GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD GEPHARDT

May 24, 2016
Washington, D.C.

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Riley: This is the Richard Gephardt interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. We've just had a quick conversation before the recording began about the conditions for the interview, the most important one being, again, the stipulation about confidentiality.

Because our time is relatively limited—I understand we've got you until about 12:30—I wanted to begin by asking if there were any particular aspects of your experience with President Bush that you wanted to be absolutely sure to get on the record so that we're getting what you yourself think is most important for people to understand about your relationship with this President. If so, we'll begin there. If not, we'll find another place to start.

Gephardt: I've seen some questions that you are thinking of using and I think you've covered the waterfront.

Riley: OK.

Gephardt: Obviously a lot of his Presidency and our work in Congress during his Presidency was involved with the 9/11 disaster, or whatever you want to call it. Obviously you're going to have questions about that, because that drove a lot of what I was involved in with him.

Riley: Let's start back before then and try to leave ample time to deal with that. Did you ever have any encounters with this man before he became President?

Gephardt: Not really up close. Just to back up, I was [House minority] leader and was hoping that Al Gore [Jr.] would be elected. So the first thing that I remember about George W. Bush, I guess, had to do with the Florida recount and that very complicated, difficult period. One anecdote I would give you is after the election was over and the Florida recount was still going on, I was in constant contact with the Gore campaign and what to do about the recount or what not to do.

We made the conscious decision not to send operatives down there to raise heck. In retrospect, it probably was a mistake, but be that as it may, that's what the Gore campaign wanted and that's what we did. I thought it was the right thing to do.

Perry: That is, they did not want the operatives sent down?

Gephardt: They did not want to make this a confrontative situation. They thought it should be handled through the normal process. I agreed with that, obviously, and that's what we did. But putting that aside, the clearest recollection I have is Bill Daley was in my office on a Sunday when the Supreme Court was still deciding this case. It was a Sunday afternoon and we were in

the Capitol in my office. While we were talking about what to do and what was happening—and we were going to have a press conference to bring the press up to date on our view of this—I got word from my office that the Court had decided the case against us.

Perry: So this was the second opinion that was coming down from them and this was going to be the ultimate—

Gephardt: This was the final opinion. I remember two things came to my mind. One was that I was horribly disappointed and not in agreement with what they had decided and thought it was a miscarriage of justice. But having said that, I also believe that Vice President Gore's reaction to it was the correct reaction.

When we walked out to meet the press, I remember worrying that there could be demonstrations, violence, and that in probably any other country there would be. I was wondering if Americans would rise to the occasion and, as Gore was, put up with this, even though you hated the result.

Riley: Right.

Gephardt: That to me has always been the essence of the majesty of democracy. I'd always say to my Members in Congress, in a democracy, process is *everything*. I said that because in a democracy if people feel there is a process that is legitimate and fair and reasonably well run, then they'll put up with bad outcomes, even though they are very angry. If you lose that process, people resort to violence. I always would say politics is a substitute for violence. As [Winston] Churchill said, "Democracy is the worst form of government on earth except for all the others." What he was really saying was the process allows people to govern themselves without resorting to violence.

So this was a clear, prime example of that. Even though all the cards were on the table. This was king of the hill, that's exactly what it was. You know, I think we evolved from animals—I'm deadly serious. We've evolved, though. That's the good news. What we've evolved to is self-government and democracy and a process that people can put up with when they lose. That to me was a memorable moment in my recollection of beginning to deal with George W. Bush. I hadn't up until that time, but I knew then that I was going to. That was my—That's more than you needed to hear.

Riley: No, no, that's exactly what we needed to hear.

Perry: Back to the process point. The briefing book is filled with the conference call that you had with Al Gore and Joe Lieberman along with Tom Daschle and then your going to Tallahassee to do a press conference on their behalf. You, of course, and Senator Daschle, kept referring to the process—Let this process keep going; let all the votes be counted. Was that then the source of your anger and upset over the Supreme Court truncating that process?

Gephardt: Right, and what we felt was ending something that should have continued further. Of course our suspicion, or our belief, was that if it had been allowed to go further, he would have won Florida and obviously won the popular vote in the country, so he should be President. So swallowing all of that in a loss like that is hard.

Again, I'll go back to my essential point: even though we felt the process was not as good as it should have been, we have a process. The judicial process was ending where it had to end. It was a process. Even though we didn't like the way it was run, in the end you have to accept it. That is the key to democracy.

I was watching the LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson] show [*All the Way*] on HBO [Home Box Office] the other night—

Perry: Isn't that a great movie?

Gephardt: I turned to my wife when he was trying to get that last vote for the proposition that was so hard—

Perry: The Civil Rights Act of '64.

Gephardt: [Walter] Jenkins was next to him, as he always was, and he turned—"Yes, I got it." You could see on the other side, with Richard Russell, that he hated that outcome. It cut him to the core. But he was willing to grudgingly accept it, because he had had a process that he could have faith in, and that's the key to democracy.

Riley: You commented on how difficult this was to accept and immediately you're thrown into a transition with the President, who didn't get the majority of the nation's votes.

Perry: Popular vote.

Riley: Popular vote. There were questions about the process, but it had reached a conclusion with the Supreme Court's finality. Tell us about how you begin trying to reconcile these things and develop a relationship with this President coming out of that very stressful series of events.

Gephardt: I always felt it was a responsibility, no matter how anybody—no matter how much you disagree with him on lots of policies, that you need to have and should have a good human relationship with this individual. He is going to be and is the President of the country, and you have a responsibility as a leader in the other big section of the government that has to work with him to have as good a personal relationship as you can.

I always had that with his father to a fare-thee-well. I really respected him. We disagreed on lots of things, but from a personal standpoint it was always a strong relationship. We had all these budget summits with him and we really made the first big steps on balancing the budget. I saw him take on the right wing of his own party to do that and going back on his tax pledge, his "no new taxes" pledge. To me that was the definition of leadership, taking on your own side, not the other side. That's tough.

I had a great relationship with Ronald Reagan. I thought he was—I disagreed with most of what he wanted to do and thought he was wrong on lots of his major policies, and I fought against him, but you had to like this man; you could not dislike Ronald Reagan.

So it goes to the question of what are we trying to do here? What is it about? Why am I here? Why is that person here? I believed, in George W.'s case as well as the others'—that as much as

I disagreed with him, he had the interests of the country at heart. He wanted to make the country succeed; he wanted to make it better. That was his motivation, prime motivation. I respected that and I was glad for that. I wanted to meet him halfway or more and try to make that happen, even though it would be very difficult. There would be lots of holes in the road and lots of disagreements and lots of fighting and quarreling over outcomes. But we were all trying to do the same thing. That's a very important place to start from.

Perry: How about your first meeting with him? Can you describe that? You've spoken about the leadership qualities, personalities of previous Presidents, including his father. What did you think about him and his personality and his style?

Gephardt: He was different, even from his father, even though he had a father who was President. I guess I'd say he was more Texas and less Connecticut, less Maine. [*laughter*] Kind of self-assured to a greater extent than his father, but very affable and personal and nice. He liked to tell stories and laugh. We always had an immediate bond over baseball; he was a big baseball person. He owned part of the Rangers or owned the Rangers and I'm a huge Cardinals fan and have been my whole life. So that was an easy entry to any meeting with him, to talk about baseball. He was current on what was going on and I'm always current on what is going on, including last night when the Cardinals beat the Cubs.

Riley: No wonder you're so happy. [*laughter*]

Gephardt: Which was totally unexpected. So we'd banter back and forth about things like that. We had a good relationship from the beginning, from those early meetings. Again, I think he began—he didn't know me at all well and I didn't really know him—but I think he picked up and I picked up that we both wanted the country to advance and do the right things.

Riley: How hard is it with your folks in Congress? You explained that you have a sense of obligation to the country to try to get past Florida and to deal with the President who is duly elected. I get the sense maybe not all of your membership feels exactly the same way. I'm wondering if you're getting much pushback from them or whether they're pretty much falling into line with you in terms of trying to negotiate through these early days with this President?

Gephardt: Well, it was varied, as it always is. You had two hundred or so Members, however many we had at the time. Everybody's different. That's the thing I was impressed with every day: that everybody in their caucuses, the individual human beings, had different backgrounds, different experiences, and different beliefs. So some of them were angry for a long time and didn't want to deal with him, thought he was illegitimate and shouldn't be there. We ought to fight him at every corner and try to stop him from doing anything he wants to do. Others were more understanding and ready to cooperate.

Being from Texas, part of what goes on in politics in the House is people have—even the different parties have—some affinity to people from their neighborhood. I think our southern Members—although we don't have many anymore, but we did at the time, we still had some—they were more amenable to his views and his conservative policies than some from the Northeast or the West Coast. Some in the Black Caucus, the Hispanic Caucus—this was interesting. The Hispanic Caucus members were more copacetic with him because he came from

a state that had lots of illegal and legal immigration, especially from Mexico. So they had more respect for his views and his willingness to take those issues on.

Riley: He had a pretty good relationship with them.

Gephardt: He did. You have to if you're from a state like Texas. You see it through a different lens because of your experience. You realize that immigration reform is probably a smart idea. He did. A lot in his party did not, and fought him tooth and toenail over that. So that was an interesting place where a lot of Democrats could see eye to eye with him.

But on most things, the tax cutting and some of his other major policies, they were really angry at him and didn't want to deal with him and wanted to defeat his policies if at all possible.

Perry: I was going to say—because we see this, of course, then when President [Barack] Obama comes in, although he comes in fair and square in the electoral process, we know the other side—there is some view that the other side views him as illegitimate for a host of reasons. Was this the first time that you had experienced in your long career in Congress that feeling of illegitimacy on the part of the President, in part because of the 2000 election? Do you see partisanship growing sharper, the elbows growing sharper, in this period? Had you seen that happening before 2000?

Gephardt: Yes, I had seen it happening before. Often when people bring this up, and they bring it up a lot now, saying, "Gee, aren't things more polarized and difficult now?" Obviously they are. But I try to back people's expectations up a little bit. Politics is a substitute for violence. Don't forget that. And it really is true. These are heartfelt issues that people care deeply and emotionally about. If we didn't have this process, there would be violence. We've had examples of violence throughout our history and you see it every day in the world where politics fails. So that is where I start the discussion.

I also say that in our past, in our history, there have been lots of examples of polarization and almost—by what I call near violence, where people are attacking people's character, making harsh accusations about them as human beings, all the things you would do right before you shoot somebody. So this is not a new phenomenon is what I try to say to people. But to go directly to your question, in my career I'd never seen a President come in with real questions on my side about whether or not he really won the election.

I don't remember all of my history, but I don't think there have been many instances where somebody lost the popular vote and became President. So that was a huge impediment for many of my Members to accept this President and to want to deal with him in any way. They just thought it was stolen. It was also—I guess I would go back to [Newton] Gingrich coming in and maybe Lee Atwater before him with George H. W. Bush as bringing in a lot of confrontative politics, the politics of character destruction as a method to gain power.

Just to take you back to the Gingrich period. When he came here to the Congress—and I should add to you that I see him in a much better light now because of what is going on now. [*laughing*] There is near violence and then there is near violence and then there is way up toward violence. You know, in his first years in Congress Newt spent much of his time doing ethics charges against Democratic Members, starting with Charlie Diggs [Jr.]. You won't remember this, but

his first big speech on the floor was to say that Diggs, who had allegedly taken money out of his office account, which was the charge, should be expelled from the Congress. The punishment we were giving him wasn't enough; we needed to kick him out.

Then he started on the Jim Wright [Jr.] case. And he once told me it was like writing a PhD thesis, that he spent most of every day and night building the case to take out Jim Wright for selling books to some of his supporters. Anyway, pretty tame stuff. So Jim Wright resigned under an ethics cloud. Right after that, Dave Bonior, who was our Whip, was right behind me in the hierarchy, started filing ethics complaints against Newt for doing the same thing, selling books to supporters.

Newt called me in the office one day and said, "What Bonior is doing is ridiculous and you know it, and you have to stop him right now." I said, "Newt, isn't there something familiar in this?" [*laughter*] I said, "Even if I wanted to stop it, I can't. I don't control him. I didn't elect him. He is here as a free agent. He is elected to the leadership just like I am. If I told him to stop, he wouldn't stop." Newt turned to me and said, "You're going to be sorry."

Thereafter ethics complaints were filed against every one of our leadership and lots of other Members. Then our people started filing. I began to think that all we were going to do here is do ethics of each other and never get to the people's business.

Then you get to the George W. Bush election and you can go back and forth about who did what in the election and the Gore campaign. With that as a backdrop, now you're into a hotly contested election where the President that is actually deemed elected didn't get the popular vote. So you can see that we're into a cycle of—what I call a cycle of violence, if you will, or near violence. And cycles of violence only end when everybody is dead.

Perry: Mutually assured destruction that actually leads to—

Gephardt: You kill my kids, I'm going to kill your kids. It's really simple the way it works. So that's where you often can get in politics. That's where we've been ever since. I'm not blaming it all on Newt Gingrich, it just is the nature of the beast. It's king of the hill. It's a fight for the power to make decisions on behalf of 320 million Americans. It's always going to be that; it was that then.

Perry: On the legitimacy issue, before we jump into the specific issues that you will then have to deal with, with some of your caucus who believe that this President is illegitimate, is that in the arguments surrounding the Florida recount, you and others would say, if we don't let this process go to the end, somebody is going to file a FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] request and they're going to come in and if the counting is stopped, somebody is going to count. They're going to figure out who really won Florida.

As we know, and the Bush people will say to this day, ultimately it wasn't a professor who filed the FOIA request, but it was what, the *Miami Herald* or other journalistic outlets that did do this count and came up with Bush leading by 300-some-odd votes. Did that mollify anybody? First of all, those stories, and did people on your side believe that that recount was correct?

Gephardt: I don't clearly remember, but what became more important to people was the popular vote in the country. So it was "whatever." Hanging chads to the contrary notwithstanding, the fact remained that he didn't have the popular vote. Then it became kind of a boiling anger about the electoral college system, which since then some have tried to change and are working on changing as we speak. This is still going on. So that became more of a focus. But it didn't lessen—Whatever what was actually the case, he still didn't get the popular vote in the country, and that really bothered people.

Riley: Let's turn to—

Gephardt: Americans have a real sense of fairness about elections. You saw that in [Donald J.] Trump saying the thing is rigged and the delegate mess and then Bernie [Sanders] saying the same thing. It's the same concept: if you get the most votes, you win. That was violated.

Perry: That is so rooted. I sometimes do teacher institutes with teachers in early childhood education. So there will be first- and second-grade teachers, and when I say, "How would you like to teach the Bill of Rights?" they say, "Oh, we almost don't have to teach that because these children come to school with the sense of what is due process." They wouldn't call it that, but what is fair. That's not fair and free speech. They all think they have the right to say what they want to say and what is fair and not fair.

Gephardt: I'm glad to hear that.

Perry: I am too; it's fundamental.

Gephardt: It has kind of gotten through; it continues to get through.

Riley: You're working on a couple of things that happened before 9/11. You're working with this President on a major tax policy change in 2001. I wonder if you have any reflections on that process, how it went, your consultation. And then No Child Left Behind doesn't get enacted until after 9/11, but a lot of the legwork gets done there. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about—We've focused so far on the tensions and the division, but for better or worse you're getting some things accomplished in that early period on some major things. We'd like to hear from you about your working relationship with the White House and whether you were happy with these developments or unhappy with them.

Gephardt: On taxes, not so good. On No Child Left Behind, much better, and I'll tell you why.

Riley: Good.

Gephardt: On taxes you have to remember—If you look back at the recent history before then, we had been through, from a Democratic standpoint, some real demonstrations of what tax policy works and what doesn't work. Our belief is that Republicans are always worried about the supply side, and we also want to worry about the demand side. So we've always been for cutting taxes for the middle class and the poor if they have taxes, and even being willing to somewhat increase taxes on the well-off, including capital gains. They've been the opposite. So we've had this raging argument, and I was very involved with the Reagan administration in the late '80s in tax reform. That was something that you can get bipartisan support for, because you're getting

rid of loopholes and you're lowering the rate for everybody, including the well-off. But you're doing it by taking away special treatments, which is always what happens in a tax system.

No matter what tax you put on, you'll have people show up and say, "Well, that's fine, but I'm doing something that is so valuable to society that I shouldn't have to pay this tax." Then they get a special treatment and then it gets more special treatments, and then it gets to eroding the tax base dramatically.

So we got rid of that in the Reagan period in a bipartisan way. I started with Bill Bradley. We put our first bill in in 1984, finally got it passed. Jim Baker worked with us. It was a totally bipartisan effort, and we thought a major accomplishment. It really helped the economy, and I still think it did. So here we are after all of that. Then the [William J.] Clinton years in which—and this gets into some of the rhetoric in this campaign. So we started with George Bush the first [George H. W. Bush] to get the budget balanced. In that case, we actually raised some taxes as well as cutting major programs, which was very difficult to do. It was done in a bipartisan way.

Then here comes Clinton in '92, and my first words with him after he was elected were, "Congratulations, but you don't have any money." [*laughter*] "So we need to get the budget balanced finally." After the Reagan tax cuts we still had big deficits, even after the first big step we took with George Bush the first.

Clinton obviously understood that, but Newt had told me—After we won the election, he said, "I know you're going to try to deal with the budget and you're going to have to do it on your side alone. We will not give you one vote to raise taxes or to cut spending."

Riley: And he kept his word, didn't he?

Gephardt: He kept his word. The hardest fight I ever had, which reminded me of the LBJ movie, was trying to get the votes to pass that budget.

Riley: In '93.

Gephardt: It was excruciating. We had Members lose the election in '94, lots of them, because of that vote. We raised the gasoline tax for the last time up until and including today, three cents. We raised some other taxes. We cut Social Security; we cut all kinds of things. So having done that and getting not one Republican vote, we made the second big step to balancing the budget. Now Republicans say, "Oh, we balanced the budget with Bill Clinton." Sorry, not true.

Riley: We're happy to give you a microphone.

Gephardt: Not true. But that's OK, that's the way it goes. We felt—And when we're talking to George W. about this big tax cut program he had, you know, we've been through this. We've seen what big tax cutting with Reagan did. We cleaned up the mess. It took us 10 years to get the mess cleaned up, and now here you are wanting to go right back into the same mess. Why would you do this? Can't we learn from anything? Can't we learn from history?

When you do a big tax bill, you're going to put in more tax breaks for various special interests. It's just insane, so we were incensed that he was doing this. We lost the argument. He was the

new President. He could get it done. So there were a lot of hard emotional feelings about it. When you go through—From my standpoint, I felt like the Republicans come in, get the political credit for cutting taxes—especially for the wealthy—then we have to come in as janitors and clean up the mess.

It's OK. I came to public service to do the right thing, but I'm getting tired of this. [*laughter*] I don't want to be a janitor forever. So that was a hard pill to swallow, especially with that history. It was—to us—a very provable set of facts, and that nobody would pay attention was beyond us.

Perry: Were the lessons of the '92 election, with Ross Perot running on a balance-the-budget platform, where he gets 18 to 19 percent of the popular vote, which helps push, don't you think, the country toward that budget in '93 to balance it—Is that lesson then gone as well? That by the time George W. Bush comes in, tax cuts are more important?

Gephardt: The Republican argument has always been—and I love Jack Kemp and I love Art Laffer, but their constant argument—and still to this day—their argument is tax cuts always pay for themselves. There is no impact on the budget. We believed that we had just been through a 15-year demonstration that the opposite is true. Now, that doesn't mean you don't cut taxes, but you have to cut them in the right way and you have to combine it—while you're cutting programs as well—with investments in programs like infrastructure and education that can grow your economy. In the end you have to grow your way out of deficits. You have to do some cutting, you have to do some tax increasing, but you have to grow your way out.

You have to tailor the cuts and the taxes so that you engender economic growth, because that's the engine that brings you out. We thought that he was oblivious to this. How many times does this lesson have to be taught? So that was the angst.

Riley: You said that on education it is a happier—

Gephardt: It was a different story.

Riley: From your perspective—

Gephardt: Prior to him being elected, I think was my timing, I had set up an ad hoc group within my caucus on education. I've always been fascinated with it. I know that it's the key to everything in our society: it's the key to economic growth, it's the key to happier lives, it's the key to saving the environment, blah, blah, blah.

Riley: As professors, we're happy to hear that.

Gephardt: I also say that the greatest assets of the country are our colleges and universities, unparalleled in the history of the world. There is nothing like it anywhere in the world, and it's our greatest strength. That and immigration are our two greatest strengths. Colleges and universities are at the top of the list.

But we have problems in primary, secondary as you know, early childhood. That's where our real problems are. So I had probably 12 sessions with as many as wanted to come, over at the Library of Congress. We brought in the people who had actually been doing things in the field

and had a lot of experience with the federal programs. So we were building more of a consensus, if you will, on what works, what doesn't work. Is Title 1 any good? Early childhood? Reading programs? All the things you would—Kips Kids came in and some of these other early experiments that were going on, charter schools, on and on and on.

There was a pretty high degree—I don't want to overstate it—but we had a great deal of understanding within the caucus that we need to do something about this. There is a big problem. We're not doing well enough. How do these programs need to be changed?

When he came in, he talked about what he had done in Texas, saying that we have to have higher standards and that's what we've done in Texas and that trumps some of the targeted federal programs that we've had like Title 1 and on and on. This is a new approach. We have to have a national set of standards. That made sense to many of us, not that we thought it was the be-all and end-all or was the panacea to the problem, but we're not succeeding here. You have to try something; it's really important.

Then you had [Edward M.] Kennedy and George Miller, George Miller being our kind of education leader in the House, Kennedy in the Senate. George W. Bush and his staff really reached out to them and worked with them, along with the Republican Members, and came to a consensus that this was worth doing. It became a much more consensual, collaborative effort than the tax thing. Therefore, it was successful.

Perry: Only in a—

Gephardt: In a bipartisan way.

Perry: Except on vouchers. That was one stand to take from the Democratic side.

Gephardt: Absolutely. You're always going to have some disagreements, but on the overall picture, there was agreement.

Riley: Any more questions about the period?

Perry: No.

Riley: I don't know whether we have time to deal extensively with your experience on 9/11.

Gephardt: I'll be happy to—

Riley: If you tell us a little bit about what happened as you can on that day and then we'll talk about—

Gephardt: It really, in my view, transformed his Presidency and it transformed the country, and still is transforming the country.

Just to give you the anecdotal history: I'm in the Capitol early on 9/11, early in the morning, 8 o'clock. We had a meeting on the budget. I had my leadership team. We had 20 or 30 people in the room, just like this. TV was on. I'm sitting here looking at them, talking. I can see their eyes

were going to the TV and they weren't listening at all to what anybody was saying. So they said, "Looks like a small plane hit the World Trade Center." Whatever, it's another mess.

Then soon after that the second plane hit and the police, the Capitol Police, came in and said, "We think there is a plane on the way to the Capitol; we have to get you out of here." So they ran—I had Capitol Police with me. They took me down, put me in a car at 100 miles per hour. I had a condo over here near the river. They went there. My wife was there. We watched the TV together. An hour or so later they said, "We're exercising the survival of government plan in the case of a nuclear war or whatever. You have to come to the Capitol right away; they're going to take you and the other three leaders to an undisclosed location in Virginia. You have to leave right now."

Riley: Your wife?

Gephardt: I said goodbye to my wife. She always says she felt like chopped liver: We're going to have an A-bomb here and you're going to be on a mountain somewhere and I'm going to be a piece of toast.

So I went to the Capitol grounds. They had an individual helicopter for each of us, because they didn't know what was going to happen and they wanted to get as many people out as they could. I remember looking down at the Pentagon and seeing it in flames and smoke and thinking, *The Germans and Japanese fought us for five years and if they could have done this, it would have been their fondest wish, and four people did this.* It was a wake-up call of the first order.

So we go out there. Dick Cheney is on the phone with us. He says, "You can't come back until we get all the planes on the ground." They had four planes from Europe they didn't have on the ground yet. They finally got them on the ground. Then we came back, met the Members on the Capitol steps, sang "God Bless America."

The next day, maybe the day after—I think it was the next day, I'm not clear on that, but it was soon thereafter—we met in the White House: the leadership, and the President, the Vice President. Everybody said their piece. When I got a chance to talk, I said something that I felt very strongly. I said, "Mr. President, the most important thing now is that we all trust one another. This is about life and death. Our first responsibility is to keep the people safe. We failed; we all failed and we have to do better. The only way—I know politics intrudes in everything that happens here, as it should, but with this we have to keep politics out. We cannot play politics with this. We have to do whatever we can to do the right things to keep the county safe and to avoid anything like this happening again."

He took me over to the side after the meeting and said, "I really appreciate what you said." We were all deeply moved, as you would expect, by what had happened, in part because—and I gave a speech on the floor a few days later. People were saying this was the FBI's [Federal Bureau of Investigation] fault, this was the CIA's [Central Intelligence Agency] fault, this was the President's fault—this, that, and the other thing. I said, No. It is all of our fault. We are all to blame.

We had Khobar Towers, we had World Trade Center 1993, we had the embassies in Africa. We had the USS *Cole.* What didn't we get about this? We had plenty of warnings. These people

want to do great harm. They're willing to kill themselves to do it, which is a new phenomenon, only seen with the kamikaze pilots in World War II. We didn't get it; we didn't take it seriously. So let's stop blaming one another and let's find the right answers. Let's do the right things together to make sure this never happens again.

So that's what we tried to do, and we pretty much did. The President then had a meeting every Tuesday morning at 7 A.M. in the White House with the four leaders and Vice President Cheney. He'd bring in the head of the CIA or Condoleezza Rice, others who had angles on different issues. We met for an hour, an hour and a half, just on this and what we could all do together to do better, what legislation needed to be passed, what initiatives needed to be taken.

We were worried about a nuclear attack in the United States. We still are. They found a scientist in Pakistan, [Abdul Qadeer] Khan I think, who had been allegedly giving out nuclear secrets to terrorists or whoever. We became very focused on that and any other cases where we thought weapons of mass destruction can wind up in the hands of terrorists. Again, because we felt very deeply we had to avoid—as I said at a number of meetings, "We cannot have a nuclear device in the United States; it can't happen." We spent a lot of time on all of that, going to Afghanistan and so on and so forth.

That was all September to January. About January, the President in these meetings started to talk about Iraq. My immediate reaction was yes, I understand what you're saying. I was also aware that our Air Force and our Armed Forces had been maintaining the no-fly zone in Iraq 10 years after the first Persian Gulf war and that that was expensive and we were losing lives and that was a big problem. But I said to the President in one of the meetings, "If this is just about getting rid of Saddam Hussein, I am not for it. There are a lot of bad guys out there and we can't go kill all of them; it's impractical."

"But," I said, "if it is about him having weapons of mass destruction that could end up in the hands of terrorists, then I am willing to listen and get serious." He said, "Figure it out for yourself. Don't take our word for it, go out to the CIA, talk to them, talk to anybody you want to talk to in the military. Make up your own mind."

I went out to the CIA. I think I went three times at least and talked to everybody there, alone. I said to George Tenet, "This is not about Saddam Hussein for me. This is not about trying to go change the Middle East forever," which some of the neocons [neoconservatives] thought this should be about. Even though that's understandable to try to do, I said, "For me it boils down to one simple fact: Does he have weapons of mass destruction, especially components of nuclear weapons, or does he not? Do we worry that some components could wind up in the hands of terrorists?" Tenet and everybody else I talked to—They said the other world intelligence services agreed that he did. It was a real problem.

So I came back and told the President, "I'll speak for and vote for and cosponsor the resolution." I felt that was the right thing to do, given where we were and what I believed and what I had said since 9/11. You can imagine that this was not a popular decision in my caucus, and we had many raucous, difficult caucuses. In the end, a majority of my Members voted against that resolution, but I voted for it, obviously. It was a very difficult period. Always in the back of my mind I worried that the neocons within the Defense Department, [Paul] Wolfowitz and others, were

maybe sliding over the real facts, but I reassured myself that I was talking to the right people in the intelligence service who were giving me unvarnished, objective facts and that's all I could deal with.

Riley: Sure. There was no information coming to you at that time that might have led you to question whether the people at the Agency were feeling pressured by the administration to cook the books on the evidence?

Gephardt: I did not get that feeling. Maybe they did; I don't know. I've known George Tenet a long time. He was in the Senate committee. I believed him; I trusted him. I said to him, "George, I have to answer to 600,000 people out in Missouri. You don't. If I put my word behind this, then it is what I believe to be right, so I want you to tell me your unvarnished opinion. Don't F around with me here; this is big stuff."

Perry: When you would talk to your caucus about this and express your fears about what could happen based on the intelligence that you had—First of all, were you able to share that with the caucus?

Gephardt: Sure.

Perry: What was their best argument against your argument?

Gephardt: What you would expect? Some of them brought up the fact that if you go in there, Colin Powell's "Pottery Barn rule" applies—If you break it, you own it—and we'll never get out of there. One of the lines—People would ask me, "How long do you think we're going to be in Iraq?" I said, "Well, we've been in Japan and Germany for 70 years, so you tell me how long we're going to be in Iraq."

I knew what I was doing. I knew that I was also committing young men and women to an enterprise that would kill a lot of them and gravely injure many more, which has obviously been the case. I must tell you, as a sidenote, since all of this, I regret my vote. Not that I would have—Knowing what I knew then, I wouldn't have had a different vote, but you never get the ability to go forward and then look back. You have to deal with what you have. But if I knew then what I know now, I would have voted no; I would not have been for this. But you never have that ability and you never have that—But every time I read another story about how messed up Iraq is and how we did such a big favor to Iran and we've really in a way opened a Pandora's box in the Middle East—Shi'a, Sunni, all the things you know—you can argue it from now until Sunday.

Others would say, "Well, we've started the process of modernization of government in the Middle East and it is going to take 50 years, whatever. It had to start somewhere. We couldn't have this awful ferment of people living in horrible dictatorships forever and wanting to lash out." You can go through all the arguments and counterarguments. Also in my mind, you always get back to personal anecdotes. In that period when we were deciding this, I was meeting with families of people who were killed on 9/11: husbands, wives, kids would come to my office. It's really tough to look them in the eye and say, "We failed. We failed you. This was our responsibility and we failed and we're going to do better." So that's in your head.

Then on the other side of the coin, now, I see these kids coming back with their legs blown off, their eyes blown out, their arms blown off. We ruined their lives. And then he didn't have weapons of mass destruction. So I really feel guilty, if you will, that I was inadequate. I should have dug harder. Maybe I should have gone to the intelligence services in Europe or wherever, gotten more opinion before I made that decision, but that's water over the dam. That's more than you needed to know.

Riley: No, no.

Gephardt: This event—What I'm trying to say is this event was transformative for George W. Bush and for everybody in the government at that time.

Another thing that I felt very inadequate about was that we didn't know enough about al-Qaeda. We had had all these events go on in the '90s, but we never really investigated what was behind this, what was happening in Saudi Arabia, what was happening in the Middle East, that would cause people to commit this kind of violence with the willingness to die themselves. This was a very new phenomenon that we're still dealing with, obviously, every day. But I felt that we had really failed the people of the United States by not understanding all of it much better than we had.

Riley: There is a point in late 2002, I think, where you write an op-ed for the *New York Times* that is very critical of the administration. What was the genesis of the decision to go public with that criticism, if you remember the circumstances? Yet it was not a signal that you were abandoning the momentum toward war at the time.

Gephardt: I don't remember the verbiage in it. Was this prior to the war being declared?

Riley: It was. I'm sorry, I don't want to spring something on you. I'm trying to find the date of this. Defend the country, not the party. It would have been September of 2002. Let me just pull it out.

Gephardt: Let me go back to that period, because I think I know what I was talking about. I was very worried when we ran up to the actual decision to go to war. What I told the President was, "I'm willing to vote for this if I come to the conclusion that he has weapons of mass destruction." I'll read it. I got very worried that we were doing this alone. I really wanted us to get other countries with us and I wanted a UN [United Nations] resolution. I was very adamant about that and I told the President that a number of times.

I began to have the feeling that he was moving in the direction of doing it even if he couldn't get that, and I thought that was a real mistake. In every case where we succeeded in foreign policy taking on an adversary, we had NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], we had lots of cooperation from other countries, and it was a joint enterprise, as difficult as that is. After Colin Powell had testified and we still weren't getting the UN lined up and Europe was still off the reservation, I called Colin Powell and I said, "Colin, I sure hope we aren't going to do this if we don't have the UN with us."

I'm not sure that he said it in this way, but he basically said yes, that would be a bad mistake. He agreed with me. Now, whether he really did or not, I don't know. Then we went ahead without it

and I was very disappointed in that. But I had voted for the declaration of war. I was on the record. I didn't feel that at that point you could back up and start another process. But that was a big disappointment. I was critical *to* the President and *of* the President for doing that.

Riley: Let me ask a more general question. That is, at some point, in your public remarks after 9/11, you say that on this issue there is no daylight between me and the White House. At some point daylight begins to appear between you and the White House. I'm wondering, from your perspective, how quickly did that process happen? There is a piece in the briefing book where Karl Rove is picking at you because you had requested a change in tax policy, some emergency tax policies that were—He suggested that that was a sign that the Democrats were no longer being supportive of the President. Frankly that's a little bit of an excessive interpretation, but I'm curious about your own.

Gephardt: Again, we're always in disagreement on a whole range of things. I don't think I ever said I'm going to be for however they prosecute this war, however inappropriately run. So there will always be new disagreements as you go along on the war, on policies surrounding that, and obviously on other policies. But on the basic decision, I made it the way I told you, so to me there was no daylight. Maybe what I was trying to say is that on the security issues we have to work together; we have to trust one another. We have to come to an agreement on what to do.

Riley: OK.

Gephardt: Again, the worry being that if we mess this up—We cannot do that again. You can mess it up once and not be at all happy about it, but if you mess it up twice, there is no coming back, there is no excuse.

Riley: Got you. In the aftermath of 9/11 there are a lot of developments in the security and intelligence arena that the Vice President sort of lumped under the category of "the dark side."

Gephardt: Yes.

Riley: I'm wondering if you could tell us about the level of consultation that you were getting on these issues, like detentions and black sites and things of that nature. Did you feel that you were getting the information that you needed? I'm assuming that you were within the group of people who would have been routinely in consultation with the White House on these types of matters.

Gephardt: Largely we did. I can't sit here and tell you that we found out about everything in real time that we should have. But again I have to take you back to where we were, which was we failed. There are many people out there who really want to come and inflict incredible damage on the American people. Our first duty is to keep them safe. So we have to rethink the way we prosecute all of this. It is obviously still going on with [Edward Snowden] stuff and on and on.

Riley: Sure.

Gephardt: It is not easy to come to conclusions on what is appropriate and what isn't. I remember when I was in the police headquarters after 9/11, waiting to get the helicopter, Senator [Patrick] Leahy was in there. We commiserated and he said to me something I've never

forgotten. He said, "The balance between freedom and security is forever changed." He was right. I knew that. I mean, I knew that we were going to have to come down more on the side of security and less on the side of freedom; that's the underlying assumption. If someone is coming in this room with a gun to kill you, you'd better do something or you're going to be killed.

Riley: As a citizen, I certainly want to be protected. We live, by airline standards, 10 minutes away, basically, from where the plane that went into the Pentagon was. Charlottesville is not that far away. The question was posed mostly because we're trying to get a sense of clarity about the inclusiveness of Members of Congress, or at least the leadership, in some of these very hard decisions that had to be taken.

Gephardt: It was largely inclusive. It wasn't we're going off and waterboarding people and not letting you know what we're doing. Now, you can argue with our joint decision.

Riley: Sure, but the consultation was made?

Gephardt: It was adequate.

Riley: It was adequate, OK.

Gephardt: Cheney was in every one of these Tuesday-morning meetings and he was very clear. People talk about Cheney and being dark and ridiculous and so on, and there is some truth to that. I think he gets carried away. I've known him—I knew him from early days in the House, so I know him well. I really believe—He did turn way dark, but you have to, again, remember where we were.

Riley: Exactly.

Gephardt: I think in his own mind he thought that he was in this job at a time of great danger to the country. His obsession—I know the phrase he uses about nuclear devices in the United States—I think it's something like you can only be wrong once. I think he took it on as his own personal responsibility to see that everything humanly possible could be done to prevent a nuclear device in the United States. I understand it. I think he sometimes went too far in some of the things he wanted to do and did, but I understand the motivation. It's not like he wants to rip up the Constitution and make us all subject to security procedures. Again, this is a transformative event. It's more than Pearl Harbor. It's more than anything I think has ever been experienced in American history.

Riley: We agree with you, and that's why we appreciate your being willing to talk about this. Do you recall any circumstances where you felt that you had gotten blindsided on something? When you read a report in the *New York Times* and said, "Damn it, I was just at the White House two days ago and this was on the table and I wasn't getting—I'm not getting what I needed."

Gephardt: There may have been some cases. I just don't remember. But largely there weren't. I remember the President—This was just at the start of drones—at one meeting he had CIA bring in a video screen and they had a picture of some alleged terrorists in Afghanistan I'm sure it was, and the drone shooting a rocket in and blowing up the car and the terrorists. The video was my

first introduction to that whole technology, which is still going on today. As of two days ago, we supposedly killed some big guy in Afghanistan.

So there was pretty free-flowing information about what they were doing.

Riley: I wonder if I can get you to reflect more generally on the role of Congress in this new—in this transformed—age. Are the constitutional provisions sufficient for what we're confronting? Are the separated institutions properly constructed to allow us to deal with this sort of threat to our existence?

Gephardt: Nothing's perfect, but it's pretty good. If you didn't have a Congress, if all the decisions were made with one person in the room, you'd have a lot different situation. We have committees that call these people up and ask them all the questions they want to ask. We have Intelligence Committees that can be fully briefed on all of the things that the security services are doing. The leadership is fully briefed. It's a pretty good check and balance. Is it perfect? No, nothing is. But it's pretty good. I'd give it a B+.

Riley: I don't know if you're a tough grader or not. [*laughter*]

Perry: Grade inflation happens. Can you back us up to 9/12/01, when you went down to the White House? At the beginning of our conversation today, you talked about President George W. Bush's personality and style when you first met him as he came into office. Obviously everything is transformed as of 9/11. On that very day of 9/12, what did you see in him? Did you see leadership? Did you see a different person? Did you see a different personality? Then could you take us over the next two or three years?

Gephardt: Yes. He reacted as you would expect him to react, which was as we were all reacting, which was, we failed; we have to do better. This is not the right word, but he was grave; he was subdued but resolved. That is, "OK, this is where we are. My job as President is to deal with it as best I can." He really appreciated my statement that we have to trust one another. Politics isn't everything; on this we have to push politics out and just do what's right. That is totally the way he felt. He was totally wanting that to happen.

The weight of it was on him—as it was on all of us, but even more on him. There was this banter about he was in a plane and he couldn't come back, that he didn't know what he was doing, so I'm sure he was concerned about that. And as we all were, he was highly motivated to never let anything like this happen again. To me it became kind of the organizing rationale for the rest of his Presidency. There were other things that came up, especially in the second term, but this was always front and center. So he was appropriately and rightly grave, serious, resolved to do the best job he possibly could. I think he did; that's what he did.

Perry: I was going to ask a follow-up on Iraq. You spoke so eloquently and poignantly about making that decision and believing that there were weapons of mass destruction there. When they weren't found—even putting that aside—did you begin to have second thoughts at the time about the decisions that the administration was making, once Saddam Hussein was taken out of power?

Gephardt: You remember, if you remember the history, I forget the name of the diplomat we put in charge.

Perry: Paul Bremer?

Gephardt: Bremer. My reaction was like a lot of people's. He seemed to be making questionable calls and throwing the Ba'ath party out entirely and really acting like Douglas MacArthur in Japan. Every country is different and that certainly is a different country, with all the sectarian rivalries and tribes and things that have gone on there. So I was worried that we were not doing this as well as it could be done.

Having said that, I knew from the beginning—As I said, we had been in Germany for 70 years—that in the end this is nation building. One of the things I used to say is we can't kill all of them. You'll never kill all the terrorists. You have to figure out how to change the underlying causes, which is nation building. That's really hard to do. In this part of the world it is even harder to do. And query the appetite of the American people to do this, even in the name of national security. It's a really tough leadership proposition to lead this country in the face of that threat. But the answers to it are really complicated, expensive, and difficult, and we're still grappling with it and we will be grappling with it for a long time.

We are going to make good decisions and then we are going to make bad decisions. It's a nagging crisis that's going to keep going and going. Unfortunately, there's no happy ending to this story. There's no meeting on the battleship *Missouri* deck to accept the surrender of ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] and al-Qaeda and say that it's all over and now we can all live happily ever after. It's a really tough, dangerous, complicated situation. Leadership here has to keep the American people—to the extent you can—up for all the things that have to be done, which are expensive in terms of lives and money.

The backdrop of that—If we can't keep our economy strong, we won't be able to do anything. People will—As you can see, they're still freaked out about the recession and very unhappy with what leadership has produced. That's what you're living through right now.

Riley: Given the centrality of the WMD [weapons of mass destruction] issue for your own decision about going into Iraq, where do you think the failure was on that issue? How was it having relied on the intelligence services that was so wrong?

Gephardt: This is an uninformed guess, but from what I've read, I've come to the conclusion, OK, and I may well be wrong—that it in large part was caused by Saddam Hussein's great desire to convince—especially his rivals in the region—that he had weapons of mass destruction. At the time we were leading up to war, I could never understand why he just didn't give them up, which is what Bush kept saying for him to do to get out of the bull's-eye. I conclude he was just a crazy man. He was a despot. He was a vicious, violent despot. So if you put yourself in his shoes and you're as crazy as he was, that's probably what you'd do. You'd try to convince everybody in the region that you were the strong man and you'd better not mess with me because I'll blow you up with an A-bomb.

Riley: Got you.

Gephardt: Now, you can argue that the intelligence services should have seen through that, but that's how it happened going out west.

Riley: Much of what you said about the UN and about WMD in my mind echoes very closely what Tony Blair was telling the administration.

Gephardt: Yes.

Riley: Did you have communications with Blair, or would that have been considered an out-of-channel—?

Gephardt: I don't think I did in any definite way. I was certainly agreeing with him in reading what he was saying and I may have mentioned it to Colin Powell, saying, "We just can't do this unless we get the UN. Tony Blair and others are saying it, so surely we're going to do this." I think Powell said to me, "It would be a grave mistake." He really felt that way as well. In a way it's interesting. That reassured me at the time. I thought, *Well, if Colin Powell believes this as strongly as I do, then Tony Blair—maybe he's going to convince the President.* That didn't happen.

Riley: We have just a couple of more minutes. Israel. Materials in the book reveal you to be a very strong advocate for Israel. How did that factor into your relationship with the administration? On some occasions you were critical of the President on Israel.

Gephardt: Right after his election, I think, I made a trip to Israel and the region. I even went and met with [Yasser] Arafat and other leaders in the region. Bashar [al-] Assad was also on that trip.

Riley: We want to hear about that.

Gephardt: Interesting sidenote. He was in a castle that was high on a hill overlooking Damascus. I remember our Ambassador—We were walking up this long walkway; it was a football field long and it was all uphill. He said he built it up there so that any visitor—including, obviously, constituents—would have to feel like they were ascending to heaven. [*laughter*]

Riley: And be exhausted.

Gephardt: So I got up there and we had a contentious meeting. He is really a—I think he's in a job that he never really wanted and he's sorry he is in. He's a London ophthalmologist who had to do this because his brother, who was a playboy, got killed in a sports car accident. He was standing at the window showing me different parts of Damascus. It was way down, like miles down, this hill. I thought to myself, *I wonder if he has ever been down there, ever met anybody he is supposed to be the leader of?*

This was also a meeting—Prior, we did a meeting with King Hussein bin Talal, the old King, but his son met Newt and me and took us in his car from his office to his father's house, from which you could see Israel. I remember when we were in the office he said "Look, I've got a car out here. Why don't you guys jump in with me and we'll ditch the security and I'll drive you to my dad's house?"

So Newt is in the front seat; I'm in the back seat; here is the King to be. He's driving through the main drag in the main town. I saw people waving to him and they were coming up and saying, "King, it's so good to see you; I saw you last Thursday at the bazaar." My test for a politician is always how do you do in a parade? People are not shy about telling you what they think. When I made votes that people really hated, like the tax increase, people were screaming at me. Fourth of July parade—"You idiot, you son of a bitch." So I saw this and I thought, *Hey, this guy is in touch with his constituents; he's a politician; he's really doing this.* But Assad would never—[*laughter*] still to this day he is only killing people, not talking to them. Where were we?

Perry: Israel.

Riley: You were making a trip to the region soon after—

Gephardt: I went to Israel and we had a great ambassador there who may have been a holdover. It was right after the election. I thought he was probably a holdover from the Clinton administration; I'm trying to remember his name. He's still around town and he's an expert. [Ed. note: Martin Indyk]

Anyway, we talked to the Palestinian Authority and we talked to the Israelis. We did a very intensive tour of the area. This was the time—Two things before this: one was, this was right after Clinton had made this big effort—

Riley: Right.

Gephardt: —at the end of his administration to get peace talks going—to get peace, and almost got it done. In my view he waited too long, but that's another story. In any event, they were starting to bomb school buses, as I remember. They took us to a site where a school bus had been blown up and kids had been killed. So I said to our Ambassador, "This is getting out of hand again; this is déjà vu all over again. Shouldn't the President send somebody over here to try to reignite the peace process?" Because much progress was made and there was an offer on the table from the Israelis that was done by the then Prime Minister whose name I'm forgetting. He had been Defense Minister and then he was Prime Minister. I'd been there during their election.

Riley: [Shimon] Peres?

Perry: [Ariel] Sharon?

Gephardt: No, I'll think of it. [Ed. note: Ehud Barak?] So I said to the Ambassador, "Don't you think we ought to send somebody over here to restart this thing?" He said, "Absolutely, this is a disaster; we've got to get going here." He said, "If you would go back and tell the President that, I'd really appreciate it, because maybe he would listen."

I went back, had a one-on-one meeting in the White House with new President Bush and I told him what I'd seen. I said, "This is not my place to say this, but I think you would really do yourself good and all of us good if you would just tap Bill Clinton to go back over there and not leave until he gets this done. He'll do it; I know he'll do it. Maybe he'll fail, but you'll get caught trying." He just said, "Yes, thanks, that's good advice." Nothing ever happened.

That made me critical of his unwillingness to do what I just thought was a good time and a good situation in which to try and reignite that. I always thought that Presidents should use former Presidents in finite, tough deals that have to be done. Not that they go off and do whatever they want to do; they have to work for whoever is President. If they don't want to do that, they shouldn't do it. But I've never understood why we don't use former Presidents, who have this wealth of experience and knowledge and standing and could really do some things.

Perry: Eventually they do get around to that with the tsunami and—

Gephardt: Yes, but it's always—

Perry: It's more humanitarian rather than—

Gephardt: It's not these tough—

Perry: Negotiations.

Gephardt: Diplomatic—

Perry: Yes.

Gephardt: High-profile, difficult situations. If they fail, they fail, but if they succeed it's a very good thing. Then whoever is President gets great credit, especially if you're a Republican sending a Democrat or vice versa, for trying to do the right thing for the country. What's wrong with that?

Perry: Do you think it was still too close to the Clinton Presidency, plus the issue of having defeated his dad and then the contested election in 2000? They were probably still too close.

Riley: But they didn't send anybody. It's not just they didn't send Clinton, but there was a conscious—

Gephardt: They just—It's not going to happen, so let's just forget it, put it on the side track and ignore it.

Riley: We haven't interviewed Colin Powell, but my suspicion is that he may very well have been pushing for the same thing.

Gephardt: Could be. What we've learned is—and I still believe this and I give John Kerry tremendous credit for what he did with Iran. I wrote him—I hope he got it—a long, laudatory email to his—I hope his—private account, and said this was the tour de force of American diplomacy in my time; this was awesome, because it was as hard as anything has ever been. That's what Middle East peace is. If it were easy, we would have done it a long time ago.

Harry Truman, who is my hero, used to say leadership is getting people to do things they *really* don't want to do. That's what that is.

Riley: Congressman, we've reached our appointed hour. You have one more question?

Perry: Can I ask one more question?

Gephardt: Sure.

Perry: As you geared up for your Presidential run for 2004, what was that like, as you had to pivot a little bit from the post-9/11 unity, reaching out, hand-to-hand with the President, and then turn more toward a critical role?

Gephardt: There were a lot of reasons that went into my decision to run. You may remember I ran in ’88, so I’d been through this; I knew what it was. I had tried four times to win the House back after we lost it in ’94 and had failed—came close, but failed. I was at a stage in my life where, because of my age and because of my family, I knew that I wanted to either go up or out. I wanted to end my career. Because I had run before, I thought I knew what it takes to run and where I had made mistakes in the first run and things that I could overcome, like fund-raising, which still was a big hurdle.

So I decided—and I didn’t agree with 90 percent of Bush’s policies outside of this 9/11 security thing. As you know, in Presidential elections most of the issues are domestic, not foreign. So I thought I had a good case to make, a good argument to make against him being reelected. So I made the decision to run, and it is what it is. I never have regretted it and I never look back. I’m a fortunate person. I learned so much from my whole career. I’m lucky that I still have my health and I can do things in the private sector and try to advance things that I care about a lot in a different way. I felt this was the right thing to do, so I did it.

I also knew from my experience that having a chance in Iowa was going to be critical. I still had personal relationships. I had spent in ’87 and ’88—starting really in ’86—probably 380 days on the ground in Iowa. I had been in every county many times. I knew lots and lots of people who were still calling me all through those years. So I thought that set of personal relationships was important in a grassroots campaign, which is the way I did it in ’88, when I won Iowa. All of that played into it.

I also knew that having been cosponsor of the war resolution would not go down well with many of the left, in Iowa especially. As it turned out, that was fatal. Howard Dean ran ads with me in the Rose Garden with George Bush and that was fatal. But that’s OK; that’s the way it goes.

Perry: That is probably an appropriate note to end on for the George W. Bush Oral History, your being in the Rose Garden with him.

Gephardt: You bet. You don’t pick your time to serve. So I served during that period and I’m proud of what we did. I have regrets, as I told you about much of it, but you do the best you can; that’s all you can do.

Riley: We appreciate your service.

Perry: We do, your long service.

Gephardt: As I always say, it’s a great country. I sometimes think we get too pessimistic about the country; we’re too negative. All the news is negative and it really bothers me. I’ve even

chided some of the networks; they're trying to do a little more. CNN [Cable News Network] has this "heroes" thing they do, but I just think that the information flow is so negative to people. I'm amazed that Americans are as optimistic as they are or that they even want to be involved in the political process. It's amazing. But it really is a great country. The greatest benefit I had from public service was just meeting and getting to know and listening to so many people across the country. I really feel like I have a sense of the people and their quality. It's an amazing country because of that.

Riley: We feel that we have terrific jobs because we get the opportunity to talk to people like you and hear both about your experiences—

Gephardt: I'm glad you're doing it. I'm a big believer in history. I think it's critically important. I worry that we don't deal with it as much as we should. One of the ways—maybe this will be fodder, content for some movies, streaming, and other things. I think that's the way people learn history today. The LBJ show I thought was fantastic; I loved every minute of it. Of course, I'm crazy. [*laughter*]

Perry: Then I am, too, because I loved it as well. I went to see it on Broadway to begin with, which was really something, but I said to Russell I really loved the dramatization, where you could bring in all of the different characters and particularly the Frank Langella/Richard Russell and LBJ relationship was fascinating.

Gephardt: [Bryan] Cranston is a great actor.

Perry: Isn't he? Didn't he totally channel LBJ? I said to Russell there were times—He didn't have quite the physique, you could tell; he wasn't the imposing figure that LBJ was, but they tried to do that with camera angles—but I said there were times, like the one where he was so upset and he had his head on the pillow and Lady Bird [Claudia Alta Johnson] was there, but the angle—he looked exactly like Lyndon Johnson and of course nailed the accent and the eyes and the facial expression.

Gephardt: And the anger and the cursing.

Perry: He nailed that, for sure. But that's what we do at the Miller Center too. We have all of these, the tapes that were made by Lyndon Johnson—going all the way back to FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt]. We've gone through the LBJ tapes and the [Richard] Nixon tapes and the [John F.] Kennedy tapes—We have colleagues who do that. Then we add the oral history to it. So really for the modern Presidency we feel that we have it covered.

Gephardt: It is really important.

Perry: That gives American people the context that you're talking about to put current times into context, and you're helping us do that.

Gephardt: So I'm a poor kid who got to go to Northwestern on scholarship. I went to the speech school. I had classes in language and thought and group dynamics and all things that really helped me, would help anybody in whatever you want to do. We had a professor—I'll never forget—Dean [Marlin?] and he'd stand there and say the greatest attribute of being human is that

you can bind time, because we can communicate. If we fail to bind time, then we will fail to be human. That's what you're doing, you're binding time. So it's really an important thing.

The worry that I have is that nobody reads anymore, so you have to figure out a way to get it. As Jake [James] Pickle used to say to me on the Ways and Means Committee, "You've got to put the hay down on the ground so the cows can eat it." [*laughter*] So the streaming and the movie—all these things, podcasts, and all the modern ways of communication.

Perry: We're putting these out now with our social media from the Miller Center. We're putting these tweets out that have links to—When the oral histories have been released, we link to the oral histories little pieces that people can read in snips. Then we put the tapes in as well.

Then when things are on, like the LBJ show—or *Confirmation* was another HBO show, about Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill—then we push out the material that we have that relates to that.

Gephardt: That's really great.

Perry: And attempts again to work with teachers and teacher institutes; we've done a lot of those.

Riley: All on a completely nonpartisan basis. Our interest is in the history, the institution, and in American politics.

Gephardt: This is the way you get the content.

Riley: Exactly.

Gephardt: Then once you've got it down in writing, you can get it out and then people can pick it up.

Riley: Exactly.

Perry: So what we'll do with this, then, is when we have a critical mass of these hundred or so interviews that have been released by the interviewees, then we'll work with the Bush Library Foundation and do some rollouts either in Charlottesville, which we'll hope you'll come to, or down in Dallas. Then we put out commemorative books with photographs, and we do scholarly works on it. We try to cover all the bases, to give as many people access to these materials as possible.

Gephardt: That's great. I wish you well, I'm glad you're doing it.

Riley: We appreciate it; you've been very generous with your time and your recollections.

Gephardt: I'll go back in the end here to what I started with, which is colleges and universities are our greatest strength. I really believe that.

Perry: We like to think so.

Gephardt: If we could do as well with K through 12 or pre-K through 12, we'd be better off, but we're trying. It's always a work in progress. But you guys—I have three kids and I took them around to different colleges to look at them, and I was stunned at the excellence of all these places, public and private, small, medium, and big. It is a cornucopia of skill and talent and capacity.

The other thing I always think about is the incredible job our ancestors did in setting this place up.

Perry: I know.

Gephardt: The whole construct was theirs, right? They did read books, they were scholars, and they did study.

Perry: And they knew about that state of nature that you were talking about, with the violence. They were very much a part of that.

Thank you again. And thank you for your service to your country. It's an honor to be with you.

Riley: Thank you so much for your time.

Gephardt: Thank you. If you need anything else, let me know.