EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH STEPHANIE CUTTER

November 10, 2009
Boston, Massachusetts

Participant

University of Virginia
Janet Heininger

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Janet Heininger: This is an interview with Stephanie Cutter on November 10, 2009, in Boston.

Stephanie Cutter: I'm from Massachusetts and had always been aware of Senator [Edward M.] Kennedy, and of the Kennedy family. My house was a very political household, and the Kennedys were always an iconic family to us. I got involved in politics in high school and college.

My first experience with Kennedy was in 1988, when he was up for reelection. I was working for the state party—That was also the year that [Michael] Dukakis was running for President—and the campaign was based here in Boston. I was interning for the state party and working at a law firm during my sophomore summer of college. I remember going to the convention—I think it was in Worcester—and seeing him give his speech, seeing the support in the crowd and all the "Kennedy" signs, and being wowed by it. Then I watched him at the national convention in Atlanta. That was my first *real* awareness of him.

Heininger: But you had grown up with him as a—

Cutter: I had grown up with him.

Heininger: Yours was a Kennedy family, in a Kennedy state.

Cutter: But to see him in person speaking and the passion and the—I'm going to say "fierceness," but I don't mean that as a pejorative—

Heininger: No, no.

Cutter: He had real passion, unlike many other people. I hadn't been around many politicians at that point, so he was one of my first experiences with a politician, and he certainly had more passion than anybody else.

Heininger: You still don't see that in many politicians.

Cutter: You don't.

I finished college and moved to Washington. I interviewed with his office, to be on his finance team, but I didn't get the job, so I ended up—

Heininger: With whom did you interview?

Cutter: I don't even remember her name.

Heininger: Not with Ranny [Cooper]?

Cutter: No, no. It was his finance director at the time, and I can't even remember her name. I was about 21 years old; I'm a lot older now. [*laughing*] I went to work for Mario Cuomo, who I really wanted to run for President in '92, and worked for him for about a year and a half. When he decided not to run for President, I went to work for Bill Clinton and started to go to law school at night. I ended up in the Clinton administration and the Clinton White House, at EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]. I didn't have much interaction with Kennedy.

Heininger: You were an intern on the health care task force [Task Force on National Health Care Reform], weren't you?

Cutter: Yes, but I was the low man.

Heininger: Okay. You weren't seeing any of the Kennedy staffers and the work that they were doing?

Cutter: No, and I wouldn't know them. I went to some of the hearings and watched *him*, but I didn't—I was pretty low on the totem pole. I was doing all of the legal research on issues like malpractice and antitrust, which were obviously not very contentious in *that* health care fight. But it was a great experience, a fabulous experience. It was my first experience with a war room—There was a health care war room—and watching the developments of politics and legislation and intergovernmental—all the different facets coming together.

Heininger: You clearly caught somebody's eye, though. You clearly made an impression, because your career really took off from there.

Cutter: After the health care task force ended, I went to EPA as a press secretary. It was my first experience doing press.

Heininger: Is that what you wanted to do?

Cutter: No. I had no idea what I wanted to do. This was around the time of the '94 election, when we lost the House and the Senate and so many state houses, and there weren't that many administration jobs. The health care task force ended in September or October. I got the job at EPA in October, and that's where I started with press and communications. I didn't have any interaction with Kennedy there.

Heininger: Did you with Carol Browner at that point?

Cutter: I worked for her. I was the deputy press secretary, then the press secretary, then her counsel, and then the associate administrator.

Heininger: You were very young for—This was a helicopter trajectory in Washington.

Cutter: Yes, but I'm trying to make it about Kennedy. [*laughing*]

Heininger: But we are also—We interview people for different reasons, and it is in interviewing many of his former staff that we are getting a picture of who it is that Kennedy hires, who he's attracted to. There's very often a pattern. He picks the best.

Cutter: There is a pattern, yes.

Heininger: Your career is fitting right in there with so many of the others. You were *very* young, doing law school at night, yet you went right up.

Cutter: I was fortunate to work for many good people.

Heininger: You worked for a good woman there, too.

Cutter: Carol Browner was terrific. We used to joke that we spent more time together traveling around the country than she did with her family or I did with my boyfriend.

Heininger: She and I had our children in Senate daycare together many, many years ago.

Cutter: Anyway, Loretta Ucelli became the White House communications director. I was elevated to be associate administrator at EPA, for communications, education, and public affairs, then Loretta hired me to be the deputy communications director at the White House, so I left to go back over to the White House. That's where I met Mary Beth Cahill, who was the head of public liaison.

We started around the same time at the White House. That couple of years was a great experience, and I became friendly with Mary Beth. After the White House, I went to work at AOL. Technically, it was at Robinson Lerer & Montgomery, but they ran communications at AOL. I was paid by Robinson Lerer, but I was basically with AOL. About four or five months into it, Mary Beth called and said, "I'm now Kennedy's chief of staff. I need to hire a communications director. Will you come talk to me?" I did and I met with him, in an interview I'll never forget. I got the job, took it immediately, and that's when, back in 2001, I became close with Senator Kennedy.

Heininger: This is an unusual career path, to put it mildly. You never had any real interest in press work, but as soon as you got a press job, you discovered you had a real flare for it. Why do you like it?

Cutter: I like communicating. I like helping *other* people to communicate. Communicating is really about solving problems, discrete problems. Give me a problem and I'll figure out a way to solve it. There are all kinds of bells and whistles you can put around it and you have to make sure you're talking at all different levels and communicating the right things to certain audiences. That's a problem-solving situation to me, so that's why I like it.

Heininger: So you went over to Kennedy's office. What was the interview with him like?

Cutter: It was great. It was in his hideaway. Mary Beth had clearly told him about me. I went to Smith College, but he kept bringing up Mount Holyoke. [*laughing*]

Heininger: That's the other one.

Cutter: I was just laughing. Every now and then I'd say, "No, no, it was *Smith* College." "Oh, well, you know, I used to go up there in college to have a good time. You know those Mount Holyoke—" I'd say, "I'm from *Smith*." It was a very funny interview. We laughed.

I told him where I was from and that my family grew up in Wareham. That's where the Cape Cod Railroad runs through. He talked about taking the Cape Cod Railroad in the summers, down from Boston to the Cape, and his mother would pick him up. He mimicked the conductor on the railroad. The Cape Cod Railroad, back when I was growing up, was a very old-fashioned railroad, with old cars and conductors and things like that. It's different now. Now it's like a Maglev [magnetic levitation] train. He was mimicking the conductor and I was mimicking the conductor and we were laughing about it. I don't think we really ever talked about the job or work or anything; we just laughed.

Heininger: That wasn't what was important to him. Obviously, you came vetted by Mary Beth and what he wanted to see was how well you fit with him.

Cutter: Yes, and I think he felt comfortable with me and I felt comfortable with him. I immediately felt comfortable with him. I think everybody always felt comfortable with him.

I took the job and started, and it was a very exciting year. It was the year No Child Left Behind passed; we were late into negotiations on the Patients' Bill of Rights; and his relationship with [George W.] Bush was developing at that point. I started in the summer of 2001, when all that was cresting. It was very exciting, and I loved the Senate.

Heininger: He had a talented press secretary at this point in Jim Manley. What did he need or want out of a communications director?

Cutter: Jim was considered the best press secretary on the Hill, and he probably still is, but Kennedy liked yin and yang on his team, and he had a lot of yins and yangs. This is not in a comparison situation, of Jim or me, but I was a planner; I was a thinker; I was a writer. I wasn't concerned about being quoted in the press. I was more concerned about figuring out how we were going to build around certain situations. At the White House I had become known for my very detailed communications plans, and for making sure that no stone was left unturned, or no idea left undeveloped, in figuring out how to communicate something. That's what I brought to him in terms of how we talked about No Child Left Behind and how we developed the rollout for the signing of that bill. Remember, the President did a tour? We generated that.

Heininger: You were the strategist?

Cutter: Yes.

Heininger: In the Ranny Cooper mold.

Cutter: Yes, although nobody can compete with Ranny.

Heininger: Yes, we know that.

Cutter: Make sure I'm quoted as saying that.

Heininger: "Okay Ranny, she gets it. She gets it."

Cutter: That winter, he had his 70th birthday, which was a big milestone for him; he loved his birthdays. We did lots of activities for his birthday. We organized people around the state to write op-eds on the contributions that Kennedy had made to the state. We organized big parties in Washington and in Boston. I had the *Today Show* get a bunch of B-roll of the party at the Kennedy Library, and did the same thing, but on a different network, in Washington, and many profile pieces were done and tributes made on the floor. Mary Beth and I put together this multitiered plan to recognize that this was a significant milestone for the country, for the state, and for the Senator. I think he liked all of that. I didn't have anything to compare it to, to what the staff was like before, but he was finally getting the due that he deserved for his contributions to the country. It was hard for somebody like him, in many ways, to have a Democratic White House, because he was no longer the loyal opposition.

Heininger: Yes.

Cutter: President Clinton had treated him very well, and the Senator had treated President Clinton very well, and they did a lot of good work together. But now he was working with a Republican President, and people really appreciated him for what he stood for. We did other things going into 2002. I'm just telling you what I remember.

Heininger: That's fine.

Cutter: In 2002 we passed No Child Left Behind, and we started working on the prescription drug bill [Prescription Drug and Medicare Improvement Act of 2003]. Oh, God, I've left out a big piece of it: 9/11!

Heininger: Yes, a big piece.

Cutter: 9/11. This will always be a remarkable point in my life, because it was the day Laura Bush was coming to testify in front of Senator Kennedy's committee, on early childhood education. No Child Left Behind was close to being done, and he was always looking to the next thing before the last thing was done, so he was already trying to figure out how he was going to move early childhood education in the wake of No Child Left Behind. He was beginning the drumbeat of that as No Child Left Behind was coming to a close.

It was her first time testifying in Congress and it was a big deal for a First Lady to testify. That morning we were all there at the crack of dawn; everything was ready; and word came that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. Vicki [Reggie Kennedy] called the Senator and told him about it, and just then Mrs. Bush was walking down the hall. He went to greet her in the hallway, because he was always the gentleman, and as they were walking, news came of the second attack. I was in the anteroom of the hearing room and saw the plane hit the World Trade Center, because I was watching TV. I walked out into the hallway as they walked up, and they said, "We're going to postpone the hearing." We went into the Senator's office and he suggested that she call the White House, and he suggested that she call her children.

Heininger: This was before there was the recognition that there was a plane coming at the Pentagon too?

Cutter: Right. We didn't know any of that.

Heininger: So there wasn't the security worry at that point.

Cutter: No.

Heininger: That came shortly thereafter.

Cutter: Yes, shortly thereafter. Then they decided, as we were all standing there, that they were going to go into the hearing room and make a statement, completely impromptu. Nobody had talking points. The Senator suggested to the First Lady that we should say something here, because the press was already in the hearing room, waiting for the hearing. We had just announced that we were postponing it, but they needed to hear something from the Senator and the First Lady. They made remarks.

We went back into the Senator's office and then the Secret Service SWAT [Special Weapons and Tactics] team arrived. They just descended out of nowhere, and started to walk her out. They got as far as—Whose office was it? I don't remember, but it was down the hall of Russell [Senate Office Building], to the left. There was a Republican's office. I want to say Senator [Judd] Gregg, maybe.

Heininger: [John] McCain's is—

Cutter: It wasn't McCain's; I would remember that. I think it was Gregg's.

Heininger: There's one before McCain's office, yes.

Cutter: They locked the First Lady down in that office, and then word came that another plane was approaching, and they didn't know what to do with her. The Senator was stuck in there with her.

Heininger: It was a vulnerable building.

Cutter: The Capitol was deserted. It was just the First Lady and her staff, the Senator, me, Mary Beth, and the driver—and the SWAT team—that was it.

Heininger: I'm surprised they didn't go downstairs and go into one of the hideaways; that would have been safer.

Cutter: We were stuck there for a long time.

Heininger: Wow. Upstairs? On that floor?

Cutter: Yes. Finally, they figured out what to do with her and they whisked her away, leaving us high and dry. [*laughing*] The Senator said, "Well, we know where we stand."

Heininger: Not as high.

Cutter: He kept his cool throughout. We left to go to his house and got stuck in traffic, because it was back-to-back traffic. You also couldn't use your cell phone; everything was jammed. We dropped him off at his house and went to Mary Beth's and set up a little operations center there, because there were so many people from Massachusetts who were affected. I don't remember day-by-day, but at some point soon after that was the anthrax scare, and it closed down Russell, and we got stuck—About a half dozen of us worked out of the hideaway with him for a couple of weeks, which was fun, but challenging.

Heininger: As I recall, you only had one computer in there?

Cutter: Yes. But we had BlackBerrys.

Heininger: That helps.

Cutter: It was the beginning of BlackBerrys. Jim, Mary Beth, Michael Myers, some of the other staff, and I were there. The rest of the staff had to work from home, because there was no place to work. He never stopped working. Steve Kerrigan was working with the staff at that point. Steve Kerrigan was in charge of the 9/11 families, and I remember him calling through those families, one by one.

In fact *I* suggested that he do an interview with New England Cable News about these conversations. He kind of blew up at me and said, "I'm not doing this for publicity. I'm doing this because these families have suffered a terrible loss." It was the first time we had any type of—I don't want to say it was a confrontation. He was just emotional about it and I misunderstood. I was still getting to know him, and misunderstood the importance of this.

We had a memorial service at Faneuil Hall and he spoke. It was more like a keynote, but the way it came out, it was like a eulogy—and his voice cracked. There was a reason why his staff was so loyal to him, because when you saw something like that, you just knew you were working for the real deal. That was in the fall of 2001. No Child Left Behind passed in December. In 2002, the Senator had his 70th birthday and the Patients' Bill of Rights talks fell down.

Another thing on the Patients' Bill of Rights that I remember: Senator [John] Edwards was in the Senate at that point, and Kennedy and Edwards were the key Democratic negotiators. McCain and Charles Norwood, in the House, were on the Republican side. I don't remember who else was on the House side; it must have been [George] Miller. I remember being on the House side in one of [Richard] Gephardt's conference rooms, when the bill was in conference. There was a key provision that was controversial and they couldn't get—The White House was pushing, but Kennedy wouldn't relent. It had to do with the size of rewards in tort cases.

The thing that made conferences work was the trust of those on the conference committee, in both the House and the Senate. You have a pact, that what's happening in conference stays in conference, and it was a closed conference. Norwood went up to the White House without telling anybody, and went to the press briefing room with the President, to say that he was signing on to the White House policy.

Kennedy was upset, no doubt, but what I remember about this is McCain. They had a conference committee meeting in Gephardt's conference room late that night. We were all in there. McCain was screaming at Norwood, calling him a scoundrel and a turncoat and all of that, and really getting in his face. Senator Kennedy stepped up and said, "Now, we are where we are. Let's figure out how we're going to move past this. Charles Norwood, either you want to be part of it or you don't, but we have to figure out how we pick up the pieces here and move forward." *He* was the person who helped pull everything back together. It eventually failed, just never went anywhere, but for someone who was new to the Senate, it was quite an education to see that.

Heininger: That *was* quite an education. To see political roles not being carried out the way you would have expected, with McCain—Kennedy the peacemaker. It is an education.

Cutter: In 2002 prescription drugs started really building up. That was the primary thing we began to work on in the spring and summer of 2002. It was also in the buildup to the midterm elections.

He was very involved in Shannon O'Brien's race here in Massachusetts, but he was also traveling across the country. [Paul] Wellstone was up and had a very tight race, and he traveled for some other people. The fall of 2002 was when Wellstone's plane went down, and there was a moment, when the plane went down, when nobody knew where Senator Kennedy was; there was a lot of concern that he was on the plane. I got the call first, from the Office of the Senate Sergeant at Arms, and quickly called Mary Beth. We located him, but there was a time in there when we thought that he had gone down. He stayed out there and consoled the staff, which he was so good at, and really gave it his all for [Walter] Mondale, when Mondale took on the role as the candidate.

In the fall of 2002 we also discovered this disc, through a weird circumstance. Our office manager's girlfriend found a disc in Lafayette Park. It turned out to be the disc of the Republican White House game plan for the midterm elections, about how they were going to use 9/11 as a platform for reelection, and were going to use it to build up attacks on Democrats on security issues. Jim and I decided we were going to make it public; we gave it to *Roll Call* and it became very public, very quickly.

Heininger: Did you ask Kennedy about making it public?

Cutter: I don't remember; I think we must have. It was one of those things that—We didn't want any fingerprints on it, but somebody had dropped it in Lafayette Park; anybody could have gotten it. We made it public and it turns out that that *was* their game plan.

Heininger: Yes, we saw that, didn't we?

Cutter: Yes. It was all very interesting at the time. In the buildup, one of the things for which I was always so proud of Kennedy, and so proud to be a part of, was his opposition to the war.

We went to war in March of 2003, but the buildup was through the summer and fall of 2002. In fact, we voted on it before the midterms. The Senator kept telling [Thomas A.] Daschle, "Keep this off until after the midterms, because politics is going to influence this and this is about *war*." Democrats were so afraid of being painted as weak on security, because it was all through the

lens of 9/11, that they had the vote before the midterm, and Kennedy was the most vocal opponent to the authorization for war. We decided to give a speech on it before the vote, at SAIS [School of Advanced International Studies], and it became the definitive speech for the opposition to the war.

That will always be something that I am most proud of in my entire career, what we did with that speech. He was the driving force and he knew exactly what the President was doing in the run-up to the war. He knew that the evidence didn't add up. He was there in the Armed Services Committee asking the same questions as everybody else, and was not getting the right answers. He became close to [Eric] Shinseki, and Shinseki was fired when he was asked about how many troops were going to be needed. He always remembered what General [Joseph P.] Hoar said about Iraq being the last fifteen minutes of *Saving Private Ryan*, about how it was going to be block-by-block combat in the streets of Baghdad, and you can't win a war like that.

When he gave the speech at SAIS, it sent huge reverberations through the White House, but also through the Democratic Party. That's really where MoveOn.org and everything else started to get their sea legs in the opposition to the war. He and Senator [Robert C.] Byrd, who would soon also state his opposition, became the spokespeople against the war. I think 24 people voted against it, and he helped rally the troops against it, on the floor. That was in the fall of 2002; going into 2003, we went to war.

There would be periodic hearings in the Armed Services Committee and he would always—We never went into those hearings without being fully prepared, without having a strategy as to what information we were going to draw out of the administration on the war, because there was no information on WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. He did his homework on everything. He was always talking to Kofi Annan and European leaders, and had his own cadre of foreign policy experts—not just in his office but outside, here up at Harvard or retired military—to talk about the types of things that we should be asking and looking for, and about reports that should be coming out from the administration, why they were doing certain things, and what they could be doing better.

We had that famous hearing with [Donald] Rumsfeld, where he posed a series of questions and Rumsfeld answered three questions admitting mistakes. He said, "Secretary Rumsfeld, in baseball it's three strikes and you're out. What is it for you?" Rumsfeld was flabbergasted, because Rumsfeld was a friend of his; they used to play tennis. I remember seeing Rumsfeld at his birthday party in 2002 and thinking, *Wow, there are Bush administration officials at the Senator's birthday party*. That was my first experience in seeing that Kennedy was one of the few people who transcended dividing lines and had the respect of people on both sides of the aisle. That's why Rumsfeld was so taken aback at Kennedy's comments, because they had known each other for years.

But when it came to the Iraq War, Kennedy didn't care. This was an unjustified war and too many people were getting killed, and people from Massachusetts, so he became the opposition to Bush on the war. He became the opposition to Bush on No Child Left Behind funding, too, because the administration put up no funding to support the bill.

Heininger: This was the deal he had cut with Bush.

Cutter: Yes, the deal that he had cut, and he felt that he had been betrayed. The White House kept sending signals back to the Senator, asking him to tone it down, but no, he wasn't going to tone it down; he felt betrayed. That was 2003.

The two big issues I remember in 2003 are the war and the prescription drug fight. We passed the bill out of the Senate. It was day to day trying to get that done, and he was on the floor every day, rallying for prescription drugs. We organized doctors and pharmacists and seniors, and we worked very closely with AARP [American Association of Retired Persons], which is a famous rift now in Washington. He never forgave AARP for what they did. We passed what we considered to be a very good bill out of the Senate. In conference, it came back with a big doughnut hole in it and AARP supported the final product. The Senator led the opposition to it and led the filibuster.

Heininger: It was in conference that the doughnut hole was put in?

Cutter: Yes.

Heininger: I couldn't remember whether it had come out of the House bill—

Cutter: I think it was the conference. That's how I remember it, because we had no notice.

Heininger: I think you're right. It was definitely not in the Senate bill.

Cutter: Oh, it was *not* in the Senate bill, no way.

Heininger: It was the pushback that came at the very end.

Cutter: And this is all in the context of not funding No Child Left Behind, of going to war without cause and spending billions of dollars on this war, with no reporting, no WMD. This is also the beginning of the Italian failures.

Heininger: No armor on the Humvees.

Cutter: There was the expression "You go to war with the army that you have, not the army that you need." All of those things were in his head: *This is a massive failure and we can't pass a prescription drug bill that's going to make life better for seniors, when we're wasting all this money on these other things*. We passed the tax cut while we were at war in Afghanistan, and the Senator's opinion was that you don't pass tax cuts when you're in the middle of a war.

I'm jumping around here, but the President kept using President [John F.] Kennedy as justification for passing tax cuts: "Why are Democrats opposing these tax cuts when even President Kennedy passed tax cuts?" Senator Kennedy's response to that was to say, "We weren't at war then. We're at war now. This is a time for sacrifice, not a time for the rich to get richer." This image of him having this close relationship with Bush—The reality was that it was very short-lived, because the Senator so disagreed with what President Bush was doing after 9/11, in the run-up to the war, and in the conduct of the war.

Heininger: What about the Patriot Act?

Cutter: He opposed the Patriot Act, even though he actually wrote the original FISA [Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978] law. He was very skeptical of the administration because he had been betrayed, but also skeptical in that he felt—He was one of the people early on who saw that they were using 9/11 to do these different things that were part of a bigger agenda and had nothing to do with 9/11. I may have my own—I may not be extremely objective on this, but I believe it, too, that they rode 9/11 to get a lot of things done.

Heininger: I don't think there are many people who would disagree with that.

Cutter: Now, but early on, nobody would say it. The only person who would say it was Senator Kennedy.

Heininger: Right. Did he foresee, at that point, with respect to the Patriot Act, the extent to which the administration would be using the Patriot Act to subvert civil liberties? Was it clear to him at the beginning that there was an underlying agenda there?

Cutter: He opposed it for that very reason. There was no reason to weaken the protections for civil liberties to achieve security.

Heininger: "Enhanced security."

Cutter: Yes, because he understood the FISA law better than anybody did. It's a pretty complicated law, but he wrote it, so he knew. Very few people understand that about Kennedy, that he had so much experience with the criminal code, civil procedure, and things like that. He really understood how that system worked. Again, that was one of those issues where he dove into it and pulled together the experts.

Heininger: Who was staffing him on it? I know Sharon Waxman was dealing with Iraq, but who was staffing him on this at that point?

Cutter: Civil liberties. Melody Barnes was the head of the Judiciary Committee, and I think Robert Toone was the person tasked with dealing with that issue.

That's the Patriot Act, the war, prescription drugs. I left the office in September of 2003 to come up here to the convention. I wanted to get out of politics and I saw—I'm from here, so I saw the convention as my way back here, to figure out how I would build a career here.

Heininger: You wanted to get out of politics? Why? You certainly haven't.

Cutter: No, I know. I wanted to settle down and have a normal life.

Heininger: It's not normal, living that kind of life in Washington.

Cutter: I had always wanted to come back to Boston. I had tried, for law school, but ended up going to Georgetown. After the White House, I had looked at different opportunities up here, but ended up staying down there. At every turn, I had tried to come back here, but always made the decision to stay down there. But this was going to be different. I was going to go work on the convention, still keep my hand in politics, but it would be a slow transition out. I felt that the

convention would be a good way for me to meet a broad swath of people in Boston, because we would be here a year before the convention took place. Kennedy played a big role in getting the convention to come here.

Heininger: A huge role.

Cutter: Has anybody given you the poem, *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*?

Heininger: No. I know the poem, but no.

Cutter: He wrote a poem about the convention coming to Boston, to the poem of *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*.

Heininger: Oh, no.

Cutter: It's in my files somewhere. He charmed the pants off of everybody, in getting the convention to come here, and raised the money. He worked like hell to raise the money to get the convention here. Mary Beth and I spent a lot of time on that.

Heininger: This was the year that Carey Parker was out, right?

Cutter: I don't remember. He came back part time, but he wasn't working—I never knew him to work like he used to. He was part-time when I started, and he built up, but the Senator relied very much on Carey. He was in the room on everything. I left in September to come up here, and he was great when I left.

Heininger: He also knew that you were going to be his person then, too.

Cutter: Yes, yes.

Heininger: It worked well for both.

Cutter: Then at the end of October, the [John] Kerry stuff—Kerry was running for President—was starting to kick up; there was going to be a change in that campaign. There had been a period several months before where there could have been a kick-up in the Kerry campaign, maybe a change, and Mary Beth's name had been floated. The Senator talked to Kerry very actively about Mary Beth. But it went away and then it started again that fall. It all happened very quickly, and she was placed as the campaign manager by the Senator, and then I was placed as the spokesperson by the Senator and by Mary Beth. I had maybe 12 hours to decide what I was going to do. I called him and said, "Should I do this? He's 25 points down in New Hampshire, and this is a three-month campaign." He said, "Yes, you should do it." I said, "What if he loses?" and the Senator said, "You can always come home if he loses." I felt that if I had Kennedy's blessing on this, whatever happened would work out.

Heininger: He hadn't replaced you as communications director?

Cutter: He had.

Heininger: Oh?

Cutter: Yes, yes, with David Smith, who is now at the Human Rights Campaign.

I went on the campaign. There's the famous story of the Senator coming to the campaign headquarters and talking to the staff—who had just been through this upheaval with the leadership change—and bucking them up, saying, "I've been here before. You have many other turns ahead of you in this campaign. This is not it. You need to get back and fight. John is going to win this." People talked about that for months after, saying that they stayed with the campaign because of that. I was not there, because I had hit the road with Kerry the minute I joined. I talked to the Senator a lot through the course of that campaign.

I remember being in Iowa with him. Kerry had a problem of not being viewed as an everyday man—

Heininger: You mean like windsurfing on Nantucket?

Cutter: Yes. Kennedy understood the needs and wants and desires and feelings and realities of the average American better than anybody else, and he made it a *point* to understand it. I remember we were in Iowa, going to get something to eat with a bunch of reporters, and Kennedy ordered a cheeseburger and a beer, and Kerry ordered a chef salad. The next time we went to do it, he kind of whispered, "For Christ's sake, John, get a cheeseburger." [*laughing*] It was in those types of things where you *so* appreciated him.

Heininger: The politics of the visual.

Cutter: He understood it. He understood everything about that. Going through Iowa, whether it was a gymnasium or another room in an elementary school, it was always the "John F. Kennedy Gymnasium" or the "Edward M. Kennedy Library." He would go into those places and build these crowds, because people were coming to see Kennedy. We did this big rally—I want to say it was in Davenport, in the same media market as Howard Dean, at Howard Dean's height in Iowa—and we got more people at our rally than Howard Dean did, because of Ted Kennedy. That was a huge turning point in Iowa, and he was just great that day. I was so happy to see him, because—This was only in December; I'd only been on the road for two months, but that was a life-altering experience. Seeing him was like seeing a parent.

Heininger: You'd come home.

Cutter: Yes. Just when you thought, *Thank God! I'm so happy to see you; you don't know how hard this is*, he would buck you up and tell you what you could do better. He was always very honest with me about things. We ended up winning the caucus, and it took off like lightning from there. Kennedy was in New Hampshire with us and he was with us every step of the way.

Fast-forward to the convention: Unfortunately, I wasn't able to go to his big event at the symphony, because I was literally in a back room, behind the stage, working 24 hours a day. But I did go to the floor of the convention to see his speech. It was just great to see him in his hometown, giving a speech at a convention that he brought here, nominating the person for whom he had worked so hard to get the nomination. And then the election happened; we lost.

The day after the election, Mary Beth and I were up all night. Mary Beth and Ron Klain were working on whether to concede, how to concede, and when to concede. They were the two who talked Kerry and Edwards into concession, while I was getting returns from the Associated Press about key counties in Ohio, because the holdout was Ohio. Once certain counties turned for Bush, against us—the counties we were depending on—it was clear that he had to concede. I was feeding the information to Mary Beth, and she was talking to Kerry and Edwards, and the concession happened.

Then I worked on where the concession speech was going to happen, and it was going to happen at Faneuil Hall. I called the Kennedy office and said, "I need your help turning people out for this," and they just turned on the machine. There was an overflow crowd at Faneuil Hall for the concession speech. There was only—I started planning it at 2:00 or 3:00 a.m.; the speech was at 11:00, and we had to be out of there by 1:00, because there was another event they had planned at Faneuil Hall. I thought, *Okay, there's no end to the indignity, okay*.

Heininger: This is after all, just the race for President. Okay, I guess it doesn't take long to say, "We lost."

Cutter: [Robert] Shrum, Mary Beth, and I went to Senator Kerry's house in Louisburg Square, and were arriving just as the Senator and Vicki were arriving. He saw me—I obviously looked like hell, but I wasn't upset or anything. At that point, I was numb to it; I just wanted to get this thing done. He said, "Whatever you do, don't cry." And I said, "I won't." He said, "Whatever you do, don't cry." I said, "I'm not going to," and he said, "Okay, good luck today. We're going to get this done. Whatever you do, don't cry." I said, "If you say that one more time, I'm going to cry, [*laughing*] so stop telling me that." He said, "All right. I just want you to keep a stiff upper lip and keep your chin up." "Okay, I've got it." Those are the moments you'll never forget, Senator Kennedy telling you that. What happened that day is all very public: Kerry gave a speech; Edwards began his run for President.

Heininger: Yes. [*laughing*]

Cutter: That afternoon, after the adrenaline was gone, everybody did cry. I stayed with my family that night and flew to Washington the next morning. As my plane was landing, my cell phone was ringing. It was Senator Kennedy. He said, "I want you to come in and see me." I went in to see him the next day and he said, "I want you to come back here, under whatever terms you want, but I want you to come back here." It was almost as if he knew what was coming for me, that *Newsweek* was going to come out and I was going to get my ass kicked. I had no idea any of that was going to happen.

Heininger: Really?

Cutter: No idea. *Newsweek* never talked to me.

Heininger: It doesn't matter, does it?

Cutter: I reached out to them, on the advice of Mike McCurry, who said, "You have to pay attention to this. Everybody else is talking to them, so you need to talk to them, to give your side

of things," because Mary Beth and I were very public in that campaign. We were put on a pedestal after winning the primary, so we could only fall in a general election loss.

Heininger: That's true.

Cutter: And we did; we both got hurt. Some of it true; a lot of it is not true, but we were the two antagonists in it.

Heininger: Cross of the two women.

Cutter: He saw it before I did, and at that point I didn't know what I was going to do. This is before I really knew what was happening with *Newsweek*. I said, "I want to think about it. I don't want to make any decisions right now. I'm leaving to go on vacation. I'll talk to you when I get back." When *Newsweek* came out, again my first phone call was him, and he said not to worry about it, that anybody who matters in this town knows what's true and what's not true.

[BREAK]

Heininger: This is a resumption of the interview with Stephanie Cutter on November 10.

Cutter: I came back to Kennedy's office as a senior advisor, and he moved mountains for me, whatever I wanted; he was terrific. Unbeknownst to me, when he would go around the city and do his fundraisers and meetings and things, he'd be talking about me, unprompted, "We're going to get a lot done the year; this is a new season. I have all of these plans. We're going to bring the war to an end—and oh, by the way, I have this wonderful woman working for me, Stephanie Cutter." He would say all these amazing things about me. He would never say it *to* me. People would periodically call me and say, "I was with Kennedy last night, and here's what he said." Or, "I was at this fundraiser with Kennedy. It was a 25-person dinner, very intimate, and people were asking him questions. He brought your name up, unprompted." That would happen all the time, so one day I was on an elevator with him and I said, "I got a call about your dinner last night," and he said, "Yes?" and I related to him that someone had told me about the nice things he'd said about me. "I don't know what you're talking about." I thought, *Oh, okay*.

Heininger: Oh, boy! Oh my.

Cutter: We both just laughed.

Heininger: Oh, that's funny.

Cutter: I thought, *All right, I won't say nice things about you, either*. I spoke the world of him any chance I got, because he—I was very lucky to work for him. The loyalty he showed to me after 2004, was . . . . Very few people get to see a manifestation of something like that. The one person I would throw myself into a fire for was Senator Kennedy. That was remarkable.

Heininger: [*laughing, imitating Kennedy*] "I don't know what you're talking about."

Cutter: "I don't know what you're talking about." We would have that kind of banter over everything. He liked banter; he liked people he could have fun with, but he also liked to have a lot of people around him who were very honest with him. I never had any problem being honest with him. That is not true of everybody that I've worked for, but I had no problem being honest with *him*. He liked to see debate in front of him. I was always pushing the envelope with Carey Parker, and he was always the person pulling it back and remembering the expanse of this man's career. Everybody came to meetings with Senator Kennedy over-prepared, ready to go, and with a position, and he liked that. He gave you a lot of running room to figure that out.

I remember one of President [George W.] Bush's press conferences, right after we went to war. The President said something in the press conference—I can't remember what it was—and Mike Allen was getting ready to ask his question. I emailed Mike Allen a statement from the Senator, and Mike Allen stood up and said, "Senator Kennedy just said . . ." and Bush responded to Kennedy in the press conference. Kennedy called me from home, asking wonderingly, "Could you send me the statement?" [*laughing*] He was laughing and I said, "How do you like *that* one? That's called modern media."

Heininger: That's right. Do you think this would have happened in 1963? No. It's indicative of a new direction in how the media operates.

Cutter: When I came back to the Senate, there was another push. He was already developing another speech on the war and developing a policy. The choice was whether to call for a phased withdrawal or to just call for some changes in strategy. Nobody, at that point, had called for a withdrawal of any sort. Remember the problem that Kerry had on the campaign, where Bush was given the open-ended question, "Knowing what you know now, would you still go to war?" That was a problem for Democrats, because if you said you wouldn't go to war . . . . Public opinion had not shifted on it; there wasn't the intensity there in the middle of the country that there was just six, eight months after.

You know, the Cindy Sheehan—That was such a turning point. The choice was to, again, lay out a change in strategy, all the things that the President was doing wrong, or to finally call for a phased withdrawal, that this wasn't working, we shouldn't have gone to war, we needed to get out of there and go back to Afghanistan. I was in support of calling for the phased withdrawal and others were against it. He ultimately did it; he was the first to do it. Democrats weren't there.

Heininger: No, they weren't.

Cutter: He became sort of a lightning rod on the issue of Iraq, and nobody in the Senate was turning to him. Coming out of the 2004 election, after Kerry lost—People misinterpreted what that election was about. They thought that Democrats were just weak on security. That really wasn't it. It was more of a character/trust issue, and that the country hadn't turned yet.

Heininger: The country *hadn't* turned.

Cutter: He became a lightning rod on the issue, and this is what I regret most about my time with him. He wanted to give another speech, to go to the floor and offer an amendment to

something on the phased withdrawal. I was afraid that the amendment would fail miserably, that we wouldn't even get the 24 or 26 people who voted against the war on the amendment, and that it would be like a referendum on withdrawal and would delay the buildup of public support on withdrawal, because everybody would run from it after they saw such a low vote count.

We all got together in his office to talk about it and I said, "If our goal here is ultimately a withdrawal from Iraq, you can't be the spokesperson right now for the withdrawal, because Democrats clearly aren't there, even our loyal Democrats against the war weren't there when you gave the speech. The Bush administration is really kicking you around, in ways that we can't even see, and we have to find another way to build support without *you* being the leader on this." I argued against the amendment, argued against another speech, and I regret that, because it was against his instinct and against his principled stand on the war. His instinct was to keep going and the hell with it. I was arguing that if our ultimate goal was to change the policy, we had to go about it in a different way. He should have just done what he wanted to do and let the cards fall where they may.

Heininger: If he had wanted to enough, he would have.

Cutter: Yes, but that's the one thing I regret.

Heininger: How did you feel about being back in Washington? You'd wanted to leave; you had wanted to get out of politics.

Cutter: After the 2004 campaign, after *Newsweek* came out, I made a decision that I wasn't going to leave, that I was going to make my way in Washington.

Heininger: You said this with a defiant faith.

Cutter: Yes.

Heininger: "Nope, you're not going to push me out."

Cutter: I was not going to go away and people were going to understand what happened. I remained very loyal to Kerry, never said anything about Kerry or what happened, but there were other people on whom the story was going to be set straight, and it was. No way was I going to back down after that, because it wasn't true. It was not true.

Heininger: And you had Kennedy in your corner.

Cutter: And I had Kennedy. He knew exactly how this was all going to play out. He was giving me a landing pad and a protector. As long as I was with Kennedy, nobody was going to do anything to me. That was an eye opener in many ways. I already thought the world of him, but that was—I will never forget that.

Heininger: Had it been eye opening too, in how much benefit there could be in having a protector?

Cutter: Oh, yes, absolutely. But there are very few protectors.

Heininger: Yes, right.

Cutter: I've worked for many people. There was nobody like Kennedy. The Kennedy staff is famous. If you are on Kennedy's team, there's a presumption that you're very good at what you do and that you're going to go on and do great things. Not everybody can compete with a Supreme Court Justice and all these other great people, but to be able to work with such a qualified group of people, and for somebody who worked harder than you did on things—I was pretty lucky to be there.

Heininger: You stayed with Kennedy for a while and then what?

Cutter: In the spring of 2005, Harry Reid approached me and asked if I would run the "nuclear option" campaign, which was this arcane Senate rule to get rid of the filibuster. The Republicans were trying to get rid of the filibuster, and that's all that Democrats had at that point.

Heininger: A huge fight.

Cutter: I took a leave from Kennedy and ran the nuclear option campaign. We won it, but we won it at the expense of letting many bad judges through. It seemed like a success communications-wise. I then went back to Kennedy and stayed there into 2006. They asked me to come back to do the Supreme Court, so I worked in a hybrid role between Kennedy and Reid. I did the Supreme Court Justices and the caucus communications on what we called the "Six for '06," which was the Democratic agenda for the '06 elections, and I rolled out the Honest Leadership [and Open Government] Act and Real Security and all the different tenets of Six for '06.

Then I went to Kennedy and said, "I want to leave the Senate and go work for myself." He said, "I thought you would be with me through the election." He was up in '06 and didn't really have an opponent. I said, "I will be. I will do whatever you want me to do; I just won't be in the Senate." I left the Senate and he ended up hiring me as a consultant, which was great. I started this new business with Ted Kennedy and Harry Reid as clients, so it was great. I have to remember my timing, but through '06 we did the reelection and the debate with Kenneth Chase. We had one debate on New England Cable News, which was very funny.

Heininger: This was the campaign his grandsons ran?

Cutter: Yes. Actually, they were his great-nephews, Matt [Matthew M. T. Kennedy] and Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy III].

Heininger: I'm thinking the grandchildren generation, but you're right, great-nephews, Matt and Joe.

Cutter: He loved them. They were great ambassadors for him, traveled around this state, and had their own following. They were great. After the election, I stayed on as a consultant and would prep him for Sunday shows, would work on the big speeches, would consult, give my advice to the communications shop. That was a big part of my world, being part of that Kennedy world, and he relied on me for anything public-oriented. It was really Michael Myers and me, and Vicki played a big role in all of that.

I'm skipping over many things, but we did his two books, including *America Back on Track*, and did a lot of fun events on that. He was on the *Daily Show*. I've never seen such a popular talk show host being in awe of someone such as I saw Jon Stewart being in awe of Ted Kennedy. Kennedy was excited about it too, because this was not something he was used to doing, and here he was on the most popular show there is. We did the *Daily Show* and it was very funny.

We showed up at the *Daily Show* with Caroline [Kennedy Schlossberg] and me and Vicki and some other—Ranny Cooper and Jeannie Kedas. I forget who else was there, but it was Kennedy and a bunch of women. Jon Stewart came into the green room and said, "Wow, this is quite an entourage." He went out and did his monologue, and said, "Kennedy showed up with more people than Snoop Doggy Dogg [Cordozar Calvin Broadus]." [*laughing*] We were watching it—It was now just me and him in the green room; everybody else was in the audience—and he said, "What did he say?" And I said, "He said that you showed up with more people than Snoop Doggy Dogg. He's going to call you Ted 'Snoop Dogg' Kennedy." "Who's Snoop Doggy Dogg?" he asked.

Heininger: Yes, right, of course. [*laughing*] That was a cultural reference that was not going to be within his world.

Cutter: Yes. I replied, "It's a famous rapper."

Heininger: "Yes, right, rapper guy, rapper. What's 'rap'?"

Cutter: It was very funny.

Throughout 2007, also, was the buildup to the campaign. If you read Dan Balz's book, the chapter on the Kennedy endorsement, that's all true and it comes right out of the Senator's oral history, actually.

Heininger: Yes, I know.

Cutter: I did it with the authorization to do it. We were worried that President Clinton was going to make the Senator's choice about race and it wasn't about race; it was about [Barack] Obama and about change, really, a new generation versus an old generation.

Heininger: How did you get to the Obamas?

Cutter: How did *I* get to the Obamas?

Heininger: Yes.

Cutter: I met Obama when he gave his '04 speech, and then I met him in the Senate. I convinced him to be one of the key spokespeople on the nuclear option.

Heininger: Your association with him goes back that far?

Cutter: Yes. Then I convinced Reid to make him the point person on the Honest Leadership Act, which was the ethics stuff.

Heininger: So the connection goes way back.

Cutter: I was always in awe of Obama and would see him around the Senate. He obviously knew many people. I was not somebody who was important in his world, but he knew me because I was with Kerry, with Kennedy, with Reid; I was doing all these things. And I knew his people: Pete Rouse was a very good friend of mine; Robert Gibbs and I knew each other professionally and he's become a friend; Alyssa Mastromonaco, his scheduler, is a very close friend of mine; His speechwriter, Jon Favreau, worked for me on the Kerry campaign. I gave him his first speechwriting job. It's a very small world.

Heininger: But no contact with David Axelrod?

Cutter: No, I didn't know David at all. I came to know David through the endorsement process. Pete Rouse was working the endorsement with me and I was working it with Kennedy, and Greg Craig was working it. We were coming at Kennedy from different angles, but Kennedy was driving the process on it. It's all been very well documented, all the different phone calls and buildup. We would do these conference calls with his core team, Nick [Bancroft] Littlefield [Jr.] and Ranny, Paul Kirk, David Burke, and me. It was a big choice for him to go against the Clintons.

Heininger: Did you expect him to do it from the beginning?

Cutter: I expected him to either stay out or go with Obama.

Heininger: Really?

Cutter: Yes.

Heininger: What did you see in his relationship with Hillary [Clinton] when they were in the Senate? A good relationship?

Cutter: It was fine. It wasn't anything significant. She's not—I don't want to be—She's not chummy.

Heininger: No.

Cutter: I remember what he told Obama, when Obama came to him after the '06 election, "Should I do this?" and he said, "Yes. This is your time. You only get one time; go do it." He wouldn't have been as emphatic about it if he didn't see something in him.

Heininger: That's right.

Cutter: I remember being on a conference call with him when everybody was debating the pros and cons. People were arguing for him to just stay out of it, and he said, "Look, I'm not going to be on the wrong side of history here."

Heininger: So it was more than Caroline?

Cutter: Oh, yes.

Heininger: And more than Caroline's kids?

Cutter: Yes. He said, "I'm not going to be on the wrong side of history." Then it became an issue of timing. We can go into this in detail if you want to, but you can also just read Dan's book. You have it all from the Senator, actually. I'm not going to tell you anything that—

Heininger: Yes, but what we have from him we also have to get from other people, because people in the future will want Kennedy's piece and they will want to see other people's perspectives on it, so go ahead and cover it; it's not duplicative.

Cutter: Through the late fall of '07 the pressure started to ramp up about who he was going to endorse. At that point, everybody close to him thought he was going to stay out.

Heininger: Did you think he was going to stay out?

Cutter: I thought he was secretly interested in Obama, but it was going to take him a lot to get there.

Heininger: Did Ranny think he was going to stay out?

Cutter: I have no idea. Ranny can answer that. I was for Obama. I wasn't *publicly* for Obama, because I was doing—I was a TV commentator and had a contract, so I couldn't declare for anybody. But I was very supportive of Obama and did whatever I could behind the scenes; I would write things for Pete and write staffing plans and things, and sent as many people as I could to that campaign. My best friend, Julianna Smoot, was the finance director and all of my good friends were on it. I had worked for the Clintons for a long time and this was, to put it in Senator Kennedy's words, not me against the Clintons, but being enthralled with this person, Barack Obama.

Heininger: How early did Greg come out for Obama?

Cutter: Pretty early.

Heininger: Was it earlier than the fall of '07?

Cutter: Yes, and he came out very publicly.

Heininger: Yes, he did.

Cutter: It was very anti-Clinton. Mine was not so much anti-Clinton. The Clintons could sense that something was up, too, which is why the President was calling more and more often. There was a series of conversations in December with Daschle. Obama was very smart about how he handled it, and it's very indicative of who he is. He wasn't the heavy. He didn't pressure Kennedy. He made the ask and let Daschle handle it. It was very much a soft touch. The Clintons were just the opposite. They were like the 800-pound barbell coming down on your neck every day. [*laughing*]

Heininger: A little more in need.

Cutter: The more they felt him slipping away, the harder the President worked and the more divisive he got about what he was saying about Obama, which was making things worse with the Senator. We all watched Iowa happen. I was on TV that night, but I remember talking to him the next day and his being thrilled with Obama and moved by what he saw, both in the turnout for him but also in Barack's words the night of the caucus victory. That's when things really started ramping up for the endorsement.

There was another series of conversations, and the President was calling a lot. We quickly went into New Hampshire, and that's when the "fantasy" thing started, that he's living a fantasy. Some thought that that was racially tinged. The Senator didn't necessarily think so, but then the language over—That it wasn't JFK [John F. Kennedy] who achieved civil rights, it was LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson]—That it wasn't Martin Luther King [Jr.]—That it takes more than a message; it takes somebody to get it done. The Senator was offended by that, because it wasn't necessary.

Heininger: Intemperate words.

Cutter: He made it clear, and many other people made it clear.

I remember a conversation with President Clinton after New Hampshire. I was in Nevada already for the caucus and something happened where the President and the Senator were supposed to talk, but it was postponed into the afternoon or the next day. He called me and Greg Craig and said, "Give me everything they've said about Obama." We put together a timeline of everything that they had said, so that he would have it. The President started the conversation, laying into what Barack Obama was doing to Hillary Clinton and how unfair it was, that he was lying about her record and blaming her for 9/11 or Benazir Bhutto's assassination.

The Senator pushed back and said, "You're wrong." There was the now famous exchange—It's also in the oral history—when Bill Clinton said, "She did not vote for war; she voted for the authority," and blah blah, and the Senator said, "I voted too; and I voted no, because I understood that that was a vote for war, so don't tell me what it was a vote for."

The conversations with the President got more and more difficult and on the LBJ/MLK/JFK issue, the Senator suggested to the President that Hillary go out and make a statement, that we were going to put an end to this discussion, and that we need to bring people together. The Senator told the President that too much blood had been shed over these issues, too many tears had been spilled, and he needed to put an end to this. "We cannot do this; we cannot go back to that place," he said. The President obviously hung up the phone and talked to Hillary and she put out a statement. Obama was ready for that—no secret there—and was ready with his statement, and it was satisfied for a little bit.

When I said the conversations got more and more difficult, when the President could sense Kennedy slipping away from Hillary, his comments on Obama got more and more tinged. He said, "You know, Ted, this is a guy who got to town two years ago, put down his bags, and got us a cup of coffee. And now he wants to be President?" The Senator called me as soon as he hung up with the President when he'd said that. He told me what he had said—and this was in

the middle of all the racial stuff—and I said, "How did that strike you?" And he said, "Well, how did it strike *you*?" I said, "Well, it strikes me as a little off," and he said, "Yes, me too." We never told anybody about it.

Heininger: That's good, no need.

Cutter: Word had gotten around that Bill had said something that crossed the line racially, but the Senator didn't want to elevate any of that stuff. He just wanted it to end, so we kept it quiet. People were trying to piece the pieces together and I think the Clintons were trying to figure out what went wrong in the conversation, so many urban myths were created about that conversation. People think that they're close to having it, but nobody quite has it yet. And I don't—The Senator purposely left it out of *True Compass*. It has to be in the oral history with him. It is; I know it is.

In the week leading up to the South Carolina primary, he decided to endorse. Caroline had her op-ed in the *New York Times*. I think the conversation with Senator Obama happened on the Thursday before the primary and we were putting the pieces together for a Monday event. Once Caroline's op-ed leaked out—The *New York Times* put it out on Saturday afternoon because it was such big news—the pressure—Everybody started guessing that Kennedy was soon to follow.

We had been working on the speech and now Shrum was looking at the speech and a very small group of us knew about this. I can't remember who else was there, but I was at the Senator's house on Sunday. Vicki was there; the Senator was there. I can't remember who else was there, but we had a whole rollout plan. Part of it was to call his family to say, "I'm going to endorse Obama." He called some of the RFKs [Robert F. Kennedy] and told them, and the RFKs told the Clinton campaign. The Clinton campaign leaked it on Sunday afternoon, so word started to spread. We didn't comment on it and the Obama campaign didn't comment on it, so we were able to preserve some of the news for Monday. He never spoke to Hillary that day; she never called him back.

There were two conversations with Clinton, the President. In the first one, news had already broken on CNN [Cable News Network] that he was endorsing Obama. He called Clinton. Clinton sat there and listened to the Senator say, "This is not an endorsement *against* anybody; this is an endorsement *for* Barack. I've never seen anything like this. It reminds me of a different time and I think he has the power here to bring us all together and transcend the things that have divided us." The President didn't say anything. I heard the Senator say, "Mr. President, are you there?" When he said that, I thought, *Hang up the phone; just hang up the phone. Don't trust this*. Ten minutes later the phone rang; it was the President, calling back and saying, "Could you please tell me why?"

The Senator went into the reason again, that the type of coalition that he was able to put together in Iowa and the inspiration amongst people of all walks of life was reminiscent of a different time; we hadn't seen that in a long time and the country needed it in the wake of Bush. We needed it. He could hear the President writing. I don't know what the President was saying on the other end, but the conversation just ended with "Okay, thank you." As soon as the Senator hung up the phone, he said, "He's going to make this about race."

That's when we went full speed ahead and put out a narrative in all of the papers about what it was really about, and how the Obama relationship had developed over time and the reasons for this endorsement. If you go back and read Monday's papers, they all have that context in them.

The event at American University was a huge success; lines were down the street at 6:00 a.m. to get into that. It was a real turning point in the campaign and for Kennedy. He really did pass the torch right then and there.

Heininger: Did you see a change in him?

Cutter: In Kennedy?

Heininger: Yes.

Cutter: Oh, yes, yes. He was excited about that campaign.

Heininger: I've heard someone else call it the "politics of joy," that this was—and he was referring to all of Kennedy's career—I look at that time period for him and you could just see him light up. He just lit up.

Cutter: Yes. In many ways, he saw the best of America happening, but he also just really liked Obama as a person too, so it was very personal to him. Many great things happened that day. Senator Obama and Senator Kennedy went out to speak to the overflow crowd and Senator Obama said, "This is one of the most important days of my life," and he got teary-eyed. That's when I really understood the importance of what was happening.

Heininger: But the whole thing had to have been very painful for Kennedy, to say no to the President, to say no to Hillary, who had been expecting his support.

Cutter: Or expecting his neutrality. The Senator would bring up all the time, "This is the President who searched for my nephew" and "This is the President who appointed my sister to Ireland."

Heininger: There were many feelings of obligation there. For all the rational reasons that there were, there had to have been a personal cost—

Cutter: Oh, yes, definitely.

Heininger: To him—

Cutter: Yes.

Heininger: And a terrible personal cost to the Clintons as well, regardless of what they were saying and regardless of the language being used.

Cutter: No, they never got over it; they're still not over it.

Heininger: I can't think of many other political moments in the recent 20 years that could have been quite as difficult as that. Yet, if you spoke to Kennedy afterward, he lit up; it was a big change.

Cutter: Yes, and he hit the ground running. He would travel anywhere they asked. He went to Texas and New Mexico and California, and did everything he could in the lead-up to the February 5 elections; whatever the campaign asked. He was always doing interviews and always doing what he could. He sat next to Obama, remember, at the State of the Union, and Hillary was right behind them. [*laughing*] He went up to both Hillary and Obama on the Senate floor after the February 5 contest, where Massachusetts went for Hillary, and pulled them together. He said, "Hillary, aren't you glad you don't have my support? You would have lost Massachusetts." He made a joke out of it, and tried to bring everybody together. Then he got sick in May.

Heininger: You handled the communications during that, right?

Cutter: Yes.

Heininger: What was that like?

Cutter: It was horrible. I was with him—The last interview he did was with Al [Albert R.] Hunt with Bloomberg, at the house, on a Friday. I think it was the Friday before the Saturday he got sick. I was at my house when Vicki called and said, "I need you to get up here." At that point we thought he had had a stroke. I said, "Do you want me to come right now?" And she said, "Yes, come right now." I literally just walked out of the house and went to the airport. Some friends of mine came over and helped; they took me to the airport and got stuff packed. I arrived up there at the hospital at the same time Caroline did. They didn't know anything at that point, except that they did a scan and saw some sort of a lesion.

Heininger: Who was called in at that point?

Cutter: It was Barbara [Souliotis], Kathy [Kathleen] Kruse, and me.

Heininger: Was Larry Horowitz called in at that point?

Cutter: He wasn't *there*. He was in California, but he was called. At the hospital, it was just Barbara, Kathy Kruse, and me, then Barbara brought in some of her staff, Graham [Shalgian], too.

Heininger: Massachusetts, yes.

Cutter: We were there day and night. We got there on a Saturday. Tuesday was when we announced the diagnosis, but Monday was when the diagnosis was clear to us.

Heininger: Did you have a sense it was terminal?

Cutter: Oh, yes.

Heininger: Did *he* have a sense it was terminal?

Cutter: Oh, yes, yes.

Heininger: Did Vicki have a sense it was terminal?

Cutter: Yes. This is how the conversation went.

Heininger: We all know what it was, but the question is, was everybody sitting there, all the kids sitting there, everybody, thinking, *Whoa, there's an end to this*?

Cutter: Yes, yes.

Heininger: That must have been awful.

Cutter: We all had our private time with the Senator, too, and mine was to go over the statement. Vicki said, "I want you to draft something." The doctor took me aside and said, "Here's what this means. He has as little as two months to live." I was devastated. I pulled myself together and tried to get the doctor to help me put the words together, to be honest but not too revealing. Vicki said, "I want you to go in to the Senator and go over the statement." The doctors insisted on being there, and were wonderful, but they're doctors.

Heininger: Was this more than Larry Ronan?

Cutter: And Lee Schwamm, all the oncologists. They were wonderful, and that was a real bonding experience for everybody who was there, because it didn't get any tougher than that. It was the Senator, Vicki, the doctors, and me, and I was reading the statement. At that point it had "glioblastoma" in it, because that was what he had. I was reading him the statement and trying to keep my composure and said, "I think it's wrong for us to put 'glioblastoma' in here," and the doctor said, "Well, that's what he has. Everybody's going to know that; with the type of treatment, it's going to be obvious." I said, "Yes, but we don't have to say it. People can come to their own conclusions, but those are *their* conclusions. We don't have to say it. There's a difference."

Heininger: There's a big difference between saying, "He has a brain tumor," and saying, "He has a glioblastoma," or an astrocytoma.

Cutter: We just said "glioma," and I made my case for saying glioma. I said, "It's another way of saying a brain tumor, and everybody's going to know it's malignant, but they don't need to know what type of malignancy it is. They can come to their own conclusions, but we can maintain this cone around what's really going on, because we have a long road ahead of us. Whatever happens, it's going to be tough."

Heininger: That's good advice.

Cutter: The doctors were saying, "No, no," and we were arguing in front of him. He was just looking at me, and I was trying to—I couldn't believe I was arguing over when this man was going to die, with his doctors. I said, "Look, he's a sitting Senator. If we put out that he has a glioblastoma, his tenure ends as soon as the statement goes out."

Heininger: We're talking lame duck; we're talking that's it.

Cutter: And that's not fair.

Heininger: That's the end of influence.

Cutter: We needed to leave a little uncertainty out there about what was going to happen.

Heininger: What was Vicki's sense at that point?

Cutter: She was completely quiet.

Heininger: Really?

Cutter: She obviously was the key to everything that was going on, and she was the one who kept all the trains running. She really was a remarkable person during this time. Through the whole 18 months, she was a remarkable person.

The Senator just said, "We're going to go with Stephanie's statement," and that's what we went with.

Heininger: A very political calculation, in which I think you're absolutely right.

Cutter: It bought him time to figure out how we were going to handle this.

Heininger: Yes, absolutely.

Cutter: He didn't even know what his course of treatment was, and even if he only had two months, so what? They don't deserve to know every medical fact about what's going on with him. Anyway, things went on from there and I brought the photographers in to get a picture of the family, so they could see that he was himself—

Heininger: A great picture.

Cutter: Because he looked fine, and he left the hospital the next day to this huge fanfare that was not planned by us. All we did was announce when he was leaving and people lined the highways down to the Cape with signs. It was very emotional.

Heininger: Preparation for things to come.

Cutter: Then he decided to have the surgery at Duke, and we all—the same team—flew down to Duke in secrecy. I couldn't tell anybody where I was going.

Heininger: You and Kathy and Barbara all went down. Did Graham go too?

Cutter: Not initially, I don't think, but it was basically the four of us for anything like that. We kept it secret until the morning of, and then we put out the statement that he was having the surgery, in his words, because I felt that it was important for his voice to finally be heard, saying that he had chosen this course of treatment. Then he came out of surgery, and I sat with the

doctor and wrote another statement from the doctor. I was going through my notes the other day; I have a whole file in here on "Mass General," which is a euphemism for cancer.

Heininger: Right.

Cutter: That's how I have it in here. We stayed down there for the surgery. He came home and recuperated, and started getting ready for the convention.

Heininger: And started sailing.

Cutter: And started sailing. After that, he dove into his book.

Heininger: How much work did you do on the book?

Cutter: I didn't do any work on the book while it was being written. Vicki sent me the manuscript early last summer. It was really Vicki and the Senator, the publisher, and Ron Powers. Nobody else interacted with it. I went down to visit him in Florida in February, with my boyfriend, Erik [Smith]. He had just gotten the photo that was going to be on the cover of the book shipped to him.

Heininger: It's a great cover.

Cutter: He was showing that off and he was in great spirits and hilarious.

Heininger: In the meantime, you were continuing to do work for, shall we say, another political figure.

Cutter: Michelle Obama?

Heininger: Yes.

Cutter: Yes. I joined the campaign. We had had long talks about different things in the campaign. Nothing really felt right, through the fall, winter, and spring of 2007–08 and then finally, in May—Actually, the phone call came about the Michelle Obama position while I was up here in Boston, when the Senator was in Mass General, when he was first diagnosed. I said, "I can't even think about this right now," and they said, "We understand. Call us when you can."

Heininger: Interesting, the first loyalty there is still to Kennedy.

Cutter: Oh, absolutely. I got his blessing before I went on the campaign. I talked to them over the course of six weeks on the Michelle Obama position, and eventually went out and met with her. I really liked her and decided to do it. It grew into a bigger role, as a senior advisor for the campaign, doing different things, and being her chief of staff. I did that through June, through the end of the campaign. The day after the election I learned that I was the transition spokesperson, when the release went out. [*laughing*]

Heininger: They hadn't even talked to you about it ahead of time?

Cutter: Not really.

Heininger: Oh, well, okay. We have a utility infielder here. Was that fun?

Cutter: Yes, it was great. It was hard, but it was—The transition piece, you mean?

Heininger: Yes, the transition piece.

Cutter: It was really hard. It was probably one of the hardest jobs I've ever had, until, of course, I went to Treasury. But to make a long story short on Kennedy, we had a conversation in the spring of last year, when it was clear that the medication wasn't working. He wanted to know who was going to be around. I said, "Hands down, I'll be there. Whatever I'm doing, I'll do whatever you need." That's why I took the [Sonia] Sotomayor position, because it had an end to it. We knew the fall was going to be—that things were going to happen for him in the fall at some point, and this ended—We wanted to get Sotomayor done by the August recess, so the timing was perfect. He died sooner than we thought he would, than *I* thought he would. I thought I would be up here working on some things with him.

Heininger: That's the same that Vicki thought, the same that other people thought.

Cutter: It was the first day he didn't get out of bed that he died.

Heininger: On the other hand . . . .

Cutter: He was ready to go.

Heininger: It's not a bad way to go, either, sailing up until the last. Tuesday night came and all of a sudden there was a memorial service and a funeral to get ready for, in how many days? Two? That's quite a telescope there.

Cutter: The same team was working on the funeral, except Ranny was now part of it and Paul Kirk was part of it. We had started the funeral planning much earlier, and Ranny and I had gone out to Arlington and looked at the plot. We had a general idea of where the funeral was going to be and where he would lie in repose. Paul Kirk had reviewed it with him in broad details in the spring, so he had an idea and we had some feedback from him as to what he wanted. We had been working on it pretty diligently.

The day that he died, actually, we had a meeting on the Cape to get final signoff. We had thought we probably had three to four weeks left to get final signoff on many of the details, including who was going to do the eulogies and when we were going to make the request to the President, and how he was going to travel from the Cape up to Boston. You know, he wanted to go by boat. How were we going to get the Coast Guard to give us a boat, who was going to pay for it, and how quickly could all that happen?

Heininger: I understand the desire; the practicality is a little less—It sounds great, though, a Viking funeral.

Cutter: Well, he wasn't going to be buried at sea.

Heininger: No, I understand that, but he was going to travel to his funeral—

Cutter: He was going to travel up here—yes.

Heininger: It would have been appropriate.

Cutter: Vicki came and gave us her blessing on all of it, gave us her reaction to some things, and we made some alterations. She said, "Okay, I'm going to go back to him now and spend the afternoon with the Senator." We had no idea that that was the day. I got on a plane to go back to Washington, because I was supposed to leave the next day, or the day after, to drive up to Massachusetts to start at the IOP [Harvard University Institute of Politics]. By the time I landed, Vicki called and said, "The Senator has taken a turn. Can you come back?" And I said, "I'm not going to come back tonight because you don't want me on a plane; you need me stationary somewhere to work, so I'm going to stay here tonight, I'll be on the first plane in the morning if nothing happens, but I'm going to stay here tonight in case something happens."

He died at 11:22 and I was up all night, like everybody else involved, and my phone rang off the hook. Shrum and I wrote the statement, and then Vicki and I rewrote it. She was right on it, as she normally is. I had a 9:30 flight, which I missed, and I missed the 10:30, the 11:30, the 12:30. [*laughing*] I finally got on the 1:30, because I couldn't get off my phone or my computer, things were moving so fast. I got up to the library that afternoon; Ranny was already there. The core team had already assembled. People were coming in periodically, and we just started working like hell to put the details together. We worked all night every night, pretty much, with the exception of two or three hours of sleep, Tuesday, Wednesday, and then Thursday. That was when he came up from the Cape. He lay in repose Thursday and Friday, and we had the memorial service Friday night. Saturday was the funeral. Sunday we all collapsed, and that's when it all hit us. It was pretty miserable.

Heininger: A very tough period.

Cutter: It was. Then I drove up here and started working on the book rollout.

Heininger: It hasn't really stopped, has it?

Cutter: No. Have you read the book?

Heininger: Not yet.

Cutter: Oh, you have to; it's great.

Heininger: I know.

Cutter: Are you afraid it's going to influence your interviews?

Heininger: I've put off reading it for precisely that reason.

Cutter: That's probably a good thing.

Heininger: I don't want to see his words, yet. We still have too many key people to interview right now. We know what's in *his* interview, but I don't want to see how he's turned it into words yet.

Cutter: Yes.

Heininger: It just doesn't feel right yet. It's too tough.

Cutter: It's a great, great book. You can hear him speaking. I love it. He really nailed it.

Heininger: Now, you're still involved, beyond the book?

Cutter: Yes.

Heininger: What else are you working on for him?

Cutter: The institute [Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate] and some family stuff. I'll always do whatever is needed, but I'll go off of payroll at the end of the year, I think.

Heininger: Then what are you going to do?

Cutter: I don't know. I'll deal with it later. [*laughing*]

Heininger: It's been an eventful few years for you.

Cutter: Yes, it has, but I'm not worried about what I'll do. I'll figure it out.

[END OF INTERVIEW]