the outset?

Bolten: Karen had the title of counselor.

Riley: Counselor and communications director?

Bolten: She had the title—it was a little awkward. Karl and Karen were both essential to the President's operations, so they each needed to have some kind of title that reflected their importance and influence. So Karl somehow ended up with senior advisor and Karen ended up with counselor. I don't recall how that division was made. My guess is that Andy made it probably in consultation with them, saying, "One of you gets to be senior advisor, the other gets to be counselor, but you each get to wear a tiara." *[laughter]*

Nelson: This might be kind of an essay question, but I wonder, during your time as Deputy Chief of Staff, what were the things that you thought were particularly admirable about the way Andy

Card did the Chief of Staff job? What did you think you would do differently if you were in that job, and of course later you were?

Bolten: I ended up in that job. Andy has many remarkable characteristics. I thought he was a remarkably good Chief of Staff in his humility. It's a very influential position that needs to manage big egos, especially in the Cabinet, but also within the White House. I thought he did a tremendous job, which I tried to emulate, of never making anything about him, protecting the President, making crisp decisions that are properly within the purview of the Chief of Staff, but being humble about the use of that authority and recognizing that the Chief of Staff's authority is 100 percent derivative from the President and emphasizing the "of-staff" portion of the job rather than the "chief."

Andy also has a spectacular memory, so part of the benefit of Andy spending so much time with the President was that we basically had in his memory banks a record of everything that was said to and by the President.

I thought that Andy spent, if anything, a little too much time with the President. His time would have been probably at a higher value if he would have spent more of his time back in his office keeping up with what was going on with all the other elements of the White House operation. But as I said, one way in which it was not a detriment that Andy spent so much time with the President was that he was the institutional record of what happened and what was said, and the President relied on that.

In my tenure as Chief of Staff we lost that capability. As you've already probably recognized through the course of interviewing me, my memory is hardly extensive or precise, so I couldn't play that role. I did do my best at it; I did try to make sure that there were others present in meetings with the President who would be accurate record keepers and reporters. A lot of what the Chief of Staff has to do is communicate to the rest of the government what the President has decided, what he wants and what he needs.

Perry: You had said you wanted to stop at noon.

Bolten: Let's go for a few more minutes and let me expand a little bit on Andy because I think it's important. I think he was careful to avoid becoming a friend of the President or consider himself at that level, but I think that he and Cathy [Card] were actually as close to friends as the Chief of Staff and his wife can or should be in the course of an administration. They went many, maybe even most weekends with the Bushes to Camp David. You're still working, but it's a much more relaxed environment and you can actually chew stuff over, and I think Andy was a really good stabilizing force in turbulent times in the White House.

He was also very well-liked by the White House staff and most of the Cabinet. Just because of his graceful personal style—he's a person of grace and warmth and as I said humility, which I thought served the President very well, and, by the way, was what the President wanted. We'll probably get to it, but one of the first things the President said to me when he was talking to me about becoming his second and last Chief of Staff was that he didn't need a Prime Minister. It was unnecessary for him to say that to me. Maybe somebody coming from the outside you probably would have to say that to, but he didn't need to say it to me because I'd watched how

he operated. The fact he felt he should underscore it was sort of telling. Andy was an excellent Chief of Staff without anybody having any concern that he was trying to be the Prime Minister.

Riley: Thanks. That felt like about 10 minutes to us. Maybe two hours to you. Let's take a few minutes.

[BREAK]

Perry: I had a question about an interesting comment that you made about President Bush's ability that you said you thought was ahead of most Presidents in his ability to take his agenda, hold fast to the agenda as best as possible, and yet be able to comprehend what's coming into the in-box and prioritize that. So my question is, what do you think in his background, his experience, his intellect, his personality, his persona allowed for that?

Bolten: A combination of experience and personality. Experience—he watched his dad. He watched his dad pretty closely. He was not a government official. I think he was interested in and aware of the mechanics of his father's Presidency more than most people realized. I think he took a lot of lessons away from that experience.

Nelson: Positive or negative?

Bolten: Both.

Nelson: What did he take away and what did he do differently because of that observation?

Bolten: That's an interesting question, which I'm probably not well equipped to answer, but I think in both—as both a positive and a negative example—he drew both positive and negative examples from his dad in the process of empowering people, in delegating, and in choosing the right people in the first place.

I gave you already the episode of when he was first talking to me about becoming his Chief of Staff and he said, "I don't need a Prime Minister." He was almost surely reflecting on his dad's experience with John Sununu, who I think both Andy and 43 will tell you they were both instructed to fire. Forty-three was asked to fire him first and thought he had, and it didn't take. [laughter] Then Andy Card had to fire his boss. I don't know if you explored that with Andy or not when you talked to him.

I think he was a pretty keen observer of who was helpful to his dad and in what way. It gave him an appreciation for surrounding himself with people who were loyal but independent and unafraid to tell him the truth. He put a lot of store on that.

Riley: Was there anybody in the family who served that role for him? He was to his father in some respects what Nancy Reagan was to Ronnie [Ronald Reagan], somebody who was completely invested in the President's agenda.

Bolten: You mean 43 was for 41?

Riley: Exactly.

Bolten: No, I don't think he was nearly as invested in the daily presence in the 41 administration the way Nancy Reagan was in the 40 administration. But in the 43 administration, you know not really. He maintained a close and warm relationship with his parents. He talked to them pretty often, but rarely talked business. His mom would call to make comments like "You've got to stand up taller," or something like that. "You can't slouch in the chair that way." [laughter] But I think people have the misimpression that his dad would call up and chew up some difficult foreign policy problem at length. That's not the way they did it. He would call for support and encouragement, but not to become a policy advisor.

In the rest of the family I always felt that he enjoyed most in his family being with his brother Marvin [Bush], who lives in this area. He was just a good guy to hang out and watch a ballgame with or play golf or something like that. [REDACTED]

The family around Bush during his Presidency was a very warm, tight-knit, supportive family, but not particularly involved in the business.

Nelson: We stepped on your question. Did you want to ask more about his managerial style?

Perry: Right. Could we bear down on management style just a little bit more? One answer to that was watching his father's Presidency. Then how about his own experiences, his own background, his own intellect and personality?

Bolten: Bush was conscious of good management and good leadership. I don't know whether that's really a product of being the first MBA [Master of Business Administration] President. I think it's just more a facet of his personality than anything else. Maybe that's the personality that goes to business school, rather than you develop that personality from having been at business school. But he was conscious of setting a tone, setting objectives, holding people accountable. All the stuff that I—not having been to business school—that I imagine in business school that they teach you that good leaders do. I think he was that instinctively, but also approached his job in that way.

You could almost feel him—I think most Presidents in that kind of position go in and they do the job the best they can without a lot of reflection about how am I behaving as a leader. Bush, I sensed, always had some consciousness of that issue in his head. He was very careful about keeping himself fit and alert. That's in his nature anyway, but he was really doubly conscious about it because he thought it was important to his ability to make good decisions. Most people will stay up the extra hour if they're worried about some decision or something like that, reading and so on. Bush, if he had important decisions to make, would make sure that he got exercise and rest, and one of the few ways you could make him angry as a staffer was to interfere with his ability to stay as healthy and clear-minded as he could be to make the big decisions.

He went to bed, he got up. He always tried to exercise every day. I don't want to give the misimpression that he's not a hard worker. He is actually—I would bet—among our hardest-working modern Presidents. From 6:45 when he would walk into the Oval Office until he left, he was moving; he was doing stuff. He wasn't wasting time. Lunch would be an opportunity for fuel and literally last seven or eight minutes. This would have been a leisurely lunch by Bush standards. *[laughter]*

I had lunch with him fairly often when I was Chief of Staff. We didn't particularly schedule lunches for him because he didn't really like that; it was interfering with his ability to do stuff. Somebody he would meet with was the Vice President and that was an opportunity to talk. He would have [Alan] Greenspan in once a month just to talk. But if it was just like, "Let's get a sandwich," I'd order a sandwich; he would have already ordered his. We'd sit in the private dining room and he would have finished before I'd gotten my sandwich. He'd say, "OK, let's get back to work." *[laughter]* So I had many a hungry afternoon.

He was very disciplined in that way. He was also conscious of what his own behavior was saying to other people. He was very conscious of how his demeanor would affect other people. He spoke often about—beginning in the campaign he spoke about that you can't be a leader if you're not optimistic. He said you cannot go in front of people and say, "Follow me, things are going to get worse." I think that's a direct quote. He said you have to have the ability to go before people and say—and mean it, because they can tell—"Follow me, I think we can make this better." So that was the attitude that he absorbed for himself.

I have to say, especially during the three years when I was Chief of Staff, when I would see him a lot, every day, I have to say there were very few days where you could describe him as down. I remember coming into the Oval Office—I used to walk into the Oval Office every morning—I think I told you this when we visited three years ago. I would begin every morning by thanking him, thanking the President for the privilege of serving, in some words or another. Just maybe, "Mr. President, good morning, thanks for the privilege of serving." That wasn't intended as brown-nosing or anything like that, it was intended really as a reminder to myself that here we are starting a day and we get to work in the White House. He would always sort of barely acknowledge that.

I remember it was a particularly bad morning—something really bad had happened the night before. It might have been the defeat in the 2006 elections, which was a real fun day. I came in the morning and I said, "Mr. President, it's a privilege to serve even today." He looked up and he said, "Especially today." You could see that he was setting himself to be in the right demeanor to be a good leader at the time his party—in the time of adversity. So he was conscious of all these things.

Riley: We may only get started on this question—

Bolten: Did I cover that?

Perry: Yes. That's very helpful.

Nelson: Russell, could I just ask some follow-up on that?

Riley: Mine is a follow-up; if yours trumps it then let me know. It's about the source of his own personal reserves. The way you've described this is it's his—it's a kind of a theory of the way one leads as President. But we know that there are terrible things. We've spent hundreds of hours listening to people talk about many of the terrible things that happen.

Bolten: Terrible things that happen, yes.

Riley: What are the reserves that allow somebody to have this kind of positive optimistic approach in the face of the dreadful things that he has to deal with?

Bolten: Bush would probably mention first his family and faith. Those are kind of standard answers and I think they have a lot to do with it for Bush. I go back to the answer I was just giving to Barbara's question. I think as he took on the persona of being President—which he did—that he tried every day to be conscious of being a leader worthy of that role. He just kind of made it his job to be in the right frame of mind and in the position of a leader whom other people would respect and follow. Agree or not agree, he had a real consciousness about it.

Riley: That would require almost superhuman discipline.

Bolten: He was a very disciplined guy, a very disciplined guy. You go back to where he begins his book. The first major decision was quitting drinking. Clearly he had some kind of drinking problem in his youth or up until exactly age 40. Then he sort of had a moment of clarity and decided that this was undermining his ability to be the person he could be. So he quit drinking and has not had another drink since then.

He wakes up without an alarm clock every morning at 5:15 and goes through the same routine. He exercises almost every day that he can. If he said he was going to do something—if he said, "OK, I'll read that tonight," all of us are human. You'd say, "Oh, man, I got too tired, I didn't get through it." He wouldn't say he was going to read it unless he was going to read it. I never encountered anyone who was more faithful to fulfilling any commitment or even assertion that he made about his own behavior. I think that is substantially the answer to the question—it's as much a question of character as it is of training or experience.

Riley: You mentioned when you got started but almost set it aside and suggested that there was something—

Bolten: Yes, there would be a lot on the record about his faith and how important that was to him. I think it was, but I could tell that he was drawing on a reserve of faith in very difficult times. For him, for example, in the Iraq War, when he was looking at the casualty reports every morning and meeting several times a week with the families of the fallen, there must have been a substantial element of faith to that. We didn't sit around talking about religion, God, or anything like that. It was something that was in the background.

Riley: There may have been others with whom he would have had those conversations, not his Chief of Staff?

Bolten: Maybe, but I saw a very large proportion of his conversations outside of those with his family up in the Residence, so I was witness to almost every other conversation that he would

typically have. They didn't go that way. There wasn't a discussion about what's God's will here and what's the situation, that kind of thing. So the religion was something foundational, but I never found it present in the way I think some people think that a person of faith in that kind of position usually brings their religion to bear.

Riley: Why don't we take a break?

[BREAK]

Perry: Could we circle back to stem cell, the research funding issue, and the policy part of it? We talked a little bit about how that arrived in the in-box, but we didn't talk about the emphasis that the President put on that. I'm thinking even unto his—was it his first prime time speech, I think, on media from Waco?

Bolten: From Crawford, from his ranch.

Perry: That's right, from the ranch.

Bolten: Was it his first prime time? That sounds right.

Perry: I think it was.

Riley: Outside of a message to Congress.

Perry: Right, it was the first policy speech done I think in prime time on national news in August I think. Was that a communications shop decision, or did the President think that it was so important that he should do that? Do you remember what the conversation was about that?

Bolten: A decision to do something like that would have been a Presidential decision regardless. Karen Hughes and her shop would have been heavily involved in the choreographing and so on of the announcement. But it seemed sort of natural to do it. In retrospect, it seems like kind of a small issue on which the President would give his first prime time address. At the time it didn't seem that small. This was pre 9/11. I guess it was August of 2001, just a month before 9/11. It seemed like a pretty big deal.

On top of that the President had struggled with the issue in a way that he wanted to share with the American people. He didn't just want to put a decision out and defend it. He wanted the American people to know and have a sense of the pull on both sides of that kind of issue. Once again, I think conscious of his persona as a leader, he wanted the American people to see the President really weighing carefully the ethical, moral, practical implications of a relatively important government policy decision that people on both sides felt very strongly and emotionally about.

So at the time it seemed pretty natural to do an address about it. The address was designed not really to persuade, as many addresses are, but to be transparent with the public about his thinking. “On the one hand, there is this; on the other hand, there is that, and therefore I have come out here. Many people will disagree with that, but that is where my principles and my responsibilities take me.” That was basically the approach.

There was plenty of disagreement inside the White House I think. You would have found people—there was sort of a continuum of possible places to land in that decision, and you would have found people, different people in the White House at different points along the spectrum. One thing we did in that policy process that the President encouraged and welcomed was that we would bring into the Oval Office and expose him to the most articulate and informed proponents of different outcomes.

I’m guessing that a majority of the American people would then—and even more so today—would disagree with where he came out, but I regard that as a successful episode in the Bush Presidency, because he remained true to his principles and explained them to the American people.

Nelson: A couple of political questions. One is, early in the year [James] Jeffords changes—leaves the Republican caucus and now you have a Democratic majority in the Senate. How did that affect your work?

Bolten: It pretty dramatically affected our legislative work because it changed—it flipped the majority. It just made life a lot harder in dealing with the Senate. Now, nobody—no party actually controls the Senate unless you’ve got 60 votes, so it’s easy to exaggerate what the change in control would mean, but it does mean you lose control of the agenda, when things are coming up, what’s going to come up, what’s going to be allowed in the way of amendments and so on.

We were engaged in some very difficult legislative maneuvering at the time on the tax cuts. It made it a whole lot more difficult. That was not a welcome episode in the White House.

Nelson: Was there a postmortem in the White House about—?

Bolten: How did this happen?

Nelson: Yes.

Bolten: I don’t remember one. There weren’t many postmortems in the Bush White House. There were a lot of bodies, but it was not Bush’s style to spend a lot of time figuring out who was to blame. If you want to look back to inform what you should do going forward, Bush was all for that. If you wanted to look back to figure out who was responsible for something going wrong, he just wasn’t that interested in it. Again, it was part of the persona of the leader, which was eyes forward and very disinclined to engage in recriminations or anything like that. I’m sure he was mad at Jeffords, but he’d be mad for a short time and then move on.

Nelson: I can imagine looking forward and thinking, *OK, so [Lincoln] Chafee, [Olympia] Snowe, [Michael] Collins, is this—is Jeffords domino number one?* Is there any thought about how can we keep more bad things from happening in the future?

Bolten: Yes. I remember we were concerned about it, but it probably caused us to be a little more gentle in dealing with those who were in the moderate caucus, but I don't remember a dramatic change. It wasn't the style of this White House to excommunicate people and declare enemies.

Yes, I guess you can go back and look at LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson], who was very good at using the potent powers of the Presidency, and one of the ways was in punishing his enemies. That was not the style of the Bush White House—for better or worse.

Riley: But there was no sense that this was—that there was an unforced error within the staff on this either?

Bolten: No, certainly I don't recall that. Most people just stacked it up to Jeffords being a pain—which he was. He was kind of an odd personality as well.

Riley: Were there other instances you can think of where there were questions raised about staff mistakes where you had to exercise some internal discipline about things being done? I'll ask this sort of globally.

Bolten: Very few. I'd be interested in what you all might have discovered about—This is the episode that really resonates through time: the banner behind Bush on the aircraft carrier that said, "Mission Accomplished." Somebody allowed that to be put up. My understanding in retrospect was that the banner was intended for the sailors onboard that ship—they had accomplished their mission and they were headed home. But somebody made a bad mistake allowing that to be in the photo. Bush never said those words, and in fact if you go back and read his remarks, he's complimenting the troops on the great job they've done and preparing everybody for the important work that lies ahead. Yet that "mission accomplished" moment—it's an emblem. So somebody did that.

It was not the kind of place where you figured out who let that be there and fired them or something like that; nobody got fired or anything like that.

Nelson: When Russell was asking his question I thought the example you might give was when John DiIulio left, the circumstances under which that happened.

Bolten: I think that was viewed by most people as kind of like the Jeffords episode. *[laughter]* John was an odd fit to begin with in the White House. He was of a piece with the spirit of the compassionate conservative agenda that Bush was promoting, but he certainly wasn't a conservative. So I think he was uncomfortable in a Republican White House. I don't even remember the full circumstances. If there was an error, maybe it was collectively—and I must have participated in it—in putting John in charge of that office to begin with. I guess in retrospect you need to give thought not just to if that person says they're comfortable working here, but will they be comfortable here. You have to make an independent judgment.

But I do not recall John's departure and the tensions that led up to it as a significant episode in the White House. It's the kind of thing that would have absorbed a few minutes of the President's time and, "Oh, gee, we're sorry to see you go, John" sort of thing. Again, the Bush mode was not to make enemies of people; they parted on friendly terms, him personally with DiIulio—but I don't remember any sort of hunt for how did this happen; how did this go so badly off the rails. I don't even remember feeling it was all that badly off the rails. The agenda from the faith-based and community initiatives office didn't depend on DiIulio, it depended on the President and his own investment. It went forward just fine.

I remember another episode in which I had been selected as Chief of Staff and named, but not yet taken over. I had about a two-week period during which Andy was wrapping up and I was gearing up. I was the budget director at the time, so I had stuff to finish up and wanted to be prepared to take over. One of the early things I did once I had been announced was I fired the press secretary, Scott McClellan. It was not because I thought ill of him or thought that he was anything other than loyal to the President—did we talk about this episode before?

Perry: I don't think so.

Riley: I think it was mentioned, but you didn't go into any detail about it.

[Two pages redacted here]

Riley: Mike, do you have a follow-up?

Nelson: No, that's great.

Riley: What is it that you expect is going to be the next thing on the domestic agenda when 9/11 hits? What's being teed up? If you don't have 9/11, what are the major things that you're moving around on your whiteboard from the bottom to the top?

Bolten: It's hard to go back that far, but we have not yet done No Child Left Behind.

Riley: You're getting close you think, I guess.

Bolten: We thought we were getting close. I think we had hoped to have something enacted before the end of the year. But I would have—now I'm guessing and not recalling. I'm guessing that we would have thought about how to sequence prescription drugs and Social Security.

Riley: Were those doable in an election year or was it the idea that you send them up and do the best you can with the idea that you—

Bolten: We never really accepted the you-can't-do-stuff-in-an-election-year maxim. I think that's right. I think you can do stuff in an election year. You have to stop at some point before the election, but you can certainly start something like Medicare and take it as far as you can

before the Congress is going to shut down and avoid any partisan advantage one way or the other. So again I'm guessing and not recalling—I don't think we would have hesitated in the absence of 9/11 to go forward with either Medicare or Social Security. We would not have done both at the same time.

Riley: There was talk of a civility agenda. Was that something that was on your plate? Do you have any recollection?

Bolten: It's ringing a dim bell. I think it was of a piece with the faith-based and community initiatives, sort of the soft side of things. I don't remember much about it. I think it would have been regarded as an attractive add-on, but not at the core.

Riley: Not a core thing, OK.

Bolten: Not what the Presidency was going to be about.

Riley: OK. September 11th, your story. What was your day like?

Bolten: We did not talk about that last time?

Nelson: No.

Bolten: Actually, it's great having the West Wing in view while we talk about this, because it's sort of hard to place yourself in time unless you can actually see where you were. I remember it being an unusually relaxed day because people were still sort of filtering back from vacation. The intensity of the Congressional calendar and so on had not yet taken hold. I remember a very pleasant and relaxed day.

Riley: And the President is on the road.

Bolten: Especially relaxed because the President had left very early in the morning or maybe the night before—I don't remember. What I do remember is when I came in that morning they were either just leaving or gone. We would always have a Chief of Staff traveling with the President. It was typically Andy, and if not Andy either me or Joe Hagin. It was not that unusual to have either Andy or me and Joe Hagin. Very rare for Andy and me to travel together, because we always had one of us with the President, and one of us back home in the West Wing.

Riley: What was the rationale for that?

Bolten: The rationale for having a Chief of Staff with the President I think is obvious: you need a Chief of Staff around the President to execute on directions, basically to be—any decision making that needed to be done short of the President and then to determine what needs to get to the President. Because there isn't naturally anybody else to play that role, and you can't make the President the victim of whoever can get to him on the road.

Riley: Sure.

Bolten: In the White House, in the West Wing, you can't get to the President unless you're one of a half-dozen people, otherwise you cannot get to the President except by getting onto his schedule, and you can't get onto his schedule unless the President or the Chief of Staff says so. So there's a way of controlling that. It's protection for the President. On the road it's the same thing, but you're in a way less protected because a lot more people have access to the President. So it makes perfect sense to have a Chief of Staff with the President. During my tenure as Deputy Chief of Staff that was—most of the time it was Andy and this was no exception.

It was a trip to Florida to help generate support for the No Child Left Behind agenda. It would have been something that, on the whiteboard I talked about, we had looked at it and said OK, we want to take three or four days in September to highlight the President's commitment to education reform, and these are the states where it makes sense to do that. These are the messages we want to convey, and then it would go off to a different process to decide exactly where are we going to go, with what kind of visuals.

Riley: How far in advance would that trip have been decided on?

Bolten: We planned pretty far in advance. I think that was also a Bush hallmark, which is pretty careful and disciplined scheduling and planning. It would probably have been no less than a month and could have been as much as three or four months in advance.

So they're off. They're doing education. I led the senior staff meeting at 7:30 as always. Rather, Andy would—if he were in town he would lead the senior staff meeting, but with him out of town I led the senior staff meeting.

Riley: How many people would be in that meeting?

Bolten: I could probably reconstruct a list, but it would have been—it's in the Roosevelt Room. It would have been the seats around the Roosevelt Room table, which I think are 12, and then about another half-dozen back benchers. As Chief of Staff I spent a lot of time—I devoted a lot of calories to deciding who would be there and where they would sit and so on. I helped Andy also with the original configuration, which I think turns out to be very important.

Just to take a quick detour. For example, we placed—Andy was in the center of the table so he could see the most and be heard by the most. We put at the head and foot of the table the two people whom the Chief of Staff is likely to call on first every day and who will have something to say almost every day. That's the press secretary and the legislative affairs director. That morning meeting is intended for what's happening today. Usually what people need to know about what's happening today or need an update on is likely to come either from the press or from the Hill. So let me just cite that by way of example of the importance of the configuration of the table.

Anyway, I led that meeting, and went back to my office. I saw the news report—what was supposed to have been a small plane hit the Trade Towers. I guess there was some footage of smoldering. I didn't think much of it, but didn't have—I wasn't particularly pressed on the schedule or anything, so at some point I wandered down to the Situation Room, where they served as a kind of command center or nerve center for information. They had a lot of screens up

simultaneously and they were also in communication with all the departments, the relevant departments and agencies. Information was kind of changing, it wasn't so clear.

I remember feeling a bit uneasy, and while I was there the second plane hit. I thought *OK, this is not an accident*. So I went into the large conference room in the Situation Room where Condi was having her staff meeting with all her senior directors. That's a lot of people, it's like 20 people or something like that in the room. I'd never walked in on one of her meetings before, so she immediately said, "Oh, and here's the Deputy Chief of Staff, Josh Bolten." She started to introduce me. I said—

Riley: Made the "time out" sign.

Bolten: I made the time out sign. I motioned her to step out of the room and I told her that there was a second plane hitting the other Trade Tower so this was clearly an attack of some kind. We stayed down in the Situation Room I think for a couple of minutes but then we went up to the Vice President's office, which is right next to the Chief of Staff's office, to talk with Cheney about what was going on.

While we were standing there talking, a large Secret Service guy came in and said to the Vice President, "We have to go *now*." He got around behind the Vice President, put his arms around him, all the way around him, picked him up, and started running with him with Cheney's feet barely touching the ground.

Nelson: Did Cheney just not respond immediately? Is that why the Secret Service agent grabbed him?

Bolten: No, I think that was part of the training, which is—

Perry: Grab him and go.

Riley: Move him.

Bolten: When it's time, you actually physically grab him and you go. Fortunately both Condi and I were aware of the bunker that is now no longer classified space—well, its existence is not classified, its location I think remains classified. We sort of knew how to get there. I didn't have Secret Service as Deputy Chief of Staff. Condi did, but they weren't in the building with her, unlike with the Vice President they're always proximate to the body. With the National Security Advisor, they're out on West Executive Drive in the car.

We found our way to the bunker and spent most of the rest of the day in the bunker with the Vice President, ultimately with Mrs. [Lynne] Cheney joining and other people coming in, filtering in as we were able to get hold of them and bring them into the building. Meanwhile the White House was being evacuated. Except for a few brave souls who stuck it out in the Situation Room, which is unprotected—for clarity on the geography, the Situation Room is on the west side of the West Wing at ground level, so that if you could see out of the windows—and some of the windows you can see out of—you would just be looking straight out onto West Executive Avenue. So it's not a particularly protected location. But some brave souls stayed there and kept the communications and everything going for the White House.

Perry: Had you had any drills, Josh, in those first nine months?

Bolten: We had one. Joe Hagin, a fantastic Deputy Chief of Staff—we divided it for operations and for policy. Joe was for operations; I was for policy. Joe knew a lot about the operations and how the White House runs and all. Going back to early in his career he was the body guy for 41. He knew his stuff. So Joe had arranged for a group of us to get a briefing and to actually physically go into the bunker to receive our briefing about emergency procedures.

It's interesting you raise that, because at some point—and I can't really pinpoint exactly where it was in the timeline—the inside line on my desk in the Deputy Chief of Staff's office rang, which was quite unusual. I'm not even sure I knew what the number was for the inside line; I certainly hadn't given it to anybody. I figured under the circumstances I'd better pick it up. It was one of my predecessors as Deputy Chief of Staff, Steve Ricchetti, who had been Deputy Chief to Clinton. He is now Chief of Staff to the VP [Vice President]?

Riley: I think that's right.

Bolten: Anyway it was Ricchetti on the phone saying, "Are you watching TV, do you know what's happening?" I said yes. He said, "Do you know about the bunker?" I said, "Yes, thank you" and hung up. I had a conversation with him later in which he revealed that he had been at the White House for almost a year before anyone even told him that the bunker existed. He was worried, quite reasonably, that nobody had mentioned it to anybody. It clearly was not on anybody's mind that you need to go to the bunker. It was built there during the Cold War as where the survivor staff would go to survive the nuclear holocaust.

Perry: By having had that drill, that's how you knew, vaguely at least—could piece together how to get there?

Bolten: Yes.

Riley: You knew that the protocols would allow you to go there?

Bolten: Yes. I knew that I—and certainly Condi—we knew that we were both people who would be expected to be in the bunker at this time.

Riley: You knew that from the one training session that Joe Hagin gave you?

Bolten: Yes.

Riley: Was there anybody else who showed up and you had to say, "Sorry, you're not on the list"?

Bolten: You know, some people did show up who weren't entirely on the list. We bounced—I think I vaguely recall bouncing a couple of people. I was the acting Chief of Staff at that time, so it was my job to bounce people. That was not trivial. The place was really so antiquated and basic that they were worried about lack of oxygen down there if we had too many people. So we sent a few people away who weren't critical to the operation.

Riley: Tell us about it, what does it look like? What does the bunker look like?

Bolten: You know, I don't recall what's classified and what's not. It was a very simple room with a long table. Actually, this is the 9/11 bunker. One of the steps we took shortly after 9/11 is we upgraded the bunker. It took a couple of years to really upgrade the Situation Room. It just needed to become a more modern facility. But the bunker had the appearance of not having been upgraded maybe ever.

Riley: Since you were in elementary school.

Bolten: Certainly since well before the end of the Cold War. They weren't rotary phones, but it was pretty close. You had this big thing you had to pull up and put on the table. It had some TV screens. There was a control room around behind there. There were a couple of other small rooms with some beds, military-style, very simple beds. Literally there was some food stocked down there and all. It was also intended as a place to take the first family in the event of a threat on the White House, which did happen in the aftermath of 9/11 when some threat arose and the Secret Service took the first family down to the bunker.

Anyway, we found our way there, assembled. The Vice President took the center seat, took charge, got on the phone with the President several times. It was very frustrating because the communications were bad. I think at least once, and probably more, the Vice President got cut off while he was talking to the President. I remember him getting mad about that. It was pretty darn primitive. Cell phones were not working. D.C. was shut down.

I recall that I thought we needed to get Karen Hughes into that room because a lot of the challenge we were facing was not really the response or the recovery—all of that is happening in New York—but the communication to the American people of what's going on. We got Mary Matalin into the room. She came in. She was the Vice President's communications director, but I thought we needed Karen. Karen was off campus somewhere and was picking up her son from school. I remember trying to send one of the Army drivers out to get her and get her back to the White House, which was not an easy thing to do in D.C. at that time. Anyway, she eventually showed up and joined the group.

There was a huge challenge under the primitive circumstances of both communicating with the rest of the government but probably more importantly, communicating with the American public. We realized that we had no way to communicate with the American public. The press had been evacuated.

Riley: Right.

Bolten: There were no communications. There's no camera or anything like that down in the bunker. I think the first official person from the government to comment on the 9/11 attacks wasn't the President, it wasn't the Vice President or anybody else in the White House, it was John McCain, who happened to be at a CNN [Cable News Network] studio to talk about something else.

Perry: And Mrs. Bush and Senator Kennedy and Senator Gregg up on Capitol Hill.

Bolten: Yes, up on Capitol Hill, exactly.

Perry: Came before the cameras.

Bolten: Exactly, they came before the cameras before anybody in the White House or the President came before the cameras. The President had been whisked away and taken up into the air, which I was a little surprised to learn the security people think is the safest thing to do, get the President on Air Force One and into the air with some kind of escort. That had happened, so he's out of communication at least with the public. Presumably he should be able to talk on the telephone with the Vice President, but not easily.

Perry: Was there conversation going on in the bunker about whether the President should come back?

Bolten: Yes, oh, yes.

Perry: What was the Vice President saying, what were others saying?

Bolten: The Secret Service was saying, "No, you can't go back." Most of us in the room (and the President) were saying, "Wait a minute, the President needs to get back. Maybe he doesn't have to come at this minute, maybe we need to make sure that the situation is secure." The preoccupation in the early hours was, is this it?

Riley: Right.

Bolten: There were three plane attacks in the immediate moment that happened in pretty close proximity to each other. The reason the Secret Service guy ran in and picked up Cheney was because of the report of the plane at National Airport that turned around and they thought it might be headed for the White House; it was the one that crashed into the Pentagon. So we got Norm Mineta, who was the Secretary of Transportation, into the bunker, and he was in the process of shutting down the skies. He was getting direction from the Vice President on that, the authority. The FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] was closing everything down. We were trying to track down where some key officials were. Paul O'Neill I think was somewhere in Europe, Colin Powell was in South America somewhere.

Perry: Did Andy attempt to be in touch with you, or vice versa?

Bolten: No, and there probably would have been no way to do that. If the President and Vice President were having trouble talking to each other—I'm sure I talked to Andy at some point on that day, but in the early hours he's on the airplane taking off from Florida, we're in the bunker trying to direct the securing of the rest of the stuff. There were lots of reports of unidentified planes, planes that were not on the course they were supposed to be on, and so on.

The FAA was frantically trying to get everybody out of the air as quickly as possible so that anybody left in the air could be identified as a danger. There was a report of a United flight—I don't remember the number—that had been going west, I think from New York, and had turned and was headed toward D.C. and was over Pennsylvania. The military aide was shuttling into the room with updates on all of the planes—there's this one, that one.

Eventually as time went on each of them got resolved except for this one that was headed toward D.C. from the northwest.

Perry: Was there a screen physically in the bunker that you could see that on?

Riley: You're shaking your head no.

Bolten: No, there wasn't.

Perry: You're just getting—

Bolten: And there weren't smartphones. There were Blackberries, but they were telephones, basically. No, this was just information that a military aide was getting probably from the Situation Room and the Situation Room at the Transportation Department and the FAA. So it was pretty chaotic. It became clearer that this one plane actually might be another one the terrorists had taken over. So the military aide was shuttling in saying how far out, what its trajectory was. It was headed straight for D.C. It was 500 miles out, estimate this much time until arrival.

The military aide asked the Vice President for authority to shoot it down, to issue the order to shoot it down, which I had presumed that the President and the Vice President had talked about because that was the clear issue. If there are more planes in the air, do we take them out of the air to prevent them from doing any damage?

The Vice President very calmly gave the order to shoot down, to scramble fighter craft that were available and intercept, United Flight 93, is it?

Perry: I think it was 93.

Bolten: To intercept it, attempt to make contact, but if you can't contact—I think the protocol was that they're supposed to fly up next to it and look in the cockpit.

Perry: Make visual contact.

Bolten: Make visual contact. If you can't get them diverted, take them down. So he very calmly issued the order. I remember the military aide asking twice for confirmation of the order. That might have been in the protocol as well, but I think it was also because the Vice President was so calmly issuing the order that I think the military aide thought he didn't understand what he had been asked.

Perry: Josh, just as a human—did you feel like you were in some kind of *Fail-Safe* Cold War-era movie?

Bolten: It did feel unreal. It didn't feel Cold War, but it did feel unreal that all of a sudden—we watched on TV, on CNN, on the screens in this fairly antiquated conference room, watched the towers come down.

Nelson: You hadn't overheard the conversations between the Vice President and the President before he issued the order?

Bolten: I knew they had talked and I knew that that was a subject of discussion. I had assumed but do not know—did not know and do not know—whether the President gave the Vice President the authority to issue a shoot-down order. That was a subject on which the 9/11 Commission was very interested because Scooter Libby took extensive notes. He was the Vice President's Chief of Staff, and was present in the bunker. I noticed that he was probably more savvy than I or the rest of us. He was aware of the historic nature of the moment and the importance of everything that happened and was taking very careful notes about what people said. Scooter Libby's notes reported me, after the Vice President issued the shoot-down order, saying to the Vice President, "You need to notify the President." There was a long silence after he issued the order as people were sort of absorbing what he had just directed to be done, and I said—in some respectful way—I don't remember the exact words, I said, "You need to notify the President. You need to notify the President of the order that you've just given."

The 9/11 Commission thought that that reflected in my mind doubt that the Vice President had the authority to do that. I actually wasn't doubting that, I was just saying that even assuming he had the authority—which I thought he did—the President needed to know that he had executed that authority. Otherwise he wasn't going to know.

Riley: Right.

Bolten: The Vice President said, "Oh, of course, of course" and tried to get him on the line, which I'm not sure he was able to do very quickly. He told him. At some point the military aide came back in. He was periodically reporting on the progress of Flight 93 and then came in and said, "Flight 93 is down." At that time we had assumed that our fighters had brought it down. As it turns out, given the trajectory and how far away the fighters were and everything, the 9/11 Commission concluded that we could not have shot it down, could not have intercepted it in time. As people know now, particularly through the movie, it was brought down by passengers, but we didn't know that inside the bunker. We had just assumed that it had been brought down by fighters.

It was a truly surreal and horrifying situation in which I've got to say for people in that room, people behaved very calmly and professionally. It was a credit to the character of those who were in service at the time.

Nelson: You said earlier, with reference to the fighter pilots making visual contact with the cockpit, at this time were you assuming these were terrorists?

Bolten: Yes.

Nelson: What was the basis for that assumption, rather than it being a foreign state?

Bolten: That's a good question; I don't know. But I don't remember—I mean, there's a lot of uncertainty about exactly where this was coming from, but I don't recall there being much doubt that it was terrorists of some kind. Terrorists were doing this. I mean, if you think of it, even pre-

9/11, that's the only plausible explanation. The country had been through a number of terrorist traumas already. There had been the failed attack on the towers—

Perry: The [USS] *Cole*.

Bolten: The *Cole*.

Perry: There had been the Khobar [Towers].

Bolten: The Khobar, Lebanon, Beirut.

Perry: Had you been aware—there wouldn't have been any reason necessarily that you would have been, given your domestic policy portfolio, but had you been aware of the famous warning in August of that year about bin Laden being determined to strike?

Bolten: No, I wasn't, but even if I had been getting the President's daily brief, there was no way you could draw from that brief anything other than that there are a lot of bad guys out there. The President's daily brief is full of reports about bad guys that we're concerned about watching and so on. I've always thought that that was a ridiculous assertion, that somehow there was intelligence clearly indicating what was going to happen and people hadn't responded. The President's daily brief is filled with that stuff and very little of it is actionable. If stuff is actionable, the intelligence committee doesn't like to sit around; they like to go help take out the bad guys. So I've always thought that was one of the more ridiculous side stories of the 9/11 story.

Riley: Was your general sense that the 9/11 Commission got the narrative pretty well right?

Bolten: I think so. They did a serious and professional job. I think most people involved would say the same. There's no way to conclude the U.S. was in any respect, in almost any respect, well prepared to deal with an attack on the homeland of this kind and magnitude. For the most part what followed were sometimes messy but mostly rational responses to a change in threat circumstances.

Nelson: It sounds like one of your concerns going down to that room was the President communicating with the nation, with the world, with the American people. What he eventually did that day, over the course of that day, how did that take shape?

Bolten: The President—first of all, I recall the President insisting on coming back to D.C. He was at the Army base in—Air Force base, rather.

Perry: Barksdale in Louisiana.

Bolten: Then there was the other one.

Nelson: Nebraska, Offutt.

Bolten: In Nebraska, yes. So he ended up at the one in Nebraska, which is the one from which he was communicating back. At that point we were able to get on the secure video screen. I think I

and many others were in more of a stunned state than anything else, managing our different roles but not really fully comprehending what had happened and what it meant for the country.

The President seemed to get that right away. The very first thing he said when he got on both that conference call and later a conference call with the relevant members of the Cabinet and the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] director and stuff like that was that he had a pretty clear sense that everything had changed, that the United States was now entering a war that was likely to be a protracted struggle against a grave threat to the homeland.

My mind, and I'm sure the minds of many others, didn't really—I mean, I understood that, but it didn't really extend that far. He seemed to have absorbed that immediately and knew that his Presidency had changed dramatically and knew that the jobs of all kinds of people had changed dramatically, including on 9/11 he addressed Bob Mueller [III] directly and said, “Your job has now changed. You're not trying to catch people after they do bad things; your job is now to catch them before.”

Perry: Where does that come from, from the President? Does that go back to what you've told us today about the leadership component, the leadership quality? How does he make that turn on a dime—I see everything changing?

Bolten: I think it comes from exactly the kinds of qualities I was talking about before and the understanding of the need for his persona to expand to the position that was required. You almost saw him physically get bigger and more serious and more determined, because I think he knew—he knew instinctively and very quickly that he was going to be a different kind of President.

Riley: When did you first see him after he comes back?

Bolten: He landed on the south lawn in the early evening. We'd already brought in—Karen was there. We'd brought in Mike Gerson, a speechwriter, a brilliant speechwriter and a great partner with Bush because he was able to express Bush's sentiments in his Presidential voice. So Mike was there and was already working on a statement along with Karen. The President came in off the lawn. I think there was supposed to have been some sort of Congressional party on the south lawn because there were a lot of tables, big round ones, out there. But he came directly into the Oval Office and talked to some of us in the Oval for a bit and I think went directly back to the private dining room with Mike and Karen to work on his remarks.

I think it was then, after he made the remarks, that he convened a conference call. We went back down to the bunker and he convened a conference call with various international security players. He was in full war President—he didn't seem panicked. He didn't seem exhausted. He just seemed like, “OK, I've got this. That's why they put me here.”

Perry: Do you think that came through on television that night when he gave the address?

Bolten: You know, I don't remember. I'm not even sure I watched the address. I was there, I was probably there while he was giving the address. I don't remember—I might not have even known how he looked on television. Do you remember?

Perry: I always thought that there was a big difference between that night and Friday at the National Cathedral. That's where I saw the growth from a television perspective. Obviously seeing him in person—

Bolten: Obviously much more controlled. He and Mike worked really hard on that speech at the Cathedral, which I think is one of the great Presidential addresses of modern times, as was the address to Congress about a week later. I think both of those—

Perry: Then of course the Ground Zero moment itself. It seemed again—as a political scientist, but also as an American, I saw an upward trajectory.

Bolten: Yes. He definitely to me felt like a different person when he got back to the Oval Office that night. He seemed like a more serious and determined person than the one I had known before.

Nelson: Is there anything in the—The narrative sort of stopped where Cheney gives the order and then resumes now with Bush back at the White House. In those intervening hours—it must have been about six or eight hours.

Bolten: Yes, a lot of hours.

Nelson: What was going on?

Bolten: There wasn't that much to do. We tracked different planes that might be a threat. We worked on getting people back. We talked with folks in New York, made sure that they were getting whatever support they needed.

Perry: Did you stay in the bunker that whole time, or did you ever go up to your office?

Bolten: We stayed in the bunker until pretty late in the afternoon; I don't remember exactly how late. The Secret Service was nervous.

Perry: There was no one there, right? Everybody had evacuated?

Bolten: Everybody was gone. So by midafternoon—I think we probably stayed longer than we needed to, but that was on the advice of the Secret Service. There was no reason to go somewhere else because at least in the bunker we were all together. If we scattered to our offices, nobody would have had assistants or anything like that. I think what a lot of folks were doing was spending time trying to track down their key people, get the ones they needed back into the White House, that kind of thing. But no, there were not—as you say, after the narrative of the shoot-down order, there wasn't that much of consequence that could be done from the bunker.

One thing that could not be done from the bunker is have a statement from the White House. We ended up sending Karen Hughes out to the—I think we sent her to the press room at the FBI. It was either the FBI or the Justice Department.

Perry: I think it was DOJ [Department of Justice].

Bolten: DOJ. We sent her there to make a statement. Everybody was sort of kibitzing on the statement that she was going to make on behalf of the White House. That was a trivial thing. I thought it was very awkward that the White House was not heard from.

Nelson: Was there a moment where you thought, *OK, it seems like the first wave of attacks—at a minimum the first wave of attacks—is over?*

Bolten: Yes.

Nelson: At what time do you think it felt that was probably the case?

Bolten: By early afternoon.

Nelson: Then at what point—if at all—are you thinking about the financial markets and economic consequences, immediate economic consequences, trickling down?

Bolten: In my head I'm starting to think about those things by the afternoon. We don't really get organized to start dealing with them until the next day.

Riley: Is there a staff meeting the next day with the President? I'm trying to remember.

Bolten: It makes sense. There probably was, but I'm not remembering.

Perry: At some point the Vice President and Mrs. Cheney are removed, correct? Removed from the White House grounds to—

Bolten: To an undisclosed location.

Perry: Once the President comes back, they don't want him and the Vice President together, right?

Bolten: I thought that was kind of silly, but OK.

Perry: Did the Vice President put up any kind of fuss?

Bolten: No, he was an adherent of security protocols and somebody who had a pretty strong sense of the responsibility that was at the top levels of government. He was not one to take a chance.

Nelson: He had done a lot of work on continuity of government, so I assume this was—

Perry: He did.

Bolten: Had he?

Perry: Yes.

Nelson: He had, yes.

Bolten: I didn't know that.

Nelson: I assume this is part of continuity of government.

Bolten: This is continuity of government.

Perry: You mentioned that the bunker had been in place in part too for bringing the first family down. I think, is it not that very night that they do—?

Bolten: Was it the same night?

Perry: I think it's the early hours of 9/12 that they are rousted out of—

Bolten: It turned out to be one of our own planes.

Perry: They took them in their bathrobes down to the bunker.

Bolten: I could just see Bush being annoyed about that. [*laughter*]

Perry: I think I read that might have been the case.

Bolten: Because he's like—his sleep is important to him; he does it on a very strict schedule.

Perry: I think they had to sweep up Barney and get him going as well in the right direction. Anyway I wondered if the next day there was any talk about it.

Bolten: Maybe, but we operated in a very entertaining, funny White House. There was humor even at the grave moments and maybe especially at the grave moments to try and break the tension and so on. If you go back and look at the White House photographers' photos, of which they sent me a whole bunch that I haven't even been through—but if you just flip through the photos it's astonishing in how many photos we're laughing. It's not that we didn't take the job seriously, it's not that people weren't working hard, but it was just a culture where good humor was well appreciated and healthy. But I don't remember any of that in the aftermath of 9/11 except as a pretty big exception.

Riley: Are you OK to continue or do you need a break?

Bolten: Can we finish on 9/11 and then take a quick break?

Perry: Sure.

Riley: I was just going to ask, when did you—I can't remember when the first meeting was; I had assumed it was the following day, 9/12. What I'm interested in hearing from you is your reorientation; you're going to have a new portfolio put on top of your old portfolio. I'm wondering how that transformation happens, what the components of the transformation are, what gets left behind, what is it that you're now concerned about? You used the term the “domestic consequences of the Principals Committee”—

Bolten: I was just trying to remember the name of that, thank you. I got as far as domestic consequences.

Riley: Page 148 of your first interview.

Bolten: DCPC [Domestic Consequences Principals Committee].

Perry: It's in the timeline too.

Riley: I'm not sure I had heard that term before, maybe I had just forgotten it. I'm sort of curious and I'm guessing you're like everybody else, a lot of this gets jumbled together because you're working 27 hours a day on something that's literally inconceivable two days before. But if you have recollections about how you're orienting yourself to this portfolio, how is it being presented to you and how are you bearing up with it?

Bolten: First of all, everything else just fell away. It's actually one of the luxuries of working in the White House, that very often you have important stuff that is sufficiently important that it can just blot out everything else completely. You actually don't have to feel that you're derelict in your responsibilities if you're not dealing with all of the things that you were dealing with the day before. All of a sudden I was dealing with none of the things I was dealing with the day before.

I don't remember exactly when the Domestic Consequences Principals Committee was set up—the DCPC. I do remember a conversation in which—with the President, with Condi, Steve Hadley was probably there, and Andy, of course, in which—that the whole response to this—there was no place to put it except the National Security Council [NSC]. In other words, the homeland security aspects of this didn't have a home in the White House because it didn't exist as a subject.

Riley: Right.

Bolten: It became pretty clear that the NSC was going to have trouble dealing with the domestic side of the response, the hardening necessity in particular. But it didn't fit in the NEC, it didn't fit in the DPC. So we had agreed that Condi would take—that the NSC would take—the external get-the-bad-guys part and that we would temporarily form this Domestic Consequences Committee—temporarily form a structure that I would lead that would be responsible for our domestic response. That got named rather blandly the Domestic Consequences Principals Committee, which we had never intended to be an ongoing operation.

We knew that we would need some kind of structure to manage that, but we didn't have one, so I was the default. So I convened the DCPC. I don't know if it was the 12th but probably by the 13th it would have been up and running. I may have notes to get precision on that. I enlisted Gary Edson—in addition to my immediate assistants Joel [Kaplan] and Kristen [Silverberg], whom you all met the last time. I enlisted Gary Edson, who was the Deputy National Security Advisor for international economic stuff. So it was not really his portfolio, but he was somebody that I worked with many times over the years. He is great to bring in in a crisis to knock heads and get stuff organized.

I enlisted him to help in the management of the DCPC. We convened this big group in the Roosevelt Room with a whole lot of Cabinet officers and just started going through a menu of problems. You had the Treasury with the stock markets, the Transportation Department with when and how to reopen airports and resume travel. We had FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] and all the other support organizations and what do we need to do for New York, et cetera. It was a really long agenda of stuff.

Riley: Law enforcement as well? Criminal justice?

Bolten: The Justice Department was to bring there any additional authorities that they thought they might need. They overrequested. I remember kind of going—

Perry: What do you mean by that, Josh?

Bellinger: They sought too much authority, I thought substantially more than they needed to respond. This was just the immediate reaction—we need to be able to declare martial law. I don't remember what they were asking for, but the DCPC created the venue where all of these different departments could come and try to get some discussion of and blessing for the steps that they thought they needed to take.

Then it was my responsibility to do a sort and just on my own authority authorize some things to go forward, take other things to the President and/or send them off to some other policy process, which is what we eventually did with the authorities that the Justice Department was seeking for their response. It all mostly worked surprisingly well.

Perry: Did you see at this time—You mentioned the President saying to Bob Mueller, head of the FBI, now instead of rounding people up after the fact, prevention is going to be key. You were mentioning DOJ perhaps overstating or overstepping what they should be asking for in terms of authority, but do you see the switch that gets made from law enforcement and how to deal with terrorism to the war footing?

Bolten: I'm sure that was happening. It was hard for me to see because I didn't actually have much visibility in how it operated before. I saw the activity, the domestic activity gearing up, but I didn't have a frame of reference to compare it to, maybe because a lot of it just didn't exist.

There was a fair amount of concern domestically about vulnerabilities that needed to be hardened rapidly. The Vice President in particular was concerned about the biological and chemical element, weapons that could have been used. There was a lot of scrambling and thinking going on about what do we do to respond to that. It wasn't that long later that we had the anthrax attacks. I don't remember the exact dates of the D.C. sniper, but all of those were happening at about the same time.

Nelson: That was the following spring.

Riley: The anthrax?

Nelson: The D.C. sniper.

Bolten: The anthrax was closer, it was closer in. So there was a lot of that kind of stuff to deal with. I remember people—I remember very few if any panicked people. I remember a few young staffers who clearly felt nervous and uncomfortable working in the jobs they were in, but they were the exceptions.

Nelson: Worried about their own safety?

Bolten: Yes, or whose parents—I'm talking about the 23-year-old personal assistant to somebody. But by and large people just dove in and went about their jobs.

Nelson: These DCPC meetings or in other settings, in kind of the swing toward concern for safety, who were the voices for civil liberties, for not going too far in the direction of safety, that you're sacrificing more than a necessary amount of personal liberty?

Bolten: I've already said that I thought the Justice Department overreached in some requests.

Nelson: Who?

Bolten: I don't remember the details of that.

Nelson: Who would have pointed that out or who would have said something to the contrary?

Bolten: Probably the White House Counsel's office would have said something. I always found Steve Hadley to be a wise head on such things. I don't remember specifically whether he was in the room for all or most of those discussions, but again I'm guessing and not recalling. I'm guessing that he would have been a voice for saying that might be unnecessary and overstepping.

Nelson: Was your voice part of this discussion?

Bolten: Yes, but I was candidly more traffic cop than anything else at that point. I wasn't spending a lot of my very limited time at that point trying to sort out is this program overstepping, or even digging into the details of what eventually became the PATRIOT Act [Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001].

Riley: Is there any source of historical knowledge that is consulted in these times? It wasn't the first time the U.S. had gone to war, but it had been a very long time, not in anybody's memory. Are you so pressed at that point that that is not a fruitful use of time?

Bolten: Yes, probably not fruitful, but even if fruitful, probably hard to access at that moment.

Riley: Are you a participant in any of the discussions about the foreign policy dimensions of this, or are you so swamped with—?

Bolten: You know, I was included in the invites to the Deputies Committee meetings that were about that, and I found that I didn't have time to attend most of them. So I am not a good source of what was going on in those conversations.

Nelson: How about the communications side that led to the Cathedral speech, the speech to Congress, the visit to New York?

Bolten: The visit to the mosque. That was very important.

Nelson: How much were you involved in—?

Bolten: I'm involved in all of those. For some reason I remember being very directly involved in the visit to the mosque, but I don't remember why.

Perry: Do you recall who recommended that?

Bolten: No, but I'm going to guess it was either Karen or Mike Gerson. I probably didn't think of it, but I would have been highly supportive of it. I was very concerned about the turn that the country might take, and the President was cognizant of his own important role and what kind of tone the immediate aftermath of 9/11 was going to have.

Riley: Do you want to take a break?

Bolten: I want to get something to drink.

[BREAK]

Riley: My next question is what are the two or three most vexing problems that you personally are having to deal with in the aftermath of 9/11? You have this new portfolio coming in.

Bolten: Wow.

Riley: We talked significantly about the homeland security issue last time, but it was more on the back end, after the decision was taken.

Bolten: What I remember spending a lot of time on was—Well, what was a big public issue was getting the airports open again. I remember being focused on that, but the really big thing was getting the markets back open in New York. I had a lot of interaction with a very talented guy named Peter Fisher, who was Under Secretary of the Treasury at the time, whom I don't think I had ever met before 9/11. I spent hours with him on the telephone—maybe not hours, but I spent a lot of time with him on the telephone in the aftermath of 9/11. But I don't think I met him for a year or two. Anyway, he did a fantastic job.

He had come from Wall Street and he did a fantastic job helping them organize themselves, pushing where we could, giving support where we could, making sure they had electricity and all that kind of thing. It was a priority for the President. We concluded it was an important emblem to get the markets back open again as fast as possible.

Nelson: I'm thinking about an administration that came into office expecting that domestic policy was going to be its major opportunity and challenge, and presumably people were appointed to White House staff positions and Cabinet positions with that understanding. I'm just wondering, did you find as the agenda shifts that there were some people who were great for the job they were appointed to do, but now a different skill set is needed in that job?

Bolten: All of those jobs still needed to be done. It was a question of shifting appropriate people to new roles and bringing in more people to do the others. We moved pretty quickly to set up the Homeland Security Council and to populate that, but the truth was we had to populate it with people who were not necessarily demonstrable experts in the field because there wasn't a field. [Michael] Chertoff now makes his living being a homeland security consultant. On 9/11 he was a judge or something, or a prosecutor. So there was a whole new field that was being built.

The reality of the initial homeland security efforts was a little bit ragged, to be honest. I say that without disparagement of the people involved. It was just such a new field it was hard to find actual experts in it.

There were people in the intelligence community who sort of spoke in dark and obtuse terms that were hard for people like me to understand what they were trying to say. I found them not particularly helpful in what practically needed to be done in the United States. What do we need to do to harden ourselves, to prepare ourselves? What are the steps that ought to be taken?

I'll tell you one episode that deserves some scrutiny—hopefully you will have some history on this and somebody will pursue it as a case study at some point if they haven't already—is smallpox vaccination. At some point—and this is well after 9/11, but it's part of the aftermath—the Vice President in particular seemed to feel very keenly that there was a significant risk that terrorists would come after us with smallpox. There had been reports, most smallpox had been eradicated. There were secured cultures of smallpox that the United States had in its control, that the Russians had in their control but apparently lost.

So there was some concern that this would be a pretty easy way to attack the United States and much more effective than anthrax, for example, where you actually have to put your stuff in physical contact with people, and anthrax is pretty hard to deal with. It's hard to have a mass anthrax event; smallpox becomes a mass event pretty quickly.

The President went through a couple of very interesting briefings that I think were prodded in substantial part by the Vice President about whether and how to proceed with the vaccination of the population. We have smallpox vaccine. We don't give it to people anymore because it has been eradicated, and the President then was in the position of having to balance the security risk against the actuarial risk that getting a smallpox vaccine kills every ten thousandth person or something like that—they actually get smallpox.

I don't remember what the calculation was, but the President had to multiply that by the population, add it up, and it turned out to be I think about as many people as were killed at the towers.

Perry: About 3,000.

Bolten: Yes, it doesn't have to be a high mortality ratio in a country of 300 million people to kill 3,000. The President ultimately said, "No; that's a victory for the terrorists."

Perry: Was there a conversation about the history of the swine flu?

Bolten: Yes, all the history came in and that kind of stuff. Probably Tony [Fauci] probably came into the Oval for those purposes. It's one of those interesting issues where you had the health people in, the security people in, the intelligence people in, the communicators were in going, "Oh, my God."

Perry: I think there was even—I don't know whether inside there was discussion, I can remember discussion in the media about whether those of us, of our generation, who have been vaccinated, but whether that would still hold.

Bolten: Yes, apparently not.

Perry: That's what I remember reading.

Riley: I still have my scar here; I can't remember which arm it's on.

Bolten: Apparently not. There was ongoing discussion about things like anthrax vaccination—There is an anthrax vaccine, but it's not widely available. Apparently it's hard to make and there is not a lot of it. So who was going to get it? We ended up vaccinating deploying troops against anthrax because we were worried that Saddam Hussein had some and would be using it—which he didn't.

Perry: Back to President Bush's way of making decisions. It sounds like he made a pretty quick decision on smallpox.

Bolten: It was an unusual thing where it took a couple of briefings. He wasn't satisfied after the first session that he knew what he wanted to do, and he sent people away with some questions and stuff and people came back for another briefing. I don't know if we talked about the President's decision-making style before, but this one was probably typical of the way he did stuff, which is he would have the meeting—He began many meetings with a statement of his own principles that he thought would apply to the issue at hand—if it was a big enough issue.

If it was just a should we cancel the Fourth of July party kind of thing, no. But if it was something like stem cell or using smallpox, he'd state some of the principles that he was bringing at the beginning of the meeting without indicating where those principles might lead him. Then he'd say, "Go ahead." Then he would quiz people. If he thought there was somebody who hadn't had a chance to talk who had something to contribute, he'd draw them out. He would talk a lot, but it was in exploratory mode. He would try stuff out. He would say "Well, but isn't it true that—?"

He would turn to somebody that he thought would disagree with what somebody just said and ask them a leading question to get them to disagree. He had a good method of bringing out the various disagreements.

Riley: He liked to have those litigated in front of him?

Bolten: He did. He liked to be the judge in the litigation. Especially when I was Deputy Chief of Staff, but also when I was Chief of Staff, I viewed it as my job to present the President with sharp as possible disagreements on issues that were Presidential. I probably said that in our last session, but I thought that was the most important thing I did as Deputy Chief of Staff, to help separate the Presidential from the non-Presidential issues and then to take the Presidential ones and make sure that the President had the full range of competent advice and was confronted with a real decision—which he liked.

I remember when Mitt Romney—did we talk about this three years ago?

Riley: I don't think so.

Bolten: Mitt Romney when I was Chief of Staff came to my office in—It must have been 2007, because he had not yet announced that he was going to seek the nomination. He called and asked to come in and see me, supposedly because I'd been the policy director of the 2000 campaign, which had I think a justifiably good reputation—not principally because of its leader. He just wanted to talk about how do you set up a policy operation in a campaign. I said sure, come on in. But he was probably coming in because he knew I would tell the President that Mitt Romney was coming to visit me and the President might wander down, which he did. We couldn't put Romney on the President's schedule because that would look like he was endorsing a nominee, but Romney was there to talk to a staffer. I told the President that Romney was coming in and he said, "I'll stop by."

The President wandered down about halfway through our meeting. He said, "So, are you running?" in typical Bush style, no pleasantries or anything, just, "So, you running?" Romney said something like, "Well, you know I'm really thinking seriously about it." Then Bush said, "There's no thinking about it; you either are or you aren't." So Romney was clearly being sort of coy and said, "I can't say." And he said something like, "I think I'd really enjoy it."

They talked about is it a good job to be the President and Bush said, "Do you like to make decisions? Because if you like to make decisions, this is the job for you. But that's what the job is about. You get the hardest decisions in America to make and you get to make them." To Bush that was a commendation to the job. That's great. What he was saying to Romney is, if you're not up for that, you're not up for being President.

I'd always understood that about Bush and I always felt that he didn't mind being confronted with a tough decision. He figured that's why he was there and he sort of relished that. He minded being confronted with something where he wasn't really being given a choice or he was kind of being managed or steered by the staff. He liked to hear the litigation and have it be a real litigation and be a real choice, make a choice, revert to his principles, be clear with everybody about why he was making the choice, and move forward from there.

Riley: Now paper comes into this in advance or during or after?

Bolten: He gets paper before the meeting, usually in his—he would get a book, a binder that was delivered up to the Residence around 6:30 or 7:00 in the evening. It would include all of his

briefing papers for the next day. He would actually read them. He had read pretty much every word that he was supposed to read.

Riley: At night, or does he get up early in the morning?

Bolten: He would do them that night; he would have an early dinner with his family, like at 6:30. Then he would go to his study and work for a couple of hours, smoke a cigar or something.

Riley: He was out early, right?

Bolten: He was asleep by 9:30.

Riley: I'm getting there. I'm about the age where I'm asleep at 9:30.

Bolten: But he'd get up every morning at 5:15.

Riley: I don't do that. So I couldn't be President, not because I don't like to decide, but I can't get up at 5:15.

Bolten: Clinton and [Barack] Obama are both night owls.

Riley: I didn't know that about Obama, I certainly did about Clinton.

Bolten: Apparently he's a real night owl. Folks were telling me they'll get an email at 2:00 A.M. Clinton would sleep late; Obama apparently just doesn't sleep that much. But the point I was getting to about the decision making is he would have read the stuff, he'd engage in the litigation in his presence, and he'd rarely say this one or that one. If it was an important or difficult decision, he would say, "OK, thank you, I'll let you know." So everybody would filter out. Then he would chew it over. You could tell it was on his mind. He would ask me, the Chief of Staff—or he'd ask a couple of questions of somebody, "What do you think of this, what do you think of that?" Then maybe the next day he would say to Andy or eventually me, "OK, I've decided. I want to do X."

Nelson: You said you wanted the President to have the best articulation of all the different points of view, so what was the process of putting together that binder that the President saw?

Bolten: Well, the individual papers were the responsibility—if it was a policy paper, it was the responsibility of the policy council that had aegis over that issue. So we had a standard format for a briefing memorandum. There would be an introduction, there would be issue, there would be discussion, which would include pro and con. Then there would be options. Usually the options—or often the options would say who was supporting which option.

Riley: These were two pages usually? Three pages?

Bolten: Could be more. It would depend. He was intolerant if it was a long memorandum that wasn't warranted. We always tried to keep them short, but if it was warranted he would read it and he wouldn't complain at all.

Riley: Lots of attachments?

Bolten: Sometimes. He was a good reader, contrary to popular mythology. We tried very hard to avoid that. There was a premium put on writing in a way that the key points were made as tightly and clearly as possible. But if you needed the room to present the argumentation to the President, you had it, you had his tolerance and attention. It wasn't like [Dwight] Eisenhower, where you had to get it on one piece of paper.

Riley: OK.

Perry: Did he engage in writing on the briefing book? When he would come in, would you see that he had notes?

Bolten: There was often a little bit of scribbling. He, maybe second only to Andy Card, has a superb memory. So he would remember what he read and he would remember the points he wanted to make, much better than I. Now he was getting a good night's sleep every night, [laughter] I was not. So there was a big difference there.

Nelson: Was that all he had to say about how the briefing book is put together? Was it ever sent back? Did you, or maybe when you had deputies, ever send it back and say, "Look, you've got to sharpen this up, tighten this up, say this more effectively"?

Bolten: Yes, sure. The paper, if it were a policy issue, probably wouldn't get to the President until I as Deputy Chief of Staff would have had to have seen it. Certainly the head of the policy council would have had to approve it. The memo was coming from the Cabinet officer or the head of the policy council—typically the head of a policy council. It would have gone through some serious quality control, but we tried not to have a system where it got so gummed up that it would take weeks or something to get through. It takes a day.

Nelson: So when he comes in and starts a meeting by stating his principles, relevant principles, would that then cause people to think, *Uh-oh, I'd better reformulate what I was planning to say?*

Bolten: Yes, they might recalibrate, but usually it was done in a way that he wouldn't tip his hand as to where he was likely to be coming out.

Riley: Then when the decision is taken, are we likely to find in the library a decision memo that has a box checked?

Bolten: That's the thing; I doubt it.

Nelson: Really?

Riley: So the paperwork was very tight.

Bolten: The paperwork was tight, but then his decision was often just communicated to the Chief of Staff, who would then send it out. Now there would probably be some kind of communication from the Chief of Staff saying the President has decided X.

Riley: Decided to do this.

Bolten: But we did not have a system where he had to check the box. I'm sure there are plenty of those memos—

Riley: But it wasn't standard style.

Bolten: A lot of the most important stuff probably never has a check mark.

Riley: One of the points of criticism that you obviously would be familiar with was that at least the lore is that there is no decision memo on Iraq, that there is not a formal memo that says yes, we will do that. You're smiling as though you—

Bolten: I'm smiling because I hadn't heard that and it hadn't occurred to me, but I'm not surprised.

Riley: Which is the reason why I raise the question, because it sounds as though this is sort of standard operating procedure in this particular White House, that you might not have a crisp decision memo in the Eisenhower fashion, where it's two pages with a box you check at the end of it.

Bolten: Yes.

Riley: I think that there are few like that in the Clinton administration because they didn't do paperwork.

Bolten: They must have done paperwork.

Riley: I think there was some, but I don't think it was—part of it was just an aversion to paperwork because of their general aversion to publicity and subpoenas, things getting subpoenaed, but I don't know how thoroughgoing that was within the policy process.

Bolten: By the way, I don't remember that being a factor in any—

Riley: No, I wouldn't have thought it was because you didn't have an independent counsel to deal with, for one thing.

Bolten: We did; we had a special prosecutor in the form of Patrick Fitzgerald, but I don't remember anybody trimming their behavior because they didn't want it being on paper. But it was a crisp and disciplined process that in many cases lacked the checked box. But I don't remember there being situations of ambiguity about what did the President decide.

Riley: One could easily interpolate, I would guess, between the presentation memos and the memoranda coming out of your office indicating that the President decided X; this is the follow-up. You'd have to put the two together.

Bolten: Yes.

Riley: Everything then would be buttoned down at that point. The President is a stickler for paperwork or is he looking to you guys to make sure that the paperwork is done?

Bolten: Yes, he had a pretty keen sense of what was his job and what was our job. Paperwork was not his job. He would read it and he was interested in it, but he didn't pay attention to it after he was done.

Riley: The question was more whether he would complain about indiscipline if things weren't getting reduced to paper for him to look at.

Bolten: No.

Nelson: I want to be sure that we get to the end of 2001 today, otherwise we'll forget what we did. There are two things that I thought to ask about. One is putting together the homeland security office. Last time we talked a lot about putting together the Homeland Security Department, but—

Bolten: And we had Joel with us who was in, what was it, the gang of five or something.

Nelson: The gang who developed that department.

Bolten: Yes.

Nelson: The other is the coming together of the PATRIOT Act. There may be other things.

Bolten: We can move pretty fast beyond those because they are dim in my memory and I think others can fill in the history much better. Especially on the PATRIOT Act, which I don't have much recollection of other than that sensation that the Justice Department had a request that was too forward-leaning. But that's basically all I remember about it. I'm sure others will have a much better memory.

On the creation of the Assistant Secretary—I mean, the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security—I do sort of remember the conversations that led to the selection of Tom Ridge to fill that role, which was kind of an interesting one. But we ended up having to staff the place with—you know, he brought with him his former gubernatorial chief of staff who was a good guy, knew nothing about homeland security. But we wanted somebody who had experience—who had both executive experience as a Governor and who would be an appropriate spokesman to the public because a lot of the homeland security activity required building both understanding and confidence with the public.

Perry: I'll get us to 2002.

Riley: I was just going to ask—Afghanistan—is there anything that you can tell us?

Bolten: That didn't seem like much of a struggle. I remember there being frustration inside the White House that the Army was not prepared to go in, would need a few months to gear up to go get these people. So the President sent in the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], who did a pretty good job. But I remember—and I was not at all intimately involved in those discussions and

certainly not the decision, but I do remember being surprised that the CIA does this, that's interesting, and the Army is not ready to do this?

Riley: You have your own personal CIA background.

Bolten: That's true.

Riley: You would have a greater sense about that than most people.

Bolten: I had a sense, a little bit of a sense of surprise, but sort of a little bit of familial pride that when you need somebody to go kick some ass really quickly, then you have to call in the CIA.

Nelson: Were you there at that Camp David gathering on September 14th and 15th where the decision was made?

Bolten: I was not.

Riley: For historical purposes, is the notion of Iraq bouncing around as early as the end of 2001?

Bolten: Probably. I mean, there's a lot in play at that point. We're looking in the whole region at where are they getting safe harbor, who has weapons of mass destruction—because remember, what we're most worried about at that point is terrorists coming back at us in the homeland with weapons of mass destruction. The planes were bad enough, but if you start contemplating nuclear or chemical or biological, then it was a real disaster. So I do have a recollection of the national security community basically running through the whole set of scenarios about where are the dangerous places. When we have rooted them out of Afghanistan, where will they show up next?

Riley: What about the President's own time, the last few months of 2001? Is he demonstrably spending most of his time on foreign policy?

Bolten: Yes, but he still has time to have a meeting about the No Child Left Behind Act and things like that. He certainly devoted the vast majority of his time to the national security issues, but he had time to do the other stuff. We thought it was important—he thought it was important to still do the other stuff because he was—His message to the country was “If we change the way we live, if we go into a crouch, then the terrorists win, so don't give them that victory.” He remains raw to this day about having been accused of telling people to go shopping. He thinks that's a really unfair criticism, that the message he was sending was “Don't let the terrorists win.”

Riley: But that sort of brings us back full circle.

Nelson: That's what I was just going to say. This is the time of year usually when a lot of activity is going on involving the preparation of the State of the Union and what is going to go in, recommendations coming in. Is that happening?

Bolten: Yes, still happening.

Nelson: Are you honchoing that process?

Bolten: Yes, I mean, I'm in charge of the policy side of that process. We are pulling in the different bits and pieces of the agenda. I'm working with Gerson, the chief speechwriter. It's interesting the extent to which the preparation of the speech leads policy in an administration—at least like the one I served in. It's not because the speech is more important than the policy, but it's because it provides the construct of the venue and the timeline and everything.

I would look at what was in the campaign agenda that was not yet addressed. I would have conversations with the policy leads about what was in their bag that ought to be pulled out at the State of the Union, and then sit down with Gerson. He'd say, "Well, we need something on the domestic side that shows he cares about X." We'd say, "We have this, we happen to have one of these." That's how the State of the Union gets put together. It sounds sort of messy and cheesy, but it's actually—in my experience it was a terrific process. From a policy standpoint it was quite positive.

Nelson: You didn't feel that it was getting truncated by the focus on the threats?

Bolten: Oh, it was. It was getting truncated by the national and homeland security priorities, but it was still important to show that we can chew gum and walk straight. I felt that the walking straight part was an important part of the agenda, just smaller than it otherwise would have been.

Nelson: Was the same thing going on with budget?

Bolten: Yes.

Nelson: That's a huge commitment of time that's just there on the calendar, that you just have to do it. You felt that you were adequately staffed to do it?

Bolten: Sure. This red building that you see right there— [laughter] The budget director has about 20 people working for him or her in the gray building, in the old EOB [Executive Office Building]. There are five *hundred* people in the red building—

Nelson: In the new EOB.

Bolten: The new EOB, who are outside the White House gates. The old EOB is inside the White House gates. That's quite significant. You asked me before if when I was at OMB I'd left the White House—no, you don't actually leave the White House. You're still inside the gates. The OMB Director sits at the senior staff meeting at the morning. It's as though OMB is its own policy council.

Riley: That just gives us more to talk about the next time. I was trying to find some shortcuts and you're not giving me any. But you suggested—in some respects we've come full circle. You indicated in response to the question after 9/11 that the old agenda got left behind and we're into a new agenda.

Bolten: The immediate aftermath.

Riley: The immediate aftermath, right. Then you say we get No Child Left Behind passed. So at some point—

Bolten: What month did it pass?

Perry: January. The President signs the bill January 8th of 2002.

Bolten: Great.

Riley: So it may have been December when it passed.

Perry: It is amazing.

Riley: My question is, do you have recollections of how we get from point A to point B? How in the aftermath of 9/11 is there the energy and enthusiasm to move on this when there are so many other things in play?

Bolten: I don't recall that as a problem. Margaret Spellings, in the aftermath of 9/11, didn't have a lot to do with homeland security. She had some stuff to do, but in the first few weeks after 9/11 we have the DCPC, we have this long menu of things we need to address, but then not too far out there is the creation of the Homeland Security Council. Do you know when that was created?

Riley: I'm not sure; it's on the timeline.

Bolten: It's only a few weeks later. Then we have a place to put those issues. The folks who are working on the education bill—It's pretty hard to repurpose an education person for anthrax. So the education people are still there to work on education. What's reduced is the bandwidth at the top to make something a priority. But what a great emblem for the country that the January after 9/11 we're doing major education reform and it's bipartisan.

Riley: The President is investing some of his time in this as well at critical moments?

Bolten: Sure, yes, he is.

Nelson: Did 9/11 contribute to the bipartisanship that helped pass No Child Left Behind?

Bolten: Possibly; I bet we would have been able to do it anyway. But it probably made things easier.

Riley: Can I ask a more generic question off that? What are you finding on Capitol Hill? Has partisanship been suspended after 9/11, and if so how long?

Bolten: Yes and no. Yes, the tone is improved. Yes, there is a general feeling of wanting to support the President on measures that have some relationship to 9/11, but the no in my answer is that fundamentally partisanship isn't eliminated, it's just sort of cushioned during that period, and the cushioning comes off.

Perry: But the good news for the country, it would seem, politics and policy aside, but the examples of the bipartisanship are No Child Left Behind and then I'm also looking to see that in March of 2002 the President signed the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002.

Bolten: Yes, that was—

Perry: Do you take that off the table and say not really?

Bolten: Yes, that was John McCain—

Perry: That's McCain-[Russell] Feingold.

Bolten: That's John McCain and the Democrats.

Perry: So it was claimed to be bipartisan, but not really?

Bolten: Not really, the President didn't like it; just basically felt he had to go along with it. Now that is an important aftermath of 9/11, which is that the President is less willing to pick fights that he doesn't have to because he needs the support of Democrats in prosecuting the War on Terror.

Perry: Is that why he doesn't take a stance or outright veto—

Bolten: The campaign finance?

Perry: Yes.

Bolten: I don't know. My guess is he probably would have had to swallow it regardless because it had a head of steam behind it. It would be pretty hard to explain to the public why—

Perry: The optics of it?

Bolten: Yes, the optics would have been terrible. It turns out that the opponents of McCain-Feingold were right, that it made things worse, but you couldn't persuade people of that at the time. So I can't say that 9/11 made it more incumbent on the President to go along with campaign finance reform. I can say as a general proposition that if occasions for confrontation with Democrats could be avoided, the President was more likely to be inclined to do that in the aftermath of 9/11 because he had this higher priority, which had to trump all other issues in getting support.

We're bleeding now into my experience as budget director. That applied particularly in the budget area, where the President was willing to make a lot of compromises on fiscal restraint to ensure that the troops and the national security community had the funding they needed to adequately prosecute the War on Terror.

Nelson: I know that by Election Day President Bush had raised more money for his party in a midterm than any President in the past. He campaigned a lot. He had been involved earlier in the year in recruiting strong candidates. Is there a point at which you realize this is an election year in which the President is taking a deep interest, more than his predecessors, to bring about a favorable output in the Congressional election?

Bolten: Is that a generally accepted assessment, that he took more interest in the midterms than previous—?

Nelson: Yes, well, he raised more money, spent more time campaigning, and was involved in recruiting candidates.

Bolten: Well, raised more money—I guess everybody raised more money than ever came before.

Nelson: No, but—

Bolten: He was a good fundraiser, spent time. Credit that to Karl Rove, and the President is onboard with that because he wants a Republican Congress. The most important thing is to support his efforts on the War on Terror. If he's going to do Social Security and prescription drugs, anything like that, he's not a partisan person but he's a very political animal and he wants to win. So he's going to work hard for his team. He never seemed at all reticent about that. He might be annoyed with the impositions on his time, but if he was bought in to the strategy he'd go out and do the three-tiered events. He'd complain if an event had too many tiers to it.

Perry: Three was his limit?

Bolten: He always considered that a dirty trick—they'd say we just have one event. And then Karl Rove's operation or Karl himself would say it's just one event, and it would end up having three tiers, which is the first tier is the small cocktail gathering with the 10 biggest donors that would take a half hour. Then there would be 45 minutes with a slightly larger group taking a photo with everyone, and then there would be an hour with the big group of people who only paid a thousand bucks each who would get to do Q and A and so on. He'd be pretty exhausted by the end of it. He would sort of comically complain about it. To the extent the complaint was real, he didn't object to the function, he was fully bought into that. That's our democracy; that's how the system works. But the underlying complaint would be that you're making me too tired to do my job well.

Riley: If politics—

Bolten: Have you talked to Rove?

Riley: Yes.

Bolten: Isn't he great? Just a fascinating guy.

Riley: Lot of fun—as is this one, by the way. If it's fair to say that politics as usual was suspended after 9/11, at what point in your mind has it returned—

Bolten: It wasn't totally suspended. I'm thinking of one—for example, there was legislation passed very rapidly in the aftermath of 9/11 and it included—Tom Daschle had insisted that there be pretty lavish funding for the families of the victims of 9/11, and we disagreed with that. I disagreed with it. Why does the federal government owe money to terrorists and the people who supported them owe money to the families of these people but—and certainly if there's somebody—there ought to be a mechanism to take care of the people whose families otherwise would suffer, but I forget how many billion we put in. But Tom Daschle just said no, this is what we're doing. That wasn't bipartisan, that was this is our price and there'd better be X-billion

dollars in there to pay off the families. We ended up getting Ken Feinberg to run a process where he valued the life of every person who died on 9/11. The people who had three million bucks worth of earning potential left in their careers, who were probably already extremely wealthy, their families got three million bucks of their dollars. That wasn't a kumbaya kind of thing, it was Daschle said you want my support, this is going in. The President said OK.

Nelson: You think his hope was that the President would say no?

Bolten: No, I think he knew the President couldn't say no.

Riley: We've done it; you have been terrific.

Bolten: Pleasure, I really enjoyed it.

Riley: We're looking forward to finishing.