GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD GILLESPIE

January 24–25, 2012
Charlottesville, Virginia

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Riley: This is the Ed Gillespie interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. Thanks for coming to Charlottesville.

Gillespie: Thanks for having me. It's good to be back.

Riley: We have spoken before we came on the tape about the ground rules, the main one being confidentiality. There's one administrative chore we have to do as an aid to the transcriber. Rob is going to be keeping a sequence of interventions to aid the transcriber, but there are a lot of male voices around the table. I'm going to ask everybody to make a self-introduction and say just a few words to help the transcriber. I'm Russell Riley, chair of the Oral History Program.

Jones: I'm Chuck Jones, Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin, Madison. I'm still crying about the Rose Bowl.

Perry: I'm Barbara Perry, a Senior Fellow here at the Miller Center Presidential Oral History Program.

Martin: I'm Rob Martin and I'll be taking notes for this session.

Milkis: I'm Sid Milkis. I'm in the Department of Politics and also have an appointment here. I'm head of a program called Democracy and Government Studies.

Nelson: I'm Mike Nelson. I teach Political Science at Rhodes College and have an affiliation with UVA [University of Virginia] as well.

Riley: We always like to get some biography before we get into an administration. In your case, I've talked with everybody at the table and they agree that your formative experiences before you even get to the 2000 election are really important. You had a role in, or a ringside seat to, an awful lot of important history before that election. We don't want to rob too much time from what happens in the 43rd Presidency, but if you could indulge us for an hour or two about some of those things we'd appreciate it.

Gillespie: Certainly, I'd be happy to.

Riley: The first thing is, we're familiar with your book and the interview you did with *Frontline* and we don't want to spend too much time going over territory that has already been plowed, but there was a question about your family background and whether politics was a part of your upbringing. Was there a sense that politics was important, and did your family have a kind of

political disposition as you were growing up?

Gillespie: There was a sense that politics was important. I'm the son of an immigrant. My father came from Donegal in northwest Ireland at the age of nine. There was certainly a real sense of patriotism. He didn't talk about it much, but he was a legitimate World War II hero. He was an infantryman, a sergeant. He earned two Purple Heart medals, a Bronze Star, a Bronze Star with oak leaf cluster, and a Silver Star for his adopted country.

There was a sense of Irishness in our family but there was a strong sense of how fortunate we were to be Americans. Neither of my parents had the benefit of a college education, yet they're two of the smartest people I've ever known. My mother could have taught English here; she was a stickler for grammar.

There was certainly conversation around the table, but the truth is we weren't—my mother was a Democrat, Irish Catholic. I was born a Democrat, as I joke. Although it's not a joke if you're Irish, Catholic, born in New Jersey in 1961, the year John F. Kennedy was sworn in; they stamp it on your birth certificate. My father was a Democrat but he became an Independent during the [Jimmy] Carter years. He was a small-business owner and felt that the President's policies were not good for small-business owners.

So there wasn't political involvement. We didn't have fund-raisers at our house or anything like that. My mother was a trailblazer in her own right. She ran for and was elected to the school board in our township. She was the first woman ever to be elected to that position and that was a source of great pride in our home.

Riley: Was that in the '70s?

Gillespie: Yes, I was about 10, so it was '71 or '72. She became president of the school board and she was on the board for about ten years. But you know, Washington, D.C., it may as well have been Paris, France. That was just not how we grew up. However, my father was an influential person in our small town. He was a grocer, and reminds me of something Robert F. Kennedy said when they asked him how did John Kennedy win the West Virginia primary and how did he win the nomination? He said the other guys were always trying to meet the president of the Chamber of Commerce or the county party chair, the big donor. We would go into a town and say, "Who's the man to see?" In my small town Jack Gillespie was the man to see; he knew everybody. He was tied into the church and from the grocery store, he would talk to people and he knew everybody by name. All that to say that politics wasn't formally part of my growing up. There was a fascination with it. There was a sense of patriotism.

Riley: Do you have siblings?

Gillespie: Five, I'm one of six. I'm the fifth of six children. I grew up in a very tight-knit, classic, Irish Catholic household.

Riley: Did any of the others become politically active as you did?

Gillespie: My brother is political. He's an attorney up in South Jersey with a firm that does a lot of—he' a municipal lawyer, so he's pretty involved. They have strict pay-to-play rules up in

New Jersey so you can't be too politically involved, but he is political. My sister is a volunteer for the county party up in New Jersey. She is a Republican as well. But the others, no, not really.

Riley: What about your choice to go to Catholic University? It's in Washington and a lot of people choose to go to college in Washington because they do have an interest in national politics.

Gillespie: It chose me. I was rejected by Williams College, which is where I had my heart set on going. When I was rejected from there I thought it was the end of my life. I'm not going to be able to go to the college of my choice. One of my teachers, my student council advisor, told me that I ought to think of Catholic University.

I was president of my student council and he felt that I had a penchant for politics. I'm sure all of you who are teachers hear this—if you don't, you should—but he was someone who saw in me something that I didn't even recognize in myself. So I went to Catholic University. I was going to be a journalist so I could cover politics, because I thought that was a way you could get close to it. I really didn't know how you got involved in it.

So that's how I ended up at Catholic University. I'm on the board of trustees there now. It's a wonderful institution. I'm very proud of my Catholic U degree and very committed to the school. I maintain a very strong involvement there.

Nelson: Did you do any internships or any kind of political work?

Gillespie: That's how I got into it. If you're familiar with the grocery business you know that there's a small profit margin in owning a grocery store. We weren't poor, but we weren't wealthy. I went to school on student loans and I also worked three jobs. I was a Senate parking lot attendant; I was a short-order cook at what was then the American Café on Capitol Hill, and I worked in the dining hall. I was in charge of the milk.

The first political job I ever had was parking cars in the Senate parking lot. That parking lot job led to an internship. One of the guys I was parking cars with had an internship with a Congressman by the name of Andy Ireland. He said it was a good office, it's fun, and there's an internship available there; you should apply. I got credits with the politics department at Catholic U. I interned for Andy Ireland, which I thought was kind of kismet given my family background. That was in 1983, which was my senior year.

Andy was a boll weevil Democrat, a [Ronald] Reagan Democrat from the South, Florida. I was comfortable with that because my identity growing up was a Democratic household, so conservative Democrat made sense to me. I was not active in the pro-life community at Catholic U but that was a part of our upbringing as well and something I believe in. He was a pro-life Democrat. He was in favor of the Reagan tax cuts and that kind of thing. My dad, even though he was an Independent, was a Reagan supporter. My mother never crossed the party line. So it was a comfortable fit.

While I was working for him his press secretary quit. He either quit or got fired. I was working for the press secretary; I was his intern. I ended up filling in and being acting press secretary my senior year in college. I actually would go into that office every day. My professors were OK

with that; they thought it was good experience. I was a politics major. I thought I was going to get hired to be the press secretary, and I was disappointed when that didn't happen. I was counting on that. I really was out of luck when graduation came as I didn't have anything else lined up.

So I went back home and worked in my father's bar. My father joked that he lived every Irishman's dream: he had sold his store and he bought a bar.

Jones: Not only Irishmen.

Gillespie: I was thinking about going into the Air Force. I grew up right next to Fort Dix and McGuire Air Force Base, so there were a lot of military and a lot of retirees in our area. But then I got a call from the chief of staff in Andy Ireland's office and she wanted to know if I would be willing to move to Bradenton, Florida, and work in his district office. I said I was, and I left for Florida on August 1st, which was my 21st birthday.

I drove down there and I lived there. I handled Social Security checks and VA [Veterans Administration] checks. I went to the Rotary Club lunches and I would travel with him and be his body guy when he came into the district. He switched parties in 1984 to run as a Republican with Reagan. He just wasn't comfortable running on the ticket with Walter Mondale. He was supportive of Reagan and he decided to announce that he was going to be a Republican and he ran as a Republican.

Jones: He did this before the election?

Gillespie: He did it before the election. He stood for election as a Republican and before any of the primaries in ample time—some people said he should have resigned, as Phil Gramm did. He didn't. He felt that announcing that, it's not like his vote was going to change and he gave the Democratic Party a chance to produce a nominee. There was a spirited contest for the nomination on their side.

I thought about it and I thought, *I'm with him. I think that's right.* I changed my party affiliation then too. To a certain extent he and I personified what was going on at the time. He was a southern conservative Democrat who changed. I was a northeastern ethnic Catholic Democrat who changed. There was a lot of that going on in the Great Lakes area and the Northeast, in particular, for Irish and Italian and German Catholics who had been raised as a Democrat, and in the South for folks who had grown up in a Democratic Party system. So the two of us, to a certain extent, kind of captured what was going on at the time.

Nelson: You say in the book, somewhere along the line, words to the effect that you like reporters but you don't like the media. Did that in any way come out of your experience as a press secretary?

Gillespie: Less as a press secretary, less as a congressional press secretary. It was really more when I had a more national interaction, a national role. The media, the reporters in Bradenton, Florida, and Sarasota and Polk County weren't that bad to deal with, in my estimation working for Congressman Ireland. Later I found that when you're dealing at the national level, you're swimming against the tide if you're a Republican, a conservative Republican press secretary in

particular. But that's the way it is. I'm not bitter about it or anything.

I like reporters and generally got along very well with them. But the media itself has gotten worse. It's much more pronounced now than it was in the '90s when I was really, you know, the Contract with America, then working for Dick Armey as House majority leader and then for Haley Barbour at the RNC [Republican National Committee]. I think it's more pronounced today even than it was then.

Jones: Why did you like reporters?

Gillespie: Well, as I said, I wanted to be one at one point. I liked their interest in the political system and covering politics and I felt, still feel, that the role they play is important in informing the public about what's going on. I don't think they always get it right—I'm sure they think I don't always get it right—but I think that the free media and the free press are a very important part of our process and our system, and a healthy one. They're generally pretty gregarious people. You can have a couple of beers with them.

Jones: So it's partly lifestyle, the nature of what they do?

Gillespie: The nature of what they do, the fact that they're interested in what I'm doing. Right from the start they're asking me questions. That probably sums it up. I think they're generally interesting people, informed people, smart people. They were—this is impressionistic. I think back in the '80s and '90s, back in a little bit of the old days, when the old media certainly was dominant, there was more of a sense that it was as much a trade as a profession. There were fewer graduate degrees and Ivy League degrees. I don't begrudge that. As I said, if I had gotten into Williams I would have gone. But there's a little more pronounced elitist strain in the media today, especially the elite media, that I don't think is healthy. I think that they have a harder time checking their own viewpoints at the door, not just covering events, there is a lot of inflection in there.

Riley: There were a lot of people in the '70s and '80s who moved into journalism, to an interest in journalism, by Watergate and [Bob] Woodward and [Carl] Bernstein.

Gillespie: That was my case.

Riley: So your own sense of politics and your own political universe, [Richard] Nixon was not somebody that you had a particular affinity for?

Gillespie: No. Again, I came of age during Watergate and had a pretty healthy cynicism. I felt like what he had done was wrong, which it was, that it threatened the stability of the country and the faith in the institution of government and the executive branch. That was definitely a factor in my wanting to be a journalist; keep people honest. But also again, as I say, I had a fascination with politics and thought this would be a way to be near politics. I didn't ever actually think I could be in it.

Perry: You said that your father's politics began to shift during the Carter years, but your mother never crossed over from being a Democrat?

Gillespie: No.

Perry: Did they comment on your shift, when you shifted over to the Republican Party?

Gillespie: Not really because as I said, we didn't really talk politics. Issues and that kind of thing, but even then we didn't go into it all that deeply. My father was very hurt by the inflation of the '70s and at one point almost lost the store. My brother, who was then right out of law school, helped him fight to keep the store when it almost went under and he had creditors about to take it and that kind of thing. So he had a very tough time with it.

My mother and father were very proud that I was working for a United States Congressman. After I went to work for Dick Armey in '85, right at the very beginning, somehow we got tickets to one of the inaugural balls for President [George H. W.] Bush. So I guess that was '88; that was a little later, but I remember they just loved being at this inaugural ball. It was such a far cry from Donegal, Ireland, where my father came from, or even Philadelphia. It was just a black-tie-and-boots ball, which was the Texas State Society ball; it wasn't even one of the formal inaugural balls, but the fact that they were there truly was one of the highlights of their lives.

Perry: Did they see your ascent to the White House itself?

Gillespie: No, I don't think so. My father lived to see me become the RNC chairman and he was very proud of that. I made a specific reference to him in my acceptance speech up in New York at the summer meeting. But my mother was very proud of—She saw the Contract with America and they saved all the clips. She's not spinning in her grave that I'm a Republican. I think she felt conflicted about the party. When Andy Ireland changed parties—He didn't coin this phrase, but he said, "I didn't leave the party, the party left me." For my mother in particular, the issue of life was a difficult one for her to reconcile with her allegiance to the Democratic Party.

Milkis: I'm interested to hear a little bit about the 1984 campaign. It's interesting. Ireland switches to the Republican Party. I'm curious about the special challenges that posed for you and whether or not you took any lessons from that that suited you well in the roles you played later.

Gillespie: It was different. There's not a strong union presence in that part of Florida, but your base obviously shifts. Andy had a tenuous relationship with the base anyway because he was a Reagan Democrat and pretty vocal about that, but he was popular for it. Really what happened was a lot of the conservative Democrats, the chamber of commerce Democrats—At that time the state senators and the state representatives were Democrats; they were conservative Democrats too. As you know, those kinds of changes occur first at the national level and kind of work their way down, as we've seen across the South. They weren't ready to make that change yet and when he did, it made it a little harder for them, so it created some strains.

Then you're dealing with a different base. Now, Congressman Ireland had worked it out to where he was going to be unopposed in the Republican primary. You could do that back then, but you can't really do that now, it's a little harder. He had protected his seniority, but he was going from the majority to the minority. That was tricky. All of a sudden you're not in meetings with the people you were in meetings with a month ago, now you're in meetings with different people, although his base was really a congressional district base and he had a lot of Republicans for Ireland. We had a lot of Democrats for Ireland when he switched, so he had his own base.

But you're in a different milieu. He was a little freer to espouse his views about Reagan and tax cuts and national security and things like that.

Nelson: One of the things that runs through your book is value placed on being somebody's guy, and that kind of personal loyalty.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: If your friend in the Senate parking lot had said there's an internship with Chuck Schumer of New York, would you have gone for that or would you have been a different Ed Gillespie than you are now?

Gillespie: That's a really good question. I probably would have. I was pretty conservative in my political view to the extent that it was formed, but that was a formative time for me. It's conceivable because I do feel that loyalty is an important thing, and to a certain extent I had an awe of Members of Congress and Congress, and I still do. I mean, when I would walk into the Capitol, when I had my office in the Capitol, and it would be early in the morning and cold, I would think, *I can't believe I get to walk up these steps and that my office is in the Capitol of the United States of America*. When I would drive through the gates at the White House in the morning and they'd open up and I'd drive in and park next to the West Wing, I would think, *I can't believe this*. The hairs on the back of my neck would stand up.

So it's conceivable to me that that would have been the case. I doubt it though; I think I would have gotten the experience, would have seen how a congressional office works, but I couldn't have seen myself going to work for Chuck Schumer the way I could Andy Ireland, who was very much in sync with how I felt about policies and issues.

Riley: Did that remain true when you moved to work for Dick Armey?

Gillespie: It became deeper. Working for Dick Armey was like going to a tutorial every day. He's a former economics professor, really brilliant, and very thoughtful about legislating. I went to work for him when he was a freshman, his first month in office, February 1 of 1985.

Jones: How did you get selected?

Gillespie: I wanted to be Andy Ireland's press secretary the second time around. He went through a second press secretary and I thought I was then in line to be the press secretary and that I had kind of earned it, and I was passed over for that. I was disappointed as I decided being a press secretary was what I wanted to do.

Jones: You had done a fair amount of press work with the press during the campaign, right?

Gillespie: In the District and on the campaign, but I think he wanted, and understandably so, a more seasoned press secretary. I was 21 years old. He was a more senior Member.

So I wanted to do press. I started quietly talking to friends from softball teams and things like that.

Riley: The true network.

Gillespie: Yes, it is. I interviewed in two or three offices. Interestingly enough, the person who brought me into the fold was in the Texas delegation. I really wanted to work for [David] Mac Sweeney, who had worked for Ronald Reagan in the White House and had gotten elected and was seen as a rising star. But I interviewed with Armey and I got the offer from Armey. I went back to Sweeney's office and said, "I'm going to take the offer unless you're going to hire me, in which case I'll go to work for you." He didn't. Again, it's just one of the lessons I try to impart to my children. If I'd gotten accepted at Williams I'd probably be a lawyer in Boston right now, not that there's anything wrong with that.

Jones: There's probably a lot wrong with it. [*laughter*]

Gillespie: That's the professor on the record, not me. Not that I argue with that. If I hadn't been turned down by Mac Sweeney—you know he lost the next election. He didn't get reelected in his first bid, and Dick Armey went on to be the first Republican majority leader in the House in 40 years. We really hit it off, Armey and I. I loved the staff and the whole ethos. I remember one time there was a bill to subsidize cranberry gleaning. We had an argument that went for probably an hour over whether or not the government should be subsidizing cranberry gleaning. It was fascinating. Back and forth. We came down against the subsidy, which is the right place to be, but nobody else, I promise you, of the 435 Members of the House spent an hour talking about that bill.

I remember my first month in office, there was a vote on the House floor on a bill by Pat Schroeder, it was a whistle-blower protection bill. It was to reward government workers for identifying waste or fraud or abuse. The vote was 415 to 1, and Armey was the 1. I remember getting a call from an AP [Associated Press] reporter, which for a freshman office is out of the ordinary. They wanted to know why Armey voted the way he did. I said I needed to check and I said, "Why are you asking?" He said, "Did you not see the vote?" I hadn't seen the vote; it was only about ten minutes after it had taken place. He said it was 415 to 1. I said, "I'm guessing my boss was the 1." He said yes.

So it was a really interesting office environment, very exciting. It was Reagan's second term. There was a sense of energy and momentum and resurgence and there was a big freshman class, kind of like we've got now. Dick was great to work with. He was very accessible. He slept on his sofa back before that was cool. I don't know if it's cool now, but it was really out of the ordinary then. It was the college professor aspect of it. He was very hardworking. Then he gravitated toward [Newton] Gingrich and [John Vincent] Vin Weber and those guys, he became sort of an intellectual force. We passed the base closing bill in his sophomore term as a Member of the minority, which is pretty remarkable. That was a real media push. I was dealing with the *New York Times* editorial page and the *Washington Post,* and Dan Rather came in and did an interview. I'm working for a second-term Member of the minority.

Nelson: You're 23 years old?

Gillespie: I'm 23 years old. He ran for Chairman of the House Republican Conference and challenged the sitting conference chair and won that. Then I became spokesman and policy and

communications director for the House Republicans in the minority. That was in ’93 and that’s when we came up with the Contract with America.

I can’t remember what question started that, but all that to say the experience working for Dick Armey was really informative. Oh, and it deepened my free market principles—my instincts were all there but it gave me a deeper intellectual underpinning for it.

Nelson: During your time in Armey’s office, George H. W. Bush was Vice President. They just called him George Bush back then.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Clearly he was gearing up to run for President. His son George W. was involved in some ways in that campaign. What kind of Texas connection is there between Armey and the Bushes?

Gillespie: None, there really wasn’t. Vice President Bush did an event for Armey in ’84, but they were from completely different orbits. There really wasn’t much of a connection, to be honest with you.

Nelson: So when the elder Bush was running for President, it’s not awkward that a Congressman, a prominent Republican Congressman from Texas, is not supporting him or supporting him—Armey had to make a decision about how to relate to that.

Gillespie: Armey supported him.

Nelson: Through the nomination?

Gillespie: Yes, I’m pretty sure he did. I’m trying to remember in ’88 who challenged—

Nelson: It was [Robert] Dole, [Jack] Kemp, Pierre DuPont.

Gillespie: Yes, right, whom I was enamored by. I thought Pete DuPont was actually the most exciting of our candidates. He was talking about Social Security reform back then.

Milkis: Somebody like Kemp must have been—

Gillespie: Armey was close to Kemp. But I don’t think he got involved in the primary. It may have been hard for him because he was close to Kemp, but at the same time George Bush was a Texan and the Texas delegation was strongly behind him, I’m sure.

Nelson: So it clearly wasn’t a big deal.

Gillespie: No. It’s not like they were trying to get Armey’s endorsement or anything. At that time he was a second-term Member, so his endorsement wouldn’t have mattered much.

Nelson: Did you meet George W. at any point while you were with Armey?

Gillespie: No, I met [J. Danforth] Quayle. Armey became the Ranking Member on the Joint

Economic Committee and I was his staff director. That was in'88. I worked a little bit with some of the folks in the White House, providing economic data to make the case for the President's agenda. Tony Snow, in particular, and I developed—I had known Tony when he was the editorial page editor at the *Detroit News* and then when he became a speechwriter. He and I had a little bit of a relationship. I would send him reports and studies from the Joint Economic Committee to work into the President's speeches and things like that.

There was a group. Billy Pitts, who was Bob Michel's floor marshal, had put together folks to work with the legislative affairs people at the White House, but I don't recall meeting President Bush until he was former President Bush 41.

Nelson: And you never met the son? You never met George W.?

Gillespie: No, I was pretty far down the food chain for all of that.

Perry: You were mentioning the run-up to the Contract with America, how exciting it was to be in Congressman Armey's office and that you were meeting Newt Gingrich and Vin Weber. Would you talk a little bit about that?

Milkis: Were you actually in the Conservative Opportunity Society? I've always been fascinated by that.

Gillespie: Yes, there was a change in mindset, a different mentality, among the younger Members. The term was "crumbs at the table." You know, we shouldn't accept crumbs at the table in exchange for supporting the majority's bills. We had a little something, we need to present an alternative vision and we need to fight for our principles. I was very involved on the conservative staff front; in fact, I ran meetings of conservative staff on the House side. I was very deeply involved.

I came up through the conservative movement. I went to Paul Weyrich's lunches and to Grover's [Norquist] meetings, and at the Heritage Foundation. Armey was really in the center of all of that. I liked the Bob Michel people. I liked Bob Michel a lot, still do, and Billy Pitts and his folks. But at the same time there was a generational shift that was going on. I knew which side of that shift I was on. Newt was a very dynamic force of nature as the Whip. So yes, I don't want to exaggerate because you're a staffer and everything, but I was in the thick of all of that.

Riley: Did you think that you were in somewhat the minority tradition?

Gillespie: No.

Riley: Did you sense it was as close in time as it turned out to be?

Gillespie: No, not at that point. Although I remember going—when Armey was conference chairman, and he was elected conference chairman after President Bush lost and President [William J.] Clinton was elected. Armey did challenge President Bush pretty head-on about the tax, the compromise out at Andrews Air Force base, and I was in the middle of that, very much so.

Nelson: The 1990 budget.

Gillespie: Exactly.

Riley: You were at Andrews?

Gillespie: No, but I was selling Armey's no new taxes resolution in the House Republican conference. Michel and Jerry Lewis, who was then the conference chairman, didn't want that resolution and neither did the White House. We pushed it very hard and Armey was at the center of that; it was his resolution. It created a pretty big fracture in the conference, and that was that generational divide that you saw. So when Clinton won, part of the backlash was that Armey beat Lewis, who was the first—you all probably know better or have better access to it, but I'm pretty sure he was the first challenger to a sitting Member of the leadership to win a contested leadership election since [John] Jay Rhodes beat somebody else for the same job, conference chairmanship, which would have been in the '60s I think. So it had been a long time since a sitting Member of the leadership lost a leadership challenge. It just wasn't done back then. You didn't even bring a challenge back then. Armey won by four votes.

It was a very sophisticated campaign. It was also the first outside campaign. It involved *Roll Call* and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page and others—We tried to shape it—outside groups, the antitax coalition, and others.

Riley: Norquist?

Gillespie: Yes, and the Heritage Foundation. They were kind of putting pressure on Members. Armey got two-thirds of that big—because even though Clinton won, we picked up seats. I think there were about 37 freshman Republicans in that class and I'd say Armey probably got about 27 of those votes. That's what put him over the top. So that challenge was the rift with then President Bush, but that's when he rose to the leadership.

As for when we sensed the majority, we sensed it early. I remember feeling like there was something going on and we were going to build on that because the [Ross] Perot voters were our voters really. It wasn't clear initially, but that was definitely the case. As I mention in my book, I'd actually seen a profile of Frank Luntz, who was Ross Perot's pollster in that Presidential campaign. One of the things I thought as a young operative was that we've got to get to the Perot voters, they need to be with us, not with President Clinton in these debates. I reached out to Frank and asked him to come and speak to the House Republican retreat, which was at Salisbury, Maryland, and he did. I've joked since that I created a monster.

But it was useful information and some pretty good insights about the Perot voters, and they did end up being absorbed into the Republican Party. What I was leading to, I remember going to a *Roll Call* editorial board visit with Armey in April of 1994 and him predicting we were going to take the House in November. They all but laughed him out of the room at that point, but there was a growing sense among the leaders that there's something going on here. President Clinton badly botched his first year in office, I would say.

Milkis: Most political scientists agree.

Gillespie: So there was a sense of we can do this. There was this really interesting mix of leaders who had come together at that point on the Republican side. Armey and Newt, they had really become a nucleus at that point; John Kasich and Bill Paxon and Tom DeLay. There was a real cohesiveness and a real sense of energy and tirelessness. So we were early to the party in terms of thinking that we could win the House.

Jones: You really had created something during that time, I mean this group that we're talking about, and you had created something that was more than just a regular organization. It was an organization. It was a structure that had this kind of energy. The feeling, and we observed it at the time, was of something moving that was more than just the minority and the whole notion of the permanent minority, which had come to be pretty familiar to us looking at it from the outside.

Gillespie: Well, it was a new way of thinking. Again, Gingrich deserves a great deal of the credit for this because he fostered that mentality. All of the leadership offices up to that point in the minority were fiefdoms, the conference that served Jerry Lewis. Bob Michel's staff served Bob Michel. And Newt fostered a no borders kind of mentality; the staffs were almost interchangeable. I mean, there were times when I would staff Newt on something if Tony Blankley couldn't. That was just the way it was. They really tried to minimize the infighting and that kind of thing with the leadership staff and the Members themselves. It was cause-driven, which helps.

Jones: Right.

Gillespie: It was a sense of something bigger than ourselves. There was a vision. You had all the training of the military experts who would come in, and the retired generals and those types of people. It was half bullshit but it was half real. It did foster this sense of we're comrades in arms and we need to try to get this done. It was a very interesting time. Then the Contract with America, the first hundred days, the shutdown, all of that. The bonds I have with those folks—I just lost one of my comrades in arms in Tony Blankley a week ago or so. I wrote a little piece in the *National Review* about it. Tony was at the center of it. It was a unique kind of mentality. The truth is, once we got the majority and we'd had the majority for a while, that all dissipated. It kind of fell back into the fiefdoms.

Milkis: Because?

Gillespie: I think there's a dynamic to it; we had achieved the cause. There's a difference between trying to wrest the majority control and trying to keep it. There's just a different kind of mentality.

Milkis: One thing that does seem to endure is the polarization that grew out of this. I was struck when I read in your book how you're a little ambivalent about how that happened, whether people like Armey and Gingrich caught a wave that was growing, developing in the country, or whether they were important independent factors of that polarization.

Gillespie: Were they cause or effect?

Milkis: Yes.

Gillespie: As with anything like that, a little bit of both, certainly Newt, even more so I think than Armey. I think Newt is more polarizing than Armey was then. Also, when you're a change agent that tends to be part of—it's inherent. I do think that politics has become more polarized. The distance between Bill Clinton and Third Way, and former President Bush 41 and a Thousand Points of Light is not anywhere near the distance between President [Barack] Obama's agenda and whoever emerges as our nominee today. So things have diverged. The left and the right have gotten further apart. I think maybe that's a natural progression in some ways. We're a young country, obviously still, and it has gotten to that point in other countries sooner.

From my perspective I don't think it has to be caustic and I don't think it has to be mean, and I do worry about that in the House a little bit. The other thing is the precision of redistricting contributes to that. There are, believe me, a lot more Members, as you know, who are more afraid of losing a primary than a general election; that's just the nature of it. That pulls both sides. Then I think the campaign finance laws have contributed to it.

I think a perverse impact of the McCain-Feingold Act—and I said this as party chairman; I believed it then and I believe it now—is that the parties actually have an ameliorating effect on some of that polarization. Partisan has such a negative connotation but the parties themselves—When I was party chairman I campaigned for Arlen Specter; he was our nominee. We put money into Pennsylvania, but Club for Growth isn't going to do that. So that exacerbates it, the fact that we've ended up putting more influence and impact in the political process in the ideologically driven groups as opposed to the party campaigns, the party apparatus.

Jones: Could I go back to the Contract a bit? Did you travel some during that time with Armey or with Gingrich?

Gillespie: No, but we had a daily phone call while they were traveling. It was Newt, Armey, Paxon, and DeLay on the call. They were all around the country. They would call in and compare notes. The staff would be on the call, but as a congressional staffer I was camped out in the Longworth Building on the seventh floor. It was kind of the command center of all of that. Newt's office and our office, the staff offices, at that point were right next to each other, before we moved into the Capitol.

Jones: Were there a lot of meetings with the staffs during this time?

Gillespie: Yes, there was pretty constant interaction. They were calling in and saying, "You won't believe the crowd here in Michigan, people are so fired up." You could just sense it on the calls. It was growing. It was getting bigger as the calls went on.

Jones: Did you bring in people?

Gillespie: Haley Barbour had agreed to underwrite the Contract with America and he put staff in the RNC building. Barry Jackson, who is now the Speaker's chief of staff, and Bob Schellhas, he and I wrote the Contract, the book, together. The NRCC [National Republican Congressional Committee] had staff out in the field, obviously, but not much staff, but those two in particular handled the Contract, media requests about the Contract, background papers on the Contract.

Jones: I'm just trying to put a profile together of Ed Gillespie making connections with party

people, with others, with—

Gillespie: That didn't really happen until I went to the RNC for Haley, that's when I made my connections and contacts with the party people out in the real world outside of Washington.

Jones: I understand, but it sounds like it was starting just by the nature of the project you were working on, the Contract.

Gillespie: A little bit, but it was all Washington-centric. I got to know state party chairs and that kind of thing more when I went to work for Haley, which was not long after. That was '96.

Nelson: Did you make a decision at some point that you didn't want to be a House guy anymore, that you wanted to get into Presidential politics? National party?

Gillespie: No, I never really did. In fact, when Haley approached me to go to work for the RNC I was a little reticent, although I was ready to do something different. I had been with Dick Armey for ten years and that's a good run for anybody on the Hill, and I liked Haley a lot. He was in a lot of our meetings. As party chairman he operated and functioned a lot like a staff guy, and he knew all the staff by name. When he was in a meeting where I was, as a staffer, and kind of a political staffer, it felt good that Haley was there. But I was worried at that point even about the RNC trying to salvage the Dole campaign, which I thought was probably going to be an uphill climb and that we would lose the House. I was pretty explicit about what would happen if it came down to having to choose between putting chips into the Electoral College or saving the House, the majority. He was pretty explicit that he would not let the House majority go under to try to save a campaign that couldn't win.

Jones: Interesting.

Nelson: When were you having that kind of conversation?

Gillespie: It was probably November or December of '95.

Nelson: So that far out you thought that—

Gillespie: Well, I was a House guy, to your point. I didn't want to go somewhere—I wanted to have a sense that he had a commitment to the House, which he did. I didn't know it would come to that, but it did eventually. By the way, Senator Dole, who has become a good friend—I shouldn't say a friend; he's someone I admire immensely and have gotten to know very well—but he saved the House.

If you look at Bob Dole's itinerary for the last week of his Presidential campaign, those were not Electoral College stops. He was trying to crank up Republicans to save House seats. I was thinking it would be interesting to go to work for Haley Barbour and the RNC, but the truth is, never in my career have I thought, *Well, if I do this, will it result in that?* It was more that would be an important place to be in a Presidential year. It would be a good experience. I learned more from Haley Barbour in one year at the RNC than I learned in 12 years of school and four years of college. I mean, the guy is a genius. That was a very formative moment for me as well, and that was really my introduction to national politics as opposed to the national media, where I had

already been operating.

Jones: He came to you?

Gillespie: Yes, he came to me.

Jones: How did that go?

Gillespie: It came through Don Fierce.

Jones: He said get over here; I want to talk to you.

Gillespie: Chuck Greener, who was my predecessor there and ran communications for the RNC for Haley, had decided he was going to leave. I didn't know that. Then Don Fierce, who was kind of Haley's confidant and right-hand man, pulled me aside after one of our meetings and said, "Chuck Greener is going to leave the RNC." I said, "That's a shame, he's really good." He said, "Would you consider going to work for Haley?"

I was kind of surprised, I was shocked, and I said, "Gosh, I don't know." I wasn't looking or anything. I said, "I need to think about it. What's the job?" They also made it communications and congressional relations. So I was not only in charge of communications but also in charge of the interaction with the Senate and House leadership, which was interesting to me as well.

Jones: With Armey?

Gillespie: No, with Haley. The RNC had always had a Congressional Affairs office that would deal with the Members and the staff up there, and they rolled them into one. So I had Congressional Affairs and Communications. I thought about it. It was hard to leave Dick Armey. I was very close to him and very loyal to him. But then I thought we're cause-driven, this is the right place to go and be. It was hard to leave Armey but it turned out, obviously, to be a very important decision for me in my career, and it was a good one.

Milkis: I'm curious about how you made that switch to Barbour. I have great admiration for him, but you learned a lot about party organization and strategy in the House and with the Contract with America and the '94 campaign. What did you learn when you got to the RNC under Barbour? What was the value added? What kinds of lessons did you learn there you did not learn—

Perry: If I could just add, especially in communications, coming from the campaign for the Contract with America and then coming to a communications position with the RNC. You said you learned so much in that year but then communications becomes such a major part of your portfolio as you go on even ultimately to the White House.

Gillespie: One was data and understanding the importance of polling data and how to read it and how to read through it, analyze it, break out cross tabs [cross tabulation tables], look for pointers, and things like that.

Milkis: That's old school now, cross tabs.

Gillespie: It's still really important. I learned a lot from Haley in that regard. He could chew through a poll in ten minutes and highlight—there's an aberration here, we need to drill down on this, and focus groups and things like that, that aspect of the communication. I was shooting bullets more than making bullets and it was good to learn how bullets are made.

Then the other thing is the significant impact of paid media. The Contract with America was all earned media, with the only exception being the ad in—

Nelson: *Readers' Digest.*

Gillespie: No, in *TV Guide,* two weeks before the election. So the importance of paid media and its impact, placement of it, tying it to earned media. I remember one of the things that frustrated Haley about the Dole campaign was that there didn't seem to be a connection between what the Senator was saying in terms of his speeches and what his message of the day was and what the ads were, and trying to tie those things together.

I worked pretty closely with some of Dole's people, more at the end, as things worked out. It was a tough campaign to work with. It kept the RNC at an arm's length, which was a mistake on their part, I think, for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that Haley had control of a lot of money and you're allowed to coordinate with them. But at the end, I got brought in and I got to see more there from the inside of the workings of a Presidential campaign. Not a good one, unfortunately, but I got to see it.

So that was interesting to me. Also the coalitions and the effect of coalitions and the importance of our allies in the Right to Life community and the antitax movement and the national security side of things. That was back in the days—again, it was pre McCain-Feingold. There was nonfederal money at the RNC.

So those were some of the things I learned. I learned a lot about leadership of an organization by watching Haley, which served me very well when I became RNC chairman myself, and the importance of staying close to the state chairs and some of the members of the committee, and information flow and those kinds of things. It's hard to quantify, but those are things that come immediately to mind in terms of lessons learned.

Jones: Had you had anything to do with a campaign committee in the House?

Gillespie: No. Interestingly enough, I had never run a campaign. My area of expertise was really communications. I shouldn't say that; I did Andy Ireland's reelection campaign. I went on the campaign staff and I was coordinator of three counties for him. So I had done a congressional campaign, but I had not been the one responsible for making the decision about the buy or what is our attack or that kind of thing. It was actually helpful to see those inner workings.

Riley: I wonder if I could get you to reflect across the decade of the '90s. You talked about the great enthusiasm that came from the Contract period and this really fascinating core of people who were involved in Republican Congressional politics at the time. If you could talk about the relationships among the people who were central to that effort in '94 and then help us understand what happens to those relationships over time, because they sort of fracture. I'd like to get your story on what happened and why it happened.

Gillespie: One, there was an agreement, or this cause-driven mentality, that helped a lot, shaped the dynamic. The other thing is, there were such complementary talents of the different people.

Riley: How so?

Gillespie: Newt was really a visionary. That was important. Armey was policy, steeped in policy, really cared about policy. Bill Paxon was a great political mind and specialized in fund-raising and turnout. And Tom DeLay was a great organizational person in terms of the coalitions and the outside groups and working the Members. They all had a niche that dovetailed very nicely. But it's also axiomatic that it's a lot easier to maintain unity in the minority than the majority. It's a lot easier for us all to say, "No, we're not for that." It's harder to say, "Here's the bill we have to pass, we need 218 votes." So that was a factor.

It has been written and it's true, Newt's leadership as Speaker was mercurial. It was fractious. It could just flat wear you out sometimes. One day we would be like, "We're going to take this hill, this is the ditch we're going to die in," and the next day it was, "Anybody who thinks that that's the hill to take is an idiot and you're out." The Members got whipsawed. It was hard to hold the troops together at that point.

Armey had a great line at one point about his working so closely with Newt, especially in the minority when Newt was Whip and he was conference chairman, and through the Contract with America and all that. He said, "Newt and I agreed to set our egos aside. I set aside Newt's and he set aside mine." [*laughter*] But when you're in the majority for a while, the egos do tend to come more into play. It just became harder and harder to maintain that unity. It's one of the reasons, actually, that by '96, even though it was hard to leave Armey, I was ready to leave the House leadership. It was not a happy, joyous place to be like it was in the minority. So I think those are probably the most significant contributing factors.

Our majority then was a little more diverse than it is even today. Swing seats used to swing between moderate Democrats and moderate Republicans; they now tend to swing between conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats. We had more moderate Republicans in the conference back then. Partly because of where I grew up and where I came from, I somehow ended up being the liaison to the moderates in the conference. I understood where they were coming from and I understood Bobby Franks' district is a lot different from Dick Armey's district.

But it was hard. There was constant kind of—then you get to the point where Members can leverage their votes. They won't vote for it unless you do this. It's just tough; it's a draining thing to be the congressional majority, House majority in particular.

Jones: Another factor of course is that the President was not a Republican.

Gillespie: Yes, and the fights over the shutdown were grueling. We made some tactical mistakes. The Clinton White House was good. As I said in my book, they were speaking English, we were speaking math. That's not good. That's one of the things I learned. We're talking about $1.6 trillion and reducing the rate of growth to 3 percent instead of 5 percent and they're talking about Medicare and your elderly mother and streams and dirty water. That's not a good matchup.

The shutdown was a tough time, but we got through all that. The House Republican conference got through all that. It was more the second term. The welfare deal was good; it helped Clinton, but it was a good bill. It was really after that. I was gone by then but that's when things really started to unravel. They built to that point but they unraveled, the coup and everything.

Nelson: It looks like your leap to Presidential politics took place with the Kasich campaign in early '99, but I wonder if there is anything in the intervening years, the time with Haley Barbour's policy impact communications firm that you were part of.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Is there anything in that period that bears on development, on the George W. Bush campaign?

Gillespie: No, not really. In fact, if anything, that was kind of a hiatus for me. It was my first introduction to business, serving clients and the lobbying side of things and the communication side of things, and really making money for the first time in my life. I had young children. I was trying to fill up college funds. I guess that was almost a three-year period of a hiatus.

Then Kasich, who's a good friend and someone I like a lot—we have very similar backgrounds if you look at where John Kasich comes from and where I come from. We have similar personalities in some ways, although I have a dimmer switch and John only has an on-and-off switch. [*laughter*] He decided that he was going to make a run. We had an open field. There was no—it's not like Dole was coming back or Kemp. It was wide open. I liked John's ability to connect with blue-collar voters and the middle class. I liked how he talked about free market policies and lifting people out of poverty. The most formative book for me, in terms of my view of the world, is Michael Novak's *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism,* which is kind of a Catholic take on the importance of free markets and free people in terms of fulfilling ourselves.

Jones: That's interesting.

Gillespie: Anyway, that's kind of where Kasich is intuitively, and I liked him and we were pretty friendly. All the folks were signing up with then Governor Bush. I didn't really have a connection to Governor Bush or his people. I didn't know him. To me, like I said, it's a lot about loyalty, and I thought Kasich would be good for the party. I didn't kid myself that he was going to be the first House Member to get elected since, was it [Chester] Arthur or, no, [Rutherford B.] Hayes. I thought it would be good to go out there and do Iowa, New Hampshire, and we did. Kasich can really crank them up; he can crank up a crowd. There are times when he's just electric. So that was pretty neat. But we realized we couldn't get there from here.

Bush himself was really in that similar niche then, the compassionate conservative niche was what he was talking about, communities. So it's not like we were contrasting with—he would become the frontrunner pretty quickly. We were right there in his slot. You can't be there in the frontrunner's slot as a House Member, so he decided to get out. I wanted him to stay through the debates. I thought if people saw Kasich in the debates it would be good for him. He didn't want to do it and we were out of money. I don't even think I got paid, by the way. So he could have cut my salary in half.

Then he decided he was going to leave Congress as well. So I said, "Let's do it big; don't just get out, do something positive. Who do you like?" We had been a part of then Governor Bush's meeting folks; he had invited Kasich down to Austin and I went with John. That was the first time I met Karl Rove, although my wife knew him. Karl had done Joe Barton's campaign and Cathy [Gillespie] was Joe's campaign manager. She really headed up Aggies for Barton at Texas A&M University.

Jones: Your wife, to make it clear.

Gillespie: My wife, yes. So we met there.

Nelson: When was this?

Gillespie: This was in '99, so it was before everything was really getting started. Bush was not in yet. Kasich wasn't in yet but he was nosing around. They had a good breakfast. I was there for the breakfast. It was the Governor and Karl and Kasich and me. It was interesting. So I said, "Bush is really where you are. He's the one talking about things you're talking about." We agreed that he would endorse him.

I called Karen Hughes, whom I didn't know, and we arranged for the event at the Reagan Building in Washington. They were both going to be in Washington at the same time. That's when Kasich announced that he was abandoning his plan to run for President, shutting down the exploratory committee, he was leaving Congress, his wife was pregnant with twins, and he was endorsing George W. Bush for President. It was good. He was the first domino to fall and to get behind Bush, so it was kind of a significant event.

Milkis: They put on the caps.

Gillespie: They put on the baseball caps, which I thought—

Milkis: That was your idea, right?

Gillespie: That was my idea. I thought both of them could pull it off; not everybody can. So I suggested that to Karen and she thought it was a good idea. She thought it was kind of fun and would be a good picture. So they had Bush campaign caps, and Kasich said, "I'm glad to be on your team now," and they put on the caps. It was a good shot. It conveyed youthfulness. [Albert, Jr.] Gore couldn't wear a baseball cap.

Milkis: Maybe backward.

Gillespie: Cathy told Karl that he should get to know her husband, he should get him involved. I stayed neutral after Kasich got out. I did a lot of TV and that kind of thing.

Nelson: Why did you stay neutral?

Gillespie: My heart wasn't in anywhere. I thought Bush was probably going to be our nominee and I thought he'd be fine. I was kind of intrigued by [John] McCain.

Riley: You had breakfast with him; you didn't say much about your breakfast.

Gillespie: He served bacon, which was funny to me because later, when I met him at the event—I came in with Kasich and Bush came in with Maria Cino, we were friends. I remember he went up to him and said, "John, thanks for doing this." Kasich said, "Happy to do it, George." They talked a little bit and Kasich said, "This is Eddie Gillespie, he's been helping me." I remember Bush saying, "I've met Eddie, I served him bacon at my house," which I thought was pretty remarkable. I was struck by that. Bush probably didn't remember; it was probably in a briefing book somewhere, but it was very good. It was really good.

Riley: But what were your impressions of him from breakfast?

Gillespie: I thought he was really interesting. Karl didn't say anything.

Milkis: That's interesting.

Gillespie: That was very opposite the public perception.

Milkis: The dog that didn't bark.

Gillespie: Yes, I spoke more than Karl did. I didn't really think much of it. I was just there with Kasich, and there were questions and there were answers I had. John would pull me into the conversation sometimes. I didn't overdo it. I thought he was very gregarious. Kasich took umbrage because he, the President, even then had the propensity to dub people with nicknames and he called him Johnny-boy, which Kasich did not like.

Milkis: A slap on the back?

Gillespie: But it was good conversation. He was probing in his questions about the federal budget. He was drilling down with John on that. Then he took us on a tour of the Governor's mansion in Austin, which is a remarkable place, a lot of history. He was nice. In addition to me, we had a driver, Chris [indecipherable]. He was nice to Chris. I left with a very favorable impression.

Riley: But you didn't fall in love with him at the time?

Gillespie: I didn't, I wasn't in the mood to. I wasn't looking—I just wanted to get back to my business. I thought that this is all going to sort itself out. Then Cathy put me in touch with Karl. I started to email him and have some thoughts. Then I started feeling like, I think that's who I like. It's kind of a process you go through. I had concerns about Senator McCain as our nominee.

Bush won Iowa—I remember realizing, Kasich and I were in Iowa when Bush came into Iowa for the first time. I'm on a commercial flight on the tarmac waiting to take off and I'm tired. John is nocturnal. I'm on an 8:30 flight and I'm tired and I'm leaning my head against the window. I think it was about 10:00 by the time the Bush—a 767 comes in with all the media, they're dropping cameras out of the belly of the thing. And John and I were just driving around in an SUV [sport utility vehicle] with two reporters every once in a while following along. I thought, *This is over*.

So I started thinking that's probably where I am, that's who I'm for. I like what he says, I like his approach. Then he lost New Hampshire. People were thinking he's not going to be the nominee after all; McCain is going to win. The day after New Hampshire I emailed Karl and the folks who send out the talking points and I said, "I'm for Governor Bush. The next time I'm asked to go on television I'm going to say I'm not a neutral observer anymore; I now consider myself a Bush supporter. If I can be helpful to you in any way, let me know."

They hadn't gotten many emails like that that day and Karl really appreciated it. So then I started lobbing in some thoughts from time to time. He was always responsive.

Nelson: Karl was.

Gillespie: Karl was. Then when the Governor had all but clinched the nomination they needed to have the echo chamber in Washington, the establishment folks. They needed to get us inside the tent peeing out, not outside peeing in. So he asked Haley Barbour and Mary Matalin and Bill Paxon and Vin Weber and Charlie Black and me to serve as an informal advisory group in Washington, D.C. They called us the group of six but it became the Gang of Six.

Milkis: Did the media call—?

Gillespie: I think Karl started it. For me to be with Haley Barbour and Mary Matalin and Bill Paxon and Vin Weber and Charlie Black, was—that was me and them. To be in that group was very flattering to me.

My task was to look at the research on Gore; they had a lot on him. I was struck in going through it by how many times in the open-ended questions people would say he's wishy-washy. Can't take a stand. He flip-flops. I was struck by that. I did a memo on it and I sent it to Karl and said, "I think there's something that we need to pursue here."

Nelson: When you say the research on Gore, do you mean focus groups?

Gillespie: Focus groups, but also quantitative as well, but with open-ended questions. So when you would ask the question, "What do you think of when you think about Gore?" they would say that.

Milkis: You thought it was going to be that he was arrogant.

Gillespie: Yes, I thought it was going to be arrogant, elite, elitist, that sort of thing. I was struck by the wishy-washy responses. So we hit him on that. We did it more to [John] Kerry four years later, but it's interesting that we were on that with Gore. They found that valuable. I was going on the shows then as, not a surrogate, I wasn't an official surrogate for them, but I was a Bush supporter. I think they liked what they saw down in Austin, so then they asked me to do the convention. That was really where I got knee-deep in it. They liked what we did on the convention. I worked with Andy Card there; he was the chairman of it and I was his number-two man.

It was a huge undertaking because they were very behind the curve. Literally, when I went up there on June 9, I think it was, they didn't have the person to say the Pledge of Allegiance on

Monday night. We had to go through all of that, the speakers and everything. It was grueling. I would get into my office in Philadelphia at 7:30 in the morning and I would be there until 10 o'clock at night, eating cheesesteaks at my desk.

Nelson: How did you know what were the nuts and bolts, the things that needed to be accomplished at a convention?

Gillespie: I didn't. It wasn't really my job. My job was more the messaging, what are we trying to convey? The imagery. There are others who do the nuts-and-bolts stuff; there's a whole infrastructure for that that's permanent.

Milkis: So you weren't choosing the speakers or—

Gillespie: I was choosing the speakers; I was recommending the speakers. Karen would sign off on that.

Milkis: That's part of the message.

Gillespie: Yes, but there were times that she was so busy, she was swamped. I started signing off. I thought I'd rather get fired because they don't like the speaker than to have hand puppets for a half an hour one night because we didn't get the speakers signed off. They liked that. They appreciated it. They'd come back and say, "I'm not sure we want this person" and I'd say, "It's too late, I've already invited him. I'm sorry." They were like, that's OK, it will work.

Then the convention was over. We had a really good convention.

Milkis: Could you tell us real quickly what message did you think was—?

Gillespie: Different kind of Republican was the theme of that convention, and we conveyed it in a lot of different ways. It was very diverse, which was a conscious decision. I remember Kevin Merida, who is a friend in the media whom I happen to like, said, "It looks to me like you're trying to feature African Americans and Hispanics and Asian Americans." I said, "That's right, we are. If you're accusing me of trying to increase our share of the black and Hispanic and Asian American vote, guilty as charged. I'd like to have more diversity on the floor, but we only get 10 percent of the African American vote and not a large percentage of them are going to come to a convention for four days. But we want it and yes, we're trying to send that message."

We had a black gospel choir close us out on the first night; it was great.

Milkis: You had Herb Lusk, the former running back for the Eagles.

Gillespie: Herb Lusk, yes.

Milkis: Can I back you up a little bit? Did you ever find out how that Gang of Six was constituted? I mean, you were working with Haley at the same firm. Did he say you have to include—?

Gillespie: No, I don't think he did, I think it was Karl. That was all Karl's doing. I don't know—

I married way over my head, and he always loved Cathy and thought Cathy was very sharp, which she is. I think he thought, *If that guy is smart enough to marry Cathy, I should get him involved*. Then two, I think the interactions that we had, limited though they were—and I think he felt, all those folks, the other five folks that I mentioned, are stellar people. But I also think he thought we needed the next generation down to be in the mix too, and I'm a generation behind them.

Nelson: You and Matalin, I guess, were—

Gillespie: Mary, although Mary was a very prominent figure. She essentially ran the RNC when Lee [Atwater] got sick in the reelect. I always admired her from afar because she went down swinging. A lot of people abandoned President Bush in that campaign, and she went down swinging. I said this the other night, which is the reason it's fresh in my mind, because she and I were in New Orleans at the same time. I was in New Orleans for the RNC meeting and I was honored at a dinner for former RNC chairmen, Frank Fahrenkopf and I, and Mary came because she lives there. She said some really over-the-top things about me, which really touched me. I had admired Mary Matalin from afar for a long time and she was a star. I think [James] Carville, Matalin, American Express ads, she's famous. I just love her. As I got to know her I knew that she's a genuinely good person. It's nice when someone you admire from afar turns out to be even better up close. That's how I feel about Mary.

We're not that far apart in age. I'm 50; Mary, I can't guess. She's a little older than I am but she had already cut her teeth. She was there with Charlie and Haley and Bill to a certain extent, and I wasn't. But it was Karl's doing. He was the one who got me into the mix.

Riley: Now that you backed us up, Mike, I do want to ask one other question. I wonder if you could help us understand something about Texas politics. Not on the state level, but you have an extraordinary window through your own experiences and through your wife's experience to help us figure out the relationship of these people and how they're eye-balling national politics. I mean, Armey himself must have had national aspirations at one point, right?

Gillespie: Yes, he thought about it at one point.

Riley: How does this all play out ultimately? How do these people get along?

Gillespie: It's a big state, that's an understatement. For Republicans, Texas, in terms of the Electoral College base, the money, the size, the persona that it tends to produce, there is—I don't know, Phil Gramm was so dominant for so long. The Bush Governor operation did not really interact with the delegation very much at all. To the extent they did, it was probably through Bill Archer or someone like that. It's like they say, it's like a whole other country. That's just the way you—what you do in Washington is fine, just don't screw with us here and it will work out fine.

Riley: That's the polite version.

Gillespie: It's not like they're always up there, we're trying to get the superconducting, supercollider, and there's lots of money that goes to UT [University of Texas] and research grants and all that stuff, but the Republican delegation in the House from Texas, it's not a bunch of pork barrelers. They're not people trying to bring money back to Texas. They're really trying

to keep Washington out of Texas. So there's not a lot of bumping and grinding that goes on between the figures in Washington and the figures back home. If you look, in terms of the Texas Governors, you don't see Members of Congress go and run—and when they do, like Kay Bailey Hutchison, they get their heads handed to them.

You've got to come up from Texas if you're going to be the Governor, and Governors are generally the route to the White House for our party. So I don't think there really is much friction. The Karl/John Weaver dynamic goes back to the political consulting aspect of it. In my experience, every state tends to have two camps of political consultants; that's just the nature. They run against each other in primaries, there's a lot of hard feelings, they're recruiting. They're trying to get their candidate; they're trying to get donors to give. So there's always that kind of friction.

But in terms of—I mean, Armey and DeLay had a big falling out at the end, but that was proximity. They were side-by-side for a long time. Generally either it doesn't exist as much as we'd like to think or I'm not as privy to it as others who are actually down on the ground in Austin. Karl would have a lot more insight. But there's not a lot of that dynamic that I actually saw up close.

Riley: So there wasn't any sense of resentment toward W. Bush as a young upstart coming in and using Austin as a platform for—

Gillespie: No, he was a popular Governor and a conservative Governor. Armey—again, they weren't friendly and they were from different orbits—but Armey didn't have any animus toward him. I remember he called the office one time. It was a big deal; the Governor is calling. I don't know how DeLay felt about him, if there was any friction there, but the rest of the delegation, I don't think—and I don't know about Phil Gramm's relationship, although my impression is that it's actually pretty good.

Riley: Do you remember when it first became plausible to you that this person might have fruitful Presidential aspirations? It's not the Bush that everybody expected.

Gillespie: Yes, we thought Jeb [Bush]. I remember being at lunch, again with a reporter who was a friend, Tom Galvin, who was at the *New York Daily News* at the time. We were talking about it; I can't remember what year it was. It was probably after the midterm, '98. I remember him saying that George W. Bush, he's the one—and I thought, *Really?* I hadn't even thought about it. Then Haley was for him when I was for Kasich. I said, "Why are you for him?" I didn't get it.

I know we'll get to it by the way, but let me just say it right now, I love George W. Bush. But I didn't get it at the time. Given where I was with Armey at the time and everything, I wasn't a big admirer of 43. I am now. I think he's a class act and a really good person. But where I came from, that wasn't my thing. Kasich was more—

I remember Haley saying, "It's cold outside and we need to get inside and this guy is going to get us inside. He's a good guy." Haley had dealt with him because Haley worked closely with the Governors as RNC chairman. I respected Haley's opinion obviously. Haley saw the timber there that others didn't. He was in early for him. So somewhere in that time frame. Then, as I say, I

was watching him on the stump and I would watch him in the campaign. I remember thinking, *It's a really good operation; he's a good candidate. He's somebody I would be comfortable supporting*. But as I say, it was a gradual thing.

Riley: What about McCain? You had said earlier that you didn't—I got the sense that there was a discomfort with the idea of McCain as the nominee.

Gillespie: Yes, I don't know why. It's interesting because—I don't mean to sound self-aggrandizing or anything, because then you get to know these people and you realize he's a really good guy. I just didn't feel like Senator McCain would be a strong nominee for us. I respected his record. I remember even when I was a Bush—I was asked at one point about something negative about McCain, I never said anything negative about McCain. I admired his service and his sacrifice for our country. I didn't agree with him, didn't think he'd be our strongest nominee but I remember saying, I think it was on the air, if not to a reporter, "If you're looking for somebody to take shots at McCain, you're going to have to call somebody else. I'm for Bush. I think he's the guy, but I didn't spend seven years in a POW [prisoner of war] camp, and he did, and I'm not taking a shot at him."

Anyway that was my view; I didn't think he was our strongest nominee.

Riley: I interrupted a line of questions about the convention.

Jones: I'd like to go back to the convention.

Riley: Sure, go ahead, but I also wanted to follow up with McCain in the sense that here's a Senator. History tells us Senators directly winning the White House, there are damn few to start with and not all that successful. Three of them died in office. So the larger question is of a legislator as President, and to ask you about Kasich. You were attracted to him.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: But were there characteristics that suggested to you because of his experience, his one experience in the House where he certainly was an important Member of the House and had a lot of battle scars, what would make him a good President?

Gillespie: No, I wasn't that sophisticated at the time, to be honest with you. I thought he was a great messenger. I liked how he talked about our views. I thought he was forceful and strong and he was a leader. I didn't know as much about the office as I do now. If I did, maybe then I would have thought, *Love John, great messenger, but I'm not sure he can be President of the United States*. But that's the benefit of experience that I didn't have at the time.

Jones: But if he was thinking—

Gillespie: By the way, I think a term and a half as Governor of Ohio could do that for him.

Jones: But on the convention, with whom did you work mostly?

Gillespie: Andy Card, he and I were joined at the hip. But it was really my own shop.

Jones: It's fascinating. I had a former student who used to work with the Democratic Convention and I never could quite get the sense of an organizational structure in putting together the convention. Of course the role of the RNC, as you suggested, is quite structured, it's there and it's permanent.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: But as far as the in-and-outers and the people who are associated with the campaign coming in, it never was clear to me what the model was, clearing out a hierarchy, maybe it is amoeba-like?

Gillespie: There's a hierarchy to it. There are really two sides organizationally of a convention. One is the internal. You've got 2,000 delegates who have to be in hotels, get from their hotels to the floor. They've got to vote. You've got Governors. All of that. The logistics of a convention is a nightmare. That's a big chunk of it, having enough buses and all of it.

By the way, a sidenote: a convention should be three days, not four. There's really an anachronistic thing that painfully hurts everybody. It's not good for the host city; it's not good for the parties.

Then there is the external, the outward-facing part, which was really my purview. That is, who's speaking? Colin Powell is going to be our keynoter. Should Laura Bush speak on the first night? Yes, I think she should. Why? Here's why. [Condoleezza] Condi Rice should have a role. We need to highlight the community service aspect, the voluntarism that's part of the compassionate conservatism. There's the Vice President's night, the third night, and then obviously the President's speech. There's the national security night, there's the domestic policy night. You have to get all that.

What we wanted to do was to not have a bunch of 20-minute speeches. We wanted to have a whole bunch of three-minute speeches, which was even harder. Then you're moving people on and off the stage. We had two different stages. You want to have entertainment, you want to have music, make it fun. Beach balls, videos, all of that. To fill 8:00 to 11:00 P.M. Eastern Standard Time for a convention and also keep the attention of the people in the hall is a real pain in the ass. That was my job. I worked very closely with Andy on it. In all honesty, it was a leap of faith for them to put me in that job. I'd never really had that kind of experience before, but you just get stuff done.

Jones: It occurs to me, and I don't recall, it may be in this *Frontline* interview, but there was a wonderful phrase that you attributed to somebody else, "absorbed into the organization."

Gillespie: That's Lee Atwater.

Jones: OK. It strikes me that very early then, for you, you had to become absorbed—

Gillespie: I got absorbed.

Jones: —into the campaign structure in *that* organization.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: In order to know that this is going to work, that's not going to work, and this is what we're trying to portray. You have to know enough about the candidate and what's acceptable, plus his fingers into the world, all of the others, to come up with the right choices. Is that correct?

Gillespie: It is correct and it's the mark of a good campaign, especially a national campaign, a Presidential campaign. Lee Atwater said the sign of a truly great campaign is that it can absorb unlimited numbers of people.

You're right, I got absorbed. I remember when I went up to Kennebunkport. Again, this is like a mystical place, Kennebunkport. You hear about it with former President Bush. Then Governor Bush, he and 41 and 41B, the First Lady, and the brothers and Doro [Dorothy Walker Bush Koch] and—they get together as a family up at Kennebunkport once a year. I got a call from Andy Card asking if I could go up to Kennebunkport tomorrow and meet with Karen and Karl, they were all up there. It was in the thick of the campaign, but the Governor rightly deserved some downtime. He wanted to be with his family. So it was my first time to Kennebunkport.

We moved into a new house that day. If Cathy were here she would correct me and say, "What do you mean, we? You were in Kennebunkport." [*laughter*] I half expected to come home and see my clothes lying on the front lawn. So that was June of 2000. They laid it out at Jean's—

Riley: Becker?

Gillespie: Jean Becker's house, at her kitchen table, with Karl and Karen and Andy and me. Here's what we want out of this convention. I absorbed it, and took it back and implemented and executed it.

Milkis: So the theme was a different kind of Republican.

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: Interesting.

Gillespie: So that's where I—and I just executed against that. I did have interactions with Karen. Karen was really kind of, the Governor's muse is too strong. But it was hard to get her to get me answers on stuff. That's when I, as I said, just kind of came unglued and said, "I'm going to do this stuff and if she gets mad at me, fine." I'd rather get fired for something I did than something I didn't.

That said, I also think in the back of her mind is, *I told you what we wanted, what are you calling me for?*

Milkis: Delegator.

Gillespie: Yes, she was a great delegator. The Governor afterward was thrilled, then Governor Bush, with the convention. He was very nice to me. I got to see him again there. Then he's the nominee and he has the aura and everything. He sent me a very nice handwritten note that I was

surprised to get saying you did a fantastic job, thank you very much for all your hard work.

Nelson: So there was no taint because of your association with Armey on the opposite side of the budget fight with his father? You didn't have to get that stain off?

Gillespie: No, actually I believe President Bush 43 is actually more intuitively conservative than his father. I'm not sure that he necessarily—Armey was in a different place than Newt. There was a sense of betrayal with Newt because he was in the room. Armey was on the outside saying, "Don't raise taxes in there." So it was a little different.

Nelson: Right. Yes, it's a little different.

Gillespie: I'm not sure that Bush 43 probably didn't agree that it was a mistake for his father to break that pledge. But on top of that, it's more the mentality. As I say, it's this is a national campaign for President of the United States. If there is a good person—and you can tell if somebody is loyal over time—you show your loyalty and you get further and further inside. They judged right away, rightly, I'm just a loyal person. If I sign up and I'm your guy, I'm your guy. I'm not going to go out and pee on you with reporters on background, I'm just not.

Riley: Sid has reminded me that I didn't give you the break I promised. We've got about another hour. Why don't we take three or four minutes and we'll go to six if that's OK with you?

Gillespie: Great.

[BREAK]

Milkis: One of the things I find most interesting about your career is that you're known as someone who is not that common, who combines gifts with communication with substance, policy, and message. So I'm fascinated by your interest in ideas and how you were attracted to Kasich and compassionate conservatism. I've always been a little curious about what that means and what its relationship is to some of the cause conservatism that was dominant in the House when you were part of that moment.

Jones: And if I can add, what you understood Bush to mean by it.

Gillespie: From the process side of things, I was a legislative assistant for Andy Ireland and I wanted to be his press secretary. To me, politics is a means to an end and the end is governing and good policies. It sounds trite and people say it all the time, but I believe it. I think good policies make good politics and good politics lead to good policies. I was the staff director of the Joint Economic Committee. It was a little bit odd in that world, seen as—I don't know if it was seen as, by Armey, to be kind of not taking the job seriously enough. It was established as Congress's answer to the Council of Economic Advisors and it's not, it's a backwater. The Budget Committee overtook it in the Budget Act of 1974 but I liked being the staff director of that committee.

I had 11 PhD economists who worked for me. I was lucky to escape with my undergraduate degree from Catholic U. But I knew how to take what they were saying and to get it out there and sell it. What they were saying was important, that's what I really cared about. Then when we took the chairmanship of the House Conference—I say we; when Armey took it, I was the policy and communications director, both—I felt that's what it's about. I wanted to also be involved in the policy making and I wanted to have the communications side of things and the political thinking about it to factor in the policy-development process as opposed to after the fact, where the policy guys come to you and say, "Here, go sell this." You look at it and you think, *Nobody can sell that, that's not going to work. It may work in theory but—*

So I liked being in the mix on the policy development. Then when Armey became majority leader I became policy and communications director to the majority leader, I was involved not just in the selling of the Contract with America, but in the drafting of it. I think that served me well. I think that being able to go, especially with reporters and the media, three or four iterations deep on something just gives you greater credibility.

Milkis: True.

Gillespie: I have a natural interest in the policy side of it. Part of my business now is giving strategic advice to law firms who are in big, high-profile legal fights. I never went to law school but I shepherded two Supreme Court Justices and I got a pretty good sense of the law in that process.

Milkis: Maybe there's a lesson there about not going to law school.

Gillespie: Right. So I think that being steeped in the substance is important and at the end of the day what it's really all about. To me, compassionate conservatism was a brand. It was a smart brand, given where we were with the Republican brand at the end of the '96 campaign, all about slashing spending and all of that. We just never captured it right. So to me compassionate conservatism is, well, welfare reform. The welfare reform bill that was passed by Republicans and signed by President Clinton was a good example, but we didn't really get that bill done until we stopped talking about saving money and started talking about saving families and saving lives. That's when we won the debate on welfare reform.

Milkis: Putting people to work too.

Gillespie: Putting people to work. Part of this is infused by—in my mind, John Paul II, in his encyclical on work, talked about the dignity of work. This isn't just about punishing people for their welfare, we have to make them work; there's dignity in work.

I felt, coming from where I came from, that there's dignity in all work. My father stocked shelves and sliced lunchmeat. He was the most dignified man I know. He didn't wear a suit to work. There's dignity in work and we needed to capture that. That's where Kasich was. As I say, to me, compassionate conservatism really is Michael Novak's view, which is that we have to help people. There does need to be a safety net. People meet hard times; they have to be protected. We have to protect people from unethical businesses. That's not to say that businesses are inherently unethical.

To me, it's helping to let people rise and having a dynamic economy that protects consumers and people but at the same time allows for people to flourish and for upward mobility. And I think too much government stifles that. That is the stagnation we're feeling now; it's because of excessive government spending and regulation that leads to income inequality. There are a number of ways that income inequality can rise. I think it's a mistake for conservatives to argue that income inequality is not a concern; it is a concern.

The bigger concern is income stagnation. If someone who makes a million dollars has their income go up 10 percent, the gap widens from somebody who makes $50,000 whose income goes up 10 percent. But that's the right problem. That's not our problem right now, so I think we need to—to me, there has been no greater antipoverty program than democratic capitalism. It has lifted millions of people out of poverty. It lifted my father out of poverty. That's why his father brought him to America. He was a janitor. That dynamic economy allowed him to become a salesman for Procter and Gamble and then work in a grocery store, then buy the grocery store, then buy the bar and put six children through college for the first time on either side of the family. That's compassionate conservatism. It's not a laissez-faire fend for yourself, it's a let's foster a society and it's a recognition, apart from the economic side of the political economy, the societal side of it. It also means that those of us who have the benefit of making a good income and creating wealth, that we share that wealth, not necessarily entirely through taxation but through giving back to the community.

I thought Bush captured that, the faith-based initiatives, and the way he talked about government programs. I think that's where his heart was and I think he did a pretty good job of repositioning the party in that regard.

Jones: In a sense it's moving from the problem to the goal. That is to say, not just talking about this is awful, this is awful, but this is what you want to achieve.

Gillespie: We've got some positive vision and I think that's right. As I said, I think Bush did a good job of laying that out. I think we suffer as a party right now. We're not doing as good a job. I thought President Bush's approach to immigration reform was compassionate conservatism. I think his approach to Social Security reform and Medicare reform was compassionate conservatism. It has a bad name right now.

Milkis: One thing he stressed quite a bit in 2000 was education reform.

Gillespie: Education reform, exactly. You know, "the soft bigotry of low expectations."

Milkis: I love that line.

Gillespie: It's a great line and it captures what was going on and the notion that if you're in an inner-city school and you're trapped there, that's a tough break.

Nelson: You said you loved President Bush; you came to love President Bush.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Here you talk about what you believe and what you saw in him as one who believes. It

surprises me that it took you as long as it did for you to fall in love with him. Why didn't you fall in love with him in—what was holding you back when Kasich withdrew? There must have been something there because he was saying the things that you believed.

Gillespie: Maybe it's a reverse elitism to a certain extent. It's one of the things I learned in some ways. I don't have a chip on my shoulder at all about—I'm proud of where I came from, where I'm from. But at the same time I'm not the son of a President and didn't know any sons of Presidents, and I didn't know any sons of Senators or House members or county commissioners for that matter. I didn't go to Yale. So to a certain extent I didn't relate to him. It wasn't a hostility; it was more just not caring.

But—and I regret that in the same way—President Bush never looked askance at me because I'm the son of an immigrant, I shouldn't have looked askance at him because he's the son of a President. I think that was a factor, it was just part of it. I was wrong about that. There are a lot of people who are born to privilege who are really good people, and just because I wasn't doesn't make me worse, but it doesn't make me better either.

Riley: Anything else on the convention?

Nelson: What were the high points? What were the things that you felt went really well?

Riley: And what didn't work?

Gillespie: It sounds kind of silly but I don't think there was anything that didn't work. I really think it was a ten-strike event. It was just a really good convention. One thing that didn't work was we had confetti go off when Mrs. Bush came on to speak, everyone was excited, and it buried the teleprompter.

Riley: This is Laura?

Gillespie: Yes, on the first night. So her paddles were blank. All she could see on the paddle was confetti on the teleprompter.

Jones: It's real hard to keep confetti from dropping once it starts.

Gillespie: Yes, that's one of the things we learned. That didn't happen in the '04 convention.

Milkis: So she did the whole speech extemporaneously?

Gillespie: She started extemporaneously—

Milkis: Then it cleared up?

Gillespie: No, we couldn't clear it up but we had a big-screen television at the center of the back of the hall. It was covered with black felt basically, but this was an emergency. We realized we were in an emergency and we ripped off the cover and she picked up her speech.

Riley: Like off a Jumbotron?

Gillespie: Not a Jumbotron, it would be more like a—those halls aren't that big. Once you build out the stage and everything, it's not that far to the back of the hall.

Riley: OK.

Gillespie: So it was more like a 56-inch TV. But she still turned—when you don't have the advantage of the prompter, she was about two minutes into it before that came up and it was a little harrowing. She never batted an eye. She never stumbled or missed a word. Clinton did that one time with the State of the Union Address.

Milkis: With health care.

Gillespie: She was really remarkable. But otherwise, in terms of accomplishing what we wanted to get done, it was pretty close to perfect.

Nelson: Were the speakers given their speeches? Were their speeches vetted?

Gillespie: We worked with them. There was this whole speechwriting apparatus and so when you—even then, no one was going to hand General Powell a speech and say, "Here's your speech." But you'd sit down and say, "We'd like to highlight these things." In his case I think he wrote it and then there was some back-and-forth. If you remember, Zell Miller wrote his own speech that year, which was pretty fun. That was '04, I guess.

Milkis: Yes, '04.

Gillespie: It's a mix. Condi wanted to write her own speech. But there's a speechwriting team and they work it. It has to fit the theme of the night and the segment and all that. So it's a combination—there are some who when you hand it to them they'll go through and edit and hand it back.

Milkis: Were you consulted at all on President Bush's acceptance speech?

Gillespie: No, I wasn't.

Jones: To what extent in preparing and organizing, setting up the convention, is there attention given to the other convention or to the candidate?

Gillespie: Well, we went first; they had last licks. There's really not that much. There's not enough time to focus. They're going to say what they're going to say; we're going to say what we're going to say. It's more the other way around. I'm sure they watched what we were doing and they probably responded, but it's hard to anticipate what they might do.

But in '04 when the President was running for reelection, we got to watch their convention. I was in Boston and we saw the points that they were trying to hit and we wanted to knock those down or address those, take away some of the strength that they had gained out of Boston.

Nelson: Did I hear you say earlier that four nights was one night too many?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Why?

Gillespie: You just can't keep the attention span anymore of the media or the people back home or even the delegates. It's a foregone conclusion. I think that will be the case for the Republicans this time, but maybe not. You can get everything done in three days. There's a one-day session on Monday and then the Monday night session and then Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday night; it's just too much.

Jones: Do you have any influence, or try to have any influence, on what the various channels or networks are going to cover?

Gillespie: That's a little bit of a back-and-forth kind of thing. You try to push them to cover certain things. But as you know, the nets [network television stations] don't take it anymore; the cables [cable television stations] do. The nets will take the Wednesday night 10:00 to 11:00 slot and the Thursday night 10:00 to 11:00 slot, which is another reason not to do it in four nights.

Jones: I think people have forgotten that they did not cover Barack Obama's speech that sort of launched him. The nets didn't cover him at all.

Gillespie: In Boston.

Jones: Right, quite astonishing.

Riley: Some people watched it on cable TV.

Gillespie: Yes, they watch it on YouTube, they watch it many different ways. It's kind of a given now. And the cables are going to talk; they talk over the speakers. It's just constant chattering. In a lot of ways it's a waste of time.

Nelson: On the absorbing people line of inquiry, Bush chooses [Richard] Cheney to be Vice President.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Can you talk about that? Integrating Cheney into the campaign, et cetera?

Gillespie: The first I heard about it was actually early in Philadelphia, not the week of the convention, but I was dealing with some of the folks. I remember being out to dinner with a couple of people from the campaign and that was the first I heard it. I was like, "What?"

Nelson: Heard it before it was public?

Gillespie: Yes. Some of his folks came in, like Dirk Vande Beek, who worked with him at Halliburton, but I think everybody else was pretty much assigned to him. Kathleen Harrington was assigned to him. He's kind of his own operative. His family and Mrs. [Lynne] Cheney, to a certain extent, staff him. He doesn't need much staffing. He's very sharp and knows policy and

everything. But in terms of the campaign, that was the role—the Cheney announcement was flawed. It hurt us. There was too much secrecy inside the organization.

Milkis: Plus, he headed the committee—

Gillespie: That was part of it. So there was a little bit—

Jones: I'm sorry, he headed?

Gillespie: Headed the search committee.

Nelson: Could you elaborate on that? What didn't happen as well as—

Gillespie: We were flatfooted on his record in terms of the votes that he had cast as a Member of Congress. He represented Wyoming. Some of his votes were a little tough to sell in swing-state territory. This came back, by the way, at other times that it has happened with the Bush operation. The Harriet Miers nomination is another example of that. It was held too tight for—not proper vetting because I think it wouldn't have mattered, it wouldn't disqualify the Vice President, but we would have been better prepared to deal with the—the Democrats had more information than we did in the first 24 hours of that.

Jones: Wow. They were talking dispassionate conservatism.

Nelson: Why did they have more information?

Gillespie: I think they had a sense that he—they had a book on him, it was clear. They were throwing stuff out that we were scrambling to answer. When I say "we," I mean that Austin was. I was in Philadelphia. The Bush campaign [snapping fingers] is a very tight operation. It wasn't there. Ordinarily when you are dealing with something in Bush world and you get a question, somebody hands you a one-pager and says, "Here's the answer." We just didn't have that. The plastic bullets and things like that.

Nelson: Did the campaign regard this as having not gone well?

Gillespie: Yes, Karl talks about it in his book; the Vice President talks about it in his book.

Nelson: Did the campaign learn from that experience about how to—in ways that translated into the general election campaign?

Gillespie: Yes, probably. I'm not sure how, but I think it was a learning experience.

Nelson: Debate prep maybe?

Gillespie: Maybe in the debate prep, but again, I wasn't part of the debate prep either.

Jones: It's interesting, because his father did the very same thing.

Gillespie: Yes. Right.

Jones: A surprise, even a greater surprise. You could imagine since Cheney was clearly close to George W. Bush.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: The general, what was your role after the convention?

Gillespie: Well, then in September things were pretty good. I went back to my firm and I was happy to be home. We had a bad—at that point it was "they." They had a bad September. One of the things that they decided was that Karen was going to go on the plane with the Governor. That left a vacuum in Austin in the communications operations. So they asked me to come down and be a senior advisor to the campaign, but really I was the communications director. I functioned as the communications director.

I went down there right after Labor Day, the first week of September. Karl set me up at the house of one of his friends. It was a very nice house. I was in the pool house, a really nice pool house. I like to pretend I was like Kato Kaelin. I got into the slipstream right away, in particular with Mike Gerson in the speechwriting shop and Ari [Fleischer] and Dan Bartlett in the communications shop and with Stu Stevens on the media.

I became pretty quickly one of the top people banging away on TV. I did a lot of television from there. I would email Karen and talk to Karen, but I was really the one thinking, *OK, if we had our choice, what would we be talking about on Friday? It's Monday. What do we*—You're always staying one step ahead of the posse. I was the one doing that, and I would work with Karl and I would look at the data and see what was going on. I was responsible for response. I helped deal with the Gore plane, not directly, but feeding them stuff through Tucker [Eskew].

Nelson: Feeding the Gore plane?

Gillespie: Feeding the press on the Gore plane.

Nelson: Oh, the press.

Gillespie: Opposition research and stuff like that. Ask him about this. I was in Karen's office. I mean, she had vacated the office so I was literally in her office.

Riley: She went with him on the plane, why?

Gillespie: I think they felt like they were losing control of the message in the bubble around the Governor. That she could tighten it up a little bit. I'm not really sure. That's my sense.

Riley: Karl was in Austin?

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: Who else was on the plane that would have been the main figures in the bubble?

Gillespie: Ari was on the plane.

Riley: You said that you did or you did not have any engagement with debate prep?

Gillespie: I did not.

Riley: You did say, if I recall correctly, the passage in the book where you say you attended one of the debates—

Gillespie: I attended all of them.

Riley: OK, attended all of them. I was trying to remember; you got a signal from one of your colleagues before the debate that you—

Gillespie: Dan Bartlett.

Riley: You don't go into details and explain that. Tell us what was going on.

Gillespie: He was with the Governor. Dan and then Governor—he was not really the body guy, that was Izzy Hernandez, but he was a confidant and he came into the—as you know, there is a holding room where you have all the laptops and you're printing off rebuttals and firing off emails and watching with folks.

Nelson: During the debate?

Gillespie: During the debate. And he came in as the Governor was getting ready to go on stage. He just looked at me—we had gotten pretty close at that point; we were working side-by-side.
Nelson: This is '04? The debate with Kerry?

Gillespie: Yes, that's Kerry. Yes I think that was '04.

Nelson: I'm taking this from your book.

Gillespie: But in 2000 I was at the debates as well for doing response, the spin alley and all that stuff, but I wasn't there before. I would huddle with Karen and Karl and we'd agree, "OK, this is what we've got to hit. Here is what we've got to say and we need to put out these talking points."

I remember being with—Ari and I shared a room in Boston at the Logan Airport Hotel. Ari would get up really early, like 5:00 A.M. That was the debate where Gore said he flew with James Lee Witt to the fires in Texas, which he hadn't. Ari said, "He was never on the plane with Witt. He never went to Texas for those fires. He's making stuff up again." I remember that was the first time I was hearing that, but Karen had said it the night before. Karen said, "I was there during the fires and he never came with Witt." She was working for the Governor at the time.

So anyway, I remember that was one of the things we jumped on. But I was there for all the response to—but it was debate response, not debate prep.

Nelson: The first debate with Gore. The difference between what people who were in the hall thought was happening, which was that Gore was wiping up the floor with the Governor, and the experience of watching on television and seeing all of Gore's mannerisms and so on. Did you

have any sense of that? Where were you?

Gillespie: I was there but I wasn't in the hall. I was watching it on television. I was with the response team.

Nelson: So were you picking up on that?

Gillespie: Oh, yes, we couldn't believe it. I forget who it was, somebody said, "He doesn't know the camera is on him," which was apparent. This is unbelievable. We felt it right then, that it was—and the makeup. You could see as soon as he walked out, the Oompa Loompa. So we felt like we had set expectations high. By the way, we had high expectations too. We thought Gore was going to be this magnificent—

Milkis: Yes, a great debater.

Gillespie: The Governor himself jokes, not the most eloquent, he connects with people very well, but there was definitely—we thought we were going to have to survive this thing, and we did better than survive it. He did better than people thought. Like you said, in the hall, but all across America people saw a completely different show.

Riley: Was he a good student in preparing? Did he have much tolerance or patience?

Gillespie: That I don't know. I know from later experience dealing with him that he was great. I loved working with him on things like the State of the Union Address or the surge speech, which is kind of a similar dynamic. I don't know. He had maybe grown; he had more experience at that point. But the nature of his personality—he can be short and cut you off and that kind of thing, but he's the guy so he gets to do that. If he's done, he's done.

Jones: Did you see him after the debates?

Gillespie: I saw him after one of the debates, I can't remember which one, and I may be blurring '04 and 2000.

Jones: I'm just interested in his reaction, or was he not much of a self-evaluator?

Gillespie: I wouldn't be privy to it. If I saw him, it would just have been kind of "Good job, Governor."

Nelson: Your perceptions. You said September was a rocky month for the campaign.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: I'm thinking it might have been the first time that you would have had a chance to see him up close when things were not going well.

Gillespie: I did see him up close. I remember the first—he had a reception in Austin for some of his Austin people and donors and the Bush Mafia there. It was over at the Stephen F. Austin and I went over for it. I saw him there. He was very nice to me. He said, "Oh, I heard you got down

here, that's great. Glad you're on board. Appreciate your coming."

I said, "Thrilled to be here." Just that kind of passing thing. But he clearly knew who I was. He knew I was there and why. Then he called one time; I think he called for Karen. It was on a Saturday. He had done an interview with Dan Rather, and Karen wasn't there but I was in the office. I answered the phone. He talked about the interview with Dan Rather and he was kind of chatty. He was calling from the Governor's mansion. I just listened. He clearly wanted to talk about it. That was kind of fun.

Then I didn't really see him that much. I saw him at one point during the inauguration because I was on the inaugural committee. I didn't see him election night because it went on forever. I went to Florida. I just didn't see him for a long time after that until I was RNC chairman.

Nelson: The two stories you told of your encounter suggest that he bore adversity well.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: The way he dealt with people.

Gillespie: Yes, I didn't feel like he was worried about the outcome and everything. I do tell a story that I think is interesting about the Bushes, President Bush and the First Lady. During the inaugural committee I was responsible for all the—and this was, again, you kind of get thrown into this thing. We only have something like 30 days to pull together the inaugural, which is not easy. We had to get the official biography of the President and the First Lady and Vice President-elect Cheney and Mrs. Cheney. That goes into the National Archives. It's the inaugural facts.

I was really nervous about it. I wanted to get it right. Karen said to fax it to the Governor's mansion. She said Mrs. Bush should see this directly, let her sign off on it. I sent it and I put a note on it that said, "Here's my cell phone number." I thought a staffer would call back with her comments. I was also coaching my son's basketball team and I'm on the bench. The game had started. I was carrying my cell phone just in case and I had a copy of the biography for the First Lady literally on the clipboard under my plays.

The cell phone rings and I'm on the sideline of the court. I answer and hear, "Ed?" and I said yes. She said, "This is Laura Bush." I said, "Oh, hi, Mrs. Bush. How are you?" She said fine. I had met her before. She said, "I've got the biography, if I could just go over a couple of things." I said sure. Then a whistle blew in the background on a foul. People cheered. She said, "Where are you?"

I said, "I'm at my son's basketball game, but it's not a problem. I've got the bio right here, the draft, and I've got a pen." She said, "Oh, no, don't be silly; that's ridiculous. Watch your son's game." She didn't know I was coaching. "You watch your son's game and call me; I'm around all day. Here's the number to the Residence." I just thought it was pretty remarkable. It was consistent from there on out.

Milkis: You thought she was really important on the campaign trail, that her presence was a real asset?

Gillespie: Two things.

Milkis: You lobbied for more of her?

Gillespie: I wanted more of her, yes. I urged more of her. One, I think she exudes warmth, and two—it's true of just about anybody; I think it's true of the current President and current First Lady—she makes him better in a lot of ways. He's just better when she's around. So anyway, I thought that having her out there more was a good thing. They knew that too, by the way. It's interesting because it's one of those things that you realize as you get up close. Republican nominee, Governor of Texas, also a mom and a dad, and there was a lot of mom and dad stuff going on that summer with the two girls getting ready to go to college. That's what she was focused on.

They were getting clothes for school and they were going through course books. She was getting them settled. And Barbara [Pierce Welch Bush] was moving to Connecticut. Yes, there's the Presidency of the United States, but that's what I'm doing right now. I admired it. I respected it. Once they told me that's what was going on, I backed off.

Nelson: The last weekend of the campaign, I guess, were you involved at all in how to respond to the news that there had been a drunk-driving charge in Maine years and years ago?

Gillespie: I was there; I was in Austin when it broke. Dan Bartlett came in, closed the door behind him, and said the story is about to break. I said, "Is it true?" He said yes. I said OK. That was really outside my purview. That was really rapid response, Dan and the plane. I threw in my two cents here and there but really my job, like I said, it's Monday and I'm thinking about what we're supposed to be doing Friday, but in those situations everybody gets thrown into it. I remember talking to Dan and Karl during the course of it.

At that point I was really plugged in. I was not an outsider sitting there; I was in the flow. But you also have to know when to get out of the way. They were dealing with it. If I felt something was really important or worth noting I would say it, but otherwise you just cross your fingers and hope this works out.

Jones: The candidate was also Governor.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: It was important for you to know what was going on in Austin in that role, right?

Gillespie: Not so much, not at that point. As you know, the Texas Governorship is not a powerful Governorship. It's really ceremonial. It's as powerful as you can make it, but at this point he wasn't consumed with the duties. Really, the biggest thing that was going on in terms of Texas and the Governorship was defending the record there. So I did have to know his record in Texas.

Jones: You would have been alerted to anything like that in any event?

Gillespie: Yes. His people were still running the Governor's office, but it's not a full-time

legislature. It's not like there was a bill sitting on his desk that he had to sign or veto; they were gone.

Jones: Thinking about Clinton, as I recall with Clinton there was an execution, wasn't there?

Milkis: Ricky Ray Rector.

Gillespie: Yes, that's right.

Milkis: So your role of Monday, thinking about Friday, were you thinking on Monday, the day before the election, what do we do in the days after we win?

Gillespie: No.

Milkis: Your plan stopped on Election Day?

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: Your planning did, but obviously your role didn't.

Gillespie: We did not plan past Election Day, which was a mistake. They had. When I woke up Wednesday and got into the office—and I got in there around 9:30, which turned out to be really late, although I was one of the first ones in. The DNC [Democratic National Committee] had sent a plane of lawyers to Florida.

Nelson: When you went to bed, did you know that Florida was once again considered in play?

Gillespie: Yes, I did. I'm the one who pushed the networks and called the networks and urged them to take Florida down.

Nelson: When they called it for Gore?

Gillespie: When they called it for Gore.

Nelson: Then they called it for Bush. Bush is elected.

Gillespie: Well, one of them called it for Bush.

Riley: Tell us how this all went.

Gillespie: They called it before the polls closed in the panhandle. Karl was livid about it. It had a big impact—there were other polls further west that weren't closed yet. It had an impact on turnout. It had a big impact on the popular vote. If you're in California and you think it's over, and you're Republican, why vote at all?

Nelson: More to the point, a state like New Mexico that ended up being very close.

Gillespie: It was 600 votes or something like that; maybe 6,000, I can't remember. But anyway, New Mexico hung in the balance as a result. But I knew people at all the networks from my work

at the RNC and elsewhere. I'm not sure why, I can't remember the details of it. Ordinarily it would have fallen to Ari, but I'm not sure why it ended up being me and not Ari.

I went to college with Brian Williams. I called Brian and said you guys are wrong; you've got to pull this down. I can't remember who I called at ABC [American Broadcasting Company].

Riley: Telling them they were factually wrong.

Gillespie: I said this is a mistake. There are still votes coming in and they're our votes, this is the panhandle, this is Alabama coming in. They agreed and they did pull it back. I can't remember who I talked to at each of the networks. I remember Brian because I knew Brian. I can't remember who I would have talked to at CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] and Fox. But I called around. Karl gave me data and I gave it to them and said it's not fair. We objected vigorously on the air at the time. We were critical of the networks for calling it. To their credit, they thought about it and they pulled it back.

Nelson: Then later, into the early hours of Wednesday, they called it for Bush; Bush wins so far.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Bush wins. What I'm wondering is, at some point even further into the wee hours of Wednesday they decide to take it down for Bush as well.

Gillespie: They took it down as well.

Nelson: When you went to bed on election night, were you aware that they had taken it down for Bush and that the election was going to be not resolved by the time you woke up?

Gillespie: I was out; Cathy was there. We were out at the state capitol where the Governor's mansion—It was cold and rainy and everybody was waiting. It was about 2:00 in the morning, waiting, waiting, waiting, and [Donald L.] Evans then came out and said there's not going to be a decision tonight.

I went back, I stayed at the Stephen F. Austin Intercontinental Hotel again and it was 3:00 in the morning and I was watching it on television. I think when I went to bed I knew it was in limbo. I can't remember if they had pulled it. I think they had.

Nelson: So the Democrats got it right away. We need to get down to Florida instantly. It took you and others, the Bush campaign, till the next morning to realize that this is going to be a legal fight now.

Gillespie: That's right, yes.

Riley: Let me pose, if I may, the valedictory question this evening because this is a good stopping place for us to come back. As a political analyst, how well, apart from Florida, which will be a different issue, how well do you think your opponents played the hand dealt them in 2000? Were you surprised at their strategy in conducting their campaign? You're looking over at them.

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: How well did they play their hand? Were you afraid that there were vulnerabilities that they could have exploited?

Jones: Or strengths they could have used, like getting Clinton involved.

Gillespie: That's the biggest one, Clinton's involvement.

Riley: Obviously.

Gillespie: Obviously now.

Riley: Maybe he could have helped?

Gillespie: I don't know if he could have helped. I'm not sure that was a wrong call. That's one of the things that people think in retrospect. My impression was that their campaign was—I didn't have a negative impression of their campaign. I thought they had a good organization. I thought Gore had flaws as a candidate that came through time and time again and gave us opportunities. Things like the tendency to exaggerate, which over time is what the wishy-washiness became. As I said, he makes up stuff.

Jones: Arrogant, wishy-washy.

Gillespie: Well, it wasn't arrogant. Arrogant never really stuck to him in a way I thought it would. I thought he came across as arrogant and condescending and that kind of thing, but that wasn't in the data. I have to believe the data, hard as it is sometimes. The perception, though, that he would say anything, and that kind of thing, definitely stuck and we drove that, and he gave us ample opportunities for it. It started with the wildfires in Texas. Then it was the prescription drug story, the story of the classrooms where a little girl had to stand throughout the whole day. The parents said it was just not true. They brought in another desk. It's true that they went in a desk short but she didn't stand there for six hours like he said; it was more like six minutes. That kind of thing. But I didn't feel like they had a bad campaign.

Riley: So there was nothing that you feared, no turn that you had feared that they didn't move into.

Gillespie: No, actually I think if you look back at those two campaigns it was a slugfest from the get-go. They were two very good campaigns. They went toe-to-toe. It ended up in a 50-50 split.

Jones: Were you worried that you were running—this is just a footnote here—were you worried because you had somebody who was part of an administration with a booming economy?

Gillespie: Oh, yes, absolutely. George H. W. Bush to Reagan was a period of prosperity and peace, and that's what we thought in 2000. Both of them were a little illusory. But he definitely had the advantage. He should have had an incumbent's advantage, essentially, that he did not end up using.

Nelson: So why do you think he ran a good campaign if he was dealt a winning hand?

Gillespie: I think they did run a good campaign; I think he was a flawed candidate. At the end of the day, candidates matter a lot. You can have all the ground game and everything that you want. They pressed us; they kept us on our toes. We were responding to them; they were responding to us. I suspect if you talk to the Bush campaign people and the Gore campaign people, they would talk in respectful terms of one another's operations and organizations.

I wouldn't say that about the Kerry campaign. But the Gore operation versus the Bush operation was a heavyweight fight.

Jones: I wanted to ask you an Electoral College math question. It occurred to me, looking at the math afterward, that the Bush operation had what I'd call a nickel-and-dime strategy, that is to say, win all of these small states and then supplement it with a sufficient number of large states to go over the top.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: Were you involved in any of the Electoral College math?

Gillespie: Targeting? No. It was all Karl. It was before I got there. But I had a view on it.

Jones: The view is what I want to hear, whether that's roughly correct. Because that map was essentially repeated again in 2004, almost exactly the same map with the exception of New Hampshire and Iowa, I guess.

Gillespie: Well, the truth is the Electoral College map starts with the big states going to the Democratic nominee. You right away take New York, Illinois, and California off the map for us. You're spotting them a big head start. Michigan really has not been a swing state for a long time. I think it may be a swing state this year.

Jones: Pennsylvania.

Gillespie: Pennsylvania had moved away from us but I think it's moving back. There's something going on in the Great Lakes. But Pennsylvania had essentially come off the map for us, although we fought for it pretty hard. So you have to piece together—we start with Texas and a little bit of a lean in Florida. I think on a typical day that Florida is more likely to be for the Republican nominee than the Democratic nominee, but you have to fight to keep it there. But they start with a huge Electoral College advantage.

We have the South; the Southwest is increasingly a battleground. A lot of the battleground shifted from the Great Lakes to the Southwest; it may shift back. So we have to piece together those smaller states. They start with a bigger base in the Electoral College. New Mexico, to me, is the biggest argument for the Electoral College in the first place. If it were a national popular vote, New Mexico will never again see a Presidential candidate come to Santa Fe or Albuquerque, which I think would not be a good thing, not just for New Mexico but for the country.

Riley: Thank you very much, all of you.

[BREAK]

January 25, 2012

Riley: Let me introduce us again. This is day two of the Gillespie interview as part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. The way I normally begin after a break like this is to see whether there was anything that occurred to you last night or this morning that you wanted to mention.

Gillespie: There was something that occurred to me last night, which was that my father was alive when I went to work for President Bush in the White House, so he had not only seen me become RNC chairman, he was there, as I mentioned. I remembered it because when my father passed away, he had come to the White House for one of the White House Christmas parties. He was in a wheelchair. He died of congestive heart failure; his kidneys and his heart were competing for oxygen at the age of 85. But one of the things that struck me that I remembered was that President Bush handwrote a note to each one of my brothers and sisters telling them he was sorry for their loss, and it's men like Jack Gillespie who make our country so great. It was just a nice gesture. He never told me he did it. I got a call from my sister saying thank you for having the President send me a note, and I said, "What note?" She said, "I got a handwritten note from the President about dad's passing away." I saw him and I said, "I can't believe you did that. Thank you, sir." He said he was happy to do it.

Anyway, I said yesterday I love the man, and that's one of the reasons people love President Bush.

Riley: Anything else?

Gillespie: That was the only thing that came to me.

Riley: OK, we got to Election Day and I think we put you to bed. You got up at 10:00 or 11:00 and discovered that an airplane full of Democratic lawyers was on its way to Florida, dot, dot, dot.

Gillespie: I heard that from John Fund, who was then an editorial writer at the *Wall Street Journal.* I called him, we were talking and he said, "You know that the Democrats have sent a plane full of lawyers down to Florida."

Then I wandered into a meeting in the conference room with Josh [Bolten] and Andy and Karen; Karen was back at that point. We were just realizing what was upon us. I'm sure Karl was in the mix. I can't remember all the details. We dispatched Tucker, who was the first press person on the ground. Ken Mehlman was the first political person on the ground and I think Ben Ginsberg

was the first lawyer on the ground. In each of the locations there was a lawyer, a political person, and a communications person to set that framework.

Riley: By design, was there was a decision taken that you needed to do that, or did it just sort of happen?

Gillespie: I think it just sort of happened, but it started at the outset in, I guess, Tallahassee. I guess it was in the state capital, or Jacksonville. I can't remember where they went first. I thought I was done. I had three young children and had taken a leave from my firm. I didn't do any client work while I was there, which I thought was appropriate. I had moved to Philadelphia to do the convention. I was really in Philadelphia from June through August, June 9 through August 4, I think it was. Then I ended up going to Austin. I had a flight out on Wednesday and that was obviously canceled.

Then it was clear it was moving to Miami, which was where the biggest number of votes were. So I was dispatched to Miami. Ken Mehlman was in Miami. And the lawyer there was Kevin Martin, who was later our FCC [Federal Communications Commission] Chairman. So we were the three on the ground in Miami.

I was with Ted Olson. I handled the press for the filing of *Bush v. Gore* in the circuit court in Miami. I went down for the filing and I stayed. I was there for about three and a half weeks. It was surreal. I've never been through anything like it and I hope I never go through anything like it again. It was kind of chaotic. You would go in and watch the counting and people would be holding up the things, examining the chads. They would say, "That's a Democratic vote, that's a Gore vote." Then our person would challenge it and they'd set it aside. And someone would hold it up and say that's a Bush vote, and the Democratic lawyer would challenge it and they'd set it aside.

Riley: Each one was challenged as a matter of course or—

Gillespie: No.

Riley: Challenged based on what their odds were?

Gillespie: Yes, based on what they were seeing and if they thought it was a challenge. There were three people and two lawyers. There were tables all around the room. It was like a card pit in Vegas. They would deal them out; people would hold them up.

Jones: Sort of a bingo fest.

Gillespie: Yes, or bingo hall. It was a lot like that.

Perry: We should probably just say for history that when you're talking about holding things up, that it is the punch card.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: And chads.

Gillespie: They would run them through the machines, and every time you run them through the machines you degrade the ballot more. I remember at one point they had them—this was at the Dade County government center—in U.S. Mail bins, those gray mail bins. Somebody knocked the bin over and the ballots went spilling out over the floor and chads were—it was like confetti on New Year's Day. I thought it was just bizarre to be seeing this.

The big thing for me on the ground was—I think I've talked about it; others have talked about it—I'm credited for breaking the story on the Gore-[Joseph] Lieberman campaign trying to disqualify the military votes. Mario Diaz-Balart, who is now a Member of Congress from Florida but who was a state party official in Florida and very influential down in south Florida before he got elected to Congress, is the one who told me about it. He said, "You know they're disqualifying the ballots from military voters?"

I said, "You've got to be kidding me." He said, "No, it's ridiculous. Most of those are our votes and we're getting killed on it."

Riley: Sure.

Gillespie: So I went and confirmed it with one of our people and I gave it to Bob Novak, who broke it on CNN [Cable News Network] and it just took off.

Riley: And the grounds for disqualification were?

Gillespie: They were late.

Riley: Deadlines.

Gillespie: But it wasn't the soldiers' fault they were late. The backlash was severe. The soldiers had met their deadlines. Something happened somewhere where the soldiers had gotten their votes in time and someone had screwed up in the chain of command and didn't get them. At that point Marc Racicot had come on board. He was banging away out of Austin. I had a Blackberry at the time, I was an early adapter. There weren't many who had that so I had the capacity to email from the ground to people back in Austin without having to go and sit down at a computer, which really gave me an advantage and kind of gave us an advantage. I would email with Marc Racicot.

Milkis: The Democrats didn't have a Blackberry?

Gillespie: They probably did. It's funny. We got them at my firm. It was a big deal. I remember when we got them and they were pretty cool. Racicot did a press briefing back in Austin and he really hammered on it, picked up on it, that CNN is reporting that this is going on and this is outrageous. So that was a pretty big turning point.

I eventually got out. I mean I literally reached a point for me that I'd never been before and haven't been since in terms of pure physical exhaustion. I didn't feel that I could finish it out. I had been away from home too long. I told Karen that I'd lined up a reinforcement for me, Jim Wilkinson, who said he could come down and help take over and handle it. It was descending at that point. I left probably three days before the Supreme Court ruled. I was home when the Court

ruled.

Jones: What was a day like? It sounds like there was no typical day.

Gillespie: There wasn't a typical day. I stayed at a hotel a little bit outside the center. I'd have to take the subway in to the government center, to the Miami-Dade Center. I can't remember where I was staying; it was about three stops up the line. I would get up at 7:30, grab something to eat, and then we'd meet in the hotel around 8:00 A.M., Ken, me, Kevin Martin, to get the lay of the land, get a sense of where things were breaking. We'd had surrogates come down. I remember driving around with Rob Portman, who was on the ground, who was a Congressman at the time.

At that point I had somewhat of a profile in the campaign because I'd been doing so much television out of Austin. So we would go around to fire up the volunteers. We'd have sandwiches with them and we'd say keep going and thanks for all you're doing and the President-elect appreciates your standing firm and that kind of thing.

Jones: The volunteers would be challengers?

Gillespie: They'd be the ones counting the ballots and going—

Jones: Volunteers were doing that?

Gillespie: There were officials, but volunteers were watching and they were protesting, doing counterprotests. I remember at one point, talk about surreal, a Winnebago was parked by the government center there at Miami-Dade. As I'm walking by it the door opens up and a guy dressed as a Thanksgiving turkey steps out.

Jones: Why not?

Gillespie: He steps out with a sign saying something like get this over by Thanksgiving. So it was a lot of different things. There would be a flare-up in West Palm, so I'd drive up to West Palm Beach and I'd handle something there. I did a lot of TV from down there, banging on the Democrats. But it was all trying to keep track of the votes and the chads and the legal process. There would be a conference call. Then we'd reconvene at night. Ken had a big suite with a conference table. A number of us would sit around the conference table and compare notes of where we were today versus yesterday and where we expect to be tomorrow and game out what we were going to do. Who's coming in, who were the surrogates coming in and that kind of thing.

Jones: You had to have lines of communication, given the court decisions. You were getting court decisions on at least two different levels.

Gillespie: Yes. The lawyers were linked up. The political people were linked up and the communications people were linked up and then they were integrated at the unit level. So there were people up in Tallahassee and there were people down in Miami-Dade. Broward was a big place; there were people up in Broward. At the high command there was kind of an integration at the macro level. Then there was integration through the lawyers, the communications people, and the political people, down that chain. Then there would be integration as well on the sites,

Miami-Dade, Broward, and others.

Jones: Did you have any sense of the Gore operation?

Gillespie: Not really. I didn't recognize any of the Gore people on the ground in Miami-Dade. They were there. Donna Brazile was there, I saw Donna. I'm sure they had operatives but I wouldn't recognize who they were.

Nelson: Did you see the movie *Recount*, the HBO [Home Box Office] movie about this?

Gillespie: I don't think I did.

Nelson: I was going to ask you how accurate it was. Were you involved in discussions about alternative routes to getting Florida's electoral votes, like having the legislature declare that electors would be chosen by them? Or having the Governor certified?

Gillespie: No, that was above my pay grade. Those decisions were made at the top—at that point it was not decisions, recommendations—by James Baker or Cheney, the President-elect. I'm sure Karl and others were in the mix on that, but I wasn't, I was executing.

Perry: You said that you left about three days before the Court's decision.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: But of course there were two decisions that the Court handed down. One was the per curiam decision that seemed to have the Court stepping back a bit and informing the Florida Supreme Court that it needed to follow the federal law.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: Do you remember if you had thoughts about that? This isn't a clear-cut victory in the way that the final decision was, the second and final decision.

Gillespie: I was still on the ground for that. There were no decisions that came other than the Supreme Court final decision. I was watching NBC [National Broadcasting Company]; Pete Williams was the one I saw who came out and said it. But for none of the prior decisions at any point did I think, *Oh, that's it, it's over.* I always thought we were still in the trenches, we're still slugging this out, and I never felt like *Damn, I guess we lost*, or *Dang, I guess we won*, until the Supreme Court. It was always just trench-to-trench kind of mentality.

Riley: Were you in any way aware of any transitional planning that might have been going on at the time? In other words, were there people dispatched probably back in Austin to be thinking about what the government would look like?

Gillespie: There definitely were. They were public about that. They announced that they had formed a transition team and they were moving on. That didn't matter to me. I didn't intend to go into government. I wasn't working on the campaign so I could be something. I just was doing it because I was doing it. So I wasn't really focused on that. It's not like I coveted a job or

anything. They were planning that. I think the Vice President-elect was in charge of the transition even at that point in Austin and they moved it to McLean.

Riley: You mentioned Jim Baker briefly.

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: I'm wondering. There's this perception that part of the advantage that the Republicans had in Florida was that Baker was a more adept operator in that environment than Warren Christopher was.

Gillespie: That's my sense too.

Riley: Do you have any observations or evidence about that?

Gillespie: No, I don't. You see the two of them and Baker projects an aura of I'm going to get this done. But my sense was from our lawyers that we were a half step ahead of them in the legal proceedings. I thought we were a half step ahead of them on the communications front. But the fact is, we had the advantage. They had to take the ball out of our hands.

Jones: It was an uphill fight.

Gillespie: Exactly. We had to stay a half step ahead of them. If we stayed a half step ahead we were going to win. But I felt that we did that throughout the process.

Nelson: It sounds like the military ballots issue that you fought out was in the realm of public relations rather than litigation.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Could you elaborate more on how that happened?

Gillespie: One of the reasons, I remember, Racicot—you know Racicot was a JAG [Judge Advocate General] officer, and his military background and being a JAG was really helpful in framing up that issue. I had a visceral reaction to it. We talked about my background yesterday, growing up next to Fort Dix and a father who served in the Army. But I also felt that that visceral reaction would be shared by a lot of Americans and this was just—we're talking about somebody who wants to be Commander in Chief of these men and women disqualifying their ballots. It just struck me as unsustainable for them.

At that time CNN was the place where you broke stories in the middle of the day. I guess Fox was up and running but I think of CNN as the modern-day AP, you broke stories there, and I thought Novak was a good one to break it. He was on the air all the time. But it just took off, and that was obviously before blogs and that kind of thing. If that had broken in today's environment it would be a mushroom cloud, but it was a pretty big mushroom cloud even then.

Nelson: And Lieberman—Was Lieberman the one who responded?

Gillespie: He backed away; he wouldn't stand by it. That was a pretty big blow, and Gore wanted to fight the ballots.

Nelson: So Lieberman just got off the reservation?

Gillespie: That's my understanding.

Nelson: How many ballots are we talking about here, the military ballots?

Gillespie: I think it was pretty significant; I think it was about 10,000.

Nelson: So really, it could decide the election.

Gillespie: Yes, I think it was 734 votes.

Jones: Gore got involved, at least as I recall. Gore was seen to be involved.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: Bush was seen not to be involved.

Gillespie: Right.

Jones: Was he ever, apart from his connection with Jim Baker?

Gillespie: Again, I wasn't there. My impression, just from the way the President operated even then, was that he was involved. He was fully apprised of what was going on, but—

Jones: Not publicly, as I recall.

Gillespie: No, not publicly. Racicot really was the public face in Austin. He did a very good job. I think he was offered the Attorney General position after the election, in the transition. But the President—it's not that he was disinterested or wasn't involved. He had good people. He had faith in Jim Baker, he had faith in his communications people and his lawyers, and he trusted them. But in that situation there's not a lot he could do other than say, "Yes, I agree, we ought to do this." He was good for morale. There would be emails from him to the people in the field and that kind of thing.

Jones: There was an interesting, to me, photo set in the *New York Times* three or four days out. On the left-hand side, properly perhaps, Gore was playing touch football with the staff. On the right-hand side Bush was meeting with Condi Rice, Dick Cheney, and somebody else.

Gillespie: The transition team.

Jones: The transition team, right. I thought at the time, and I'm questioning if you know if it was the case, that the strategy or the plan or at least the impression they wanted to set was that we're settling down to business to do what is necessary to be President of the United States, and on the other side is this picture of Gore playing touch football. But was that correct?

Gillespie: There were two things. One, there was some discussion as to whether or not it would be seen as presumptuous to begin doing that, to begin planning for the transition.

Jones: There was some feedback of that sort.

Gillespie: Yes, that was an internal discussion. What came to prevail was, we think we're going to win this and it would be irresponsible not to plan the transition of government. If it goes like it did—another 30 days or whatever, like it did—was it 36 days?—to start then trying to determine who's going to be the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of State would be irresponsible. Bush himself, and I don't know it firsthand, but my understanding is that Bush himself said we have a responsibility to do this. There was some debate as to whether or not the import of that or the effect of that was going to be they're presumptuous or they're the ones who are the de facto, they've got the ball in their hands, like I say.

I think it played out that way. I think that was the effect. Oh, right, he's the President-elect right now and they're trying to stop him from being the President-elect and make Gore the President-elect. My point is, it wasn't as calculated as people might think it to be. There was a calculation of what's the impact of this, but the center of the decision was a governing decision.

Nelson: There was kind of a public perception at the time that some of the volunteers who came down and demonstrated and so on were crossing a line into rowdiness and intimidation. Did you see any of that? Was that an accurate perception?

Gillespie: Emotions ran high on both sides and there were protesters where at times I thought, *This is a little too much*. But truthfully, compared to what you see now, given the stakes and the closeness of it, it was pretty civil in retrospect.

Nelson: Did you see anything going on by people on your side where you thought, *This is not helping us*?

Gillespie: I don't recall that.

Riley: Did your previous experience in Florida help you at all in this or were you in such a different place?

Gillespie: Not really. I had been on the west coast. As I said, I was doing Social Security checks and VA checks and that kind of thing, so I wasn't that familiar with Miami-Dade. That's a whole different world.

Riley: Exactly. Are there any underappreciated components of the story that we should be aware of? Are there unsung heroes of the story, from your perspective, that ought to be identified for historical purposes?

Nelson: Untold villains.

Gillespie: I don't think, to a certain extent, that Racicot gets his due for the effect that he had. He had a very positive effect on the people on the ground. I remember watching his briefings. You

were just so dog-tired and you would think, keep it up. It was encouraging to folks on the ground.

I remember at one point I had footage; I think it was footage of that incident of the ballots slopping out of the mail tray. It was like a beta. I went to find a place where I could feed it out via satellite. I was trying to get the networks to show it, just to show what kind of chaos was going on here. I couldn't get anybody to take it. It was one of these things where I jump in a cab, I've got the tape, and I go across town to one of those video uplink places and send it up. I give all the coordinates to the networks for them to pull it down and take a look at this. Today you could shoot it on your cell phone and send it digitally, but back then you had to feed that stuff. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon and I hadn't had lunch because things were crazy. I took the cab back and I had to have something to eat. I saw this little pizza place and I had the cab stop there and I stepped out. I thought I was going to pass out; I thought I was going to faint.

It was hot and I've got this tape and I think I've got to eat something. That's when I just really hit the wall, but that's the way it was there.

Jones: Sure does sound like it.

Nelson: Pizza in Florida?

Gillespie: But my point is that Marc Racicot would then get out there and bang away and it was like a message from home. It would just buck you up a little bit. So I think his role in that situation was a little underestimated.

Then on the ground, Joe Hagin, who became the Deputy Chief of Staff in the White House, was really phenomenal in terms of the logistics. He was in Miami-Dade with me. He was constantly moving people and resources and Subway sandwiches. He did a fantastic job keeping the supply trains moving to the troops.

Riley: Were there broader lessons from this that you—have you reflected back? Is there a time that you think this political system works or it doesn't work?

Gillespie: I think the system worked. I thought it was unfortunate. I don't know how I would have been if it had been the other way around. But I thought the delegitimizing afterward by some on the left, by many on the left, of the President's election—he was selected, not elected—and all of that was unhealthy for the political process. But I understand it's easy for me to say because we were the ones who won. But I think denigrating the Court and the process like that—I mean, we did have it on our side at one point. A lot of people think Nixon should have challenged the ballots in Cook County in 1960 and he didn't. He said, "We lost, that's the way it goes." I think the reaction by many on the left helped contribute to a more poisonous environment.

Milkis: What do you think the influence was that the Governor of Florida was the President's brother and the state legislature was controlled by the Republicans? Was that a sense of comfort to you or was it a little dicey because well, the President's brother is Governor and how is that going to—

Gillespie: I would say it was more a sense of comfort to have that as a backstop.

Milkis: A safety net.

Nelson: During the 36 days, from what you saw, do you think the media coverage played it straight?

Gillespie: Yes, I don't recall having a real beef about the media coverage at that point in time actually.

Perry: You had mentioned when you first got to Miami you were speaking to Ted Olson.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: Of course he ends up arguing the case at the Court. Did you have other interaction with him on the ground, or did he quickly move up the chain of command?

Gillespie: We met with the guys who filed *Bush v. Gore*. Ted was a lawyer but someone, I think it was Ned—I blank on his last name—strong supporter of the President. They filed it on the President's behalf and Ted was the lawyer. They had standing. So I met with them and Ted in a conference room overlooking Biscayne Bay, on the top floor of one of those office buildings, and talked about here's what we need to hit. That was one of my first times that I was listening to the lawyers and trying to process the legal arguments and translate them into message that would resonate with others. So I would ask questions from a layman's perspective. The guys who filed, by the way, were laymen too; they weren't lawyers.

Ted would answer. Then I would ask, "Is it safe to say it like this?" He would say, "Yes, you can say that." So that was my interaction with him that day. Then we filed it. I remember sitting in the courtroom on a wooden—it was an old-fashioned courtroom with wooden benches. Ted filed the motion and then we did a press briefing on the steps of the courthouse. A ton of cameras were there, obviously. Ted didn't do any interviews; he made a statement and then I did some postbriefing spin with reporters. That was the last time I saw him. I didn't stay with him through the Court process because I was on the ground in Miami.

Nelson: Sounds like another time when not being a lawyer was an advantage. You knew how to break it down, so to speak.

Gillespie: Yes, I think it was. I think if there was somebody in my role who was a lawyer, they wouldn't be translating it.

Riley: Anything else on this?

Jones: It's amazing to me how much a person in your position has to know, and it seems like being there is the most important source of information.

Gillespie: I think that's right.

Jones: And being connected. But the sheer—given all the venues that we're talking about.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: And you're then being the face to the larger media. How demanding it is to get it right.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: And to get it right having at least close to right information.

Gillespie: Well, in terms of being there, my wife Cathy says I'm the Forrest Gump of American politics. I just happen to be at these places.

Riley: There's no resentment in that. She had obviously her own independent political—

Gillespie: She did, yes. I think one of the things, to the extent I've had some luck in the business and that kind of thing, I do think that the original inclination to be a reporter has helped me because I'm not hesitant to ask questions and to probe and to try to understand it. I'm not afraid to look stupid and ask stupid questions because I feel like I'm, to a certain extent, representing people like me in this process. I know what people like me are confused by or want to have a better sense of, and that's why I ask those questions and then try to bring it back to people. I think the interest in policy helps as well.

The truth is, there are people in the business who just convey what somebody else says. I think they're less credible, and at the end of the day they're less impactful and less effective on behalf of the people they're trying to serve.

Milkis: I just noticed that John Wilkinson said you were the Michael Jordan of communications.

Gillespie: That's better than Forrest Gump.

Milkis: I wish somebody would call me the Michael Jordan of political science.

Nelson: You're the Forrest Gump of political science.

Jones: Maybe this is a good place to ask a broad question that I had. What is effective press relations?

Gillespie: I think it begins with the notion of credibility. My relations with the media—and by the way, they've tapered off considerably. I really don't talk much to the media anymore because I find it to be less impactful than it once was. I do the Sunday shows because nobody can say what I said or what I meant. People see it. I don't have a filter, but I don't trust the filter as much as I once did. There was a time when if you had the credibility you could say to a reporter, "That's not the case, it's just not true." If they couldn't verify it somewhere else to prove that you were lying to them, they wouldn't write. Now if you say, "That's not true, it's just not the case," they'll write and they'll say you denied it. That's different.

To answer your question, I think effective press relations is to have the credibility that when you say something, one, it's true; two, it's relevant; and three, you're communicating through the media to real people who are either reading it or hearing it or seeing it on television and you're

taking them into account and you're advocating for your side. I'm always honest and truthful, but it's not my job to represent the other side too. My job is to advocate for my side and do that as best and as most effectively as I can. I take into account I know what the other side is going to say and I try to anticipate that. But to me, effective press communications is truthful, relevant, and understandable, relatable to the audience.

Jones: Marlin Fitzwater once said don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."

Gillespie: That's right.

Riley: All right, so you go home, you get some rest. You get to meet your children again.

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: You said you had no interest in going into the administration.

Gillespie: I didn't, and I was offered a position.

Riley: Congressional relations?

Gillespie: Congressional relations, which was a really good job for a President just starting out with Republican majorities in both places. That's a pretty—We passed the tax cuts.

Jones: It was even in the Senate.

Gillespie: That's right. Cheney's vote gave us effective control. I remember Andy called me, I called him back. He called me again, I called him back. I was going to accept the job; I was going to take it. Even though, as I said, I didn't covet it. I was tired, I was still tired. I thought, *That's a grueling job.* The worst thing about legislative affairs is you keep both the President's hours and the Members' hours. So when they're in session you've got to be around. Bush is in the office 6:30 in the morning, you've got to be around. I mean, it's a pretty grueling job. But I thought it was a pretty exciting time. So we traded calls and I was going to say yes.

I was coaching my son's basketball team then. I relate this in my book. It was a crisp December night. I was driving him home after practice. We weren't saying much. He was about 12 years old at the time. Then just out of nowhere he said, "Thanks for coaching my basketball team, Dad." I took it as maybe a little more divine intervention than I should have because I wouldn't have been able to coach his basketball team if I had taken that job. I just thought, *I'm going to keep coaching his basketball team.*

So Andy reached me the next morning on my way to work, it was about 7:45. I was driving down Route One and I said, "Boy, we should have caught up yesterday because I was calling to take it, but I can't." I told him the story. There was another aspect, which is a little more—when I walk out of the gym there's a light that shines on the cross outside the gym. It was a dark night and it projected up into the sky like a bat signal. Those two things combined, I thought it was truly God saying, Focus on your family.

He completely understood. I remember thinking, *I'll never get another chance like this again*. I

had mixed emotions about it. I said, "Maybe at the end of the term when people are tired the President will need a fresh set of legs. I would love to serve but I just can't serve right now." He said, "You've got your priorities straight and I completely understand and no one is going to begrudge this to you."

When I took the job as RNC chairman later, I was coaching my son's basketball team. When I took the job I said, "I'm going to take the job and I know it entails a lot of travel but I still want to be home on Saturdays during basketball season for games and I want to be able to coach at least one of the two nights a week for practice." I remember Andy Card saying, "The President wouldn't have it any other way," which was true.

I thought that was it. I thought I was done and I'd never have another chance, but as it turned out I did. That premonition that at the end of his term he might need a fresh set of legs is exactly what happened.

Nelson: It sounds like part of the concern was the unique time demands of being—

Gillespie: Yes, those were the concerns.

Nelson: Did you ask Card if there was anything else you could do?

Gillespie: No, and I told him what my concerns were. He said, "We can accommodate that." I said, "You can't. I know you would want to, but *I* couldn't accommodate it. I wouldn't be doing the job well if that's how I was doing it." As I said, I didn't covet anything, so I wasn't thinking, *I'd rather do* this. He said, "Something will come up at some point; we're going to need you later."

Nelson: Did you do anything outside of government during the first couple of years of the Bush Presidency to be helpful?

Gillespie: Yes. They wanted to take the Senate so Karl had asked me in '02 to help Elizabeth Dole in North Carolina. I said I would. He had meant just kind of be like a Sherpa a little bit, be a graybeard. I think he asked a couple of others; I think he asked Charlie Black to do the same thing for Jim Talent in Missouri. But I just got sucked into it. I was her general strategist and really came to love her, still do, and him. But yes, I saw it as a favor to the President. I saw it as helping the President not Elizabeth Dole.

Nelson: What would Sherpa have meant?

Gillespie: It was kind of like the Gang of Six was in terms of a sounding board. Just take a second look at the polling data, run the spots by you and say, yes, I think that spot is good or not. But not move to Salisbury and live in the hotel.

Jones: As much fun as that would be.

Perry: When you said you were looking ahead to being a fresh set of legs maybe toward the end of the President's term, were you already thinking that this will be a two-term President?

Gillespie: That was my assumption when I said it. I wasn't looking forward to it, but it was my hope that maybe that might happen. I knew the nature of White Houses and that they churn and they turn over. Bush's White House turned over less than most do, but people get tired and you do need a fresh set of legs. I just hoped that if I could stay close to him, I had great loyalty to the people there. I had become very close to Karl in the course of the campaign and wanted to be helpful. I tried to be helpful on the outside in a number of different ways and capacities, but probably the most significant one was the Dole campaign.

Jones: What about the transition?

Nelson: Can you tell us about Karl Rove, just in general?

Gillespie: Everybody knows he's brilliant, and he is. There are very few people in my estimation where there is a greater gap between kind of the public persona and the real person. Karl is a very—when Karl is your friend he's your friend. He's tough. There's no doubt; you've sometimes got to be tough in the business. Somebody at the end of the day has to say no, we're not doing that, or yes, we are. Karl is willing to do that. He is a vigorous advocate for the things he believes in, loyal to President Bush, always has been. Loyal to me; I'm loyal to him. He's a generally good, caring person. Not many people who think of him through his public persona would think of the adjective "sweet," but he's a really sweet guy. He's very thoughtful in terms of remembering birthdays and checking on how your son is doing, things like that. I like him a lot. I think he's much maligned, but that goes with the territory these days.

Jones: Did you do anything in the 2000 transition as an outsider?

Gillespie: No. I think I had recommendations for people they ought to take a look at and that kind of thing. I served as a reference for folks. But I don't think I was on the transition team or anything. My formal role ended with the closing down of the inaugural committee.

Riley: Forgive me because I can't remember if you give your account in your book of where you were on 9/11.

Gillespie: I was at my office. I drove home. You know the city was evacuated.

Nelson: Where is your office?

Gillespie: It was on Connecticut Avenue, right up the street from the White House, 1133 Connecticut, right by the Mayflower Hotel. Getting out of the city was hard; it took me about three hours to get home. I drove across the Wilson Bridge and you could see the Pentagon burning. I wasn't in the White House but I had a lot of friends there, obviously.

I did emotionally watch like everyone else as everything unfolded, but then I did have some thoughts that I tossed in to Karen and Karl about the President's speech and the trip to New York and that kind of thing.

Milkis: The January 20th, the joint session of Congress?

Jones: The post 9/11 speech?

Gillespie: No, I had a couple of thoughts, one was the cathedral speech. And I felt that when he went to New York he should wear a FDNY [Fire Department New York] jacket.

Milkis: Did you tell him to talk through the bullhorn too?

Gillespie: No, I just thought that would relate to them. He wore just a casual windbreaker. I asked Karen later if he didn't want to wear the FDNY jacket. She said he told her that that had been discussed but he didn't think it was right that these men had been out there for days and had lost their comrades. He just didn't feel that he had any right to wear that jacket, which I thought was a pretty—

Milkis: What were your thoughts on his speeches? What kind of advice did you give about the addresses?

Gillespie: I can't remember. I tossed in a couple of things. I'm not taking credit for any of that. It's one of those things. One of the things I've realized is that—I tried not to bother them at the White House from the outside. But I know at moments like that you appreciate stuff. I'm not sending long memos or anything, just "think about this." That tends to be appreciated. It's kind of an all hands on deck thing, and if you can lob something in without getting in the way, that can be helpful.

Nelson: Did you feel like on September 11th itself, when I guess he made three appearances on television, two from various bases and then the Oval Office—

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: —did you think this isn't going well, he's not coming through in a way I wish he was, for whatever reason, production values?

Gillespie: Not really, no. I wasn't thinking of it that analytically. Like every other American I was just riveted and trying to figure out what the hell was going on. It was chaotic. As you know, he was frustrated and wanted to get home. His security advisors would not have had him get home to the Oval Office that night. He finally said, "I'm going home, I'm going back to Washington. I'm going back to the White House, that's where I need to be." And that's what he did, which was the right call. But they would have had him on a military base. I wasn't thinking of it in those terms, I was just thinking what are we going to do and what's going on, that kind of thing.

Riley: There's one thing that I had intended to ask you before we got to the 9/11 piece, particularly because you had been considered for the congressional relations post. In the middle of the year roughly there's a churning in the Senate.

Gillespie: [James] Jeffords switches.

Riley: Jeffords switches parties and there is an enormous amount of media attention to the condition of White House and congressional relations at that point.

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: What were your thoughts about how effective the White House was being in its congressional relations? And did you have contact with people about that condition or maybe have a good impression?

Gillespie: Because I came from the Hill and have a lot of friends who are staff and Members, I had heard some grumbling about it. Not that bad, especially compared to if you talk to folks on the Hill now; both sides howl. The Democrats will tell you in retrospect that congressional relations looked pretty good back then. But there was friction between the—but I think that's not uncommon. There was definitely friction between the White House legislative affairs shop and folks on the Hill.

Riley: Was it preventable?

Gillespie: I don't know, I wasn't there. There are two sides to it. I do think from the Jeffords' perspective if you're in a 50-50 situation like that and Jeffords is willing to hold you up for X billions of dollars, whatever it was, and you cave in, that won't be the last time that happens.

Riley: OK, let me use this as a launching point for a much broader question I've been thinking about as we spoke yesterday. As political scientists we're always interested in interinstitutional relations, whether we have a Presidential-centric government or the role of Congress and the relative positions of Congress and the President.

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: You came from the Hill, and a lot of what's going on in the '90s is a kind of restoration of power, if you will, to Congress, the Contract with America.

Gillespie: The Hill-driven agenda.

Riley: Exactly. I'm just sort of thinking through. I want to get you to talk a little bit about whether, from your own perspective, you had a position on what's the proper role of Congress versus the White House, or whether what we saw then with the pushback from the Hill is something to be expected after what had happened in the '90s.

Gillespie: I was probably more in line with my friends on the Hill. I felt that the Texans weren't appreciative enough of the legislative branch and of Congress. I don't think they had to be deferential necessarily, and I had a little taste of this in the Supreme Court confirmation processes.

Jones: By the "Texans" you mean those in the White House?

Gillespie: Karl and Karen and Dan; the inner circle were Texans.

Jones: There were an awful lot of important Texans on the Hill as well.

Gillespie: That's true.

Jones: They had a different view of the Hill.

Gillespie: In the Supreme Court, I remember talking to Andy, and Andy was mad at Arlen Specter. I had forged a very good working relationship with Specter as running the confirmation. They wanted him to cancel a recess and have the committee come in and meet, and Specter said we're not doing that. People have plans, there are delegation codels [congressional delegation trip], and all that stuff. Andy said, "They need to cancel those." I said, "They're not gonna." He said, "You need to tell Specter to—" I said, "Andy, you realize this guy has the confirmation in his hands, our fate is tied to him?" Andy and I had a pretty good relationship and he kind of backed off. But that was the mentality, make them do it, make them do it. I think there has to be more give-and-take.

We were more deferential to the Hill, as it turns out, than this administration by a long shot.

Riley: This being Obama.

Gillespie: Yes, our successors. They couldn't give a fat rat's ass about Capitol Hill and Members of the Senate and either party. I think that's pretty apparent. When [Harry] Reid started convening the Senate every three days, pro forma sessions, we considered ourselves blocked. The President blocked from doing nominations, recess appointments. Obviously there's a different view today, and apparently Senator Reid—I saw on the *Today* show this morning—said he's OK with actually 51 votes for judicial nominations now. So they're setting all kinds of precedents, weakening Senate authority relative to the executive branch, that I think in the long term are probably not good.

I felt that certainly before 9/11 there should have been a little more give-and-take with Members of Congress. President Bush did a lot, as it turned out, when I was there. I don't know if that was more in the second term than in the first term, but we had Members over a lot in the Yellow Oval Room and receptions. He spoke to the House Republican Conference and the Senate Conference. Our relations were pretty good with the Hill by the time I got there. But I think there was a period initially where there was some friction.

Riley: You mentioned the Texans as being sort of Presidential-centric in their overall relations. The Vice President's office is often thought of as a hotbed of thinking unitary executive and these kinds of things.

Gillespie: That's true in the theory—I don't mean that dismissively, in terms of the point of view of the unitary executive. It's not necessarily true relative to the relationship with congressional relations. Cheney had very good relations with his—he went every Tuesday to the Senate policy lunch. The RNC chairman goes to the Senate policy lunch when the RNC chairman is in town, so I would go to the Senate policy lunch. He would always be there.

He had an office up in the Capitol, as they do, a ceremonial office, but he spent time there. He worked the Hill pretty hard actually and I think he liked—he was probably more of a mind to accommodate the Hill and have a little back-and-forth with them than the President and Karl, or Karen or Dan or the folks around them. It was almost like looking at the Texas legislature. I'm the Governor, and even though it was not a strong Governorship he was a strong Governor, and if he said we're going to do this, we did it. There was some friction, but it got better.

Riley: I'm mindful of Chuck's question about what constitutes good press relations. What

constitutes good congressional relations? You're almost suggesting that good congressional relations doesn't require deference to the institution so much as it does just—

Gillespie: Collaboration and communication. I mean, when I was there, and again it's not—I think my Hill experience was of value to the President when I served as counselor to the President. My relations with Members directly were of value. So I could, like on the SCHIP [State Children's Health Insurance Program] fight, which was a pretty big fight when I first got there, call over and talk to Richard Burr, who was a very savvy legislator and a good guy. I would say, "Where are we on this?" Or I'd call and talk to [John] Boehner and say, "What's your take on this? Are we going to get our ass kicked?" It's more that.

And when you're crafting legislation, I think early on in the first term there was a tendency to say, "OK, here's the bill, pass it." I think there's a little more collaboration and give-and-take, but you set the agenda. You drive the agenda. But sometimes the Members have a better sense of what can get done and what can't, and what's going to fly and what's not.

Milkis: I heard a story, maybe I read this in some *New York Times Magazine* article, and I never knew how to interpret this in terms of Russell's question that Cheney, when he went to the Republican caucus meetings in the Senate, used to take Karl Rove with him. Is that so?

Gillespie: No, I don't think so.

Milkis: As far as you know that's not true?

Gillespie: I don't think that's true at all.

Riley: We'll take a break here shortly, but is there anything else? Before the 9/11 period or I guess actually before you go to the RNC, are there pieces missing?

Milkis: I was just going to ask, we kind of swept over the 2002 election and I think that's a really interesting—

Gillespie: That was big.

Milkis: —election. It's the first time since Gore, I think, the President party has gained seats.

Gillespie: In a midterm.

Milkis: The first midterm.

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: I think the role the White House played in it is interesting. They not only recruited candidates, but they recruited you.

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: Just tell us a little bit about how you thought about the 2002 election, why you were sent to North Carolina.

Gillespie: I would say, from my perspective I was in a silo. My silo was the Dole campaign. I fell into it. I'm working on a book right now and this is actually something I have in my book; it's a novel. The guy who sells the Ginsu knives doesn't love the Ginsu knives. I ended up loving the Ginsu knives. I really came to love both Elizabeth Dole and Bob Dole. I just got deeper and deeper into it. She came to rely very heavily on me.

The reason Elizabeth Dole has gone as far as she has is because she is always the most prepared person in the room. I think, by the way, that's probably because she was one of the first five women to go to Harvard Law School, and if you're one of the first five women to go to Harvard Law School you're probably a little more prepared than the other people at the table. When you're the first woman to be the Secretary of Transportation you might prepare a little more for the meetings than some of your colleagues. It's kind of her nature. So I helped her prepare.

I remember I went to meet with Bob Dole, whom I knew a little bit from working on the Hill for Armey, and Bob Dole knew who I was. I wanted to get his advice about working with Elizabeth. I'd never even met her before I went to work for her. I said, "I would just like to have your counsel on how I could effectively help her." He said, "You know, Ed, if you say yes to Elizabeth early you'll save yourselves both a lot of time." [*laughter*] It turned out to be true.

So anyway, I ended up moving to North Carolina and living in Salisbury. It's easy, it's a one-hour shuttle to Raleigh and then about a 45-minute drive from Raleigh to Salisbury. So I was back and forth quite a bit. My kids had gotten a little older and it was a little easier. But I wasn't looking at the big map, the whole thing, like Karl was. I was just looking to elect her.

The thing I would say about it is that President Bush was in for her three times in 2002, and obviously that was not the case for those who ran in the '06 cycle. He was a very big force in terms of energizing our voters and Independents, and she benefited from him coming into North Carolina three times.

Milkis: It was a tough race, right?

Gillespie: A very tough race. It broke our way pretty well at the end, but it was nip and tuck. She put the wood to him. She was a very good candidate. She and I had a lot of fun together but she was tough. She unveiled the Dole Plan for North Carolina. She had Social Security reform and jobs and all that. They went after it. They rose to the bait on it and they started attacking her on it. She went into the debate one time and she held up her plan for North Carolina and she said, "I have a copy of Erskine Bowles' plan too," and held it up and it was a blank piece of paper.

This was the real coup de grace. She said, "Oh, wait, I have it backward," and she turned it around. Beautiful, beautiful. So anyway, I recount that because I do think she's one of those people—I mentioned this about Mary Matalin yesterday—Elizabeth and Bob Dole both are people who you tend to look at from afar and you think, *I wonder what they're really like*. She is a wonderful woman. They have a real marriage. They love each other. They're fun to be around. I just found myself—I still, obviously have a crush on Elizabeth Dole today.

Riley: Let's take a quick break and we'll come back and pick up.

[BREAK]

Riley: Chuck, you said you had a question for us, why don't we start with you?

Jones: It's about nine questions actually.

Milkis: Choose your three best ones.

Jones: As I look at your career, you start off living in the legislative world, the congressional world.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: You lived in the national party world and you lived in the executive world. Along the way you've done living in state politics, and overriding all that is that you're a political junkie.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: That's very special. There are not that many careers where a person has substantial experience in all those various areas. Can you say something about how those worlds differ and how you adjust to those various worlds? I realize that party chairman is—

Nelson: It's an essay question.

Jones: Be brief and please be more articulate than I've been.

Gillespie: I'm waiting for my blue book; it has been a long time. There are a couple of things. One, I like the state politics. I think it's closer to home. It has a more intimate feel to it. It's not the normal trajectory to go from the national to—I went from RNC chairman to state party chairman.

Milkis: That's really interesting to me.

Gillespie: I don't know of anyone else who has done it. I'm told it had never been done before on either side, but who knows if there are records of those things. I thought it was important. One, I thought it reflected the impact of McCain-Feingold and the new campaign finance system and the importance of the state parties after that.

Two, it was good for me. I may or may not want to run myself at some point, and that was a helpful thing to do. The state stuff—this is about our quality of life, the value of our homes, the streets we drive on, the schools our children attend, the streams and rivers, the economic growth and the jobs in our area, all of that.

So the state stuff is very important. And if you believe, as I do, in a federalist system, the state should get equal due with the federal government. I got involved through the state party of Virginia. I had been involved in Virginia state politics, volunteered, that kind of thing. When I became chairman of the state party, I obviously deepened my involvement.

Then I became chairman of Governor [Robert] McDonnell's campaign in 2009. Interestingly enough, the difference is more in the process. State politics are less partisan. The divides are less sharp. They are more results-oriented, which I kind of like. It's more about getting things done. State senators don't get a lot of benefit from stopping stuff that the Governor wants to get done. They can vote against it but it's not—it's a little less polarizing.

When you're talking about the Commonwealth of Virginia, Democrats and Republicans, we all want the Commonwealth of Virginia to, you know, what can we do here to get this—? I just had a nice visit with Governor [Gerald] Baliles. That's more the nature than at the national level, so I like that part of it. But the politics is not all that different. You're still targeting voters; you're still turning them out. You're still trying to motivate them on these issues. You're still trying to get your contrast. It's just a little less poisonous in a lot of ways. I enjoyed it.

The other difference is that state legislators have day jobs. They're insurance salesmen and they're attorneys and they're car dealership owners. They have a different—unlike Members of Congress who are a little more "royalistic." I like dealing with the state legislators.

Jones: What about executive and legislative at the national level?

Gillespie: The executive, it's just a lot easier to be a legislator than an executive. The decisions that the executive makes are really tough. I know we'll get to this with the President, but I saw him make really tough decisions. TARP [Troubled Asset Relief Program] is probably one of the best examples that I went through. That was a really tough decision that he had to make. The surge was a really tough decision that he had to make.

Legislators can have opinions and express themselves on it and they can vote against it and they can put out press releases, but they're not the ones who have to actually, in the moment, do it. That actually minimizes the partisanship, or should, in my estimation, if done right. That's a big difference. It's a lot easier to vote no and walk away than to say no and then live with the consequences.

Jones: OK.

Nelson: RNC chair is the next chapter, is that right?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: How did that come about?

Gillespie: I think the 2002 Dole campaign really probably resulted in that. Again, it's not as if I was thinking—Karl asked me to come to the White House before the Dole campaign was over, interestingly enough, or at the very end of it. I went. We had lunch at the White House mess. I had shrimp.

Riley: A little cocktail sauce?

Gillespie: It was the grilled shrimp with rice.

Nelson: What did you have for dessert?

Gillespie: I'm having a *Rain Man* moment. At his table—there are two parts of the mess. There's one for the really senior staff. He had started thinking about the reelect. He said, "The President has authorized me to start thinking about the reelect." He said that the President wasn't thinking about it yet but he was going to go to him with some ideas and people and structure after the New Year. He said, "Marc Racicot is going to be the chairman of the campaign committee. He's going to leave the RNC. Do you have any thoughts on who could take his place as RNC chairman?"

I thought about it and, on the spot, said—I probably shouldn't say what I said, although I think I did in the book. I said, "Well, J. C. Watts would be good. He had been conference chairman and I like him a lot. He's a good guy and I believe strongly in the party's need to increase our share of the African American vote and Hispanic vote." I thought that would send a good signal.

He said, "Yes, I like J. C. He's good, but I'm not sure he's the right person for that job." Then I mentioned somebody else, I think I mentioned a Hispanic but I can't remember who it was. He said, "Yes, he'd be good too but I don't think that would work." Then I decided to say what I was thinking out loud, which was, "You know, I could do that job."

Milkis: Why not the best?

Gillespie: I feel a little bit like Dick Cheney on the Vice Presidential search. So I said, "I always felt like I could do that job." I felt like I could because of my time working for Haley and the communications aspect of it and having now done the campaign with Elizabeth Dole. I had done Andy Ireland's campaign and I ran Dick Armey's primary campaign in Texas back in '86, but the Dole campaign was the first campaign where I was really the one making the strategic recommendations. The candidate, at the end of the day, has to say yes or no, but I was the one saying we need to double down or we need to—

I felt pretty good about that so I said, "I've always felt like I could do that job." He just kind of smiled and said, "Me too." I said, "That's interesting." He said, "I haven't talked to the boss yet but if you're OK with it I'd like to recommend it." I said, "Let me talk to Cathy and see what she thinks."

We talked about it that night. I said, "You're not going to believe what Karl said at lunch today." She said, "Really?" We were pretty excited about it. We held it for a long time. There was probably about a six-month period where only Karl, the President, Cathy, and a few others I knew that I was going to be the next RNC chairman. I think that was probably reinforcing, too, the fact that it never broke anywhere, never leaked out. Then I think it was in May that it finally broke; it started to move around. I didn't move it, it just started to get around.

I got a call from someone at *Roll Call* asking about it. I said, "You need to ask the White House what they're thinking; you can't ask me." I did call every member of the RNC and ask for their vote because having come from the RNC and working for Haley, I knew the importance of the committee members and I wanted them to know that I knew the importance of the committee members. They all appreciated that.

Neither [James] Gilmore nor Racicot had—that's not a shot at them. You don't need to do that. The Members are going to vote for whoever the President puts up there. But I just called as a sign of good will and respect. A lot of them laughed and said, "Is there anybody else running?" I said, "No, but I'd like your vote. I want to ask for your vote. I want to tell you what I want to do as chairman," and that kind of thing. That helped me get off on a good foot with the committee, which is important.

Milkis: When you talked to Rove about the job, was there discussion about—of course there was discussion about reelection.

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: Was there discussion about the institution? What should happen with the RNC?

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: What your objectives should be?

Gillespie: Yes, register voters.

Milkis: Register voters, simple.

Gillespie: That was my focus in the target states. There's a natural role for the RNC chairman in a Presidential election to carry the negative message against the other side, which I enjoyed. With some relish. Then also there was something personal to me, that I really wanted to do, which was to try to increase our share of the black vote, in particular, and the Hispanic vote as well. I had license to do that. I don't think strategically from the President's reelection perspective that was as imperative as the Hispanic vote, they're both important to us, but when you look at the target states, New Mexico, Nevada, the Hispanic vote—it's easier. The Hispanic vote is not as locked in as the African American vote.

But those were the three things: register voters, register voters, register voters in the target states. Do the opposition research for the whole field, so it was Howard Dean and [John] Edwards, and Kerry and [Richard] Gephardt, and be prepared for when the time comes so that we have something to work with. Then for me, the minority outreach.

Nelson: I think it's the case that every President seeking a second term from [Dwight] Eisenhower on won a lonely landslide, to quote George W. Bush, meaning that while they were winning big, their party was losing seats in the Senate. That was something that Bush did not want.

Gillespie: No, he did not want a lonely victory. That's exactly right.

Nelson: Was it clear to you in the time that you were RNC chair that Rove wanted a party victory?

Gillespie: Yes, definitely, no doubt about it, which was good for me, helpful for me because of my relations with the House and Senate Republicans. I think that was part of it; I think they

factored that in. I think they wanted to send a signal to the Hill that we're going to have somebody there who's going to watch out for everybody.

Jones: A party guy.

Gillespie: Yes, and who's a Hill guy and a House guy. Not only did I do the Senate policy lunch, I was invited to go to the joint leadership meetings. I sat at the table with the minority leader and the Speaker and was welcome there. I had a comfort level with those folks and they had a comfort level with me. But yes, that was definitely a directive, no lonely victory as well. Ken was the same way at the campaign. We were joined at the hip, Ken and I. We did pull out all the stops too, not just to ensure that the President got reelected but that he had a majority with that.

Nelson: Did Rove talk with you at all? Did others talk with you at all about trying to build an enduring Republican majority?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Not just win this?

Gillespie: My contribution to that was my strong view that we should have a higher percentage of the African American vote as well as a bigger percentage of the Hispanic vote.

Nelson: Did he buy into the idea that going after the African American vote was as likely to bear fruit as going after the Hispanic vote?

Gillespie: No.

Nelson: Say some more. Were you out on your own on that in terms of what they thought?

Gillespie: It's not to say they humored me on it, that would be too strong. [*laughter*] If you look at the map the truth is that it's not going to—one, given the historic voting patterns, it's a much harder thing to do as opposed to the Hispanic vote, which Reagan got, I think, almost 50 percent of the Hispanic vote in the '84 landslide. We'd been up and down in the Hispanic vote. We'd been locked in at about 10 percent of the black vote for a long time. But, by the way, we had an uptick from 9 percentage points to 11 percentage points. That's kind of pathetic to say, we got 11 percent of the black vote, great. The truth is, it was a significant contributor to the President's win in Ohio. I think we probably did better in Ohio among black voters than we did nationally.

They were fully supportive of it and they liked it. They were glad I was doing it, but the truth is that was more in terms of long-term party than the reelect. They were fine with that. The President was encouraging of it. I remember seeing him during the campaign and he wanted to know how it was traveling with Don King. He was kind of curious. [*laughter*]

Nelson: How was it?

Gillespie: It's the only way to travel. He's a great guy. It's a lot of fun.

Nelson: It's true, Bush, unlike any other President, his National Security Advisor and his

Secretary of State were African American. I mean, they were not just Secretary of HUD [Housing and Urban Development] or something.

Gillespie: No. He had at that time the highest percentage of minorities appointed to top positions of any President. I don't think he ever got enough credit for it; I'm not sure he should get credit for it because he wasn't doing it for that. Although he was conscious—the Office of Personnel Management was conscious of diversity. We wanted diversity in the administration. But Condi was there by virtue—and Powell too.

Nelson: Those were not diversity appointments.

Gillespie: I've always said, if not Powell, who? And if not Condi to succeed him, who?

Perry: Can I ask about your role as chair and new technologies, new techniques, coming to bear? I'm thinking, for example, of microtargeting once you zeroed in on voters and groups and registering them. How about reaching them and then getting them out to vote?

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: Then your message through media, you said back in *Bush v. Gore* that CNN was the place to break your stories.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: Are things changing at this time?

Gillespie: Yes, we're now getting into email, text messaging, forwarding messages. Radio was still pretty big, although not for registering voters. Registering voters is really data crunching and going after folks and have them be—That's why I think the state parties are so important, getting the state parties engaged in registering, people moving in, comparing. When I was RPV [Republican Party of Virginia] chairman, one of the things I did was we'd get lists of new addresses, new utility hookups, change of address. You'd check the change of address: somebody moved to Prince William County from New York, so you'd go back and check the registration in New York. If they're registered as Republicans in New York you go after them. That kind of thing was going on.

Perry: Because they're not going to register—they can't register by party.

Gillespie: They can't register by party in Virginia. So you trace them where they were. If they've come from a state with party registration, let's get them. You can also know by the nature of the house they bought and their auto registration. There are a lot of ways to do it.

So we were doing a lot of that. In fact, we registered about three million voters when I was RNC chairman, which was the goal; I met the goal. I put a goal—I gave each of the state party chairs their goal for registration. Bush won by three million votes.

Nelson: Did you target the exurbs, I guess they're called?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Could you talk about that? I remember after the election the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Bush had carried 97 of the hundred fastest growing counties in the country.

Gillespie: Yes. I mentioned Prince William County, it's an exurb. That's kind of the model. People who are buying—they want a little more house, they're willing to drive to work to do it, they want better schools. There are a lot of ways our demographic—we went after them, we had to register them. That was the target of the registration. They were new to these areas.

Nelson: Right.

Gillespie: My last swing as RNC chairman was to all these places where I went to thank volunteers on the phone banks for all they did in terms of registering these voters, and then we turned them out. We didn't just register them, we stayed on top of them and turned them out. I remember being in Hendersonville, Nevada, which is kind of the classic one of those places where I'm standing on the back of a pickup truck with about 500 volunteers who were about to fan out and turn out voters, and thanking them for all they had done to register voters and help reelect the President.

I'm digressing a little bit. I had a really good volunteer speech—one of the important things for a party chairman to do is to go crank up the troops, and I did a lot of that. I would always say, "For the last nearly four years we have counted on President Bush to do the right thing, to do his job for us. Over the next 72 hours President Bush is counting on you to do your job for him." Women would cry. People were fired up, like grab the torch and let's go. It was fun. I really enjoyed it. By the way, I felt it. But all that to say, we had a very focused effort on identifying, registering, and turning out those voters.

Milkis: I wanted to ask a follow-up question to Barbara's. One of the things I think is very important about 2004, these primary efforts are attributed to the 2008 election but I think they began in the 2004 election, the use of the grassroots organization, people like Terry Nelson.

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: Coming out of the RNC.

Gillespie: Yes, the 72-hour program.

Milkis: There was this fascinating combination of the use of the Internet and old-fashioned canvassing. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Gillespie: It has been overtaken a little bit by what the Obama campaign did.

Milkis: They pushed it a lot further.

Gillespie: More digital.

Milkis: But I even heard David Plouffe one time talk about how some of the ideas—

Gillespie: They totally lifted it and they took it a different iteration, yes. It was a simple premise, which was that all the radio, television, it all matters, but at the end of the day what really matters is, what can make the difference is, if your neighbor says to you, "By the way, did you vote?" or "Are you going to vote tomorrow?"

If you say, "I might," then your neighbor says, "You've got to be kidding me. You might? You've got to vote." And emails, forward an email to somebody and say, "Did you vote? Did your sister in New Mexico vote? Make sure that she does." It was very essential. I used to quote Abraham Lincoln when he was running for office the first time; he said, "Make a perfect list of those who support your candidate and make sure that they vote on Election Day." That was the election of 1858. That's the same thing that we were doing in 2004.

Milkis: There were well over a million volunteers, right?

Gillespie: Yes, it was a volunteer Army. Ken's mentality was, and it's the right mentality, you work your volunteers like mules. That's what they want, that's what they're there for. Treat them like paid employees and make them work. Give them lists. I went to countless—Then we stood for the first time—This was the first time I saw this; it was in Washington State. We went out and we had a rally, and then after the rally people stayed and we had tents, it was outside, and long tables. We just dumped a bunch of cell phones on the tables. Everybody picked up a cell phone, we handed them a list, and people worked off cell phones. It was the first time I ever saw a cell phone bank. It was out in Washington State, which we had as a target state for a pretty long time until we realized we weren't going to be able to get there from here. But Washington State—I probably did three trips out to Washington State, thinking that maybe we could win it. It was pretty neat to see that. That was innovation from the Bush campaign. They did that at other places as well.

Milkis: If you'll forgive me, I want to ask a kind of Chuck Jones institutional. One of the things that fascinates me and that I'm curious about in putting together the grassroots organization, which was kind of a candidate-centered organization.

Gillespie: It always is.

Milkis: President Bush would come down to the tarmac. Then there's the RNC and the question of the party, and Mike and you had this interchange about this wasn't a lonely win.

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: What I haven't been able to figure out in my research is, how enduring was that kind of candidate-centered organization that was put together? What happened to these volunteers? Were they absorbed into the organization? Did they become part of it?

Gillespie: It's hard to transfer them over, candidate-centered volunteers, those folks over to the organization, to the party. I'm the RNC chairman, I'm standing on the back of that flatbed truck and I'm thanking them on behalf of President Bush. I'm not thanking them on behalf of the party. They weren't there for the Republican Party, they were there for President Bush.

Now, you keep the list. The state parties keep the lists and they keep the volunteers and you try

to keep them involved, but they fade away over time. Then they come back if they see a candidate they like. That's true at the state level as well. If you look at the McDonnell organization, we had volunteers all over the state. It was a great volunteer organization. You can dovetail some of them into the RPV but not a lot; it's just not the way it is. People are drawn to a candidate, not a party, most people.

There are party regulars but they're not the norm. So we try to—and in terms of building the enduring majority, which, by the way, is often derided or mischaracterized as a permanent majority. No one ever said permanent majority, no one ever thought we could get a permanent majority. We did think we could build an enduring majority. I think we would have built an enduring majority if not for the Iraq war and Katrina as well. But we had a chance for an enduring majority; we suffered setbacks. All that to say, it's hard to translate those volunteers from an individual candidate to a party apparatus.

Perry: As long as we're on 2004, you had mentioned that one of the three main goals that you had as head of RNC leading up to 2004 was the opposition research on the potential candidates.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: Could you talk specifically about John Kerry, the opposition research on him, and leading then ultimately to the swift boat ads and the impact of those on the election?

Gillespie: We had a pretty thick book on Kerry. I knew all of his votes. The one thing that frustrated me early on when he became the nominee, in terms of the media, was that the media were buying this line that he was a centrist Democrat, like he was Mark Pryor or something. John Kerry is a classic liberal. On the *National Journal* ratings he was something like a 96 out of 100. It was nonsense. They had a couple of votes that they were saying he voted this way probusiness or conservative. It was absurd. I found it very frustrating.

I immediately set out to make clear his voting record was a liberal voting record. Lots of tax increases, lots of spending increases, lots of defense cuts, down the line. So part of it was to convey that. The other thing was to never denigrate his service in uniform, which we always respected. I laid that marker down very early on, I remember, at the RNC meeting, making clear that we respect his service. We appreciate his service in Vietnam. But if you look at his record on votes in the United States Senate on military issues, it was not good.

I had seen the stuff about the medals and everything. We just didn't go there. Nobody wanted to. It wasn't a fight worth having or a legitimate fight. We thought we had him dead to rights on his votes and his record. So when the swift boat ads hit, I was surprised by them. I was surprised by how much attention they got and how much penetration there was with it. We couldn't disavow them. One, there's a law; you can't tell them to stop running the ads. But two, you also can't tell people who served themselves who are raising their own issue that they think is legitimate, whether we thought it was a legitimate thing or not. It just didn't feel right to say that. If that's how they feel—so anyway it was a complicated time and it was the first time anybody had to deal with that, the 527 ads, essentially. Now it has become routine, this notion of what can a campaign say relative to a 527 ad, and what should a campaign say relative to a 527 ad.

Riley: One of Karl Rove's preoccupations before the first election was the place of Catholic

voters in the Democratic Party, the sense that there were inroads to be made there.

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: Was this a preoccupation in the second election, and if so, how did it manifest itself?

Gillespie: It turns out it was one of the things that Karl—I had written a piece about the Catholic vote. When I was working for Haley at the RNC in '96, I had lunch with Kate O'Beirne, who as you know was at *National Review*. She alerted me to the demographics of the Catholic vote and their correlation to the Presidency, which, going back to Kennedy, the majority—whoever carries the Catholic vote carries the White House. There was one aberration. I think that has been the case since Kennedy. I was kind of fascinated by that. Again, it struck me as relevant because of my own—the whole Reagan realignment was very Catholic in nature, and in a lot of ways the ethnic Catholics in the Northeast and the Midwest and the Southern conservative Protestants.

So I started doing some research on it and I brought it to Haley's attention. Haley was fascinated by it, especially when you looked at the disproportionate share of the vote that Catholics were in states like Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Florida, swing states where they are a big chunk of the swing vote. So I wrote a piece about it for the RNC's magazine, *Rising Tide,* in my own name. Haley said, "You should write this up." So I did, it had charts and everything. Karl locked into that, he'd seen that and he thought it was interesting. He was there too; he had the same view.

My being a Catholic, a graduate of Catholic University of America, my life story, was helpful. I did a lot of Catholic outreach as well. I went to Catholic schools and spoke to Catholic student groups and went to Knights of Columbus halls and spoke at a lot of Catholic venues, talk radio shows and things like that. It was a focus, no doubt about it. There is an overlap obviously with Hispanic focus and Catholic focus as well.

Riley: Was this issue-based?

Gillespie: It was largely issue-based and it wasn't just life, although that's a big part of it. Values, there were a number of things. Life and marriage were pretty essential to it but immigration reform and things like that also were resonant in both the Hispanic and Catholic community.

Nelson: You played such a role in the 2000 convention, tell me about your role in the 2004 convention.

Gillespie: It was pretty big. I was pretty involved as chairman. I wasn't there on the ground, but I was in very regular touch with them. It's the President's convention but I saw it as the party's convention too. I was the RNC chairman, it was the Republican Party's convention, and I saw it as important to not just the President but to me and to the party. I was very involved in the themes and the program and the imagery. At that point I was inner circle. I had more access to the speeches and the President's speech and that kind of thing.

The inner circle of the '04 reelect was Karl, Ken, me, Nicolle Devenish, now Wallace, and Matthew Dowd and Mark McKinnon. So I saw the speeches and I had a view on what we ought

to do. It was a great convention. New York City turned out to be a fantastic venue. I dealt with the [Michael] Bloomberg folks and the mayor's office, the host committee and everything. I wanted it to be positive and uplifting and fun. I was completely in sync with the reelect on it, but I was very involved in it. The experience of the 2000 was helpful to me in terms of how I interacted with the convention folks.

Nelson: There were at least two amazing speeches at that convention, one by Zell Miller and one by Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Were you involved in putting on the program? Were you involved in what they said?

Gillespie: I was involved with Schwarzenegger.

Milkis: You tried to get him in 2000. You tell that great story.

Gillespie: He tried to leverage it for an interview with Maria [Shriver]. He called me on my cell phone at McDonald's. I forget who got Schwarzenegger but he wanted to come. I wanted Zell, and he wanted to come. The Democrats for Bush was an important part of '04 and he was good. Rudy Giuliani's speech was really good too, which was the same night as Schwarzenegger's speech. He went over, which makes me very nervous, but they stayed with him.

The President's speech was good, but I agree with you that I would add Giuliani to the Miller and the Schwarzenegger speeches. Those three speeches were the centerpiece of that whole thing.

Nelson: I'm wondering, because the conventions have become basically extended free commercials for the party. You want to have themes; you want to make sure that the speeches—

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: How did you help establish the themes for the convention? How did you work with the speakers to make sure that they were—How did you sort of slot the speakers?

Gillespie: I had input in the themes, prosperity with a purpose, I think that was the '04. I remember calling in. I had gone up to New York for a convention meeting, a more technical meeting, with the Bloomberg people and the host committee, dealing with the buses and all that stuff, the transportation and the hotels. On my way back I stopped at the Jersey shore, where I have a house. I called in. I remember Mary Matalin was on the call, Karen, and Dowd and Karl and Ken. I remember because seagulls flew by and they screeched, and typical Ken Mehlman said, "Did I just hear a seagull?" I was kind of busted. I said, "Well, I'm calling in from the Jersey shore."

Milkis: Which shore?

Gillespie: Long Beach Island. But I remember on that call kicking out this notion of some of these themes that everybody liked and we stayed with them.

Nelson: How then do you slot the speakers, make sure the speakers are on message?

Gillespie: That got turned over at that point to Russ Schriefer, who had my job from 2000. I forget who was the convention chairman. But it got translated. He did much—like I did in 2000. Now I know the direction, I've just got to fill in the blanks, but these are the themes.

Nelson: Prosperity with a purpose, but the convention was in New York the week before the 9/11 anniversary.

Gillespie: Yes, it was very tricky.

Nelson: How did that play out?

Gillespie: We were under a microscope in that regard. The media were looking to catch us exploiting September 11, which we obviously had no intention of doing, but September 11 was a big part of the Presidency.

Jones: That was the theme of the campaign really, wasn't it? Leadership and—

Gillespie: The leadership—steady leadership, which we felt that Kerry wouldn't provide. But the President had provided steady leadership in the aftermath of September 11, so that was a big part of it. I thought the extent to which the media was almost daring us to mention September 11 was unfair. You had to mention September 11. Could you imagine doing four days of talking about national security and not talking about September 11? It was absurd. There was a trap laid for us and we had to spring that trap at some point.

Anyway, it was a big factor, and how to handle it was important. How to touch on it was important.

Nelson: So what did you decide?

Gillespie: We decided it needed to be touched on before the President spoke, so Giuliani had to come and talk about it. Kristen Breitweiser—I think that's right—some of the 9/11 spouses who were very strong supporters of the President, they wanted to talk about it. So having some things on Monday night, Tuesday night, or a thing or two on Monday night and Tuesday night to touch on it before the President took the stage or Cheney took the stage was an important part of it. But we couldn't accept the premise that you're not allowed to talk about September 11th in New York City on September 4 before the election.

Milkis: I was going to ask; you said the theme in 2000 was a different kind of Republican.

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: You kind of answered my question; in 2004 it was strong leadership.

Gillespie: Yes, steady leadership.

Riley: Do you recall any instances when you were chair when you were at loggerheads with Karl

or people at the White House over particular issues or focus?

Gillespie: Loggerheads, no. I'm trying to think if there were times I disagreed, and I would express my disagreement.

Riley: Sure.

Gillespie: Sometimes he would say, "Yes, you're right." Sometimes he would say, "No, we've got to do it this way," and he'd do it. But I can't remember—Karl and I generally tend to often see things in pretty much the same way. I'm sure there were times when I felt like we should be doing something different.

Oh, I know one. I was surprised when I was RNC chairman that I was one of the first to pick up the blowback on immigration reform. I remember saying—it was during my second time on talk radio where I raised it. The callers just raked me over the coals. Then also I went in at a phone bank, I was firing up the volunteers and I said, "immigration reform," and they were all like, Oh! I said to Karl, "I'm getting bad vibes on immigration reform." He said, "It's really important to the President—" And it was.

Jones: He was really committed.

Gillespie: But that cross-pressure between our base and the Hispanic vote, I remember flagging that early and I was on the front lines and one of the first to have my shock collar go off on it. It turned out to be a real problem and a real strain for the party. I'm not sure we should be emphasizing this; I did say that. Karl said, "We have to emphasize this."

Riley: Sure. OK.

Milkis: He was vindicated even though it caused tension, then you did well with the Hispanic voters.

Gillespie: Yes, 44 percent.

Milkis: You were certainly appreciated, because later this is—

Gillespie: Yes, the intensity in our base on it flared up.

Jones: How much turnover is there when a new chair comes in, and how much discretion do you have?

Gillespie: There wasn't much turnover. They're the President's people who are there. I did want Maria Cino as my deputy. She and I had worked together. Karl wanted her to be the deputy; she didn't want to do it. I really implored her, I begged her as a friend. I literally said, "I'm begging you. I don't want to do this if you're not the deputy. I'll do it, but I don't want to if you're not there."

I told her, "My intention is to raise the money and to get the message out there. I want to get around the country and fire up our troops. Somebody has to run the building. You know the

building. You can do it." I think she wanted some assurance that it wasn't going to be a minor position, and it wasn't. Maria Cino ran the RNC as deputy chairman, including me. "Here's what you need to do." But Karl was fine with that; he wanted her. He thought she would be good. We were completely synched up on that. I really wanted her badly.

I inherited the political director. The communications director I brought in, Jim Dyke, I wanted him. So I put in some of my own folks. But the hiring in the field operation, it's all the field folks and they're really very synched up with the Bush-Cheney folks. So I didn't have a big hand in hiring a lot of those regional field representatives, but I didn't really care to, to be honest with you.

Jones: Were you pleased with the fund-raising operation?

Gillespie: Yes, I was pretty pleased with the fund-raising operation.

Jones: Did you make any changes?

Gillespie: No.

Jones: Not just in personnel but in what—?

Gillespie: I was a pretty vigorous fund-raiser. The RNC finance staff was happy that I was a vigorous fund-raiser. I would work the phones. They would come up with the list and I would call them. Not every chairman does, it's not the most pleasant part of the job. But I knew it was an important part of the job. I had worked with Haley Barbour so—You realize it's an important part of the job. You just try to do it with some relish, and I did. I thought the place really hummed.

We started this—I've been second-guessed on this a little bit—we leased this big 18-wheeler registration rig and it went all around the country and would show up in places. It had a big logo painted on the sides. It would open up and there would be a concert stage. I'm exaggerating a little bit.

Nelson: Were you on this thing?

Gillespie: I went on it quite a bit, yes. It was great for rallies. We went to the tulip festival in Michigan and we registered voters there.

Nelson: NASCAR [National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing].

Gillespie: We went to NASCAR races. We went to a WWE [World Wrestling Entertainment] event. We parked it in Times Square at one point and did something with VH1 [Video Hits One] or MTV [Music Television]. I enjoyed being RNC chairman. It is still probably the most favorite thing I've done. I got to see the country, meet really neat people. You learn a lot about the country because when you go into a city you've got to know something about it. When you go into Nevada you'd better know about Yucca Mountain. When you go into a state you have to know what's at play on the ground. It was a great way to get to know the country. I was in 36 states in 18 months.

Riley: Chuck, did you have a follow-up question?

Jones: It's a slightly different subject, but it is related to fund-raising and the coordination with the White House and the campaign and that whole apparatus. I've always been curious about how all that is coordinated. Not to mention the two campaign committees.

Gillespie: Well, the national party is the one entity that is legally allowed to coordinate expenditures with the Presidential campaign, and coordinate we did.

Jones: But still you're going, in a sense, for the same dollars.

Gillespie: You have limits. That's where the 527 ads have come into play.

Jones: This is after McCain-Feingold.

Gillespie: So the most anybody could give to the Presidential campaign, I think, was even then still something like $2,400, so a couple could give $4,800 for the primary. And then for the general you could do like $10,000. There was a joint committee that you could give to. But basically the most anybody could give to Bush world was about $20,000, including the joint committee. Then you could give $25,000 to the RNC. Then you were done. The most a couple could give in a year to the campaign and the party was about $100,000.

Nelson: Let me ask you, it's a naïve question, and there were a significant number of people who were maxing out, right?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Couples?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: What did they expect?

Gillespie: A lot of them honestly don't expect anything.

Nelson: Granted, but the people who do have expectations?

Gillespie: I don't think donors do; I think bundlers do. I think if you're somebody who is raising half a million dollars, in the back of your mind you may want to be an ambassador somewhere or an appointee to something, a Presidential commission or something like that. But somebody who strokes a check for $2,400 to the President's reelect is not expecting anything.

Nelson: But how would somebody who thought, *OK, I've given my max. I've raised money from others. I've got something in mind that I'd like*. How would they express that? Would they express that to you?

Gillespie: Yes, they would come in through me or through Ken. They would say, "Hey, I was really helpful. I'm kind of interested in the President's Commission on Technology," or whatever, "and thought we'd put it into play." They'd have to go through Presidential Personnel

and everything. How that all folds over is a little bit of a mystery to me, to be honest with you, but I would put in a good word with Karl or Ken and say, "This guy is a good loyalist." I generally never urged one way or the other. I would just flag it and say, "Apparently they're in the process. They gave and they knocked on doors."

Nelson: What about face time with administration officials?

Gillespie: No, not really. I've never really seen that. I mean, that matters to lobbyists who are bundlers. For real rank-and-file Republicans that's not really a big factor.

Riley: How much interaction did you actually have with the President during the time you were party chair?

Gillespie: Not too much. One of the things about being party chairman is you're not where the President is because it's not efficient. So if the President went into Columbus, Ohio, and did an event, I wouldn't be in Columbus, Ohio, doing an event. They'd want me to come in a week after. I didn't really see the President much. I saw him—he did events for us at the RNC and I always enjoyed my interactions with him, but they were limited. I didn't expect to see him. I was thrilled that he had asked me to be RNC chairman. I don't even know if he ever—yes, he called me.

I said to Karl, "You know, by the way, I'd like for the President to ask me." He said, "Oh, yes, he'll do that, he'll call you." He called me on my cell phone.

Milkis: Were you coaching? Were you the basketball coach?

Gillespie: I wasn't on the basketball court, I forget where I was, but he said, "Eddie, I hope you'll be the RNC chairman. I think you'd be good at it." I said, "I'd be honored to, sir."

Riley: Sure. Let me pose a different question. Was Karl better positioned where he was in the White House or should he have been the party chair?

Gillespie: He was better where he was.

Riley: Because of the proximity?

Gillespie: I think because of the proximity—I mean, if Karl had wanted to be RNC chairman he could have been RNC chairman. I think Karl has gotten very good on television. He's a good television commentator; he's great on Fox news. I don't think that was his highest, best use. People have different attributes and skill sets. I don't think at that time he felt himself being the communicator and the one carrying the message. When I said to him I always felt I could do that job—you know, Haley was a master at it; he was very good at it. I was right by his side and I was helping Haley with the message and that kind of thing and I knew that was a big part of the job, and I felt like I could do that. I think they felt like I could do it too. I don't think Karl would have felt at that time, and he can speak for himself, that he could have done that or wanted to.

The proximity to the President is important. I think he would have known too that the RNC chairman is not going to have proximity to the President.

Nelson: Was there a tension between being party chair during an election campaign and being the President's—I'm thinking, for example, Bush putting together an Electoral College majority. He's going into some states and not others.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: There might be Senate races or House races in the states he wouldn't have an incentive to go into, but the party would care very much about winning.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Did that ever come up, and did you consider yourself to be sort of the voice for the party to the President?

Gillespie: I did, yes. Now again, because the mentality was don't win a lonely victory, it wasn't like I was swimming upstream on it, but I was a conduit. I guess [Addison Mitchell, Jr.] McConnell and [William] Frist were there at the time still.

Nelson: Yes.

Gillespie: The House Republicans, the NRCC chair, Tom Reynolds, George Allen, who I was very close to and is a friend, was Senatorial Committee Chairman at the time, they saw me as an ally at the RNC. They hit me up for money; I shifted money from the RNC to them. I would go to Karl and say, "I think we ought to shift this money; they need some help over there." That was the more important thing. It wasn't that they would want you to come in and do something, say, in Nevada, that would be a target state. They would want you to slide some money to do what they needed to do. The answer was generally always yes.

There were times when they would ask me and I wouldn't even take it to the White House; I'd say, "No, we're not doing that." But if I thought they had a good case, I would take it to Karl and say, "I think we ought to cut them this check."

Nelson: A good case meaning they had a chance to win?

Gillespie: Yes, they had a good plan, they just needed some money to get the turnout and that kind of thing.

Perry: I wanted to talk about Ohio. The morning after the election all eyes were on Ohio and the Kenyon College blowup over the students in line and the voting machines. Did you have the sense of déjà vu?

Gillespie: I did.

Perry: Here we go again? Tell us what that was like.

Gillespie: It was just awful. It was déjà vu and I was at the Reagan Building. It was where we were going to have the President come and thank the troops and give his election night speech. I remember there was a sofa outside the holding room. I was back and forth with Karl and with

others. There was a question as to whether or not—we were in this limbo where two of the networks had called New Mexico for us and two had called Ohio for us, but none of them had called Ohio and New Mexico for us. So we were just hanging there, trying to get the two that had called New Mexico to call Ohio and trying—By the way, it's a strange thing in terms of how this has evolved to where the networks decide who has won and when; it's kind of crazy.

So I was back and forth with Ken and Karl on the phone all night long, and finally I fell asleep on the sofa at two o'clock. Cathy woke me up and she said, "We should get over to the hotel." I called. They said we're all going to bed here too. So I went over to the Willard Hotel. We got there around three o'clock in the morning and went to bed. I left a wake-up call for 8:00 A.M. I guess I thought I could get five hours sleep. But then Ken woke me up—I had left my cell phone on, which I felt I needed to do. Ken called me before the wake-up call came in, probably around 7:00 or 7:30 or so, I can't remember. He said, "Kerry is going to concede." I said, "Great, that's wonderful." I thought he was calling to tell me, "You're going to Ohio."

Milkis: You could probably get better pizza.

Gillespie: I said, "That's great." He said, "Can you get back over to the Reagan Building? We'll be over there at 11:00." I think that's what it was. I said absolutely. So I went back over. We regrouped and everybody kind of celebrated that Wednesday morning. There was some back-and-forth. I remember at one point being asked did I think that we should claim victory, harkening back to 2000. I can't remember where I came down on that, whether I thought we should or not. But they had decided not to.

Nelson: But this was 124,000 votes, right?

Gillespie: Sixty thousand votes the other way would have cost us Ohio.

Nelson: We're not talking about Florida.

Gillespie: No, not 734, that's exactly right. That was the thing. I think that's why the Kerry people saw that you just couldn't get there from here. I think that's also why it was understood that this is going to get resolved tomorrow. Don't go out and do it now, be gracious, let it come. I think that was the right call. That's essentially what happened. They looked at the numbers; it was insurmountable.

Nelson: Were you checking the airports to see if Democratic lawyers were coming?

Gillespie: I didn't hear of any lawyers coming there. Actually, you didn't need to. Everybody was on the ground at that point. There were lawyers on the ground in Ohio covering the place. That was one of the lessons from 2000. So there were no planes with lawyers; the lawyers were there.

Milkis: One of the things I really found fascinating about your book with respect to Kerry was the counterfactual—you were worried about how Kerry would speak to the issue of the Iraq war and his original vote for the resolution.

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: What would he answer when he was asked the question, if you knew then what you know now, would you have voted? If he had said, "I would have voted no," that might have posed a lot more problems for your campaign.

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: Could you speak to that a little bit? Why do you think he would?

Gillespie: There are a couple of things about Kerry's votes on the Iraq war. One was—I always admired Russ Feingold because he voted against the war authorization and then voted to fund the troops, which is an intellectually honest place to be.

Milkis: Interesting. Yes.

Gillespie: I've told him this, by the way. I've had exchanges with Feingold interestingly enough. I like him. Not a lot of my friends do.

Milkis: Not a lot of Democrats like him.

Gillespie: I know, that's my point. He's not easy to like. But I was struck by that sequence of votes and it was the exact opposite of Kerry. Kerry had voted to authorize the war and then voted against funding the troops, which I thought was really reprehensible, as opposed to admirable from—even though I disagreed with the original vote by Feingold, I admired the fact that while he opposed the war in the first place he voted to fund the troops.

To me, if Kerry had said, "Knowing what I know now I would have voted no," that would have been more intellectually honest to a certain extent and would have even made me feel a little bit better about his voting against the funding for the troops, but he didn't. He was never able to bring himself to say that.

Milkis: Interesting.

Gillespie: It was one of the areas where I disagreed with the campaign, in particular with, as I recall it, Nicolle. They wanted to heckle him about it and force him to answer the question and I kept thinking, *Why? Why do we want this question asked and answered? What do we say if he says, "I would have voted against it"?*

He was coming out of the Grand Canyon, as I recall, and somebody shouted at him and he said, "I would have still voted for it." Then what are you complaining about? At that point I kind of understood, but it seemed like a big roll of the dice for me to keep pushing to have him asked that question. But I guess it was worth it because once he said that, he really undercut himself. So in retrospect I was wrong, but if he had answered it differently I might have been right to have that concern.

Nelson: The debates, will you talk about the '04 debates.

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: I don't think we ever got the end of the story about your colleagues saying Bush was in a bad place going into one of the debates.

Gillespie: The first debate, yes. It was Dan. He came in and actually I think—again, I don't know if I have it in the book. I think his gesture was like this [rolls eyes], this is just going to be—and he was. The President, from the first moment, was just off.

Nelson: Did you get an explanation from Dan as to how he got to the point where he thought that?

Gillespie: No, I didn't really. You just never know these things. It's one of those things. There are three debates. The stars have to align and if they don't and you have a bad one—like Gore on his first one in 2000. That was Bush in 2004. It was tough to spin it, but we did. We had one thing we were able to latch onto, which was the permission slip, the thing that Kerry said about seeking permission from the global community, or something like that.

Milkis: Global test.

Gillespie: Yes, the global test. That was like a security blanket, that's something we can talk about, and we did. We really hammered away on it. That was one failed tactical execution for the campaign. I was part of it. I was on the ground for all the debates and then, as RNC chairman, really doing a lot of the postspin myself, that kind of thing.

We all stayed. I think the first debate was in Florida, Miami.

Milkis: I don't remember.

Gillespie: The Kerry people all went home; they flew out that night and they were on the ground in Washington, D.C., the next day, working it and working it and really slicing and dicing us.

Nelson: You mean on the interview shows.

Gillespie: On the shows. We were in hotels in Miami, and then on planes flying back the next day. We didn't have our people out to respond that morning. So Nicolle was on a plane, I was on a plane, Ken was on a plane. All of our people were coming back on 8:00 A.M. flights, so we were in the air between 8:00 and 10:30 A.M. while they were just killing us. That was a mistake; we had made a mistake. We let them run circles around us in that critical point after the first debate.

Nelson: You also say in the book that you miscalculated in thinking that having a short time limit on the answers would work against Kerry.

Gillespie: Yes, against Kerry, and it helped him.

Nelson: Because?

Gillespie: Kerry has been a Senator for so many years that he would just talk and talk and talk. He would always circle an answer, circle it and circle it, before he finally—and the time limit

made him give answers. I thought he would run out of time and never get to the answer, but they're not that stupid. So he came across as more commanding than he is otherwise. I studied him. I knew Kerry. I mean, I really knew him. I watched footage, like getting ready for a football game.

Milkis: Clips from the Senate.

Gillespie: So that's what I thought, *This guy can't tell you his home address in less than seven minutes*, but that really helped him, it did. It imposed a discipline that he didn't have in his speech.

Nelson: Was there something too about, not in your book, that the podiums were such that Bush looked very short on television?

Gillespie: Kerry is tall. Bush is taller than he appears on television.

Nelson: What is he, six feet?

Gillespie: I think the President is about six feet one. He's taller than I am. I look taller than I am, he looks shorter than he is, and Kerry looks as tall as he is, he's tall.

Jones: Of course six inches of that is hair.

Gillespie: And chin. One of the things you negotiate is the podiums. If the podiums are equal height it would have the effect of making the President look shorter because there would be a lot more of Kerry over the podium than of Bush over the podium. So you negotiate them to be where they're proportionate to their height. That was something that we cared about. I think they did it actually.

Nelson: Was there a postmortem on that first debate, where there was recrimination, or how did—Didn't you realize that Kerry would—

Gillespie: I think the President—I would defer to Karl or Karen or the President or others who were doing this because I wasn't privy to it, although I think over time I came to realize that the President himself thought he blew the performance, he had a bad show. Bush is a game-day player. He didn't post that day. I say that now only in retrospect; obviously I didn't say it the next day and I wouldn't, but I think at the end of the day that's what it was.

Nelson: He's a game-day player. Do you mean he didn't like to rehearse?

Gillespie: No, just that on game day he's going to play well. He's like Eli Manning was last week. It's not like, Oh, it's a big game and—He likes the game and he responds. He just had a bad night. It gets to my earlier point, like Gore did too. The candidates matter at the end of the day. When it's show time you've got to be there and you've got to perform.

Riley: Part of the question was about preparation, and I actually posed this to you yesterday. When Reagan failed in one of his interviews, Stuart Spencer later said it was one of the few times in his life Reagan didn't do his homework, he didn't get in and take care of his briefing

books and he knew it. So my question to you is, did you have an experience where—?

Gillespie: I think with the President—again, ask others. I shouldn't be counted on with this because it's impressionistic. I think the President felt that he'd had four years of preparation on all this stuff and he didn't need a briefing book because he gets a briefing every morning. So I do think there was a little bit of that. I think after that debate he realized getting all that into the 60-second answer is different from knowing the answer.

Perry: I'm fascinated by what you say about his physical presence, that you think he sometimes looks shorter than he actually is.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: Some people would say his personality diminishes on television, or looks less than it is in person.

Gillespie: I agree with that. I think a lot of people who know the President, serve the President, have a sense of regret or frustration that the person you see or saw in the Oval Office or individual settings or closed-door speeches, that never came across on television. It just didn't.

Nelson: Why not?

Gillespie: I have my own theory on it, which is that I believe the President is very aware of the Presidency and reveres it. Partly maybe because he is the son of a President and that when he's speaking on television or in interviews, he knows that what he's about to say will be the words of the President of the United States forever. He almost translates—I took German in high school and I can speak German but I have to translate it in my head first; I'm not fluent in it. I think he translates in his head what this will be for posterity; how should I say this for posterity.

By the way, if you see him now, if you saw him on his book tour or if you see him doing interviews, he's more himself because he's not the President of the United States anymore. What he says now as a former President, he doesn't care as much about in terms of history because these aren't the words of the President of the United States any longer. I think it's more of a reverence for the office.

Believe me, I know you've done other of these interviews so I know you've heard this: when the President is in the Oval Office in decision-making mode, or other things he's drilling down on you, there is no "umm" or "huh?" or stammer or looking for a word; he's got the words and you'd better have yours. Not in a mean way or anything, but he just wants the answers. He's rapid fire with the questions.

Then I would see him speak to a group of Republican donors at a fund-raiser, without a single "umm" or "huh?"—seamless. You just would never see it on television. I always hoped that maybe I could, as counselor to the President, help close that gap, but I couldn't. That's where I came up with this theory.

Nelson: That's a plausible theory.

Jones: I think there is support in the President's book for your theory. It's almost as though—well, a lot of it suggests what you said, the reverence for the Presidency.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: Even the selection of major decisions, these are the President's decisions.

Gillespie: Exactly, that's the way he saw it. He saw himself as a steward of the office.

I'll share one other story that I've told just a few times. It was one of the neatest moments for me in the White House. We went to Texas A&M. The President spoke to the winter graduating class, it was January. It was the commencement for them. President Bush 41 and Barbara Bush met us there. It was really neat. We flew into Waco and then went by chopper to College Station. My wife is an Aggie. She flew with us. It was a great moment for her. We watched the President's speech; he was very well received there, obviously. It was at the Bush School [of Government and Public Service] at A&M. We were on the small Marine One because the big ones couldn't fly in and out to A&M from Waco.

Then the President, Bush 41, accompanied President Bush back out to the chopper, to Marine One. I was with the President that day; I was the designated, I forget what they call it, but I was there for Josh. Josh didn't go and I was the top aide. I sat across from the President in Marine One. In that smaller Marine One your knees are almost literally touching. He had finished the speech; it was well received. The speech was good. He liked seeing the President, he liked seeing his mom and dad. It was nice for him. He got to spend a little time with his mother and father. They're a very close family, as you know. He got charged up a little bit by that.

The chopper is taking off. The rotors are kicking up all of this dust, as they do, as we leave. The President taps me on the knee and says, "Look at that." I looked out the window and former President Bush is standing at full attention about 30 yards from the chopper, all this stuff blowing up on his suit. A Secret Service agent is standing behind him with his hand ready to catch him in case the wind from the rotors blows him over. We're lifting off and he's standing at full attention as Marine One left, and the President said, "He's paying respect to the office," which is what he was doing. That's how the President saw the Presidency. So I think it's true.

Nelson: It helps explain—I was at the dedication of the Clinton Library right after the election in '04. Of course, all the former Presidents were there except [Gerald] Ford. You could tell there is a fraternity there. Carter is probably the most marginal member.

Gillespie: He is.

Nelson: But I think that's by choice. The other people, even though they've run against each other and so on, they've been in that position and they're the only ones who have, and there's a respect.

Gillespie: It's a source of great discomfort. As someone who has served—when you went into the Oval Office even on a Saturday afternoon you wore a tie; you didn't have to wear a suit on a Saturday, you could wear khakis and a blue blazer but you wore a tie. I have to tell you, to see Plouffe and [David] Axelrod and others in the Oval Office in jeans and tee shirts with their feet

up on the desk, it chafes me. I suppose it shouldn't, but I think that the President's reverence for the office and the Oval Office itself is appropriate and right.

Nelson: And yet you said that it was an impediment to Bush in terms of his being able to communicate authentically.

Gillespie: Again, that's my theory and I think that's right. I wished he would just let it rip sometimes, but as long as he was the President of the United States he was never going to let it rip.

Nelson: I think you said in your book that it's an impediment to others speaking frankly to the President when they're in the Oval Office.

Gillespie: It's definitely an impediment to others speaking frankly in the Oval Office.

Nelson: So is it a net plus or a net minus to have that kind of reverence for the office if it's impeding communication both ways?

Gillespie: It's not an impediment for everyone. One of the things I realized from the get-go and the President told me is—and he understands it because of his own reverence. He knows when people come into the Oval Office, they're waiting to come in. They're in the Roosevelt Room and they're just going to let him know—Then they come in and they say, "That's a very nice suit, Mr. President." That's just the way it is.

He encouraged, he was clear from the get-go that you need to tell me what you're thinking, and I did. Karl always did. Josh always did. [Stephen] Hadley always did. The people around you do, whether it's the reverence for the office—to me, that was reverence for the office. You stand there and you tell the President of the United States what you think he should or shouldn't do because he needs to know. It's his decision, but you need to let him know.

Riley: Let me go back and fill in a little bit. We want to spend the afternoon entirely on your time at the White House.

Gillespie: Yes.

Riley: Where are we then? You won 2004. You're in the chairmanship for how much longer?

Gillespie: Just through January. I handed it off to Ken in January of 2005.

Riley: That was your choice or the President's choice?

Gillespie: That was my choice; I didn't want to serve any longer. They asked me, they said, "Do you want to stay?" I said, "I don't. I appreciate it, but I wanted to be here for the reelect."

Jones: The total number of months was?

Gillespie: About 18, July through January. Interestingly enough, it was just about the same tenure as counselor to the President. But yes, I was ready to go and there was some talk, I know,

of Andy leaving. By the way, this is in the President's book, it's in *Decision Points*.

Jones: Right.

Gillespie: Andy was going to go and I was considered for Chief of Staff, interestingly enough, which I never knew at the time. I don't think it was considered seriously, but I was on a list. It was raised with the President for me to do that, which I would have done obviously, but he wanted Andy to stay.

Riley: Right.

Gillespie: I think Andy wanted to go. By the way, he probably would have gone with Josh and not me anyway. Josh was a great Chief of Staff. I say that because I was in a position where I didn't want to do anything. I wanted to go back to my firm and build the business and spend time with my family again. So that's what I did.

Riley: Did you have conflict of interest concerns or legal constraint concerns in going back and forth in the way that you did?

Gillespie: Yes, I had concerns. I was very rigid—I didn't do any business at all for my firm when I was RNC chairman. When I ran Elizabeth Dole's campaign I had said from the outset that I would never lobby her. The way you talk to a candidate as a strategist who is trying to get him or her elected is a lot different if in your mind you're never going to go in to ask that person to vote for a bill later on.

Also I wasn't doing it because I wanted to have another contact. It wasn't another Senate office to work. I've always been very bright-line rule about those things. I didn't do any client work for—I took a leave of absence. I didn't derive any salary. Now, I've got my ownership stake so I got paid my share of the profits for the year, but I didn't do any work. I never talked to a Member of Congress or anybody in the administration on behalf of a client while I was in the RNC. I didn't even meet with clients at the RNC. I wouldn't meet with my own firm's clients as RNC chairman, which I think is kind of punitive. If Vin Weber called from his firm I would meet with clients. I think you have to bend over backward in those situations. So I would say yes, it was a concern, and I tried to address the concern pretty vigorously.

Nelson: What you were doing as RNC chair was by choice.

Gillespie: That's correct.

Nelson: There is no law forbidding any—

Gillespie: That's right. When [Ronald] Brown was chairman of the DNC, he represented clients. Haley did work for BGR [Barbour Griffith & Rogers, now BGR Group] when he was RNC chair. I just didn't think it was right. When Haley was RNC chair we didn't have the White House. I think it's a little different when you have the White House and you're there by virtue of the President having put you there, as opposed to Haley running for it and getting elected.

The other thing is—truth is, I never really liked lobbying all that much anyway, and it didn't

bother me not to do it. I also thought it was right and I thought the bright-line rules are important.

Nelson: You mentioned Haley. I guess he was first elected Governor of Mississippi in '03?

Gillespie: Yes, and I was RNC chairman.

Nelson: So what was that like?

Gillespie: It was great. It was one of the best things. It's funny, he and I had—I would talk to him from time to time. I went down and campaigned for him as RNC chairman. I fired up his troops, went to see the volunteers, did a press conference with them on his behalf, and we put money into Mississippi. Blaise Hazelwood, who was the political director, was dealing with Henry Barbour, who was Haley's campaign manager and is a friend of mine. She would come up and say, "Henry wants $200,000 for this." I said, "All right, we'll give it to him." She said OK. Then she'd come back the next day or next week, "Henry needs this or that." I said, "Let's give it to him. The truth is, if Haley wants it we're going to give it to him, but don't call him right back. Wait 24 hours before you tell him yes so that he thinks that we're chewing it over anyway."

Then I went down and was there on election night with Haley, when he was elected Governor, which was great fun. He had gone on the wagon for the whole campaign, looked great, lost all this weight. He and I used to drink whiskey together back when I drank whiskey; I don't anymore. He would drink his Maker's Mark and I would drink Irish whiskey. The election dragged on and [David Ronald] Musgrove didn't concede until late. I had gone to bed because I had a 6:30 A.M. flight, but then my body guy called me on my cell phone and said, "Haley is about to speak, Musgrove conceded." He'd stayed down in the ballroom because he was young and he could stay up until 2:00 A.M. and get the early plane.

I went down there. It was around 11:30 at night. I had already gone to bed so I just went down. I didn't put my tie back on. I wanted to watch from the ballroom and watch Haley give his speech as Governor but he spotted me and he elbowed his state trooper and he pointed to me. Then the state trooper signaled for me to come up. I made my way through the crowd. Haley had just finished speaking on an elevated dais. That's when he pointed to me. So this big burly state trooper reaches down and pulls me up onto the stage just as Haley is about to—so I'm now face-to-face with Haley and he said, "Let's go get a drink."

I ended up making it back to my room about 3:00 A.M. and then was on a 6:30 A.M. private plane out of Jackson back to D.C.

Nelson: You mentioned earlier something about maybe running for office yourself, thinking about it. Did that have any connection with the fact that that was the path you chose?

Gillespie: That was part of it. Also, as I said, for me the politics is a means to an end and the end is governing, enacting good policy. I wonder sometimes if I should try to do it myself. I think I'd like to campaign. I liked being RNC chairman. I liked going into black churches, I liked going into the barrio, I liked going places that a lot of RNC chairman had not gone to before, and people liked having me there. A lot of black voters don't like having their vote taken for granted; they liked having it competed for, and they appreciate it. They may not end up voting for you, but I was very well received. So I enjoyed that.

Being the RNC chairman in a lot of ways is like being a candidate. I enjoyed it. So I thought I might be able to be good at it, I don't know. It's a lot of work and the system is pretty rough these days.

Nelson: It seems like it's something you're still thinking about.

Gillespie: I think about it from time to time.

Jones: Would you say something about your relationship with Terry McAuliffe?

Gillespie: Yes, he's a friend. I always joke, my daughter would say, he's a "frenemy." We just duked it out on television and when we were chairs together. I think that's the role of the party chairs. I was disappointed for Ken. Howard Dean wouldn't do the shows with Ken. Even now Debbie Wasserman Schultz, they don't—she's out a little bit more now, but they had her tied up for a while; they didn't want her out. But Terry and I did the Sunday shows. It was like every Sunday we were out there during the Presidential campaign. We would just rip into each other. But we always got along, we were pretty friendly.

Then after we left our chairmanships it turns out you can get paid to do that, it's so entertaining. So we'd go around the country. We're doing a speech in Atlanta next week for a big group, a trade association that's having a convention down there. I always joke that we're like the coyote and the sheepdog in the cartoons. We punch in and we pound each other, we punch out and we go have a beer.

One time when we were playing golf in Kiawah, we went down and gave a speech. We finished up and we were having a couple of beers. I said, "Do you ever worry we're going to get caught taking money for this?" [*laughter*]

Jones: I would be delighted to sit in on you having a drink together, that session. As far as political energy, you're very much alike. He's much more of a fund-raiser.

Gillespie: He's more of a fund-raiser than I am, although I had to get good at that. I'm more of a communicator than he was, although he's had to get good at that. We come from very similar backgrounds. He went to Catholic University as well, four years before I did. We have a lot of mutual friends. We're a lot alike. We like to have some fun. I figure if we're going to do this, we might as well have fun at it.

Nelson: When you mentioned earlier that Karl Rove as RNC chair maybe didn't have the confidence in his communications abilities, is this the kind of setting where you feel you did well and he might not have felt confident he would do as well?

Gillespie: I think he's been very good on television.

Nelson: I mean in '04.

Gillespie: In '04, yes. But even so in '04, I think the real reason for Karl was that his best use was to be in the White House, not at the RNC. I guess it's more a reflection of I think it's something I do well and enjoy, and I think they saw that as an attribute for me in the job. And

I'm still doing it with Terry.

Riley: All right, let's stop now for lunch.

[BREAK]

Nelson: We got President Bush reelected this morning and I know we're headed to the role you played in the confirmation process for Bush's Supreme Court nominees, but there's this interlude in the spring of '05 when you're working with the National Republican Senatorial Committee, and the issue you're reported to have been focused on was judicial nominations.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: I wonder if there's a connection between that and the role you ended up performing in the White House?

Gillespie: I think there was. Again, it's one of those times when I didn't know there would be any connection or anything. There was great frustration with the inability to get the President's judicial nominees confirmed, particularly the circuit court. There was, in some courts, real problems in terms of being shorthanded in being able to turn around decisions. So there was a discussion as to whether or not to move to a straight majority vote, a so-called nuclear option on circuit court nominees only, I think was what they were talking about. Bill Frist was weighing that. I gave advice and counsel to them about positioning on that and making the case for the need to confirm these nominees, or at least have an up-or-down vote. If they're not going to confirm them, shoot them down. At least afford them a vote.

It was kind of short-lived, as I recall, because the Gang of Fourteen ended up brokering a deal and it rendered it moot.

Milkis: Did you have any part in that process?

Gillespie: No, I kept tabs on it but I didn't have a part in bringing it about. In fact, I recall being frustrated that they did it because I thought we ought to bring it to a head and have it out. But they did it; it's the nature of the Senate, I understand.

Nelson: You've got the Vice President as the President of the Senate. As I remember the scenario, it was that there would be this—the Democrats would filibuster, so to speak, and then the Vice President would be asked to rule that that was out of order because it was a nomination.

Gillespie: Right.

Nelson: Were you involved in developing a strategy that, with the Vice President's cooperation if he was asked to do that, he would do that?

Gillespie: I think it was a given that he would; that's where he was. I think he felt that this was an encroachment on the executive branch. I don't remember all the details. I came into it a little late. This fight had been going on. I think they determined if this fight has been going on so long, they had—Reid had set up a war room and the Democrats were treating it like a campaign thing and we were doing a legislative fight. There was some sense that I ought to come in and help in terms of the positioning on it.

But it wasn't very long after I did that that the Gang of Fourteen emerged and cut this deal and rendered it moot.

Perry: Do you think the White House was already looking forward to a Supreme Court nomination, because at this point the Chief Justice is clearly fatally ill and they know that he's not going to resign. We know that, but he has probably not got much longer.

Gillespie: They may have. Again, that was not part of the discussion with me. The discussion with me, by the way, was with Frist. It wasn't the White House that asked me to do it, it was Leader Frist, with whom I had a pretty good relationship, and his folks. They're the ones who brought me in. So if there was any of that going on in the background I wasn't aware of it.

Nelson: And Bush hadn't had it. There had been no vacancies on the Supreme Court during his first term.

Gillespie: No, that's correct.

Nelson: So that hadn't really come up.

Gillespie: No.

Nelson: Barbara's question is, were people—at the time, you were working on this appeals court-focused nomination process, at what point did the Supreme Court vacancy occur and you get involved in that?

Gillespie: That came later. The Supreme Court vacancy—

Perry: Justice [Sandra Day] O'Connor announced that she was retiring just prior to the July 4th weekend, July of '05.

Gillespie: Yes. I went to the White House right about that time. I'm trying to remember the sequence of events. I remember it was Karl asking me if I would come be a special government employee and run the confirmation effort to fill the seat from Justice O'Connor. I didn't know what that meant. So we talked about it. I said OK, he said all right. He set up a meeting for me to come in and talk to Andy.

I went in and met with Andy. I had a couple of things I wanted if I was going to do this. Again, it wasn't anything I was looking to do. I had to leave my firm again. At a certain point the novelty of that wears off on your colleagues, when you keep leaving and coming back. So I wanted to make sure that I had an office in the West Wing; I knew that was important. I didn't want to be over in the OEOB [Old Executive Office Building] or Justice. I wanted to go to the senior staff

meeting in the morning because I wanted to be in the flow. I wanted to report directly to him, to the Chief of Staff.

Perry: But at this point your portfolio is strictly the confirmation process?

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: When you were doing your conversation had they selected John Roberts yet?

Gillespie: No. I was involved in the selection process.

Perry: Tell us about that.

Gillespie: They were prepared for it, the counsel's office and the Department of Justice. They had a book with potential nominees. There was a long list and there was a short list, and there was consultation with lots of Senators, and lots of Senators offered suggestions and ideas on who would be good.

Perry: Were they going through you to do that?

Gillespie: Some did, some went through Andy, some went through legislative affairs. We kept a list. We kept track of all of the recommendations from different Senators.

Perry: Did you see any patterns developing about people's choices?

Gillespie: They were regional. They were recommending people from their state to be considered circuit judges in their state, that kind of thing. It's understandable. There was a group inside the White House and the Department of Justice; they were like a SWAT [Special Weapons and Tactics] team on this. They had a pretty firm view of what was needed, which I think reflected the President's view. I think the President had imbued in them what he was looking for in a nominee.

He clearly had learned from his father's experiences. Justice [David] Souter was like the thing that's in everybody's mind that you just have to avoid at all costs, and Justice [Antonin] Scalia is what you want to get at all costs. That basically was the mentality. So the book was full of potential nominees like Chief Justice Roberts and Justice [Samuel] Alito. There are others on the bench like them, and that's what the book was full of. There were some state supreme court justices, by the way; it wasn't all just federal circuit.

Nelson: Was it all judges?

Gillespie: I think it was all judges.

Nelson: When you look back not too far in history—

Gillespie: I know.

Nelson: Senators, Attorneys General?

Gillespie: I know.

Milkis: I believe [Earl] Warren was a Governor.

Nelson: By the time it gets to you, the book is filled with judges.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Did you question that at all?

Gillespie: I didn't question it. I think it goes to the point about avoiding a Souter. There's this strain between the paper trail, the note paper trail, but from a conservative perspective they want somebody who they can look at the rulings and get a sense of what their judicial philosophy is.

Nelson: Was Harriet Miers in this first book?

Gillespie: She was not.

Perry: On that point, did you hear talk about women? Because it was Justice O'Connor—

Gillespie: Yes, there were women on the list and there was a propensity that if it were a woman that would be a good thing. So if it came down to a choice of two 100 percent equally qualified people and one was a woman, you'd probably tilt toward the woman, which was understandable. But there was not a directive, find a woman. It was that it would be great if we were able to replace a woman with a woman.

Perry: How about your thought, as having been head of the RNC, of reaching out to Hispanics? Was there talk about that, and particularly about the Attorney General?

Gillespie: There really wasn't as I recall, but again, those conversations may have come before they narrowed the book. I always felt, and I think a lot of people felt, that blocking the nomination of—I can't believe I'm blocking his name—the Hispanic, Ecuadorian? Anyway, that was all about blocking a Hispanic Republican nomination to the Supreme Court.

Perry: [Miguel] Estrada.

Gillespie: Estrada, thank you. Miguel Estrada. So there was diversity in the book. Priscilla Owen was in there. At the end of the day Roberts somehow emerged. It just came into focus. The more it came into focus, the more it was Roberts.

Perry: Were you in on any of the interviewing that went on of the potential candidates on the short list?

Gillespie: No. I knew that Roberts was going to visit with the President, and I heard afterward that it went very well. Somewhere along the way I just got it in my mind that I thought it was going to be him.

Perry: Did you hear anything after [J. Michael] Luttig—

Gillespie: Luttig was another one, was very much—

Perry: And Judge [J. Harvie, III] Wilkinson. Did you hear anything about how those interviews went?

Gillespie: I didn't, but I heard that the Roberts one went well, which I didn't take to mean that the other ones didn't. Roberts is phenomenal, he's just phenomenal. He's instantly likable. He's just brilliant and a genuinely good person. When I met him at that point I was really impressed. I met him in Joe Hagin's office. I forget who walked me down. Anyway, I went in and sat down to visit with him. He's just really good. It was great to work for him. He felt very guilty about people having to work through August, during the summer months, losing their summer vacation time and that kind of thing. The unveiling was great, with Jack [Roberts] dancing and everything. His wife is lovely. They're very down-to-earth people.

In terms of the selection process there was a lot of pre-vetting that went on before I got into play. I wasn't part of the interviews themselves, but I did get reports. I did know who we were looking at, who the President was looking at.

Nelson: When you met Roberts—actually, starting when you were looking at him on paper, and then when you meet him—are you thinking, *OK, I need to focus on those aspects of him that will either make him confirmable or not*?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: I've got to think about the Senate end of this?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: What things about Roberts struck you as most appealing in the confirmation process?

Gillespie: One, his demeanor; two, his story was a good one. I picked up right away that he had a union card, which I thought was good; he had a steelworkers' card. At one point he worked in his father's plant and he had to join the union and he had to carry the card. I shouldn't say "had to," he did. I liked that. Small school, football player, Catholic. There were a lot of things that were net-net positive.

I asked him a lot of personal questions in our first conversation, just to get to know him a little bit. Then we went to work to sell him. Not just to sell him, but prepare him as well, which was kind of interesting for me. I had a team, someone from Justice. In this case it was Rachel Brand. She was the Justice Department person. He had someone from Congressional Affairs who was designated for it, Jamie Brown. Dana Perino was designated as the press person. Steve Schmidt was the Vice President's person on it, but he was more than that, he was kind of like my deputy. Who else? Bill Kelly was from the counsel's office.

Every morning I had my own staff that I met with and talked about what needed to be done that day. The prep work for the hearings was pretty grueling. One of the things I insisted on was, what time were the hearings? I made us go real time. So it's not just like he would do an hour and leave; he sat for three hours from 9:30 to 12:30. We broke for lunch, brought him back at

2:00, sat until 7:00. When you looked back at the history you knew that that was a possibility, which it turned out to be. That's what we ended up doing.

I went with him on the Republican visits; I did not go with him on the Democratic visits. I did not think that the Democratic Members would want me sitting in on the visits.

Milkis: So you just went to those—

Gillespie: The Republican ones.

Perry: Tell us what those were like.

Gillespie: They were interesting. First of all, we hadn't had a Supreme Court nomination in a long time; I guess it was 11 years, is that right?

Perry: Yes.

Gillespie: So there was electricity around it. It was really exciting. For him to—then of course, when it became clear that the nomination switched to the Chief Justice, now it is a Chief Justice nomination and—

Jones: The stakes were bigger.

Gillespie: —were even bigger.

Perry: Can you talk about the drama of that, of hearing over the Labor Day weekend that Chief Justice [William] Rehnquist has indeed died?

Nelson: Can I insert something?

Perry: Sure.

Nelson: That is, when you think you're promoting a nominee to replace Sandra Day O'Connor, you must be thinking, *OK, politically I've got to promote a man for a woman's seat. I want to promote a conservative for a seat that is seen as a—*

Gillespie: Swing seat.

Nelson: —*swing seat*. What are you anticipating in the way of opposition on the Senate?

Gillespie: Everything you think about is [Robert] Bork in that situation, and [Clarence] Thomas, in terms of the worst-case scenario. The assault on Justice Bork and the Thomas hearings and the twists and turns, that's really what you worry about.

It was clear. When you look at the [Ruth Bader] Ginsburg and the—

Perry: [Stephen] Breyer?

Gillespie: Breyer confirmations, the Republicans were playing by the old rules, which is you

give deference to the Executive; that's what Presidential elections are about. If there's some compelling reason by virtue of their integrity or their intellect or their record that is disqualifying, but the Democrats had made clear that that was no longer the case and that judicial philosophy was fair game and we could vote against and even possibly filibuster on the basis that we don't like how we think this judge may rule. That was a pretty dramatic change of the landscape from where it had been. I thought it was not a good thing for the country and I still don't. But that said, I also encouraged Republicans when President Obama nominated [Sonia] Sotomayor that we needed to play by the same rules now. It would be foolish for Republicans to say, "We'll just rubberstamp Democratic nominees to the Court but they get to block ours." That's a recipe for disaster over time. So if you change the rules, everybody plays by them. And the rules changed, we understood that.

We were expecting all of the worst kind of Ted Kennedy rhetoric, attacks against the Chief Justice, or then the nominee for Chief Justice. They tried to get him ginned up. First of all, it was hard to get people—even though it was the Chief Justice, one of the dynamics here that was underneath it all is, with O'Connor it was a little more pronounced but actually when he shifted to Rehnquist, in some ways it made it easier.

Milkis: Yes. Not a swing Justice.

Gillespie: Exactly. It was a one-for-one. Actually, it's why Alito's nomination was more contentious even though it was for an Associate Justice slot. We were replacing a moderate Justice with a conservative Justice.

Jones: How far along had you gotten when the Chief Justice died?

Gillespie: We were pretty far along but we were able to keep the schedule, as I recall. Specter was very helpful throughout this. Even though it switched all the paperwork and everything was all there, it was kind of a seamless switch and we were able to keep on the same schedule.

Jones: You had had visits with—?

Gillespie: Yes, we had had visits and everything. By that time we had done visits. Yes, it came fairly late in the process. When did Rehnquist pass away?

Perry: Over the Labor Day weekend. You were coming up to the Roberts' hearings after Labor Day weekend and he died over the Labor Day weekend.

Gillespie: That's right. We did postpone. We postponed the confirmation a little bit to take into account the Chief Justice, but not much. I mean, the fact is the Rehnquist slot was filled before the O'Connor slot was filled, even though the vacancy had been there for two months before. So it was kind of a straight-up swap. But we did postpone, there was some contention over whether or not we should postpone it.

Nelson: Was it automatic that Roberts would be nominated Chief Justice?

Gillespie: No, it was not automatic. There was discussion. But by that point everybody around the President and the President himself were pretty—"smitten" seems almost silly, but were

pretty smitten by John Roberts. I mean, the guy is really something, really impressive. I'm told, I don't know this from the President himself, but I'm told the President felt almost immediately he could be the Chief Justice, we could make him Chief. There was discussion of elevating and all of that. But from what I now understand, the truth is that sometimes there's an argument to be made not to elevate but to drop somebody in fresh anyway for the dynamic of the Court.

Roberts has these innate leadership qualities that the President felt would serve well as the Chief Justice. I think the President was there pretty quickly. I think there were others who were saying let's think, let's wait, but I think the President's instincts were almost immediately, let's just swap them.

Jones: What is learned in the visits of confirmation? In Roberts' case, confirmation of that impressiveness?

Gillespie: Yes, definitely.

Jones: Is there something more learned about the hearings?

Gillespie: Roberts was charming. He charmed the Senators. It was not so much the case with Alito. Justice Alito is more reserved. But Roberts had these guys eating out of his hand.

Jones: But is there also some learning from these visits about potential shoals?

Gillespie: Absolutely, without a doubt. And we had very vigorous dumps about them. Roberts would sit through them. There was a scribe who took copious notes about the questions and the answers, the answers the judge gave. You knew whatever he said in those meetings he couldn't say anything different in the public hearing. There was no winking and nodding. He was very good. We had prepared for those as well, for the one-on-one meetings.

Perry: How did you prepare him to meet with the Senators?

Gillespie: The legislative staff knew what the Senators' interests were, where they'd been on these issues and what they were likely to hone in on. The Senators, the Judicial Committee Senators, pride themselves on being able to go deep on these things, but the truth is they can't go all that deep. They certainly couldn't go deeper than Roberts even before the prep. But you know, the Commerce Clause, *Griswold v. Connecticut*. You know the ones that they're laying traps for you on. Once you get past those, there was nothing we were worrying about in terms of Roberts' command of the facts and his ability to answer questions.

Jones: Are notes taken in these visits?

Gillespie: Copious notes are taken in the visits. Then we'd come back and we'd sit in the Ward Room, which is right off the White House mess, and we would do a download from them. I would listen and I would probe the Democratic ones that I didn't go to. Then you kept a book so that you knew going into the hearings—Now, remember, [Charles] Schumer was really—he went to see Schumer three times, which just drove me crazy.

Nelson: He insisted on that, Schumer did?

Gillespie: Schumer did.

Milkis: You didn't go with him to Schumer's meetings?

Gillespie: No.

Milkis: Did he come back and report to you? Did somebody else go?

Gillespie: Yes, Jamie Brown went. She wasn't engaged at the time, but she was dating the chief of staff to Schumer, so she had some intel.

Nelson: What was Schumer's great—?

Gillespie: I never believed Schumer was going to vote for him, but there were some who believed at the end Schumer might vote for him. They developed a kind of a relationship. They enjoyed the give-and-take, the repartee, a little bit. Schumer respects him, respected him.

Milkis: You said there were the usual suspects, privacy, and that constitutional power of the Executive had become very controversial.

Gillespie: Yes, signing statements.

Milkis: Roberts had some record on that. Did that come up as a potential land mine?

Gillespie: Yes, Specter was actually one of the first people he met with, and he was one of the first to draw a bead on that. He has pronounced views on that. So yes, that was part of it.

Perry: You mentioned how the rules had changed from the perspective of the Members of the Senate.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: But one of the parts of that set of rules from days of old was to have Justices Ginsburg, Scalia, say, "Oh, I'm sorry. I can't speak about that topic because that issue could come before the Court."

Gillespie: That's correct.

Perry: Did you talk to then Judge Roberts about that? Did he have thoughts about what he wanted to say and what he didn't want to say?

Gillespie: He did. But he also understood—I think he agreed with that answer. It was interesting to me. A lot of this was new to me, but there was a little hint of—with these Senators, particularly on the Democratic side, the minority side, I'll say because it may be true, although I didn't see it with Sotomayor or—

Perry: [Elena] Kagan?

Gillespie: Yes, with the Republicans. But the Democrats came right up to the line of saying, "If

you rule this out I'll vote for you, but you'd better—so tell me how you would rule on stare decisis relative to this, and if I get the answer I want and you commit to it, then you might get my vote." There was umbrage at that. Let me just be clear, there was never any quid pro quo on the table anywhere, but that's what it felt like a lot.

I think Roberts felt that it would be wrong for a nominee to say, "Yes, I'll vote yes on that if it comes. Now you'll vote for me, right?" That's kind of how it felt. Roberts was right to say, "I'm not committing my vote; I'm not giving my vote up as a Justice to a Member of the United States Senate on a case."

Perry: Did he talk to you about the famous metaphor that he ultimately used that would then fit in with this as well, "I'm the umpire—"

Gillespie: Call the balls and strikes?

Perry: Yes, the umpire calling the balls and the strikes, which then obviously creates that sense of neutrality. That then gives him another reason to say, "I'm a neutral judge, so I can't answer your question as to how I would rule."

Gillespie: That was all his. He wrote it out on a yellow legal pad, hand wrote his opening remarks, and then left it. He has essentially a photographic memory. So he wrote out his opening statement, read it, and left it. The whole time Roberts appeared before the Court I think there was only one instance when he jotted something down.

Jones: You mean before the Senate committee.

Gillespie: Sorry, before the Senate Judiciary Committee during his confirmation. It was three days of hearings. There was only one time I saw him pick up a pencil and write something on a piece of paper. He otherwise never wrote a single note, never referred to a single note, never had to flip through a folder, none of that. Everything was [snapping fingers].

Perry: So when you say he wrote it out and left it, he wrote it out and sent it to you?

Gillespie: No, he didn't read it to anybody. No one saw it before he gave it.

Milkis: He just writes it out so he thinks it through.

Gillespie: He wrote it out to organize his thoughts.

Perry: But didn't take it in and have it in front of him.

Gillespie: He never had it in front of him; he never took it with him, and he delivered it. I said in my book it was like in the movie *Jerry McGuire*, you had me at hello. That was how he was with the Judiciary Committee at that point. I mean, he just had them.

Nelson: These meetings, if there is such a thing as a typical one-on-one meeting with a Senator, what percent of words during that hour are spoken by the nominee and what percent by the Senator?

Jones: We'd like an exact number?

Gillespie: Ideally it would be 95 percent Senator and 5 percent nominee, and that's generally what it was. He's not getting grilled or pressed. He's more listening. They're telling him their views of the Commerce Clause and the legislative branch and he's just nodding and saying, "That's an interesting point. I look forward to discussing that at the hearing." There's some back-and-forth. Judge Roberts's wife was from Massachusetts and there was some back-and-forth with Kennedy over her family being up there.

Alito was a Phillies fan and Specter got him to sign a baseball for him. I told him afterward, "That's great." He said, "Why?" I said, "You're going to get confirmed." He said, "Why?" I said, "What do you think the value of a baseball signed by a circuit court judge is?" [*laughter*]

Jones: Beautiful.

Nelson: I'm guessing that was your advice to Roberts going into these things?

Gillespie: Let them talk.

Nelson: Let them talk and be sort of agreeable.

Gillespie: Amenable. Don't commit to anything. "Interesting point, I'll take that into consideration, I appreciate you sharing that with me."

Nelson: Was there anyone who had been involved in, say, the Thomas nomination process that was involved in this, who had been through this before?

Gillespie: No, I talked to [Tom C.] Korologos at one point about it. I think he was the one I talked to, but it was all new blood. There was nobody who had been through it before who was in on the day-to-day events.

Perry: So did you breathe a sigh of relief when things went as smoothly as they did in the hearings and ultimately he's confirmed and you have a new Chief Justice of the United States? But you're back to the O'Connor seat is still open. So how does that transition—

Gillespie: There were a couple of funny things. The Roberts hearing went over to a third day, which I thought was really unnecessary, gratuitous by [Patrick] Leahy. At the end of the second day when we agreed to go to the third day, Roberts did not want to do the third-day hearings; he really didn't. He was tired of it. He had been great the whole time. There was high risk going back a third day, what's the point? It wasn't fair. I felt he was right.

I talked to Specter about it. I said, "Chairman, we don't want to do this." He said, "Why shut him down now, he's doing great. Don't give the Democrats a process argument," blah, blah, blah. I went back to the White House. Andy was really irked by it.

I said, "Look, Specter is not willing to basically shut them down so we don't really have a choice. Let's just get our minds right about this." I remember saying to Chief Justice Roberts, I said, "Let's limit it." I said to Specter, "Can we limit it, hard start, hard stop?" He said, "Yes, we

can do that." So we agreed to two hours, which was not bad. I think it was two hours.

I came back and I broke the news to the Chief and he was not happy. I said, "Two hours, lifetime appointment." [*laughter*] He kind of laughed. He did fine. They were all out of bullets. They were doing it because they can. I ran into Leahy and he said to me, "Oh, there's Gillespie who runs the Senate Judiciary Committee." I had a pretty good relationship with him. I said, "If I ran the Senate Judiciary Committee, we wouldn't be back here tomorrow."

Then the Alito confirmation was much more contentious. There was a sense on the left, which I think we want to shift to it.

Nelson: Talk about Miers.

Gillespie: As I mentioned yesterday, I thought that the secrecy surrounding the selection of Vice President Cheney hurt us coming out of the box. It was similar here. That was a very tight-knit circle that knew the—

Milkis: You weren't involved at all?

Gillespie: No.

Milkis: It just was presented to you?

Gillespie: It was presented to me, yes.

Nelson: Who was involved? Who makes—you talked about a small group, but who are we talking about here who was deciding who the nomination was?

Gillespie: I think it was Andy and the President, and my guess is Alberto [Gonzales] and Karl.

Milkis: Rumors about Laura Bush being involved?

Gillespie: Maybe, she may have been. The First Lady wanted a woman at this point and felt that it was important. She said so herself publicly. I think she said that publicly. Her preference was for a woman.

Milkis: David Addington?

Gillespie: Not that I'm aware of.

Milkis: Was there anybody from Cheney's office?

Gillespie: No, I don't think so. I'm forgetting someone, Bill Kelly and Harriet herself.

Nelson: So nobody from Justice?

Gillespie: Well, Gonzales was from Justice. That's my sense of probably what that circle was. I was playing golf, I think, on a Sunday afternoon. Andy called and said, "I need you to come in around 7:00 A.M. tomorrow." I said, "Do we have a nominee?" He said, "Yes, and we're going to

announce her tomorrow."

Milkis: He didn't tell you who it was?

Gillespie: No, but I had picked up on the "her" and I thought it was going to be Harriet at that point. I came in early and they told me it was Harriet. We announced it at ten o'clock. I had worked very closely with Harriet through the Roberts' nomination and liked her a lot.

Milkis: Did you think she was a good choice for this position?

Gillespie: I thought she would be a hard sell.

Nelson: Did you think she'd be a hard sell among Republicans or Democrats?

Jones: Yes.

Gillespie: Both, yes. I thought more among Democrats just because I thought they would think it was the President putting his—

Jones: Crony.

Gillespie: Right, on the Court and that they were going to get pushed back over that. I underestimated the conservative backlash. I knew, having gone through the Roberts nomination, how important the paper trail was for the rulings. I knew we didn't have that here and there was a little bit of a pig in a poke and it was a Souter risk. But it was intense.

I think because there had been 11 years and you had people like Luttig and Roberts and Alito and others who had had time on the Court who were beacons and had strong records. For that matter Justice Owen and others too. So it was not like, Oh, there are slim pickings here, so that's fine. It was kind of, wait a second.

Milkis: But you never got the chance to make that argument. In fact, you were presented with a fait accompli.

Gillespie: I didn't, and I'm not complaining about that; that was not my role. I do think, because of the secrecy element to it, that views—again, I may or may not have expressed them. I just remember that was my thought. I never had a chance to express it. Those kinds of views weren't brought into the vetting process. So I remember getting a call that day saying, "Why did she vote for Al Gore in—?" What was it?

Nelson: In '88.

Gillespie: In '88 in the Democratic primary. I thought, *She voted for Al Gore?* I'll have to get back to you on that.

Nelson: When they explained—there must have been some explanation. Here's why we chose Harriet, or here's what we think.

Gillespie: Yes, there was a rationale.

Nelson: What was the rationale?

Gillespie: She had a strong record in Texas as a practitioner and she was head of the Texas Bar Association, the first woman to head the Texas Bar Association. She was White House counsel. Elena Kagan is a Supreme Court Justice today, right? She was Solicitor General. White House counsel, Solicitor General, that's the same zip code. The President had faith in her and felt she was a judicial conservative. She had been through the confirmation hearings. She was a strong proponent of Chief Justice Roberts in the process. To the President's mind, I think she had helped pick him and that was a good pick.

Milkis: She didn't have to go through confirmation, right? She's White House counsel.

Gillespie: She'd never been through a confirmation.

Milkis: I thought you said she did.

Gillespie: I went through the Roberts confirmation. So I think those were the factors. We had some good talking points. And to your point about not being a judge, we shouldn't automatically default to a judge and we also shouldn't have everybody on the Court be either a Harvard Law or a Yale Law grad. There was a little bit of a populist element to having someone who went to SMU [Southern Methodist University]. So there were arguments I was comfortable making.

Perry: Were you surprised, though, about Gonzales not getting the call, and have you ever talked to anybody in the White House about that?

Gillespie: I'd not really worked with Gonzales, hardly at all. I knew him a little bit in Austin during the campaign, but I'd never worked with him when he was White House counsel or Attorney General. In my mind he was never—I had heard speculation that he might be up for the Court, but I never heard his name come up.

Perry: You didn't think in terms of *Oh, this would be a way to reach out to the Hispanic vote*, which you were courting so carefully?

Gillespie: No, I didn't. I really don't think anyone was thinking in those terms for the Supreme Court nomination. I think Obama did, but in the Bush White House that was not a real—Oh, we have to have a Hispanic. I think it was, as I said, here's the field. If our nominee turns out to be a Hispanic or a woman or an African American, that would be great, but it was more the Red Auerbach school of draft the best athlete. We need to get the best pick.

Milkis: In a case like Miers—and we'll get to talk about Alito—how important is the mobilization outside the halls of Congress?

Gillespie: It's very important. It has become a very important dynamic. It was flat. It just wasn't there like it was for Roberts. People were fired up.

Milkis: You could feel it.

Gillespie: Yes, you could feel it. They wanted Roberts confirmed. Surrogates and people were

talking to Senators and all of that. It was just deafening silence out there when Harriet got announced.

Jones: Did you talk to her a fair amount, I assume?

Gillespie: I talked to her a fair amount, yes.

Jones: Her attitude?

Gillespie: She was good. Harriet was strong throughout. She was very good. I mean, she was disappointed. I felt like I'd let her down, but I also felt that at the end it just wasn't doable.

Nelson: When did you realize it was not doable?

Gillespie: I had a conversation with Jon Kyl, whom I respect a lot. Just he and I kind of huddled. I wanted to get his take on it. He was pretty forthright.

Nelson: This was after she had been making the rounds?

Gillespie: She had been making the rounds.

Perry: Could you talk about some of those meetings?

Gillespie: I didn't go with her.

Nelson: Not at all?

Gillespie: I think I went to one, actually. There wasn't a good vibe. Definitely not like Roberts. Harriet is reserved. She's very smart but she's quiet. There just wasn't a good vibe coming out of them. It's a tough thing for the Senators, especially someone like Jon Kyl, who liked the President. They all liked the President. There was no personal animus toward the President that I ever picked up anywhere with the Republican Senators. They all liked him. So that also makes it kind of hard to say this ain't going to fly.

Jones: Was it also possible that Roberts, having so impressed, almost the model appointee or nominee—

Gillespie: There's some of that.

Jones: Then she, to follow that, and rather soon. So that there is, in their mind, this is the sort of perfect—

Gillespie: The way I put it was, I heard this from somebody who was a University of Alabama football fan, a friend of mine. You don't want to be the coach that follows [Paul William] Bear Bryant. You want to be the coach that follows the coach that follows Bear Bryant. There was some of that. But I think more what happened was there was disappointment among the Federalist Society types and dispiritment there. The Democrats sensed it and they hung back. They let Republican-on-Republican violence break out. It just got to the point where it was unsustainable. I could feel it. I remember, I did tell Andy—

Nelson: After you talked with Kyl?

Gillespie: Yes, and some others. I told him—and I wasn't sure if it was my job. I mean, my job was just to sell but I felt like he needed to have a reality check. I said, "This is going to be really, really hard. I'm going to keep doing it, don't get me wrong, but I feel I owe it to you and to the President to make sure you understand that it may not be doable."

Nelson: I'm thinking that when they chose you to do Roberts initially it wasn't because of your vast experience in selling judicial nominees.

Gillespie: No.

Nelson: It was because they had confidence that you could handle whatever task you were given.

Jones: And connections on the Hill.

Gillespie: The connections on the Hill too.

Nelson: So I'm thinking if they had a sense that when you say, "I don't think it's going to happen," their response is not, "Well, let's get somebody who does." It's, "If Ed says that, then that's probably right."

Gillespie: I hope that's right. They knew the depth of my loyalty. As I said from the outset, "Whatever we're for I'm for, but I feel I have an obligation to tell you that I think it's tough and may not be doable."

Jones: Was this getting back to her?

Gillespie: I don't know.

Jones: The description you've given us?

Gillespie: I didn't give it to her. I didn't think that's who I owed it to. When she withdrew her nomination I felt awful about it. Nobody felt good. I think it was the next day, Alito was there in the White House and she was there with him.

Nelson: That's extraordinary.

Perry: The story that I've read is that she was supportive of him even back for the original O'Connor position and that at first she was very reluctant to be named. But I've also read that then she was reluctant to step aside once she had been nominated.

Gillespie: I'm not sure of any of that. I know this, after she stepped aside she was right back at the job for the President of the United States as his Counsel and doing everything she could to confirm Justice Alito.

Nelson: So you don't know what was communicated to her after you talked to Andy Card?

Gillespie: I don't know.

Nelson: You just know that she one day came in and said I'm withdrawing.

Milkis: Soon after your conversation?

Gillespie: I can't remember when.

Jones: But it was her decision?

Gillespie: I'm told it was her decision. I'm reminded of when Margaret Heckler testified before the Senate one time and she said, "I've told you more than I know already." I may have told you more than I know already. I'm not sure of the interplay between the President, Andy, and Harriet at that point or how it came about. I believe she did what she felt was in the best interests of the President in withdrawing her name. How she came to that conclusion, I don't know.

Nelson: Did that leave the residue of all this—the Miers nomination, the Miers withdrawal—did it leave a residue of bad feeling between Bush and Republicans in the Senate?

Gillespie: There was some. I didn't necessarily feel it. I think it was probably helpful to Alito that I didn't have that feeling, but there was some of that in the White House.

Jones: If there was, it wasn't expressed toward Alito?

Gillespie: No, not at all toward Alito. It was more—to your point about the Republican Senators. I think there was some sense of why would they think I would send somebody who wouldn't be a strong, strict constructionist on the bench for the rest of her life.

Nelson: And right about this time Social Security reform has tanked, right?

Gillespie: Right, Social Security reform went down right about that time. House Republicans killed Social Security reform.

Nelson: But there was a lack of enthusiasm for it.

Gillespie: Total lack of enthusiasm.

Nelson: On the Hill. Also Katrina.

Gillespie: Katrina hit during Roberts' confirmation.

Jones: Late August, early September.

Nelson: Did the Republicans in the Senate and the Hill generally feel like we can safely put some distance between ourselves and President Bush?

Gillespie: I think there was some of that, the political banner, definitely. Not safely put distance—partly it's the nature of a second-term President. He was a second-term President. I didn't feel that the Senate Republicans in their response to Harriet's nomination were disrespectful of the President; I didn't feel that way. There were others who did, but it was not how I saw it. I think that made it easier for me to work with Senators on Alito.

Perry: So it is the third time now in almost as many months that you're back making the rounds, this time with someone I think most experts would agree is equally competent to, now the new Chief Justice—

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: —but, as you say, a completely different personality.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: And closer to Harriet Miers' quiet persona.

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: Now you've got a third character type that you're selling. What's that like?

Gillespie: It was funny. I thought he was kind of cold and—I don't know how to say it—arrogant maybe, I guess. He's not at all. He's humble and he's reserved. Shy sounds too pejorative. He's reserved. He was not Roberts. Roberts kind of enjoyed the give-and-take and the jousting with these Senators who could go maybe two questions deep, but not much more. I think Justice Alito didn't enjoy that as much as Chief Justice Roberts did. But he was good, he was just so good. The legal people around, the lawyers and the DOJ [Department of Justice] folks, they were really blown away by him, his depth of knowledge, his grasp. He'd served on the bench longer than the Chief.

Perry: Much longer.

Gillespie: Yes, much longer. The Chief—there were things that the Chief needed a refresher on, or just remind me about that again. Alito didn't need any of that. There was no moment at which I could remember that he would say—he always had [snapping fingers.] Somebody would maybe parry with him a little bit and he would say, "Well, that's true." But he never said, "Remind me about that again." He had command of virtually everything under the sun. So it was a different dynamic. But all those groups, the outside folks, there was a lot of energy again. The Senators liked the jousting with him even though he didn't necessarily like it with them. He understood it, he never complained or grumbled or anything, but it was just a different dynamic.

Nelson: Did you make the visits with him?

Gillespie: I did with him. He did very well in the hearings too. The left, particularly Kennedy on the committee and to a lesser extent [Richard] Durbin, they kind of swung a little wildly because they were frustrated. They couldn't touch him intellectually. There was no one on the committee who was anywhere even in his area code.

Nelson: From zip code to area code.

Gillespie: They just couldn't. They got frustrated and they lashed out. Kennedy in particular lashed out. It was unfortunate.

Perry: They attempted to mount a filibuster, did they not?

Gillespie: Yes, Senator Kerry called it in from the Alps. It was the first time a filibuster had ever been yodeled. Literally, he was in Switzerland.

Nelson: That line has been spoken before.

Gillespie: He was in the Swiss Alps. He called and said he wanted to put everyone on notice he was going to filibuster, by some call-in.

Jones: He has that special touch.

Gillespie: It was interesting because Kerry, Harry Reid, Joe Biden, and Senator Obama all supported the filibuster of Justice Alito. So when President Obama nominates Sotomayor, they call in the Ranking Member on Judiciary now for us, who was [Orrin] Hatch, I guess it was. Is Hatch ranking on Judiciary now?

Jones: It has to be Hatch, doesn't it?

Perry: [Jefferson] Sessions?

Gillespie: No, Sessions is Budget. I can't remember. But they're sitting there, and—Mitch McConnell—and Biden says, "I hope nobody is thinking about mounting a filibuster." Mitch McConnell said, "You know—" maybe it was Sessions—he said, "You know, Jeff Sessions and I are the only two in this room who have never filibustered a Supreme Court nominee." President Obama and Leahy and Biden and Reid were all sitting there.

Jones: Touché.

Gillespie: So the four Democrats there, Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Senate leader, Vice President, and President, all voted to filibuster Alito, for the first time.

Nelson: Was that a fight? I mean, did you worry that they might have the votes?

Gillespie: No, not really, I thought we had the votes. I had the votes; I think I had the right count on Roberts; I think I had the right final vote tally on that and I think I had the right final vote tally on Alito on the votes on the filibuster.

Nelson: You must have been counting X number of Democrats to get to 60.

Gillespie: I knew that they couldn't get to 40 Democrats to filibuster a Supreme Court nomination.

Nelson: How did you know that?

Gillespie: I think there were enough, at that time, institutionalists who thought that's just too much.

Milkis: Who particularly impressed you on the Democratic side as being concerned about the

institution in this case? Do you remember?

Gillespie: I come back to Feingold. I don't know where he was on the vote, but I felt that Feingold's questions were respectful and thoughtful. On the committee, [Dianne] Feinstein. I don't think she supported the filibuster. Those were the ones that I saw in the committee process. I didn't like to say I didn't see the other Democrats. When you looked, a lot of the moderate Democrats, centrist Democrats, you knew they weren't going to support a filibuster of Alito.

Perry: Was there any talk about yet another Catholic coming to the Court because Alito, by this time, would be the fifth?

Gillespie: There was some talk about it; there wasn't any consideration of it in terms of the nomination or anything, but it became apparent—I remember somebody saying the Supreme Court is going to be majority of Catholics. I think the Court now is all Jewish and Catholic, right?

Perry: Six Catholics and three Jews.

Milkis: There are no Protestants on the Supreme Court.

Nelson: We have a lot of catching up to do.

Gillespie: There was some talk about that, but it was never really an issue. Alito acquitted himself very well in the hearings; he was just so good.

Perry: That little spat, not spat, but episode where Mrs. [Martha-Ann] Alito had to flee from the room, what was that like?

Gillespie: It was interesting. It was just one of those human moments in one of these big things when you're talking about Supreme Court, the Senate, the White House, and all that. As I said yesterday at some point, it's really you're all people. Ted Kennedy was hinting, inferring, suggesting that her husband was racist.

Milkis: About some writing he'd done for the school newspaper?

Gillespie: Not even that, it was some membership—

Perry: Some membership at Princeton.

Gillespie: A dining club or something. It was really a reach. It was pretty reprehensible I thought. It was just—at a certain point he's not the nominee for the Supreme Court, it's her husband getting slimed and she just couldn't take it anymore.

Nelson: I'm thinking, though, you've got a professional hat here. She leaves the room crying; you must instantly know that's going to be a big part of the coverage on the news that day.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Are you wondering how this is going to play?

Gillespie: I did wonder how it was going to play. You never know. It played out actually the way I just described it, which was people going, "No wonder. Why would anybody even subject themselves to this crap? How are we ever going to get good people to serve on the Supreme Court if this is what you're going to get put through? God bless her, I feel sorry for her." I remember walking in and seeing her. She had her feet up on the radiator. She was seated behind the desk and her head was back and she had a washcloth on her head.

Perry: I think she said she had a migraine; she began suffering a migraine.

Gillespie: I think she did have a migraine. She was in tears; she was upset about the treatment. Maybe it triggered it, I don't know. That was how she was. I said, "Are you OK?" She just nodded her head. I said, "It's going to be fine; we're going to be OK. He's going to get confirmed." I think at that point she didn't really care about all that. It was really like one of those truly human moments where I just felt so bad for her as a spouse to have to see her husband put through—We do it. I thought it was unseemly and reprehensible, but you put your armor on and you go through it, but she doesn't have armor. So it was interesting.

It turned the tide. I think it was—and then Lindsey Graham teed off and really kind of said what everybody was thinking, which was nice.

Nelson: I thought in your book you said it was *his* comment that provoked the tears.

Gillespie: Actually it was—That's when she left. I think when he called him out and he articulated what she was thinking, that's when she was overcome by it. I'm speculating, but I think it was more that it unleashed it because I think she was thinking, *Damn right, about time, thank you somebody for saying it*. It was a powerful moment. I was really proud of Lindsey and I felt really bad for her. He didn't like it either, but he understood it was part of it. I think it is universally true: it's always harder for somebody to watch their spouse go through something than for them to go through something.

Jones: Or a parent.

Gillespie: A parent or a son. Absolutely.

Nelson: What I'm wondering in general is, in choosing a Supreme Court nominee you want somebody with enough of a written paper trail so that you know they are authentically conservative.

Gillespie: Right.

Nelson: On the other hand, the nominee's stance during all the interviews and hearings has to be well, I'll just have to wait and see what the case is.

Milkis: As an umpire. I'm not a Yankee's fan.

Nelson: How do you reconcile those things? Obviously, when it goes wrong, like it did for Bork, where the record spoke louder than anything and he stepped into the fracas.

Gillespie: Well, there's that, and also that was the sneak attack, and there are no sneak attacks now. You're prepared for all of that and you don't let it go unanswered, and you parry and you jump right in. To a certain extent it's sad, but this is where it is. The process has been so denigrated that a lot of it becomes noise anyway. Ted Kennedy giving the Robert Bork's America speech, you can only give that once.

Nelson: Yes.

Gillespie: You're not going to get away with that a second and third time. People start to discount it. But it's a fine line. You've got to show enough leg in terms of answering, but you can't say I'm going to predetermine that I'll rule this way or that way if something comes before me as a Justice.

Nelson: The other thing that strikes me about the process is it's not like two hours of life. If there's an hour meeting with every Senator—

Gillespie: Oh, yes.

Nelson: Plus all the prep for the committee testimony, it's an incredible campaign for the candidate.

Gillespie: It's a long process.

Nelson: Have they done this before? Do circuit court nominees have to go through this?

Gillespie: No. There's prep for circuit court nominees, but it's not this kind of thing.

Nelson: Of course, you say you weren't involved in choosing any of these three. Do they take that into account? How will this person conduct himself or herself through this campaign? Not just, what will they be like on the Court?

Gillespie: I don't think so fully. They may. I wasn't in the process. I'm sure they think *How are we going to hold up in the hearings*, that kind of thing.

Nelson: That really puts it on you.

Gillespie: Yes, you're dealt the card and you've got to play it.

Nelson: You train those candidates.

Gillespie: Yes, definitely.

Perry: Also, since this change in the process that you're talking about, Presidents have begun to interview them themselves

Gillespie: Right.

Perry: So they can get a sense of their personal relationship with them, a little bit how they would do in conversation with a Senator.

Gillespie: Right.

Jones: Did you get the feeling that any one of these three resented your having to sell them? After all, especially with Roberts and Alito, it's the quintessential judicial type and the quintessential political type coming together for a purpose. They're sensitive to the politics of the whole thing.

Gillespie: I don't think they resented me; I think they saw me as a necessary evil in the process. I like to think I have a good relationship with both of them. I have no reason to interact with them. Sometimes if somebody is going to be in town and they want to go by the Court, I'll call one of the chambers and ask if it's possible.

One of my advantages is that I'm not a lawyer. I don't practice before the Court or anything so I have no reason—I played some golf with the Chief at one point with Lindsey Graham down in South Carolina. I've seen Justice Alito and I've seen Martha-Ann. She'd been living in our area. I think they liked me and I think they understood that you've got to have a guy like this now for the process.

I do remember at one point there was some question about—I mean, there's ugly stuff. The Chief was concerned about a question about the adoption of Jack and Josie [Roberts]. I said to him, "Judge, honestly, you focus on other things; don't worry about this. I promise you I will not let them get near your family." And I wouldn't have. I would have gone ballistic if somebody had gone after the adoption. I don't think there was anything to go after, but there are some things that are just—It felt like he took some comfort. He'd like me to do something like that. I meant it. So I think they understand it's a part of the process now.

Jones: I realize now I really should have, in my earlier lengthy question, included not just the legislature, not just the executive, and not just state politics but the judiciary. Next go-around.

Nelson: We talked some about your work as a state party chair, for which Chuck gets credit for putting that out on the table. Is there anything we should talk about before the time that you rejoin the administration replacing Dan Bartlett as Counselor?

Gillespie: No, that was kind of a quiet time. I didn't have anything going on. My firm had sold, to WPP [communications firm, formerly Wire and Plastic Products], and I was in the middle of an earn-out. I was really kind of focused on business, trying to generate income for the earn-out at that point. I was doing the Republican Party of Virginia, which I really enjoyed doing and wanted to. That's what I was doing when I was asked to serve as Counselor.

Milkis: I want to hear quickly about—because I think this happened before you were Counselor—the fight over the immigration bill. Did you have any role in that?

Gillespie: I was a big supporter of the immigration reform bill.

Milkis: I was reading some statements that you—

Gillespie: On the outside I wrote an op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal* and I tried to rally outside groups in support of it. I thought it was very important. I loved hearing the President talk about

it. It just resonated. As the son of an immigrant, it was important to me and I thought politically it was important. I thought it was the right thing to do.

Milkis: You had said earlier you had gotten some inkling of this, that in the 2004 election this issue was becoming a divisive one.

Gillespie: Yes. Really, as a conservative Republican to weigh in to the immigration reform debate in support of comprehensive immigration reform, you knew you were going to be inviting a lot of blowback, and I knew that. But I thought it needed to be said. I did get a lot of blowback on it but I did think it was the right position. The immigration bill collapsed on the floor of the Senate in my first week in office as counselor to the President.

Jones: It does get us into the White House.

Perry: Just before you get to the White House, could you also mention the election of 2006, the loss for Senate of your friend George Allen, and your selection as head of the Virginia GOP ["Grand Old Party," Republicans] as kind of the jumping-off point of going to the White House.

Gillespie: George is a good friend and neighbor. I was really not as involved in his campaign. In fact, I was kept at some distance from the campaign by the campaign manager. I wasn't looking to get into it but they didn't—I remember talking to George at one point about the "macaca" incident. I expressed a concern to him about it. He said, "Dick's [Wadhams] got it under control" or something.

Jones: Yes.

Nelson: Dick was Jim Webb's campaign manager?

Gillespie: I was still close to him and supported him and we did a big event at my house. The President came to my home in the Mount Vernon area and did a big fund-raiser for Senator Allen in August, I think it was, or the first week in September. We raised a lot of money for him.

Then I was with him on Election Day. He knew he was going to lose; I could tell. I went by to see him in his hotel room and I could just tell. He's generally a buoyant upbeat person and he was down. It was so close. I was preparing to marshal resources and efforts for a recount, but Virginia is not Florida. Our laws and our enforcement and our ballot security and everything are pretty—if you lose in Virginia you probably lost. That's just the way it is. We were inside the margin for a state paid for recount, it was less than one-half of 1 percent, but the Senate was hanging in the balance. But he looked at it and he knows the state very well. So I was on the phone quite a bit with the White House. They were saying, "Are you guys going to challenge or not?"

I remember telling Karl, "This ain't Florida. We don't have it." So they understood.

Milkis: Why did they keep you at a distance, do you think? Is it because of your relation with Bush and the President's—

Gillespie: No. I have views about campaigns and how they ought to be run. Dick Wadhams has

different views. It was his campaign.

Milkis: Sure.

Gillespie: There was no bitterness or anything. It was just that they had a plan; they were going to do it and they didn't need any other thoughts on it.

Milkis: I didn't mean bitterness, I just meant that by this time the President politically had become a bit of a liability.

Gillespie: He was very much a liability. George lost. Macaca was obviously a big factor in the *Washington Post,* but the biggest factor was the war and President Bush and his numbers. We lost in Hampton Roads. That tells you everything.

Nelson: Why don't we take a break and then go to the White House?

[BREAK]

Nelson: We're going to get you into the White House. In the time we have, what should we make sure we don't overlook?

Gillespie: In terms of Counselor? It's pretty easy, the first part was the immigration reform, the surge, the pardon or the commute at that time, my first week. Then we had the clashes with Congress over [inaudible], the investigations and producing documents and all of that stuff that we're seeing play out now too, and the SCHIP debate, which I think is significant and a harbinger. Then the Middle East push and then the transition.

Nelson: What about the financial—

Gillespie: Then the financial crisis. I was going to say TARP is the biggest thing in that whole time.

Jones: The uniqueness of that, coming in the absolute most important period before an election.

Nelson: We might have to go to Washington with you; we're not going to get through all this.

Jones: I'd love to have some comment too—there's almost nothing written or understood about transitioning out. I hooked myself on transitioning in, but not out.

Nelson: How did your appointment to replace Dan Bartlett come about?

Gillespie: I was approached by Josh Bolten. He asked me to come see him in the White House.

Nelson: Was he now Chief of Staff?

Gillespie: He was Chief. I sat in the Chief of Staff's office with him after work one day, which is late for him. I probably got there around 7:00 or so. Josh traditionally worked until about 8:00 at

night. He told me that Dan was leaving. I was surprised. I really thought Dan would be the last person to turn the lights out in the place. He asked if I would consider being Counselor.

Josh had approached me earlier when he came in to be the press secretary. [Scott] McClellan had to go. I just didn't want to be the press secretary, to be honest with you. It had no appeal to me. I had just done the earn-out. We just sold the firm, Quinn Gillespie & Associates. There was no way they were going to let me go. That was in 2006, right when Josh started, right after the midterm losses and everything.

We were in year two of the earn-out; it was a three-year deal. So he called me back this time and he asked me if I would take Dan's job. That was much more interesting to me and I was now only less than a year away from the end of the earn-out. I thought maybe I could do it at that point, as opposed to being at the front end of the three-year deal.

I said, "Let me check it out, let me run some traps and let me see if I can do it." I thought I would like to do it. That was always the job in the White House that I actually felt would fit me most.

Nelson: The title is Counselor but what is the job?

Gillespie: Counselor has all of the communications essentially, the speechwriting, the communications writ large, the strategic—partly the scheduling, where the President goes, where he is seen, and then the press and the Internet and all of that. So that was kind of my wheelhouse. You're kind of—I always say it is pronounced *consigliore*; that's really what the job is in a lot of ways. I like it. You have real line authority for things but at the same time you cut across all—The deal was, and Josh said, any meeting the President is in you can be in. You're free to come and go from the Oval Office any time. You don't need to go through me and you don't need to go through anybody else. There are three people who have that prerogative in this White House, and it's the National Security Advisor, the Counselor, and the Chief of Staff.

I liked that; that sounded good. So I talked to Cathy about it. We were at a point where we thought we could do it; the hours are brutal and we knew that. I was ready for a new challenge. The tougher thing was the Republican Party of Virginia. I had only been there for six months and I was really turning it around. It was a shambles. I had already raised a million bucks. It was coming together pretty nicely. The point is, it was easier for me to leave Quinn Gillespie than the RPV; I finagled that.

When I didn't say no right away, Josh was pretty excited about it. Then I started talking to the folks at WPP, could I get out of it? I started talking to lawyers. I was committed for another eight months at that time. When I went in in June there were six months left on the earn-out, I had to walk away from it. Lawyers at the White House signed off on that. I couldn't take any money; I didn't get—I know you have to scrub this. I didn't get any of the earn-out money. So I walked away from a significant amount, a really significant amount that I just left on the table for my partners. But I thought it was one of those moments; to me it was kind of a "who are you, really?" moment.

I didn't come to Washington, D.C., to make a lot of money. I don't mind making a lot of money; that's nice. If somebody had said to me 25 years ago sitting in the Senate parking lot that someday the President of the United States is going to turn to you and say, "I really need you for

the last 18 months of my term," and the Commander in Chief with two wars says, "I need you to be by my side for this," I'd have said, "Where do I sign?" So it was kind of, where do I sign? I need to do this. It's the right thing.

I remember Cathy and I went back and forth about it. We did the thing where you list the pros and the cons. Cathy said, "What's the right thing to do?" I said, "Well, the right thing to do is to say yes to the President of the United States when he asks you to serve." She said, "Why don't we just do the right thing?" So we did.

I was trying to work—literally, now it was a question of can I get out of my contract and get out of it in a way that meets all the terms of the White House's ethics rules and all of that? And I've got to deal with the Republican Party of Virginia, which I just got to vote for me unopposed. I did have to run for this, it wasn't like the Bush thing. But nobody ran against me and it was going really well.

When I became RPV chairman, President Bush agreed to come and do an event for the Republican Party of Virginia, down here in Richmond, over at Rick Sharp's house. We raised a ton of money; we raised something like $650,000, which was a lot of money for the Republican Party of Virginia at that time. Josh called me and said, "Have you been able to make a decision yet?" I said, "No, but I'm getting close." He said, "You know, the President is coming tomorrow. I'd try to get that decision made before you see him because he's going to want to talk to you." I said, "I hear you." Josh said, "He doesn't want to hear no." I said, "I understand."

We were waiting to go on at the event, Governor McDonnell and Bill Bolling went out. It was just me and Cathy and the President and the First Lady about to be introduced to the crowd for the RPV event. Bolling went first, then McDonnell. As soon as they were out of earshot he was on me. He said, "Are we going to do this, Eddie? Are you going to come? It will be the best 18 months of your life, I promise. You're going to love it. We're going to have a great time."

Jones: Nothing much going on.

Milkis: Did he really say that? Is that what he said?

Gillespie: He said, "It will be so exciting, it will be a great experience, you'll love it. This will be great. I hope you can do this." I said, "I'm trying, Mr. President, I'm trying." He turned to Cathy and he said, "You're for it, right, Cathy?" Cathy said, "Yes, sir, Mr. President, I'm for it." I said, "I'm hopeful I'll be able to get this answer soon, Mr. President. I really want to do it and I think I'm going to be able to." He said, "Good, good, it will be great."

Nelson: At this stage you're just waiting to see whether you can get out of your contract?

Gillespie: Essentially I'm trying to get the legal stuff worked out. Then they announce RPV chairman Ed Gillespie. So just as I'm leaving the First Lady Mrs. Bush says, "Nothing like a little pressure, huh, Eddie?" I said, "Yes, ma'am."

So I went up to talk to them after I decided I could do it. I got the lawyers to sign off and the White House lawyers signed off on what to do. In all candor I was trying to get some money out of the deal prorated, and the White House counsel said you can't. I was six months away from a

three-year earn-out. But they said, "You can't even take a prorated share of the thing."

Milkis: Wow.

Gillespie: I had gotten some money up front, don't get me wrong. It wasn't like I wasn't going to get anything, but I had to leave the bulk of it. They just said, "You can't take any," which really chapped my ass later. When Axelrod left, he left with a two million dollar check to go to the White House, and I was told I couldn't get anything.

But anyway I did it. That was the ruling; that was the determination, so that was the answer. Then I went to meet with the President. The first meeting I had with the President was up in his study in the Treaty Room. He was behind his desk and it was after hours, just the two of us. He was excited. He said, "I'm glad this worked out. I'm looking forward to working with you." I said, "I'm looking forward to working with you."

Then we talked about the nature of the job, what he wanted from me in it and all that. He said, "There's something you need to understand though. You are great at understanding the domestic audience and the American people and the voters and how to communicate with them, but when you take this job, the President of the United States has more than just the domestic audience and you're going to have to learn how to take the other audiences into account. Our enemies listen to everything the President of the United States says. If they detect weakness it will affect what they do. Our allies listen to everything I say as Commander in Chief, and if they sense any vacillation or backing away, they'll be gone tomorrow."

And he said, "Our troops listen to the Commander in Chief and everything I say as Commander in Chief and if they sense that I'm in any way undercutting them, that's bad for morale, it doesn't help them in the theater. There will be times when you'll want me to say something that is politically beneficial to the domestic audience but would hurt the morale of our troops in the field. You just need to know that I will never do that."

I said, "Yes, sir." Then I thought, *Where do I sign, where do I sign? That's him.* Then I thought, *This was entirely the right thing to do and the right decision*.

We hit it off. I'd known him a little bit and spent time with him, that kind of thing. We had a friendly relationship. We hit it off like that [snapping fingers]. From that moment on I was enthralled.

Jones: Is that an example of where you make the distinction between demanding loyalty and commanding it?

Gillespie: Yes, that's exactly right. He's a very good judge of people. I always felt that, even when I was in Austin. One thing about President Bush, then Governor Bush, you go in a room with 100 people, you work the room, and you're out of there in a half an hour. He can tell you, "These 33 people, we ought to get them locked up; those 33 are not worth anything; and I can't figure out the other 33 in those 20 minutes that I was there."

But he really has a very good read on people, and is a judge of people. That was one of those moments where you think—I've told this story only one other time, I just told it in New Orleans

actually. That's the kind of leadership that the American people want. They don't always see it, but that's him when nobody is looking; that's how he is. So it was a very meaningful moment for me. He may have thought that too; it may have been calculated on his part. It's how he felt, by the way, but he may have also known that that would resonate very strongly with me.

So I went to work for him. I'd leave my house at 6:10, 6:15 in the morning. I'd get into my office about 6:40 to 6:45 and I'd go see him around 7:15, and senior staff meeting was 7:30. I got right into the flow of it very quickly.

Nelson: The big issue your first week there turned out to be the death of immigration reform?

Gillespie: Well, there were three. The first was the immigration reform bill collapsed on the floor of the Senate. It just collapsed. A couple of amendments passed and that was it. That was pretty bad.

Nelson: But was it a surprise at that stage?

Gillespie: We hadn't given up the ghost yet, the White House hadn't. I wasn't that surprised. I was new to it, but I was surprised that people there were surprised. They were just working it and trying to get it done. Then Pete Domenici was home in New Mexico and basically he came out against the surge, which was really tough for one of the old bulls like Pete Domenici to be opposite the President on Iraq. I got a lot of questions about that.

Then on the third day Scooter [I. Lewis] Libby got convicted and the President had to decide whether or not he was going to let him go to jail. He decided to commute his sentence, which I thought was the right decision.

Nelson: Rather than pardon?

Gillespie: Rather than pardon and rather than let him go to jail. That was tough. I thought surely it will get easier after that kind of week. But it never really did. It was a slog the whole way through. That was the first week: immigration bill, Domenici and Iraq, and Scooter.

Nelson: The surge really, it took a while before the evidence came in that it was working, and for a while the Domenicis and others probably felt like—

Gillespie: They wanted troops coming home, not going in.

Nelson: Exactly. Did you deal much with that issue?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: You did?

Gillespie: I dealt incessantly with the issue.

Nelson: Tell me how, especially before [David] Petraeus and [Ryan] Crocker come and give their September testimony.

Gillespie: First of all, I started a group that included General [Raymond] Odierno over in Iraq and Pete Chiarelli and some of the others who were over there, also Afghanistan. They would come in via SVTS [Secure Video Teleconference System] and we would meet in the Situation Room. I had somebody from the Pentagon and somebody from NSC [National Security Council] and communications group to try to get our hands around this and try to get an information flow going and try to push out some of the positive developments.

Anecdotal evidence started to come pretty early about the impact of the surge and the success of the surge, especially with the Sunni population rallying and getting engaged. I remember one anecdote that had to do with the Sunni sheiks all kind of telling their tribes to side with the troops. Things like that were starting to come in. I tried to start to get some of the—you have to be careful. There is a little leeriness from the military guys, not the DoD [Department of Defense] guys, but the military themselves relative to their interaction with the White House Counselor.

It was a given you weren't allowed to talk about body counts or things like that of the enemy. The military really—not that I did, but they were always expecting somebody like me to say we should give out the body count of how many enemy killed. They really hate that kind of thing. I understood. I absorbed the culture pretty quickly. Once they had developed a little level of trust, there was an ability to get out some of the reports of Iraq and Afghanistan. We weren't trying to bury bad stuff, but we were trying to highlight good stuff, things that were happening, in an organized fashion.

We were trying to get reporters to go over, we were trying to send media people to go and talk to Petraeus in the field and Crocker and others. So it was pretty much a daily part of my routine, dealing with Iraq and to a lesser extent then Afghanistan and the impact of the surge. Then of course we had the September 27th report to Congress, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker.

Nelson: Yes.

Gillespie: I wanted to see what they were going to say and I wanted to have my two cents' worth. One of the things about being in that position, essentially you're not in the chain of command at all, but there's a military kind of ethos almost in the White House itself, part of the culture, because the President is the President and the Commander in Chief, and the Commander in Chief part kind of infuses—There are generals, there are—and as counselor to the President or as Chief of Staff, you're afforded a rank. I was never conscious of it, but they are to a certain extent.

When you say you want to see something even to the military guys they generally do it even if they're not that crazy about it. You can't command them to, but they see you in that way.

Milkis: Did you work with Secretary [Robert] Gates?

Gillespie: I worked with Secretary Gates and Geoff Morrell and the people over in the Pentagon. I had a good working relationship with Secretary Gates.

But anyway, I wasn't going to alter their testimony or anything, I just wanted to know what was

in it so we would be prepared to respond. That's what I was looking for. They were very good, obviously, and they made a very forceful case before Congress, but they had good facts too. So that was important.

I had urged that we do more specifics on what was going on in Iraq. You run into the NSC bureaucracy and everything all the time and you kind of have to pry stuff out, but I thought it was my job. Iraq was obviously a huge factor in the '06 election. It was a huge factor in '07 and the surge and everything. I was constantly dealing with Iraq and working the NSC and working the Pentagon and working others to try to pop out information, pushing people to let us say things that they wanted to hold, and forcing them to put stuff out there.

Jones: In regular meetings with the President, there was a lot on this?

Gillespie: I didn't go to every meeting. One of the things—I don't mean this disparagingly of Dan Bartlett, but Dan was always with the President, like at every meeting. I didn't feel that that was the best use of my time. I didn't have the same personal relationship with the President that Dan had, but I felt if I didn't have to be in a meeting with the President, it freed me up to be doing other things that needed to get done.

There are meetings where you have to be in with the President. It sounds odd to say, "meetings I have to be with the President." I loved being in those meetings, but I didn't feel it was always the best use of my time. I think the President sensed that and appreciated it too.

Perry: How did you make the distinction which meetings to go to and which ones you wouldn't?

Gillespie: I would ask Josh or I would ask Hadley, do you think I need to be—There were some I wanted to be in that I just went to, but there were some—You know, they list you on the briefing, and you see what you're listed to be on and you have to check to make sure your schedule matches up to what the President has and if you're on the list. I would just ask Josh. I would say, "I'm scheduled to be in with the Prime Minister of somewhere. If I can get out of that I'd just as soon—" He would be like, all right.

There were times I would ask if I could be out of a certain meeting and he would say, "No, I need you to be in there." So I tried to balance that, the consigliore part with the managing the communications and the strategic guidance thinking. I thought through about the budget fight with Congress, and my experience working for Newt and Armey during the shutdown with Clinton was very valuable to the President in that dynamic.

Milkis: Of course, you're dealing with a Democratic Congress.

Gillespie: Dealing with a Democratic Congress and everything. I had gamed all this out, so I was playing a little bit of a different role than Dan had played. The President had to get used to that, but he got used to it very quickly, and I like to think he appreciated it. I think that was an answer to a question.

Nelson: Scooter Libby, did that—I know it hit your third day.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Did it affect your work from that point on in any way?

Gillespie: No, not really; not again until the end. I was an advocate for the commutation. I thought that the notion of Scooter having to go to jail over this was really bad and would be dispiriting to people, and it just made me sick to my stomach. I knew Scooter a little bit; I was one of the first donors to his legal defense fund. I told the White House counsel's office that. I said, "I don't know if that means I'm conflicted or not." They said, "No, you're free to help somebody pay their legal bills." I think the commutation was the right decision and I think that held up over time. The media were crazy about it. What was the deal? It was all like Watergate, it was ridiculous. Then toward the end it was a pretty consuming discussion.

Nelson: Toward the end meaning January '09?

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: How did it come up again and what made it—?

Gillespie: The President was dealing with pardons in general. That whole pardon thing is unfortunate. It has really taken on an unseemly—not just because of the Clinton stuff and all, but how these pardons rise to the President's desk. I knew there was a system. I think the President had gotten so jaded by it that I think—and he might say, I don't know. But in retrospect, he maybe should have pardoned more people than he did.

I only had one case that I cared about, which was [Ignacio] Ramos and [José] Compean, the two border guards who had shot somebody fleeing, an illegal immigrant. It was not a good dynamic. They were essentially in solitary confinement because they couldn't be in with the broader population. It was very unfair. I felt that was an important one. The Scooter one, the Vice President was very firm and felt very strongly that he should be pardoned, which I could understand. I understand the Vice President's views on that. Had the lawyers recommended it and the President agreed to it, I would have been fine, kind of fighting it out, but the lawyers didn't. There was not a lawyer who said the jury got it wrong, which is what you're talking about with a pardon, or that the time has been served, because there was no time served.

Tony Snow had been chased around the table by the media pretty good on it at the time of the commutation and all but ruled out—but he rightly said that anybody can seek a pardon. Being commuted doesn't prohibit you from seeking a pardon. But he said, "Don't envision further action on this," or something like that, which he was authorized to say, and that was the mindset at the time. People had forgotten by the time January '09 came around. I didn't forget it because it was my first week on the job. But it was a firestorm, the commutation itself.

The Vice President was rightly standing up for his person and I respected that, but I didn't feel that, given there wasn't a lawyer arguing it and where we were positioned before, that the President could or should do it. I told the Vice President that, which I think he didn't agree, but I think he thought it was—there were others who felt the way I did who didn't tell the Vice President that. I think he appreciated that I was a stand-up guy about it, and I think the President appreciated that I was willing to say that in front of the Vice President. It was a very hard decision and it was emotionally very difficult for everybody in the White House and for the President too.

Jones: I'm trying to recall when Karl Rove stepped down and the relationship to your time.

Gillespie: Karl left—

Nelson: September of '07.

Gillespie: —about three months after I got there. That increased my portfolio.

Jones: My question was first going to be about the effect on Karl of the whole [Valerie] Plame incident.

Gillespie: It was just awful. The whole thing, when it came out that [Patrick] Fitzgerald knew that [Richard] Armitage had put it out there, but they kept the investigation going and everything. It was just incredibly unfair. That's the way those special counsels go and that's the way it is. But it was grueling, it was very emotionally draining and financially draining too, by the way, on Karl and Scooter and others in the White House, but Karl and Scooter in particular.

As Karl recounts in his book, he very narrowly avoided being indicted himself. I think it took a lot out of him but he's pretty indefatigable. He was unsure as to whether or not he should leave. I felt it was in his interest and the President's too at that point, not that he didn't serve the President well or anything but again, you get to a certain point. I encouraged him, I said, "I think it will be good for you to go." I wasn't looking to increase my power or anything like that, but I thought for Karl's sake and the President's sake it would be good to let somebody else rise before the end of the term, and let Karl—he had been there forever. So he did end up going.

Jones: Can you talk about how it increased your authority?

Gillespie: A lot more on the scheduling front than came into my purview in terms of where we should go and who we should be talking to and that kind of thing. I worked very closely with Barry Jackson on it. That really, in Josh's mind, kind of became my thing. Like I said, I wasn't looking for it. It was more meetings, more work, more hours. But it was a good experience. It meant more travel. I ended up traveling with the President more than I had been before that. That was kind of fun.

That also took—I traveled over weekends so I ended up—I wasn't home much on the weekends, which was hard.

Jones: You traveled more because?

Gillespie: Karl just traveled more. You end up being—political stuff comes up everywhere.

Jones: So you're really the political guy?

Gillespie: Yes, I became more of a political guy.

Jones: Warning flags, analysis, and the effect of this and that?

Gillespie: Yes, and the President was looking to me more for that kind of insight, what's going

on in the race. It was curious what was going on in the race, in the primary initially and then in the general. I ended up spending more time with the President after Karl left.

Milkis: You suggested earlier that you thought it might have been a mistake for there to be a merging of Karl's political and policy responsibilities that merged.

Gillespie: Yes.

Milkis: Could you talk just a little bit about that and what problems you think it created, because it was sort of novel.

Gillespie: It was novel. One, there's not enough time in the day to do both those jobs in one job. So that's an effect. And not even enough time in Karl's day, which is longer than most people's day. Two, I think it makes—everybody understands that policy decisions in the White House have a political factor to them and a calculation to them, but when you completely merge them you end up in some ways kind of denigrating the policy because it is now politics and policy all in one as opposed to policy with a political calculus. I think that was part of it.

Then the truth is, those are two countervailing positions to a certain extent, and so they shouldn't be one position.

Milkis: Yes.

Gillespie: The policy people and the political people—

Milkis: Checks and balances.

Gillespie: There's push and pull there. Joel Kaplan, whom I mentioned—I think it would actually be worth your while talking to Joel here. He was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy when I was counselor to the President, and he and I had a lot of push and pull. It was all respectful; he's one of my best friends. We would laugh a lot throughout that push and pull, but it was push and pull. So I think you need those two offices doing this as opposed to being like that.

Nelson: I was going to say, surely by January first of '08 a lot of the media spotlight is shifting to who is going to be the next President as opposed to what is the current President doing.

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: Does that make your job harder because you're having to work harder to get attention to what you're trying to communicate, or easier because there's less pressure?

Gillespie: The answer is a little bit of both. It's frustrating. By the time you're in January of '08—and the President understood this. It's the nature of the media today. I think President Obama is overexposed. I think he does too many speeches. I think he gives too many joint session speeches, too many prime time speeches. People just get tired of you. By the eighth year and two wars, people were tired of him. They were tired of him by '06. He understood that. He didn't take it personally. We knew it.

I tried to scale back his appearances. I thought he was carrying too much of the message for us as it was when I came in. It happens. You almost default—we'll have the President say it. Why don't we have Hank Paulson say it? Why does the President have to say it every damn time? Or Gates. Get Gates out there. Or Condi. So there was some of that.

Then the funny thing is when they want you, you don't want it, and then all of a sudden they don't want you and you want it. We couldn't command the stage like we did. It's understandable. It didn't cause resentment or anything, but that said, he's the President of the United States and when he spoke people reported it, and there was coverage and it was important and it mattered. We tried to be conscious of not putting McCain in a tough situation or making him respond in a way that would be hard for him. But we didn't integrate with the campaign; we didn't really coordinate with the campaign at all.

Nelson: You had a State of the Union Address in January of '08?

Gillespie: Yes, it was the last State of the Union.

Nelson: What is it like giving that speech at that stage of the Presidency?

Gillespie: It was really good. I thought it was a good State of the Union speech. If you go back and look at it, I haven't done that in a while. There was a lot of policy in there, a lot of ideas that he was laying out. We understood that we weren't going to have a big busy legislative session with bill signings and that kind of thing, but he had an agenda. It was credible.

It was neat being in the chamber. I had been in the chamber for the State of the Union before for Clinton when I was working on the House side. So it was kind of neat to come in with the President for a State of the Union. I rode over with him in the limo. To walk in and then sit—you get to sit in the chairs. I had sat in the chairs too. It was neat, I enjoyed it.

We knew it was swan song. We knew that we weren't going to be pushing a big vigorous agenda. I thought it was well calibrated. I thought it was a good speech.

Perry: Was there a lot of talk between the two of you about legacy at this point?

Gillespie: We called it the "L word"; we weren't allowed to talk about legacy and certainly not around him. He really didn't want that mindset permeating the White House. He wanted to keep folks focused on doing the job at hand, but I started meeting with some other people. I started thinking about legacy. I wanted to think about it and I wanted to highlight various accomplishments of the administration. It's an historically significant two terms.

I want to highlight the good things, obviously, and positive—so we started doing what we called the Legacy Project internally, with the understanding that no one could say that in front of the President. We prepared—I think you've seen the summary of his accomplishments in office and the schedule going back to some of the places he'd been to, Greensburg, Kansas, and some other places, the Citadel, and revisiting some speeches. But at the same time we also understood that we didn't want to do anything to affect McCain or put McCain in a position of having to respond to something we did. So we had to tread a fine line.

We did a lot of foreign affairs work, which is the nature of the last year in office. We did the world capitals farewell tour, which was fantastic, and the Middle East. He was really making a push for the Middle East, and Condi felt optimistic that he could get something between [Ehud] Olmert and—

Perry: [Mahmoud] Abbas.

Gillespie: Abbas.

Milkis: Did you go on the trip to the Middle East?

Gillespie: Yes, it was really interesting.

Milkis: Can you tell us a little bit about it?

Gillespie: The meetings were interesting. Abbas and Olmert had a very interesting chemistry. I think there was trust between them. The President had a very good chemistry with both. Condi had a good relationship with both. We made a lot of progress. Olmert got weakened domestically and couldn't deliver at the end of the day. My view from where I was, and I was pretty close to it, I think there was a lot more progress than people realize and things were a lot closer to getting done than people realize. It was a good trip, that Middle East trip. We ended up faltering; we couldn't get it done. It was a legitimate shot.

People think it's crazy, but in some ways you're actually better as a President in your last year trying to do something like that. If you don't push it too hard—I think Clinton made a mistake and spurred the intifada with his—he was a little bit too heavy-handed. President Bush had a very good relationship with foreign leaders. He had a very personal relationship, which I *saw*. It was interesting to me. It's one of the things that from a distance you don't realize the importance of it, the significance of it. But his personal relationship with [Nicolas] Sarkozy, with [Angela] Merkel, with Hu Jintao, with the various leaders, with Olmert and Abbas, I saw it time and time again. He had a rapport with them; there was warmth there. They liked him. It was politically in vogue to knock the President and all that stuff, but if you saw him in the meetings, the G20 [Group of 20] and the different meetings, he had a real genuine relationship with these people.

Nelson: Was he different in that kind of setting than what you saw?

Gillespie: No, that's what was interesting, he was himself. He turned on the charm. President Bush—people saw him, he was a good politician. It was the reason he was elected President of the United States twice and Governor of Texas twice. He would turn on the charm. He was a glad-hander. He's funny.

Nelson: Did he give nicknames?

Gillespie: I don't think he did. He and Sarkozy had a good relationship. He had a very good relationship with Merkel. It was interesting to me because I would watch the President. I would watch him—this sounds bad, how he would play people. He had a bead on people and he knew how to kind of play them, and it always struck me that Merkel had a bead on him; she played him.

Nelson: For example?

Gillespie: I don't know how to quantify it. It's just interesting. She has, in those settings, almost a girlish personality, persona.

Nelson: Really?

Gillespie: Yes, it's interesting.

Nelson: That doesn't come across at all.

Gillespie: He likes her a lot and I think she likes him. They had a fun kind of relationship.

Nelson: Playful?

Gillespie: Yes.

Perry: Teasing? That kind of back-and-forth teasing?

Gillespie: I don't know, there was genuine warmth to it. It was nice. By the way, then they would get down to serious business. But the ability to get down to serious business was helped by the sense of the personal relationship. I think President Obama does not have that; in fact, he'll tell you he doesn't really have that and he doesn't think it is important. I think he's wrong. The only one he says he has a personal relationship with is [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan apparently. Bush really had it with just about all of them. He was a two-term President. He'd been there eight years, so he'd served with these people for a long time. It wasn't their first G20 together. But I was fascinated by that. I really enjoyed watching that.

Jones: He certainly confirms all of what you described in *Decision Points*.

Gillespie: I haven't read *Decision Points,* by the way, just so you know. I've kind of read through it, I've read pieces of it, and he had sent me some things that he had written while he was doing it.

Jones: I read a very long review of it comparing it to other memoirs since the World War II period. And compared to others, for the most part, it's actually a book.

Gillespie: Yes, right.

Jones: He intended it that way. It was recommended to him that he read [Ulysses] Grant's memoirs.

Gillespie: Which he did.

Jones: That it should highlight and be more story-like.

Gillespie: It was candid. The parts I saw were very candid.

Jones: This is true.

Gillespie: My point is, I'm not trying to reinforce what he said.

Perry: Did you deliberately not read it for that reason, that you would prefer to have your own thoughts?

Gillespie: No, I've got it and I want to read it. The truth is, I just haven't gotten to it yet.

Perry: Did he talk to you about the books he was reading? I know he had a competition with Karl Rove.

Gillespie: He would give me books. He gave me *The Shack* to read, which I thought was—he'd ask me, "How did you like it?" We talked about *Unbroken*. He recommended *Unbroken* to me, which if you haven't read it, is a phenomenal book. So yes, he would talk about the books he was reading and share a story or an anecdote from a book.

Nelson: This interview is going to work its way into a book someday and I want future scholars and so on to get your take on the financial crisis. Take your time and set aside ample time for it.

Gillespie: One of the things about the financial crisis, when it hit, it hit hard but it was building. The housing crisis was the first, then the mortgage crisis. We were dealing with that in March and April. It really started to feel pretty acute on the housing front and then the housing market. I remember, I think it was [Ben] Bernanke or somebody at Treasury saying, "These markets are like popcorn. Miami will pop and then Phoenix will pop and then Detroit will pop. They're starting to pop all over, and the popping is starting to get faster."

We had reached the point, obviously, in the summer where things were really bad. Then we were watching it constantly like hawks. The collapse then of the banks—Lehman, AIG [American International Group, Inc.]—then the decision not to step in on Lehman. I remember coming in every morning and the President asking what's the LIBOR [London Interbank Offered Rate] today? Every day. It was like the—he got a report every day on the casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, and this was right behind that. We were watching the LIBOR like our lives depended on it, which they did.

The liquidity freeze, sometimes liquidity would freeze up. It was just an awful, really draining situation. I remember meeting in the Roosevelt Room with Paulson, Bernanke, and [Timothy] Geithner, that is really where the TARP came from, that meeting. They were briefing on the financial crisis, these banks going under, and Fannie and Freddie and all of that. Paulson said, "We need legislative authority to go in and save the financial system and we have to act in a big way." The President said, "What do you mean by big?" Paulson said, "Five hundred billion to a trillion dollars," or something like that, I think is what he said. The President had a long pause. He said, "We'll be able to get it back but we've got to get the liquidity going."

Nelson: Yes.

Gillespie: The President said, "What are the other options?" or something to that effect. Paulson said, "I really don't think we have any at this point. I think if we don't act and act soon, we're looking at an economy worse than the Great Depression." The President again, his head kind of nodded, and he said, "Worse than the Great Depression? Twenty-five percent unemployment?"

Paulson said, “I believe that’s right, Mr. President.”

The President looked at Bernanke and said, “Ben, do you agree with that?” Bernanke nodded yes. The President said, “OK, let’s figure out what we need to do and let’s get it done.”

We got up from the table, the President walked across the hall to the Oval Office and Josh walked behind him and I walked behind Josh. The Secret Service agent closed the door behind me from the outside, reached in and closed the door behind us. Bush stood at the end of the sofa and he was looking out the window behind the *Resolute* desk. We didn’t say anything. Josh and I were just waiting for him to say something.

He turned around and he said, “We’re going to act. I’m not going to be Herbert Hoover.” That was that. Paulson came over with a plan the next day, $700 billion to get liquidity into the banks. Actually, first it was to buy bad paper, take them off the books. The rationale shifted over time, which was very frustrating to me as a communicator, but they were reacting to real-time information and I understood that, but it kind of pissed me off.

Tensions were high at that time. I really feel like if you were in the White House at the time, we were staring into the abyss. That’s how it felt. You just didn’t know what was going to happen the next day, if this was going to work or not. We had problems with our own people on the Hill, obviously.

Milkis: You had to get it through Congress.

Gillespie: We had to get it through Congress. When we announced it, I remember it was a big speech in the East Room. I remember working on that speech, trying to get the words right, trying to capture how to sell this. What could we call it? Treasury was coming up with stuff that I didn’t like. They weren’t thinking in terms of what’s the acronym for it. I was trying to think about why don’t we come up with an acronym and then come up with words for that, instead of these words with this crappy acronym.

Nelson: What would the ideal acronym have been?

Gillespie: I had something; I can’t remember. Somebody made fun of me for it in a book, but you’re just spit-balling at some of these points, trying to think about how are we going to sell this thing? It wasn’t a dog, it had to be done, but that’s not an easy sell. It just is not, especially on our side.

Milkis: You obviously knew this was going to be called a bailout, right?

Gillespie: Exactly. To a certain extent it was. The one thing that has been lost is just about all the TARP money has been paid back. It’s also one of these things where you can’t prove what would have happened if you didn’t.

Milkis: Counterfactuals, yes.

Gillespie: The notion for people, free market people like myself, is we should have let it melt down. Well, 25 percent unemployment—when somebody says to you we’re looking at 25

percent unemployment, I'm sorry, no President—

Milkis: Collapsed banking system.

Gillespie: Yes, collapsed banking system. President Milton Friedman would not say good luck with that and we'll let it go.

Milkis: Ron Paul.

Gillespie: The President did what he had to do. It was a very tough decision. When the first bill went down and the market dropped 750 points in about 45 minutes, then people went, "Oh, I guess maybe this is for real." We came back I think 24 hours later and we got it done, but it was a really harrowing time.

Jones: Were the tensions a matter of a collectivity of tense people or tensions between people who are tense? Did they share the tension, or both?

Gillespie: There was some back-and-forth. One thing about the Bush White House, it was a very collegial place. There was no—even when there were tensions there was no screaming and slamming doors and cussing. It just wouldn't happen. It was not the culture of the place. There was genuine fondness. The only thing I miss about the White House is the President and the people I worked with. Well, Air Force One. The hours and all of that other stuff, I don't miss it at all, but the collegiality there was real. So even though it was high stakes, there was respect.

People would push back and forth in front of the President. This notion, by the way, of the President—I had an argument in front of the President with Hank Paulson—this has been reported too, [Michael] Ratner's book has it—over the second auto bailout, which I was opposed to. I think the President, by the way, if it were January of 2008, I don't think he would have gone for it, but it was January 2009 and he felt that's not what one President does to an incoming President. *I'm going to make this decision right now that you're going to have to live with for the rest of your term in office.* You just don't do it that way. Again, his respect for the office was admirable. I understood that. That made sense to me in that instance. On its own, I didn't think the second bailout was right. But Paulson thought it was and couldn't do it.

Anyway there was tension. We had a pretty vigorous back-and-forth.

Perry: Explain your position on that as a free market person.

Gillespie: I felt that it was not the same as the financial sector. That if it went into a, I forget the term for it, not just a fire sale bankruptcy but kind of a managed bankruptcy, that there are real assets here that would have been purchased by somebody else, and there were employees who would have been rehired without the legacy costs. They would have scraped off some of the barnacles. There would still be an auto industry; it would be different. It might not be called General Motors. It would shake out. That would be the right thing and it wouldn't have the ripple effect.

I'm not an economist so I could have been wrong about that, but I thought I would make that trade-off. I worried that we were effectively nationalizing the auto industry too. Paulson said,

"We're not." I said, "We're not yet. But we are now two-thirds of the way there." Anyway, that was the nature of the thing. The President heard it out. He didn't mind. But tensions were high because the stakes were so high. People who were there for the whole eight years will say it was the most nerve wracking time.

The President was very good but he was keyed up about it. He wanted answers. He didn't feel like he was getting accurate information in real time. Policy rationales were shifting on him and that was ticking him off; it was ticking me off. It wasn't bad faith anywhere. Information was moving fast and we were chasing information as opposed to being in front of information.

Jones: Meanwhile there's an election going on and I wanted to hear about—everybody will have an interest in McCain's decision relative to that too. And Obama's support for it. And McCain's interest in having a meeting. The President writes about it in the book, I'd like to hear your perspective.

Gillespie: McCain was in an awful situation, there's just no doubt about it. I said to Steve Schmidt, who's a pretty good friend; he and I had done the confirmation together. He was the campaign manager for McCain. There was a question whether McCain was going to come out for the TARP bill. It was a tough place for him to be, but my point to Steve Schmidt was, "You just need to understand, this is not a free position on this. If McCain comes out against it and it goes down, whatever happens is going to be yours, all yours," which it would have been. I think they realized that he couldn't—If the nominee of your party is now coming out against something by the sitting President of the party and it goes down and then the market drops another 750 points, it's not like the Democrats are going to say, "Oh, I guess that was a bipartisan failure." They're going to say, "John McCain torpedoed that bill and now look where we are."

I just wanted to flag that for them. We were trying to pass the bill and I wanted to play that card to make sure that the McCain people understood this is not a freebie for you. And voting no, which is usually the easy thing to do in that situation, the easiest thing is to vote no—in your case, no is not a free vote because if it goes down as a result of that, because you take 20 other Republican Senators with you and something bad happens in the marketplace, that's going to be yours. My inference was, and I'm going to say it is too, if you're not there for us on this.

Jones: Plus, he had also suspended his campaign, which the implication was—From the White House perspective, all of a sudden here is a leadership Senator, presumably by McCain's declaration, and what did that do and right before the first debate?

Perry: He was threatening not to come.

Gillespie: Not to go to the first debate. It was turmoil. It got announced on the—he called the President to tell him he was doing that and he was calling for a meeting. The President said, "A meeting to do what, John? What are you going to do in the meeting?" He said, "We need to bring people together."

I remember the President saying to him, "What do you want to do at the meeting? Why? You're going to undercut Paulson, my negotiator. We're getting close on this thing. Having a meeting with Nancy Pelosi in the room and you and Obama, that's not going to help us get to a bill."

McCain said, “I’m going to call for it, I just wanted to give you a heads up.” Then the President said, “Well, he’s going to call for it. What are we going to do?” I said, “How do we say no?” It was just kind of crazy but he did it, it threw everything into turmoil. Then we had the meeting. Where do people sit and all that.

Nelson: Did you decide that?

Gillespie: No, they had protocol on it. There is a protocol for the Speaker and the minority leader and all that, the chairman. But where does the Democratic nominee sit and the Republican nominee sit in the Cabinet room? I thought for sure the McCain folks had a plan coming into this.

Nelson: The McCain folks.

Gillespie: Yes. So I called back to Schmidt and I said, “What’s the plan? You got the meeting and what do we do?” He said, “We just need to talk about this and he needs to get back—” I said, “But what is McCain going to say in the meeting?”

They had no idea. That was as far as they had gotten. We’re going to suspend our campaign, we’re not going to debate, and we need to have a meeting. So the morning of the meeting I went into the Oval Office like I always do in the morning and the President said, “What’s McCain going to say today?” I said, “I have no idea.” He said, “What do you mean? What’s the point of the meeting?” I said, “Mr. President, the meeting is the point of the meeting.” He just couldn’t believe that, but that’s what it turned out to be. Senator McCain hardly said a word.

Nelson: And Obama?

Gillespie: One of our guys saw Obama and Pelosi and Reid gather in the Roosevelt Room before going into the meeting and they kind of cooked up—they did it on the fly, right there. When the President called on the Speaker, which is the protocol, she said, “Mr. President, Senator Obama is speaking for me today.” The President said OK, and he turned to Harry Reid and he said, “Harry?” Reid said, “For us on the Senate side too, Mr. President.” So the President said, “All right.”

So he turned to Obama. “Barack, what’s your view on this?” He gave a very good take on things for about seven minutes, kind of speechifying but pretty good speechifying. The President turned to Senator McCain and he said, “John, do you want to—?” He said, “No, Mr. President, I’ll defer to Leader Boehner and to—”

It was really bad, it was painful. It set us back. But I think they were just trying to get their sea legs, to get their bearings on this. In McCain’s defense, he was really whipsawed. He was in a pretty tough position. I think they were just trying to buy time, but the White House meeting was a mistake. I think it set us back in terms of our ability to—basically we lost two days.

Nelson: Let me ask you this, when Paulson and Bernanke and Geithner were in the room that day and told the President you’re talking about half a trillion to a trillion dollars—

Gillespie: Yes.

Nelson: —how does the President evaluate a request like that? You've never heard a request—no President has ever heard a request like that.

Gillespie: No.

Nelson: Is it because he has such trust in these two individuals? Is it because he's stuck with these two individuals?

Gillespie: He's definitely stuck with them. Who was it? It was [Donald] Rumsfeld, right? You go to war with the army you've got. By the way, that's not to say—he liked Paulson and Bernanke. I know he was glad Paulson was there as opposed to his predecessors.

Nelson: Paul O'Neill.

Gillespie: Paul O'Neill for sure.

Jones: For sure.

Gillespie: Or [John] Snow. He was glad to have Paulson there in that instance. He never said that, but I'm pretty sure that's the case. Their point was, by the way, that this would be temporary, that a lot of this money would be paid back.

Nelson: Who knew?

Gillespie: Who knew, I know.

Milkis: Who knew whether it was going to staunch—?

Gillespie: It was one of those things. It was a really gutsy move. I need to go read *Decision Points,* but that was a really gutsy call.

Milkis: That's actually a very good chapter. I remember what Chuck said, that it was a "riveting" chapter.

Gillespie: It was a big thing. One thing the President said that I wish he hadn't. At one point he said, "I'm a free market guy and I had to set aside my ideology to do it." I understood what he was saying, it was not his first instinct to do $700 billion; there's no doubt about it. I don't think it's inconsistent with his ideology. It's a last resort. No President, I don't think, confronted with that choice would have just walked away and let the economy and the financial markets go down the drain.

So to him, he wanted to see the plan, he wanted to understand how it would work. He probed on it quite a bit. He wanted to hear from different advisors as to whether or not it made sense, would it work. Then it came in around $700 billion. It was in two tranches, 350 billion. So now you're getting into at least something that's a little more in the zip code of what you're dealing with in terms of deficits and that kind of thing.

Having the second trigger for the second 350 billion helped actually. I thought it was smart,

again in terms of legislative process. I thought that was a good addition from the legislative process to put a break in there but give the President the kind of leverage to do it if he really needed to.

I remember we had a big discussion in the last week about whether or not he should ask to take down—for some reason the terminology for it was to take down the additional 350. I didn't want the President to take down the additional 350; I wanted Obama to do it when he first came in. My point was—the President said, "We should do this, it's going to happen anyway. We should make the ask."

I said, "This is what he ran to get to do, don't deny him the joy of the job."

Milkis: Pretty smart politically.

Nelson: Public perception at the time, and I don't know if it has gone away, that Bush really didn't understand what was going on and was not in any sense of the word in the driver's seat. There was a book by Matt Latimer, who was a speechwriter at the time. It provided what he thought was convincing evidence that Bush didn't know, didn't understand his own program. Now you're the communications guy, if I'm right in thinking that was the public perception, was there anything that could have been done to change that?

Gillespie: No.

Nelson: Bush is 25 percent in the polls now.

Gillespie: It was awful, it was a very tough time. Matt Latimer had no idea; he worked for me. Actually, let me just be clear. He worked for somebody who worked for me. He was pretty far down the food chain. We let the speechwriters sit in meetings with the President, which I thought was nice. That's what people go to work at the White House for, to see the President. So you let them sit in meetings and then all of a sudden you're reading a book, "I was in a meeting with the President."

Bush knew. Bush was very jaded about the financial markets. He was mad. He has always had a strong populist streak; he doesn't trust the bankers. He thinks the credit default swaps and these instruments that got set up were all suspect and half illusory and he was really—he was mad at the notion of having to bail these guys out and felt like there was a gun to his head so he had to. And there was a gun to his head and he did it. There was confusion around what the TARP was going to do.

Nelson: There was a good deal of discretion, wasn't there?

Gillespie: There was a lot of discretion about it and there were, as I say, shifting rationales for it. This is what somebody like Matt wouldn't know. So there's confusion around it, which would lead people to think the President is confused. Well, yes, because there's confusion. Paulson is in here telling him one day we're going to buy bad paper and take it off of the ledgers of these banks and that will give everybody confidence. Then he's back the next day saying we're not doing that thing where we're buying the bad paper anymore. We're just giving them an infusion of liquidity.

I remember Bush saying, "What are we doing?" It wasn't, "What are we doing because I don't understand what we're doing," it was "What are we doing? Don't come in here one day and tell me and tell Eddie to craft a speech based on that and then come in the next day and say we're not doing it." It was more that. It was a confusing situation. Are we taking over—we're going to bail out AIG? Not Lehman? The next one? What's the rationale for doing one and not the other? There needs to be a set metric by which we determine—There was a lot of it that was on the fly but that was the nature of the—it was, a crisis, and you don't always have perfect information in a crisis.

Nelson: Paulson gives you two different rationales in two different days. Wouldn't that shake the President's confidence that this guy knew what he was doing?

Gillespie: It did.

Nelson: That we should be spending this kind of money?

Gillespie: It did. Look, the President pressed him. The President was pressing every step of the way. But once he left the Roosevelt Room, the default mechanism was on acting, not on not acting. In his mind we were always going to do something, he just wanted to make sure we were doing the right thing. He didn't want shifting rationales for what we were doing.

Jones: To do nothing—

Gillespie: Hank would have had to start speaking pig Latin for him to say we're not doing anything. As long as he felt—he had confidence in Hank. Hank was working hard, by the way. I'm not knocking Hank. There was a reason why he had shifting rationales. His experts, the economists, were saying this would be a better way to do it, more efficient and all that.

Perry: Could there have been, on the communications side, more references to the issue of what ultimately became the criticism of get the government off our backs, too much in the way of a deficit, Wall Street versus Main Street, which leads in a direct line eventually to the Tea Party?

I'm thinking of somebody like Senator McConnell, who voted for it and then had to run in 2008 and it wasn't by whisper, but had a strong opponent and became pretty close for him, Kentucky in 2008. What he heard over and over again out in the state was this—we can't believe you've done this. You've abandoned Main Street for Wall Street. Get the government off our backs, bailout, deficit. Could something have been done in the process and in the communications of the process despite this policy confusion that you've explained so well that would have helped that situation?

Gillespie: We tried. If you look at the President's speech from the East Room, it's a lot of that "I am confident." I know that that is what I was trying to get done and trying to convey to people, that this is not about Wall Street, it's about Main Street. But the truth is, it's Lehman Brothers and AIG and JPMorgan Chase. Yes, at the end of the day that ends up in Main Street but that's not what you're seeing. It's not like they were putting money into the dry cleaner down the street.

Perry: Or your dad's grocery.

Gillespie: Or my dad's grocery store. Eventually that's what they were doing but it's hard to—There were times when we were afraid that those small businesses were not going to have the liquidity to meet payroll.

Perry: Right.

Gillespie: Now, if you let it get to that point, by the way, people would have understood, but they would have said, "Why did you let it get to this point?" So you're kind of damned if you do, damned if you don't. You just have to act. That's my point; when you're the President, that's the difference between the executive and the legislative branch. It's easy to say, "I'm voting no against this bailout." But when you're the President you're the one who if you don't act on it and that grocer can't make payroll and pay the clerk for the week and all of the things that that unravels from that point on, it's you, you did it. It's not, you didn't vote no, you didn't do your job, you didn't make the tough call. So he made the tough call.

We tried to sell it as best we could. It's a hard sell. I understand people's frustration. By the way, to me the whole thing goes back to Fannie and Freddie, reforms that the President tried to do. One of the greatest frustrations is criticism of the President brought about the financial services collapse, deregulation. Anybody who says that, ask them what regulation did the President repeal that led to this? Nobody has one. There was never a repeal of any financial services market regulation.

Milkis: There was a big bill that happened in the Clinton administration, the repeal of Glass-Steagall.

Gillespie: There was repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, but that wasn't Bush.

Milkis: No, that's my point.

Gillespie: More importantly, I can point to a bill that didn't get done, which was to rein in Fannie and Freddie from entering the subprime market, and Chris Dodd and Barney Frank said, "No way, Bush. We need to be doing this." The administration got shut out from making a change that I think would have actually made things—maybe prevented it, because at the heart of it, the core meltdown in the reactor is Fannie and Freddie. That's really at the heart of it.

Nelson: Chuck, I want to make sure because we're up against the clock, that you get to ask about the transition thing.

Jones: Before that, everything you've described, you've got two related clocks ticking, the election clock and the end of the Bush Presidency clock, which is going off.

Gillespie: Yes.

Jones: You played a very active role in the transition out and I think it would be interesting to hear some description because so little is written or known about the transfer from the point of view of the outgoing President.

Gillespie: The President directed Josh—he wanted a smooth transition. Having come in with the

recount and everything, it was a very messy transition from the Clinton White House to the Bush White House, and the President wanted a professional transition. He wanted to help the next President regardless of outcome, although we kind of knew what the outcome was going to be, obviously. But he had set this in motion before the election.

Josh was very serious about it and we all were tasked with coming up with transition documents and to make our successors be able to hit the ground running. It was interesting—the Cabinet Secretaries were all directed to do the same and they all did, to have a transition plan. When the Cabinet Secretary leaves, before there is a confirmation, who's going to be running your department? Make sure they link up with the transition person on the Obama team and all that. So it was very well executed.

I remember the President, we talked about it when President Obama got elected, how historic that was. We wanted to make sure, even though he had spent the last year kicking the crap out of President Bush, but the President wanted to, as President of the United States, rightly note the historic significance of that election. I thought he did very well in the Rose Garden statement the day after the election, congratulating President Obama and talking about the historic significance of it.

There was a feeling of optimism in everybody at the White House; the election is over now. Sure, they beat us up, but there's a sense about the White House, the occupants of it, that you have Obama, you have these new people going to come in. I was looking forward to giving the benefit of my experience to Axelrod. We had a couple of meetings that were pretty good. I know Josh did quite a bit with Rahm [Emanuel].

The President did the lunch with the former Presidents. That was a really nice gesture, the lunch with the former Presidents in the Oval.

Jones: Was there resistance because of suspicion on the part of the Obama people in the transition?

Gillespie: I think they were a little—they had just spent a year running against us. Our mentality was, sure, they're running against us, we're in and they're out. Even though I'd been a party chairman and done the campaign and everything, when you're in the White House you're in the White House, you definitely have a different mentality, it's not as political. I was asked a lot of times to comment on the Presidential race from the front lawn of the White House, and I would always say, "That's not what I get paid to do. I'm paid by the taxpayers. You need to call somebody else." I wasn't RNC chairman, I loved it but I'm not that now. I serve the President of the United States and I'm paid by the taxpayers.

That's not the mentality now. If you watch what's his name, [Jay] Carney—but they were suspicious. I think over time they realized that we were sincere. I remember telling Axelrod at one point as I was walking down the stairs from the second floor. I said, "You may not believe this, but we want the President-elect to succeed." He said, "We believe it. I believe that, we can tell it." I said, "When you're here, you'll feel that way too."

I will say, I don't think they feel that way. I think they're different. I don't say that with any bitterness, I say it more out of disappointment, I don't think they see it the same way, to be

honest with you.

Nelson: It's hard to imagine what the consequences would have been if it had been a bumpy transition, given the continued economic crisis.

Gillespie: The President made decisions in concert with the President-elect on the auto bailout and on appointments even to those things because he felt that that was the right thing to do in terms of the continuity and for the country. I think if the second auto bailout had come a year before he wouldn't have gone for it, but he didn't feel like it was right to hand that off to his successor.

Riley: It is my duty to point out that it is four o'clock.

Gillespie: Thank you.

Riley: We always say we never exhaust every possible avenue of discussion, but we do a pretty good job of exhausting the interviewee. This has been an extraordinary session for us, in part because you've been so forthcoming and helpful, but also because it's a pleasure to work with this group of interviewers. I don't always get this high level of interest.

Jones: Thank you from the point of view of future scholars.

Perry: What a treasure trove.

Nelson: We really enjoyed it and learned a lot.