EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS M. ROLLINS

April 22, 2009
McLean, Virginia

Interviewer
Janet Heininger

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TRANSCRIPT

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Heininger: This is an interview with Tom Rollins on April 22, 2009. If I recall, we concluded the last interview with having gotten through the agenda, pretty much that you had drawn up, so that [Edward] Kennedy was ready to go when the Senate came back into Democratic hands. Before we even get into all the substance, let's talk a little bit about how you managed the staff. Part of that agenda was restructuring the staff for what you felt was a better way to utilize some of their talents, reorganizing, plus you were able to staff up once the Democrats came back in.

Rollins: Right.

Heininger: What was your approach to managing a staff, in terms of getting the best out of people, providing or not providing access to Kennedy, whether or not you acted as a funnel, et cetera?

Rollins: Well, let's see. You gave me a whole bunch of questions.

Heininger: There are, I know.

Rollins: And it's fair, we want this to be open— The last time we met I showed you the book that we put together for Senator Kennedy's legislative agenda, once we had taken the Congress back. This was the 100th Congress agenda. My view of staff, and I think it's fairly clear in that book, was that staff follows function. The first thing you do is you figure out what it is you want to get done and then you staff for it. In prior times—and some of this characterization is obviously overdrawn, but it's meant just to show the difference—the staff were hired by area. So you had people who covered education. Oh, and by the way, we need somebody to cover health for children, so you'll do education and health for children. And somebody, usually a specialist, has to do labor policy.

The approach to staff was that they were largely there to respond to things that happened in these areas, and to identify and write speeches about the Kennedy position, and decide which things he

should cosponsor and which he should sponsor. My view differed in that I thought—and it was my view and the Senator agreed with it, so we did it this way—we were going to pick pieces of legislation in each of six major areas where we had specific outcomes; long ball; big, hairy, audacious objectives that would be served by a particular, or promoted by particular, pieces of legislation. And that we would hire people to make those pieces of legislation happen. So it was entirely possible that you might hire somebody who was an expert or really capable of doing something and they might only be helpful for two or three years, the time that it took to get this or that done.

I also staffed all of the ancillary functions that go with a committee's staff—press office, research assistants, so on and so forth. All those positions were designed to move legislation. The press position was designed to move legislation into law. It wasn't designed, in the first instance, to get lots of kudos for Senator Kennedy. I explained to him, and I think I told you earlier, in the couple of joshing occasions I had with him where he pushed by saying, "Well, we had this many cameras at that other thing." I'm pretty sure I said to him that it wasn't my objective to treat him as a rodeo clown, where we could just get attention by having him do outrageous things in the Senate, like hold hearings on nuclear winter as soon as Carl Sagan had come up with the idea. The idea was to move important legislation that would dramatically improve the life of the country, and that much press credit would come his way as a result of that.

So the press position was designed to move legislation, which meant, in many cases, that our job was to create powerful coverage or positive coverage in states other than Massachusetts for legislation that we were moving. We might need positive press coverage on the plant closings legislation in Arkansas because we're having trouble getting Senator Dale Bumpers to come around. In fact, that's not a made-up case; that was a real case. So we were generating as much TV coverage and newspaper coverage on plant closings in Arkansas as we could so we could move Dale Bumpers closer to our position. The press job was part and parcel of that. It was all designed to move legislation. At the end of the day, if we weren't moving legislation to make gentler the life of the country, then we needed to rethink whether or not we needed to do that thing.

All that having been said, it's a huge guessing game as to whether or not the people that you hire will have the inborn talent for doing this kind of thing. I had a prejudice back then, which I've since come to modify quite a bit, just because I've lived longer and have employed more people. Back then, Senate salaries were a pittance compared to what most people could make in the private sector, so my prejudice was just to hire as many IQ [intelligence quotient] points as you could. In general that meant hire them young, since IQ points are more affordable when they haven't been out in the marketplace for a long time. I liked to hire really smart young people.

There's another virtue in that, and you and I have both been on the Hill and you know this, or I assume you do. Once somebody's been on the Hill 10 years, 15 years, oh my God, 20 years, they don't think anything is possible. It's like, "Oh no, do you know how much work it would take to get that done? That's not possible. And these guys are going to oppose you and these people won't want it done that way," and yada, yada. There are a million reasons not to do something. The young are ignorant and will push forward, and the things that are 90 percent unlikely to happen will happen more often than 10 percent of the time in the hands of the naïve, because

they don't know that it's not possible. So you might get it 20 percent of the time, which is a huge breakthrough.

I employed a young woman to work hunger stuff. This was an objective over which we had very little jurisdiction—food stamps and school feeding programs and so forth—but one of our objectives was to end malnutrition in America. Studies were reasonably convincing that in the 1970s and early '80s malnutrition had been eliminated in the United States. There had been a terrible crisis, documented well, in the '50s and '60s, and federal food programs had pretty much wiped it out. There just weren't cases of kwashiorkor and other things like this showing up in American hospitals any more. Come the [Ronald] Reagan cuts in these programs in the '80s and all of a sudden kids are showing up malnourished again. You can predict what it's going to do to their educational achievements, 10, 15 years down the line, and our objective was just to get the programs back in place. We have this one wonderful problem that we know absolutely how to solve. Malnutrition: food fixes it. You know? We don't need boards, we don't need a special study commission, we don't need anything. Humans know how to fix this problem. By God, you don't throw dollars at it, you throw tacos at it and that problem can be fixed.

So Sarah von der Lippe had been recommended to me by Larry Horowitz. He said, "We dealt with this young woman out at Stanford when they were doing something and she had to brief the Senator. She's fabulous. Hire her." It wasn't even "Interview her," it was "Hire her." So I hired Sarah and her job was to get these programs restored. She was our special agent and her job was to work with the Ag [Agriculture] Committee and get these programs put back in place. Many, many people deserve credit for that, and I think I can say that we were the germinating engine of the pressure to restore those programs that had been cut.

Heininger: Which a lot of the times was needed. I mean, you have to have somebody doing that.

Rollins: And follow all their committee hearings and go to all their markups and report back forthwith to me, and thereby to the Senator, and we're going to stay on this and we're going to get them replaced and done. So Sarah was hired to do that. She had worked on hunger issues quite a bit as an undergraduate.

Heininger: Now, you're hiring people in a way that is atypical for the Hill, and that is probably atypical for how Kennedy's staff had been previously hired.

Rollins: That much I know. I don't know how the rest of the Hill stacks up, so I'll trust your judgment.

Heininger: And you're dealing with current staff that you have retained, and redefining their jobs in many ways. What kind of reaction did you get from those staff that you retained?

Rollins: Good question. You anticipate what was, in fact, a central problem. I probably should have followed my father's advice. My father had become a CEO [chief executive officer] of a number of companies over time, and he said the first thing you should probably do is fire everyone. People will not like change; they will resist it at almost every turn. There will be those who resist you and those who suck up to you, and neither are going to be particularly good for you.

I say this lovingly, and this was a guy I adored. Dave Nexon had been Kennedy's health insurance staffer for a long time before I got there. David just wasn't used to cranking out a predictable work product by a certain time. I'll leave it right at that. So we would have these meetings and my method was this. You have a clear set of objectives. I have this map somewhere around here that I kept. We agreed on the objectives and the pieces of legislation. You put the piece of legislation at the far right-hand side of what was about a three-and-a-half–foot map, and you back out everything that needs to happen in order for it to pass. It was simple project management. And on the Hill, that meant originate the piece of legislation, have the piece of legislation, find cosponsors, introduce it in the subcommittee, hold hearings in the subcommittee, mark it up and so on, and move it up to law.

So we would have these meetings and David would be in charge of three or four things at a given time. Each week we would all agree on what needed to be done the next week. Then we would have a meeting the next week to see if that which we had agreed to be done had been done, and what else ought to be done to keep moving everything forward so we can pass all this legislation. It was just comical to go through each area where the committee was doing work and see what was moving. David almost never had his stuff, never!

I remember there was a small piece of alcoholism legislation. We were working on this because a lot of people were interested in it. Weeks went by and the initial draft, the potential components of a bill, had not been listed. Finally I said, "David, I realize now that I misunderstood. This is a cry for help. You have some kind of addiction problem that you haven't disclosed to us, right? And this is your way of demanding an intervention?" I was joking, of course. He just hadn't been managed to where he had to produce stuff other than his opinion on other people's work. Some people were very much in the in-box mentality of Hill staff life, which is that you respond to that which the world does. No, no, no! We make stuff happen.

Heininger: I would have to say, Tom, that what you were up against was absolutely the classic way the Hill operates. The Hill *is* reactive. My observations on the Hill from my years there were that nobody knew how to manage their way out of a paper bag. Senators didn't know how to manage; they delegated it out. And AAs [administrative assistants] were not hired for that kind of managerial ability.

Rollins: Often political.

Heininger: Often political because they served—the AAs, in particular, served a very important political function. Committee staff directors often would have the same problem of not coming out of a managerial background. It sounds like what you did is you came in, actually not having had a managerial background but obviously understanding Management 101, and tried to impose on this staff a new order, an actual management, define objectives, lay out the steps needed to achieve objectives, requiring accountability each step along the way. This had to have been a major upheaval. Where was Kennedy on all this?

Rollins: He was great.

Heininger: Was he comfortable with this?

Rollins: Oh, I never had any ounce of resistance from the Senator. Honestly, Jan, I don't think I'm blowing sunshine at myself on this one, I think he loved it.

Heininger: Because Kennedy, more than anything else, wants to accomplish things.

Rollins: He wants stuff done. I know they were frustrated. And I only go by rumor and conversation, repeated conversations where I wasn't present, so it was lots of hearsay that they were unhappy that the committee staff had been reactive, had been extremely traditional in its reactions. The mindset was, "Let's reheat some 1930s socialism and there's our basis for critique of whatever is going on." I was hired during the Reagan years. People wanted an answer and there wasn't really a strong or credible Democratic answer—or a cohesive, coherent Democratic answer—to the Reagan Revolution other than to tend the dying embers of socialist ambition, and that wasn't working and everybody knew it. So the '84 election was [Walter] Mondale against [Gary] Hart, and if Hart hadn't been caught with his pants unzipped all the time, he might have gotten the nomination.

If I could just reprise the case of that election, the Democrats wanted to nominate somebody who wanted to serve our values, but in very different ways. Everybody knew the old answers weren't working anymore, or weren't going to work anymore. Here was Hart, trying to invent new stuff; we're going to serve our traditional values but we're going to do it in very new ways. Now, he only came up with a couple of new ways, and they were kind of minor. Actually, I shouldn't say that. In fairness, I thought it was the germinating seed of innovation in the party that could have taken us a long way. I think Clinton's "Third Way" was heir to that. That's why I joined the staff. I wanted to be part of that.

But back to your original question, I got a fair amount of resistance from certain quarters in the staff. The fact that I was setting objectives and defining legislative ambition and outcomes and so forth meant they weren't defining those things anymore. They could supply memos; they could make recommendations. I recently completed, for grins, a personality profile that my company is now using.

I loathe these tests and I'll tell you why. There's one I did that Gallup does; you answer 45 questions, and they're very simple questions. I mean, there isn't a whole lot of flexibility in the answers. In this other one, you basically check off sets of traits. It's a list of something like 50 traits, and then they form a profile of you. What I hate about these things is, as I remember when I did the first Gallup thing, you answer the 45 questions and they tell you, here are your five dominant traits in order, and there are like two sentences attached to each of these traits, to explain who you are.

So here I am; I am a fabulously complex, sophisticated, multifaceted individual. I've done this; I've done that. I've been here; I've been there. You can't possibly boil me down in this way. I do this Gallup test, I get my little five results, and I say to my wife, "Imagine, the audacity of this bullshit, to think that they can reduce me like this." And I hand her the thing and she reads it and she says, "They nailed you." [*laughter*] They nailed you. Wait a minute! You're not supposed to agree with that. But really, this is exactly how I am? "Yes, that's exactly how you are."

So I did this other test and it was pretty much like the Gallup one. The results were not too far afield. But one thing that I thought rang true, and I was surprised that this little list of inventory of 50 traits could figure this out, is that I'm very consultative but I never delegate true authority. I needed to make sure I thought it was a good idea before it moved on.

Heininger: But you see, that's actually a very interesting constellation, because if you follow Harry Truman, the buck does stop here. But if you're consultative, which many people for whom the buck stops here are not consultative, not inclusive, then what they're relying on is a very narrow set. If they came up with "you're very consultative," that means that everybody's views are being heard and are being considered and are valid and valuable.

Rollins: If people understand me truly, they probably wouldn't feel that good about that result. The way I come to that, or the reason that I am that way, is that I debated, and if there's a trait that defines my decision-making style, it is that I spent eight years in competitive debate. To me, you get to the best answer possible by finding every possible scrap of evidence that's ever been produced on a given subject, you organize it and see what are the best arguments that could be made for something, what are the best arguments that can be made against it. You sort those out, figure out which arguments triumph and which fail, and then you go with the best answer.

This feels so arrogant to talk about myself in this way. I consult because I'm hunting for evidence; I'm looking. I go through other people's opinions like a soldier looting a town. I'm looking for evidence on what can work, what will fail, what are the unforeseen consequences, and so forth. It's a habit of mine. At the same time, I've had troubles with this. I've finally come to the point where I explain to people, "This is how I do things," because otherwise they get confused or misunderstand what's going on. I tell them that I expect the same from them. I don't have a valid opinion on anything. It can all be overruled in an instant by a really good piece of evidence. We should all be that way. Be humble before the facts, humble before the evidence, and look for whatever the best answer is.

And so with Kennedy—and he loved to use this phrase all the time: "If you can find a better way to skin the cat, I'm there." So, we need to find better ways.

Heininger: But it's very interesting because what you're describing is something that could really put people's backs up—if at the core you're consultative, but you'd never really delegate the true authority. I have to tell you that from all the interviews that we have done, I have heard exceedingly positive views of you and your managerial style, because people felt they had access, their views were heard, in ways that perhaps in other eras they were not, that the perception of you was perhaps a bit at odds with "but I never delegate true authority."

Rollins: Well, then it worked.

Heininger: Yes, it may have worked in ways that it perhaps, with some other people, failed to conceal that as well as perhaps you did.

Rollins: Well, I'm flattered by the comment, but it did actually better enforce my views, so let me modify it a little. I do run open. I hate what is the standard practice in so many offices. This isn't just true of the Hill; this is everywhere I've ever worked. People want to hoard information.

Heininger: Yes, right.

Rollins: It's their little piece of territory, and the Hill especially so. "Oh, I know what the other subcommittee is going to be doing. I know about [Christopher] Dodd's fundraiser at 8:00 tonight and you don't." That information is power. Knowledge is power of some sort or another. I loved sharing everything I could within the group. We shared nothing outside the group. We feed the tribe, we don't let anybody steal from the tribe, but within the group we had a mass briefing. We'd have a staff directors' breakfast and I'd go back and brief the Labor Committee staff before I went and briefed Kennedy's staff. We'd call everybody in, interns, secretaries, everybody. "Here's what's happening on the Hill this week; here's what's happening in the Labor Committee this week. Let's all be clear on what's happening; here it goes."

Every now and then I'd point out: "And by the way, this one promotes our objective on income distribution improvements for the poor, this one is moving along the hunger objective and the six things we're trying to do, the investigative hearings on the Mine Safety and Health Act are finally coming to bear, and let's remember, this is part six; we're doing all our worker safety stuff solely by investigation," et cetera. Everybody was briefed. I liked having everybody know. I would hear the hazard in that, and it's not a big hazard. Every now and then you get opinions from people who aren't terribly well informed, but you're so open that they want to tell you what they think. But every now and then you get a gem from somebody who isn't terribly well informed.

Heininger: That's right.

Rollins: And so you sometimes have to truncate conversations with 20-year-olds who have had an epiphany the night before about what you could be doing about the sea turtles getting caught in fishing nets, and so on and so forth. For the most part, I find that information engages people. I truly believe that if you light the torch of another, it increases the light of the world and it does not diminish your own.

Heininger: And it makes them feel valued.

Rollins: Right. Now, the problem case I identified was David Nexon. I do not mean to assign any bad traits to David. David was not a hoarder of information; he was not any of that. He's a brilliant guy and a lovely guy, a wonderful human being. I treasured my relationship with him, but he wasn't used to working in a measured environment—I mean, he came from academe, for God's sake, where it's even worse.

Heininger: Right. It just doesn't work like that.

Rollins: So David had a difficult time getting my style and the way that I wanted to run things. "No, it is a train and it has to run on time, and I need you to get your health legislation on the floor that week because I have polygraphs I need to land the week after that, and I have AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] happening in any of the two weeks before. I need this health legislation for kids. I have to hit the floor this week." The problem is that the entire tight schedule is a year from now, and a lot of people just can't understand why you should care about anything that's going to happen in a year. So much is going to change. No! You can make stuff

land pretty close. And you know what? If you're not aiming for a particular week, you're not going to hit anything, so we're going to have an objective and you govern toward that.

There were other people who were just difficult people to manage. They would do things on their own; they had little agendas of their own that they wanted to serve. There was a particular doctor, a holdover staffer we'll call "X." I once threw a chair against a wall in X's office, I was so mad. I hurt my knuckles smashing the back end of a book, I was so mad at X. X was just a tough person to manage. Dave Smith, who had been our chief economist, went on to become the head of economic development for New York City. So Carey Parker said, "Oh, Dave got this great job. You're management there; you work with the committee. Is there any advice that you would give David?" because now he's going to have a staff of like 200 or something like that. I said, "Absolutely. One piece of advice." He said, "What's your one piece of advice?" I said, "Fire every one of them in case one of them is X." [*laughter*] Just don't even take a chance on having that come back into your life. X was a really difficult case.

There were other people who plainly were not competent to do the work they were asked to do. I won't name names, but there were some people who kind of drifted up in the organization and had filled a slot during the minority years, where they were handling stuff that was just way above their pay grade. We're going to move serious legislation now, and the fact that you have been occupying that chair for a couple of years didn't mean that you were sufficiently capable of doing that job. So I had to move some people aside, and there was some obvious unhappiness that went with that. Everybody has a constituency, so you're going to hear from their constituency. And constituency both within the Kennedy organization and within the groups who had come to know that this or that person was an absolutely reliable megaphone for their stuff, and they would try and protect their people.

You know, the groups—God, how I came to loathe that phase, "the groups"—no one would make a move without checking with the groups. I kept fighting against the groups. At the end of the day, they are people who receive membership dues from certain folks. All of these groups tend to represent the most extreme view within their area, because only the most extreme people are the ones who are willing to send the money to move along their agenda. The cases are endless with this. It was true in foreign policy; it's true in domestic. I'm sorry; they don't represent the American people, they represent their interests, but if the groups don't agree with it, then often nothing could move forward.

I remember once, God bless her, I'm standing next to Senator Barbara Mikulski. We're on the floor and we're trying to get a deal done on a big piece of civil rights legislation. Howard Metzenbaum is there and Kennedy is there, and the groups are in force outside in the lobby, waiting to see what we want to do about this or that amendment. Metzenbaum says, "Well, this sounds like a fine idea. I'll go outside and check with the groups." Mikulski says to him, "I don't know about you, Howard, but I wasn't elected by groups, I was elected by the people of Maryland, and speaking for them, I can say this amendment works." I just wanted to hug her and take her home. Even though she and I usually fought hammer and tongs with each other, I just loved her. That was the line I had been working toward for a year and a half: we weren't elected by groups, we were elected by the people of Massachusetts, Ohio, Maryland, so forth. Let's do their bidding while we're here, and by the way it's our job to figure out what's best. They're paying us to figure out what's the right answer here, so let's get to it. The groups could be

helpful and they could be incredibly informative. They can help you spot all kinds of problems, unforeseen problems, in this or that language or approach, but at the end of the day, they don't vote.

Heininger: But you saw them as a source of information.

Rollins: As a source of information, absolutely. And when it came vote time, other people were moved by groups. You used to work for Senator Robert Byrd. I'm sorry, there are a lot of United Mineworkers in West Virginia, and if we really, really needed help, we'd send in Rich Trumka, assuming Trumka thought it was good for the mineworkers. I remember on plant closings, it was when Trumka went to Byrd that he finally agreed to bring this thing up, but we all knew it was going to be filibustered. It was going to be filibustered and it was going to be vetoed, so it was going to be a bitch to move this thing through. Why would you take it on? You used groups to move other people; you don't let them move you. And if you're doing big and good legislation, the groups will come along, and there will be some offended folk along the way. That's how omelets get made.

Heininger: Now, Larry was there until when?

Rollins: Larry Horowitz?

Heininger: Yes.

Rollins: He was not there long.

Heininger: Was he there after the Democrats took back the Senate?

Rollins: No. He handed off to Ranny [Cooper], I thought it was before we got the Senate back. I'm remembering the debate with the Judiciary Committee over whether Kennedy should take the Labor chairmanship or the Judiciary chairmanship. I think Ranny moderated that debate; in fact, she gave me the instructions on what I was permitted to say in that debate. History speaks for itself.

Heininger: I would assume that your approach to management could have been in conflict with Larry's overall approach to managing the whole Kennedy operation when he was chief of staff. How was it in terms of how Ranny managed the staff?

Rollins: Larry was there—he and I overlapped, for the most part, when we were in the minority, so there wasn't a hell of a lot going on. You couldn't force legislation; you couldn't do much. You could do a really good job on rear guard resistance action, so we'd defeat nominees, we'd beat back amendments, and so forth.

Heininger: This is when you still had Kitty [Kathryn Higgins] partially occupying your slot.

Rollins: And my parking space too.

Heininger: Giving you the time to actually develop this agenda, so that you could have everything in place.

Rollins: That's right, but there was real stuff to do too.

Heininger: There was stuff?

Rollins: Oh, yes. I remember a guy who was nominee to be chief counsel of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and we wrung him out over the course of three hearings and defeated the nomination.

Heininger: Is that Jeff Zuckerman?

Rollins: That's him.

Heininger: We'll get to him.

Rollins: Republicans took a big shot at trying to repeal the Davis-Bacon Act, requiring the federal government to pay wages consistent with—

Heininger: Double-breasting.

Rollins: Well, no, double-breasting was an affirmative use of labor legislation.

Heininger: It came later?

Rollins: Yes. That the unions wanted to prevent double-breasting, so that you can't have one union company and a nonunion company, and put your work through to the nonunion company. No, Davis-Bacon requires that if you do a federal project, if you're going to build a road in Tuskegee, you have to pay roughly the prevailing wage in Tuskegee. It prevents the federal government bidding down the price of labor in a given area. Some would say it overpays workers because we could get a better price on these federal deals because we're doing so much. Anyway, Republicans wanted to repeal Davis-Bacon.

Heininger: That was a Harry Truman piece of legislation, wasn't it?

Rollins: It dates back; yes. I don't know if I told you the story about we were working up this resistance on Davis-Bacon, so we're still in the minority. [Orrin] Hatch is leading the charge on this thing. I grew up middle class and white, in Texas, and I don't have blue-collar reflexes. I've come to develop some but I wasn't born with them. I'm sitting there with Kennedy and we're getting ready for this floor debate. I have all my stuff and I'm geared up like a debater. I have five answers on this; I have two studies and four answers on this. I mean, we're rock and roll. We have letters in to every Senator, showing the exact number of people who are going to get pay cuts in their state if you repeal Davis-Bacon. We went to town on this thing.

So I was getting him ready for a floor debate and I said, "All right, Senator. They have a study, it's a GAO [Government Accounting Office] study, and I'm afraid the evidence is pretty clear that in several projects, at least in the state of Ohio when they did this study, guys who ought to be making $20,000 a year"—They were being paid on the federal program—"were making $22,000 a year." There was this pause as I was suggesting that this was an outrage. It was going to be on the front of the *Post* the next day. He leaned over and looked at me and said, "God

forbid that a working man would make another two thousand dollars a year." I sort of winced and looked at him and I said something like, "Boy, you just caught my white boy reflexes, didn't you?" [*laughter*] And he said, "Now, what's the next thing you're worried about?" And we moved right on. To this day, that was the day that the scales fell from my eyes.

Heininger: It stuck.

Rollins: It really stuck, and I was like, twenty thousand dollars a year? Anybody—oh, these are family guys, right? This was 1980s money, but 20 grand a year? Oh no, they're making 22! And we have millionaires from the Republican Party leading a charge to make sure that those guys aren't making another two grand a year. I gotcha, I gotcha. That's right; that's why I'm a Democrat.

Anyway, so Davis-Bacon. There was stuff to do. Horowitz didn't have much to do with me. For one thing, he didn't remove my predecessor until after I had arrived. Larry had a style that may have been very different for others. I only had a tiny window on it. It was sort of, throw all the fish in the tank and let them fight it out. Let Judiciary fight with Labor for the Senator's time, let foreign policy fight with domestic policy for the Senator's time; just let them have it out. To an extent, that increased his power because he was the one who could resolve the conflicts, so everybody needed Larry. Yet, he's a brilliant guy. He had the Senator's ear at every moment, or at any moment he wanted it. The Senator trusted and loved him. He was really, really smart. There was no doubt that lots of lots of intel [intelligence] and experience was being brought to bear on decisions, but the management style I found at first chaotic, and then Machiavellian in an unproductive way. I did not think that it advanced the Senator's cause.

Ranny came along, and I've just described the way I like things run. We have objectives, we know what resources it takes to reach the objectives, we'll line them up; if we don't have enough resources then you have to change the objective, you set the timeline, we go. Ranny comes along, and here's this woman who reviews the objectives, understands the timeline, agrees with my resourcing needs, is consultative about everything. So if we had a conflict—we need him on Wednesday for this, but foreign policy needs him on Wednesday morning at the same time for some other thing—we'd work it out, and we did it out in the open and we did it based on what was probably best for the Senator and the country. Those were the arguments that won the day. And when you walked out of the big Kennedy staff meeting, everybody knew what the story was, what the job was, and you didn't have to go and visit with Ranny four and five times a week to make sure that your people got their stuff.

The one place where she would play bottleneck—and somebody had to do this and it was right that she did it—she decided just how much crap went home in his briefcase every night. If I had allowed the Labor Committee staff to do it, we'd fill two, three briefcases for him every night, just with memos from this intern on what to do about the turtles getting caught in the nets and so on. So she would limit what went into the bag.

Heininger: An appropriate management function for her.

Rollins: Absolutely. Plus, it kept her very up-to-date on what was happening everywhere. I thought it was a beautiful device. She knew everything because she had to check the damn

memos to see, oh okay, so they're doing this over there and she's pushing for this and so on. So every night before the bag went home she had this bird's-eye view on what was happening everywhere, in part informed by the memos.

Heininger: So you probably couldn't have had a better AA to deal with than Ranny.

Rollins: No. I have said to many, many people, I've never had a better boss than Ranny Cooper. She was perfect for me; cagey, warm, open, funny, just opposite the *Sturm und Drang* of the Horowitz days. It was like the clouds went away and the sun came out. I say all this with respect for Larry, and I was just a tiny piece of what he was governing, so who knows? I don't understand all those reasons for the way he did things. As for management styles, you asked or implied correctly that I didn't have one when I showed up. I didn't know management from anything—I had worked at a law firm. I saw how my law firm did things. I had been a debater. I knew how a good debate team was organized. We wanted to be the best team in the country; here's stuff you have to do to do that. That means we have to be at the library at 8:00 tomorrow morning, doesn't it? So saddle up and let's go to the library.

I knew when I arrived that I was in over my head as a manager, so I contacted GAO and said I want advice on how to be a manager, so they sent over these two guys who had been management consultants out in the real world. I forget who they were with. They'd been with Arthur Andersen or something, back when that wasn't a dirty word, or a pair of dirty words. These two guys were brilliant management consultants. They came over with a couple of books for me, we did a long interview, where I explained here's where I find myself: here's the little I do know, you tell me what I don't know. They went away for about three days, then they came back and they said, "Okay, here's the first thing you have to read," and they had this short book for me. I said, "I can't read the collected works of Peter Drucker or anything like that." They came back with some short stuff. They said there is some specific training we want you to get.

One thing I was very concerned about was I didn't know parliamentary procedure from nothing, but I'm a lawyer so I thought, *There has to be a way to learn these rules.* I thought, *This* so *suggests a game.* Games are a great way to learn this stuff. I remember civil procedure, which is the most boring subject ever fashioned by the mind of man, but our law professor had worked out this little game for us and we learned a bunch of stuff. I said, "Can we do a game about parliamentary procedure?"

The GAO developed a game and we took the entire committee, Democrats only, on a three-day retreat out in the mountains of West Virginia, and we played parliamentary procedure for three days, doing the GAO games. So my whole staff knew how you do a second-degree amendment, how you do an amendment to remit to the committee and report back forthwith with that amendment, yada yada. Everybody knew because we had all done it to each other. We'd all been screwed one way or another with parliamentary procedure. We actually read the book. Bob Dove was the parliamentarian back then. He would generally play it fair, but when it came down to whether he was going to do anything that hurt the people who hired him, he would do you in.

Heininger: Did you ever listen to the tapes—what was it? Martin Gold, the guy who had been the previous parliamentarian—did on parliamentary procedures?

Rollins: There were some tapes. This is coming back to me now.

Heininger: I listened to every one of those tapes within the first six weeks that I worked in the Senate. To find out exactly—

Rollins: But you were working for Byrd, weren't you?

Heininger: Yes.

Rollins: Yes, you had to know that stuff.

Heininger: But nobody else—

Rollins: Nobody else took it as something you were supposed to know.

Heininger: It was amazing how few people on the Hill understood procedures.

Rollins: Right.

Heininger: They knew nothing about procedures, which was at the root of the Senate.

So you come in, and I've never heard of anybody going out and hiring management consultants to figure out how to run a staff in the Congress. So you hire management consultants, they tell you what to do, you do it, and then you train your entire staff in parliamentary procedure.

Rollins: Yes.

Heininger: I can't tell you how atypical—

Rollins: Everyone, down to the interns.

Heininger: Down to the interns?

Rollins: Well, yes, it also turned out to be a great occasion for everybody to get to know each other, out there in the mountains of West Virginia. We were mostly young and single, and it was a great time. Anyhow, we did that. I remember, it was about a year after I'd been there that I also asked them to go and do a 360 review of the committee and tell me what I was doing wrong.

Anyhow, I had them do a review and it turned out there was some lack of clarity about this or that, so it gave me something to work on. These are Management 101 moves.

Heininger: Management 101, which is foreign to the Hill.

Rollins: Yes, I know, but it is what I had hoped to create as sort of a standard expectation for what the committee ought to do. One, there should be strong, clear objectives. Two, that the resources should be lined up to serve those objectives, that there should be accountability in time for those objectives being moved along and then finally met. And you're not going to get everything you want passed. I didn't get the minimum wage passed in the time that I was there, and trust me, that's a sad part of my tenure, but they went and got it the next year. Then it turned

out to be the best standard Democratic thing to run up the pole during almost any election. I knew it was a great issue and it took a long time to convince people to—

Heininger: As you look back on it, do you feel that these steps that you took initially made the staff members more effective?

Rollins: Oh yes, absolutely.

Heininger: Did they feel it made them more effective?

Rollins: You had to ask that.

Heininger: Or did they view it as busy work, or did they go, "Oh, now I understand what a second-degree amendment is"?

Rollins: On the parliamentary stuff?

Heininger: Well, the parliamentary but overall, just knowing what objectives were and how to accomplish those and to lay it out and have a plan.

Rollins: I'll say it this way. Nobody came running into my office and said, "Oh, thank God, I finally understand the meaning of my being." But I didn't get any pushback on the style of organization. Now remember, for most of the staff, I hired them. More than half of the people were my hires, so they were going to learn it.

Heininger: But the other half weren't.

Rollins: The other half weren't, and it was probably less than half who were not my hires, because some moved on. Then others were my compadres, so they were going to love my style because I'm the guy who thought they ought to be working for Ted Kennedy. I think that helped contain things. Having a little over half of your staff appear overnight is a great way to quell all those concerns about a new style.

Heininger: Well, it's very nice to come in at the point at which the Senate changes hands and you can hire a whole bunch of people, instead of being there when the Senate loses whatever party is in office and you have to fire three-quarters of them.

Rollins: Right.

Heininger: That's happened to Kennedy on several occasions. So it was a fortuitous time for you. You had had time to do the prep work so that Kennedy could hit the ground running. You hired many of the staff, where you defined the functions of many of the staff, had developed objectives, laid out those objectives, trained people the way you felt they needed to be trained. You trained yourself, the way you felt you needed to be trained, and then turned everybody loose under a very tight regime where everybody was consulted, everybody had information, and you retained the authority.

Rollins: But the train was moving forward every goddamn day, progress every day.

Heininger: Did you ever discuss any of this with Kennedy?

Rollins: Discuss what? I mean, it was the whole thing.

Heininger: Your whole approach?

Rollins: There was the memo that I showed you, where I said we ought to organize the staff by legislative objective, and by the way, here are the laws I'd like you to sign.

Heininger: I understand the agenda piece but your management style was really very different. Did he understand it, or it didn't matter? You just got things done?

Rollins: I don't think we ever talked about it. It was my job to make this stuff happen and make it work. Had hearings not been held, had an agenda not been developed, had legislation not been ready and moving and appear to be compelling, and so on, I think there would have been some hell to pay. I don't think he had a prejudice or a view about how things ought to be organized. For God's sake, look at the two AAs he had in my time. We had Larry Horowitz—we'll just leave it at that—and then we went to the uber-consultative Ranny Cooper, which is unfair. It wasn't a purely consultative style. Ranny would manage toward a point, not of consensus, because there's never consensus, somebody was going to get done in. You have a scarce resource on your hands here; it's Kennedy's time, money, and so on and so forth. She would hear out the arguments, she would let everybody sharpen them, and at the end of the day if the answer wasn't obvious, she would tell you what it was going to be. Ranny ruled, but she preferred that people work it out in argument and consultation.

Heininger: But I have to tell you, from all the people that we've interviewed, she is absolutely beloved by people and highly respected for her managerial abilities.

Rollins: And by me. I loved it, and it was a woman who was in this snake pit of politics, cigars, testosterone, and the rest of that, and she just ran it. She was terrific, and I would use her as an example. Young women would start off in the committee and I would say, "Just watch how Ranny does stuff." You want to see how stuff gets done where you don't get to yell, you don't get to threaten people physically, it's probably not a good idea if you punch the backs of books when you get really angry, as a way of letting people know that you would prefer things be otherwise. Watch Ranny. There is an effective management style, utterly unlike mine. I shouldn't say utterly but it was inflected in a very different way and it was just incredibly effective.

I worked for 20 years at my own company. I would tell female managers about Ranny Cooper. "Let me tell you how a woman can pull this off in a man's world." I had women managing guys out in warehouses and so on. I said, "Listen, women can run anything. I've seen a woman do it and nobody ever called her a bitch, nobody ever said any of that bullshit that women have to put up with when they're effective. It can be done." Ranny was a brilliant example of it. I got my ambitions trimmed from time to time by Ranny. At the same time, I was delivering a real good product for Ranny too, so she was pretty happy to be supportive, and in difficult matters too.

And here's the amazing thing. You're asking me, "Did your staff rebel because they were suddenly being forced to organize themselves?" What about what Ranny Cooper was dealing

with? She parachutes in, in a place that has been a snake pit of staff dissension, self-loathing, territorialism, all this kind of nonsense, and all of a sudden, there is smoothness across the waters. I'm reminded a little, or I think sometimes, when I hear about [Barack] Obama's style, which is almost Zenlike in its cool—I don't think he's as funny as Ranny Cooper, but I think their styles, in some ways, may be alike. It's just, "Talk to me about what has you so upset," and people would calm down and start talking. She would pick up the phone, get somebody else in her office right away, and you'd work it out.

Heininger: Carey Parker must have been thrilled with the two of you.

Rollins: Well, I would hope so. In a way, we all did feel as though we were working for Carey's approval. And why not? What more credible judge could you have for what you were doing than a guy that smart, who had seen it all. I think I told this story already, when I came back with our first bill that we got to the floor. It was about welfare-to-work transition, JEDI [Jobs for Employable, Dependent Individuals] and passed the thing, 99-zip. Joe Biden was out of town. I came back with the vote sheet and I showed it to Carey. I said, "Look at that, our first bill, boss, and we passed it ninety-nine, nothing." And he looks at it and hands it back without even taking his eyes up off what he was working on, and he said, "You obviously didn't ask for enough." [*laughter*] You should have lost a few votes. Ah, right. I loved working with Carey and for Carey. There was the sense, though, that he was Kennedy's legislation operation for 20 years by the time I got there.

I may have told this story too, but at one point we were working on a piece of legislation that was very near and dear to my heart. It was to provide early childhood education for every four- and five-year-old in America, starting with poverty, but I didn't want it to be a poverty program because those get cut. You make them programs for everybody and they don't get cut.

Heininger: Smart Start.

Rollins: Smart Start. And working women—I even knew some back then, and I married one—who are working hard, would love to be able to put their kids in a public school where they're going to get education from 9:00 to 5:00 every day, and there are going to be trained, capable people there, rather than have to leave them in the "Might-Be-a-Felon Daycare Center" or whatever else was available to them. We were going to replicate the results of the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, which has huge effects on kids' lives downstream.

So we're in this staff meeting, deciding what bills we're going to go with. I said, "Now I have this one bill, where we're going to spend some serious money." My mantra had been we can do all this stuff without spending any money. I said, "There's no way to thread this needle without spending some money." Now, the program is going to run about $15 billion, but it's only going to take $1 billion in federal funding to do it because we're going to have a sliding scale on tuitions based on income. I said, "It's going to cost about $1 billion, but I have the studies here, they're unbelievable, on the impact that this has downstream on federal spending. You give them the early childhood education, welfare dependency goes down by 33.2 percent, so it's going to produce enormous long-term savings."

Now, the Senator is here, Carey is over there, I'm presenting, and Carey said, "These savings don't occur until after they graduate from high school." I said, "Yes, it takes a while to produce a result like this." He said, "This is going to be like two Senate elections from now, when it happens." I said, "Listen, mister, if you'd done this when you were my age, I wouldn't have to be doing it now." He looks at me and he says, "I was too busy trying to keep your ass from getting shot off in the Vietnam War." And the Senator goes, "Boys, boys, come on." That was one of my favorite moments working in the Senate, having the generations yell at each other: "If you fixed the country when you were younger, I wouldn't have to be doing this right now." "Yes, well, I was trying to save your ass." [*laughter*]

Heininger: And he was. He was working on the lottery.

Rollins: I was in the last year of guys who had to register for the draft. He probably might have saved my ass from getting shot off in the Vietnam War, but he didn't get around to early childhood education. So yes, I loved working with Carey and we had a lot of successes. I showed you this poster that's up on the wall behind us. This is a shrunk-down version of a big poster at the end of the 100th Congress. Here's the Labor Committee legislation enacted in the 100th Congress.

Heininger: Oh, my God.

Rollins: Because of the layout on the poster, they left something like five or six bills off. We passed 45 separate public laws, and some of these are more modest than others, but some of these are big.

Heininger: It doesn't matter.

Rollins: Plant closings, education reauthorization, polygraphs.

Heininger: From Kennedy's standpoint, boy, he'd want to see stuff like that.

Rollins: Exactly.

Heininger: Year after year after year after year.

Rollins: Name the objectives, set the timelines, move it up and through. And to my successors I would say, "If you're running the 101st Congress, you produce a poster like this, okay? And don't fill it up with chicken shit bills, either." If there was some way to make the bills visually bigger or smaller, depending on the number of people they affected, that would be a good thing too.

Heininger: And you realize how atypical this is for the Hill. This just isn't—

Rollins: I don't know anything. Kennedy's office is the only place I ever worked on the Hill.

Heininger: But this is not the typical approach on the Hill, it just isn't.

Rollins: Well, and oddly enough, it's not the typical approach even in business, and it's certainly not the approach in academe. Anyway, you were asking how did your staff feel about this and so on and so forth. I don't know if you noticed, a couple times I kept looking up back there because the bottom picture there is all the staff, arrayed on the hearing dais in the committee room. I think as a whole, we were pretty happy about what we were doing. It was a bitch for a workload, but I borrowed this trick that I saw Kennedy do with staff and I started to do it on my own. I call it the "pony express rider method of management."

You have people who are working on different subject matters—You work the hell out of them on their subject for a given time, and then you let them go on the beach. Then you move on to the next group and you work the hell out of them, and then when they're done, you let them go on the beach. And you kind of cycle back through them periodically. So if it's education this month, the education people would be there burning the midnight oil, working 17 hours a day and then we're down on the floor with this and with that. Done with you, I'm on to polygraphs now. You're on the beach, okay? Start working out the stuff on this and that bill and so on and so forth, but we're not coming back to education for another month. Take it easy for a week, show up late for a week, have a nice time for a week, and then we're going to sail back into this thing.

Heininger: Also atypical for the Hill.

Rollins: But you know that if something is going to the floor, and this is typical of the Hill, whoever is handling that thing is going to work like a mad dog while that's happening.

Heininger: Yes.

Rollins: So that's predictable. Our style was such that I needed them working like mad dogs for that two weeks before it got to the floor. Again, debate. I like being ready for everything. If we know that there are 15 possible amendments and there are four arguments that go with each, I want answers prepared on all four arguments. I don't want just one answer, I want three really good answers on all four arguments, on all 15 amendments, and we'd put that all together in a big briefing book. I hired two guys, Lenny Gail and Jonathan Massey, who were former national debate champions, as research assistants. Their job was to prepare answers to other people's arguments for floor debate.

So we go to the floor and the opposition would say, "Oh, but the GAO study of Tennessee in 1979 found that—" and we have four answers on the GAO Tennessee 1979 study, good to go, and they're written out for the Senator just to deliver them. You pull it out of the binder, click it shut again, you set it on his podium, and say, "Boss, we have four answers on that one." And then the opponent says, "Ah, and there was a Congressional Research Service study that found this and that in 1972." We say, "Here are the answers on the CRS '72 study," we put those underneath the GAO study. "All you have to do is read them in order, boss." He loved it!

So we put a real premium on heavy work that staff have to do before you go to the floor. Or often before big committee markups, there would be a lot of prep that went into that. And you knew that staff group was going to be exhausted, and they're just burnt. Let them be burnt. You can't ask more of them after they've done something like that. You get the big bill done and

you're on the beach, and not a formal vacation, just you're on the beach. Read the *Washington Post* until 11:00.

Heininger: But then you're rewarding them. I mean, on the one hand I look at that and I think, *Okay, any staff member who has been part of any of those bills for the 100th Congress is going to feel an immense sense of satisfaction that they contributed*, and that's something tangible.

Rollins: Yes.

Heininger: You see a picture like that and you go, I helped to do that.

Rollins: I was there then.

Heininger: I was there, and see that one up there.

Rollins: I was part of that championship season.

Heininger: Yes.

Rollins: And that sort of stuff people don't forget.

Heininger: They don't forget.

Rollins: They want to be—they were members of a winning team.

Heininger: And particularly if after they have burnt themselves out with an intense month of getting this education bill on the floor, you then say, "Look, you don't really have to show up at 8:30 in the morning, relax."

Rollins: Take it easy.

Heininger: Take it easy.

Rollins: Great job. And by the way, we'd like a few cheers from the gallery while we're down there doing the polygraph thing. That would be nice, and we'd get that.

Heininger: Well, this is also helping me to understand why I was hearing these positive comments about your management style, because when people feel that they have concrete objectives and there is a process laid out for how to achieve those objectives—and even if they have to work really hard, they see an objective achieved—and then they are rewarded for it and then they feel they are part of something that's important, that makes for happy workers.

Rollins: Yes, it does, for all of us. I believe one of the deepest yearnings that human beings have is to be part of a winning team, and it comes from back when we're all running around on the greenery in Africa. You wanted your tribe to succeed and you wanted to be part of a succeeding tribe. You wanted to be included in it and you wanted it to win, and people love that.

I remember one year at my company—We hadn't changed anything. Everything was the same in the way that we treated people, paid them, but the company was not doing nearly as well as it

had the year before. And it was owing to a big mistake in pricing strategy that I and a guy I trusted too much had made. We got back our employee satisfaction data, and oh, my God, things were down. So the HR [human resources] guy wants to talk with me. "Gosh, there's such unhappiness reflected in the numbers."

I said, "Bob, the problem here is not that we are treating people poorly or that we're not treating them extremely well." After all, I had blue-collar reflexes now. I treated my workers extremely well. Nothing had changed; it was that we were not *winning*. People want to be part of a winning team. They don't like coming in and hearing, "Sales are down 10 percent versus same week a year ago, and shit, next week looks like it might be even worse. But everybody keep pulling at the oar, okay?" We're not winning here in this boat; why pull on this oar? And things that ordinarily would be minor nuisances become great big complaints.

Sure enough, we figured out the issue with pricing problem, changed it, revenues skyrocketed, and people were working mammoth hours because we had so many orders to fill because things were so successful. The marketing department was staying up late, creating new catalogs. The employee satisfaction number skyrocketed; everybody was thrilled with their jobs. They were there four and five more hours a day, but they were having a great time because we were winning. People like to win, and I think the committee loved winning, and we won a lot.

Also, this is right back after C-SPAN [Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network] had started taping and cable casting the Senate floor debates. The last year of the 100th Congress, it was mostly the Labor Committee's show. Senate C-SPAN was "all Kennedy, all the time." There's the debate going on all the time and you can see how well prepared Kennedy is! "My God, he had a footnote from the GAO study that impeached its own major finding. Somebody had read the goddamn *footnote* in the GAO study." Yes, I had my national debate champions figure out how to beat the GAO study! We were just so ready on stuff.

To their credit, I must say the Metzenbaum staff had a couple of guys who also knew how to wire things, so when we did finally go to the floor with plant closings, we had arranged a cascade of studies to be released *during* floor debate. We had a GAO study come out on Monday, then we had a Congressional Research Service study come out. I forget, we had some econometric forecast that the University of Pennsylvania had run for us that came out on Wednesday. We had fresh, crisp, walloping good evidence coming out every day. We just crushed people on the merits. At the end of the day, the merits matter. In part, they matter because Senators dislike humiliation.

People are embarrassed to get clobbered in floor debate. They don't want to go down there and get their faces crushed. And we prepared in such a way that opposition would get crushed. I remember an amendment Senator [William Philip] Gramm used against our polygraph bill. We crushed it so badly that he withdrew from debate on his other amendments so we could negotiate a deal in the Republican cloakroom—where there are no cameras. Well, sometimes there were amendments that you're never going to get the votes to stop, so you do something to finesse it, to deal with it, to incorporate it and make it your own, or just to swallow it because at the end of the day, you put the arguments together and you say, you know what? *Their* arguments are the crushing ones.

There was a piece of civil rights legislation where we couldn't beat the opposition's argument. It was whether Catholic schools that receive federal aid should be required to deliver abortions in their hospitals. I pushed the lobbyist on this: "Really? Really? You think we can force them to do that and that we can get 51 votes for that proposition?" And he said, "Yes, we can get majorities." They ended up with 35 votes on that thing, and then they wanted to pull down the whole bill, even though black folks, the aged, people with disabilities wouldn't get any federal civil rights protection, either, because the groups would stop the entire bill if this particular provision wouldn't go through. At the end of the day, the groups ended up having to swallow hard and say the bill should go through. But that's one where you just look at the argument and you say, "I can make some arguments here but this is going to be a powerful argument coming from the other side, and I think on the merits, we're going to lose more votes than we get on this one." So those things go both ways. I think people love being part of a team that could win and a team that won big. When we'd win, we'd win big.

We went down with the first piece of AIDS legislation and people were so afraid. This was when, 1987 or so?

Heininger: Eighty-seven was the first piece.

Rollins: People didn't talk about bodily fluids back then. There was stuff that had to be discussed to do this legislation, stuff that people weren't sure you were supposed to say in open company, much less on C-SPAN. We were going to have to debate this stuff, and Jesse Helms was going to make this as uncomfortable as possible for us. We were going to have to talk about condoms and intravenous needles. That was a piece of fun, his intravenous needle amendment. We humiliated him on that one. Anyway, this was hard stuff and it was five days of debate. Kennedy and Helms nearly came to blows. Hatch and Helms were in a vicious shouting match that then led to this oration by Hatch in favor of gay rights that I'm pretty sure I told you about. It was just a draining piece of legislation, and we passed that son of a bitch, I think it was 88-4 or 88-6, something like that. It was a huge win. We stormed them, and we just had them on the merits.

Heininger: Well, you had the evidence.

Rollins: Piles of it. I hired two gay guys, Terry Beirn and Mike Iskowitz. Michael was just this brilliant, passionate kid fresh out of school basically. Terry was an experienced researcher. He was a television reporter with IQ points spilling out of every pore of his body, who, it turns out, I found out nine months after I had hired him, was HIV [human immunodeficiency virus]-positive. I didn't know that. I didn't even know he was gay and we worked together almost every day. I could be a bit dull back then. Terry died of AIDS the year after I left.

These two guys worked up what was called the "fat book" and the "thin book." The fat book was an enormous compilation of studies done by CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention], various public health officials, and so forth, all of which pointed toward a consensus approach on what we ought to be doing about AIDS education and research, which was the subject of S-1220, our AIDS bill. And then they also produced the thin book—I don't know if it's a gay thing, the fat book, the thin book—which was a distillation of the most important themes.

We were printing, through the good offices of the Senate, thousands of copies of this thing, shipping them all over the U.S., and even to Europe. I mean, the AIDS community across the planet was soaking up the research that we were doing in support of this bill. We had briefing materials on every possible amendment on that thing out the wazoo. We had data; we had evidence. We were so good to go on that bill. At the end of the day, though, it was just a tough, tough set of issues, deeply emotional. Everybody thought their elections were at stake based on it, and that may have been, but we won big.

Plant closings, when we finally got that through, went through big. We'd pick big fights and then we'd win them big. The only thing we had to pull down, Family and Medical Leave didn't make it through the first time and minimum wage didn't make it through. Now those are two big exceptions but they went and got them.

Heininger: For the AIDS bill, where did you find Mike Iskowitz and Terry Beirn?

Rollins: Good question. Iskowitz—I'm having trouble remembering.

Heininger: Was it Mathilde Krim, did she recommend them?

Rollins: Oh yes, she—

Heininger: She may have recommended Terry.

Rollins: I'm fairly certain, it's just I can't remember her recommending him to me. Maybe she recommended Terry to somebody else who said this is the guy you ought to have. He was working for her. In fact, he once set me up as her date at an AIDS dance here in Washington. She needed some fellow to dance with her and so I was her date. Terry worked for her in New York, so he was splitting his time between here, New York, and then, as it turns out, one day a month in a clinic in Philadelphia where he was being treated for his HIV infection. He was a magnificent character; brilliant, funny, taught me a few tricks too.

When we moved that bill to the floor, I was keen on the use of the Senate recording studio to beam out video, and I wasn't up on all the latest technology. Terry learned to use a fax machine that had broadcast capabilities. So we got this fax machine and you could preprogram 999 numbers into it. Terry preprogrammed into it and he and Mike built an AIDS network, a call tree, in all of the 50 states. Any amendment would come to the floor and he would broadcast the facts to something like 1,000 people, with talking points against the amendment, and there were prearranged call trees set up in every state. We faxed the talking points against or for the amendment.

The call trees—they were fax trees—would then fax them to their people, and they would fax them to their people, and then you would get these ridiculous third- and fourth-generation faxes that finally got down to some clinic in Arizona, where the director knew it was his job to pick up the phone now. Now! Just as the amendment is hitting the floor, we had thousands of calls coming into Senate offices. The Senators didn't even know the amendment was being offered yet because it had only been about five minutes since someone had said that they were going to introduce this thing. And we'd have calls for and against just pouring into offices. Nowadays, of course, that's easier with e-mail and the like.

Heininger: But faxes were new then.

Rollins: Faxes were new. Heck, having alternate fonts on your word processor was new stuff back then, but faxes were new and we used broadcast fax. The AIDS bill was the first time that we really went to town with that. Of course, we had a great network, a great community that you could work with. The gay community and the AIDS treatment community were there. It's a little tougher to do something like that with people who had been laid off in a mass plant closing or the like, but with AIDS, we had a clear community to work with.

Heininger: But this was a perfect marriage of new technology, working the press, using the groups, rather than just merely consulting the groups, but using the groups to bring pressure to bear for an objective that had been defined, to move a piece of legislation.

Rollins: Yes.

Heininger: Kennedy must have loved this.

Rollins: I'm not sure how much of it he even knew about. I tried not to tell him about a fair amount of it, just in case we offended someone—I had to preserve plausible deniability for him. I remember, and I think I told you this story. One time we had been broadcasting madly into Arkansas about plant closings, and the one guy we had to have to finally break the logjam on this thing was Dale Bumpers. My little staff area on the Senate floor, where they pen the staff in, was right behind Kennedy's desk, and Bumpers sat near Kennedy. So Bumpers comes over to him and I can hear the conversation because I'm only as far away as you are right now. He's going, "Now Ted, every TV station in my state last night was running the story on your plant closings bill. They had people from Arkansas who had been laid off in these things in the stories. And they're talking about the legislation." Kennedy looks over at me with a knowing look that said, "What have you been doing?" That was the only thing that I ever told him about broadcasting in other people's backyards.

Heininger: Did Ranny know about it?

Rollins: Oh yes, because I would say, "I'm off to the recording studio to put it on—" what was the name of that damn thing? There was a name for the satellite. I loved this satellite. The name was something like bluebird, transponder number 64. You would call the TV stations and say point the dish at the bird, and the bird is bluebird, at transponder 64.5. I had no idea what any of that meant, but when you told the programming guy, he knew where to point his dish and pull down the signal.

Heininger: How did you figure this out?

Rollins: Well, I went to the Senate recording studio when I first became staff. They said, "We want to show you what we can do," because they were the people who would come and tape your hearings for you. Most people would then send it back, say, to the TV stations in Boston and give them footage that they could use on the news. And so they're showing me all this and I said, "How do you distribute it back to the TV stations? Do you send them a tape?" They said, "Oh no, we put it up on a satellite and then they can pull it down on their dish."

I said, "What satellite?" And they said, "We have this satellite and the Senate rents time on this satellite so we can beam stuff out to them." I said, "What does that satellite hit?" And they said, "Actually, the lower 48 states and Puerto Rico." And I said, "So I could theoretically put up stuff on there and a guy in California could pull it down, right?" They said, "Yes, but nobody in California would be interested in it because unless they know what is being transmitted at any given time, they don't point their dish at it, because they have to choose where they're pointing their dish." I said, "Thank you very much."

So I would have them come in and tape stuff that we would beam to local stations wherever we were trying to move votes. We discovered very early on that with a local station, the question they would always ask you was local. "Do you have anybody from Arkansas in the hearing? Do you have anybody from Ohio in the hearing?" So if there was a guy you really had to get—and it was usually the same five or six people from the Democratic South that you had to get—you always made it a point to have witnesses from Arkansas, and so on, in the hearing, so that when you beamed out to their state you would say, "Oh yes, we have Arkansas witnesses in the hearing." They could have that local angle, so they would use the footage. We'd basically just put together low-key, five-minute commercials for our bills and beam them out to their state.

Summer interns, there's another thing. Summer interns are generally the college-age children of wealthy donors. Your job is to let them sit in some hearings and be able to tell stories about how they were there when legislation happened. No, no, no. We created phone banks out of our summer interns, to call all of the different TV stations that we needed to point the bird at this or that. We could blanket with coverage during the summer just because we had enough interns. We could turn on any television station we wanted and have them at least pull down the footage. We couldn't make them use it, but local news guys are generally desperate for stuff that would show their community affected by national legislation. You could do stuff like that for them and they would run it.

Heininger: Did Judiciary Committee ever do any of this?

Rollins: Not to my knowledge. It's not like I was trying to keep it a secret. They didn't move legislation nearly as much as we did. Nominees tended to be the primary focus of their work.

Heininger: Which would get plenty of coverage.

Rollins: That would generate coverage all by its lonesome. I think I told this story already, about the debate between us and Judiciary about whether Kennedy should choose to be chairman of the Judiciary Committee or the Labor Committee. Well, he had to decide. This was shortly before the election and it seemed reasonably clear that we were going to get the Senate back. Obviously, I wanted him to be chairman of the Labor Committee and the Judiciary folks wanted him to be chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and he was going to have to pick because he was senior enough that he could do either.

So Ranny set up a debate. It wasn't really a debate. We would each be able to present our side to the Senator, and we had an hour in which to present our case. I remember that she called me and she said, "Now listen, Tom, I'm going to give you an hour to present your case for why he should be chairman of the Labor Committee. You are absolutely forbidden to go negative on

Judiciary. [*laughter*] You can say anything you want about Labor, but you can't go negative on the Judiciary Committee." I thought about that, and so my opening to him was this. I said, "Senator, I want to ask you if you remember the [Clement F.] Haynsworth and [George Harrold] Carswell fights."

Heininger: Which I'm sure he did, vividly.

Rollins: Oh, of course he did. I said, "Do you remember those fights?" Because when they happened I was barely old enough that I even followed those fights. And he said, "Oh yes, I remember." I said, "Sir, do you remember who was the nominee who filled the slot that was not filled by Haynsworth or Carswell?" He said, "No, I don't remember." I said, "The name is [William] Rehnquist."

Heininger: Yes, right.

Rollins: I said, "So the point I'd like to make, Senator, in opening my case for the Labor Committee, is that a defeated nominee is a replaced nominee, but a public law is a thing of joy forever." [*laughter*] I opened with a negative argument.

Heininger: I bet that's all you had to say.

Rollins: And I'm just watching and Ranny's there with hate in her eyes that said, "You bastard, I told you absolutely not to do that."

Heininger: But that wasn't going negative.

Rollins: It was just one sentence. I laid out my case for what I thought the Labor Committee could do.

Heininger: Well, in fact, they do do legislation. I mean, the sentencing forum is theirs.

Rollins: Yes, absolutely.

Heininger: But that was earlier.

Rollins: The reach of it is nothing like what the Labor Committee could do. And he still had not made his decision until after the election. Or at least he had not announced to us what he was going to do. I remember election night—and I probably told you this story too—I got lit up, I was so happy we had won. I was drunk; oh, I was drunk. I went home, fell asleep, and the phone rings at 6:00 in the morning. Oh no! I'm still drunk and it's the boss on the phone. I said, "Hello?" And he said, "Tom, Tom, this is the commander," which meant he was feeling good, when he would refer to himself that way.

I said, "Yes, yes sir, what's up?" He said—and I'm quoting him verbatim—"I've decided I'm going to take that Labor thing." [*laughs*] He said, "We're going to have a press conference here in Boston at 11:00. Can you remind me again of what a bunch of those things are that we can do without spending any money?" [*laughter*] He had forgotten the bullet points of the briefing, where I said you can do all our agenda without spending money; we can beat Gramm-Rudman

constraints, and so on. So I summoned that stuff up, I hope well, or I think well, and got him briefed. That's when I found out that he was going to do the Labor Committee, the morning after the election.

Heininger: But you know, to a certain extent, it would almost seem to me to have been a foregone conclusion, because from his standpoint, he was going to get the press—

Rollins: On nominations.

Heininger: —on Judiciary regardless.

Rollins: That's right.

Heininger: Regardless. And even though he could have shepherded through, which he did earlier, the sentencing forum, and there were civil rights bills that did come later around the Civil Rights Restoration act of 1990 and 1991.

Rollins: That was a Labor Committee bill.

Heininger: Right, which could, shall we say, fall into multiple jurisdictions. There's no question that the potential for positive action and the issues that he so deeply cared about resided in the Labor Committee, and had from day one.

Rollins: And that was part of my case to him. The other part of the case was, and I meant it, public law is a thing of joy forever. I shouldn't say that. I don't believe that about all public laws, but you put something on the books, you can move the country. Nomination fights have to happen, they're important, and you have to beat bad nominees. But a bad nominee is going to be replaced by somebody who is only ten degrees less bad. They're going to get their way on a lot of stuff. I'm sorry; who did we get instead of Bork? Actually, that was pretty good. I think we got [Anthony] Kennedy instead of Bork.

Heininger: Yes. It took three tries.

Rollins: That's right, yes, after they condemned anybody who was smoking marijuana.

Heininger: Then afterwards came [David] Souter. And Souter was one that he opposed, and shall we say, he's probably changed his views about David Souter since.

Rollins: I'm certain he has, but that's the other problem with the nominees.

Heininger: You don't know.

Rollins: Who really knows how they're going to pan out?

Heininger: Or Dwight Eisenhower and Earl Warren.

Rollins: That's right. Lifetime tenure can have a dramatically liberating effect on a person.

Heininger: Except not on all of them.

Rollins: Not on all. Well, I think it has a dramatically liberating effect on people. I think [Antonin] Scalia is probably more an intellectual bully than he was on the street, and Sandra O'Connor changed significantly over time.

Heininger: She did.

Rollins: But, you don't know how anybody is going to play out for sure. Anyway, we made that jurisdiction—

Heininger: So that's how you found out that he was going to take the Labor Committee.

Rollins: That's how I found out he was going to take Labor. And then, I think it was only a few days after that, that Carey said, "We want to have a big meeting up in Massachusetts, at the Senator's place. We're going to take days to do this and we're going to work up the legislative agenda. What do you have?"

Heininger: Did Carey know that you had already been doing this?

Rollins: No. I think he was quite surprised that I had a book ready. I said, "Actually, funny you should mention that because I have this book I've been working on." So I finished up the book and got it off to Carey, the Senator, Ranny, and then they scheduled the time that we would spend up in Hyannis. So we flew up, and I think we were there two or three days.

Heininger: From Carey's standpoint, if he didn't know you had been working on that and called you and said we want to have a meeting in Hyannis to go over the agenda, and you come up with a book, you must have sealed your fate with Carey Parker right then and there.

Rollins: Well, in an important way, not necessarily. It is nothing to build a book of memos—and you know this. You go to the various staff members and say, "Okay, education person, I need a memo on what the Senator should do about education. Health people, I need a memo on what the Senator should do about health," and so on and so forth. These memos are, in general, risible. "Oh, and here's what we've been doing for the last five years, which we could do again. And there will be an opportunity to reauthorize the subamendment to the alcohol and firearms bill, where we can push this forward, and so on." It would be a mishmash of tiny ideas and little imagination.

Heininger: But that wasn't what your book was?

Rollins: No, no. I had thought—

Heininger: I'm talking about what you eventually—

Rollins: I mean, you can crank out a book. That's nothing.

Heininger: You can crank out a book, it is nothing, but you're right, we have to reauthorize this bill, yada yada, we always have to reauthorize these bills, etc. But that's not what you had provided.

Rollins: No. This was a new legislative agenda, and reauthorizations—

Heininger: That's the part for which I say you sealed your fate.

Rollins: Reauthorizations are useful only insofar as they allow you to put on new legislation, to actually move the cause of the country forward, and that was the point of doing those. It wasn't just oh, we must shepherd through the reauthorization. People treat that as though it's an end in itself. Why don't we just pass a bill that says keep it for another five years? No, no, no. It's an opportunity to do something big, and so you use it in that way.

Anyhow, I'm sure Carey was pleased that we had a clear idea about what we wanted to do. We even had hearing schedules, and there were stories about this that ran at the time. Holy cow, the Senate, the Congress just opened and Ted Kennedy has 15 days of hearings, or whatever it was, scheduled. I needed to get a bunch of hearings done so I could start moving bills.

Heininger: First 100 days.

Rollins: The hearings are the first step. We need to have a bunch of hearings, don't we? And let's get them done and march them through. The staff for other Senators were stunned: "What the hell is this? And we're going to have a hearing in a day and I have to brief my boss." The train is leaving the station, you know? Because I know that we're going to hold the hearings, then I go through subcommittee, then I go through committee, and so on. It's going to take me a year to get this stuff to the floor, so I need to have started yesterday; let's go. So we held lots of hearings.

Heininger: All right. Well, let's talk about how the other staff and other Senators responded to this legislative train that was embarking at a stellar rate. What was Hatch's response? At this point Hatch has now worked with Kennedy in a ranking minority status for six years, and all of a sudden now Hatch—

Rollins: They trade places.

Heininger: They trade places and they developed a nice working relationship.

Rollins: They had an excellent working relationship. I'm sure, Hatch knew—I don't know, I'm making guesses about what's inside somebody else's head, but it was so obvious they were going to get rolled on some stuff. I don't think they had any idea how ambitious and organized we were going to be about this. If I had done it their way, the way they did stuff, there would probably be a couple of big fights, big bills a year. Meantime, there would be hearings, there would be oratory delivered on other people's bills, there would be the occasional amendment that would require serious Labor Committee involvement. There would mostly be hearings just to make findings about things. Screw findings.

Heininger: You make findings when you can't accomplish anything.

Rollins: Exactly. It's a way of using your committee as, I don't know, a showpiece. And then you can say, "Oh, we investigated that," and "Okay, fine." That wasn't what I was about or I wanted us to be about. I don't think he saw it coming. At the same time, he saw some stuff

coming and was grateful for it. One, he wanted the polygraph bill. He'd had a staffer who had gotten zapped by a bad polygraph test for some national security job, and he assumed that the guy wasn't lying about this or that. He knew that these machines were dangerous, and it was something that he could do that was pro-labor, so he'd be able to say he's often in favor of the working man. Like Reagan, he had once been a member of a union, so he liked to talk like that. So he wanted to do the polygraph bill, he wanted to be our cosponsor on it.

Kennedy and Hatch had many conversations on AIDS. I believe they had one conversation that was a big heart-to-heart. Kennedy held the view, very strongly at the time, that this was *the* public health crisis of our generation, and that we would be judged by how well we responded to this thing. In truth, I think the country responded extraordinarily well, given who we are and where we were on those issues. And it's because of the work of people like Kennedy and Hatch, who did respond to the crisis when it was just evident.

Heininger: And there was a very big discussion, and we've had it with some other people, about how did AIDS, that gay disease, get transformed into major public health crisis that can affect everyone, not just the gay community? Frankly, that transformation—

Rollins: Was a heck of a piece of work.

Heininger: Was a heck of a piece of work.

Rollins: The other transformation was—and I believe this—was that the identity of gay people in America was transformed by the AIDS crisis. I grew up in Texas and if you do anything that's less than macho, people will snap you with towels in the locker room, right? So everybody works real hard at not being gay. Nobody even knew a lot of gay people, and if you did you didn't talk about it much. My college debate coach was gay. I didn't discover it until the mid-'80s, you know? He successfully stayed closeted for the entire period of the '70s that I debated for him, and I graduated in 1978. You just didn't know any gay people. Gay people were not out.

The AIDS crisis comes along—and a good friend of mine made this observation; I'm only borrowing it from him. All of a sudden, on the talk shows, you have gay doctors, gay lawyers, gay university presidents, people coming out, and they're representing the gay community in a way it had never been represented before. It wasn't what we usually saw when someone was out; I'm thinking of Our Mother of Perpetual Motion on a motorcycle and the gay celebration in New York City, and so on. Most folks thought, *This is a kooky group of people*. No, no, no. All of a sudden they're like our brothers and sisters, oh and the cousin who may be gay, and so on. I think it had a transformative effect on the view of gay people.

I remember I was debating in college. There was a *U.S. News & World Report* survey that asked people to rank the awfulness of crimes. Murder was the most awful, homosexuality was second, and it beat out arson, rape, robbery, all this stuff. Homosexuality. Really? You know, whose body parts you touch, that's that bad? The country was very different on this—

Heininger: Well, and the law supported it too.

Rollins: Yes, oh yes.

Heininger: The anti-sodomy laws supported it too.

Rollins: That's right. We still haven't come the whole way on that, but for the most part those were all a dead letter. I think that the AIDS crisis did that for a lot of people. Also, a lot of people no one knew were gay had to come out because they were HIV-positive. I think of my brother's best friend from high school; the two of them had been skinny-dipping in Austin. Ted and Gerald had been fixing cars together—Gerald was a very car-oriented guy. They had been completely close friends for years and years and years. All of a sudden they're now both four years out of college and Gerald has to tell Ted that he's gay because he's dying of AIDS. My brother is as Texan and fierce as you can get, and it shattered him that his friend was dying. He wasn't sure, and he admits that he wasn't sure, which bothered him more: that his friend was dying or that he was gay. He had to spend the next month or so completely changing his view about gay people. If Gerald's gay, then who's to say that this is so bad?

I think a lot of people went through that as a result of AIDS. There's the cousin, the friend, the coworker that all of a sudden, you're kidding? And the poor bastard could never tell me? When I found out about my college debate coach, he was one of my closest friends and best mentors of my life. He couldn't tell me? I remember confronting him about it and he said, "Tom, I'm a professor at a Catholic university, Georgetown. You can't do stuff like that." I said, "Well, I think the Jesuits do." Anyway, I think the public confrontation with AIDS had a powerful impact on the public view of the gay community.

The AIDS legislation was something Kennedy and Hatch worked on together, agreed that it was a shared challenge to do this right, and the agreement they reached was that they ought to do whatever was most appropriate as a public health measure. We're going to try to depoliticize this. We're going to treat this as a matter of public health science. What do you do when there's an epidemic? What's the right answer in dealing with epidemics of this sort? So we want to hear from the Centers for Disease Control, we want to hear from HHS [Health and Human Services] on this and that. It's really an epidemic control strategy. What do you do about something like that?

Heininger: How important was Hatch to making it a public health crisis?

Rollins: Central, I think.

Heininger: Because if it had been Kennedy taking the public health approach and Hatch taking the approach of, I know this affects the gay community but yes, we really have to do this, it might not have had the same effect as the fact that you had this conservative Mormon Republican from Utah with Kennedy, in a united front.

Rollins: Enormous credit goes to Senator Hatch and his staff.

Heininger: Was this an approach that came to you via Mike Iskowitz and Terry Beirn in saying, "Politically, we think this is the way to do this"?

Rollins: No.

Heininger: Okay, how did it come to you?

Rollins: Terry and Mike's role was much more tactical than that. I'm trying to remember. I think Larry Horowitz may have taken Kennedy to the Hatch meeting.

Heininger: Oooh.

Rollins: I'm trying to remember when that discussion—

Heininger: And Larry would approach it from a public health perspective.

Rollins: Well, at the end of the day it was the right answer. I mean, we have an epidemic. Yes, it's caused by sexual contact but it's an epidemic. What do you do about an epidemic?

Heininger: Frankly, if you go back to how was AIDS discovered, it was discovered through a series of cases initially in L.A. [Los Angeles] that got reported to CDC, and then cases in New York that got reported to CDC, and CDC sending out instructions to report these cases, evidence-based. So from the beginning it was being scientifically built.

Rollins: If we go back to the very first of these, cholera, it turns out that everybody in London who lived above the point where urinals were being drained into the public water supply didn't get cholera. Hey, we should move the urinals or the public water supply. And we should approach this in that way. Now, it turned out there were some preventative measures and educational measures we were going to have to take that felt pretty controversial. One example: how early are we going to start warning the school-age population? I had to tell my third-grader about condoms last week. He's asking about sex; let's talk, buddy.

Heininger: They do.

Rollins: Respect and safety, these are your two watchwords as we go into this thing.

Heininger: In my family it's condoms, condoms, condoms, condoms. But 25, 30 years ago, that was not the discussion that was being held.

Rollins: No.

Heininger: How important was Surgeon General [C. Everett] Koop's report to the country on this?

Rollins: Very. Let me tell you what else was making this fly back then. We didn't know for sure it was an entirely or mostly gay disease. We knew it was a gay disease, but we didn't know if it was a primarily gay disease. We knew there were a lot of heterosexuals who were infected. I must tell you that I got the CDC reports every week on who was getting infected. And they would say this percentage is gay men, this percentage is known intravenous drug users, and this much smaller percentage we don't know; we can't tell. They are neither gay nor intravenous drug users. I kept looking for the promiscuous heterosexual group, to see how our group was doing. Were we coming down with AIDS, was this being transmitted?

Heininger: Which, as the years go on, grows bigger and bigger.

Rollins: It does, but the truth of the matter is it's promiscuous heterosexuals who sleep with bisexuals, and it's mostly women sleeping with bisexual men, that's how it moves heterosexually. Men don't pick up a lot of AIDS from women, especially if you wear a condom. In general, straight people who sleep with straight people don't tend to get AIDS. Back then, we didn't know.

In fact, I remember there were two big public health experts and they issued a report about how it's about to sweep the straight community. I remember looking at the data and I said this is bullshit. They're just doing this to make sure all the public is willing to support AIDS measures. And I had a big fight with Terry Beirn about it. I said, "Goddamn it, this is a lie." And he said, "Well, it's a pretty goddamn helpful lie, isn't it?" I said, "That's all we need to agree on, my brother." But promiscuous heterosexuals remained safe, and they would tease me about that.

It was not clear back then that this was a gay-only disease, so everybody was scared to death that they were going to get this, and that helped a lot too. And the IV [intravenous] needle-using population was also a way it was making it to straight women, because they were sleeping with boyfriends who were using the IV drugs. That was the transmission mechanism. At the end of the day, semen and blood are the transmission mechanisms. Women tend not to transmit semen and blood to men, and we know that, or that seems reasonably clear now. It was not reasonably clear back then. We were all still worried about toothbrushes and toilet seats.

Heininger: On the other hand, if you jump ahead to Ryan White in 1990, it strikes me as one of the most valuable things about Ryan White is that you had a poster boy for hemophilia, the "innocent" population, who can also get this and ultimately die.

Rollins: Well, I think that poster boy was well chosen.

Heininger: I'm sure he was.

Rollins: I remember when this first came along, Kennedy had to have a transfusion for some damn thing, like three or four years before, and he had somebody, I think maybe Horowitz, run it down over at GW [George Washington University], to make sure that that blood supply was clean. I'm not sure there was any way to know in retrospect.

Heininger: He did have it out of the blood bank, didn't have donor-donated blood?

Rollins: I don't remember, but I remember he had had some blood and he was worried about hey, we ought to make sure that my blood supply was okay.

Heininger: Well, the interesting thing is that when I had my daughter in '85 and nearly hemorrhaged, they kept me in the hospital to try to get my hematocrit to come up because I said at that point, no transfusions.

Rollins: You're not going to transfuse me.

Heininger: No transfusion, yes. So even as early as '85, which predates—it was known, it was suspected, and who knew what blood supply was safe? They didn't have the testing measures in

effect at that point. They didn't have the screening measures to ensure that the blood supply was safe.

Rollins: Right. We didn't know a whole lot.

Heininger: No, we did not know a whole lot by then. So the legislation in '87 was absolutely critical for education.

Rollins: It was critical and it was timely. There was a window there where everybody presumed that they were in what John Rawls calls the "original position." None of us knows how any of us will come out of this thing. Maybe we ought to do the best thing to prevent the spread of the disease. And fast-forward to now: the data on this, the dramatic quality of reduction of infection in this country, are just astounding. The reverse is true in Africa, but that's a whole different set of problems. The gay community, frankly, has been unbelievable in the energy and resources that they have devoted to trying to beat back the AIDS crisis in Africa, which is mostly a straight person's disease, but that's because of prostitution, truck drivers, and a few other features they have going on there that we missed out on, at least in the same quantity.

So anyway, if you had Hatch on your bill, it meant you were probably going to have a much easier time moving it through the Senate. You were covered on the right. People couldn't say this is some cockamamie left-wing thing that Kennedy wants to do on his own.

Heininger: You were covered on the right except for Jesse Helms.

Rollins: Except for Jesse Helms and that guy, Robert C. Smith from New Hampshire, who was to the right of Helms on most stuff. Yes, so you had really obnoxious weirdoes you'd have to deal with, but not centrist, sort of center right guys who would say, "Okay, I need to take a careful look at this. I'm probably going to vote for it; do I need it amended to change this or that?" But it meant that you had enormous credibility in taking the bill forward. Two, we wrote legislation to win majorities. We weren't trying, as I feel some of the current budget that's been offered is, to run up a flag of loyalty to groups with our legislation. We were trying to win, and so we wrote bills to produce majorities.

The plant closings legislation was drafted very narrowly. It made it absolutely clear that people did not get benefits after they were laid off. We weren't requiring businesses to do that. We weren't going to interfere with the decision to close plants or announce layoffs. It was only 60 days' notice that you had to give workers, which would be the shortest period in the Western hemisphere. Everything was done very carefully. On the Family and Medical Leave Act, I think we started out with firms with 100 or more employees. Some people would say well, what about the rights of people working in the firms with only 20 people? You know what? We're not going to get them, it ain't going to happen. They will be no worse off than they are today, but look at all these other people who will benefit if we draft this in a way that is sensible in the first place. Many people have a different theory, which is no, you go for the extreme thing and then you can bargain back. No! You go for the extreme thing and they don't need to talk to you. They say, "That's bullshit, that's no threat at all," and then you end up having to negotiate with yourself on cutting your own bill back. No. Go forward with something that is credible, that is majoritarian to begin with, and progressive, and you can actually improve people's lives.

My irksome case in point was the [William] Clinton health bill. Before the Clinton health bill there was the Kennedy health bill, which required all employers to provide health insurance to their employees and allowed small companies to band together—waive the antitrust laws so that they could band together and buy health insurance as a group. We would have picked up 66 percent of the uninsured with that bill. It was six pages long, it was Volkswagen-quality coverage. Everybody would have been protected. Clinton ran on that—require the employers to insure them, let the small businesses band together—because the Southern Governors Association had favored the bill and he knew about it.

Then it turned into this thing that was apparently about three feet high when they were done stacking it and all of its amendments together. It was a monster thing that regulated the percentage of people in different ethnic categories who had to graduate from medical schools and that, within that bill, banned workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation, which I favor, but again, that's not drafting from the center.

I deeply believe that there are about, call it 66 percent of 46 million people, call it about 35 million people, who would have had health coverage for the last almost 20 years, 15 years, if they had just gone for that which was doable at the time, and having done it, improvements could be made. But in trying to go for the extreme ideal and trying to go for the best, they destroyed the good, and you also don't get the best. So you draft legislation to thread the needle in the first place and you're vastly more likely to get it.

Heininger: Do you feel that this was a change from how Kennedy had approached legislation previously?

Rollins: Yes, I do. My favorite example, my strongest example, is health care. I came onboard and I got this memo saying we should reintroduce national health insurance. I had this little epiphany one night as we were working on raising the minimum wage, where I realized we could just require minimum health care as part of labor law. We govern benefits. There's a minimum wage, why can't there be minimum benefits? So that became part of the program. If we're going to raise the minimum wage by a buck an hour, let's do 50 cents in cash and 50 cents in benefits. Two thousand hours a year, that's $1,000 toward a health plan. What can we buy for a grand? So I got in some insurance guys and here's what you get for a grand. Actually, David Nexon went out and priced what would you get for a grand.

Heininger: You could get a lot in those days.

Rollins: In those days you could get quite a bit, and really good catastrophic coverage for everybody. I put prenatal care in there just because the cost-benefit numbers were so beautiful. We could have decent coverage for this huge fraction of the uninsured population. Then I had to deal with the guardians of the flame, including Kennedy himself. He said, "What's with national health insurance?" I said, "Senator, how many cosponsors did you have on this bill the last time you introduced it?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "You had nine."

Heininger: I was going to say seven, but nine is probably accurate.

Rollins: He got nine. There are nine people who want to do this thing. I said, "It's never going to happen. Why are we doing that? If we really care about getting to these people, about insuring them—" He said, "Maybe we could just do the children." I said, "I'd like to get the families. I'd like to get the parents too." And now they do SCHIP [State Children's Health Insurance Program].

Heininger: Ultimately it was SCHIP, yes.

Rollins: That was a very good way to do it.

Heininger: But it only came in the wake of the failure.

Rollins: Of the failure of the worker-based solution, which I thought would have been great. It threaded so many political needles. There were these poll numbers that Paul Begala generated from the New Jersey campaign he was working on. If you ask if all Americans deserve health care as a matter of right, about 35 percent strongly agree. But roughly 65 percent strongly agree that all Americans who work full time all year ought to receive health insurance from their employer. There were majorities of employers who agreed with that statement, because people believe that people who work hard all year ought to be treated decently. This is the way I thought Democratic reform ought to be done.

It also fit neatly with the overall package of stuff I was trying to do legislatively. We're going to provide benefits for *working* people. We're going to solve poverty by solving the problems of *working* people, some of whom may be on welfare right now rather than working, but that's a sane choice because working at the minimum wage with no benefits, their kids get no health care and they actually get less money working full time in a minimum wage job. Back when we were doing this, I think the wage was $3.25 an hour. It hadn't been raised in ten years. In 37 states, you made more being on AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] than you did in a full-time minimum wage job. Well, people are actually making a perverse, a moronic, decision to work full time and deny their kids or their families health care as well and hold one of those jobs.

All of these were part of the package of programs to deliver things to people who work full time all year, because Americans support it hugely. It eliminated the taint on so many Democratic programs—that programs were giveaways to people who don't work. They were going to take from those who work and give to those who don't. Frankly, the ethics of that seem fairly reasonable to me. Yes, we should stop giveaways from workers to the indolent, but how about treating people who work decently? Oh, working people are all in favor of treating working people decently, and that was the way to approach those problems. Not that SCHIP is a bad idea; obviously, kids can't work, they're dependents, and those problems should be addressed too. I had to deal with the tenders of the flame, with the old approach. The old approach was just as dead as a doornail.