



EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS M. ROLLINS

May 12, 2009
McLean, Virginia

Interviewer
Janet Heining

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TRANSCRIPT

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Heininger: This is an interview with Tom Rollins on May 12, 2009. Let's start with committee hearings. You came in with a somewhat different approach to committee hearings than had been used when the Republicans were in the majority. What did you see as being the purpose of a hearing, and what did you want [Edward] Kennedy to accomplish with hearings?

Rollins: Hearings had two purposes, really, and both served a single purpose. That single purpose was to move legislation that mattered on the six agenda items, the six national goals that we wanted to push forward. So a hearing can do that in two ways. One, it creates an opportunity for public awareness, media attention, and exposure, and so forth, on an issue. We were doing a lot to move a big poverty agenda, and part of doing that was just to remind people that there was an enormous amount of grinding poverty in the U.S. We were doing this in the mid-'80s, it had come out of the recession of '82 and thereafter, and I think people had forgotten that there were enormous pockets of pressing, almost unsolvable, poverty in parts of the country. So some of it was to raise awareness. The other part was to build a legislative record that would establish that a given style or piece of argument or legislation would be successful and, frankly, to hear about the problems or challenges that might be raised by such a piece of legislation.

Wait a minute; I'm going to take a step back. This is too wordy a way to do this, but it makes the point. Any idiot can manage on one dimension. Let me repeat that. Any idiot can manage on one dimension. You get on an airplane and the pilot says, "Today we're going to work mostly on speed. The direction, the altitude thing, I'm not struggling on that so much. I'm working on speed today." You find the nearest form of egress; you get off the plane.

I see this all the time: on the Hill, in business, and so forth; idiots managing on one dimension. I'm just going to produce profits here, before the next quarterly or annual report, and so forth. Well, any moron can do that. Cut all the employees' salaries and dilute product quality by half. The numbers will jump up and you will be eaten alive in the coming period because the customers will abandon you and all the good employees will leave. But your numbers look great in the short run. Or you can say, "I'm going to make the employees as happy as possible." Good.

Put them in La-Z-Boys and feed them Dunkin' Donuts all day long. No work will get done but your employee satisfaction numbers will skyrocket. In legislation, the idiot dimension is to write legislation that thrills your core constituency. None of it will come to pass.

Heininger: Right.

Rollins: Everyone will live in the preposterous illusion that their vision of the world is somehow redeemed because someone powerful agrees with them, but their vision of the world will forever remain nothing but a cloistered fantasy among the faithful. If you really want the world to be better and not just for people to pat you on the back for having agreed with them, then you have to fashion legislation that doesn't merely *anticipate* the objections of those who disagree with your approach or those who are fearful about what abuses might be entailed by your approach, you have to *solve* those problems for them.

That's hard work. That's hard, intellectual work and the answers are not obvious or it would have been done already. And you have to admit that you are in a very unhappy place intellectually. There's a problem you want to solve; the ways that you usually go about solving this run into intractable opposition. Often, I think you have to admit to yourself, you run into *legitimate* intractable opposition from the other side. I will give you examples that I think I've used before.

I had this polling data back in '85. The *L.A. [Los Angeles] Times* had done a bunch of survey work on the desire of Americans for *massive* domestic reform. They would say, "Do you want dramatic action from the government?" And I'm obviously making a caricature out of the poll questions at this point. Dramatic action from the government to reform education and produce greater success for American students, 90 percent. Actually, I think it was like 85 percent think that's a fabulous thing to do. Question two. "Do you believe that the federal government can provide that?" And about 25 percent believed that the federal government could do that. People wanted reform, they wanted change, they wanted results. They did not believe the federal government could do that, and why? Because they were looking at a 30-, 40-year history of how these things had gone.

My belief—I still believe it, I don't think we've come that far—is that we are still in the infancy of activist government. We are still in the infancy of figuring out how best to use the massive sum of resources that the government now commands as a share of total domestic life. The early answers that we had, which are all basically descendants of FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], were, "Let's set up a government agency, give it the capacity to give everyone orders and tell them what to do, and in addition to that, if there's something we want that the private society is not producing, why we'll just have the government manufacture it, like public education." You want the kids educated? We'll have the government educate them. You want people provided with health care? Let's have the government provide it to them. We'll manufacture the good that we want, as well as decide that we want it.

Well, it turns out that there are a lot of legitimate objections to that—you end up not getting much result for your money, and the constituencies of those providing the service in fact come to dominate the legislature that created them in the first place. So the programs will be designed, in

the end, to serve the service providers rather than the potential beneficiaries, the putative beneficiaries of the program, and things go awry in a big way.

Then you have Republicans saying we should get rid of the Department of Education, or can somebody show me that any of the dollars spent by this particular program have produced any measurable good? And on our side we're scrambling madly to find decent data that showed that the resources are producing results. At the end of the day, are resources producing results or not? In the private sector, if they're not, the invisible hand wipes away whoever was using those resources and lets somebody else use them. Government has the capacity to hold on to resources, whether it's producing a result or not. And the discipline of good statecraft, I think, is to—in answer to the standard objection to activist government—ensure that resources produce results.

I will give you a tiny example of the way that the needle gets threaded properly. We had this welfare reform idea, Jobs for Employable, Dependent Individuals, JEDI, because I liked the *Star Wars* series. The argument was, "Look, we have some good evidence that Welfare-to-Work programs succeed, that you can train people, put them into private sector jobs, and they don't come back on welfare." There's an enormous amount of evidence that a lot of these programs are boondoggles too, that they don't work very well, that they measure their success not by the number of people employed but just by the number of people who pass through their building. Oh, we trained 1,000 people this year and you know what? Their unemployment rate is exactly the same a month after they left as it was the month before you brought them in. This stuff wasn't working.

We crafted a program and said, "Find somebody who is chronically likely to be on welfare—" and it was absolutely clear who these people were—you've been on for five years or you are under 21, female, single, with children. The statistical likelihood that they would be on for the 15 years that we even track this kind of thing was over 90 percent. So here they are. It turns out that more than half of all welfare dollars were spent on just those two categories of people. So if we can solve those two, there's a big dent in the problem. And we know you guys don't trust us to actually fix this stuff, so here's what we're going to do instead.

We're not putting up any money up front. Instead, what we will do is this. Anybody who finds, trains—defined very loosely, it could include just vitamin C in the morning; it might mean day care, it might mean lots of education. You guys figure out what it is—if one of these people is then off public welfare entirely for one year, we will give you 50 percent of what they otherwise would have collected in welfare benefits. Year two, another 50 percent. Year three, 90 percent. We really wanted to get to that third year because we also knew that—this was from a big Michigan study that had been done on this topic over decades—once you've been off for three years, you are less than 5 percent likely ever to go back on welfare again. In truth, people would prefer to be self-sustaining, and some of the old caricatures were, in fact, completely inaccurate based on the evidence.

So we said, "Look, there's no up-front money. We are only paying for success." We will not spend a single nickel of the taxpayers' dollar until we've saved the taxpayers two nickels, and then we'll just share one of them with whoever did the job. It took a while to work up the bill and so forth. We had to adjudicate a fight between Orrin Hatch and Dan [J. Danforth] Quayle over

who got to be lead sponsor, cosponsor of the bill. There were staffers screaming at each other over all this stuff. They both wanted to be lead sponsors.

Heininger: They liked this.

Rollins: They loved this idea. They were all for Welfare-to-Work transition programs. They just wanted something that was going to work, and here was something that said we're not even going to pay for it until it works. So you say to the Rand Corporation, the Sisters of Mercy, the state of Wyoming, whoever, you go out and do this thing and we will pay you success bonuses for doing it. It passed the Senate, 99-0. In the House, we had to pass it four times. The House wanted nothing to do with it. And I'll say, without much fear of accurate contradiction, that the House was in many ways in service to the service providers. House members are only—I'm not telling you anything new—they're members of one committee, and so they tend to be very close to and very dependent on the lobbies that cover that committee for their campaign financing. Senators are on three committees and have a broader portfolio, and tend to be less hostage than House members.

Henry Waxman wanted nothing to do with this bill. We finally got it passed and into law but with a rider that said that no funds could be provided to the program until the Job Training Partnership Act had been appropriated up to its full level of authorization for some period of years. It had never been anywhere near that, so it meant the bill would never really come to pass. We had all these letters from incredibly successful agencies saying, "For God's sake, pass this thing. We'll go nuts if you pass this because it means all of a sudden we're going to have this success bonus money coming in here." And they were permitted to spend it any way they wanted. People would say, "Well, they might decorate their offices." I said, "Let them buy high-end Buicks if they want. They will keep doing whatever it takes to produce that flow of money. And if it means you make the employees happy with nice Buicks, that's great too. Let them decide how to spend the success bonus."

Heininger: This is a very new way of approaching social problems.

Rollins: And it has a nickname, I already gave it one. It was called public enterprise. The idea was there are goods out there that we want, that the private sector does not provide. There's the rationale for the existence of government. Rather than try to manufacture the good ourselves, rather than create an agency to do job training, why don't we just say how much it's worth to us? And we'll pay what it's worth to us. You all figure it out. You provide the good, I give you money for it, same as this coffee. The current model is that government goes to 7-Eleven and 7-Eleven says, "Give us money and we'll make coffee for you." No, no, no. Better this way: I stroll into the store. "You show me a great cup of coffee and I'll give you some money for it." That's all we were saying. We're just going to treat the private sector as a servant of government.

The government's job is to figure out which public goods we want and how much we'll pay to have them, and government is good at this. We worked with Senators, right? Senators are very good at figuring out what the public really wants. They're also very good about figuring out just how badly they want it. I think that can be expressed in tax dollars, just how badly they want a given result. What Senators, what legislators, what governments are *terrible* at is then figuring out *how* to provide it. I've been in both sectors. The private sector is really good at figuring out

how to provide it. You have very talented people who understand that there is a profit motive here. We're going to be paid based on whether or not we're successful. We're going to make X amount of money if we're really good, and we're going to make X minus X if we're really bad, but let's do the good part so we can make the more money, and away you go. Let the private sector provide the public good. Then the government's only job is to create the market for the good. There's no market in having highly educated high school kids. There is no market in having poor people assisted off welfare and into work. Create the market.

I did another bill like this, actually with Kennedy, and then morphed it into something for Dick Gephardt back in '88, when I was doing some work for his campaign, and this was to address the terrible level of math and science education in the U.S. You read this story every year. They do comparative tests across all the industrialized countries on the planet, and the U.S. always comes in last, or actually always second to last. I don't know how they do this. I remember one year we were 13th out of 14, I think, and 14th place went to Jordan. So you have the United Kingdom, you have Japan, you have South Korea, you have Jordan in there. How did Jordan get on this list? I remember one year we came in second to last, and the people we beat were Catholics in Northern Ireland. It's as though they always have to put somebody in there so we don't get slaughtered entirely. But we know we're getting creamed in international manufacturing and invention competition because we just don't train people well in math and sciences.

So here was the plan. From now on, any American high school that graduates a senior class where the average score of that senior class on the standardized exam, the International Math and Science Comparative Exam, is equal to or better than the winning country, we pay \$5,000 for every member of that senior class, every kid. Moreover, that's for the average. For any kid who is Chapter One eligible—that is, any poverty student—we don't care what the average of the class is. Any Chapter One-eligible kid who scores at or above that number, \$10,000 per kid on graduation. If every kid in America won the bonus, if the entire graduating senior class of the United States of America won the bonus, it would cost us about \$10 billion.

Do you know how fast we'd make back \$10 billion, if the average American high school senior were outscoring the South Koreans? Actually, I think Taiwanese are in first place now. We'd make it back in an afternoon. We'd make it back in an hour in an afternoon. Oh, and we don't care how you do it. Once more, we don't care what you do with the five or ten grand. So IBM [International Business Machines] may come to them and say "There's this ocean of money that the government is putting up for this. We've actually written this computer-based training thing and teacher training materials that go with it. We think we can skin this cat; we can get your average scores up there. We need half the bonus money." What principal would say that's a bad idea?

Or you've just got a group of teachers who come together and say, "We know how to do this, and yes, it will be a little teaching to the test, but teaching to the test means they're all going to know second-tier calculus, they'll all be really well skilled in chemistry, and so forth." Go for it. "Oh, but we'd like a third of the bonus. We know you're providing the classrooms, the books, and all the rest of that. We'll take a third and do the deal." Give half of it to the kids; see if I care. Let different schools experiment with it.

The other trick was that everybody had to share. Anybody who was successful had to afford complete transparent access to any other school that wanted to copy it, because it wasn't a zero-sum game. Everybody can win; you just have to beat the South Koreans. We don't want to share it with the South Koreans, probably, but you cannot hoard the information. So it was a market-based mechanism; we're just going to create a market for this. It's worth ten billion bucks a year to us to produce this result, and maybe you have to play with the amount you're willing to pay for it over time. Maybe it turns out this could actually be done for a couple grand. You might lower the bonus over time and say, "We're overpaying for this thing. Let's move it down a little." Or it may turn out it's wildly successful but only at the level of ten grand. Great, then let's move them up; let's be wildly successful. You create the market. Politicians are very good at figuring out what the public wants and about how badly they want it. And if you limit them to that, you avoid what happens currently. And you know this; you've seen this a hundred times. This isn't just stuff that happens in little amendments. This is how whole bills get done.

A guy, I'll pick a name, Bill Bradley, because this is an actual case. He had been home to New Jersey for two weeks or something. He's come back. Someone has explained to him that, in fact, parental involvement is the key determinant of educational outcomes. Now that's true: hold everything else constant, and parents who are involved in a kid's education make a huge difference. Well, now he wants amendments to study parental involvement, how we might increase parental involvement, and so forth. So you're sticking a \$25 million thing on the end of this bill to keep this guy happy, which is pissing off some other guy because he knows that we're not going to get anything for this \$25 million, maybe a couple of reports from the Department of Education, which are no better than the ones that the guy in New Jersey showed Bradley in the first place. Whole species of legislation are run awry because people are doing this based on the anecdotal evidence that they've been able to collect on what might work to address one of these problems.

We have a brilliant engine in the modern world on how you provide things that people want in exchange for money. It's called the private sector. The trick is to set the price. The trick is to police for fraud. After that, the things run like a top.

Heininger: This was not the approach that Kennedy had taken up until now?

Rollins: No. In fact, I have that lovely picture up there, where Jack [Kennedy] had just found out that he was elected President. You have the three brothers there and it says, "To Tom. May your private enterprise always be as successful as your public enterprise. With respect, Ted Kennedy." That was a reference to this group of bills that we had put together that were based on this idea.

Heininger: Did he like this?

Rollins: Oh, yes. Well, JEDI [*jed-eye*], he just loved it, though he kept calling it JEDI [*jed-dy*] because he had never seen the damn movie.

Heininger: Oh, God.

Rollins: Oh, and Darth Vader [*vah-der*]. [*laughter*] That would turn up in spots. [*Mimicking Kennedy*] "I don't know who that is." I remember trying to explain to him who Robin Williams

was. Do you remember? They did this *Comic Relief* thing for the homeless on HBO [Home Box Office]. It was Williams, Whoopi Goldberg, and Billy Crystal.

Heininger: Right.

Rollins: They were like—well, you’re my age, right? These are icons. These are the greatest comedians of our generation. And I said, “So, boss, we’re doing this thing and we have this press conference with Billy Crystal, Whoopi Goldberg, and Robin Williams.” And he’s looking at me and I said, “You don’t know who they are, do you?” He said, “No, who are they?” I said, “Well, Whoopi Goldberg is this kind of funny black comedienne. She’s very funny, wild hair.” This wasn’t really working. I said, “Okay, Billy Crystal. If you ever heard anybody say, ‘You look marvelous.’” He says, “Oh yes, I’ve heard that. I’ve heard that line.” I said, “That’s Billy Crystal, that’s a gig he does on *Saturday Night Live*. Robin Williams, like *Mork & Mindy*?” I’m going nowhere with him. I said, “He’s just this wild—Jonathan Winters. Do you know who Jonathan Winters is?” He said, “Yes, I know who Jonathan Winters was, the funniest man.” I said, “He’s Jonathan Winters’s protégé.”

Heininger: Right.

Rollins: So then he went on and told me this outrageous story about having to speak after Jonathan Winters at a dinner, where he’d actually refused to speak after Jonathan. He found out he was set up after Jonathan Winters. He said, “I can’t do that.” He grabs people, takes them backstage. “I can’t go on after Jonathan. I have three lame jokes here. Jonathan’s going to kill ’em.” Kennedy went on, “Winters comes backstage, he can tell there’s something going on. He said, ‘What’s the problem?’ I said, ‘Look, I can’t. I respect you as a comedian. I can’t follow you. I have three lame jokes here.’ Jonathan says, ‘You know what, Senator? I’ll tell you what I’ll do. This is the dinner program for the four people we’re honoring, and their biographies are on the back of the dinner program, just their bios, a paragraph apiece. I’ll tell you what. My whole speech will be nothing but to read these four biographies. Is that okay with you?’ ‘That’s all you’re going to—no other words, just the biographies?’ He said, ‘That’s it.’ ‘Yes, okay, I’ll do that.’ Winters goes up and says, ‘Claude Hooton was the—’” [laughter]

Heininger: I know.

Rollins: Four paragraphs. Grown men were laughing so hard they were crying. Women were doubled over in their seats. He destroyed ’em, destroyed ’em. Then Winters walks over; they were seated about two apart from each other on the dais. He comes over to the Senator, throws the dinner program in front of Kennedy, and says, “They’re all yours, Senator.” [laughter] He says, “See, I know who Jonathan Winters is,” after he tells me that story. I said, “Well, this is the same kind of guy, he’s like that.”

Heininger: Oh, my.

Rollins: He didn’t know who these people were, but back on the bills. So he didn’t know about *Star Wars*. My best friend, Bob Shrum, had written a speech. Darth Vader [vuh-der] got in there. The Republicans would tease me about the fact that Kennedy couldn’t call it JEDI (jed-eye), kept calling it JEDI (jed-dy). We had issues with that. Star Schools he got right. That was a different one, he got that one. But for the most part, he was not up on contemporary culture.

Heininger: No.

Rollins: That's okay. Who is it? Jessica Simpson is on the cover of *Vanity Fair* this week. I'm not entirely clear who she is. Does she sing or something? I know she's Tony Romo's girlfriend because I see that on *Monday Night Football*, but I really don't know who she is.

Heininger: Yes, but don't you know that she was married to Nick Lachey and she was a complete bimbo on her own reality TV show when she first got married. They were on, spoofing their first year of marriage, and then ended up getting divorced.

Rollins: I missed all that. So I forgive him.

Heininger: Yes. You obviously don't read *People Magazine*.

Rollins: Well, I don't date 20-somethings any more, and you don't have to keep up with that stuff. Anyhow, this species of legislation, we did a dropout-prevention package that was like this, all results-based. We're just going to pay you based on the rate at which you reduce dropouts. The one sort of funny premise in all of this is that the federal government was providing no start-up money. It was a market. You get paid for delivering results. We don't give you money so you can go and make the thing and then charge us for having made it. If we're going to pay you to make it in the first place, we're not going to pay you for the result, though actually some mix of that probably wouldn't be a bad idea. No one ever actually got—I was ready to talk about that issue but nobody ever seemed to figure it out that far down. But we did that with welfare reform, we did that with math and science education. We were doing something—or that was one of the approaches that we considered for Smart Start, for the early childhood education portion, that it would be results-based. There, it wasn't quite as clean a fit.

I had thought about trying to argue that you can do defense spending this way, but that was a little extreme. There are some places where it works. In domestic legislation, where you are providing a public good, a thing that is not provided by the market, by the private sector, it is generally because there is something wrong with the way that economic incentives are structured. That's why the private sector is not producing it. So you could create a market for it with government and just let the private sector produce it, and then your job is just to manage how much you're paying and to make sure they're not lying. We have the Securities and Exchange Commission to make sure they're not lying about private earnings. You would have a public enterprise enforcement commission; just make sure they weren't giving kids the test answers or something like that. You would do hard time for that stuff, just as you do in the private sector. You lie about whether or not your company is profitable, you do hard time. Then people will not do that kind of thing as often as they might otherwise.

Heininger: Why hasn't this approach been used more?

Rollins: Well, this is among my regrets about having left the Hill. I think this idea or set of ideas could have gone a long way. It's actually one of the things I thought about doing after I sold the Teaching Company, going back to work on the Hill, in part to get public enterprise going. There are problems with it. Mostly I think it creates problems for Democrats. It means you're not going to provide money to those service providers unless they're good at what they do, or unless—not even good at what they do—unless they do what the public wants done with their money.

When Dick Riley was Governor of South Carolina—I'm going way back now, mid-'80s—he did big education reform, the best education reform I'd ever seen, and they financed the whole thing with a one-penny increase in the sales tax. Here's the miracle, though. They sent a report to every taxpayer in the State of South Carolina every year titled "What the Penny Bought," detailing actual increases in SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] scores, first-grade achievement tests, because their goal was to be ranked first in the U.S. in the first grade. Rather than be last in the first grade, which is where their kids were testing when they started this program, they wanted to be first in the first grade. So they would show them how much progress they were making each year, on what were clear metrics. "We want our SAT scores on average to get here. We want to be first in the first grade." Very clear objectives. And they would show what the penny bought. Now, how do you and I feel about a relationship with our government as taxpayers, if they actually give you a document that says here's what we got with your money?

Heininger: I'd give them a dime.

Rollins: Exactly.

Heininger: I'd give them a quarter.

Rollins: Exactly. Well spent, boys. Do more of it. Forty percent of the work I do goes to the government. If someone would tell me what I was getting in exchange for what is 40 percent of my work, I'd feel a whole lot better about it. Now I live here in Fairfax County, which is, frankly a hell of a good government, and I have a pretty good idea. My police response times are almost instantaneous, the public schools are terrific, even though I'm not enrolled in them. They do a great job as a government. But it would be really good if they just sent a report around, instead of all the campaign stuff that you get all the time. How about just one from the government like, "Here's what we've done with the public libraries this year. Did you know you can order up a book online and return it—we'll FedEx it to you and FedEx it back." They do that in Fairfax County public libraries. The level of service is extraordinary, but they don't do a very good job of telling people about it. Most governments don't. Most governments don't produce good results, so it wouldn't be a very happy report. "What We Did With 40 Percent of Your Income." That would be a very sad chapter in the history of literature.

But my argument was, and it was based on the *L.A. Times* poll data that I had seen. It was based on some stuff that Stan Greenberg had done for a friend of mine who ran a political action committee. You interview these people; they want the results. The public wants greatly improved education. They want greatly improved health care. They just don't believe the government can do it. We did some focus group research on this to prove it. What if we didn't pay any of the money until they had delivered? People say well yes, of course I'd support it. Wait, how much are you going to give them? Well, that's a good question. We think it will cost about this much but it's worth this much to us. I mean, you agree that if we got all the kids to get scores as high as the South Koreans on this thing, what do you figure that's worth? Over the lifetime of those kids, that's hundreds of billions of dollars worth of economic productivity. What if we only paid ten for the whole thing? Pay a hundred, you get the whole thing. Do it; do it twice, do it every year. People understood very clearly, this was a whole new way for government to do what government is supposed to do. Just create the market and then they don't need to know.

The public, I don't think, really understands that in the hands of legislators, all of these programs end up being little anecdotal experiments. And when they cease to be little anecdotal experiments, they become giant, mushroomed bureaucracies that then have lobbies that back them, that exist to do nothing but keeping the giant bureaucracy in business. That does not get the goal accomplished. The kids remain ignorant, the ill remain sick, things don't get fixed.

I had thought about going back into government to work just on this. There is a guy, I can't remember his name. He was a policy entrepreneur back in the [William] Clinton days, and he was working on ideas like this, on government effectiveness. He had started by studying some models of what had worked in different local governments all over the country. It turns out that if you have really clear goals and metrics and people get paid for achieving those and those only, then in fact you get much better results. I studied how his—he turned it into a consulting firm—how that had worked out over time. Things became incredibly diluted. So rather than paying for the number of people who were employed full time for three years, you end up paying for the number of hours that they spent in the classroom. Who gives a shit how many hours they spent in a classroom? If you can do it with one hour that's great, and if a thousand hours doesn't do it, then I don't care about the thousand hours. I'm concerned with three years worth of employment. It means you might have to consider something else—maybe classroom time isn't the problem.

I know with working mothers it's day care and medical care. You take a minimum wage job, you're off Medicaid. So your son turns up with a whooping, croupy cough. Now you have to walk over to the emergency room and pray that they will pay attention to him within the next five or six hours. That's not an exaggeration. I've spent time in the Georgetown ER [emergency room] with what I thought was a broken leg. Thank God it wasn't. These kids are incredibly ill. No one even touches them for hours. So you're making that choice. Or do you say, "I keep the Medicaid, I can walk in, I can get a doctor to take a look at my kid." That and day care. I'm sorry, you're a working mom; you know the drill. How do you hold down a full-time job if you have no day care? Maybe that's where the money belongs. That's one of the things that Massachusetts had figured out. Day care is the "but for" cause of success of those. Yes, you need training; yes, you need this, but if you don't do the day care thing, none of it holds together. What, is she supposed to abandon them at home?

Heininger: So Kennedy liked this.

Rollins: Kennedy liked this stuff. I think he liked it a lot. There was at least one interview that I saw—it was a couple, three months after I had left—where he was still talking public enterprise as a way to approach these things. I'll say this, and I know this sounds vain and it's probably because I am vain; I don't mean it to be. It's an intellectually tricky proposition. I mean, you seem to have grabbed this real quickly, but then you're real smart. It requires a discipline and an understanding of the way that all these things fit together. To say to someone, the purpose of government is to create public goods that are not created by the private sector. I mean, this is introductory economics. A lot of people don't get that. They don't understand. They think government is here for an entirely different set of reasons. They may not know what the set of reasons is. They know that it has them in the big time and so they're happy about that. To say that you're going to create the market and then to understand what you need to do to create the market and regulate it as it comes into being, these are nonstandard challenges.

Heininger: It's also not business as usual.

Rollins: No.

Heininger: And it requires thinking in a very different manner. The only analogy I can make is to a way of raising kids. You provide incentives for getting them to do what you want them to do; and believe me, incentives work. It's a concept that is antithetical to most parents because they think that that's bribing them. And of course bribing is to get people to do wrong things, not to get them to do right things. Incentives get them to do right things. But it's not a concept that people tend to think of in terms of applying it to government.

Rollins: Right.

Heininger: But that's exactly the same thing.

Rollins: I come from the private sector, and I was very successful in the private sector, but I think one of the primary reasons that I was very successful in the private sector is that we had a very broad-based, big profit sharing program at the Teaching Company. Every employee was in. Once you had been there for three months, you're in the profit sharing pool, and your share of the pool was determined by your most recent performance evaluation, whether you're the CFO [chief financial officer] or you're a guy working in the back of the warehouse. The guy in the back of the warehouse got a five on his performance review, the CFO got a four. The guy in the back of the warehouse is going to get more money than the CFO. Actually, we ended up splitting up the pool, so some of it was based on relative salary, some of it based on the most recent performance. But it was very common for guys in the warehouse to get more than the CFO. Everyone understood that their success depended on the overall success of the enterprise and their particular contribution to it, right? We have to have lots of profits in order to share, and you need to be really good at what you're doing for you to get a big chunk of that share. People were just mad for producing great results.

Now, you also have to give them a lot of instruction about what we have figured out will produce lots of profit for us. In our case, lots of customer loyalty mattered. We needed people to buy from us every year. You find a customer, and it's very expensive to find them. We need to keep doing business with those people. We cannot produce a bad course. We produced a few along the way. There was one, I remember I announced to everybody. I said, "Not only are we canceling this course" —we had been selling this thing for about two months— "I'm getting mail from my customers, customers I know well or know through the mail well, and they're just furious at me for this course." It was an ultra-politically-correct literature course; it's condescending, assumed that most of the people listening were racists who needed to be fixed, and so forth. They said, "Don't you dare sell this kind of thing."

So I went out in front of everybody and I had the master tapes. I said, "Not only are we not selling this course any more, I'm going to destroy the master tape so that we never accidentally produce another copy of this thing and let it out the door." I cut up all these audiotapes on the spot. People got the message: you don't sell a bad course. I said, "We're burning the bridge to our customers with a bad course." We probably burned the bridge with a bunch of them. So we

had to write to people and tell them we'll give them their money back if they wanted it. Many of them wrote back and said good for you, because you had lost me until I got that letter.

Anyway, you have to give people instruction on how that works. But unless people have a stake in the success of the thing, employees would be kind of crazy to work really hard to produce that result, right? There's nothing in it for them.

Heininger: To what extent were you able to sell this concept to your staff? Did they get it?

Rollins: I don't think it had as much traction with them. Honestly, I think we can mark this one up as a limitation of the work I did. Look at how much, after I left, looked like this. Almost none. Dick Gephardt loved it. He used it in his '88 Presidential campaign. He still included it in his most recent biography. "Rewards for results," he calls it, rather than public enterprise. Paul Begala got it. He was working for Gephardt at the time. He was enthusiastic about it and we worked hard on this science/math bill because he was very excited about it. But what kind of legs does it have?

Back to the very early point I was making about the airline pilot. Any idiot can manage on one dimension. This was a three-dimensional approach to things. We said we're going to solve the problem. We understand there are objections and, you know what, they're probably right about the objection. Now, there is a minority within Republicans—and I'll use the shorthand, the Republican Party, the conservative party—that actually doesn't want to produce public goods. It's not that they think we're bad at producing them; they don't want them produced. They really don't believe in public education. I've gotten drunk with some Republican staffers who, at the end of the day, admit they'd really rather we not have public education. People should be able to pay for their own education. Why am I paying for some kid on the other side of town, and so forth? Let his parents pay for him, and if they can't afford it, they shouldn't be having the kids in the first place. End of argument.

Well, we have such different premises that we can't really argue. If you don't believe in the production of the public good, then we disagree about that. That's a different disagreement. But for those who agree that we should have the public good, but who don't believe we can actually produce it right now, this threads the needle. We just won't pay for it unless the good is actually produced. And then they see, because they're actually believers in the market. We might actually be able to produce tons of this public good. Now, that might work. What if IBM, what if the Rand Corporation, what if all those guys were trying to figure out how to produce that public good because there were billions of dollars in producing that public good? We might see a ton of that stuff starting to come through. That's sort of where No Child Left Behind fails. You were talking about the metaphoric child punishment. No Child Left Behind is all penalties.

Heininger: Incentives, not punishment.

Rollins: Exactly, it's all punishment.

Heininger: Yes, it's all punishment.

Rollins: This is what's just starting to dawn on me as a parent. Punishments produce all kinds of counterproductive results, unintended counterproductive results. My son will not read *Harry*

Potter because I once made him read the first volume of *Harry Potter* as a punishment for misbehaving in class. Now he won't read any of the rest of *Harry Potter*.

Heininger: Then find an incentive that makes it worth his while to read *Harry Potter*.

Rollins: That I need to do. But there's this other series that's many volumes and it's about some superpower kid who discovers that he is the son of Poseidon, and so forth. Well, he's just ripping through that. We had to special-order the last volume from England because he's dying to get at it immediately and Amazon U.K. had it before Amazon U.S. He loves it, and he would love *Harry Potter* but Daddy poisoned the well, so I have to undo that.

Heininger: It's easy to unpoison it, really.

Rollins: Is it?

Heininger: Ask him what incentive would make it worth his while.

Rollins: Oh, you're a genius. I will.

Heininger: What incentive? It might be money, it might be a video game, it might be—I mean, you don't know what it's going to be, but you ask him what the incentive would be that would make it worth his while. It has to be worth his while. And that's in part, when you talk about public policy, what will make it worth the while of those who have to do the producing, to meet, to produce this kind of result, which of course is never done in terms of public policy.

Rollins: That would be the big question with public enterprise: where do we need to set the price on this thing?

Heininger: It doesn't always have to be money. It can be additional resources that are not necessarily money. For schools, it could be the government builds them a new school, which is resources but it's a different form. It's a different approach and it's one that is in many ways antithetical to how public policy is created, which gets me back to the whole issue of how did Kennedy react to this? He liked it but was he fully grasping that this was a new approach that could be applied to multiple things?

Rollins: He embraced every example of it that I turned into a piece of legislation.

Heininger: But you had to turn it into legislation.

Rollins: But I had to turn it into a piece of legislation. This was very unlike what he'd been doing for whatever, 30 years, by the time I showed up. Kennedy never wrote bills. He always had great suggestions about things you ought to consider putting in, about avoiding things that would create problems for you. He would tell you who would be the problems and what their problems would be.

Heininger: Right.

Rollins: But you know, it was the staff's job to come up with the actual bills. Frankly, I never actually wrote the bill. I would go up to Senate legislative counsel and say, "I want to do this" and they'd say, "You're going to have to amend these ten statutes, and we'll put this in there." I'd let them do that stuff. I went to law school but that was—

Heininger: Did Carey [Parker] get this?

Rollins: Oh, I think Carey got it. Carey understood. I think the record speaks for itself. They didn't do a whole lot with this after I left. I think this is one of those things where the entrepreneur needed to do it. It would be like me writing a piece in some magazine and saying I think you ought to go out and find all the best teachers in the country and just put them on tape and let everybody study with them. Do college professors, high school teachers. People say, "Oh, that's a wonderful idea," and that would be the end of that. Somebody has to actually go out there and do it, do the lifting, build the bills, build the coalitions.

What frustrated me about the lack of traction that public enterprise got is that I thought it was truly a way to solve the divide, to reach across to the Republicans, or to 80 percent of the Republicans, and say let's only do policy that works. Enough, all right? I'm done creating bureaucracies, you're done having to oppose educational improvement or better health outcomes, and instead, we're going to do this thing where we will pay for the stuff if somebody delivers. The trick is to figure out what we want delivered and how much we're willing to pay for it. Those are the only two issues. So why don't we start talking about what we want and how much we're willing to pay for it? And that's all we're going to do, and we're going to let the private sector figure this stuff out. Then they can start talking about how all this is market-based and da da da, which fits their religion. And we can start talking about how we are sick of programs that don't produce results for the beneficiaries.

This is where I think all this goes awry on the Hill. I've said this before but maybe now the context makes it more clear. When you work on education, you don't hear from ignorant kids and their parents; that's not who lobbies you. You hear from the teachers' unions, you hear from the school principals, you hear from the head state administrators. It's all the bureaucracy that comes to talk to you.

You want to worry about health care? You think people with brain tumors come into your office? Hell, no. Doctors come in to see you, all the nurses are represented, the health insurance companies are there. There's nobody there representing the beneficiary. At the end of the day government, when it manufactures the product, does not serve the beneficiary. Any positive effect on the beneficiary is often an epiphenomenon, an almost accidental result. Its job, after it becomes entrenched, is to produce results for the intermediates, for the service providers, for those who get paid by the government to deliver service to the beneficiaries.

If you're only paying for results delivered to the beneficiaries, you get a very different outcome. Now you don't give a damn about the doctors and the nurses and the teachers. You care about the beneficiaries, and if the doctors, the nurses, and the teachers are producing results, you want to make them rich. You want to make them very successful in what they do. And if they're not, you want them to go do something else.

Heininger: Did you get pushed back from the Health Subcommittee?

Rollins: Well, we didn't officially—there was no official Health Subcommittee when I was on the Labor Committee. Kennedy sort of pulled all health functions up into the main committee. That way he didn't have to have a subcommittee chair who could claim to be Dr. Mister health guru.

Heininger: Right.

Rollins: That didn't take a whole lot of doing. People understood, Kennedy is a Senator—

Heininger: Did you get push back from the health area?

Rollins: The health people?

Heininger: Yes.

Rollins: Well, part of my problem was in defining specific outcomes that I wanted in health. You can say, "I'd like cancer cured." How much are you willing to pay for that? That didn't work entirely as a way to produce the result, but it was clear that a lot of basic research needed to be done first, before we were going to get to any outcome like that.

One thing I did want to do on a results-oriented basis was the provision of prenatal services to poverty mothers. You're pregnant, you're poor, we will pay the states for the number of women that they provide with regular prenatal visits, vitamins, and so on. The list of what you need to do when somebody is pregnant to *dramatically* reduce the risks of bad birth outcomes is really clear. And we're just going to pay based on the number of those that you do. You figure out how you want to do it. You administer it through your current state bureaucracy, you can pay private physicians, however you want to get it done. We just need a certificate and we needed a sworn—I mean, we had our own sort of Sarbanes-Oxley thing. I need a statement signed by the chief health officer in the state that, in fact, this many women had been done, and we needed an audit trail showing that, in fact, that had taken place. You can send GAO [General Accounting Office] in there. Go make sure that Alabama is telling the truth or that Massachusetts isn't making up numbers. Just pay them for the number of women who were provided a specific list of services and not say, "Well, you have roughly a million people who fit this category, so we're going to give you roughly \$1 billion dollars, and good luck."

I remember one program in particular was supposed to provide not just prenatal, but early childhood medical services to poor women. We had this GAO study that showed that over half of the money was consumed by federal and state administrative apparatus before it reached the street. So we're paying some goddamn program planner, or group of program planners, half of the money and now we're reaching half as many kids as we're supposed to. How about if we just pay them based on the number of kids? I bet a bunch of program administrators have to go find jobs elsewhere and we have a bunch of kids who are born with their heads the right size and all that good stuff. Enough already.

Heininger: Well, if you want a reduction in infant mortality, you pay cities and states for one year of reduced infant mortality. You'd pay them X percentage for a reduced infant mortality.

You look at the HIV [human immunodeficiency virus]—and there was a big HIV bill that took place in the time that you were there. You want a reduction in a city or state's new cases of HIV, you pay for a reduction. Now, you run into Jesse Helms problems but—

Rollins: But you run into reporting problems too.

Heininger: There are things like—this fudges the whole needle-exchange programs, et cetera, et cetera. It fudges the condoms. You just pay them for the reduction.

Rollins: Let them figure it out.

Heininger: Let them figure it out, but clearly this is not the approach that has been taken, then or subsequently. Is it because you need more people to be advocates for this? You would have needed Kennedy to have incorporated this more thoroughly into himself so that this became second nature to him, and that he's constantly pressing staff to do it.

Rollins: I could let you go on for five minutes and you would come up with the entire list of what it takes. All those things. I would have to stay there and do it for a decade or two.

Heininger: You would have had to stay longer.

Rollins: Yes. I mean it. Go ask my wife as my witness. I thought about going back to the Hill just to work on this, after I was done with the Teaching Company and a few other things. Frankly, I'm 53. I'd be a hell of a lot better at this now than I was at 33. I know how the private sector works. I know a lot more about managing than I did back then. I could produce some serious results. At the same time, you need the right guy. After all, I worked for Ted Kennedy. You want an issue to get attention, we could make that happen. The junior Senator from Colorado, and I don't even remember who that was back then, wasn't going to get that kind of traction. Frankly, the boss is dying. The same opportunity simply doesn't exist. I saw this as a potentially very powerful idea or set of ideas. It solves the problem with the Republicans, but the reason it solves the problem with the Republicans is that it solves the problem with the voter.

Heininger: Right.

Rollins: It changes the agreement between the government and its constituency. We won't spend your money until we get what you wanted for it.

Heininger: Until we get the results.

Rollins: That's a completely different relationship than we have now. And we will prove to you that we actually got what you wanted. You may disagree about what we think we ought to go do, that's what elections are for.

Heininger: Could an [Barack] Obama do it?

Rollins: Well, yes, except they appear to be pretty much captive of the traditional Democratic approaches.

Heininger: But if you're going to change a whole policy apparatus, does it take somebody who is charismatic to embrace this and say—

Rollins: You know, I'm a wonk, Jan, so my own belief is that had we been able to pass four or five big programs it would have created sufficient momentum. I had the attention of Kennedy. I had the attention of Gephardt. These are guys who toiled in the dilemma every day. They knew the programs don't really work but we have to try and solve the problem. I can't tell you how many times in the last 20 years I've read stuff about this guy got elected or this guy was serving and he said, "You know what we're going to do? First, we're going to figure out what works and we're going to replicate it. We're going to get rid of the stuff that doesn't work." I have some terrible news for you: most of it doesn't work.

I think I told you this story, where I asked the Congressional Research Service to figure out which job training programs work because we were only going to replicate success, baby. So I said, "I want you to find every published study on all training programs, and I need to know which work." And work means that it can in some way demonstratively show that it produced more benefit than cost, and I'm wide open on how we're defining benefit. I remember they came back and they had found over 100 studies. And they said, "Well, we found one where it demonstratively produces more benefit than cost."

Heininger: Oh, no.

Rollins: I said, "At least we have one. Tell me about the one." They said, "It's a Job Corps program, and I think the study was done in Utah, where they have a big Job Corps facility." And they said the thing did not, in employment terms, produce more benefit than cost. The reason that it broke ahead on benefit was that while the people were in Job Corps, which is kind of like a labor camp, they weren't committing their ordinary quota of crimes. So if you include the savings from the robberies and assaults that didn't happen, then the thing was net cost beneficial. I said, "So it was cost beneficial because it's a prison." They said, "Yes, basically, that's kind of how it works." [*laughter*]

Heininger: So why are all the job training programs not working? Why don't they work?

Rollins: Well, let's see. Who gets paid based on how long they stay in a job?

Heininger: Nobody.

Rollins: Who gets paid based on the number of people who move through the building? Everybody. Would you expect, then, for people to move a lot of people through the building or would you expect them to place people for a long time, in long-term jobs? Probably the former. I remember Bill Spring—he's an old friend of mine and was on the President's domestic policy staff in the [Jimmy] Carter years, and one of the founders of all the job training programs of the '60s—said, at best, the evidence suggests that job training programs reallocate unemployment, they don't actually reduce it.

Even that's a heroic assumption, that the people who got the job training are getting jobs and others are unemployed as a result. I'm not sure the evidence supports that. They don't have much effect on anything. They're not being paid to have an effect. Why would we expect any other

result? Now, I might be contradicted by some studies done in the last 15 years that I'm unaware of, but unless the program has changed in some way I don't understand, I wouldn't expect anything otherwise from it.

Heininger: Because this is the bedrock of how do you end poverty? You train people for jobs and you get them jobs. It's the bedrock of the Welfare-to-Work program too.

Rollins: This is the Great Society alternative to what would amount to public works programs. Either you just create jobs—we're all going to go crack rocks in the hot sun or build roads or lay bricks at a school or do whatever—and those programs actually turn out to have very mixed results and are very expensive to produce and administer—or you have the Great Society alternative, where we believe in the perfectibility of human beings and that the real problem is that they're just not trained.

A lot of it turns out to be educational deficits, a lot of it turns out to be simple behavioral deficits, like understanding you really do have to show up on time every day, and if you're not going to show up on time, you need to call in advance and tell them when you're going to show up. Oh, and by the way, you really do have to show up every day. There are lots of things that some folks just haven't been trained to do. They didn't have to show up for school every day, so the workplace doesn't seem terribly different. Having employed a number of such people, I understand that in a more tangible way than I did on the Hill.

Most of the stuff doesn't work, that's why I wanted to do JEDI. We can do one that works and then you can start making everything results based. I think people suspected, and they were right to suspect, that all worker training programs could be rewritten this way. I wanted to do this to all of the Job Training Partnership Act. Let's put it all on a results basis, not just the Welfare-to-Work stuff. Imagine guys who lost jobs in the Ford factory or the GM [General Motors] factory. Great. If you want to provide these guys with training and get them into a job, we will pay you based on successful one-year employment results, and not because they had 50 hours of ass time in front of a computer. Oh, we taught them keyboarding skills. Fantastic, and what has that done for the world? Now a guy can wander the Internet on his own? No, I wanted everything moved over to results-based, and I think people understood this was a wedge in the door. We might only pay for actual proven results for our clients, which I think was a threat to a lot of people, a lot of agencies.

I don't think the education sector saw this coming in a big way. We didn't have enough legislation we were moving that worked like that. This math/science thing would have been seriously revolutionary. Now, when I gave that to Gephardt, he couldn't even get Waxman to hold a hearing on it, because Gephardt's not on the Education Committee, right? You know the House. Boy, those are silos over there, those committee structures. The guy was the majority, and he was running the Democratic side. He could not get the committee chairman just to hold a hearing on it. After a while I said, "Don't let him hold a hearing on it, he's so hostile. Can you imagine what kind of witnesses he's going to call? He will trash your program for a few hours and you'll get to make a nice opening statement, but that's it."

A lot of people in this world don't want consequences for nonfeasance. They like getting paid whether they're doing things or not. That's a problem. But I think that with the right advocacy

and with the right handful of successful examples, you could really start to build and you could say, “Look at this thing” where you created a public market. One of the limitations with the public market is you really do have to guarantee the money to it. If you do X, Y will follow. It is not dependent on how the Appropriations Committee is feeling in any given year.

Heininger: I was going to say, which means you have to make sure the Appropriations Committee is tied into this.

Rollins: Exactly. You have to have the money flow because people are making up-front investments based on the assumption of downstream reward. The reward needs to be there, and I think that poses a problem on the Hill, too.

Heininger: How good a relationship did Kennedy have with the appropriators?

Rollins: Good, but decidedly mixed. I remember going over to have him personally beg for money during Appropriations Committee markups and so forth. Again, we’re good on the Senate side. On the Senate side, his relationships were great, and I think Tom Harkin and Barbara Mikulski and Bob Byrd were the people we had to deal with most; very flexible, very accommodating, very helpful. Not always where we wanted them to be but hey, that’s the name of the game. On the House side, it’s like they revel in the ability to turn down a Senator. It’s like they celebrated the fact that the Senate needed them.

I had a couple of meetings with Henry Waxman with Kennedy. I remember walking across the Capitol, to go from the House side back to the Senate side, after meeting with that little tyrant. Kennedy was white in the face with anger. I was so mad, I went back to my office and I punched a book and broke its binding. I remember Nadine Arrington, who had been the secretary of the committee for ever and ever, came in and said—she had this fake British accent that came from Texas. She said, “Young man, have you been meeting with Mr. Waxman again?” [laughter] “Yes, Nadine. I hate that little pecker.”

I remember going in for this meeting with Waxman, and I don’t know if this is just Waxman or the House or whatever. He had one of these typical [Benito] Mussolini desk arrangements, where there’s a big window behind him. The desk is there at the window, so you must stare into the beaming sun as you look at this tiny little man hidden back behind the chair. You’re seated 25 feet over this way. He has flanks of staff on both sides of him. He’s just terrified, you can tell, that you’re going to come over that desk and get him. I wanted to make moves toward him. He makes you effectively genuflect to come into his office. I thought, *You little man*. So we ended up rolling him on some AIDS stuff. I suspect others have condemned him for decades because of his manner.

Heininger: Was Dave Obey any easier to deal with?

Rollins: We didn’t deal with him directly, or I didn’t. I remember Waxman being particularly difficult. I cannot remember who was chairing the Subcommittee of the House Appropriations. We went over to ask for some money for Star Schools, to build a transmission network to beam out university offerings to schools everywhere. We only wanted ten million bucks. This was chump change, and they didn’t give it to him. They said, “Maybe we’ll do it next year.” He went over to make a personal appeal for this money, and it wasn’t targeted to anybody in

Massachusetts; this wasn't pork. We just wanted our program funded. Just results, baby, just trying to get this thing done.

You know, if this was something I was going to do for another ten years, one of my big projects was going to be improving relations with the House, or figuring out how to deal with them more effectively. A bunch of it was going to be that you had to come off your pedestal and not be Ted Kennedy, in order to do that. Actually, that's wholly unfair. The boss never seemed arrogant about himself. I think we staffers needed some humility. There was also an arrogance in our approach in dealing with the Senate, so that was going to have to change some. But House leaders were going to have to come off pedestals, too. Some of these guys were just ridiculous about their little baronies, their little bishoprics.

Heininger: Well, let's talk education. This is a time at which education reform is beginning to heat up, particularly in the states. Had there been a separate Education Subcommittee staffer until then?

Rollins: You mean on the main committee?

Heininger: Yes. Was Terry Hartle—this is when Terry Hartle gets hired.

Rollins: I hired Terry, and Amanda Broun and another staffer handled early childhood education issues and stuff like that.

Heininger: Terry did college.

Rollins: Terry did college. Terry was a higher education guy. I don't know. We were in the minority before, so I don't know how they had staffed that. There was a young woman, Deborah Curtis, who had education jurisdiction. If there was an education matter the Senator needed to be briefed on, she would do that. She did not have a professional background in it; it was just one of those things.

Heininger: What did Kennedy care about in education?

Rollins: He cared about equal opportunity, that's safe to say. He also cared about the support of the higher education industry, which is extremely important to the State of Massachusetts. At the end of the day, my boss never missed an opportunity to help Massachusetts. I remember one time I was talking to him, this was early on and we were flying around the country doing a poverty tour. He's a huge guy, and he was particularly huge—if you catch my drift—when we were doing this. So he's in this little bitty Learjet seat like this, and he's next to the window, and I'm asking him about how you do giant national programs when those are disconnected from Massachusetts. "How do you do this? How do you explain this to your constituency?" He gave me this little speech that I held onto. He said, "The first thing you always do is you take care of your base. Massachusetts, number one. Massachusetts first. If there's something we can do for Massachusetts, we are there for Massachusetts, and they understand that they are first. I've communicated to them; they are first. And if they know you're always taking care of them first, they'll let you go do that other stuff. They regard that as part of your agenda too, and they'll let you."

So it was always Massachusetts first. I think higher education is the second largest business in Massachusetts, all those lovely Pell grants and Stafford loans and all the rest of that. A ton of those get spent in Massachusetts, at various very expensive private colleges we have going there. And yet, I think he believed, as an article of his being, that education is good in itself, that there are few things that we do that you can just say are good in themselves, and providing people with a great education was one of those.

I remember once we were having a fight over pork in education, and Cassidy & Associates, one of the lobbying firms here, was making a fortune in figuring out how to do earmarks for education projects. I remember there was one, what was it? It was something at Boston University. Money was going to go to BU. Yes, it was an earmark; it was a great project. He was arguing with somebody—this is one of those Senator-to-Senator conversations. He said, “At the end of the day, you can call this pork, but this is for education.” And that was the end of the argument for him. I don’t care what you call it—you can call it homemade sin—but it’s for education. You think we’re doing too much for education in this country? And the answer is no. He believed powerfully in education, and everyone having a good one mattered enormously. I don’t think he thought of it as an employment program. I really think he shared in the belief that this is part of your birthright as a human, to receive a good education.

Heininger: How much was he incorporating the wave of education reform that was beginning to build? Was he becoming dissatisfied with the way things were going, and recognizing that things needed to change?

Rollins: Oh, absolutely. We were doing a lot of work on trying to figure out how to do public education differently. Early on, I realized that trying to figure out why the universities shouldn’t be increasing their tuition so much every year was probably not a fight I wanted to bite off.

Heininger: *[laughs]* Nobody wants to bite that one off.

Rollins: I was representing Massachusetts, and we did not need to do a bunch of hearings on why Harvard was charging so darn much to attend the university, though my shorthand on this is the cost of higher education has gone up twice the rate of the consumer price index every year, since the end of the Second World War. If this was happening in any other industry, people would be doing hard time for the price fixing that doubtless is connected to this some way or another. You do that in cereal? If Cheerios were going up at that rate, there would be DOJ [Department of Justice] and FTC [Federal Trade Commission] people on them like a chicken on a June bug, but not in the case of higher education.

I took some look at those numbers because we were trying to figure out what we can do to make this more affordable. It seemed to me like reducing the cost was a big part of it. I realize that was a big and complicated question, probably not one where I wanted to spend my time finding the answers. What we definitely needed to do, though, was to make sure that people could afford them, so we worked a lot on loan and grant programs. Terry came up with the idea of the education savings bond. That is completely a Terry Hartle creation, which has turned out to be an extremely popular and successful program.

Heininger: Very innovative when it came out.

Rollins: Very innovative.

Heininger: It spawned—boy, talk about having legs on that one.

Rollins: Yes, that was a great idea. I remember that. What I loved about that is we basically shoved that down the throat of the Finance Committee. That wasn't our jurisdiction, we don't get to issue savings bonds on the Labor Committee, commitments to the U.S. Treasury 20 years hence and at what interest rate and all the rest of that. That was a beautiful piece of work that he did, which I believe we accomplished via second-degree amendment on a Finance Committee bill. Now, he had laid a lot of groundwork beforehand. It was not as if we did this as a hostile takeover. We were also working the Ag [Agriculture] Committee on food stamp restoration and the school lunch restoration. I think those are my two best examples of how we had an agenda. It covered the whole domestic policy front. Committee jurisdiction determined some of these things, but we weren't going to let that be dispositive as to whether or not the kids got fed or got educated. We were going to have to go other places to do some of our work. That was a breakthrough.

Education reform was a hot issue. It wasn't just beginning, it was a hot issue in the mid-'80s. Back then, Japan was killing us at everything, it was absolutely clear. They were graduating twice as many engineers per capita as we were. They had something like twice to four times as many patents per capita as we did. We were getting creamed. It turned out they were also leveraging themselves to the hilt more than we were, and they paid for that, but we were very conscious of the failures of American education. Everyone was. We knew that we weren't making a dent in the big numbers. For the very best, we were producing the very best education in the world. Everybody knew we weren't doing particularly well elsewhere. Welfare reform was an even hotter issue at the time. So the link between welfare and education was one that was very animating for everyone. We needed better answers in education. As Terry pointed out to me very early on, federal money is only 7 percent of the total. There's only so much you can do up here.

Heininger: Except, this is the beginning of the time where the federal government starts impinging on education, and it had minimal, just the Title I money up until then, which is really peanuts. Now we're at No Child Left Behind, which is affecting every single kid in every single school.

Rollins: Well, that's a sea change in the relationship.

Heininger: It's a sea change, yes.

Rollins: Back then it was just writing them checks and do research.

Heininger: Study, study, study.

Rollins: Help them find out what works and so forth. These were the [Ronald] Reagan and [George H. W.] Bush White House years, so they were mostly into research, what works. They would publish things on what works. And what turns out to work, apropos of our earlier discussion, from their perspective, was great principals. It turns out, if you have a hell of a CEO [chief executive officer], the organization tends to run a whole lot better. A great principal sets really clear goals and expectations for the organization, and there are clear consequences for

doing it well and doing it poorly. Imagine that? And it produces vastly better results for everybody.

There were swashbuckling examples of great principals, and it turned out great leaders made a huge difference in the success of those organizations. Parental involvement was big, but how you legislate that was unclear. Then No Child Left Behind goes on to a whole new step. This was in the offing, in the states and local areas back then, reporting results of individual schools. I'm trying to remember. There were states that were willing to pull away.

Heininger: Arkansas and South Carolina.

Rollins: Well, South Carolina was doing a brilliant job at education reform.

Heininger: You had Riley.

Rollins: That was Riley, who then went on to become Secretary of Education for eight years under Clinton, and I never saw a serious education initiative out of that administration. Now, they had the greatest education Governor of the latter 20th century, and nothing happened with that. That story befuddles me. But education was hot. We were trying to figure out what would work better, and their rewards for results sure seemed like a right answer to me, and that's where our little 7 percent, ten billion bucks on top of a \$500 billion system. We just paid \$10 billion for producing results like the South Koreans are getting. Oh, but we can get results like the South Koreans are getting, that was my theory. Gephardt was willing to go for it. Kennedy was a supporter of that idea.

Heininger: What about Smart Start?

Rollins: Smart Start was one of the handful of cases where I felt somebody had already proven what worked. The evidence was already in on what worked, you just needed to do that again. The evidence was the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, where they had a control and test group of very poor kids. The control group gets what everybody gets, which was nothing. The test group got, at ages four and five, half-day early childhood education programs for every class, taught by someone with a master's degree in early childhood education. And they had counseling for parents, to help them incorporate stuff into homes. Anyway, it was a reasonably clear agenda. They had been followed, at that point, for 19 years, postgraduation. They do a study on them every two years to figure out how the kids were doing.

So now they're 19, they're out. They're either in college or on the street or whatever, and it turns out that the experimental group had—I'm estimating here, but results were on this order of magnitude—half the rate of welfare dependency, half the rate of unemployment, two-thirds the rate of teen pregnancy, and we can just go on. Every marker of social dysfunction was shattered by having had an early childhood education. It did not appear to seriously affect their educations. It seems like it was socialization as much as anything else. Anyway, I'm distantly remembering research results now. So I said, "Then this is what we should do. Let's do this nationally, okay?" Enough with Ypsilanti, Michigan; we have the data here.

I then find out about South Carolina, I'm looking at what they're doing. They have this early childhood education thing, and I'm looking at the description of the bill. It's Perry Preschool.

They're doing the Perry Preschool Project. Now, it was only for very poor kids, which they had a ton of in South Carolina. So I called their guy, whoever was Riley's head guy on this, and we're talking and I said, "This thing sure looks a lot like the Ypsilanti case." He said, "Because it works. We decided we'd copy Ypsilanti. Why reinvent that? It works like a son of a bitch, let's just do more of that." I said, "I'm with you, brother. We're going to figure out how to do it up here." They went from last in the country—it was like 50th or 49th, something like that, in first-grade achievement—to 24th in two years. That's like being hit by lightning four or five times in a row. That just doesn't happen in public policy. I had never seen a result like that in my life.

So I remember we're doing this presentation to key members of the Senate on this bill. And our idea was we'll call it Smart Start because Head Start is chiefly staffed by parents of Head Start children.

Heininger: Really?

Rollins: So if your family is doing so badly that your kid is Head Start-eligible, you are eligible to teach Head Start programs.

Heininger: Oh, my.

Rollins: I'm sorry; we have the blind leading the uneducated. No, there are actual educators, but a lot of the staff are Head Start parents. It turns out that having people who had early childhood education degrees produces this powerful result. There was at that time—I shouldn't speak for the current period because I don't know the research since then—no evidence that Head Start produced any positive outcomes at all. Westinghouse did a study of Head Start participants in 1969 to see if Head Start had any effect on the kids. What they found was that it had none. Do you know what the response of the Congress was? I am not making this up.

Heininger: They doubled the money.

Rollins: They banned evaluation of the program. I am not making this up. Terry Hartle told me that story. I said, "You're making that up."

Heininger: What you're saying is that it was a feel-good program.

Rollins: Right, and everybody could say we're doing stuff for the kids and they're getting their early educations. And this huge constituency of parents who were employed by the program, came to form around the program. They didn't want Smart Start because they might not be smart enough to teach in it. They might have to go off and get a degree. So it generated enormous opposition once we got the thing going.

But take a step back. We're doing this presentation in the Senate and so I have all these bar charts worked out by the Senate graphics people that show here's the crime rate of people who went through the program, here's the crime rate of people who didn't go through the program. Here's teen pregnancy of those who went through the program, here's teen pregnancy of those who didn't go through the program, and so forth. We're putting this up and Pat [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan is in the meeting. This is one of the great social science statisticians of our day, and he's been reading this stuff for 40 years. I mean, he knew what this was about. He interrupted

Kennedy, stood up in front of these charts, and turned to the members—I think we had 20 people in the room—and he said, “What you must understand”—I won’t try to imitate that silly accent—“this does not happen in social science research. This is on the order of a miracle. I have been studying social interventions all my life, unemployment programs, this program, that program. There’s nothing else like this. This is the most powerful thing we’ve ever seen,” and took his seat. And I knew we were headed the right way, and he was right.

I had ordered up all these studies. Nothing mattered the way this thing mattered. There was huge business support for it. I remember the Business Roundtable wanted early childhood education, but they all understood that meant “with an asterisk”: we need *actual* education going on. There were great class size studies. It turns out you couldn’t have more than 20 kids in the room, otherwise the results all fall off. We knew how big the classes needed to be, we knew what the teachers needed to have as their background, we knew how many hours a day it had to last. We knew it worked at four and five. The open question was, should we try this for three, should we try it for two? Should we have enriched day care? That was an open question and we’re going to do some research on that, but for four and five the answer was clear, so we should do Smart Start.

I designed it to mimic Social Security. I did not want it to be a program for the poor. You make them programs for the poor, they get cut; they are expendable. Instead, make it a program where working women with good incomes know that they can now drop their kid off at these Smart Start early education programs. Oh, and we provided so that it would last the whole working day. Half of the day had to be early childhood education, but if you go the whole day, rather than at the might-be-a-felon day care center or whatever else you have to lean on for that kind of result, it’s going to be provided through the public schools, and we set up sliding scale tuition. So for the poor it was subsidized, but as you moved up you paid more to participate in the thing.

I think the total investment was going to be in the billions of dollars. We only needed about \$1 billion of federal money and we were going to require a state match and the sliding tuition cover the rest. We’d reach every four- and five-year-old in America. One of the reservations was that you can’t show that this actually produces a benefit for middle class and upper class kids, where you’re providing the program. I said, “For day care.”

Heininger: For day care, a huge benefit.

Rollins: We were trying to address both these issues, yes. To every working woman in America, we could now say, “Once they’re four, you’re good. You don’t have to wait until they enter first grade, we have them.” It just seemed like such a beautiful solution, and those women would cut the balls off any guy who tried to cut that program. It’s like Social Security, where my father is a fairly wealthy man. He would rip the throat out of any guy who was going to reduce his goddamn Social Security check because he earned it. And that sense of having done something in which we all share. My dad is thrilled that his relatives who live on nothing but their Social Security checks get their Social Security checks, and, by God, he wants his too. That’s how you want these programs to run, where the whole public has an investment in them and you’re producing a clear result that everybody agrees is a good idea.

We had the Business Roundtable and they did—we didn't urge them to do this—a study just came out. This is with good business economists. Their study showed that for every buck you put into one of these quality programs, you made back five in tax revenues, not in overall benefit diffused throughout society. It was five bucks (\$5) in tax revenues because of higher employment levels, lower unemployment levels, lower welfare, lower crime, and so forth. It's like the work has been done, we know what to do, let's go get it done. So we introduce this bill and Kennedy comes back from his first big visit to Massachusetts after we've introduced it. He has Head Start hecklers in every audience. "Why are you trying to destroy Head Start? Why do you hate poor children?" All mischaracterizations and so forth, but from some very angry, very loud, very poor people who did not want Head Start to turn into Smart Start.

I remember in the Bush administration, we were going to triple the amount of money going into early childhood education. They put it all into Head Start and I thought, *You've just pissed it all down the well. And you know what, you Republican bastards, you know full well that that money is doing nothing because you didn't have the guts to say that we need highly educated people teaching these programs, they have to be organized a certain way.* Now, what Head Start did show, it was very clear that these kids had better nutritional and medical outcomes because they were in the room. You could feed them, you could make sure they got their shots, and that sort of stuff, but there was no educational benefit at all. I'm talking about the evidence from 20 years ago. Who knows, it may have changed.

Heininger: But you're also saying that the early educational benefit from the Michigan project was that it didn't necessarily pay off for education.

Rollins: Right.

Heininger: But what it paid off for was socialization, which was going to have long-term benefits.

Rollins: Enormous long-term benefits.

Heininger: Okay. Why then, would Head Start, which has the kid from the same classroom, not have the same socialization benefits? Because of who they're being taught by?

Rollins: Probably because who was teaching them. It might be class size issues as well. I remember Texas did studies on class size and you get more than 20 of them in a room... And the thing about these 20 four-year-olds, you can remember, right?

Heininger: Yes.

Rollins: There's no socialization going on there, there's chaos going on there. I'm sorry, that data means so much more to me now than it did when I was working on the Hill. For me it was like yes, you can't go over 20. Now I'm like, I can't handle five of them at a birthday party at once. *[laughter]* I don't know how these teachers pull this off. Little boys all running around with anything that looks like a sword, attacking the girls, who all just want to converse and make things. Forgive my generalizations; it's the way our parties seem to work. How do you do that? But somebody was doing that with 25 and 30 kids in a room, and I'm just thinking that's mayhem. No wonder they're getting no results.

Heininger: But Kennedy got this.

Rollins: Kennedy got this, and you know what? He was gentle and kind with me about it. He was catching a lot of shit at almost anything that approached a public meeting. “Tom, you have to give me something here that I can use.” I said, “Boss, you’re talking about quadrupling, you’re talking about increasing tenfold the number of kids who are going to be in this program. You’re not an enemy of childhood education; it’s vanguard in doing this. I don’t know what to say about unqualified people who are teaching the children.”

Heininger: That’s right. You’re disenfranchising the population.

Rollins: Yes, you’re going to lose the job. Now, maybe they keep monitors, like classroom assistants or something. I don’t know, but they were getting paychecks.

Heininger: The classroom assistants are still—you still run into the same problem with socialization.

Rollins: Could be, could be. You get the idea.

Heininger: I do.

Rollins: Now, were there things educational that we could do? I remember ordering up another set of studies from the Congressional Research Service. I wanted to know about every educational intervention possible that could be proven to have a serious positive effect on life outcomes for kids. I said, “I don’t care where the study is done, you find it. Look in India if you have to, I want to know what works.” They came back and they said, “We found a ton of stuff, a ton works, and it all stops working at about age five. We found one study, and it was of some delinquent British girls where between the ages of 11 and 13 they had a program that actually seemed to seriously change life outcomes for these girls. But basically, if you don’t get them by the time they’re five, nothing seems to produce results.”

I don’t know the data. I remember this woman saying the data say it’s over by then. I just thought this was so critical, we have to get them. I think Aristotle said, “Give me a child until he’s seven, you can have him the rest of his life, I will have the child.” It looks to me like he was holding onto him for two extra years. Now, there were first-grade studies, there were second-grade studies, but the effectiveness of dollars just fell off like over a cliff as the kids got older.

Heininger: So what happened to Smart Start?

Rollins: That’s where Smart Start came from. Well, it didn’t happen. The community succeeded in its opposition. Eventually, the legacy of Smart Start was that funds were provided in Head Start programs for additional training of early childhood education teachers so that they could be employed. You’d have to ask somebody who has been watching the program since then, what happened. I don’t know. I know that in the first couple of years, there were additional funds for early childhood training and education for teachers, and people understood that we need to get the best people in these classrooms.

Heininger: My guess is it’s done this.

Rollins: Yes. But you know the dream of universal, high-grade educational day care for every four- and five-year-old in America, and after that they're in school was missed. I'm sorry, the day-care issue was very hot at this point; this had to be dealt with. I had women on my staff. I knew what was going on. I was unmarried and childless, but these issues were huge for everybody.

Heininger: Well, this is about the same time as Family and Medical Leave, too.

Rollins: Yes. And frankly, just a lot of women in the workforce. Issues that people wouldn't have paid attention to 15 years before were suddenly hot. The Senate started setting up its own little day care center.

Heininger: I had one there.

Rollins: That was back then. When did they start that? It was while I was there, so in the mid-'80s they began the thing.

Heininger: My son started at two or one and a half, which would have been—he was born in '88, so it would have been by '89, '90?

Rollins: Yes, because I remember walking when they had the thing over there by the parking lot, near the good drinking holes. It just looked to me like all these issues could be addressed in one clean way that everybody would be getting a great education for their kids, they'd be in a safe place, the sliding scale, it would create a constituency. The program would then be self-sustaining. The trick was just to make sure that they didn't dilute the program, which at the end of the day, may be an unwinnable struggle.

Heininger: Where did Star Schools come from?

Rollins: Where the Teaching Company ended up was in the origins of Star Schools. I had skipped evidence class in law school. You know the story of the Teaching Company. I didn't go to evidence class. I had to study the Federal Rules of Evidence in a weekend. They had this set of eight hours of lectures on the Federal Rules of Evidence by Irving Younger, who was an evidence professor and trial lawyer who, it turns out later, became a partner at Williams & Connolly, where my wife was a partner. This guy and I are connected in so many odd ways.

I go to the Harvard Law School Library to check out these tapes and I'm prepared for the worst weekend of my life. I'm going to watch lectures on the Federal Rules of Evidence for hours, and there were three other guys in the room with me. I had two sharp pencils, one for each eardrum, so that as I dozed off I would stab myself in the eardrum and wake up. Younger was unbelievable. Within ten minutes, he has this line where he says, "I can make you laugh or cry at will." And then he'd do it. Oh, you're so good. Can I turn up the volume, guys? Oh yes, please, turn up the volume. He would talk about what dying men would say to their wives, how Britain won World War II with radar. On and on the stories went, anything to teach you the Federal Rules of Evidence. I was fluent in the Federal Rules of Evidence by Sunday night and got an A on my evidence exam.

So we fast-forward a few years. Here we are, trying to find all the math and science teachers that we need to solve this problem that we talked about before in other contexts. I remember the math and science teachers associations had data that roughly 30 percent of the people teaching those courses in American high schools actually had any academic background in those subjects. They had education degrees, but they didn't know chemistry from fine arts. You get the idea.

Heininger: Yes.

Rollins: We wanted to train and hire enough math and science teachers to address this imbalance, this shortage. So this woman from the Congressional Research Service comes in, and I had asked her to size this up and cost it for me. How much is it going to cost to train and hire all these people? And she said, "Depending on your assumptions, the number is somewhere between \$10 and \$20 billion. How much do you want us to polish the number up?" And this was back during Gramm-Rudman, when \$10 billion was \$10 billion. I said, "Don't bother; we don't solve \$10 billion problems around here anymore."

Later, this guy came in to meet me; he was a friend of Kennedy's and he was somehow connected with the Los Angeles Rams. He was a sports guy. He just wanted to talk about this barroom game that he and his partners had invented, where people played computer football games against each other, against other guys in bars all over America. So, you in Michigan, you're fighting it out with some guy in San Diego, and so forth. And he's trying to figure out if there's some educational use that could be made of this. I remember I was terribly hung over. I had been in a bar the night before. I'm listening to this guy at 8:00 in the morning, a charming guy, a lot of fun, and we're talking about this thing and I'm fighting with the headache. I'm thinking, *Well, you could administer tests this way, to kids all over the country.* And then I thought, *Wait a second. You could actually beam out Irving Younger to kids all over the country and then give them a test on it using this thing.*

Heininger: This is called distance education.

Rollins: We could catch every kid in the country. That's right, this was pre-Internet, so you do it with a satellite, and they had ways you could keyboard in your answers. So I thought about it and I went to see Kennedy and worked up a draft idea. Let's find all the best teachers in the country and we will produce an education series with these people, provide it to every kid in America, every school that wants it, and we can administer tests and see how everybody is doing. It was a little clunky but there was something in there. I remember going up to see Senate legislative counsel about this, getting something drafted up, and he said, "You will have to amend pretty much every piece of federal education legislation passed since the Great Society." Apparently, it was boilerplate. During the Great Society, all the southern states—this is still a live issue here in Virginia—were afraid that if they took a lot of federal education money, it would become a lever for curriculum reform.

Heininger: Yes.

Rollins: All persons are created equal, humans come from apes, God only knows what they'll require you to teach next. So it is boilerplate in federal education law that no funds may be used for curriculum creation or reform. And were we to impanel a federal teachers' corps, the Irving

Younger for everything, there would be a curriculum that they taught, and we'd have a federal curriculum on our hands, and that's verboten. He said, "This is a big fight." So my hopes were at least kicked back a little bit, and I thought, *You know what, how about we just build the satellite facilities and let everybody beam out to everybody else. We'll let them figure out what they want to teach, and let them figure out what they want to buy, what they want to consume.* So we created Star Schools, and the idea was that we would build uplink facilities in the great university teaching centers, Boston, San Francisco, Madison, and so forth, and let the teaching faculties there beam out to the lower 48 states. We could even hit Alaska and Hawaii. All you need is a dish to pull it down, record it, play it when you want to, or watch it live.

It was a hugely popular idea. It became the most popular grant program at the Department of Education. It was the one smarmy piece of work I ever had to do. It turned out a Senator's son was in that line of work, doing satellite stuff, and we had to rewrite the bill. I remember we were in the room before you walk out into the hearing room—it's like a holding room or a green room—and this Senator came in and was pushing Kennedy on this. So I had to listen to this conversation, and I just thought, *This stinks. We are going to get this guy's vote because we're making his son eligible for the money.* His son ended up getting a bunch of money out of it. I remember having to change the criteria that an agency would have to meet in order to be eligible for the money so we could better reach that Senator's son with it. They were legitimate criteria; it just turned out this would be more helpful to his son.

So, Star Schools came into being. Star Schools was pretty much completely obviated by the Internet. That was pre-Internet, and you had to beam things by satellite to get them all around the country. Interactivity required satellites or something like it.

Heininger: But it was the beginning of thinking about teaching beyond just what goes on in one classroom, in one school.

Rollins: Right.

Heininger: That is now huge.

Rollins: And then you know how the story goes from there. What Star Schools missed was the central ambition I had, which was to get the best teacher in the country for anybody who wanted to learn a given subject. So I thought, *Out in the private sector, I don't have this constraint about curricula*, and that's where the idea for the Teaching Company came from. I'm going to go find all the best teachers. I remember I meant to do only high school teachers.

Heininger: Really?

Rollins: Yes. And the *Chronicle of Higher Education* published a little thing when I was leaving, saying he's leaving and he's going to go do this thing recording college professors. And I thought, *You morons, no I'm not.* It took me about three weeks to figure out that it was really hard to figure out who all the best high school teachers were, but that it was comparatively much easier to figure out who the better college professors were, so I started there and that turned out to be the core market. I did not know that at the time.

So that was Star Schools, a very popular program. Strom Thurmond was instrumental in getting that bill through, particularly on the Republican side, in part because we had a set-aside of 25 percent or something like that for programming budgets, so that people could actually invent the programming that would go up. That's because Strom, it turned out, was a huge defender of PBS, and particularly the Public Broadcasting System in South Carolina, and they really wanted some programming money and Star Schools would be the way to get it done. I remember Thad Cochran from Mississippi was huge on this program.

Heininger: Cochran really likes this stuff.

Rollins: Yes. The people who were starved for educational resources were hugely in favor of it.

Heininger: And they also had more rural states, too.

Rollins: Yes.

Heininger: But then it really becomes beneficial in the rural states—

Rollins: —where they can't have a Chinese program because they don't have enough kids to do Chinese. Well, you hook up 400 of them from across the state of South Dakota and you can have a Chinese program. You just beam it out. Frankly, it was a great idea, but the Internet was an even better way to do it, and I suspect that that is the right answer, but in its time. . . .

I remember George Will wrote a nice column about it, that this allows us to “technologically telescope,” to quote him, our teaching resources in a way that nothing else really will let us do. So again, this wasn't quite public enterprise, but the idea was that we were just going to leverage resources to get results. It didn't demand particular test outcomes but it was a way of imagining that every single school in America could have the best teachers that the country had to offer. Back then, we had hints of what might be done interactively, but it wasn't as clear as things are now, where we have Cisco teleconferences, where teachers in Delaware can talk in real time with teachers and their kids in Hong Kong, and so forth. People were talking to us about the technological possibilities, but those weren't entirely clear back then.

Heininger: Did Kennedy get excited by these technological possibilities? I mean, for somebody who doesn't know cultural icons but—

Rollins: Originally we were going to call the thing EdSat.

Heininger: Yes, okay, he'd like that.

Rollins: And then *Star Wars* was such a popular thing we thought, I dare anybody who says we can pull down missiles with a high-energy proton beam to deny that we can beam out a course on human anatomy to kids in Nebraska.

Heininger: Because ultimately, when the Internet comes in, Kennedy becomes very prominent in pushing for wiring schools nationwide. There's a disconnect between somebody who is, shall we say, not up on cultural icons, being aware of and interested in technological advancements,

particularly as they can improve and aid education. Was that staff-generated or was that his own interest?

Rollins: After my time. I don't know.

Heininger: But you were seeing signs of it then.

Rollins: Signs of it then. The computer revolution was—it was still unclear as to where all this could go. We got e-mail while I was there; e-mail was a new invention. I was very happy. I knew word processing from having worked on a magazine before, but I did not know—and then they gave you these programs, like Excel. It turned out to be a fine way to multiply things. I remember being given a database program and I could not figure out what in my life you would do with such a thing. Now my whole world is governed by database programs and Excel spreadsheets, and Word remains my friend.

Heininger: But I remember the one that I latched onto instantly, and that was the fax machine.

Rollins: Yes.

Heininger: It was like whoa, you can copy something and it appears on somebody else's desk? This I have to have. That one I latched onto. It took much longer for e-mail to catch on.

Rollins: Well, I remember fax. I got dragged into that one because of Terry Beirn, who was one of our two AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] staffers, New York, reporter background, so forth, a brilliant guy. He talked me into buying a fax machine that you could preprogram 999 numbers onto, and we used those to do mass faxes for lobbying on AIDS legislation, getting people ready to call their Senators and object to this and that amendment, or support this and that amendment. They used that to great effect.

Heininger: The counterpart to using the satellite to beam things out to members and local states and districts, to get—

Rollins: Yes. Whether they wanted to hear from you or not.

Heininger: Was Kennedy—how technologically savvy was he? Even now, does he use computers?

Rollins: I don't know. I'd be surprised.

Heininger: I'd be surprised.

Rollins: Typing is a pain in the ass.

Heininger: It is, but I assume that he's recognized that there are things that can be done with it that can further things like equal access and level the playing field.

Rollins: Well, or level the playing field. Look, if all the rich schools have Wi-Fi networks, we probably better get something going in the poor schools. I'm not sure it's a matter of launching it forward as much as it is just keeping them on a par.

Heininger: He actually was one of the ones who was really pushing for launching it forward very early on.

Rollins: Well, for that you need to wrap in a distance education component. Otherwise, it's just a way for kids to send each other e-mail throughout the day.

Heininger: True.

Rollins: I've been at schools where they've taken down their Wi-Fi networks because the kids just use it to fool around all day.

Heininger: Yes, they do.

Rollins: It's a bummer too because I need Wi-Fi access during their debates so I can pay attention to something else if it's really bad. The Senator is a sailor. I guarantee you he's probably got first-class GPS [global positioning system] in that thing, whatever the collision detection technology is, and so forth. He was never—I don't think he ever wanted to be a technological visionary like [Albert] Gore [Jr.], who would come out and talk about what this or that could mean to us 20 years from now. Sometimes that turned out to be relevant and sometimes not.

Heininger: But I'm assuming he's a technological pragmatist in terms of recognizing that there are certain things that technology could do for things that he really cared about.

Rollins: I'd be making guesses. The technology I was concerned with, which was most pressing for his purposes, was that we had figured out how to splice the human gene in 1979. We were working very hard on forcing NIH [National Institutes of Health] to map the human genome and publish the data so that people could start trying to find the genes where cancer originated.

Heininger: Did he care about that?

Rollins: Oh, yes. We did finally get NIH to agree that they would do what they regarded as grunt science, just mapping and mapping and publishing.

Heininger: Critically important, though.

Rollins: Incredibly important, but they didn't like doing grunt work.

Heininger: They've gotten a lot of good PR [public relations] for it, though.

Rollins: Yes, but they had to be forced to do it. I remember the meeting with the head of NIH and him explaining that this was grunt work, and the House guy who was with me on this explaining that all that other lovely work that you get to do depends on getting this grunt work done. (We were implicitly threatening his other lovely work.) And he came right around, and

then they started mapping. It was way more expensive back then. We were going to have to provide him the funds to do it, and then the price would drop every six months on what it took to map a chromosome.

Back then, the Japanese had a huge head start because they had done more work in film gel technologies, which it turned out were absolute key to doing this kind of thing. So they were doing for ten bucks what cost us twenty, and we needed to catch up and map the genome and share the results with everybody. We didn't want it done privately. We wanted every researcher in the world to have access to this stuff, so we could move the ball forward on cancer research and any genetically originated disease.

Heininger: This is also a change of procedure for NIH, making things publicly available.

Rollins: Yes. That was another issue. I had a modest portfolio to work on. It was my belief, and I had some support from physicians I had talked to, researchers I had talked to, that research just wasn't shared. People would come up with breakthroughs and then they would hold onto it for a long time, trying to make sure that the patent or the Nobel Prize was clearly lined up for them. You share early, and some other guy hitches to that wagon. Kennedy had been supporting the war on cancer since the early '70s. So now we're in the mid-'80s and cancer was still doing just fine and we didn't seem to be making a lot of progress. I believe that the intellectual property rules were probably getting in the way, that we needed people to share stuff much earlier on, so as to speed the rate of evolution in thought.

I was trying to create a new species of intellectual property, where we would have six major conferences a year, and that any results shared at any of those conferences would enjoy an intermediate patent type of protection. It wouldn't be a full-blown patent. You don't own it for 17 years, you have to move the research to completion, but that there would be an intermediate patent pending stage for results of those sort. I ended up not spending a ton of time on it, but as I mentioned to you earlier, I was thrilled when Bill Gates did his HIV project and said one of the conditions of taking the money is you publish everything instantly. There is no hoarding of information.

Heininger: That's what an 800-pound gorilla can do.

Rollins: That's right, or \$800-billion gorilla. Kennedy was such a pragmatist. If technology could help, we'd do technology; if a market could help, we'd do a market; if a regulation was the way to go, we'd do a regulation. The key thing was producing results for the people we were looking out for, and those tended to be people who otherwise weren't getting a full and fair shake, people who were working a lot and not getting paid for it. Minimum wage looked to be the right answer there. Health care, at the time, it looked like requiring the employers to provide the insurance would skin the cat. That would be the better way to go. I'm still not convinced that there's a good rebuttal to that argument.

There is the dream of a single-payer system, where all of us will get all of our health insurance from the federal government. The politics of that are playing out right now. I'm not sure I want the people who deliver my mail to do my heart bypass surgeries. I believe that if business is required to do this, they will do a much more effective job of cost control than the government

ever will, and it is both. You have to do coverage and you have to do cost control, and one of the costs you have to control is just the price-gouging capabilities of the insurance companies, which is why I wanted to create a breach in the antitrust laws and allow employers to band together in buying their health insurance. I think that will get costs down, just as the insurance companies won't have silly, truly silly actuarial arguments about why they get to charge some people much more than others.

And two is then have businesses buy it. If businesses are buying it, they will find ways to get the costs down. This is a major object of attention at every business in America, more so now than 15 years ago, because the damn insurance is so much more expensive. People will find ways to control it. Direct agreements with hospitals, you name it. There are all kinds of things you can do, and there are examples of businesses that have done extremely well at it. Federal Express, bidding out to the hospitals in the Memphis area, where they're going to spend their health care dollar every year, and those five hospitals care deeply about the level of service and the cost that they're going to provide to FedEx's employees. There are ways to get this done.

I have no faith that the \$2 trillion that the health companies say they're going to save over the next ten years will ever turn into anything. Voluntary constraints indeed.

Heininger: Well, we still have a bunch of things left to go over. We have minimum wage, labor, more on health care, mine safety, plant closings, employee polygraph protection, developmental disabilities assistance and bill of rights, leading to ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act], Family and Medical Leave, civil rights restoration and nomination, etc. that's a lot, so I think we should quit for today.

Rollins: I agree; let's do it Thursday.