INTERVIEW WITH JOAN N. BAGGETT

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Riley: This is the Joan Baggett interview as a part of the Clinton Presidential History Project. I really appreciate your coming down and giving us your time to do this. We think this is an important enterprise and we couldn’t do it without the support of the people who served in the Administration. So it’s good of you. I know you’ve got a lot of things to do and you’ve got a family to look after; it’s just very important for us that you volunteered the time and you should know that we’re grateful for it.

Baggett: You’re very welcome.

Riley: There are a couple of administrative chores that we typically do at the beginning of an interview. The first thing is to reiterate for the record that the proceedings are conducted under a veil of confidentiality, that nobody in the room here is free to report outside these doors what transpires in here. We want you to feel comfortable here, speaking candidly to history. Your audience is not just the few people seated around the table here but, more importantly, it is the scholars and students of our time who will come back to this 20, 30, 50, 100 years from now to get a better understanding of the unique time of the Clinton Presidency.

They’ll be looking for accurate, factual, candid information, and we hope that we can provide that through here. So everybody who participates has been involved in multiple interviews and understands the constraints on reporting anything out. You’ll be given a copy of the transcript. You’ll have an opportunity to review that and to make any corrections or stipulations that you wish to there, again as a way of encouraging you to speak candidly here in the room.

The second thing is an aid to the transcriber, and that is to get a voice record. This is going to be really easy for her on my end because I’m the only male voice in the room this time, but there are a couple of other people here, too. So please say who you are and a couple of words just so the transcriber will know.

I’m Russell Riley, an Associate Professor here at the Miller Center, and I’ve been heading up the Clinton Presidential History Project.
Baggett: Joan Baggett, former Assistant to the President for Political Affairs for President Clinton.

Tenpas: Katie Dunn Tenpas, Visiting Fellow at the Weidenbaum Center at Washington University in St. Louis.

Abraham: I’m Jill Abraham, a researcher here at the Miller Center.

Riley: All right. I told you a few minutes before we began that we’d like to hear a little bit about your own biography. You were born and raised in rural Alabama, right?

Baggett: That’s right. My family had been there—I’m the youngest of ten children, so quite a history on rural south Alabama that would make southern Illinois, Katie, look like a booming metropolis. I grew up on a farm and went to a very small school. I graduated from the University of Alabama in 1974.

Riley: Were you involved in student politics at Alabama?

Baggett: Somewhat. I had the southern experience and was active in sorority, was president of my sorority, was editor of the yearbook at Alabama. I worked on various student campaigns. During the summer between my junior and senior years at college, I actually got an internship for Senator Jim Allen from Alabama, and ended up working for his press secretary as an assistant. That was the summer of 1973, so Watergate was hot and heavy. They were having the hearings. This was before C-SPAN [National Cable Satellite Corporation], so back then, when we would go run our errands for the afternoon to buy Cokes for everybody in the office, all the interns would make sure we got in line, got into the hearing for a little bit, so we could call our friends and say, “Watch the news tonight because you’ll probably see us in the audience.” That was our claim to fame for that summer.

Then I went back and did my senior year at Alabama. I had the Washington bug and was invited back to work for the Senator the following summer, and did the same thing. I was actually there to watch when President [Richard] Nixon resigned, watched the helicopter take him away from Washington. It was certainly a historic time to be in Washington, DC.

Riley: Was your family political?

Baggett: I never considered them political because my father—he was like the election official for our area, he was responsible for the ballot box and all. But everyone voted. It was never the GOTV [Get-Out-The-Vote] stuff that I later learned was so important. I think they voted because they knew there was something at stake. In our part of the country it was crop subsidies, issues like that.

The time I grew up, even though it was the ’70s, was also integration, and obviously civil rights was a hot topic. I hate to say it, but my family was very bigoted and I remember all their comments about the people during the Selma and Montgomery marches. I remember when Viola Liuzzo was killed, and I remember the comments about the “white trash” from up North coming...
and marching. So later, when I would meet my friends in the trade union movement, Tom Donahue and Rachelle Horowitz, who marched from Selma to Montgomery, I said, “You know, it’s just so great to meet some of the white trash who were involved in the civil rights movement.” [laughter]

I really don’t know how I became as liberal as I ended up being, but it wasn’t hard to think about politics. I just never thought of it—it would never have occurred to me to study political science.

Riley: What did you study in college?

Baggett: Child development, which I always credited with my success in working with elected officials. [laughter] My child psychology courses were far more helpful than, I think, political science or law school, which I didn’t attend either, would have been.

Riley: You had nine siblings. Did any of those, any of your brothers or sisters—

Baggett: No one else is in politics, not even remotely. I also hate to admit that most of them have now ended up being Republicans. They’re all over the Southeast, but they pretty much reflect how the South has gone, unfortunately.

Riley: Just in the interest of full disclosure I’m also from Alabama and my dad grew up in a town that can’t be more than 60-70 miles from where you grew up, so I know the area pretty well. So none of your siblings had the same bug?

Baggett: No.

Riley: So you went to Washington and you were there—

Baggett: Went to Washington, and spent two summers. After the second summer, which is after I had finished up with the Senator’s office, they actually offered me a full-time position there. At that point I realized I was out of college, I didn’t really have to start doing a real job yet, and decided I would go to Colorado and be a ski bum. The fact that I didn’t know how to ski, had never really walked in snow, never occurred to me that this could be a problem.

Riley: It just sounded romantic.

Baggett: It sounded very romantic and irresponsible, and I was just such a responsible person that it seemed like the thing to do. As people pointed out to me later, the ’74 recession was probably not the right time to go and take off on something new, but I did go, I guess it was September of ’74. I moved to Colorado. I had a friend in Vail but she was off backpacking around Europe at the time, so I ended up living in Denver and working at the Denver Hilton Hotel as a secretary until I decided after a few months this was—I did go and learn to ski, but I really missed Washington.

I actually volunteered on Gary Hart’s Senate campaign and did some phone banking and stuff, but I realized then that if you’re outside of Washington, D.C., people don’t eat, sleep, and think
politics 24 hours a day, and I loved the whole atmosphere of Washington, D.C. As one of my nieces said to me later when she came to visit me in Washington and we went out to dinner, she said, “People just sitting around talking talk about issues here.” And it’s true. It never occurred to me that you don’t talk about things like that in most of the rest of the country. The front pages of the newspapers don’t look the same as they do in Washington and on the New York Times.

When I finished up at Alabama, I did get my major in child development, but my minor was in journalism, which I got interested in during the last couple of years.

**Riley:** [Bob] Woodward and [Carl] Bernstein?

**Baggett:** It kind of all coincided, but I think it sort of teemed up with my interest in issues and the fact you could write about this, though I didn’t have any particular interest in working for a newspaper. So I spent the rest of my time, until the following summer, thinking about getting back to Washington. When I did that, I ended up—the press secretary I had worked with for Senator Allen introduced me to a public relations person who worked with the International Union of Bricklayers. They needed an editor for their magazine.

Now in south Alabama, I vaguely thought unions killed people, I had no idea. But they were offering a salary of $10,000, which sounded good to me at the time. So I said, “Sure, I’ll do that.” So I went to work for the bricklayers in Washington. After a few years of working on their publication, 1980, actually ’79 came around and they endorsed Ted Kennedy for President.

**Riley:** Over a sitting Democratic President.

**Baggett:** Over President [Jimmy] Carter. I didn’t have any particular connection to Kennedy but they needed somebody for the union to go on the road and help organize for labor in the key states, so I headed off to Iowa and learned about the caucus system. As my mother in south Alabama had said to me, “What are those people like out there?” Iowa sounded so exotic if you’re in south Alabama. I said, “You know, they’re pretty much like people in south Alabama except they go to caucuses instead of going to cast their vote at the ballot box.” So that’s how I got into Presidential politics.

Since he stayed in the entire primary season, I went from state to state. Their campaign was strapped enough, and we worked pretty closely directly with the campaign to the extent we legally could. I ended up in the June primaries in California, in northern California. Ron Brown was running the state of California and that was how I first got to know Ron. After that I became the lobbyist and political director for the union.

**Riley:** I want to interrupt. When we were talking before you said that you’d actually met Kennedy in ’80, when you were working. Do you have any specific recollections of your encounters with Kennedy at that point? You were in a senior-enough position where you would have seen him, or he was just level enough in the organization so that—

**Baggett:** I was going to say, once he wasn’t doing so well in the primaries, you didn’t have to be so senior. I guess he would probably describe me as one of the band of loyalists. From organized
labor there were particularly three or four of us who went from state to state. I’ll say two things: one, after it was all over and he went back to the Senate, it probably disturbed those of us who were with him early, from unions that didn’t back him, that stayed with President Carter, that he treated them just as well. I mean, he certainly represented them well in the Senate and all. But I will say that he always had an extra special place for those who were with him early and stuck with him. So we just always had a friendly relationship.

He would—let’s see, it’s me along with Rachelle Horowitz from the American Federation of Teachers, Liz Smith, who at the time was with the Clothing and Textile Workers Union, and Loretta Bowen from Communications Workers. Any time he had an initiative that he wanted to push, we would always help him do it and be his labor eyes and ears, which was sort of ironic since we were women doing it from organized labor.

As I was mentioning to you earlier, one of the things that I had heard about him before the campaign was that he was propped up by a staff, he was a lightweight compared to his brothers. I just never found that to be the case. While he certainly always had strong staff support, he really drove that train and had incredible depth on so many issues that, for the time that he spent in the Senate, would make sense. So many elected officials in Washington, probably outside Washington, too, but when they see you they’re really looking past you to the next person, and if there’s somebody more important, what can they do for you. Senator Kennedy was never like that, and is still not like that. He always remembers people who had worked for him through the years, and I think has very loyal supporters because of that.

Riley: You worked with Ron Brown in California. Was there anything in particular that you remember from that experience?

Baggett: Not strong things. Ron certainly wasn’t a micromanager, and he pretty much worked out of Los Angeles. We were in the San Francisco office. San Francisco was almost like a reward at the end of the campaign for having suffered through some of the other places we had been. You didn’t have to worry about gun control in San Francisco. There were just all sorts of things, but it’s such a liberal city, it was like a dream job to have. It was my first introduction to gay politics. Jim Foster headed up the campaign there, and he has since died from AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] but was a great individual.

The other person that was close to Kennedy who worked from Washington with me there was Carol Geiger, who actually had worked for Senator Kennedy as Patrick’s [Kennedy] nanny, and she had left that and went on the campaign. So we worked with Jim there and, like I said, just had a great experience. Nancy Pelosi, I remember her from that experience, and the [John and Phillip] Burtons. It’s a great place to do Democratic politics.

Riley: So when you come out of California, you’re still with the union?

Baggett: Still with the union.

Riley: Basically doing the same job?
Baggett: We did the ’80 convention in New York City and we were fighting right to the end. Bob Shrum’s speech is still framed in my kids’ playroom at home. So after that we campaigned for Carter. It wasn’t very striking after that. I think you’ll find, for most of the people who worked on the Kennedy ’80 campaign, that was a defining moment in a lot of people’s lives, just from having been in the trenches. Even though you lost the battle, you really felt like there was a victory there, just by having fought and been together with those people. So for all the issues that I had with some of them later, it never has destroyed the bond that I felt with people from the ’80 experience.

After that I went back to the union, worked as their political and legislative director, went through—and that was during a period of time, we might talk about this later, but that’s when, in ’81, Chuck Manatt became chairman of the Democratic National Committee and convinced organized labor that they should come back into the process and begin to work with the Democratic Committee again. The President of the Bricklayers Union that I worked for, [John] Jack Joyce, became co-chair of what they referred to as the Labor Council, and I staffed that. So that was when I began to get active in Democratic National Committee politics.

Riley: Let me interrupt. The inference from what you just said is that there was a departure at some point. Can I assume that occurred during the Carter years?

Baggett: I think it actually occurred before that. I think it occurred, and I’m not a labor political historian, but I think it went back—Al Barkan had been chairman of their political committee, COPE [Committee on Political Education] it’s called, for quite a number of years. I think it occurred over the [George] McGovern–Nixon battle, and the split with some of the liberals and organized labor was uncomfortable with some of the antiwar stuff and McGovern policies. When you talk with people who have been active in the Democratic Party for a long time, and they’ll talk about the McGovern period and the rules fight at the ’68 convention and all, it’s almost like talking to people about northern Ireland. I feel like I had to go back to the beginning. Suffice to say, they split over some of the issues around the McGovern battles. It may have gone back earlier than that, and some of it may relate back to some of the civil rights stuff. But they definitely had not been active. While a number of the unions obviously backed Carter actively, I don’t think there was anything about the Carter Presidency that made them feel closer to the party.

As some of the writings have indicated, when you have the White House it’s not really a time people get closer to the Democratic National Committee or even the Republican National Committee. They know the power is in the White House then, and their allegiance shifts more over to that. The national committees—I think the activity there is really more when you’re out of power than when you’re in power.

Riley: So is it safe to say that when Manatt is doing this that he’s finding some success because of what [Ronald] Reagan is perceived to be doing in the White House?

Baggett: Yes. I think a lot of people were really shocked by the Reagan election. It’s like, oh, my gosh; this has really happened now. It didn’t take Reagan long to start exhibiting anti-union behavior. Like whoa, this really is going to be as bad as we said it was going to be. So there was
fertile ground for Manatt to go out, and he’s from California. Yet a number of union leaders or unions themselves had strong membership bases in California that were familiar with Manatt and said, “This is a pro-labor guy, you don’t need to worry about him. You can trust him, he’s going to work with us.” I think Peter Kelly from Connecticut was the treasurer or something, so he was doing the fund-raising side, and a number of the unions knew him as well.

People felt comfortable enough to go back into it and say, “Let’s make this party what we want it to be.” So that got unions reenergized and back into it. Then you’re leading up to ’84 and that’s when they start to talk about, and then ultimately endorsed, [Walter] Mondale, and did a union-wide endorsement, or AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]–wide endorsement of Mondale, which also didn’t work. So we lived through that experience.

Then Paul Kirk becomes chairman of the party. Again, unions felt comfortable with Paul because he had worked for Senator Kennedy and they thought, okay, Paul Kirk, even though this hasn’t worked out well to be backing Mondale, that’s because the Mondale people came in and took over and ignored the DNC [Democratic National Committee].

Paul Kirk comes in with a platform and says, “I’m going to reenergize state parties and we’ll build the party apparatus so we won’t have this rout again like we did with Mondale.” So he becomes chair, and unions continue to be active with the Democratic National Committee. Then you get [Michael] Dukakis and the Dukakis people take over. Now that time, actually every time, there was a labor—I happened to be a labor liaison and went onto the Dukakis campaign for labor. But each time, there’s always been a labor liaison within. But Dukakis loses miserably. So then we’re now at the point where labor is still not blaming the DNC per se, but I think they were still waiting for someone to come up with the magic formula, and Ron comes along, Ron Brown, and labor was split, not dramatically, or emotionally split really. But people had different horses in the race—

Riley: For the chair.

**Baggett:** For the chair. But a number of the politically active unions were with Ron. I think the AFL-CIO ultimately voted to support his bid for chairman. When he was elected, he was actually there for about a year before they came to me and said, “We need you.” Actually, they didn’t recruit me to do the labor piece of it, they recruited me to be director of something we hadn’t had before, which was congressional relations. At the time I said, “Quite honestly, Ron, this is kind of silly. There’s already a congressional campaign committee, and there’s a Senate campaign committee, and you’re going to have a director of congressional relations for the House and Senate.”

But I think he looked at it, because of his background from having worked on the Senate and having been a lobbyist with Patton, Boggs & Blow that we weren’t connecting with some of our key constituencies. I mean, the two parts of government we did control, the House and the Senate, we’d been successful in keeping that, but we had never had a connection between the Democratic National Committee and the leadership, the Democratic leadership in the House and
the Senate, and he wanted to establish that. He also wanted to beef up some of the connections with constituency organizations. So I came on in that role. We began having meetings.

Riley: Let me interrupt. Which constituency organizations are you talking about?

Baggett: It really varied by who you had on the staff that had good relations with various groups. And to a large extent, that was the territory covered by the vice chairs. Lynn Cutler for example, oversaw the women’s community. I’m trying to remember the other. Polly Baca would be looking to the Hispanic community. It really varied.

Riley: It wasn’t union groups, it was other Democratic constituencies.

Baggett: It wasn’t. So I said, “Look, I’ll do the labor piece of it.” My rationale was, which was the same when I went to the White House, I’m going to have to deal with it and answer for it anyway, so I’d rather be in charge of it and have some control than to have to constantly be trouble-shooting and making up for someone else’s mistake. I also figured that I could have more leeway to maneuver because I came out of organized labor, that they would trust me at least a little bit more to do their bidding.

Quite honestly, I think some in organized labor had a problem with that, and John Perkins, who was chairman of the political committee at the time, COPE, was Al Barkan’s successor, and he always viewed Presidential campaigns and the Democratic National Committee almost as the enemy. It was a very antagonistic relationship. He came to the table thinking you were going to force them to do what they needed to do for labor, which was ridiculous. Most of us who were political directors didn’t work that way. It was much more of a collegial relationship because they needed your help and you needed them to win. There was nothing that needed to be antagonistic about it.

Lane Kirkland, as president of the AFL-CIO, and Tom Donahue, were very supportive of me, as they were of Ron and later of Clinton. But I think the relationships along the way were helped by Kirkland and Donahue saying, “Joan is our person and we have an ally here and she’s going to represent our interests,” and backing that up. So that was very important.

I worked on that for—later I can go into how we organized with the Congress—but essentially I worked on that with Ron and with Paul Tully. Then about, I guess the beginning of ’90—I’m going to get the times wrong here.

Riley: That’s okay, that’s checkable.

Baggett: After a few months, I did the congressional relations thing, and then Ron named Alexis Herman, who was Chief of Staff, to head up the convention in New York City in ’92. They weren’t advertising that they were looking for a Chief of Staff, but what they had done, they had brought in an organizational consultant to do a debrief with all of us. Ron was frustrated by—apparently what had happened initially, this was before I was there, but Ron tried to run everything. He was the front person, he had to go out and do the sales pitch for the Democratic
Party, but he was also trying to manage the office. Quite honestly, Ron is like a lot of politicians, he likes to say yes to everything, and so it just wasn’t working very well.

So they did this debrief with everyone, and Ron and Alexis came to me and said, “We want you to be Chief of Staff. No more of this everybody going to Ron, everyone will report through you.” I said, “I’m honored, but don’t tell me that Paul Tully is going to—I am not going to tell Paul Tully he’s going to go through me to talk to Ron Brown.” They said, “Yes, even Paul has to go through you.” I said, “I’m not going to do it. I am not going to tell Paul that.” They said, “No, you have to do that.” So we figured out a way to talk to the staff, including Paul, and said, “Look, the tradeoff on this is you can always appeal everything to Ron. You’re obviously going to be talking to Ron 90 times a day on issues, but when you want to get approval on something, you have to go through me.”

Now, their frustration—and having been on the staff side of it, I shared it—was that Alexis was great, but it was hard to get her to deal with stuff. She was more of a crisis manager. So we figured out a system and said, “You put in a request and I’ll guarantee you a response within 24 hours. It may be that I have to get some more information, but you’re going to know exactly where it is and I will be your advocate to Ron and what needs to happen, and I’ll facilitate things.” So that’s what we did and it worked great. Even Paul, I could still see a smirk, but he pretty much did it and we all looked the other way when we needed for him to go directly to Ron. For the most part, Paul Tully and a lot of the other people who worked there were so—Ron had such a dedicated group of people that they were really committed to the mission and thought, probably as most staffers think, during their four years or whatever at the Democratic National Committee, they thought this was their one great opportunity to turn it around. People really believed that and they came to work every day with that attitude. So if you could facilitate and make things happen, that helped. So we did that. I’ll talk a little bit more later about how we organized towards the ’92 convention and what I think was different about what we did and what had been done in the past.

That took us to the general election and we were successful. Rahm Emanuel, who had come on board, shifted over from the campaign the summer of ’92 to work out of the DNC. I was very close with him and we worked well together. At the end, I had planned to go into—I omitted in my biography here the fact that in ’91 I got married. Everything sort of happened at the same time. I guess I had been at the DNC for a year, and I got married. In the fall of ’91 I had my first child, Shelby. In fact, I remember, it was the Clinton—everyone was in Los Angeles, everyone from the DNC for, I think it was the state chairs meeting, and Clinton was making a speech. It was prior to his announcement, but everybody knew he was about to announce and how it was received—it was just a really good opportunity. So while I was in labor I was listening to all this, talking to people on the phone. My doctor came up to me after the baby was born and said, “You know, I’ve been thinking about this, I have some ideas on message on things they could do.”

Riley: The doctor?

Baggett: Yes. In fact, what was really interesting was the difference in how doctors treated me when I was pregnant and had my child, and I was at the Democratic National Committee, and the second child was born when I was at the White House. Now, at that point we were in the middle
of the health care debate. So the doctors who had been very brusque about things before, just couldn’t be nice enough. I had to literally schedule extra time for appointments because they’d have to tell me everything they were thinking on whatever initiative was being debated at that time. [laughter] So it was a different experience.

Anyway, after the election in ’92 I had planned to start looking for a job in the private sector.

Riley: Can I interrupt you because there are a lot of things—I don’t know whether, you said you were going to come back to—

Baggett: I don’t know how you want to talk about the Democratic National Committee, the whole piece of it.

Riley: That’s a good question because this is something that you’re dealing with once you go in also, but I guess I tend to be kind of linear in my thinking and think more chronologically. We don’t have to stay wedded to that if you—

Baggett: No, however you would like to do it.

Riley: There’s one question that I’d like to throw out for you that’s an important part of the chronology, and that is, at the time that you’re working for both the union and the Democratic National Committee, there’s a splinter group, the DLC [Democratic Leadership Council], that pops up. As an outsider, that would appear to be, if not threatening, at least not a terribly sympathetic development for people who are in your wing of the party.

Baggett: The interesting thing on the DLC is it—I tried to go back and remember how I felt at the time because so much time has passed now and they’re a different group, it’s a different time. When I was at the union people thought, oh who is this DLC group? It’s a bunch of conservatives. So it wasn’t viewed favorably. A few, very few, like three or four of the union political directors, might go to one of their meetings occasionally. But I think the unions, for the most part, treated it like that’s just another group of conservatives getting together. But they felt like it wasn’t too threatening because of people like Dick Gephardt and other pro-labor elected officials who were part of it.

Riley: Okay.

Baggett: So I think that’s what kept unions from doing any kind of all-out assault and trying to discourage members. In retrospect, I think it’s striking that labor never tried to—that I’m aware of, so it couldn’t have been a very big-deal effort—never tried to discourage elected officials from DLC activity, which may be that labor underestimated their staying power and didn’t want to give them more credibility by fighting them. But there was never a strong anti-DLC feeling. I mean they certainly didn’t feel favorably towards them, but they didn’t try to actively fight it.

At the DNC when I was there, Ron and the staff there viewed the DLC more as a nuisance. And my own personal opinion is that the attraction of the DLC was at the DNC because we’re the governing body. It is true that when you’re at meetings and stuff, all the emphasis is always
around rules and who cares. Even when you get to the platform, the one time you’re talking about issues, you’re really trying to discourage people from talking about what they really think about the issues because you’re trying to get this vanilla document that won’t kill your candidate in the general election. So you’re really tamping down discussions.

At the DLC, they didn’t have any rules. I mean, all they were about was discussing ideas. And they didn’t have any mechanism to get them enacted. So it was just like, let’s go talk about great ideas. So who wouldn’t like that? I think there was, to their credit, there was a need out there to do that. Because when you’ve been out of power for as long as Democrats were out of power, certainly at the White House level, it just doesn’t seem like you have those opportunities to think the big thoughts and debate the big ideas.

Riley: Was there any kind of counterpart organization that would have been doing more liberal ideas at the time? I don’t recall it and I don’t know whether the unions themselves—

Baggett: Not really. They’ve started trying to now, but the closest we even got to a think-tank type of organization would have been the Center for National Policy that Madeleine Albright headed. It’s still there, but she headed it up for a while. But that was very micro and it didn’t try to attract large groups of people. It was more about the lecture of the quarter or something, pursuing some very minimal projects. Not that I’m aware of.

Tenpas: Can you talk a little bit about the changing role of the DNC as the nomination process proceeds, and once Clinton clearly won, how the campaign then works with the DNC? I know many times they send people over to the DNC. What does that mean and how did it work?

Baggett: Here’s what used to happen, or what would have been typical before ’92. The DNC had responsibility for setting the rules and administering the primary calendar, certifying delegates, very rudimentary stuff so the party could function. Then once the candidate was selected, they pretty much turned over everything to the candidate’s organization. That is what had been typical. That’s what labor, and I think a lot of contributors, had gotten so frustrated by prior to ’92: you give money and resources for two or three years to build up this war chest and resources in state parties to enable a candidate to be elected, but then the candidate’s organization comes in and blows you off because they’ve got their own ideas how things should be run. They’ve got their own operatives. You don’t necessarily have connections any more.

So what Ron and the DNC under him did was say, as Paul Tully described it for the candidates, “We’re going to be your tour guide to the general election, so you all have to fight it out. We can’t take a position in the primaries. We’ll set the rules, we’ll make it as favorable as possible to electing a Democrat, but we’re going to develop real tools that will help you think about the general election.” So we worked with a lot of the pollsters, but I remember Mark Mellman in particular and Peter Hart and Stan Greenberg. We would do surveys periodically, from the time Ron became chairman, but particularly from ’91 on, that would give indications of what people were thinking toward the Democrats. So we were in control of the information. We could manipulate it by the red and the blue states as to who was thinking what where, where resources should be.
We worked very closely with Mark Gersh at NCEC [National Committee for an Effective Congress] and that gave us tools that, when we organized these meetings with the congressional leadership, we had advice to give them. We had something real to bring to the table. See, in the past, DNC is just making up rules. Why would you want to work with them? No incentive. So we would keep the candidate’s organizations briefed and we would keep the congressional leadership and their staff briefed on what we’re finding out. We had our message people working with the congressional leadership message machines. So we literally, right up until—even through the primaries—we worked out a plan for integrating with the Presidential campaign. It obviously becomes clear, about springtime, who that’s going to be.

We brought in Mike Berman, who in past campaigns had always been the person at the DNC that the campaign would put in to oversee how the money got spent, to make sure that the national committee was spending money the way the campaign wanted the money spent. We had Carol Darr, who was our counsel at the time, so she was the expert on campaign finance and what you were allowed to do once you had the general election. At that time, I believe in ’92, it was, I want to say $56 million that you get, and there was no talk then of people going outside the finance limit. That was it.

We had just come into the phase where you started having to have hard dollars to spend on the election, and you couldn’t spend your soft dollars without an overwhelming match of hard dollars. And we were in a real bind on having enough money to do what needed to be done. But we also recognized that once the campaign came in, they were going to be bound by this $56 million. When you’re out there running for President, nobody thinks about that. They just think, “I’ve got to get the nomination, got to get the nomination. Then I’ll just be out there and be able to run the campaign I need to run.” They don’t understand what constraints will be placed on them.

So we started doing a series of briefings for the campaign on this. We worked out the types of typical budgets you’d have to think about. What could the DNC cover? What did the campaign have to cover? What did you need to think about on your staffing? So it was a real service, I think, to the Clinton campaign.

One of the briefings I remember having at the Democratic National Committee in the spring, Eli Segal was coming in and it was one of Clinton’s fund-raisers, donor fund-raiser, from, I think he was still with Goldman, Sachs at the time. They said, “We’d like for him to sit in with us because he’s helping us with a lot of our things.” And we said, “Fine.” So he goes through this. We were describing the problems that the DNC was having and would have in terms of funding, and the hard dollar-soft money split. So he suggested that we, as the Democratic National Committee, declare bankruptcy and then we would be allowed to pay off the debts with the soft money. [laughter]

First I thought it was a joke and then I realized it wasn’t, and I said, “You know, if you’re trying to go in and say we’re going to be fiscally responsible as Democrats, having the DNC declare bankruptcy might not be the way to go.” So he said, “I think it’s something you should consider.” I still see that individual and think, that’s the one who wanted to declare bankruptcy.
Sometimes financial expertise and political expertise don’t match up. That was what we worked out as a tool to help in the integration.

Typically, the first people who come over are the finance people, and that’s when I met Rahm Emanuel. He came over with some of his staff and we had to integrate them with our finance staff and they didn’t necessarily get along very well. So we had to work that out. I had known Rahm briefly when he was at the DCCC [Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee] just because I had been at the union and he covered the Midwest. He would call and bug us for money. I think part of the bond I developed with Rahm was the role I had to play in mediating the marrying of the DNC and the campaign, particularly the finances.

Tenpas: What were the sources of antipathy between the two groups? You’d think that they’d want to cooperate and—

Baggett: You would think that. I think just basically, even without the personalities on this, campaigns come in thinking they know everything because they got the nomination. You guys are stupid, you’ve been at the DNC, what do you know, we’re the ones they voted for, not you. And then the DNC feels like, you guys are quite honestly just the flavor of the month. You happened to make it here but you didn’t get anyplace else. We’ve been here working for three years. You just ran around; they don’t even know much about you yet; you’ve still got to get through a general election campaign that we know something about. So that’s the sort of clash that you get.

Tenpas: Did it consume a lot of your time, trying to handle this?

Baggett: Oh yes, yes. To the silly things like, I guess real estate is never silly, but the Democratic National Committee doesn’t have a lot of physical space, and figuring out where you’re going to put people, because the old people who have been there don’t want to give up their space, yet the new people are, you’ve got to acknowledge, they are VIPs [very important persons] so you can’t “dis” them. I moved everybody. I changed the whole layout of the office, just so people wouldn’t feel like they took too much of my space. So I played fruit basket turnover. We tried to work it out in terms of division of responsibility so there wasn’t too much crossover, but again, it’s a pretty small physical space.

On the finance side, very often you have the same people, but there are also going to be people who have given a lot of money to the campaign who come in with them, that weren’t necessarily your big givers all along. For the most part, your big givers are theirs too, but not always, so you have competing donor interest.

Tenpas: What other types of staff came over, after the finance people integrated? What was the next wave of integration from campaign people to DNC?

Baggett: I’m not sure I’ll remember the order correctly, it’s been so long. We also had the, not necessarily the unusual, but the circumstance where the headquarters ended up being in Little Rock and we were in Washington. I’m not sure ’92 was representative of what [John] Kerry’s was this time. I don’t know what it was, but we pretty much ended up with everybody who
whatever reason couldn’t leave Washington. One of the operations we had in Washington, which obviously made sense to have it there, was congressional relations. Susan Brophy headed that up. So everyone that worked with her was there. Melanne Verveer was there, Peggy Richardson, Peter Scher. I think they all worked with Susan in congressional relations.

Riley: Clarify for me, congressional relations. This is a congressional relations wing of the Presidential campaign?

Baggett: This was the campaign, yes.

Riley: So there’s a formal structure set up to work with members of Congress?

Baggett: I don’t know if it went back to when—I have a feeling that it may have gotten started with the campaign. Remember, some of his primary opposition were sitting Congressmen and Senators.

Riley: Right.

Baggett: So, since he was a Governor, I think there was the need to have more endorsements from elected officials from inside Washington. There was also the need to get their endorsements because they had a vote as “super delegates” to the Convention. Then the need, again, because the campaign wasn’t in Washington, to keep them feeling in the loop because they served as a lot of the surrogate speakers for the campaign. In fact, again, I don’t remember from the campaign organization if that shifted to serve more of a surrogate role, or it continued to be more of keeping Congress in the loop role.

Susan and I were good friends. In fact, I gave her her first job in Washington, at the union. But she had been not only in the Dukakis campaign, she had worked with Congressman [Byron] Dorgan and then later as Senator as his AA [administrative assistant]. So she was from Capitol Hill and familiar with that. Then Mickey Kantor also was part of overseeing that. Now, he didn’t operate out of the DNC, he pretty much flew around everywhere. But I think he operated out of Little Rock.

Tenpas: Any other entities besides congressional relations and finance?

Baggett: After the—I’m trying to remember if this came before, I think this came after the convention. A number of the political operatives, I don’t know what their official titles were, but Debbie Wilhite, who was helping to oversee the coordinated campaigns, operated out of the DNC.

Tenpas: What are the coordinated campaigns?

Baggett: The coordinated campaigns was a concept—well, it might have gotten started before Ron came in; he and Paul Tully really ran with it—where rather than a Senator, a House member, a Governor, all doing their own polling and flyers, to the extent that you could pool resources for joint activities. They called that the coordinated campaign.
Riley: Within a given state.

Baggett: Within a given state, and you could raise money for that separately. So it took some of the spending burden off of the individual campaigns.

Riley: And there’s a staffer in each state who reports to—

Baggett: And they sort of ran it as a—it would have been the function that a state party would have served before, except it was much more race-driven than the state party. The state party was more “get out the vote for everybody,” thus, the statewide candidates typically, who were listed, would put the money in to fund this. You were allowed to have a portion of that be soft money if there were state candidates involved, so it relieved some of the federal money requirements, hard dollar requirements. I know it was affected by campaign finance, but I don’t know how much.

Tenpas: Sort of in retrospect, Ron Brown’s efforts and Paul Tully’s ideas about providing services to the campaign, like polling and the different things that they did, was that deemed to be effective so that subsequent DNC officials followed that same—

Baggett: It’s hard to say. I think it was effective in that year, at that time, because we were into having the White House for the next eight years. I didn’t keep up with it this time so I don’t know what [Terry] McAuliffe and they did leading up to this past election.

Riley: Let me build on this because I want to dial back and ask you more generally if you could give us a kind of portrait of Ron Brown as the party leader, what you saw that he did well, what his successes were there, because we can’t talk with him—

Baggett: He was the right person at the right time, I think. He was sort of the Nixon going to China. Ron could go, and did go, to the traditional constituencies of the Democratic Party, organized labor, African-American, Hispanic Americans, women’s groups. He used to have this phrase he used called, “feel-good politics” and he’d say, “It made us feel good, we really showed them. They’re not going to be able to push us around. They’re not going to take us for granted in this election. We’ll just sit back here, we won’t go to the polls. And boy, did that make us feel good and we just lost again. So we’ve had enough of feel-good politics, and feel-good elections, we’ve got to win some out here. Everybody’s not going to get everything they want, but we’ve got to suck it up.” He kept referring to Eyes on the Prize. He could have that conversation with these groups and they trusted him.

He also, and I think people knew this, he didn’t have any other agenda. If he said he was going to do something for you, he’d really try to do it and he’d be an honest broker and tell you what he thought he could get, whether it was in the platform or not. I remember when I was working with him and Alexis, both of whom had worked very closely with Jesse Jackson, and Ron had run Jackson’s campaign for President. So he had had all these different positions leading up to where he had been part of every problem the Democratic Party had ever had to deal with. So he had the catbird seat.
We were waiting one day in his office for Reverend Jackson to come in, and he and Alexis were saying, “What do you think Jesse wants?” The other one said, “I don’t know. What do you think he wants?” I said, “I cannot believe I’m finally in a place where somebody should know what Jesse wants and you two don’t have a clue.” [laughter] They said, “We don’t know what he wants.” He pretty much treated them the same way he did others, except he knew at the end of the day they weren’t going to screw him. He knew he probably wasn’t going to get everything he wanted, but if he needed a plane to go around and do some voter registration, needed some money for that, he was going to get it. So he didn’t have to do his public antics that he would have had there been a different chairman. Ron was just particularly good at that.

He loved people; he loved going around doing this stuff. I don’t know that Ron ever had a seat on the DNC, but he was involved with the party and with the rules for a long time. So he knew it from the inside out. He had a lot of chits out in the room. He knew how to work a room and he knew what he could call in to get things done. Probably his biggest challenge, like I said earlier, was saying no, particularly at the beginning. He was going around to every high school when people would ask him to do a speech. He’d go “Oh yes, sure, no problem.” Bill Morton, who traveled with him everywhere in the beginning, would just come back and say, “Ron’s going to do X, Y, Z.” I think I missed the worst part of it.

When I came in as Chief of Staff I said, “Look, we’re going to have a filter that requests go through, and for Ron to do anything—that’s not to say somebody else wouldn’t—but for Ron to do anything, it’s got to be about money or votes. If you can’t make a case that his appearance at an event or a speech, any activity, will result in significant money or votes, then somebody else will do it because he only has so much time and that’s the resource we have to deal with.”

He got along extremely well with the donor community and they really appreciated and enjoyed him. It was tough in the beginning. When you hear about the sums of money that are raised now, to make ten million in a year was a lot for us.

Nobody thought we had a prayer of winning in ’92 and for a long time we were wondering if we were going to have any candidates. We had the Gulf War and [George H. W.] Bush’s popularity shot up and people thought we were—Paul was sitting there with his polls and showing people how soft it was, but nobody believed him. Ron kept up the front. Al From and the DLC definitely got under his skin, talking about the DLC earlier.

Riley: How so?

Baggett: They would imply that they were equal with the DNC, which just would infuriate Ron. At the time, Clinton was the head of it. So any time Clinton, or the DLC—Ron wasn’t above taking a shot back at him. I remember one time he was quoted as saying, “As I recall, Governor Clinton promised to serve out his term, so I doubt that he would be considering running for President.” I think it would be fair to say that Ron wouldn’t have looked around and picked Bill Clinton as President. I’m not saying that he had a candidate, but I don’t think he would have considered Clinton to be the strongest one to go out there in ’92.
Riley: Do you have a sense about—you said he didn’t have a candidate. If you had to survey the landscape of the potential people, and I’ll confess that I’ve heard in other oral histories that people have said the same thing, that they said that maybe he did have another candidate. I didn’t get a name, and I’m wondering—

Baggett: The only person, and I honestly don’t have—I would share the conversations if I remembered them strongly enough. I’m not saying that this was his candidate, but the most discussions we had about a candidate, who I think would have been considered the leader at the time, was Mario Cuomo. He knew Cuomo very well from being a New Yorker and all that. So I think if you had asked Ron early on, who would be your strongest candidate, he probably would have said Cuomo.

Actually, even among our staff, you had Ginny Terzano, who was our press person. She was a huge Cuomo fan. Mark Steitz was on the more liberal side. I honestly can’t remember if he was a Cuomo fan or not, but Mike McCurry was a DLCer, just in terms of his orientation, and he thought Cuomo was way too liberal. I think Tully thought Cuomo would give a strong race. But, in fairness, I also think a number of them believed—and they thought Cuomo had serious political players around him that they could work with. I think most would have acknowledged, though, that there would have been no question, if Cuomo had run and gotten the nomination, that definitely would have been an organization that would have ignored whatever you said and would have thought they knew what was best and they would have wiped out everybody. Ron might have had some minor role.

I remember in both the Mondale and the Paul Kirk chairmanships—well, in Manatt, too—the tendency was for a nominee to come in and instantly replace the Chair of the Democratic Party with a person they trusted, which, when you think about it, is pretty amazing. You have this person who has built up the party, gotten it ready for a general election, and then essentially they get fired the day after you get the nomination. Ron really worked to make sure that didn’t happen. That’s why, with the New York convention, he trusted Alexis absolutely and he put her in charge of it and he ran that convention. There was no question about—the campaign got to have what they wanted in it, but they were going to deal with him.

I think he grew to admire and respect Clinton and his political abilities, and vice versa. They really developed a bond that they definitely didn’t have going into it.

Riley: I was struck when you were talking about the message that Ron was distributing, the “feel-good politics.” That is, in a different way, the same kind of message that Clinton was selling, right? It was that we have to be a different kind of party if we’re going to win. So there’s a sort of consonance there that maybe you wouldn’t naturally expect to see between these two people who come from different wings of the party.

Baggett: And think about it. In the beginning, Clinton couldn’t have gone for a long time to organized labor. I mean, here he was, Governor of a right-to-work state. He couldn’t go and say, “You’ve got to suck it up.” Same thing with, he couldn’t go into the African-American community. He had a different kind of message to sell, I think, in terms of empathizing with
people from different walks of life and different races, but it wasn’t like Ron being one of them and going in and making the case.

I thought about it—at Ron’s funeral, we were at the National Cathedral and it was sad, but it was so political. When we were seated there, about midway in the Cathedral, I literally heard this couple who had given a lot of money to the party come up to, I think it was Janet Howard, who was serving as an usher and who used to work for Mrs. [Pamela] Harriman, come up to her and she started to seat the couple in a perfectly respectable place and they said, “You don’t understand, we’ve given a lot of money to the party and we need to be seated with the family.” Fortunately, you’d love to say that’s an isolated case, but that was one of the reasons I got so sick of politics. You see more of that than not.

I thought—it was a perfectly lovely service, but Ron was really the only person who could have managed the politics of his own funeral [laughter] and we didn’t have Ron there to do it. I’m sure there were many stories like that repeated all over the place.

**Riley:** I’m sure. Why don’t we take a 5-minute break?

[BREAK]

**Riley:** It’s important for us to know, just for the record, that we were having a conversation about papers and recordkeeping during the break and we’ll make sure we get back to that, because the essence of what we do here is constructed around the fact that the paper record isn’t what we’d like for it to be and isn’t what it was in earlier generations.

I asked you about a portrait of Ron Brown. Let me ask you to do the same thing for Paul Tully, who was an important figure at the time and obviously we can’t talk with him either. Give us a sketch of Paul Tully, what was he doing, what was his contribution to the party?

**Baggett:** Tully was definitely the consummate politico. I will say, he’s one of the few people that I knew in politics who practiced it, and he probably, Jill, would have read all the stuff on political theory and would have an opinion about it. He studied it, he practiced it, and thought about it 24 hours a day, with a passion. Paul was one of the—I always thought one of the interesting things about Paul was that he went to Yale and was, in fact, on the football team that Doonesbury writes about.

**Riley:** Really?

**Baggett:** Yes. I met him first during the Kennedy campaign. Paul went from, I think—I won’t remember this entire story, but he talked about when Carter was President, because we used to kid Paul about what’s going to be your position, where are you going to sit in the White House? He said, “I don’t do government,” that was his line. He said, when Carter was President he went to do something for them, and he had a paper turned back that had something corrected on it, and literally President Carter had made these little notations and corrections on Paul’s memo and that
was it. I don’t think he had anything else to do with President Carter and nothing else to do with
government. You might disagree with Paul, but you didn’t correct his work, even if you were the
President of the United States.

But he felt so strongly, not only about the coordinated campaign and getting people to pool
resources wherever possible. In fact, during those initial days when we were doing the
congressional relations, he would go to talk with leaders on the Hill about the campaign finance
reform bills. Obviously, Paul was opposed to any kind of campaign finance reform, and thought
we were getting killed on the money side and we were only going to give up any advantages that
we had that Republicans could get money from, any sources and multiple sources, and that
Democrats didn’t have that advantage, and we had to be able to preserve the options that we had,
both soft money and hard money.

We were at one meeting with Senator [George] Mitchell’s staff, I don’t know if it was John
Hilley, but it was some of Senator Mitchell’s staff. In fact, it wasn’t. I forget the individual’s
name, but it was on campaign finance reform, and Paul felt that Senator Mitchell and his staff
really didn’t understand and they were not protecting the interests of the Democratic Party. Paul
was just vicious. I said to him later, “The next time you go up there, I’m going to get you one of
the Hannibal Lector face masks,” because he practically took this guy’s head off. After that he
refused to have any meetings with Paul. So we had to temper Paul when it came to congressional
relations, other than passing on poll results.

He liked Tom Foley and he liked George Mitchell and all the leaders, but he referred to the way
they governed as “eat your peas” government because he said, “The Republicans will tell you
that you can have ice cream, and they tell you all the good stuff. And the Democrats, even if
they’re trying to win back the White House and win elections, it’s always, ‘No, we couldn’t say
that because that wouldn’t be the responsible thing to do for the country.’” Paul’s like, “Screw
responsibility, we’ve got to win the White House.” So he had some strong feelings about how we
should and shouldn’t go about those things.

He was very reluctant to go to Little Rock. We finally convinced him by saying, “Look, the
campaign headquarters is there. We’ve done okay by operating out of here for this long, but if
you’re going to have the impact that you really want to have on the Presidential campaign,
they’re not only open and receptive to it, they want you there, they want you calling the shots on
where they should be going when, etc.” So he finally gave in and did it, though he said he didn’t
really like the individuals, but didn’t really want to play the cut-throat politics that often goes on
in the Presidential campaigns or White House, or any other place where power is sort of
concentrated.

Paul’s ideal operating environment was to be in a little room with lots of cigarettes and coffee
and a computer and lots of data to manipulate. Then share it with an audience of people who
could do something about it. So he was a great guy. That was just a huge blow. I got the call
from Eli Segal when they had found him in the hotel room in Little Rock and had to go in and
tell Ron. That was just a very emotional time. But he was a great guy. Everybody missed him
and really loved working with him.
Riley: Can you tell us, I don’t want to park too much on this because we’ve got a lot of other ground to cover, but could you tell us a little bit about your work doing the congressional relations end, from the party end. I’m curious about who you were working most closely with, what routinely you were up to in that position. Was it issue-related or was it entirely campaign-related?

Baggett: Both. Issue-related, more in terms of message and some of the issues that were resonating on the polls that we were looking at.

Riley: This would have been again in about ’90, ’91?

Baggett: We started this in ’91. What Ron and I did every week was, he and I would go to the Democratic caucus meetings, I think it was on Thursday mornings, up at the Capitol and that’s where the whips would go over the schedule for the week and everybody sort of got their marching orders and discussed things. Now, interestingly, he didn’t—and Steny Hoyer would run those—Ron didn’t speak. They would acknowledge he was there, and I would stand in the back with the staffers. He would just sit in the audience with the members of Congress. I probably recall only one or two occasions where Steny specifically asked him to address something and he did. But again, I think it goes back to Ron’s experience as a Washington insider, that you don’t want to abuse being in the room. Don’t let them think that you think you’re at their level. You acknowledge they’re the elected officials, they’re the step above, but you’re given a certain stature by being invited into the room. So that kind of kept us in the loop as to what they were really pursuing.

I think this started earlier, before I got to the DNC, but from the communications side, and I want to say that Gephardt’s office probably initiated this, there would be message meetings, I think just about every morning, with all three campaign committees, or at least the congressional and DNC communications operatives and the leadership communications people on the House side. So that coordination, I think, helped a lot on the congressional side. The Senate is more standoffish so we weren’t invited to any of their weekly meetings. Senator Mitchell did start to invite us, particularly when John Hilley got there, would invite us over for fairly regular briefings and exchanges.

The weekly meetings—we either had them weekly or every other week, I can’t recall now—we invited the leadership and their top staff from the House and the Senate, and we would go over briefings, the poll results—

Riley: They would come to you or you would go to them?

Baggett: No, we would go up there. Typically we’d get a room up there just because it facilitated—

Riley: Sure.

Baggett: At the beginning it was almost all staff, and then gradually more of the principals came. The people who showed the most interest were—by far, the most interested was Tom Daschle,
that was when he was in the House. Interesting, when he got elected and became majority leader, but he definitely showed the most interest. David Bonior, Gephardt, Vic Fazio, he was head of the DCCC then. They were the most active within it. As I said, Mitchell sort of—his staff started participating, but typically our interaction with them was more separate.

Riley: Were these useful meetings outside the narrow advantage of just having ongoing dialogue? Did you find that you were successful in organizing the message?

Baggett: It definitely improved—well, it had to improve the relationship, there really was no relationship before. I think it made them feel more comfortable with Ron’s role as a spokesperson for the party. Initially, in the press, he got slapped down a few times by Foley and Mitchell for speaking out on issues. “He doesn’t really speak for the party,” which is sort of funny when you think about it because he’s the chairman of the party. But that was back when Democrats were in control of the House and the Senate for a long time, and they really didn’t see a party committee having any role in public dialogue and issues.

As I said earlier, Paul was pretty correct in their—Gephardt would occasionally step out and say something but, for the most part, particularly Foley and Mitchell, they were not going to go out—everything they said related to legislation they wanted to get through and what they were doing. Even back then it was still relatively collegial, so they weren’t going to take on the Republicans. I think they didn’t see a need to. We thought they were getting away with more than they should, and people weren’t seeing a difference.

The first glimmer that I remember where you could start to see the Democrats sort of go, “Hey, this feels good,” is when they had one of the tax battles, and Bush finally had to renege on his pledge, but they were pushing him on that, on the budget. They stuck together for one of the few times. I think it empowered them. They thought, Okay, this is both the right thing to do, and it’s to our political advantage as well. Now people see that there’s a difference between who the Republicans are willing to fight for, and who Democrats are willing to fight for. Before that I think they thought we were encouraging them to do something that was irresponsible, in terms of speaking out on issues.

Riley: Do you remember when you first became cognizant of Bill Clinton?

Baggett: Well, a couple of times really. As most people do, I remember his very long speech at the ’88 Atlanta convention.

Riley: You were there?

Baggett: I was there, thinking, *Will this guy ever shut up?* [laughter] I remember that. Then after that I remember him—it might have been early, when I was working on the Democratic National Committee, or it could have been even before that. He was Governor of Arkansas and he was giving a speech to one of the DNC money groups and telling a story, one of his many about when he lost the race for Governor and he ran into this guy when he was campaigning to get into the Governor’s seat again. Clinton said to this guy, “I really appreciate your vote,” and the guy said, “Yes, I voted against you last time, but I’m going to vote for you this time.” Clinton said,
“Do you mind me asking why did you vote against me, and now you’re going to vote for more?” He goes, “Well, I voted against you because you raised—” I think it was the fee on the hunting license. And Clinton said, “Yes, I remember that. But why are you going to vote for me now?” He said, “I figure you’re not stupid enough to do it again [laughter] so I’m going to vote for you this time.” I just remember thinking, There’s a guy that can tell a good story about himself.

Then probably the first casual conversation I had with him was when I was at the DNC, I think it was in the spring of ’91, and, on the finance side, we formed the managing trustees, because trustees had been a level where you give $100,000 and you were a trustee of the DNC. But that wasn’t enough money, so we formed a group called the managing trustees where, if you gave $250,000, you were at that level. As we were getting ready to kick that off, we held a retreat at Pamela Harriman’s estate in Middleburg, [Virginia] and we invited all the expected future Presidential candidates to come to that, and he was one. Middleburg is so small there wasn’t one hotel where everybody could stay, so you had the B and Bs [bed and breakfasts] around where we stayed that night. It happened to be at the one where he and Gloria Cabe, I think was his Chief of Staff at the time, they were staying there. So we just chatted. He seemed very down to earth.

I always felt like I knew him better than I really knew him because one of my best friends is Frank Greer, and because he had worked for him for so long in the Governor’s race, even before the Presidential, when we would be with Frank and Stephanie [Solien], Frank would be talking about him. So I felt like I knew this person. It’s like feeling like you know someone on television that you see all the time. I feel like Katie Couric and I should be best friends.

Riley: Did you know Frank from Alabama?

Baggett: No, I actually met him when he was working for Ray Marshall in the public information operation at the Department of Labor during the Carter Presidency, when I was campaigning for Kennedy. I ran into him at a building trades convention in Sacramento, California, where I was giving out pro-Kennedy literature. I had known Ray Marshall from the Secretary of Labor side, as a bricklayer. So I was chatting with Marshall at the convention because he was there to speak for Carter, and Frank comes running up, he was very animated all the time, and he has one of my brochures and he’s shaking it in front of Marshall’s face saying, “Can you believe this crap they’re giving out?” He goes on and on, he didn’t even notice that I was there.

So Ray said, “Frank I’d like for you to meet the person who’s giving out this crap.” [laughter] Then he said, “Oh, you two are both from Alabama.” So we chatted for a minute, but you know Frank was off to—after the campaign, he and Stephanie and I got to be close friends. So that’s how I initially met Clinton, but during the campaign, I had to speak up for him occasionally during some of the womanizing things.

Riley: This was during the primary season?

Baggett: Yes, so typically we wouldn’t be involved, but he was going down so bad that we had a request that they needed someone on CBS Evening News to talk about that he wasn’t down for
the count and that this was a bum rap, blah, blah, blah, so they recruited me to do it. So I did a bit on the CBS News. Ironically, two or three months later, Ron was out of town, Alexis was gone, and we got word upstairs, we were on the third floor at the Democratic National Committee, that the building had been taken over by a group from ACORN [Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now], the activist group. The building has been what? This was before any security concerns. They said, “We’ve been shut down. ACORN is taking over and they’re refusing to let anyone leave, we’re all being held hostage.” This is ridiculous.

Tenpas: What does ACORN stand for?

Baggett: I actually don’t know what all the acronym stands for, but basically it’s an activist group for poor people, typically around housing issues and things like that. They felt that the Democratic Party wasn’t paying enough attention to the issues they cared about so they took over the building. They were demanding to see Ron, and we’re like, “He’s not even here.” So I went down to talk with them and they said, “Oh, we saw you on the news, you can talk to us.” Like, okay, this is the world we live in. If you’ve been on TV, they don’t know why you’re on TV or who you are, you have credibility because you’ve been on TV. I got the building released, what can I say?

Riley: It’s like your version of Katie Couric, right?

Baggett: Exactly. They knew me, they could trust me, I’d been on TV.

Tenpas: Was there any conflict, though, with you being a DNC employee speaking on behalf of Clinton?

Baggett: Basically, the way I couched my remarks was by saying—their question was “Does this doom his candidacy?” I don’t remember exactly what I said, but my essential pitch was, “No, any campaign is going to have its ups and downs, obviously this is a hurdle they have to get past. But quite frankly, situations like this that the candidates go through in the primary season can make them a stronger candidate for the general election.” Little did I know how many opportunities we would have for character-building over the next eight years. So that wasn’t in conflict. If Tom Harkin had stepped in something in Iowa and I would have had to step in and say—

Tenpas: Or Paul Tsongas.

Baggett: Paul Tsongas, or any of them, I could have done that while still remaining neutral.

Tenpas: What doesn’t make sense to me, though, is they were asking women to do this, but, what you said is something anybody—I thought they were recruiting women to say something about his credibility as not being a womanizer.

Baggett: No, it wasn’t that specific. They just felt like it would be good to have a woman—that he hadn’t lost all credibility with political women, the fact that he was being accused of this type of thing.
Tenpas: I assume your title underneath your name says something like “Chief of Staff, Democratic National Committee.”

Baggett: Yes. In fact, I used to joke with people that I had worked for Ted Kennedy, Ron Brown, and Bill Clinton, and none of them had ever made a pass at me and I was starting to feel like chopped liver. [laughter] They didn’t ask me about that.

Riley: I don’t know where to go from that. Anything else from the primary season before the convention that we should deal with? I guess at this stage you’re beginning to see the writing on the wall that you’re going to have a candidate, that Clinton is going to be the candidate, the nominee, that’s pretty well settled after—

Baggett: Yes, one of the things I started to mention, which I think also helped in the integration between the DNC and that campaign, was that while there obviously were a lot of young people, having Eli Segal heading up the campaign, I don’t remember anybody’s formal title since they changed on a frequent basis, but Paul Tully, Ron, a lot of them had worked with Eli on previous campaigns. So having the connections to people who had been in politics before helped, even though, I think, as a group, definitely the Clinton campaign had more of the younger people and less of the “seasoned veterans,” though there were enough seasoned veterans that it helped the integration at the national level.

Riley: You were at the convention?

Baggett: I was at the convention.

Riley: Did you have a particular role at the convention that year?

Baggett: Actually, it was my best convention. I sat on the podium with Alexis Herman and Mike Berman, directing the podium traffic. Ann Richards headed up the—I don’t know what her title was; she was chair of the convention that year. So I was really there—in terms of my role, it was directing the DNC staff and Ron’s operation.

Riley: It was a smooth convention from your perspective?

Baggett: It was very smooth. I remember people chanting during Ron's speech. Ironically, it was the Jerry Brown people, who didn’t have any particular beef with Ron Brown, but anyway, it went very well. It was very important to Ron because New York—it’s hard to think of New York City as a hometown, but it was his hometown.

Riley: The Clinton thing with Sister Souljah had occurred before the convention? Was that during the primary season?

Baggett: Yes, it was during the primary.

Riley: Do you remember Ron’s reaction to that?
Baggett: I don’t remember it strongly. I think he probably thought it was stupid, just sort of unnecessary. I don’t recall him getting really exercised about it. He and Tully probably considered it more of a DLC stunt-type thing that was unnecessary, but just more politics to manage.

Riley: So then we get into the general election, and what are you doing? We talked a little bit about this already, but can you sort of tell us what you’re doing.

Baggett: In the general election, you have the individuals that we talked about before, so everything that can be offloaded from the Presidential campaign comes to the DNC. We already talked about the finance and congressional relations, surrogate operation. Again, we’re working with these coordinated campaigns, and as long as you can make a case that a surrogate speaker or any type of event is being done for the coordinated campaign, as opposed to the Presidential, you can pay for it out of coordinated campaign funds and it’s not counting against that $56 million, or whatever it is, on the Presidential side. So we coordinated that out of the Democratic National Committee building.

Now, while we have a significant number of our staff—Steve Rosenthal, who headed up the America Coming Together thing in the last election, Steve was there. He was a deputy to Tully and he helped oversee the coordinated campaign activity. And from the campaign side, Debbie Wilhite came in to work with that as well. You had the communications and press operation for Ron Brown—and I don’t think there was ever any consideration that Ron wouldn’t stay in that position. So I don’t think we had the type of issues that had come up where there was even a question on that. He was a very strong surrogate. He campaigned almost nonstop. So we scheduled all of that out of the DNC.

In addition to having Mike Berman there, who continued to play the role he had in past campaigns of making sure money was being spent the way the campaign wanted money spent, the campaign also had Harold Ickes and Janice Enright come and be the campaign’s eyes and ears to work with us. I don’t recall them ever having anything they wanted to have done that we weren’t amenable to. Harold—again, we went back to the ’80 campaign with Harold, and he and Ron even went back further than that. So that wasn’t an issue.

Alexis did the close-out on the convention up in New York, and then she went to work on the transition for Clinton.

Tenpas: Did you do anything special for the debates, debate preparation, like do commission polls or focus groups?

Baggett: Not that I recall. We could have, but I really don’t recall it. We were at some of them, we mainly helped with surrogates, but I don’t recall anything about that.

Riley: Is all of your energy at this point directed towards the Presidential campaign, or is there a—
Baggett: Yes. It becomes the extension of the Presidential campaign.

Riley: So the coordinated campaigns—

Baggett: The coordinated campaigns are there, and in the states where they’re working, obviously there’s a focus on getting the various candidates elected in those positions, but at the DNC we were pretty much focused 100% on the President.

Tenpas: Weren’t the coordinated campaigns just a device to create more funding support for the Presidential campaign, even though they were ostensibly there to help other candidates? In reality the Presidential campaign was driving the train.

Baggett: It was, but even in years where you didn’t have a Presidential campaign, it was a good way to get extra funding for the Senate campaign. It’s whatever was at the head of the ticket. It was a better way to get resources to that campaign as well as all the others. Because otherwise, the donors were just being hit up by all these different individuals who were going to end up doing some of the same activities, so it was a more effective use of resources. Like I said, I don’t know what’s happened to it with campaign finance reform.

Another one of the advantages of the coordinated campaign is for donor groups, as well as probably individuals, in order to get funding, one of the requirements for a coordinated campaign to be approved is you had to have a plan written down. It sounds kind of minor except in a lot of these states they would say, “We’re going to register voters and we’ll do some get out the vote,” but they wouldn’t have an actual plan as to how they’re going to do it, what kind of money, where’s the budget, what parts of the state are they going to concentrate on—some very basics weren’t even written down.

At least donors could see there was a coordinated plan for how this was going to happen. That was a lot of the tension, sometimes, in getting it approved because those candidates and their representatives had to sit down together, and what might be good for this congressional campaign might be a bad district for a Senate candidate, but working all that out in advance gave you at least a leg up.

Riley: You’ve seen a fair number of campaigns from up close. Was there anything in particular about this one that concerned you, or do you remember any disputes, or was it pretty much a sense that this is going in the right direction and you’re having a good time of it?

Baggett: It’s been a long time now. I’m starting to feel like George Bush: I’m sure there were mistakes made, but I can’t think of any. [laughter]

Riley: None of my own making.

Baggett: I’m sure there were, but nothing’s coming to mind. I’ll try to think about it some more. I’m sure there were.

Riley: I guess successful campaigns—
Baggett: Again, some of the things you think about—obviously, Tully’s death sticks out in my mind. Then the other thing we had, and I can’t remember if this was in the summer or the fall, the finance chair died. I’m drawing a blank on his name—[Victor] Raiser, he was Clinton’s finance chair. He and his son died in a plane crash in Alaska, again just sort of a huge personal blow to the campaign staff. But I’m not recalling anything of the sort of political nature, Jackson blow-ups or anything like that. I’ll probably read something or see something that will remind me, but nothing comes to mind right now.

Riley: Let me ask you this, one subject that hasn’t come up yet. There is a real oddity in this election, and that is you’ve got a significant third party.

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: What’s going on? Are you paying attention to Ross Perot and his jumping in and out?

Baggett: Yes, we were paying a lot of attention. I just remember the euphoria of when we were in New York at the convention, when we heard the Perot stuff and it was like, “Oh, my gosh.” Tully was running numbers all over the place. It was very significant. Again, I don’t have strong recollections around it, but that gets factored in in a major way, pro and con.

Tenpas: Did the DNC have any sort of strategic role in terms of creating strategy or producing research that would aid in strategy for the Clinton campaign, or was that all out of Little Rock, and the DNC basically following orders?

Baggett: It was Tully-driven, very much so.

Tenpas: After his death did anybody take over that role, or did it just stop?

Baggett: They tried to. We had people involved, but it just wasn’t at the same level. You had Mark Steitz down there working on communications and message with the campaign, but Mark didn’t have the—Mark is, I think, a brilliant message person, but he didn’t have the personality that was going to go up against the [James] Carvilles and [Paul] Begalas, and fight those battles. He didn’t have the stature that Paul had, where they would defer to it. I think the important thing that we got established early on with the campaign and with Tully’s work was with Mark Gersh and the NCEC and the weighted maps that were used to decide where you needed to go and when, and how that was shifting. I think all of that stayed plugged into the Clinton operation.

Riley: Did Tully get along well with Carville?

Baggett: They got along fine. I think he would shrug off James, all his antics, because they were just done for show, and Paul didn’t have any time for that. He used to talk about, when he was in Little Rock, having Mandy [Grunwald] and James want to go to dinner after work: “I have to deal with these people all day, I don’t want to go and feel their knives after hours.” So I wouldn’t say James would have been high on his list of favorite people, but he certainly liked him.
Riley: It’s often the case with two very strong personalities that things are going to clash. I just thought I would ask.

Tenpas: Can I ask a little about the DNC, the structure at this point?

Baggett: Yes.

Tenpas: Can you talk about—I’m very interested in how the progress of the campaign affects the composition of the DNC staff, such that you might have a certain percentage working on fund-raising. Do all those things stay equal? Do you have the same size of political staff? Do people run out to states to help the campaign? Do you develop a field operation over time, where people leave the Washington headquarters to go out? How many people are you managing at this point? Does it get more difficult as the campaign intensifies? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Baggett: It gets more difficult, some people go out. I should have brought the list. I can check back and see how many people we had on staff at that point. Staff probably doubles when you go from primary to general. Silly things like where people sit become major issues, just in terms of where you’re going to put them. Some end up going out to states. Proportionately, I’d say you have the finance side—it’s not as if it shrinks, but the political side, I would say, grows more for the general than the finance side does. The kinds of money you’re raising and what you can raise money for. Once you take the general election money, it changes somewhat. I’d say it shifts more to the political side as you do that, but you still have a fairly significant number on the finance side.

Tenpas: Does the finance side always outnumber the political side?

Baggett: No, no.

Tenpas: If you had a pie and you had to break it into—

Baggett: I’m just trying to remember. Quite honestly, in normal times it’s about equal, maybe a little more on the political side. Sometimes you’re working with finance people who are outside the physical headquarters, so that’s probably a little bit misleading. But I’d really have to go back and refresh my memory on how the make-up was, finance versus political or communications. You also, quite frankly, end up—and this is everywhere there’s an operation—you end up with some of the people that you probably wish you didn’t have, but it’s a political place to be anytime. But as you’re going into the general election, there are some people you don’t want out in the states, and the DNC is a safer place to have them, and you’ve got to manage those too. So you have a fair number of those.

Tenpas: If you had to break down how you spent your time at that point, how much was on sort of substantive issues versus just managing, or just getting through?

Baggett: I’d say mine was 100% on managing. Even if it’s substantive issues, it’s usually managing the people who are dealing with the substantive issues, and that’s what my role was as Chief of Staff, managing the resources and the staff side, making sure they were working on
what they were supposed to be working on, as opposed to what somebody else is working on that they think is cool that is not really their job. There was a lot of that, a lot of job creep, so to speak. And just managing personalities was very difficult. I mean, it was not unusual to see people have major blow-ups and come in and announce they couldn’t work that way. Again, it’s just small physical space, so you can’t have people stirring up everyone else because then you get everybody divided along loyalty lines. Even from that group, if I have an event, I know who I can invite. I can’t mix some of the two groups. It doesn’t change over time.

_Tenpas:_ Do you think the initial vision of your role as Chief of Staff and the idea that you would prevent Ron from micromanaging and let him do big-picture stuff, did it work?

_Baggett:_ I think it worked, yes. I think it worked in maintaining the focus because otherwise we had such talented individuals, and just one-on-one with Ron, it wasn’t even that it was necessarily a waste of time, but they could come up with a cool idea a minute, and then we’d be off doing that when we had all just sat together and agreed this is a strategy we’re going to pursue. So keeping those individuals focused on the good of the group, so to speak, it was pretty major. I think that was my strength, as a facilitator, rather than—I never had any illusions to, but I certainly wasn’t going to compete with Tully on political strategy and the poll of the week. And I wasn’t going to compete with Mark Steitz on message and presentation ideas. But there was a real need to keep them focused and to get the finance committee focused on getting the resources that we needed to do those types of essential tasks. I think we were effective on that.

_Riley:_ At what point do you start thinking beyond the election? Is it after the election is over?

_Baggett:_ You’re so busy that you just figure, certainly in my case—I’m sure a lot of people were getting their résumés ready for the Administration at some point. I was just thinking, this will be great because the new chairman won’t come in until the first part of the year, so I’ve got some time, I can clean off my desk after the election and figure out where to go get a job.

_Riley:_ So you didn’t anticipate that you’d be staying at the committee?

_Baggett:_ No, I figured, this is like national service. Ron convinced me to do it, you should just do three or four years in the service of your party, but this should not be a career for anyone. I definitely expected to go someplace else in the private sector. The day after the election I flew with Ron—I think Alma [Brown] and Michael may have flown with us as well—we flew down to Little Rock and met with, I think it was Eli, and David Wilhelm might have been there also, Harold may have been. I know Eli was in the room and I can’t remember who else. We talked about after the election, what all we’re doing.

We didn’t go down to Little Rock for election night. We figured there was a whole Washington contingent, but institutional Washington needed a Presidential victory to celebrate, so we had it at the Shoreham and it was great. Anyway we went down to Little Rock the next day.

_Riley:_ You must have had conversations on the plane going down.
Baggett: We did, and I’m pretty positive Ron met with Clinton that day, and I can’t recall whether it was that day or in meetings after that where Clinton talked to him about commerce. I think in Ron’s ideal world, he would have been Secretary of State.

Riley: Did he tell you this directly or you just sort of—

Baggett: When I say directly, I think he said something like, “I don’t know exactly what position I would do, it would be great to be Secretary of State, but George Mitchell—” I think he didn’t think that was going to come his way. I don’t think, though, that he ever mentioned commerce before they did.

Riley: But it was clear in his mind that he was thinking Cabinet rather than anything else?

Baggett: Definitely. Definitely. I don’t recall anything else. I’m trying to think if he ever thought of any other—I think it was pretty much Cabinet. I don’t think he was thinking Ambassador or something.

Riley: And he’s asking you at that point, are you interested in going in?

Baggett: No, I think we pretty much talked about him. [laughter]

Riley: Is that unusual in conversations with Ron?

Baggett: No, he’d get around to asking about you eventually. He definitely had an ego. He had an ego, but he wasn’t affected, if you can make that kind of distinction.

Riley: You had been Chief of Staff where he was the chair. Was there a sense that you probably would follow him—?

Baggett: There wasn’t a sense, I mean, we talked about it later, but I actually got offered the White House position before we really formalized—I think he had commerce before, but we hadn’t really had—even though he ended up heading up the inaugural, and I hadn’t planned to do anything around that.

Riley: I’ll stop asking questions. Maybe the thing for me to do is go back—

Baggett: So we went to Little Rock, we talked about the hook-up on the campaign, and I think almost when I got back from that, Rahm came to me and said, “I need for you to be political director for the inaugural.” Why the heck do you need a political director for the inaugural? Who would want to work on something as stupid as the inaugural? Give me a break.

Tenpas: What did he say? What was the reason for a political director?

Baggett: We hadn’t had an inauguration for 16 years, if you’re a Democrat, so it turned out to be a huge job. If I’d known that, I would have said no, too. I kept saying it was like the delete key: if I had a delete key I could just go back and X out that conversation and never have done it. But
he said, “Oh, come on.” I said, “I’ve got to get a job. This is my job-hunting time.” He goes, “Oh, I’ll help you figure out a job. Come on, this is 60 days, you start up and shut down this huge operation. I’ve got to have somebody to manage the politics, so you’ve got to come do it. Ron’s going to head up the inaugural. This is all work.” “Who’s going to do all the—” Not that I wanted to do all the close-out crap at the DNC either. He said, “We can figure out somebody to do that. Just come do it.” So I said all right.

So we went over, and at the inaugural committee, he was running it. You had in the political operation, I set it up so that we had Elaine Shocas, who ended up being Madeleine Albright’s Chief of Staff. Elaine was sort of my deputy, and she oversaw the Supreme Court and the Senate, I think. Kitty Higgins—

Tenpas: What do you mean she oversaw it?

Baggett: You have to get out all these invitations and handle all the arrangements for all these dignitaries. So we had the Supreme Court, we had the—I’m trying to think if we had to, I think we had to do the military, too.

Tenpas: Generals?

Baggett: Yes, Chiefs of Staff kind of stuff. We had the House and the Senate, and then we had the Friends of Bill, and then we had VIPs. You can imagine the VIP list. So you had to get together the invitation list for everybody, and then you had to handle all their ticket orders. The tickets ended up just being—and then we had to oversee all the constituencies that were going to come out. So, basically, we handled all the people. Then you had a ticketing operation, which completely, not because of the people who did it, but the operation, the computers didn't work, it was just a nightmare. We had a particularly good person, Sally Painter, who just, out of the blue, volunteered, came in and helped out, and she could help them figure out that. So we used to laugh about it. We would have people from all over the world giving us their American Express numbers. I mean, they were just calling in, throwing numbers at us, to handle all this.

Then you had the parade, there was a whole parade section. We were in this God-awful warehouse over in the Navy yard. You could just look at it and tell there’s probably asbestos everywhere. Shelby, my daughter, was a year and a half, I guess, so when I’d have to bring her in, I’d tie a little bell around her so we could hear her running around. It was just—and this is all from November to January 20th, that you have to do all this. So it’s like, during Christmas, you’re at this God-awful place. Anyway, it was a great bonding experience.

We get to the week before the inauguration. Again, everything is just frantic, getting all the final—you had a huge finance division, because you have to put on all these balls and stuff.

Riley: You’ve got all those parties, you’ve got the American Reunion—

Baggett: Oh yes, we had the whole thing on the mall.

Riley: I was there, I remember.
Baggett: So about a week before, I get a call from—then everybody in Washington who sort of thinks that they’re somebody and substantive is over working on the transition, getting their jobs lined up. So we’re sort of considered the losers, over at the inaugural, it was really funny. I get a call from Susan Brophy, who’s down in Little Rock, who had done the congressional operations, and she said Howard Paster was going to be Director of Congressional Relations, legislative affairs, whatever it’s called. She’s the deputy, and so she calls and says, “We’d like for you to be the House of Representatives person on legislative affairs staff for the White House legislative affairs office.” I said, “I can’t do that. I’ve got this little kid, I want to have another kid, there’s no way.” I know Congress and you’re never in charge of your own life, their schedule dictates everything. So I said, “That’s very kind. If I would ever do anything in government, I’d want it to be the White House, but there is no way. Thanks but no thanks.” Then I get a call from one of Bob Reich’s top people to see if I’ll be his Chief of Staff.

Tenpas: At Labor?

Baggett: At Labor. I said no, same story. I really don’t want to work in government. He has little kids, he understands, he’s going to keep normal hours. He may think he’s going to keep normal hours, but he’s not going to keep normal hours.

Riley: Did you know Bob at all?

Baggett: No.

Riley: He’s not your run-of-the-mill Labor Secretary.

Baggett: No, he’s not.

Tenpas: They obviously were focusing on your experience in labor.

Baggett: Right. Then on the legislative affairs side, I think they were also focusing on—the whole White House focus was diversity. So the word had gone out, obviously, if you looked down the list of who were going to get the main appointments, it was going to be white males. They could say whatever they wanted, but it was still going to be heavily white males.

Oh, right after that, Rahm calls me and says, “You have to come down here, I need to talk with you.” So I go down—

Tenpas: All the way to Little Rock?

Baggett: No, no, he didn’t go to Little Rock. When I say down, this huge warehouse is like a mile-long walk to get to his office. So I go there. Now this is the day that 48 Hours is filming him, going through his duties as head of the inauguration operation, so there’s a camera crew there. He says, “I want you to come with me to the White House and be my deputy.”

Tenpas: In front of the cameras?
Baggett: Yes. “Rahm, you’ve lost your mind.” He says, “No, seriously, think about it.” I say, “I can’t do this, I just said no to—Rahm, could we get the cameras out of the room while we talk about it?” He says, “Oh yes, guys, go out.” So we keep talking and he says, “Look, I understand, I’ve been working with you. You can be my deputy. I won’t make you stay late for things, you can have—” I say, “Look, Rahm. I’d love to have the opportunity to work in the White House; I just don’t think this will work.” Then I say, “What’s the salary?” He says, “Who asks what’s the salary? I don’t know what the salary is.” So I say, “Then you obviously don’t have a mortgage.” [laughter] Anyway, I said, “I have to talk to my husband, I’ll talk to him. Let me think about it and I’ll get back to you.”

Riley: You’d been married a year? Is that right?

Baggett: Yes, about a year and a half. I don’t even know that I’d called Cal [Calambokidis] yet, and I get a call from Susan who says, “Look, I know you’re a person of your word, but you said you didn’t want to devote your life to this, and I don’t know if you’re aware of it, but you’re about to be announced as the Deputy Assistant to the President for Political Affairs.” So again, I go back to Rahm, “What are you doing?” He says, “Oh, come on, you can do this.” So I call Cal and he says, “Fine, I don’t care, if you want to do it, do it.” So that was the lengthy interview.

So your question about do we have discussions about roles and responsibilities, no, other than assuring me—

Riley: And only a partial discussion about salary.

Baggett: Yes, and honestly, as much as I’d like to flatter myself about my abilities, my honest belief is that Rahm was afraid he would get stuck with somebody he didn’t know and couldn’t count on for a certain set of political skills, and that’s why he did this preemptive strike, because he knew he could sell me. Quite honestly, it was amazing to me that someone who had not been directly involved in the campaign would get a position as high as I did without a relationship with Clinton. That was Rahm doing what Rahm does best. He knew he could get away with it, and he did it. So that’s how my selection and my White House career began.

Suddenly, I had a job, I didn’t know what the salary was. Ironically, he ended up, and I won’t remember the right numbers now. I think at the time Assistants to the President made $125,000, and I think most of the deputies, well, I don’t even remember how it went, but I think what he did was take off some of his salary and give it to me. So if most of the deputies made $90,000, I made $100,000 or something. He took money off his to pay me more.

Then when I got promoted later to that, of course, I got the salary he had gotten. Then, in one of their periodic printing in the Washington Post what all the Assistants to the President made, everyone in the women’s community was up in arms because I was making less than the guys were making. It was actually because this guy was helping me make more. So it came back later.

Riley: I want to hear all about the inauguration. You’re responsible for this.
**Baggett:** We had great seats! It actually ended up being so wonderful. I was so tired it was hard to enjoy it to its full extent. First, we had the concert at the Lincoln Memorial.

**Riley:** I remember that. I remember vividly standing about halfway back—

**Baggett:** They actually started their bus tour here. They visited Thomas Jefferson’s home.

**Riley:** But you were not here?

**Baggett:** No, Rahm came on the bus with them. So we were there at the Lincoln Memorial and they came in.

**Riley:** I remember Diana Ross descending in an electric blue or red dress that almost burned your corneas.

**Baggett:** That’s right,

**Riley:** —from five or six hundred yards back.

**Baggett:** And my husband always remembers—I think Bob Dylan was there and, as we do at all Democratic events, we had signers. You know you can’t understand anything he says, so the signers were trying to deal with the words, and then finally they just went like this—[laughter]

**Riley:** That’s for Dylan?

**Baggett:** Yes. So that was great.

**Riley:** I’ll share this, and this is not my interview so forgive me, but it illustrates a point that I used to teach my classes about, and that is, there were fireworks that night down on the Potomac, and everybody was invited to go sit on the banks of the Potomac and watch this. My wife and I were sitting there, watching this magnificent fireworks display, and I looked over and the guy next to me on the right had a small black and white portable television, and I kid you not, he was watching the fireworks on TV. It didn’t exist for him unless it was on television.

**Baggett:** See, you don’t have credibility unless you’re on TV.

**Riley:** Absolutely, that just goes to prove your point.

**Baggett:** Even if it’s not as good.

**Riley:** So you get through the—

**Baggett:** We lived through the Lincoln Memorial, and then we did—

**Riley:** Who was responsible for entertainment?
Baggett: The person who was actually doing—it varied, but I think maybe Harry Thomason was leading the charge on that. That particular event Quincy Jones did. Then, I don’t know if I’ll get the order right, but then we had the “Faces of Hope” lunch the next day with the people he had met during the campaign from all over, who we brought in. There was all this stuff going on on the mall. We had the concert at what was then the Capital Center with [Barbra] Streisand and all their folks. Must have been dinners or something Wednesday night, I’m drawing a blank on that. Then the swearing in on that day at the Capitol. That was by far the best of all.

We had, and I can only imagine what they had to deal with this time on the security. It is such a monumental—we had military assigned to us. At our morning meetings we’d always get the weather report for January 20th. We got through that and the flyovers and discussed everything, but we didn’t have to contend with this huge security issue. We had to deal with whose bands were going to get in or not get in the parade, those types of things.

My friends who headed up the parade division of the inaugural operation had convinced me that I had to put Shelby, my daughter, on one of the floats. I kept thinking, this is stupid, she’s a little kid. They said, “No, it’ll be great. Your nanny can go with her and they’ll be on the float with Sherry Lewis and Lambchop.” They finally convinced me that I was going to destroy her life if I didn’t do this. So here I am at the swearing in, and we did this. After the swearing in, we went to an event at the Canadian Embassy, and then we went to the Presidential reviewing stand to watch the parade, which was fabulous. You know, you’re sitting there, the President and the First Lady are right over there. It’s nice and warm, you’ve got your coffee and you’re watching—it was really a fabulous opportunity.

So we keep waiting for this float to come. Then we see this float, which only has Sherry Lewis and Lambchop and these two kids that are unrecognizable to me. Oh, my God, I’ve lost my kid. Then there are all these people walking behind the float, all these kids, including my nanny carrying my very heavy one-year-old. By this time now, they’ve started at the Capitol and they’re at the White House. This is a long way to carry a kid. It turns out that Sherry Lewis had said no one else could ride on the float except these two soap opera kids who got on. And there were all these kids who were—actually, a lot of the kids were deaf, and there was nobody there to help them. So my nanny and this one other young woman were having to help get them down all of Pennsylvania Avenue. That was not so good. But we survived that, and then we go to the balls. By the time we get to the ball it was so anticlimactic. It was everything I could do keep my head up.

The next morning, it’s the first day—

Tenpas: Did you show up at the White House?

Baggett: The funny thing is, I went back to the inaugural committee because I had to get all the stuff, and I got a call from Rahm, “Where the hell are you?” I said, “Well, I thought I had to pick up the stuff here.” He said, “No, you’ve got to get down here.” I said, “How do I get in?” It just never occurred to me, how do you go to work at the White House? He said, “You drive up to the gate and you drive in.” “They’re just going to let me in?” “They have your name on a list, they’ll let you in.” “Okay.” Sure enough, it worked that way. I parked—I think at the beginning they
had labeled the parking lot. I had a beautiful parking place right in front of the Old Executive Office Building. His office was in the White House, my office was in the Old Executive Office Building, and it was huge. It was twice the size of this room. It was a corner office over towards the Corcoran. It has these unbelievably high ceilings.

By the time I left, I think, on the next go-around, they probably had 20 people working in that office. It was weird to be there at the beginning because the White House is unique in, I guess, all the offices of government because all the others have career employees, and other than the mess, which is operated by the Navy, there are no career employees at the White House. So the desks are empty, there’s nothing anywhere. You even go pick out your furniture. So it was great being there at the beginning because you could go in other offices and say, “I’ll take that if nobody populated it yet.” You could get whatever you wanted. That would have been on Friday.

Riley: So the point at which you had been named to this position—

Baggett: Was about a week.

Riley: And it’s a week when you clearly are completely swamped, so you had no substantive conversations with anybody about what happens before you walk in.

Baggett: I didn’t even have one of these articles to read. What do we do? Why on earth do taxpayers pay for there to be a political office in the White House? I think Rahm’s strength, and what he’s always done and even in his job at Congress now is, Rahm doesn’t really go by, okay, here are your duties and responsibilities and this is what your office does. Rahm’s idea was, “Here are the things that we were about in the campaign, and let’s get to work on them, and here’s how we’re going to pursue them.” There was nothing about, “Let’s check in with legislative affairs, and make sure, or intergovernmental, or public liaison.” None of that. It was, this is what we’re going to do.

So initially we had to hire the rest of the staff. That was the first thing that we set about doing. But I think it’s safe to say Rahm didn’t read anything about what that office was supposed to do either. His idea was, we ran a campaign, here’s what we said Bill Clinton was going to do, let’s get busy doing it. But, again, just trying to recollect what it was like those first few days, it first centered on how we were going to staff it. Whether someone said divide it up geographically, or Rahm thought this made sense, but that’s how we did it, we did divide it up geographically between the staff assistants. My role became—I mean, Rahm did deal with the rest of the staff directly as well, but it was pretty much liaison between what he wanted—he would go to senior staff meeting in the morning and then I would meet with him and we’d decide what needed to happen, and I would set about trying to coordinate with the various departments because Rahm was not about coordination.

Tenpas: Executive departments or White House offices?

Baggett: White House offices. Later we started reaching out to the Cabinet officials and primarily their Chiefs of Staff, and later their White House liaisons, but those didn’t exist initially, and trying to sensitize people to the types of things that we were going to be doing.
Later we worked to develop, again with Mark Gersh and NCEC data, literally a map with weighted points of the various states and congressional districts.

**Tenpas:** Tell me about the weighted points. Can you talk more about that, what went into them, the factors, the variables?

**Baggett:** What I’ll try to do is see if I have one of them. But basically it was past voting patterns at the various levels, congressional, Senate as well as Presidential. How states went in the ’92 elections, in the Presidential as well as previous elections, in terms of their likelihood to do it again, and where we needed to reinforce Clinton’s favorability ratings. Now, all of that was well and good, but the reality became, as we started doing scheduling for leading up to the ’94 elections and after we went through all the legislative battles, it really became more a question of where they wanted Clinton to come.

**Tenpas:** Where the House members and the Senate members?

**Baggett:** Yes. So if you go back and check the appearances, it will look like we thought Massachusetts and California were the most important places in the world. Now, to some extent, that makes sense in California. He could probably vote there now, he’s been there so much, and he started that from the very beginning. We definitely wanted to preserve California. But in reality, in terms of the races, there weren’t a lot of places where they thought he was a plus, leading up to the ’94 elections.

**Tenpas:** So is it fair to say that the mission from day one was really how to get reelected in 1996?

**Baggett:** Yes. Now, part of that is delivering on the campaign pledges you made on the last one, so it does get policy focused, but more in terms of how do you advance the initiatives, including—we probably spent, well, initially we spent a huge amount of time on the budget, the deficit-reduction package, because on that, people would ask what did you actually do in political affairs. It was our responsibility to worry about anybody who had an election. We were sort of the entry point, which involved a lot of fund-raising scheduling, quite frankly. We also had to be concerned about taking care of constituents. But, if there was a legislative issue, technically, legislative affairs does the lobbying and they would have been dealing with getting the votes. But almost every legislative issue we had was so tight that we had to be involved, public liaison had to be involved, everybody had to help do that lifting.

**Tenpas:** They talked about war rooms, the use of the war room that was popular in the ’92 campaign that was then incorporated into the White House. Was there actual coordination, like you would have meetings with public liaison at the table—

**Baggett:** Yes.

**Tenpas:** —and legislative affairs at the table, and commercial—
Baggett: The most striking memory I have, just in terms of an operational mode, is at the White House all we did was go from meeting to meeting to meeting. I’d say 90% of the meetings didn’t involve the outside people. You’d go to a scheduling meeting and that would have a representative from all the different staffs there to put their two cents into the schedule. Then you’d go to a meeting on the deficit reduction, or you’d go to a meeting on health care, or you’d go to a meeting about who should be in the meetings. It was just constant.

You’d end up with huge stacks of phone messages, and as I said earlier, e-mail had really just started to get used. The infrastructure at the White House was incredibly dated. I don’t even know when they replaced the rotary dial phones, but it wasn’t long before that. We were there a while before we got passwords for e-mail. I think, and this is both good and bad, probably after we were there, or after I left, the first two years, I’m guessing there would be better records for people to turn over because more would be documented in e-mail that was previously done in phone calls or in meetings or something. Then you just wouldn’t have time to document it in memos. So most of our written materials were briefing papers for principals, typically when they were traveling to states.

The staff members who divided up the states put together notebooks on each state. They had the key people, any important campaign pledges that were made that applied to those states, and then they just obviously kept that updated as principals were traveling to the state. So if any of the four principals—President, Vice President, or their spouses—went in, we’d do briefings for them. Occasionally, we’d do it for a Cabinet member, but most of the Cabinet members had staff who did that for them. Most of the stuff was done in meetings, and on almost all the significant issues, war rooms were set up.

I never felt that the war rooms that were done at the White House had the same intensity of a war room in a campaign. I think one of the things that was the most striking to me about the White House experience is that even—almost everything is reactive. Even when you’re trying to be proactive on something, you spend 90% of your time reacting to something else. It’s very difficult to get ahead of the curve.

Tenpas: So the Mark Gersh map went out the window after—

Baggett: We still used it, but it was the reality—it was useful. Okay, if they don’t want the President, let’s get the Vice President. They would still elicit some Administration presence and we knew it was important to be there and be doing things, so we did use it in terms of focusing resources, counting people as resources. So when we’d go into a scheduling meeting and Ricki Seidman, or whoever was doing it at the time, would say, “We need to do a school event, where should we go? Here are the states we need to hit.” Then from there we’d look at who’s up for election. Then you’ve got to vet it with legislative affairs to see that there’s not a reason you wouldn’t do it in somebody’s district. And very often, where there was an issue involved, you’d have to go to a chairman’s district or something, or state. So there were things that would counter it. But all things being equal and they wanted him, we’d go by the Gersh map. Again, after ’94, or as you got closer to ’96, and certainly in the second Administration, things improved and you could use targeting a little bit more, but it just became pretty brutal there for a while in terms of how unpopular we were on some of the issues.
That would come into play, like, well, Mary Sue Terry here in Virginia. We talked to them all the time and we tried to help, but she didn’t want him anywhere in the state. For the most part, he didn’t take that personally. He understood politics well enough to know that he would not be helpful in a lot of situations, and we could help out in fund-raising and things like that.

I remember one time, there was a special congressional election in Kentucky. It was either Election Day or the day before, it was very close to the election and the Democrat was trailing. He called me up in my office and said, “What’s the deal?” So I described what the situation was. I was lucky, probably because he didn’t know me well enough to do it, but he didn’t blow up directly at me a lot. But sometimes he’d get testy, and this was one of those times where he started yelling about how, “Do you understand how bad this makes me look? Why can’t you get this right?” I said, “Just a minute, we’ve offered them everything in the world. They don’t want you there, they’re anti-gun control.” And I named— “They were opposed to you on everything. We had Carville talk to them, we had everybody that you trust talk to them, and they said, ‘Thanks but no thanks.’ What do you expect us to do?” Then, what he would do, if you came back at him like that, he’d back down. We had that situation a lot in instances where they just didn’t want him.

Tenpas: How long did the sort of honeymoon period, the sort of euphoria of a new term and a new Administration, all these new ideas, how long did that last?

Baggett: Ten hours maybe. [laughter] What was the gays in the military thing? Not long. Literally, I think, about a week or so. It just seemed to hit all at once. I remember, this was only a few days into the term and I can’t remember if this was caused by a specific leak or what the occasion was. All the staff was called over to the residence, to the East Room. He addressed us and talked about how reporters would try to get us to talk about what was going on and that people shouldn’t do that, what we were trying to do. I don’t think it had much effect.

I don’t know if things have changed in general and this is just the nature of the game now, or if it related to the way he personally dealt with people, but probably in that campaign and certainly in that White House and surrounding consultants and all, it not only wasn’t discouraged to talk to the press, it was almost like everyone was expected to. I’m old-school Washington, where the staff was there to serve the elected person. Now you have rock star staffers, where it’s all about them, and some have done very well at that. So there’s probably not going to be any decrease in it. Certainly in that White House you had a lot of people who felt free to speak to the press on everything that was going on.

Often, and this may be the case in any elected situation, but I was shocked when I would read, even in the Post and the Times, the articles about any given initiative where the information was just absolutely inaccurate. They were quoting unnamed sources, and the only thing I could deduct from it is that people who weren’t in the room when it was discussed were trying to portray that they were in the room, and they were piecing together a scenario and giving it to the reporter to make it look like they were important and were in the loop, when they weren’t.

Tenpas: Right.
Baggett: I think that was hurtful to the Administration.

Tenpas: Is that still going on?

Baggett: Well, I have a lot of problems with the Bush Administration, but I think the Bush White House is at least much better on their discipline in terms of when they clamp down, they clamp down. They may talk, but it’s the message they want. I thought we were a little too free on that. So that’s when it started, from the beginning, and we started having to be reactive from the beginning. I buy into this 24-hour news cycle thing. I think the competition is intense and I think people—so there are more reporters who are pressuring people to talk.

I do remember, as I said, our first day at work was on that Friday. On Saturday, we all show up for work, and I remember that David Wilhelm was coming over from the DNC for a meeting. There were about five or six of us, and we all admitted that we had a moment’s hesitation when we got dressed that morning because it’s a Saturday going to work, so you typically wear jeans, and we thought we probably shouldn’t wear jeans to the White House. So everybody’s sort of upgrading their Saturday attire for work at the White House.

There was also some focus at the beginning—Michael Whouley was the person in the Office of Personnel from the campaign who was just there on a temporary appointment, he didn’t want to go into government either. But he was there temporarily to vet the people who were getting the top jobs to make sure that the top campaign people did get positions, if they wanted positions. So we worked with him and the personnel folks on filling the positions that we knew about.

Riley: How many positions did you have? I know you may not remember precisely.

Baggett: We didn’t have many positions to fill. We really just had the three. After me, we had three staff people and—

Tenpas: Were they special assistants?

Baggett: They were special assistants.

Riley: And that was where the geographical division was, only among those three people?

Baggett: Yes, only among those three. Then we had two secretaries for the department, executive assistants, whatever they were called. Then each of those three special assistants got an assistant, but those assistants were paid for by the DNC.

Tenpas: What? How did that work?

Baggett: I don’t think they can do it any more. We did it for a while. Actually, they did it for quite a while. The rationale—and I believe counsel’s office said there was a precedent with some of the earlier Republican Administrations, but I don’t know that for sure. The way that the
counsel’s office instructed us on everything was to go—they advocated using the precedent that had been set by previous Administrations, particularly Republican.

Anything that was overtly political, partisan, I can’t remember the distinction they used—so, for example, those three staff, we couldn’t have any other staff, there wasn’t a budget to hire other staff, in the White House budget. So they had the three staffers that were paid by the DNC. Our cell phones, even for mine and Rahm, were paid by the DNC. But we had offices in the White House. I think pretty much if I traveled, it was political, so the DNC paid for it. If you were traveling on Air Force One, that was official business. The President—at that point in time we weren’t going out and doing straight political events. If we had been doing a straight political event, they would have been having to pay for all of Air Force One. I don’t remember other distinctions that were made, but that’s how the office was staffed, and that’s how I got paid.

Tenpas: So there was a total of ten people.

Baggett: Right.

Tenpas: Did you feel understaffed, or was that sort of appropriate for the duties?

Baggett: We felt understaffed, but it’s sort of like being married. There were never enough people to do all the stuff that you really needed to do and keep up with. That’s why everything was pretty superficial. There was no way we could do—for example, in policy, you couldn’t sit down and really focus on policy because you had 20 briefings to do and to keep up with all these political-type things.

Now, at the same time, I’m sure there was a lot of redundancy in terms of what was being done in Office of Public Liaison, in the Legislative Affairs Office, or Intergovernmental, and certainly in terms of a lot of the things that were being done at the DNC. So the only thing that I could safely say that we did that the other departments didn’t do were political briefings for travel. Now, not that those other offices didn’t have some of the same information, but if he got ready to go on a trip and the briefing paper wasn’t there, we’d be the ones who got yelled at from the staff secretary’s office. So that was a clear division of responsibility. Who we should do fund-raisers for, who we should make personal appearances for, that all resided with us. But again, you’d get input obviously from Legislative Affairs or Intergovernmental because most, not all of them, but most of the people were already elected officials at some level, even though some, if they hadn’t held public office, we would have been the only way they came through the system. But the majority had some office already.

So if a mayor was running for election, 90% of his business would get done through Intergovernmental. But if he wanted campaign-related stuff, he’d be dealing with us. The same with Legislative Affairs. They’d be dealing with him on legislation, but if they were doing fund-raising stuff, they’d be dealing with us. Or if they wanted a political appearance.

Riley: We’re hitting lunchtime, so why don’t we take a break now.
Riley: Joan, one of the things we talked about a couple of times off tape during the breaks has been the recordkeeping process. There are a lot of other things we’ll be talking about, but I thought we might as well go ahead and talk about that right now. You had said, I think I understood this, but when you left you didn’t have a lot of stuff to turn over to the archives.

Baggett: No, in fact, as I was prepared to be cleared out and turn in my pass, they said, “We’re still waiting for your records; we only have one small box.” I said, “That’s my record,” because we really, in the political office at least, we had copies of the briefings and all that, but we really kept very little in writing because of the fear that we’d be subpoenaed over things. So there was very little that we did put in writing.

Riley: Was that something you learned on your own, or was it communicated to you? Did you have people from the counsel’s office?

Baggett: No, it was never communicated, but as I indicated earlier, the counsel’s position was the way we were structured, the way we operated; we followed the precedent from previous Administrations, including Republicans. My personal feeling was that if any questions arose, you were going to be judged on the current political atmosphere, and whether or not the media or the American public thought what you were doing was a good use of their tax dollars. I always felt that by having an Office of Political Affairs in the White House, you had to be particularly careful what you were doing. So my instructions to the staff—obviously we were doing briefings for the principals, for their travel and on other issues—and I instructed them never to put anything in writing that you didn’t want to see on the front page of the Washington Post or the New York Times because it was very likely going to appear there. And later, as you saw, fund-raising notes from the President of the United States on the front page of the newspapers, that was borne out.

It’s too tempting, and when things are taken out of context I thought it could be very incriminating. So we produced very little paper. Most of our work was done in meetings and by telephone and didn’t have to be communicated. I do think that the—e-mail had just started when I was there in terms of being utilized in the White House, and I would imagine that on during the Administration and from now on, you will see even in the Office of Political Affairs, more of the process reflected in writing, just because of e-mail communication, that it would be too convenient and will be irresistible to do as much of your business transactions as possible via e-mail. So I think that’s good news for historians.

Riley: But there would still be a cautionary environment for use of e-mails?

Baggett: I think anybody would be. Certainly given the experience of the Clinton Administration, and I don’t know if future Presidents will have that or not, but you were just in one investigation after another, which is obviously unfortunate, but that was the reality that you dealt with.
Riley: You said that you had never been subpoenaed.

Baggett: No, I was not. I had to do a deposition when Mike Espy was being investigated. That was actually as a result of the work that I did as political director on the inaugural. They were trying to determine if he had engaged in special favors or had improperly obtained tickets for inaugural events and things of that nature for supporters. So that was only in that context. I always say I’m thankful for my youngest daughter for a lot of reasons. She was born on December 1st, 1993, and if you check the timelines, it’s pretty much when a lot of the initial meetings occurred on Whitewater within the White House. I really don’t have any doubt that I would have been in a lot of those meetings because, as I described earlier, you simply go from meeting to meeting, and there’s not a lot of elaboration as to why you’re being called to a certain meeting. You’d say, “George Stephanopoulos called and you guys are getting together in such-and-such a room to talk about the budget or something.” Or so-and-so called, “Go to a meeting on this.” So you don’t have a lot of information before you go into a meeting. That’s how business gets done there, you just go from meeting to meeting.

A lot of the people who ended up being subpoenaed were simply names on a list of attendees at various meetings on a variety of subjects, Whitewater happened to be that. It’s unfortunate, and the diary incident that we talked about—

Riley: This is the Josh Steiner—

Baggett: Josh Steiner diary.

Riley: At Treasury?

Baggett: That was early on in the Administration. At the time I hadn’t even filled out my child’s baby book. I’m not saying that I would have had this wonderful journal because, quite frankly, it was such an exhausting job that I don’t know how anyone had time to jot down their daily observations. But I think if anyone had been keeping one, or had considered keeping one, that probably put that thought out of their mind. I mean, our garbage was routinely set aside.

Riley: In the White House?

Tenpas: Not shredded, because it needed to be shredded?

Baggett: No, this was one of the many times we had to turn over documents. I’m trying to remember which one this would have been. It was after the guy—we had the shooting at the White House, outside where the guy was shooting through the fence, or jumped the fence and was shooting. That was on a Saturday. I was actually in, working in my office with my two daughters, one of which was only a few months old. So there were several poopy diapers in the garbage in the ladies’ room. When they said they had confiscated all the garbage because they thought we had thrown away—they weren’t convinced that the White House had turned over all of the documents that had been requested. I don’t know why they wouldn’t have thought if you had anything you were hiding you would have shredded it, not put it in the garbage, but we had
bags and bags of garbage sitting around sometimes. They’re not going to have much fun when they go through that garbage pail.

**Riley:** That probably gave you some satisfaction.

**Baggett:** It did.

**Riley:** Let’s go back to the early days of the Administration again and think a little bit about the issues—once you kind of figured out what your job was going to be, I’d be curious to know, what was it you were spending your days working on in those early months? Was it gays in the military? Did you find yourself doing much on gays in the military? Did you find yourself doing much on the budget, on the stimulus package?

**Baggett:** We spent more time building support around—we really didn’t do much with gays in the military. Now, saying we didn’t do much policy-wise, along with Public Liaison or some others, we would occasionally have groups in that were upset, mostly gays who were upset that the President wasn’t, they felt, supporting them. So if we needed to bring people in for briefings we would do that.

Primarily, the key issues as they came up, whether it was the crime bill, we spent a lot of time on, well initially, the stimulus package and then the deficit reduction, the budget bill. That was sort of an all-hands-on-deck just in getting the votes to pass it. So primarily, building support among groups to assist us in those efforts and with direct contact for elected officials. So we’d get from Legislative Affairs names of members who were wavering, and try to think up things we could do, or if we had a good relationship with them, talk with them and see if there were specific items, either in the legislation or that could be added to the legislation, that could make a difference in terms of their votes. Health care consumed a lot of time—

**Riley:** As early as the first few months?

**Baggett:** Well, pretty early because they were starting to talk about it right away. So the public stuff we did had more to do with stimulus package, deficit reduction; but, within the White House, making sure we had someone there who could monitor what was going on. Health care had a whole life of its own. I’m sure you'll talk to several other people, but that was its own universe. It had its own solar system and everything. So we sort of, correctly or incorrectly, made an early calculation that we weren’t going to have much effect on it, that health care was going to go where health care wanted to go in terms of whether it was the First Lady, Ira [Magaziner], the people directing it, that there was a lot of fire power there and star power there.

Mandy Grunwald sat in, the pollsters were right there at the table. So we tried to stay involved but we weren’t major players on that. We were more active on the budget side.

**Riley:** Let me press you because I want to make sure I understand this correctly then. Your calculation about staying away from health care was primarily because you felt that it was amply staffed—
Baggett: Yes.

Riley: Or primarily—

Baggett: It was staffed so heavily, not with people from our office. I think we did have, I’m trying to remember the specifics. It was around for so long, I think it probably varied. I think Tom Epstein was the person on our staff who started out being our person there, but—I’m not sure that didn’t change.

Riley: He was one of the three special assistants?

Baggett: Yes, and he had come from California and had worked for the insurance commissioner there, [John] Garamendi, and just had a particular interest in that area, so I think he may have been our staff person. But again, we didn’t go to that table with the belief that we were going to be key players. It wasn’t that we didn’t think it was important; it wasn’t that we didn’t think it needed political help, it was just there were so many people there. That was an operation that was running fairly separately, on its own separate track.

Riley: But at this stage, there wasn’t a sense that it was in some way radioactive, that there were—

Baggett: No,

Riley: Okay.

Baggett: That came later on. We would certainly give input—the story of my life, organized labor. We would make sure key constituencies were plugged into it, but they pretty much did that from the beginning. It didn’t suffer for lack of political advice.

Riley: So that’s an area on the White House agenda that is sort of carved out and is running on its own.

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: Its own solar system. So that takes us back, then, to the question about the issue areas that you are working in and looking back at those earliest months. I guess the stimulus package and the budget were the key things.

Baggett: That was everything.

Riley: Were you or Rahm involved in the policy decision-making process at the time?

Baggett: No, not really. That really got put together more on the Bruce Reed side and in the National Economic Council and the domestic policy office. Those were really the policy-production areas, if you will.
Riley: But Rahm would not have been in those meetings, either.

Baggett: No. Well, when I say he wasn’t at the meetings, he could have been in the meetings, but my sense of it is when the policies were being developed, they were being developed more by what I would consider the issues side of the White House, the National Economic Council, domestic policy side, and not in Political Affairs or Legislative Affairs or Intergovernmental. That’s not to say we wouldn’t give input if Gene Sperling came and said, “Oh, we’ve got this great economic idea, we’re going to do X, Y, Z.” We’d say, “That’s a nonstarter.” We’d give feedback. But I’m trying to recall if there was ever, I just don’t think there was ever a time when we came and said, “Here’s a policy that we need to run.”

Now Rahm would be the first to say, “Look, we said, we’re going to put 100,000 more police on the streets, we’re gonna do that.” So we would be some of the reminders, or keepers of campaign promises. How are we going to do that? What are the steps to get us there? But the policy ideas were not originating out of our department.

Tenpas: Is it fair to say that rather than policy creation, you were more policy promotion?

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: I want to follow up one—

Baggett: Reaction, feedback, but not policy creation.

Riley: This is a period of time when the White House is famously porous in terms of the meeting structures early on. You hear these tales of very large meetings in the Roosevelt Room with people, rings about rings, about rings, lasting deep into the night, seminars. Were you a part of these?

Baggett: I used to have—there were so many different levels of meetings. Maybe every White House is like that, but it was almost meeting paralysis because all you did was sit in the meetings. Because I attributed it to there being so many young, single people involved in it. Very often, meetings would start at 10:00 at night. It was like being in college. So I made a rule that I wouldn’t attend any meeting that started after 8 P.M. unless one of the principals was involved. But routinely, things would go on like that.

The larger ones, my recollection is that those tended to occur at the very beginning and then people sort of got those out of their system and saw that it probably wasn’t the most productive way to get things done.

Riley: I’m trying to get a sense about your own relationship with the President. Did you have many meetings with him either during the transition or—?

Baggett: I didn’t have any during the transition. I really didn’t have meetings with him until after we were at the White House. My typical meeting with him would consist of briefings of what we were about to do, some event that we were responsible for. Then I would go in and brief
him right before the event. But in terms of general meetings, I will not remember when we first had this, but we would start to do political meetings, and that would probably be the full table in the Roosevelt Room, but not people sitting around the outside. Those just became more frequent as we got into the election cycle.

Riley: For ’94.

Baggett: For ’94. And for leading up to ’93, too. But there were some general—my recollection is we had a few, and this could have even been when Rahm was still political director. I can’t remember when we started doing this, but there were some where we would have, like David Wilhelm and the consultants, and the President and the Vice President and the First Lady and me, Rahm, the consultants, those types of meetings where we would be talking about the latest poll or maybe the state elections that were coming up in ’93. So those would occur on an occasional basis, but it wasn’t any regular meetings.

Then as we got into the budget bill, particularly in the summer, after I took over as political director, we would have meetings in the residence. I was interested in one of the articles, this could have been [Bradley H.] Patterson’s. I can’t remember, the one you did or Patterson, but one of the articles that talked about the residence meetings that I think they said started in ’95. We had residence meetings back as early as ’93, talking about the plan for how we were going to work to get the votes on the budget bill.

Riley: I’m not sure that I’ve heard that before.

Baggett: Up in the solarium.

Riley: The period after ’94, or after the ’94 elections, gets a lot of attention because the meetings, I guess, become more regularized and larger, and routinely among the people who have written about this, anyway, it’s seen as a kind of period where the President is trying to find his sea legs again.

Baggett: Right.

Riley: But I don’t know that we’ve heard much about meetings before.

Baggett: Yes, there were meetings to talk about the budget and they were in the residence.

Riley: Why would they be—?

Baggett: I’m trying to remember. I can try to name who was there but I’ll probably forget some people and also it would go back and forth, sometimes somebody would be included and the next time they weren’t. Of course, everyone would see great import as to who was or wasn’t in the room. Most of us were sitting there thinking, I hope I’m not yelled at today. [laughter] It was very basic.
Riley: You said that these meetings originally started out in the Roosevelt Room, where you were doing the briefings with—

Baggett: Yes, those were just—you know where you have a recollection of being in the room and who’s in the room and you don’t really remember what it was about. It could have even been around health care, but it was early on and they seemed to me to be more general. But in that White House’s terms, they were small enough that I figured maybe it was more specific because how do we keep that many people out of the room. I found out later that if you invited a large number, you were pretty much okay because they figured if that many people had been invited it wasn’t going to be important and then they wouldn’t come. If you made it only a few people, everybody would get upset because they weren’t invited to the meeting.

Riley: Reverse psychology in meetings.

Baggett: Or child psychology.

Riley: Exactly. So the meetings, once they get moved into the residence, was there a reason, that you recall, for their being put in the residence, was it because of the timing of the meetings or—?

Baggett: I don’t recall. The typical reason the meetings were in the residence was if they were of a political nature. The ones that I’m remembering, for the most part, were focused on getting legislation passed, so they would not have been considered political. I think it may just have been that they felt it easier to control who—you couldn’t just drop in and pretend like you were supposed to be there, which, again, people were sort of famous for doing.

Tenpas: Can I go back to health care for a minute?

Riley: By all means, yes.

Tenpas: I’m interested because it struck me that the Office of Political Affairs is really the conduit to the national committee. David Wilhelm’s contact primarily was—didn’t the DNC create a special entity to promote health care, and did you have anything to do with that? I remember they brought in former Governor Dick Celeste to run—

Baggett: I remember that.

Tenpas: A sort of a mini-campaign out of the DNC because they didn’t think they could do it legitimately from the White House.

Baggett: Right.

Tenpas: So your office wasn’t involved?

Baggett: No. We had contact with them. There’s involved and there’s involved. We just—
Tenpas: Generally speaking, who were the contacts? What was the contact point at the DNC and how did that relationship work?

Baggett: Typically, it was either—the two main contact points were David Wilhelm and Craig Smith.

Riley: Craig Smith was what?

Baggett: He was political director at the DNC.

Riley: At the DNC, okay.

Baggett: He had worked with Clinton in Arkansas. There were a lot of people there from Arkansas, but he was sort of the main Arkansas political person, if you will.

Tenpas: Would they typically call on you to help them, or would you be calling on them to—?

Baggett: Both, very symbiotic. I’d say even the first few months, it was the shakedown cruise and getting it straight. That’s why I say there was a lot of redundancy because they were creating lists and we were creating lists. We might not trust their list and they didn’t trust our list.

Riley: This being lists of people who were supporting or opposed or needed—

Baggett: Right. Who had been invited to state dinners, who hadn’t been invited to state dinners. Quite honestly, it centered mostly around the perks.

Tenpas: Giving away the tickets to—

Baggett: Who was being taken care of.

Tenpas: The Kennedy Center box.

Baggett: Right, the Kennedy Center box. Again, I can’t describe what it was. We were able to work out a system of connecting so that we reduced some of the duplication of efforts after a while. But it took a little while to get that dance right.

Tenpas: Can you talk about the geographic breakdown across the three special assistants? How did it work? Was it sort of West, Midwest, East?

Baggett: I tried to remember that. As I recall, initially we did it geographically, literally sort of dividing up the country—

Tenpas: Into thirds?

Baggett: Yes, they were more contiguous states. But then we realized that in the Midwest, for example, which Linda Moore had, she had too many big states. So then we changed it a little bit
and spread some of the big states around. The main ones that I remember is Tom Epstein had California, that’s where he’s from, and he had Washington and Oregon and probably some of the other western states. He kept focused on a lot of the environmental issues because those tended to be hot-button issues out there, and he had a background and interest in it from California. So that was sort of a subject area as well as geographic area that he had an interest in, and he was interested in health care.

Linda Moore, who had been political director of the DLC before coming with us, was from Texas originally. I think she took Texas. Then she also had a lot of the Midwest. She had Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, a lot of the key midwestern states. Reta Lewis—and Linda had an interest, again, because of her DLC background, she had an interest in NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] and she took the subject, policy focus on NAFTA when we were doing that.

Reta Lewis, who is African-American, was originally from Georgia, and she took a lot of the South, most of the South, but she also had Pennsylvania. Then Joe Velasquez, when we brought Joe in, because of his background also in organized labor and some of his previous political experience, we gave him New Jersey and New York, I think.

Tenpas: So you added a fourth special assistant, or was he on detail from somewhere?

Baggett: He was actually my deputy. When I became political director, we hired him as the deputy. He had been at the AFL-CIO in their political area and I knew him from there.

Tenpas: Aside from the states, dividing the states, I assume they responded to the state party chairs and the party apparatus.

Baggett: State party chairs, the party apparatus, as well as the key Clinton supporters in that area, which were not always the same people.

Tenpas: Then who covered special constituencies, or was that sort of ad hoc?

Baggett: It was ad hoc. Primarily that was covered through Public Liaison. Now, the day after we had to deal with Public Liaison, there were some constituents—and we did that to say to them that Legislative Affairs will deal with Congress on legislation, but we have to have a relationship with the same people on their political lives, and that’s our jurisdiction. There are obviously huge areas of overlap, so we’ve got to coordinate so we don’t look like the gang that couldn’t shoot straight.

The same thing applied to Public Liaison because if you’re the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], your constituency group that Public Liaison would be dealing with on issues, that you need to be briefed on, that type of thing, but you’re also a political constituency that we need to have a political relationship with. Then, I had taken the portfolio from labor so there wasn’t so much of a conflict there, but in every other group, whether it was women’s groups—
Tenpas: African-American?

Baggett: Yes. Civil rights groups, any of that, Hispanic groups, there was overlap. Quite honestly, how much friction we had over it depended on whether the staff people, on both sides, but from our view, looking at Public Liaison, some staffers were better than others. So, for example, even when Rahm was there, if we didn’t think they were doing what they should be doing with police officers, and we saw a good opportunity to bring in police officers, we just did it, and then we’d get yelled at later that we were in their territory.

Tenpas: Just as, if you were asked to think about ways of modifying or reforming the White House staff, do you think it makes sense to merge some of these offices so that you have Public Liaison and Intergovernmental Office?

Baggett: I would. I mean, given your diminished resources—I guess they did a modified version of this with Harold—I’d have a Deputy Chief of Staff that was going to have the political portfolio and then those offices in Public Liaison, and I’d have Legislative Affairs, Public Liaison, Intergovernmental, all report in through that Deputy Chief of Staff, and just have people within those staffs who could handle the political.

Tenpas: So you’d wipe out Political Affairs because it’s so redundant with all the others.

Baggett: I would. Now, you’d have to have that Deputy Chief of Staff, which Harold did. You’d have to have in the Deputy Chief of Staff a political person. That’s what Karl Rove’s doing now.

Riley: I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about your own learning about President Clinton’s operating style and his work habits as you’re going through. You’ve just come out of an organization where you were working for Ron Brown, who obviously had his own particular work habits. You said he was very good on outreach, had a particular kind of message and his own operating—didn’t like to tell people no. I wonder if you could give us a similar thumbnail sketch of President Clinton’s work habits as you’re learning about them in this first occasion where you had an intimate contact with the President.

Baggett: I would say that probably one of the best things and worst things about him is his comfort in getting a broad range of opinions and being able to sift through those to develop policy. So that’s good in developing, I think, the responsible policy. But the downside, I thought, in the approach he used, he would tend to get some of this information and then not vet it back through the process, the internal process, and that didn’t serve him well occasionally. Probably less on the broad policy issues than in some of the other, like the pardons at the end, those types of things. He’s incredibly smart. Even in areas that—I would deal with him on labor issues, and here’s a guy who was a Governor of a right-to-work state, had very little experience with unions and union issues, and just about any issue you could bring up, he got it really quickly.

He could absorb things at an incredible rate. I think that it was interesting to watch when we first came to office to see the Republican elected officials, when they would come through; they would walk out shell shocked because, they said, “We’ve just been through George Bush, who didn’t really care about domestic issues, and Ronald Reagan, who didn’t want to engage on any
of this either, and Bill Clinton is so comfortable talking to just about anything and really wanted our opinions.” He was used to working with unfriendly legislators in Arkansas. So it was great to watch him operate in that kind of situation. But I was always a little uncomfortable as to who got to him last and if he listened to someone and then didn’t vet his decision back through a broader group. Again, I didn’t have any experience with him before, so that was a little hard to know how to work within that structure.

Being a political director to Bill Clinton, though, is like being the Maytag repairman. [laughter] Only that he just can’t be everywhere at once and do it all because there was no state for which he didn’t know more about the politics than anybody in the room. When I’d call to give him results on something he’d go, “You know, he ran in that race, he ran that same district back in 1968 and then they changed that line.” The most obscure things. So that, just from the political perspective, was a bit daunting, just how much he knew and how much he remembered about people and places and issues.

Art Agnos, who was the Mayor of San Francisco a few years ago, was there at an event. He told us when he met Clinton, it had been like five years or something, when Clinton was running for President and came back through and they were in the same car going someplace, and Art Agnos introduced himself again, and Clinton said, “Oh, I know you. You and I shared a cab to the airport a few years ago and on that one cab ride you taught me more about affordable housing and how to get this done than anybody I’ve ever talked with.” Agnos said, “I barely remembered the conversation, and he knew exactly what I had said.” He just had an incredible memory for things like that. So that was both good and bad. And then also his—

**Riley:** The bad side of it being?

**Baggett:** The bad side of it being, he knew so much that you could get bogged down in this well, yes, but you’ve got to go back and unpack all that luggage. Well, here’s why it’s not still like that, here’s what’s occurred since. Or Cuba. His sister-in-law is Cuban. So then we’d have to deal with, “You need to call Maria [Arias] because what you’re saying on this is not what she’s hearing down here. Here’s Maria’s number, I just got a letter from her the other day.” So I have to call Maria and Hugh [Rodham] and go through their view of Cuba. That’s what I was about to say, his long list of acquaintances that he still communicated with. I’ve never met anybody who has that many contacts, and that he keeps up with.

So you could get a call from him from really out of the blue to go check out something or call so-and-so, they have an idea on something. So we would spend time with these contacts, on their ideas. I figure anybody whose call the President of the United States will take has got to be a VIP that you deal with. That was one of the most useful things to me about his book, finally understanding his relationship to some of these people. It’s like, “Oh, that’s how he knew them.” There are so many of them, there’s a reason that book is so thick.

**Riley:** So many names.

**Baggett:** In fact, he told me that when he was writing the book he had way more people in there, and it was so long that the publisher said, “Nobody will get through this book, you have to cut
“He said that he was thinking of doing what Alfred Hitchcock had done: he had the same problem and they made him cut the book, so he cut the pages out of the book but he left all the people’s names in the index, thinking people just looked for their names in the index. [laughter] I can’t tell you a lot about his management style because, again, other than the briefings and being around election-related stuff, it wasn’t like I was George Tenet and doing the daily CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] briefings.

Riley: But you had plenty of interaction and experiences to pick up things. Part of our job is to—

Baggett: He would also call people, and as we said, I wasn’t particularly close to him, but I would get calls from him at night. It would be 11, 11:30 at night, and you’d get calls from the President. So of course, you talk. Obviously, we talked around election time but usually I was down at the White House covering the results then. Sometimes he’d just call to see how a certain race was going.

Tenpas: So you monitored a lot of—weren’t there some big races in 1993?

Baggett: In ’93 there were the New Jersey and Virginia races, Mary Sue Terry and then Jim Florio in New Jersey. Now, what we would do—

Tenpas: So you monitored those closely?

Baggett: Right. We’d keep him posted on how those were going all along, and then election night, all of our staff gathered in our offices in the White House and monitored the returns, and kept him updated throughout the night on the returns, and gave him calls to make to congratulate or commiserate with people.

Tenpas: Can you talk a little bit about the transition from Rahm Emanuel being the director to you being the director, and what were the dynamics at that time?

Baggett: A little bit. This is what I recall about it. Rahm called me in one day and said, “I think they’re finally going to shift me over to something else.” I said, “How could they possibly do that?” Rahm was always getting into trouble. Rahm was—as I said, we became close during the DNC stuff and the inaugural—but it was almost like he was my little brother. So we had, and still do, a complete trust relationship where we knew the other one had our back, even if it was for our own purposes, there wasn’t any question about it.

I can’t even recall if we discussed what was the latest incriminating thing he had done, because it was sort of a collection.

Tenpas: What kinds of things was he doing?

Baggett: Rahm, by his personality, is abrasive. So I used to joke to people that the easiest job in the world is being Rahm’s deputy because anybody would always prefer to talk to me because Rahm is such a jerk. But the good thing about Rahm was he got things done. He would just plow
through. He didn’t really care. There was none of this nicety about checking in with the other departments. He was going to get the job done. So it wasn’t about anything about him personally, he would just—and for the internal people who had worked with him on the campaign, I think there was, for the most part, genuine affection for Rahm, and they didn’t take it personally when he would “dis” them and railroad things through.

But on a regular basis he would get crossways with the First Lady. Not usually about her specifically, but he’d have a run-in with Susan Thomases, her friend. There were things like that. So he had thought for a while he was—Rahm never thought about getting in trouble, he just did it. So anyway, he told me he was going to be doing something else. I can’t even remember if he put any particular spin on it. So I said, “Then I’ll quit. I don’t want to work for somebody else.” He said, “No, don’t do that.” So we speculated on who it might be. I can’t remember specific names but we figured it could be ugly. I think the rest of the staff felt like I did—Rahm definitely didn’t want us to leave but we were very concerned about who we might get stuck with, essentially.

Then, shortly after that, I don’t know if it was either Roy Neel or Mack McLarty who called me in and said, “We’d like for you to be the political director.” I said, “Okay, but are you sure you want to do that?” You know, go to gender politics here. I think by that time I was three months’ pregnant. I said, “I don’t expect you to discriminate against me because I’m pregnant, but I’m not sure that this is such a good idea.” [laughter] Now meanwhile, again, I’m not questioning his motive, but Rahm is a big proponent of that, of me taking the job. My guess is, because Rahm knew he could work with me, this isn’t another unknown entity.

Tenpas: Where did he move to?

Baggett: I don’t know what his official title was, it was probably within communications, and they sort of shifted stuff around in there. I remember people saying, “Aren’t you worried that you’ll get the shaft like Rahm?” I said, “Quite honestly, I’m not close enough to the Clintons for them to screw me like that.” [laughter] For a lot of the people who worked closely with them on the campaign, I really thought they sort of got shafted in terms of the way they were treated, and it did tend to be people who were closer to them, not ones like me who were on the periphery. Harold was crushed because he didn’t get picked to come in as Chief of Staff or Deputy Chief of Staff at the beginning.

My recollection on that was there were some kinds of questions about the unions he had represented in New York and that just—I think he stayed loyal, but while there was all this spin that he was brought in to shore me up, it was really that he finally got in after having been held out by them. So that was actually in the works, for him to come back when I was named political director.

Riley: But you knew Harold and had worked with him, and so there was a certain—

Baggett: I did, and in fact, I was an advocate of him coming there. Now, that’s not to say that we—we were allies, we had worked together on the Kennedy campaign and everything, every political campaign since that I think both of us had worked on. For whatever reason, though,
when he ultimately came, there was definitely a different relationship. I can’t say, it doesn’t make sense that it would have been him trying to put distance. I’ve never understood it, I still don’t. I don’t think Harold understands it even, because we still have a very cordial relationship. It’s never been the same since then, but it was like he was—it was clear from the beginning when he came on board that he picked Doug [Sosnik] as, Doug’s going to be my guy. Literally, if we were sitting here and having a political discussion and you were me and she was Doug, it would be, “Doug, what do you think?” I would have just said the same thing and he’d go, “That’s great.” What’s that about? It brought new meaning to gender politics. Again, not even anti-female.

Karen Hancox, who worked in the Office of Legislative Affairs and had worked for a long time on the House side of Congress, and had worked with Beryl Anthony at the DCCC, he also, I think, gave her a lot to do and Doug gave her a lot to do, and Karen and I get along great. As I do with Doug. I’ve known Doug forever, but it was just a weird relationship, which I’ve never understood.

Riley: Just to be clear, you’re saying this exclusively about Harold, or you’re saying that within the White House proper that you generally felt that the women—

Baggett: No, with Harold. The women in general—I should have kept this sheet—one time it was just so, you know how you have days where it’s a little too overwhelming. There was one day where we were downstairs in the communications office, where David Dreyer, I think, worked out of. I don’t remember the issue we were discussing. Dee Dee [Myers] was still working as press secretary, and Dee Dee and I were in the room, but other than that, I want to say there were about 12 guys. They were all saying the most obvious things. It wasn’t like any of them needed to be there other than about three. It was like, this is so overwhelmingly male, it wasn’t even funny.

Even in a White House that was committed to diversity, as it was, and I don’t question the President's commitment at all, it still had serious white-boy problems. I think it’s just something you have to deal with.

Riley: I would guess that a lot of it is not the kind of overt white-boy problems that you might get used to growing up in Alabama, where it would be overt in many instances, but the kinds of—it’s much more psychologically oriented so that people don’t even have a recognition that they’re doing it, probably.

Baggett: Oh, it was, very much. As an example, when we had all those losing races to contend with, if we were briefing the President on elections coming up or on political issues or something, there was never any shortage of guys in the room. There was Harold, Doug, everybody getting their two cents in, George, Rahm, etc. So they were all there. Okay, our guys lose. Guess who’s making the call? Then I have to have the discussion with the President. So we used to joke with the staff when we lost, “Where’d all the guys go?” That’s how it was. When there was face time and it was good news, they were all there, but when it was bad news, you had plenty of alone time with the President.
Tenpas: This is an interesting issue because I think in some of the journalistic pieces, they talked about how President Clinton was willing to promote women to senior positions, in fact more so than any President.

Baggett: Yes.

Tenpas: But then, in the case of say Dee Dee Myers, they were put in positions where they then weren’t given the access, and so then it looks like they failed.

Baggett: Right.

Tenpas: Was there any camaraderie amongst the women in these senior positions who felt frustration? Did you ever—

Baggett: To some extent, I think, and maybe later on there was more. I think there was. I certainly felt emotional support from the other women, and I think we all shared the feeling that there was a little too much testosterone in most of the meetings. But for the most part, it’s just so fast-paced you didn’t have—

Tenpas: Right.

Baggett: It’s like great, okay, get over it. You deal with it. I’ve just stopped and thought, we didn’t have Karen Hughes. I’m not even sure I’m reading this properly, but after I left, the only people I saw that I thought might have gotten close to it was, Ann Lewis seemed to get in there and totally get into the mix, but I’ve never talked to Ann about if she really felt like she was there. Again, it’s hard to say if what you see from the outside is real or not. I just don’t know. My friend Karen Tramontano became Deputy Chief of Staff, and she was there, and then after Clinton left office she was his Chief of Staff. She didn’t say this, but my impression is—again, she was always put in the same position I was, she was there, the “eat your peas” role that we had to play. Well, this is what you have to do, always giving the bad news, being the enforcer. I think Maggie Williams has always been in that kind of position as well.

Riley: Which raises the issue of your relationship with Hillary-land. Did you have lots of contacts there? Can you tell us—?

Baggett: I had a good relationship with them. Because she did a lot of political travel, we did a lot of briefings. For the most part, Hillary-land sort of kept to itself. Maggie, they were all, they were very protective. You only broke through if you had personal relationships with the individuals, which I did with Maggie and some of the others, and for the most part our staff had good relations with their staff. So we were okay.

At least at the beginning, the First Lady was in some political meetings and not in others. It was like if she was around and we had a political meeting with the President and the Vice President, she might sit in on it, but it wasn’t like we had to schedule meetings around her schedule. I’ve often thought that some of her reputation of being politically off-key, I’m not saying she has it now, but the rap on her back then was she was way out there, out of touch with people, too
liberal, blah, blah, blah. When you think about it, the President and the Vice President have a lot
of staff to brief them on meetings going on, and she didn’t have that much staff. So if she was
going into a political meeting, nobody had produced paper for her before. She was hearing things
for the first time. If she said something that was a little bit off, I don’t think any of us, including
me, felt like it was appropriate for us to correct her. Whereas, if the President had made an
observation that was off base, I could have said, “Not really, here’s what that really means.” But
with her, if he or the Vice President knew she said something wrong, they might say something,
but nobody else would. So then it was sort of out there.

Or she would blow up over something that she misinterpreted. Again, you can’t take her on,
that’s not my boss. You can’t take on the First Lady and say, “That’s wrong.” Sometimes she
would blow up over things. She was sort of defending him, like on the deficit-reduction stuff. I
remember one time in one of these meetings where she was blowing up about his staff and how
we were all incompetent and he was having to be the mechanic and drive the car and do
everything, that we weren’t capable of anything. Why did he have to do it all himself? Which
was a little odd.

Tenpas: In front of everybody.

Baggett: Yes. She’s talking about us and we’re sitting there. It was just sort of odd. So that
would happen. That’s why I’m saying, sometimes she’d be in those meetings and I’d think,
Please don’t let her yell at me, which she never did. She’s always been very nice to me. I like
her. But we got along with Hillary-land.

Riley: This indicates, though, a potential reason why it’s problematic to appoint a First Lady in a
position like heading up the health care task force. Do you agree with that?

Baggett: I think it is. Now, I also think, and, as I said, I wasn’t part of the task force, but the
dynamic may have been different there because she was seen in a different role. It was almost as
if in our meetings she was a person there without portfolio. She was one of the principals, we
used her to travel and all that, but it was different than her heading up the health care task force.
But I do think taking the personalities out of it, that a First Lady heading up a task force for an
issue like that, it’s complicated.

Riley: You didn’t feel that you had a warrant to correct or issue criticism, but your perception is
that the people in Hillary-land did have that warrant—

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: And that there may have been people on the task force who also—

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: Had that warrant. I’m thinking of somebody like Chris Jennings, who was—I guess,
technically, his assignment was elsewhere, I don’t remember. Chris had three or four different
portfolios, but I assume that there may have been a number of people who might have felt that
they could have added something to the task force enterprise, but if they didn’t have a particular portfolio to do that, they would have opted out. Am I not making sense?

Baggett: I think you’re right on that. But on the health care portfolio, I think part of the problem overall in the White House was with the health care task force there was no shortage of people, there was no shortage of expertise. Whether or not it was the right expertise in the room is anybody’s guess, I don’t know. I don’t even remember who all was involved in it now. So adding more cooks might or might not have helped. From what I recollect, they certainly did a lot of outreach. Again, whether the decisions reached were right or wrong, I don’t know. But at the time, from what I heard about it, there were good reasons to make the decisions they made.

Riley: Sure, but more fundamentally, there’s this question about the number of people who felt free to really speak their minds in the presence of the First Lady.

Baggett: Yes, I don’t know about that. I also don’t know how much control Ira had in terms of the day-to-day workings of it with her overseeing it, and I’m sure they would have felt comfortable speaking their mind to Ira. So I’m not sure that that was as big a problem as not, I don’t know.

Riley: Did you have many dealings with Ira?

Baggett: Not really. Dealt with him, nice guy and all, but I don’t know him that well.

Riley: Part of the different universe.

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: What about the Vice President and his staff?

Baggett: Yes, one of the things we didn’t talk about that we did have to spend time on during the time I was there was the reinventing government project because that had a big political component. There were things that look good on paper but don’t play out so well politically. Again, I knew Elaine Kamarck from the Mondale campaign and other Presidential campaigns, so we had reasonable access to the people who were doing it. We weren’t part of the—there was no one from Political Affairs sitting at the table, helping figure out what programs you were going to cut or beef up or reinvent. But once they came out, I remember the order correctly, but I think they either briefed us or gave us an advance copy of the types of things they were looking at doing. Some were, I don’t know if they were predictable, but they were predictable political land mines, particularly as they related to labor.

One was to eliminate Davis-Bacon [wage determinations] on military construction projects. Another was to change the railroad retirement system. Now, I don’t know anything about the railroad retirement system other than it’s probably one of the smallest unions in the universe that deal with it, but they will bug the crap out of you if you ever touch their railroad retirement, and it just couldn’t save that much money. So I said to them, “Don’t do this. They’re going to bug us
to death. You’re going to get a black eye about screwing somebody’s pension, and at the end of the day, I guarantee you, they’re going to win. You’re not going to win this one.”

So we went back and forth, had to endure about a million phone calls from railroad retirees, and they did have to drop it. And the same thing on Davis-Bacon. I said, “You’re making Republican arguments. Again, whether you win it or lose, at the end of the day you’re going to have a lot of enemies, and you’re not going to win it and you’re going to need all these unions to help you pass the health care bill over here. So if you hack them off on this, they’re not going to help you on that. It’s just real simple.” So the Vice President was good; he prevailed and he changed what he needed to change. So we had some politics that we had to do around that effort. I mean, all-in-all, I think it was a good thing to do, it was just that that had some political management component to it.

**Riley:** What can you tell us about, to the extent that you witnessed it, the difference in operating styles between the President and the Vice President, how they liked to get information, how they processed information, their political ears, their native intelligence—

**Baggett:** With the Vice President, his briefings, if you took this notebook and magnified it about three inches, that would be a typical briefing for the Vice President, and he would read it all and ask questions on it. Not that he required it, but he liked to have more information about policy areas and subjects, and he devoured it and would question you on it and all.

**Riley:** The President would not do that.

**Baggett:** No, as I said, from the areas we dealt with, he just had so much in his memory he was comfortable with, and in fact preferred, a one or two sheet backgrounder. I guess those were the main differences in style that we dealt with. [Al] Gore I’ve known since he was in Congress, so my impression of him as Vice President, everything sort of runs together. But he is sort of a nerd when it comes to material. He likes all that stuff.

**Riley:** Did he have the same kind of internal grasp of politics that the President had, the same kind of political ear that he had for things or not?

**Baggett:** Not as much. He certainly remembered a lot of people and had known a lot of people, but he, if you had to categorize it one way or the other, Gore definitely would veer towards the policy side, and Bill Clinton definitely veered toward the people side. Bill Clinton just loves people. The policies really represent, the policies are about the people to him. I think Gore enjoys policy for policy’s sake, and really understanding it. He’d love the theory of something. Bill Clinton would tell you a story about somebody that illustrated the theory. I think you see it in the way they connect and they don’t connect.

I think the Vice President is a much warmer and funnier person than he ever comes across publicly. One of the things that always struck me about his time in office, and he did just an incredible amount, those first two years. He just stayed on the road almost nonstop, doing fundraising and political appearances, because in a lot of areas of the country he was better than the President was, to go in and do these events. But, at the same time, on his blocked schedule that
we dealt with, he had the kids’ soccer games and lacrosse games all penciled in, and he made just about every one that he could. He always impressed me that he really tried to balance all that. But he did grow up with it, literally, in Washington, but even as kids, I guess the whole time they were around, he was in public life, balancing those things. I’d say that’s the main difference I saw.

It was great to watch them together. I was very sorry to see the split that occurred in the 2000 election, where Gore didn’t want Clinton out for him, because they were such a good team. I mean, there really was good chemistry there, and again, with the policy and the people analogy, they really were a good team. So I think it hurt the Vice President not to have Clinton out with him. I think there was more to gain from it than to lose.

**Tenpas:** Did the office experience any kind of, was there any sort of—let me put it differently, was there any effect when Rahm Emanuel left and you, was it a rather smooth transition since you were the deputy and had to hire another—

**Baggett:** There would be a better judge than me. I think it was pretty smooth. Yes, I think it was pretty smooth. I don’t think they were affected that much by it.

**Tenpas:** Did all the other shake-ups that were occurring in the White House, was that unsettling to you? I mean, at the time they brought in David Gergen, and George Stephanopoulos moved around, and then Leon Panetta came in to take charge. Are you just so busy and in the moment that you don’t have a chance to think about things, or does it affect the morale? I’ve just been curious because there were a lot of shake-ups going on in that first year.

**Baggett:** The George thing was like, wow. But you sort of knew George was still going to be in a significant position, so it was more, let’s see how this plays out. I think most people were skeptical about Gergen. Here’s a guy who’s worked for both sides and is going to come in here and do his value-added thing, but not really going to help anything—he’s going to be a sage Washington boy saying what needs to be said. I don’t think people’s morale was affected by it. I don’t think people felt like it was going to do very much.

I think within—obviously, most of the people came out of the campaign—and I think there was a protectiveness around George, or Rahm, any of the campaign people, to make sure that they were well taken care of and they weren’t being given the shaft. So it was more of a wait and see. First, shock, then wait and see. I think people were—“affected” may not be the right word, but they were. I know I was surprised when Howard Paster left after the first year. Then, when Roy Neel left, just because it seemed so fast. Howard loved it, so I was surprised that he left.

**Riley:** You think he just got fed up with the circumstances he was dealing with?

**Baggett:** I don’t know. I never really understood why. I wasn’t that close to him. I never understood why Howard left because when I saw him later, when he was at Hill & Knowlton or wherever he went to head up, he really missed it. He was making a zillion dollars and all that, but he kept saying, “Just think about that, though, how few people can have that hard pass and walk into the President’s office.” What I found, in talking with people after I left the White House, and
talking to people who had been there and left, is that the guys all wanted to go back, and the
women didn’t miss it at all.

Tenpas: Interesting.

Riley: That is interesting.

Baggett: I don’t know if it’s—I tend to think in terms of the way men and women look at things,
that when something happens, guys never think it’s their fault, it’s somebody else’s.

Riley: You’ve been talking to my wife, haven’t you?

Baggett: Women personalize it and always think it’s their fault, even if they had nothing to do
with it. When I left the White House and I went in to say good-bye to the President, I said, “I’m
so sorry that we didn’t win.” He said, “That wasn’t your fault.” I said, “I really feel like it was.”
He said, “Oh, no. You did much better than I thought you were going to do.” [laughter] It was a
real endorsement. In fact, when Roy Neel asked me about the political director, he said, “Mack
and I are recommending to the President that he select you as the political director.” I said to
somebody, “That is a really bad way to tell somebody because now, I’m going to know that it
was the President that rejected me if I don’t get it.”

To go back to the difference between me and Rahm, I think the department itself overall—I just
don’t have—I’m much more of a manager and Rahm is much more of a—

Tenpas: Strategist?

Baggett: Yes, and take the bull by the horns and run it through. I’m just not a confrontational
person. So we probably had better relations and worked better with other departments to get stuff
done.

Tenpas: After he left?

Baggett: After he left. But, that’s not to say if he had stayed, we couldn’t have gotten things
through the same way. We just would have walked over some more people doing it, trampled a
few bodies.

Riley: Let’s take a very quick five-minute break and come back for about another hour.

[BREAK]

Riley: Was David Wilhelm’s stock fairly high in the White House during the first year or so?
Were people generally happy with the way the coordination was going with the party and his
work over there?
Baggett: I think so. I don’t remember anything negative. My guess is, at any given time during that period, if you asked the President and the First Lady were they happy with David, I think during that period they weren’t happy with David. They weren’t happy with anybody because they didn’t feel like their message was getting out. They would occasionally have the tendency to blame everyone else that that wasn’t occurring. So I’m sure David and the DNC caught the brunt of some of it, just like we did. The President continually felt frustrated that people were only hearing negative things from the press and that we weren’t getting out the message about his accomplishments and the things we were trying to do, and job creation.

In general, I think that would have been the only—you mentioned a while ago, Katie, bringing in Dick Celeste on the health care stuff. I think, as we said before, Ron Brown is a hard act to follow. I don’t think the President would have second-guessed putting David in the Chairmanship of the DNC if they had a dream candidate that could make message and get on TV, they probably would have done that if they could have, too. So, like I said, during that first period we didn’t have a lot to work with.

Riley: How often were you in contact with David?

Baggett: Two or three times a week probably, a pretty regular basis, either in meetings, on a conference call. He traveled around a great deal. Sometimes it was through Craig, but it seems like I saw David a fair amount.

Riley: What about the political advisors, the external political advisors. I guess you had Carville and Begala and—

Tenpas: Greenberg.

Baggett: Saw them just about every day.

Tenpas: Can you talk about the role of polling and these kinds of things related to—

Baggett: Yes, certainly in the beginning, and I can’t even recall during the time I was there, but it didn’t change that much, but they were there on a fairly regular basis. I believe they were being paid by the DNC, and they were doing poll after poll after poll. It was just a steady diet of surveys. It wasn’t a let’s do a poll and see what policies we should do, it was more in terms of how things were being perceived, what were better ways of phrasing, whether in speeches or in fine-tuning of the policies, not so much what the policies themselves should be. Because, again, pretty much everything Clinton campaigned on were the types of initiatives he began to move. So it wasn’t as if he got elected and said, “Oh, let’s do something that we never talked about during the campaign.” It’s sort of hard to talk about, they were there in every political meeting. They prepared, I think at least in terms of Stan’s case, he did memos directly for the President.

Tenpas: Were you in the loop on those? Were those circulated to you at this point, the poll results?
Baggett: No. I mean, we would get briefed on them after the fact, but that’s not to say that they couldn’t, and that Stan didn’t deal directly with the President as well. So they really weren’t required to go through us.

Riley: Was it likely that they were meeting with him at times that you weren’t present, you or Rahm?

Baggett: I’d say potentially, certainly on the health care stuff they did.

Riley: Because again, that’s a separate universe, but that’s a pretty big piece of the first year, I guess a pretty big piece of the entire time you were there.

Tenpas: Did you ever have state-by-state polls done so you could see what was happening out in the states, especially since you monitored races and things like that?

Baggett: No, because it was pretty much—we didn’t commission them separately. There were polls available from the campaigns that we could have access to and look at, so we got briefed on those, but we didn’t commission the polls state by state. We didn’t do those separately.

Riley: Did they have a place to park when they came up there—we were talking about your own wonderful parking place—

Baggett: These are important issues.

Riley: I don’t mean their cars, but did they have a desk or an office that they—

Baggett: No, there wasn’t that much real estate at the White House. It was worse than the DNC.

Tenpas: They did have passes, though, so they were—

Baggett: They had passes because that was a big issue, what kind of passes and how you do that. I can’t recall now, but I just recall that was a big issue.

Riley: So they kept their own offices and would traipse up to the White House and do whatever meetings they had with the President or somebody else, and then turn around and take off.

Baggett: Right, and they were paid by the DNC so a large part of the—DNC fund-raising was now being done by the President and the Vice President, but—I’m sure it’s been published, but I don’t know what the bills were. I’m sure they were high.

Riley: Those guys were probably wearing better shoes than you. [laughter]

Tenpas: Was there any—I actually dug through FEC [Federal Election Commission] reports looking for polling expenditures and comparing the Presidents, so I know there was a lot of money spent on those guys. I also had read some reports, I think covered mostly by John
Harrison in the *Washington Post*, that there was a little bit of antipathy between White House staffers and these pollsters, especially Dick Morris. So what was—

**Baggett:** Yes, and he was after my time, so I could see how, just by what I know of his operating style, not because of any dealings I had with him, that that would be—I think he considered himself a separate universe, though. The difference, and some people felt it towards Mandy and Stan and Paul and Jim as well, but the relationships with them, because they were in the campaign and there were so many campaign veterans in the White House, it was almost like they didn’t work there but they were part of the family. But Dick Morris, that was a different kettle of fish. My guess is, the way Morris works, he was probably even working at odds with some of the things they were doing. So that really was a whole other universe out there. I wouldn’t have wanted—I don’t know, I can’t even imagine how he and Harold worked at the same time. I’m glad I wasn’t managing that.

**Tenpas:** Can you recall any incidents where maybe polling results that were reported by Greenberg et al. might have changed your strategy or changed something that you were doing, and you did something else because of these poll results? Did it have any?

**Baggett:** No, I wish I could give you an example, but it’s just not fresh enough in my memory to remember that. I don’t remember.

**Riley:** The President was an avid reader of the polls himself?

**Baggett:** He liked any of that stuff. Now that’s not to say he wouldn’t take the results and use it as, “Why doesn’t anybody understand me, and why aren’t you getting my message out?”

**Riley:** There has been some talk about, during the first year in particular, that there was a sense among some of the people who had campaign experience that the President was tracking away from the kind of Presidency that he had intended when he had come into office. This usually comes about in conversations about that first year’s budget package because there had been this emphasis on stimulus, on investment, and then during the course of the transition, for a variety of reasons, the decision is taken that we’re going to focus on deficit reduction as a way to get the fiscal house in order, which required cutting way back—first cutting way back on the stimulus package, and then, as I recall, you didn’t get any of that.

**Baggett:** Right.

**Riley:** You’re involved in these decisions, do you recall back and forth among—“factions” may not be the best word, but it’s the only one that comes to mind—factions within the White House at this point about whether the President really is being true to his campaign or not?

**Baggett:** Minor recollection. What I basically remember is sort of steady meetings where you’re assessing where you are and how you’re going to get the votes to pass this. The question of whether or not you can get the bill passed, and what ultimately has to be done to do that. That’s the only—the person who certainly played one of the strongest roles around literally everything we did, but certainly around this, and I’m sure had one of the biggest influences of all, is Bob
Rubin. It may be this Wall Street mystique, but even among the Washington veterans, Rubin was sort of this, not this mysterious character, but you’d wait to see what Bob said.

Something would happen in the market and everybody would turn to Bob at the staff meeting and go, “What does that mean?” He would say, “Markets go up and markets go down.” It wasn’t like great pearls of wisdom, but from the President on down, he had a great deal of influence. I don’t recall things he said at meetings around this, but my guess is, he was able to—and the National Economic Council, because as I recall, that was a new entity.

Riley: Yes, that’s right.

Baggett: They really, I think, played a very key role because you didn’t have the Treasury Secretary or the Labor Secretary going off and doing their own thing. It really had to go through that coordinating body. You had [Lloyd] Bentsen, you had Rubin, you had Ron Brown, you had Bob Reich. I mean, none of these are shrinking violets. Certainly, Bentsen and Brown are very Washington savvy. Those were strong voices at the table. I think, in that forum, and I was not part of that forum, but I think you got a lot of hashing out there. Then, with the political types and the legislative types, and the campaign veterans, the meetings I recall, it was more one of practicality: what did you promise, but what can we get through?

Riley: There were a couple of key decisions in that budget battle, one related—this may not prompt any memories, if it doesn’t, we’ll just move on. But I figured this may be a way of provoking some of your thinking. One was the energy tax that gets enacted, I seem to recall, on the Senate side, and then gets dropped on the House side, which had the effect of aggravating an awful lot of people.

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: Were you—

Baggett: I don’t remember a lot about it, but I do remember it. The gas tax, right?

Riley: Yes, the gas tax.

Baggett: You made us walk the plank and then now you’re going to drop it over here. That’s all I remember. I just remember, and I won’t remember the other—unfortunately, that wasn’t the only one. There were other issues like that where you convinced people to do it and then ultimately you had to drop it on the other side.

Riley: Not on the budget, but the Brady Bill passed during the first year. Was that a problem area for Democrats?

Baggett: The crime bill was a problem.

Riley: The crime bill comes later.
Baggett: The Brady Bill, it has its—Rahm was asking me the other day, this summer, if I thought pushing it as hard as we did was a mistake because Democrats still pay the price for gun control. Among labor constituencies and others, it’s just such a hot-button issue. I’m tone-deaf; it makes no sense to me. But it is still such a big-deal issue. At the time, I just recall—another one of the big pushes, but I don’t have any distinctive memory around that. I’m not going to remember details around the crime bill, but—I’m sure you’ve talked about it with some of these people—but that is, I do recall Stan Greenberg saying, because we looked back on all of the battles we had, that from the polling they did, that was the sort of low point for the Administration, when the Democratic House and Senate couldn’t get the crime bill through. That’s when the American public shut down on us and said if you can’t get something as minimal as that was, and you couldn’t get that done with the Democratic House and Senate, they sort of shut down at that point. It wasn’t the health care and some other things. Now, he may have even rewritten that. I just remember at the time that I probably wouldn’t have picked that as the low point, but he said in terms of the polling, it was.

Riley: The crime bill—

Baggett: It was about August or—

Riley: September of—it probably passed in August of ’94.

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: And then he signs it in September and that’s got the assault weapons thing in it, and other gun control measures. Supreme Court nominations, you had two, right, during your—which is fairly unusual to have two.

Baggett: Right.

Riley: Did you have to, given the fact that Supreme Court appointments had become major political marketing items, is that something that you ended up doing any work on?

Baggett: We really didn’t do any work around it. They really weren’t that controversial, and it was back when we had united governments, so around that we didn’t.

Riley: You said something about Mary Sue Terry earlier, but there were two other big races in ’93, one was the New York mayoral race and the other would have been the New Jersey Governor’s race.

Baggett: Florio.

Riley: You were involved in them—

Baggett: We were involved in both of the—I honestly don’t have a lot of recollection around the New York mayor’s race, but we were involved both in Mary Sue Terry and Florio. As I said earlier, with Mary Sue Terry we did what we could to help. She’d get Bentsen a lot. He’d go
through the conservative members of the Cabinet. But they didn’t really want much to do with the President. We were active in New Jersey. I honestly don’t remember much about it.

Riley: Since you raised Bentsen’s name, who would you say were the best of your party-builders out of the Cabinet? Who could you look to and who was really interested in leaving behind their bureaucratic battles and going out and helping you build the party elsewhere?

Baggett: Well, Ron, obviously was a big help. Bentsen would do very little, so we tried to use him on only the most essential.

Riley: He didn’t like to travel, or—?

Baggett: Yes, he didn’t like campaigning much, which is kind of funny since he ran for Vice President. Maybe he’d had enough of it. We obviously didn’t do anything with Madeleine or Janet Reno and we had, I’m trying to remember. [Henry] Cisneros did stuff for us but I don’t have a strong recollection—he did stuff. Reich was okay, but he really only wanted to go where he had labor committee people up for election, so he wasn’t that much help. Not that he was a particular draw, but Secretary [Richard] Riley was. He was great, and he would do just about anything you asked. He was very helpful and cooperative.

Riley: He’s not your—I will confess having met him, and he wasn’t what I expected of a southern Governor. I was expecting somebody who was at least overtly much more political, if you will.

Baggett: He comes across more like a university president.

Riley: He does, or as a policy wonk, as a grown-up policy wonk. So that means that I’m not completely surprised to hear you say that, although he did well, he may not have been somebody who was just eager to get out there and do the hard partisan work for the elections.

Baggett: He was there.

Tenpas: Did [Donna] Shalala do much?

Baggett: She was pretty good; she tried to help where she could. We’d send [Hazel] O’Leary. I don’t think O’Leary was very good at doing stuff. She would go out, but I don’t think there was any particular strength there. I’m trying to remember who else was in the Cabinet.

Tenpas: [Federico] Pena?

Baggett: Yes, he did stuff, he was good. Espy not so much. A lot of them just had their quirks on what they would and wouldn’t do, so it was kind of a pain to deal with. So we just tried to do more with making sure, to the extent possible, where they were providing help. It wasn’t like helping Republicans as opposed to Democrats, to the extent you could influence it. We tried to go through Cabinet Affairs, Christine Varney and then her successor.
Riley: Okay. Did you make a lot of speeches?

Baggett: Some. Mainly to constituent groups, the National Education Association, people like that.

Riley: Mostly in D.C. or did you travel?

Baggett: Political parties. No, I traveled. State chairs associations. Democratic groups, California, where we obviously had a lot of political constituents we had to give speeches for, out there. For most of the travel, because I had my daughter at home and I had no particular interest in traveling, I got to be very popular with my staff because if they managed that state, I’d let them go with the President on Air Force One. So I was very popular for that. Then occasionally there would be something where I’d have to go out and so I’d do it. I will say that traveling on Air Force One is one of those experiences that doesn’t disappoint you. Even though the White House is smaller than you expected, Air Force One looks just like it does in the movies. It was just what I expected, I wasn’t disappointed.

But one time we went to California, and at the time, I think I would have been about seven months’ pregnant, and we had to speak to a group of celebrities.

Riley: This is the President.

Baggett: This is the President. So first we go to military—I guess where we landed, a military base in Sacramento, where he’s doing remarks. So we do the remarks there, then we go by helicopter, one of these huge helicopters, where you—troop carriers that you go in. We’re sitting there with earplugs. So you fly to San Francisco, no we went to LA [Los Angeles] first. Anyway, we go to this event and he had to do something else. So I had to go in and talk with Streisand, Steven Spielberg, all these people. They had said, “We have to talk to some of the celebrities in Hollywood so we need a heavy hitter.” I said, “I know you’re expecting George Stephanopoulos and not this pregnant woman.” But they were very nice.

So I’m explaining to them what’s going to happen. When the President comes in the room, they don’t have to line up, he’ll just move from group to group, saying hello, he’d love to chat with them. So they said, “Okay, fine.” Then the most amazing thing happened. They come up and start to ask you, they’ll say, “Here’s the question I’m thinking of asking, what do you think? Is that an—I was thinking I might ask about abortion.” Barbra Streisand says, “I was thinking about asking him something on choice, or maybe there’s the water issue in the desert. Which of those would be better?” I’m thinking to myself, all he’s going to be thinking is the same thing I’m thinking, Oh, my God, she’s so much more attractive in person. She has no lines whatsoever. So I said, “Either one of those would be fine.” Everybody has their version, you know how it is in Hollywood, everybody is so much tinier than they are in movies.

Riley: Is that right? We don’t know how it is, do you know?

Baggett: They’re so little, they’re little. They’re short and very petite. So they all look like miniature versions of themselves. Anyway, Clinton is sort of tall and big, so he really stood out.
That was the California experience. But I had much less impressive groups to speak with, mostly voter groups, party groups that I would go out and talk to.

**Riley:** NAFTA must not have been an easy issue for you to work, so I’d like to hear your version of how that happens.

**Baggett:** With NAFTA, they did set up a war room on NAFTA, and Rahm was right in the middle of that and he was doing what he does best. Bill Daley came in to head up the effort, Rahm was working with him, I think it was Susan Brophy from the congressional staff, and Linda Moore from our staff. We did everything we were asked to do in the Office of Political Affairs, but basically it was getting various constituencies to weigh in with elected officials.

On the labor side, we just did damage control; there was not much else you could do. The President had been up front, even as a candidate, that he was going to pursue this. Within labor, everyone says you can put it in protected language for labor and environmental standards. In reality, I never thought they were going to get some kind of language that would satisfy most of labor, so they could live with it. That’s really how we operated on NAFTA, trying to preserve, to keep a speaking relationship with labor. It never got overly personal, I’ll put it that way.

I will say that after NAFTA passed, maybe even right before it, some of the groups I would have to speak to would be labor unions. I remember going to an AFSCME [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees] and SEIU [Service Employees International Union] meeting, I think it was SEIU. They’re service employees, so it’s not like these are manufacturing jobs. I will say that I underestimated the amount of hostility that NAFTA generated. Obviously, I didn’t bring up NAFTA, but they would yell out, because labor tends to be a fairly polite audience, particularly to one of their own, which I considered myself even though I was representing the White House. They were shouting things and all that. Like I said, it wasn’t a pleasant time.

I think keeping the relationship between labor and the President that was intact during that period is probably—there’s not much that I would take credit for, “Here’s what I did.” I would say I contributed to keeping that relationship intact so that we could move forward afterwards.

**Riley:** Tell us how you went about doing that, and who were you talking with and what kinds of arguments are you making in order to try to keep that greater breach from opening

**Baggett:** My primary contact was Tom Donahue, who at the time was Secretary Treasurer of AFL-CIO. Then occasionally I would talk with Lane Kirkland, the President. In some cases [Gerald] Jerry McEntee and some of the other union presidents who were not—again, not the manufacturing presidents that this was their lifeblood, but others who had supported Clinton from the beginning, to try to keep voices inside the movement, let’s don’t get too hot. Make the case you have to make, but don’t take on the person of Bill Clinton and demonize him with the membership.

My main argument wasn’t around the merits, because we weren’t going to win that. My main argument was, you need to agree to disagree on this. If this is the only thing you ever disagree on
with this President, that would be historic. You feel it’s important, he feels it’s important. You knew this going in, and if you destroy him, you’re going to look at all the appointments we’ve gotten, look at all the good that’s come out of it, and again, we’re still trying to pursue health care. I think they knew down deep that that was true. I was just there continually reminding them of it.

**Riley:** Joan, had you been consulted at all about the sequencing of NAFTA in the grand scheme of things in terms of what was going to be moved when?

**Baggett:** No.

**Riley:** I seem to recall that there were—because of when the agreement had been signed, that there was a certain window of time that it had to be moved, but you had just come off of—most of the first six or eight months of the Administration, you’ve got gays in the military, which was sort of floating around out there, but then it was budget-related, it was almost all budget-related, and that’s not making the labor constituency happy.

**Baggett:** Not pleasant.

**Riley:** Right?

**Baggett:** Right.

**Riley:** The core Democrats are concerned because you’re focusing on the deficit at this point.

**Baggett:** Right. You’re walking the plank.

**Riley:** You’ve got health care floating around out there, and then I guess the President does give his speech in September or October of ’93 on health care. But the next big thing to move is NAFTA, and I wonder if there was any consideration to how you might have managed big pieces of the agenda so that some member of the Democratic constituency would be there to kind of shore you up at a time where you’re having difficulties.

**Baggett:** I wasn’t part of any of the discussions. I think they made their calculations early on. That’s my recollection, too. They had, whether they were right or not, I don’t know, but they had specific reasons why they were going to move it in the order they were moving it. But I do recall there was a lot of second-guessing on, was that the right order.

**Riley:** Is it the case that as you’re dealing with the party regulars out in the country, that the labor voice is representative of what you’re hearing also from your Democratic office holders and—

**Baggett:** They were really mixed.

**Riley:** —and party officials?
Baggett: They were mixed on the NAFTA thing. There were some significant labor supporters who were pro-NAFTA. So when you got to the Senate, it was pretty anticlimactic. The battle was really the House.

Riley: Bonior and Gephardt both took passes on this, right?

Baggett: I think so.

Riley: Was there ever any concern that they would try to whip the Democrats against the White House?

Baggett: There was concern. I think there was always concern that something like that might happen, but I think they felt they had enough champions they could get it through.

Riley: Was there much discussion afterwards, again with the unions, about whether there were things in the universe of possibilities that they could get as tradeoffs? Maybe there wasn’t anything, I’m just thinking that in politics there are all kinds of quid pro quos.

Baggett: They wouldn’t negotiate at all around the NAFTA thing. There was nothing that they considered equal.

Riley: But after the fact, when you’re then trying to—for example, was there ever a discussion of increasing the minimum wage in the first year or two?

Baggett: I honestly don’t recall. I don’t think so, but I don’t recall any.

Riley: I know one didn’t pass then, but I just didn’t know whether—again, if you’re looking at, you’ve got a very angry, as you’ve testified, a very angry constituency. One way to deal with that is try to find some initiative that’s going to win them back. I don’t know what that might have been. I thought maybe they had—

Baggett: They did also, during the first. This is not stuff that would appease Congress, but there were things that were done that labor had wanted for a long time, which were done by executive order.

Riley: Okay.

Baggett: I think there may have been some more. I don’t have my notes on it, but there were things that may have been done by executive order after, but we had some of those taken care of during the first, prior to NAFTA.

Riley: Family Medical Leave Act—

Baggett: Family Medical Leave, that obviously got signed, and that’s something that labor had worked on for a long time.
Riley: You ended up getting involved in the American Airlines strike, which is not something that you typically find in the portfolio of this office. How did you get—?

Baggett: Fell into my lap. I don’t know if it was a case of the right place at the right time, at least it worked out right. Typically, we didn’t get anywhere near collective bargaining, for obvious reasons. But the American Airline situation, they had obviously reached impasse. Bruce Lindsey had a relationship with American Airlines from his previous law practice. I had been hearing, not on a regular basis, but on a periodic basis, from the flight attendants, and initially it was like, there’s really nothing we can do. We obviously can’t get involved in this, but let’s stay in touch.

This is the order I recall. I don’t know if this is the way Bruce recalled it. I think Bruce got wind of it, I’m not saying who called him from where, but I think he got wind of it from the management side that they were in a bad place, which they needed to get out of. He came to me and said, “Do you think we can do something with the flight attendants?” So I said, “Let me check and see.”

Riley: Because he knew of your previous—

Baggett: Right, so I called them and said, “We don’t want to get involved in this, but is there a way we can get you guys back together?” They were anxious to get it resolved as well. They needed their paying jobs back and the company needed a graceful exit to the corner they had gotten themselves into. So the President then got into it and they worked it out.

Riley: Did you have meetings with them on this?

Baggett: This was all by phone.

Riley: You had a previous connection with the flight attendants?

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: So I guess Harold Ickes would have been working in the White House by this time, I don’t remember the timeline.

Baggett: I don’t think he was there then.

Riley: He may not have been—

Baggett: Or, if he was, he wasn’t involved, that I recall. I’m not sure if he was there.

Riley: But Harold also had union connections, but with different unions. Is that the answer to that?

Baggett: Right. He worked with New York unions. I mean, that’s who he represented.
Riley: It’s probably not going to be in that timeline, unfortunately. It would show up someplace later. November of ’93, so I think he was in there by then.

Baggett: I don’t recall Harold being involved.

Riley: He probably wasn’t, but my question, again, as somebody looking from the outside, you know that a Deputy Chief of Staff has union connections, you might have expected that he would be the person who would have been involved, but you just explained why it might have fallen into your lap.

Baggett: Yes.

Riley: In December, you go on maternity leave?

Tenpas: Was it really maternity leave?

Baggett: That one was. They said it saved me from Whitewater.

Tenpas: I mean, did they really give you the time off, or were you sort of half-working from home?

Baggett: I was on the phone a lot and it really was, not that there’s a slow time, but it was the slowest time of the year.

Riley: Congress is out of town.

Baggett: Congress is out of town, I do recall, and Joe Velasquez was there and he was filling in on my duties while I was gone. I remember him on one of the phone calls saying, “You’ve got to get back here, I’m telling you, Harold is taking over our stuff.” I said, “And you think my being there is going to stop that?” I don’t even know if the article is in here, but there was a newspaper article that referred to Harold pushing me out or aside or something.

I don’t know if it was when I went back or before I went back, I went in to see Mack McLarty and I said, “You know, this is ridiculous that we have these kinds of stories in the press.” This is one of the most striking quotes that I remember from my service there. Mack said, “Joan, your problem is you don’t have a press strategy.” And I said, “Mack, I wasn’t elected President. I was under the impression that we had a press strategy for the President, not that we all were supposed to have our own individual press strategies, that’s ridiculous.” He said, “I’m not saying it’s right. I’m just telling you, that’s how the system works.”

Riley: That’s not something you would expect to hear from him, of all people.

Baggett: No, not from a Chief of Staff. I mean, that’s part of the problem. Everybody has their own press strategy. We had a friend who was a reporter for the Baltimore Sun and he said—I’d read that there was an article in one of the news magazines, and then it was in USA Today. I was actually traveling someplace and I just started laughing. Cal said, “What are you reading?” I said,
“I’m reading in the Wall Street Journal that my doctor has told me I need to leave the White House for health reasons because I’m under so much stress. So I think I should call my doctor and assure him I haven’t gotten a new doctor. What’s he going to think when he reads it?”

[laughter]

But anyway, the friend from the Baltimore Sun said they had a saying in the newsroom, “That story is too good to check out.” That’s what would happen all the time. You’d get all these rumors in the press that nobody would ever have called me about. So you start to shrug it off, it’s Washington. Finally, at one point, I can’t remember if I said it to Harold directly or to Janice. She said, “Harold just doesn't know where all this is coming from, he’s so concerned.” I said, “Janice, give me a break. It’s a New York Times article, it’s about how I’m doing a crappy job, and he’s doing a great job. Who do you think that reporter’s unnamed source is in the White House?” I’m not that naïve.

I had to go down and cover the labor meetings in Bal Harbor that February, in ’94. Right next door, they always hold their meetings at the Sheraton Bal Harbor, and just down the beach is the Seaview Hotel, where Bob Dole has a place, [Tip] O’Neill used to be there, Howard Baker, all these politicos. There’s a little coffee shop called Millie’s. We’d go there sometimes for breakfast. So one morning we’re sitting there and—this is one of the bad articles in the New York Times on the front page, where it says the ’94 elections are going down the tubes for Democrats and it’s my fault. I go, okay.

I’m sitting there with my pancakes and who comes in and sits next to me but David Brinkley, and I’m thinking, Oh, I’ve never met him. I’d really like to meet him. So Cal says, “Just introduce yourself.” I’m just about to do it when I realize he’s reading that article, so I thought, maybe not. Anonymity feels real good right now. I’ll never meet David Brinkley but I won’t have to talk to him about how I’m doing a crappy job.

Riley: Did you talk to reporters? Did you develop a press strategy?

Baggett: I did, occasionally. I did not develop a press strategy. I found it offensive. I had no problem working with the press office and responding to reporters with information that I thought helped advance our cause, but not to question or cut down somebody else.

Riley: You didn’t proactively seek out reporters for stories?

Baggett: No. Again, not unless we said we need an article in the Wall Street Journal, call up Mike Frisby and do an article, but that would be with communications. Let’s talk about what we’re doing.

Tenpas: Not a unilateral thing that you decided.

Baggett: That wasn’t just Harold; that was prevalent in that White House.

Riley: Why do you think the current White House is so much better with this than yours was?
Baggett: I don’t know. I think they’re a more disciplined group. I think maybe as an individual Bush doesn’t tolerate it. Clinton, that just never seemed to be one of the things that bothered him, which amazed me. I admit, I haven’t read most of the books that people from the Administration wrote, but while we were still there, when Elizabeth Drew came out with her book, and the President had said to Stan and others, cooperate with it, that’s ridiculous. Then I found, just as—I’m definitely an old-fashioned Washington staffer on this—but when George Stephanopoulos’ book came out, that one just made me angry because I felt like that was just a violation of trust. Some have justified it. Even in his book he talks about feeling so betrayed by Clinton on the Monica Lewinsky thing. Granted, I didn’t have the long-time relationship with Bill Clinton, but there is no one who could have ever worked in or around a Clinton Administration who had any illusions that there weren’t issues there. So to say that somehow they were lied to, misled, in that, and act so shocked and upset about it, I just found very disingenuous. So that really made me angry that people would violate those kinds of trust issues.

I’ve got to say, if I were an elected official, I don’t know how they ever feel comfortable enough taking people into their confidence any more. It’ll end up in a book.

Riley: It is surprising to hear you say that the President didn’t take this seriously. I thought I was picking up signals earlier that Mrs. Clinton had, on probably more than one occasion, gone into yelling fits about how her husband was being ill-served by his staff. I would have thought that this would have been the number-one advertisement.

Baggett: Yes, wouldn’t you think that this would be an example? I certainly heard that they felt that way about George’s book. But all during the Administration, and now maybe you just get the day-to-day newspaper articles, maybe there’s just so much of it you get immune to it after a while, but I never had the sense that that was high up on their list of things to be upset about. They were more upset when their message wasn’t getting out. To me, part of the reason your message doesn’t get out is you’ve got so many messages out there that are so conflicting half the time. As I said earlier, leaking things that are incorrect in the first place because they feel like somehow they need this to feel important, I don’t know. I never understood them not cracking down on it.

Riley: Part of this is a function of discipline. Clearly, they didn’t like it, but were they willing to take the steps that would be necessary to stop it, which might have meant firing somebody they didn’t want to fire, or having somebody around them who had the authority to stamp down on somebody’s foot really hard if they got out of line. We’ve got a pretty good picture, I think, that at least during the first year of the Administration, when Mack was Chief of Staff, that that wasn’t a role that he would play.

Baggett: Right.

Riley: Did it get any better when Leon Panetta came in?

Baggett: My sense was it got somewhat better. I don’t know if it got a little better because people were just unsure so they slacked off a little bit until they saw they were going to get the axe. But Leon brought a whole other set of issues in terms of—I think he really did try to crack
down on the access to the President and bringing more discipline to the staff. But then you had people like Tony Coelho and others. Leon had his own set of confidants and people he trusted to bring in, so that was another universe that got introduced into the mix. I’m not saying it was necessarily a bad thing, but that was an adjustment to figure out. And because he operated from Congress, there was just a different style as well. I don’t know Andrew Card personally, but I have a feeling with his Washington experience—first of all, I’m amazed that anybody can stay in that position that long. That’s a lot of stamina, but he seems well suited to it in terms of the discipline and getting the trains running on time.

Riley: Any questions about this? [to other interviewers]

Abraham: I have one question actually, if you could clarify. I remember there was a Newsweek article, and this is something that you talked about a little bit earlier and I just wanted to get you to say if it was true or untrue—

Baggett: Yes.

Abraham: There was this Newsweek article, I think it was called “All the President’s Zombies,” and I think that’s the one where you’re talking about all these Administration officials who had to go to the doctor because of their health, because they were so stressed and so fatigued. And I remember your name was one of those—

Baggett: Yes, I think that was the article that got recirculated. When I read it, it was actually in USA Today quoting Newsweek.

Abraham: Right.

Riley: The echo chamber.

Baggett: Exactly.

Abraham: So you’re saying that wasn’t true?

Baggett: Wasn’t true. In fact, at one time going to the doctor would become a luxury you couldn’t afford. I remember when Rahm was still the political director. He wanted me to do something and I said, “I have to take Shelby to the doctor, she has a diaper rash.” And he said, “That’s ridiculous, we don’t have time for you to take her to the doctor. I’ll get my father on the phone, he’s a pediatrician. He could tell you what to do.” So he literally got his father on the phone, and I described the diaper rash. He told me what to do, I did it, she was fine. I didn’t have to go to the doctor.

Riley: You have a direct line to God, then, if you got a pediatrician on the phone.

Baggett: Exactly, yes.
Riley: I think we’ll probably go ahead and draw to a close today because we’re within striking distance of being where we need to be tomorrow, and you’ve been good to withstand so much questioning in one day. I am going to ask you, you reported a story downstairs about being on the phone with Bruce—

Baggett: With Bruce Lindsey. When my second daughter, Alexandra, was born, I went from the West Wing of the White House to Columbia Hospital for Women. At the time, I believe it was when we were discussing putting Debbie DeLee in as chairman of the DNC, when David Wilhelm was getting ready to leave. I had an epidural so I could still stay on the phone. So I’m on the phone talking, and Bruce would call and say, “Okay, well what about this?” and we’d discuss it. He’d go, “Let me talk with the President and then I’ll get back to you.” Then he’d call back and he’d go, “How dilated are you now?” And I said, “I’m still okay.” Finally, the doctor came in and I said, “Bruce, he said I have to go.” So they knew. Clinton knew that the baby was coming. So right after Alexandra was born, Clinton called me and we had a nice talk and congratulations and all that. It turns out she was born at 37 weeks, and so was he. She didn’t go the full 40 weeks, so maybe she’ll be President some day.

Riley: Maybe so, we can hope so. Or maybe I should ask you.

Baggett: I don’t know. She keeps telling me I should be President one day and I said, “No, I think it would be better if you were President.”

Riley: So you’d be all in favor of her being President, after what you’ve seen.

Baggett: Yes, I guess I should be in favor of that.

Riley: Just don’t go work for the President?

Baggett: I’d even be in favor of that. For all of the—I feel like we’ve only talked about negative stuff, and this may be my naïveté, but there was never a day that I drove through the gates of the White House that I wasn’t excited to work there and excited to go to work. There aren’t many jobs you can say that about. It’s an incredible place to work. So even when you’re having a bad day, it’s incredibly interesting.

Riley: We’re finding it incredibly interesting. I tell people when our interviews are going well, I can’t imagine I would be any place else in the world than sitting at a table listening to these stories. I think we’ve had a very good day today.

February 11, 2005

Riley: Did anything occur to you overnight that you thought, Oh, I should have talked about that yesterday?
Baggett: It did and I’ll think of it again in a minute. It was nothing momentous, but there were a couple of things I thought, Oh, I should go back and mention that. One thing, this is something that I just thought about driving in here this morning. We were talking about those first days and about, I guess maybe the first 24 hours is the only time there wasn’t controversy, but I remember when we were talking about what it was like going into the White House, where essentially nobody was working and you were the first people there. That afternoon, I think it was the Friday afternoon, over in the Old Executive Office Building, which was pretty empty at that point. There aren’t that many of us there yet and there are those huge marble halls, and people said, “The President is coming.” I’m like, the President is coming?

The President and Vice President were walking around. It was as if they were taking a tour of their new government. They were walking around, coming in, looking at your office, chatting everybody up, seeing what you were doing. It struck me as probably one of the few calm times they had before everything just hit the fan.

Riley: That sounds like a great scene out of a movie, too, starting that way.

Baggett: It was very nice.

Riley: I’m going to ask you to report on the record, when we were talking yesterday morning before we got started, you said you had met with a group of students, and I can’t remember if they were from Alabama, and they were asking you what was the best preparation for the job. Can you—?

Baggett: When I was heading up the Office of Political Affairs, in the summer, we obviously had a number of interns, and they would have luncheon speakers for them to get to know about what we did. So when I spoke with them about being Director of Political Affairs at the White House, they said, “What would you recommend to us? What would be the best preparation for this job? Is it political science? Is it law school? What's the best thing?” I said, “The best preparation”—I actually majored in child development, so my background was child psychology, and that hasn’t hurt. “The best preparation for this job is to have a limited budget and a small room to plan a wedding, a bar mitzvah, any kind of social event where you are limited on how many can be in the room, and how many you can pay for, and make up that invitation list. Because 90% of your time is figuring who gets invited to what, who’s in the room, who’s not in the room, and managing the politics around that. That really is what the majority of the job consists of. In political affairs, it is less substance and more political process of managing the politics around the issues.”

Quite honestly, that surprised me. Not having been real familiar with what the job entailed, I, like most people, thought it was going to be more thinking the big thoughts on policy and less on managing the politics. Whether it was the donors requesting social events, or—one of the things that we did that I didn’t mention yesterday, early in the process, was the President—you obviously had, for lack of a better term I’ll call it official Washington constituencies. Whether it was organized labor, women’s groups, business groups, it was the Washington community that you needed to deal with. But there is a different community in terms of early supporters out in
the field. This is grossly simplified, but those are—think of it as two databases that you had to work from. You had to not offend official Washington and make sure they were included, but the President and the staffers who had come from the campaign obviously felt strongly that you had to also make sure the early supporters were always given their due deference.

So one of the things that we did, and I was trying to remember. It was certainly all of the early key primary states, we did New Hampshire day, we did Michigan day, New Jersey day, New York day. I’m sure we probably did an Iowa day, I don’t recollect it as clearly, but we did Arkansas day.

Riley: Illinois?

Baggett: We did Illinois. I’m sure we would have had to do Tennessee.

Tenpas: This was ’93 or ’94?

Baggett: This was in ’93, as I recall. It could have gone as early as ’94, but I think it was ’93 that we did those. We would make up the list of key supporters and invite them to the White House. We would do briefings for them in the Old Executive Office Building on whatever issues were up at the time, and we’d have as many of the top Administration officials as we could cycle through there in terms of Bruce Lindsey, Bob Rubin, people like that. I’m guessing they probably had a DNC briefing, but I don’t recall that strongly.

Then there would be some kind of social event, afternoon reception or early evening reception at the White House, so they felt touched and cared about. I think it was important to the President to know that that was done. Because when you’re doing, whether it’s your state dinners or your Christmas party, things like that, he obviously sees and remembers these individuals as they come through. But you’re talking about hundreds and hundreds of people, and they’re mixed in with everyone else. So it was good for him to know, okay, Michigan supporters have been taken care of, Illinois supporters have been taken care of, New York. So that was one of the early things we did.

Riley: Are those primarily donors, or are they a mix of donors and people who had knocked on doors—

Baggett: Mixed. It could be community leaders who endorsed him, city council people. So it was both elected officials who supported him from those areas, people who drove him around, people who gave money as well.

I remember one time, I don’t remember the woman's name, but on Michigan day, we were having the afternoon reception at the White House and this fairly elderly woman said to Mrs. Clinton—she was asking her about Chelsea [Clinton], and Chelsea was really off limits for all of us. It was almost like when I would run into her in the residence or something, you almost felt as though you should pretend like you didn’t see her. So when this woman said, “Oh, how is Chelsea? I haven't seen her in so long. I’m sure she’s getting big, tell me about her,” to Mrs. Clinton. I expected Mrs. Clinton just to give her a polite response and move on. She said, “Oh,
I’m sure she would love to see you.” So she sent me to get Chelsea and bring her down to say hello to this woman, which I did. Chelsea was very gracious. I thought it was interesting that Chelsea was off limits to the press, she was off limits to play politics with, but clearly Mrs. Clinton knew that there were some instances where she wanted to be respectful and share the family with the supporters.

Riley: Later, after your departure, there are a lot of problems about fund-raising. You were involved in raising money?

Baggett: That was one of the things that I wanted to mention. I noticed, I think it was in the Patterson article and I couldn’t tell from the footnote reference to it, but it mentioned that there were always two seats reserved on Air Force One for donors. One of the things we did at the beginning, the two years that I was there—I think I mentioned yesterday, I was very concerned about the appearance of how we used the White House, whether or not you could legally do it, and there was Republican precedent for it that just didn’t seem to measure up to me. If something came out, I wanted it to be able to stand the test of would the American people think this was an appropriate use, that you were being respectful of the institution?

During the first two years, we were fairly conservative in what we did. Certainly we tried to make sure donors were included in state dinners and small dinners and other social activities at the White House. We would bring them in for briefings and the types of things that I just mentioned. But there was no quid pro quo there. It wasn’t, you give money, you get to come to the White House. It was, you’ve supported the party all these years, and the President and we want to make sure you’re included when there’s an opportunity.

One of the things that I had also said is, in terms of Air Force One, there aren’t that many seats, first of all, and it becomes one more thing to manage. So what I recommended to the staff, and we adhered to it pretty well the first two years, is that we never offered seats on Air Force One. Now, that doesn’t mean that there weren’t occasionally donors or other supporters who ended up on the plane, but those were usually at the President’s invitation, when he said they’ll be on the manifest.

In fact, one time, this was just before the ’94 election, we had a trip to Rhode Island for several candidates, including Patrick Kennedy, but one was the Governor’s race itself. I can’t remember the woman's name now. Anyway, the Governor’s race was involved, and the President was going to speak on behalf of the whole ticket. I received a call from someone, it may have been for the party, but someone saying that one of the—I think it was, yes, it was the President of the Laborers’ Union, who at the time was a gentleman named Arthur Coia, who had been invited to be on the plane and he would be on the manifest. I happened to know he was backing the Republican candidate for Governor. So I said, “This makes no sense.”

When I talked to his staff, they didn’t seem to think it was inconsistent that you would have someone on the plane flying up with the President to campaign for Democrats and one of the people on the plane was supporting the Republican opponent. So I called President Coia. I can’t remember if I talked to him or his assistant but I said, “You know the President is going to campaign for the Democrats and it’s my understanding President Coia is working for the
Republicans. So if he would like to fly back on Air Force One, I think that would be better than flying up with the President, which could be embarrassing for all concerned.” He didn’t fly up, but I can’t remember if he flew back. But he did get to greet the President at some behind-the-stage event and say hello. But those were some of the things that we would run into.

**Riley:** Were there ever any cases that you can recall where you were put in an uncomfortable situation with a donor or with—?

**Baggett:** I’m sure there were. I’m trying to think if there’s a good example.

**Riley:** I don’t mean them pushing you to say, “Gosh, I want a seat on Air Force One,” but I mean them doing something too nice for you, or too nice for the President.

**Baggett:** People were pretty good about understanding. The people around Washington understood our ethics restriction. And the President didn’t have to—he always had all of us in between him and the person trying to give him something, to try to protect him. So, hopefully, he didn’t have to deal with it.

There was a time when, I think I was speaking to the National Education Association, and this was out in Napa, and I had given my speech. Cal was with me, and my daughter Shelby, and it was on her birthday. So—

**Riley:** So Cal will go to Napa, we’ve established that.

**Baggett:** Yes, he knew which trips to take. And because it was on her birthday, and again, when I traveled for events like this, this was the Democratic National Committee, it wasn’t the White House, but still I was a White House employee, so ethics restrictions applied. So they had flown us to Napa for this event. I gave the speech and we were going to tour a couple of the wineries. My secretary had arranged for us to have lunch or dinner on Shelby’s birthday at Domaine Chandon. The restaurant that they have there is this fabulous restaurant.

So we walked in, she’s turning two. They had balloons up and everything for her birthday. Here I am, pregnant with Alexandra, so touring the wine country I don’t get to enjoy any of it. But anyway, it was a beautiful setting. We had a fabulous meal and they served appropriate wines, which they had gotten from all these different wineries, and the whole time we’re sitting there I’m thinking, *There’s no way we are going to be able to pay for this meal.* So anyway, I’m bracing myself for the check and they said the Vice President of Domaine Chandon had arranged this and was out of the country and couldn’t—and I said, “But I have to pay.” They said, “But you can’t.” I said, “This is illegal, I can’t.” Finally, I arranged something with them to pay later. It became, we were going to cause a scene when I had nothing to do with the wine policy in the White House.

There were situations like that. Most of those people were just trying to be nice to you, not because they expected a favor in return. The more uncomfortable situations would occur when people, by giving money, would say, “I’ve given $500,000 and I haven’t been invited to the White House.” We would hear that all the time. Then the President would hear it and he’d blow
up because somebody hadn’t been included in something. The translation was they hadn’t been to a state dinner. They had been to the White House, because again, you have to clear people through, so you know exactly how many times somebody had been to the White House and what they were there for. But that didn’t count because that was just the Christmas reception and everybody is invited to Christmas receptions. So it wasn’t exclusive enough. Then when they would hear about the small dinners, “But I haven’t been for a dinner and a movie.”

Tenpas: Child psychology, child development.

Baggett: Exactly, it was all of that.

Riley: I would guess that you followed the activities in the White House fairly closely after your departure.

Baggett: I tried to.

Riley: Were you uncomfortable with the ramping up of the fund-raising activity after your departure?

Baggett: I was uncomfortable with it in that I thought it’s difficult to believe somebody’s not going to blow the whistle on this. It was so talked about and they were so successful at it. They were obviously raising a lot of money. You have to know that when you’re dealing with that many donors there are going to be some bad apples in there. And that’s what ended up to be the case. Ninety percent of the people were fine and probably 10% were questionable. I shouldn’t say very often, but as people would get invited to receptions—I mean, some of the people we recommended, you’d get back from the Secret Service, you can’t have this person.

Then you’d have the option, I’m trying to remember what they called, they had a specific term for it. Essentially it meant that you could invite them, they would permit it, but you had to keep your eyes on them all the time.

Riley: While they were in the White House or—

Baggett: While they were in the White House. I hate to say it, but sometimes we’d go along with that if they were important enough.

I do remember on clearances, when everyone was first going in and everyone was doing their paperwork at the same time, obviously some people were concerned about, have you ever used drugs, so that was that. But a lot of us were concerned about, what about the Garfinckel’s bill we were late in paying one time, all the credit card stuff. But those were the types of issues that would typically come up.

When they were doing the coffees and the sleepovers in the Lincoln bedroom, it is sort of like child psychology in that when it comes to donors, nothing is ever enough. It’s like I was saying with Ron Brown’s funeral, “I gave a lot of money, I need to be seated with the family.” You
know the next thing they’re going to ask is can they sit with him at his desk in the Oval Office and pretend to be President. They’re so demanding.

Riley: I guess there’s no really bright line between donor maintenance and the questionable areas, or is that too naïve a characterization? I think everybody expects the White House to treat their supporters well. I’m not quite sure I fully grasp at what point the line is crossed after your departure.

Baggett: For me, first of all, I had the advantage of being there two years after an election, not two years before the reelection. So I’m not trying to second-guess what they ended up doing, but if someone has given money to support you and then you include them in something, to me that is a little different from saying, if you give money I can get you invited to the White House. To me that’s selling invitations to the White House. You’re right, it is a fine line.

Tenpas: I wanted to bring you back to the office and daily life in the office. Is there any routine? Is there a typical day? Were there offices that you tended to work with? I’m trying to understand the network within the White House and how these groups interact. With which offices did you work most frequently? I’m guessing you reported to Harold Ickes once you became director. It’s kind of a functional question.

Baggett: It’s hard to say that there’s ever a typical day, but as typical a day as there was, and even this varied somewhat, but the senior staff meeting in the morning—

Riley: This is after you become director.

Baggett: This is after I become director. Senior staff meeting was at 7:30. That would last about an hour. The senior staff meeting was run by the Chief of Staff. Now, when Panetta came in, as I recall, he instituted, I don’t know if they called it a very senior staff or select senior staff, but he had a pre-senior staff meeting, which I was not included in. That was a smaller group and so I guess they met at 6:30 or 7:00, I’m not sure what time, but they met just before we met.

So that would begin about 7:30. We’d spend about an hour with the—we’d go through the President’s schedule for the day and each department would talk about any special thing that was coming up that day or that week. If there were votes coming up, Legislative Affairs would report on that. If there was election-related travel, I would talk about that. Typically, when senior staff meeting broke up, most of us would go to the White House mess, to the carry-out, to get coffee, bagels, whatever. So that ended up sort of being the informal place. You got a lot of business done because you could just do a quick back and forth with most of the people you worked with.

Riley: You’d stay in the mess and visit and then take off?

Baggett: You were literally just standing at the window where you got your coffee. We used to all joke about signing everything to Bob Rubin’s tab because if you had that money, who would notice you signing his tab? But we didn’t; we all had our own. So then everybody would typically go back to their offices. My staff would come over, the special assistants, and we would go through anything I got out of senior staff meeting and what we had up for the day. We’d
review that. At about 10:00 every day there was a scheduling meeting, and at least one person from our office would attend that.

Tenpas: Who else would be in those meetings?

Baggett: The scheduling meeting?

Tenpas: Yes.

Baggett: The scheduling meeting was held in a fairly large conference room in the Old Executive Office Building. It was run by the President’s scheduler and he would have all the major offices represented. So the First Lady’s office would be there, Political Affairs, Intergovernmental, Public Liaison, anybody that had events on. From some of those departments you might have more than one person, depending on what events were on or coming up, or were being lobbied for, on the schedule. I’m trying to remember, in a typical scheduling meeting, how far out we discussed the schedule. Sometimes there would be a block scheduling meeting and that was longer-range look at what was coming up. I believe an advance would be there for the scheduling meeting. What I just can’t recall now, I think on each of the events we probably had separate meetings to flesh out the—but we may have just discussed it in the scheduling meeting, I can’t remember right now. But that would take about an hour and that was on the President’s schedule.

Then from there, most of the rest of the day was taken up by—we did a lot of work with Legislative Affairs, Cabinet affairs about the Cabinet travel and different initiatives that they might be working on. Intergovernmental, the First Lady’s office if we had—we would go over with the First Lady’s office, with the Vice President’s office, and Mrs. [Tipper] Gore’s staff on their respective schedules. That wasn’t a daily thing, though; I don’t believe it was. So we worked with Evelyn [Lieberman] on their events. Then any policy-related initiatives—any given meeting on a policy initiative typically involved Political Affairs, Public Liaison, Intergovernmental, Legislative Affairs, Cabinet affairs. So that was sort of the core group. Then very often you’d have someone from the First Lady’s office, someone from the Vice President’s office. Tipper didn’t have that many staff, so she sometimes didn’t.

Not on a daily basis, but on a regular basis, we would have, not the Cabinet Secretaries themselves, but either their Chief of Staff or the White House liaison from Cabinet offices, and so we would again talk about their travel and upcoming initiatives for the various offices. So that’s what a typical—and very often you were either eating at your desk or you were eating in the White House mess, taking somebody that wanted to go to the White House mess and have lunch. We would have to do that on a fairly regular basis.

Tenpas: When you were at these scheduling meetings, were they, was the President’s scheduler basically telling you this is what lies ahead, or did they ever talk about “where should we go, what do you think?”

Baggett: Both. There were also constant message and communication meetings. That was another sort of regular meeting that would go on that we’d participate in. You’d have your
Message of the day, so to speak, what kind of message are we trying to communicate today? Here’s the event that we’re going to be doing. Perhaps we need to show that the President’s on top of the situation in Iraq, so should we have the Joint Chiefs in? Even in terms of who he’s meeting with on his schedule, that’s a focus. Is there an event on the south lawn, what’s that going to be about? Making sure that, if he’s traveling, he needs to do a school event, but we only have this much time. In the surrounding area, let’s say it was ’93, you would say, is it okay with Mary Sue Terry if we do something in northern Virginia? Is Alexandria okay? Jim Moran’s a supporter, it’s his congressional district. Would that work, because we can’t go much further than that? Other than that, we’ll go over to Maryland and do something because we know Paul Sarbanes and Barbara Mikulski will be okay. Those were the types of questions we would deal with, the scheduling and communications operation.

Riley: Were you ever successful in having somebody around who was thinking months ahead? It seems like there’s always a tension between dealing with whatever pops up in the in-box and thinking in terms of long-range—

Baggett: We tried to do that in the block. We’d try to say, okay, here are the places he needs to go and here are the types of things we’re going to be talking about; this would be a good thing to be talking about when he travels to California. But you constantly just had to adjust that as events happened. Sometimes you would just have the best event in the world. He talks about it in his book, and I used to have one of these great pictures of this in my office at the White House. When he was in California, he and Ron Brown were playing basketball with some kids, I can’t remember if it was east LA or south LA, and it was just, they’re fabulous images from it. It was just your dream event. Then he went and got a haircut at the airport. So that’s all you heard about. There was no news coverage of the fabulous event. Those things happen.

Tenpas: In that article I talked about how basically the three roles of the Office of Political Affairs are outreach, electioneering, and liaison to the party. Are there others that were missed, and if those were the three, how would you characterize the amount of time you spent on each, if you had to, say, break it down in terms of percentage?

Baggett: Well, as I said earlier, it would vary on the time period. So liaison to the party and electioneering, as you get close to an election, whether it’s—

Tenpas: At what point did you begin to prepare for the midterms in that first year?

Baggett: We tried to start preparing immediately, just in terms of the congressional districts and states where we needed to beef up Democratic support. So those swing districts that Mark Gersh identified, from the very beginning, almost from day one, we started sensitizing people to that. All things being equal, if you’ve got to travel, here are better places to travel. Now, it’s really in a vacuum, because later, when you’re doing specific legislation, people have different reactions to it. So whether or not those candidates want you to come there, that’s a whole other layer that you have to apply to it.

When requested by the campaign committees, we would also reach out to potential candidates in terms of recruiting them to run for office. I remember talking with one candidate, I think it was
in Pensacola, Florida. It was definitely not a Democratic district, but they wanted this individual to run. I think he was a state legislator. I can’t remember his name right now, but I remember having this conversation where he was concerned—he had young children, he was concerned about the time involved. I thought, I am really not the person to be trying to convince this guy that running for Congress is a good thing to do.

We would give the President a list of calls to people who were high up on the list, to encourage him to call and encourage them to run, and assure them that he would be helpful in fund-raising if we could, and any other way.

Riley: You’re getting your intelligence on this from the—

Baggett: Campaign committees. If we had any ideas, we’d feed it to them. But typically, they had researched the races, and it came from them. I think it was in the spring of ’94 because remember, there are primaries that are happening so we can’t really go in in those kinds of situations. But as I recall, in the spring of ’94, I want to say we had the Cabinet Secretaries in as a group, and I did a briefing for them on here’s the state of play, here’s what the races look like, which states look good, which districts are swing districts that we need to concentrate more on.

So we started doing that in the spring. I believe in the spring or summer we would have groups of the elected officials—like members of Congress—over. I think we did breakfast at the White House mess to talk with them about the types of things we were doing and what we could be available to do, and that we obviously worked closely with Legislative Affairs to invite people over. So we had them over in groups. That was pretty much it. It was pretty much a scheduling operation after that.

Typically, the President, just because of the expense, went in for statewide candidates. You would have, just as Bush did this past election, you would have an official event that you were traveling to in the state, so a lot of the costs were covered by that. Then there were additional costs that the campaign had to pay for. So it was expensive to have the President come. You had to always be concerned about expenses that the cities were bearing, in turn. So it really had to be legit that you were doing an official event, because again, there was a political backlash because you’re shutting down highways as you’re doing these motorcades and all. Everybody thinks a Presidential visit is great, but sometimes it’s not all that it’s cracked up to be.

Occasionally, we would do things for Congressmen, particularly if it was close by. I remember that we did an event for Jim Moran. This was actually for Chuck Robb, who was up for reelection, and we had managed to get Doug Wilder to agree. He and Chuck Robb really don’t really get along that well. But we had gotten Doug Wilder to agree to endorse Chuck Robb. He would only do it if the President came to the event. It was in Alexandria and Jim Moran was up as well. So we worked out an arrangement with Jim Moran’s administrative assistant that we would go and do the event.

The complicating factor to it was that it was on the First Lady’s birthday, and they were doing a surprise party for her at the residence. So with Maggie and her staff, I was under a death threat that he had to be back at a certain time. We had a limited amount of time to get this done. So you
get the program pre-approved. I had everything signed off on, and Jim Moran completely went off script and was essentially not just—the major event was supposed to be, of course, Doug Wilder endorsing Chuck Robb, and the President was going to play up on that, but he wasn’t doing extensive remarks.

Jim Moran got up, and I can’t even remember where he was in the order of introducing the person to introduce the person, and he just went on forever. Andrew Friendly was the President’s body man at that point, and I was getting such hate daggers from Andrew. I’m like, what can I do? I can’t go physically up on the stage and tackle Jim Moran and get him off. I’m talking like we were an hour late, it wasn’t even close. So that was a bad one. I never trusted that person again who convinced me that Jim Moran would be fine on that. So that’s sort of the reality of what you deal with on the election travel. That’s what is typically on the congressional races, the Vice President, First Lady, or Tipper Gore would do those, or a Cabinet Secretary.

**Tenpas:** So back to the three functions?

**Baggett:** On the percentage of time, if you count that under electioneering, those types of activities, I would say from probably from September on, 90% of our time was spent on electioneering.

**Tenpas:** September of ’93 or ’94?

**Baggett:** September of ’94. And probably, in the first year, in ’93, I would say most of it was, well more of it certainly was on the outreach portion, with electioneering taking up a larger percentage as we got towards the November elections in ’93. But those were only two states. We didn’t have quite as much outside of that September-to-November timeframe. My guess is that electioneering was probably about 50% of it.

**Tenpas:** And liaison to the party, was that sort of ongoing?

**Baggett:** Liaison to the party, you do that along with electioneering, so it’s hard for me to separate it as a distinct category because a lot of times it attaches itself to outreach, it attaches itself to electioneering. It’s hard for me to think of it as a separate category. We work so closely together, I would never—if I were doing billable hours, I wouldn’t think about a call to David Wilhelm or Craig Smith as being liaison to the party. I would think, I’m calling them because I need their help with a certain group, or I’m calling them because we need a list for who to touch base with in Nevada for an election. So I think of it as—it’s certainly a distinct area of responsibility, but it goes along with all this other stuff.

**Tenpas:** And the policy promotion would fall under outreach, or is that a separate—?

**Baggett:** Yes, I would think of it in terms—again, you’d divide it between the two. Sometimes it related to electioneering, because it was critical in a person’s state; in other areas it was critical that we needed to do an executive order to make up for NAFTA for labor. I hate to say it, but I don’t think we ever advocated a policy just because we thought, well, this is good government,
that we should do this. We probably related it to “we’ll get more votes if we do this” or “we’ll get more support from these groups if we do that.”

Riley: Let’s concentrate for a while and try to do the whole piece in the ’94 election. I’m not sure we’ve got enough time to deal with all the elements for that. You indicated that you actually began thinking about this almost from day one, but it was mostly, in that context, thinking about Democrats in marginal districts and how you can support them.

Baggett: Right.

Riley: As things began to unfold, let’s get closer to ’94.

Baggett: First, even in terms of the way we thought about it, the ’94 elections loomed for us, just in terms of the statistics, that you always lose seats. So the way we viewed it is, we thought, it’s going to be bad, let’s do damage control. That really was how we looked at it. So when we were thinking about Democrats in marginal districts, we knew we were almost in a defensive mode, in terms of history. So let’s get started early focusing on this because we know this is going to be a challenge.

Riley: How did you go about developing a sense of priorities in terms of states or districts?

Baggett: We relied on NCEC and the congressional campaign committee as well as the Senate campaign committee, and touching base with them on what their numbers indicated. I mean, there are some that you know, just because of the demographics of the district, they’re swing districts and it doesn’t matter who the candidate is and who’s sitting in that district, just by the numbers, it’s a swing district. So those are givens.

Then, as things develop during the legislative sessions, as candidates get recruited or not, you start to see, okay, here’s a whole other category of challenges that we have. So that’s how we developed the intelligence on it.

Riley: Were there cases that you can remember where you had questions of retirement come up, where you’re either trying to push somebody gently out the door because you think they’re vulnerable, or cases where you’ve got somebody who thinks Gosh, I can’t do this anymore and you’re saying “Please don’t leave because you’re our best hope for saving this seat.”

Baggett: If I had the list in front of me I could probably tell you. The retirements don’t stick out in my mind as being a huge issue, but they could have been, it’s just been so long. The one fairly sensitive one that we had to deal with was the Florida Senate race where the First Lady’s brother ran. This was not a Senate race that looked doable in the first place, let me just say. Obviously, we knew it was going to be complicated and we would be pulled directly into it if Hugh ran. I tried to make the case to her Chief of Staff, to Maggie, that can’t you just talk to her and get her—and Maggie said, “I don’t think she thinks it’s a good idea, but you have to understand, she’s not going to tell her brother not to run.” It’s not like—well, I’d tell my brother not to run.
I had conversations with her about it. I didn’t say, “Tell your brother not to run.” I just tried to say, “This is really difficult.” The tack that he took and that she, at least to me, didn’t dispute, was, “This is ridiculous. They’re going to get a free pass and nobody else is willing to step up and Hugh’s going to do it.” Anybody can show that anybody is vulnerable. So you can always get your numbers, he’s talked with so-and-so. So he ran. Obviously, we didn’t spend a great deal of time on it, but calls get through on that one, so you had to deal with it some. So that was one that just had obvious sensitivity.

Riley: Do you have any recollection about where you stood—this is an unfair question this far removed from the event, but I’m just trying to prompt memories where I can. The question relates to the division, or the number of seats that you had up in the Senate at the time. Do you remember? Whether you were at a severe disadvantage because you were defending so many more seats than the Republicans?

Baggett: Well, we definitely were. You would have had 34 up, 33 or 34, and because in every cycle around that time, Democrats were typically defending at least two to one more than Republicans.

Riley: Right, and that would have been the ’88 class, though, so it was a Presidential election class with Bush coming in. That might have elevated the number of Republicans.

Baggett: Yes, it may have. But suffice to say, I know we had more that we were defending.

Riley: I’m just trying to get a sense about how you strategize if you’re looking at this down the road, whether, again—

Baggett: The strategizing on what were going to be the difficult races was the easiest part of what we did. I probably say that because in my previous jobs, since we had a pact, this is something that you did every two years, you knew the predictable ones in advance, and everybody had the same numbers. So there was never disagreement between us and the committees, the President, we never had any disagreements over what were the tough races.

Riley: Sure.

Baggett: What was the most frustrating part of what we did, and this is where maybe I console myself with it, I’d love to think that it would have made a difference if they had James Carville or somebody sitting in the same room with Paul Tully. The frustrating part is when you’re there and you’re not the one on the ballot. But everything you’re doing is affecting the people who are on the ballot, there’s only so much you can do. And they’re saying “No, thanks. Thanks, but please don’t come to my district. Don’t do anything around my district or my state.” So that’s the frustrating part to it.

Riley: The dynamic of this is that, although you begin thinking about this in early ’93, by the time you’re really digging in on this in early-to-mid ’94, I would guess it starts absorbing much more of your time?
Baggett: Yes. I can’t remember when we started doing the individual meetings, but we went out—and remember, we worked with Governors, too. So with both the Senators, primarily the Senators and the Governors, we would go one-by-one, or a couple at a time and meet with them on what are the issues going to be, would you like the President to do fund-raising, or would you like for him not? Are there issues we could be helpful with? Just to do that type of outreach, which I guess would be electioneering, too, but to say, how can we help? Or how can we minimize hurting any more if there’s a policy difference. But again, we did everything we could do up front, on laying the groundwork. But then, as it unfolds, it starts to get more complicated by the votes that are taking place, energy, taxes, all those things that we dealt with, gun control, Brady Bill.

Riley: So the point that I was going to make is that the President’s standing in ’94 is not what it was in early ’93.

Baggett: Right.

Riley: Do you remember how early you began hearing, please stay away, I’d rather do it myself, Mom?

Baggett: That came pretty early. He didn’t start doing the campaign-related stuff, where he would go out and do an appearance for people, that wasn’t until closer to the election. But the intensity of “Please don’t come” was pretty much in the fall of ’94. But I say that because that’s when most of the appearances would be. Up until that, I don’t think we had a lot of resistance to coming in and raising money for them. The Vice President did the largest portion of that; the President didn’t really come in until later on.

Riley: He was good at that? The Vice President was good at that?

Baggett: Very good.

Riley: You said that in personal appearances you think that he’s much more engaging than you would guess from the outside.

Baggett: Not in personal appearances, as one-on-one I think he’s more engaging. If he gives a speech, it’s just the way he gives a speech. He doesn’t come across very well. You think he’s kind of stiff.

Riley: But I missed your point, which is a lot of this is done on a one-on-one basis rather than going in and having—

Baggett: Right, and they were giving money because the Vice President of the United States was coming in, not because Al Gore was coming in. Remember, these are Democrats starved to get a high-up to come in and do something. So that was as a stand-in for the President that people would give money for.
Riley: At what point did you begin to sense that ’94 was looking more than just the expected level of bad?

Baggett: That’s a good question. Certainly, by the fall, but I don’t know if it was coming in, I don’t have a strong recollection of it, but it would definitely be by the fall. At what point in the fall, I’m hard-pressed to say because, again, remember, we came off that, what I referred to yesterday on the Crime Bill, that was a big blow. You’d passed the budget, but passing it was one thing. Everybody was sort of bloodied and bruised. They’d had to walk the plank on it and go back and explain their votes back home.

Riley: Health care had had a bullet put in it in August or September, also.

Baggett: Right. And everything started off with the gays in the military. So people were already feeling like, great, we knew it, he was a liberal Democratic President. So everything was on shaky ground and it’s just getting shakier. In retrospect, when we look back and see all these things that did come to pass on job creation and fiscal responsibility and surpluses, it’s hard to remember how people felt after those budget votes. I think it’s fair to say, Democrats in swing districts felt like, even if they felt that they needed to do it, I think they felt that they’d been forced to walk a plank here. I can’t believe they felt really good about it.

We were still getting hammered by the Republicans that this was a crazy idea. It wasn’t going to do anything to create jobs. It’s still the tax-and-spend Democrats, even though we were trying to balance the budget, and they were voting against it. So people aren’t feeling too good about it.

Then you go into ’94. Now we’re starting to get more Whitewater stuff. There’s just not a lot of positive news coming out of this Administration that makes you feel like, gee, I hope they come in and campaign for me in my state. But in terms of the fending off, I’d say that was more in the fall. Certainly by the fall we knew; numbers were not looking good. But even by early fall, you have time to make up some. But it really wasn’t coming together. Now, you can’t say anything publicly. It’s not like you’re Charlie Cook or some political analyst who’s doing this and you go to the press and say, “These are not shaping up as very good races.” You have to put the best face forward. So, we could spin with the best of them in terms of why this was going to be a successful year for Democrats, and that you were going to minimize losses. You try to downplay expectations, but knew it could be bad. I will say, it just ended up being far worse than I expected.

Riley: Did it take the people that you were working with pretty much by surprise too? Were there any people that you were dealing with, the campaign committees, or private consultants who were coming in to you in August or September and saying, “You guys had better brace yourselves because this is going to be a lot uglier.”

Baggett: Not as early as that. Those kinds of warnings didn’t really come until, probably not until October.

Riley: So going into August and September, you’re looking at what you expect is going to be a bad situation, but you’re trying to do damage control. I guess there are two ways you could play
this. One is, if it’s tight and you think you can make a difference, you and the President and the Vice President are going to be doing a full-court press to get out there and beat the bushes to get every vote that you can to limit—

Baggett: Right, which we did. I think both from the Democratic National Committee, the coordinated campaigns, the Vice President, and to the extent that we could use him, the President, did. I honestly can’t think of any additional things we could have done. But he wasn’t the one on the ballot. That was the frustrating part.

Tenpas: Did the frequency of state days, where you’d invite people from the state, or the frequency of any kinds of things that you could do for people, did that increase?

Baggett: No, we did that early on, and I’m not recalling that we did many things like that as we were getting closer to the ’94 election. Certainly people were invited in, but it was more for the regular stuff then.

Tenpas: What did you think of the Contract with America? Did that affect strategy?

Baggett: It affected our communications strategy, because at that point we’re now in Leon Panetta phase, Tony Coelho phase, and you have communications meetings that Coelho is in. David Dreyer and a lot of our communications folks had worked on the House side of the Capitol. So they were familiar with the [Newt] Gingrich players, too. Trying to take on the Contract with America, I mean, they certainly tried to do that, but how effective they were—I just don’t think, when it came to the congressional races, it’s hard to say that the broad communications strategy on Contract with America—I find it hard to believe that people voted for a Republican candidate for Congress because of the Contract with America that Gingrich put out.

If they were just dissatisfied with Democrats in general, it’s easier for me to see that they would say, “I’m going to vote for change.” It’s like the remote-control society we are, just change it, click it. Move on to something else. I think probably the groundwork was there for voters to be receptive to an anti-Democrat message, but I don’t think they were actually voting for the Contract with America, but there was a communications effort to try to take that on.

Riley: I think part of the question is that people who are analyzing this, as historians and political scientists look back, there are some people who concluded that it was an error to, in terms of communications strategies, to have kind of nationalized the campaign in the way that the contract permitted. Do you think it was or wasn’t?

Baggett: Like I said, it’s hard for me to say. I may be too close to it even to say. But I don’t think—nationalizing the election, I think, given the ratings that the President had at that point, was probably smart strategy for the Republicans. For us to say it’s not a national election, you vote your own, is that a strategy? No, not really. You can see why, and I don’t question them why candidates would say, “No, I don’t want the President to come in because I don’t want it to be a national election, because nationally you guys aren’t doing so well right now.”
If you’re Ted Kennedy and you’re Massachusetts, it’s a great idea. It’s why we were in Massachusetts all the time. If you’re in California, where they loved him, that’s a great idea, too. But there weren’t very many of those where it was a great idea.

Riley: Let me ask about the President’s psychology at this time. I can’t imagine that any President, or any politician for that matter, would feel very comfortable being told, stay away from me, you’re radioactive right now. Did this President believe that he was being a drag for other people?

Tenpas: And I just want to ask, who had to convey the news? Did you get the job?

Baggett: Where are all the guys? Who do you think had to convey the news? I think he went back and forth in terms of his reaction. As a student of politics, he absolutely understood it and would be very dispassionate about it and say, “Oh yes. No, it wouldn’t make any sense for me to go to Nevada.” But other times, when he’s sitting there wanting to help, he’s looking at the same numbers we’re looking at, and thinks he’s got to be able to do something about it, and he’s the best politico there. And in those days his feeling was, again, we weren’t communicating the message right. If people only understood the path we were on to job creation and the good that we had done since we had been there. He kept saying, “You’ve got to get one of these, just get an index. I want a pocket-sized list of all the accomplishments we have.”

So we call the DNC, do the pocket-sized list of the accomplishments. But okay, we’ve told them that.

Tenpas: Was the idea to give it out to people?

Baggett: Yes, because if they only knew, then they would like him.

Riley: This is?

Baggett: Voters, everybody. So everybody would know all the good we were doing, and that the message they were getting to the press was that we just weren’t getting through the filter of the path that we were on. On those days, it was, the staff is screwing up, blame the staff. If people only knew, then I could go and campaign and save these people. On other days, he was okay with it. He knew he shouldn’t go to these states. So it really varied by the day.

Riley: Did that lead to a kind of schizophrenia in how you were approaching things, or did you have a pretty well-established plan of action and it was just a question about whether he was embracing it?

Baggett: Yes, it was more that. And we’d do regular briefings for him. Harold, me, Doug, whoever. We’d go in and update him on where things were. But he pretty much kept up with things. He’d go back and forth between understanding and frustration in terms of what he could or couldn’t do.
Riley: Do you remember any specific cases of criticism of individual candidates? Are you bringing in data to him and he’s looking at this and saying, “Oh, boy. Jim Sasser is really screwing up in Tennessee right now.” Or, “I can’t believe that Tom Foley is doing what Tom Foley is doing.”

Baggett: I’ll try to think. I’m sure there were instances, but I just can’t remember specific ones. As I indicated yesterday, when you give him results on certain races, he would remember back that somebody ran there and lost before because of X, Y, Z, and then they changed this and he was able to win. So sometimes, when you would think you were giving him bad news about a loss, he had some rationalization for it because of his personal knowledge of the history of that state or district. So that would always surprise me. But I’m sure there were instances where, and I’ll try to think some on that, because he was so familiar with all the states and races, including issues. “If he only talked more about this or that. I think he’s making a mistake by not emphasizing his leadership on Y.” We’d often have those kinds of conversations. I’ll see if I can remember some specific examples.

Riley: Do you recall whether he proved to be a particularly good handicapper looking forward to the ’94 elections, or was it the case that because things cascaded so badly in the last couple of weeks, that he was just taken by surprise?

Baggett: I don’t recall. I don’t think—I really don’t recall.

Riley: The term limits thing, it’s funny because, given the fact that that has practically died into nothingness now, it’s easy to forget how important that seemed to have been. Was that something that you guys were tracking and paying attention to at the time?

Baggett: I don’t remember. I don’t have any strong recollection around it.

Tenpas: Are we ready to move from midterms?

Riley: I guess I’d like to ask a couple more questions about—I think the briefing book said that you were with him the night—

Baggett: Yes, I was in the White House and I kept him updated on the steady stream of losses.

Riley: Can you tell us about that night?

Baggett: Mainly we had a monitoring station set up in the basement of the West Wing, where we were getting the results, and then I would just call him in the residence with the results as they came in, or he would call us and say, “How is such-and-such a race going?” I don’t have a strong recollection. We were just there all night. I think I got one hour’s sleep and came back. The only race that was still out at that point, which lasted, I think, for another day before we knew the results, was Alaska, the Governor’s race there. He wasn’t angry or anything. I think everybody was fairly shell shocked at the—I remember when things were really going, it’s like everything had finally slipped off the cliff, and I got the call from Hal Bruno, who is a friend at ABC News,
and Hal was whispering into the phone because he was by the anchor desk and he said, “This is not going to happen. Everything’s going.” I said, “Okay, thanks.”

This is at the stage where we were just at the beginning of being able to keep up with returns on the Internet, so it wasn’t quite as up-to-date and quick as things are now, but it was fairly quick. But when I got the call from Hal, I trusted his political judgment and called the President and passed that on as well. He was pretty quiet. He said, “Just keep me posted.” Shell shocked is the best—even when you know it’s going to be bad, when it was that bad, it was like, okay. It was really bad.

**Riley:** I don’t think anybody had predicted that the control would reverse.

**Baggett:** No.

**Riley:** I didn’t think so.

**Baggett:** I mean, anytime somebody would say, “You realize we could actually lose control,” it’s like, we’re not going to lose control. It could be close.

**Riley:** My wife worked for Jim Sasser, that’s why I know about this; they were all prepared to work for the next majority leader, and that didn’t quite happen.

**Baggett:** I remember after that, I used to have this recurring nightmare where I would be on an elevator and people like a Jim Sasser, former Senators would get on, and I would ask, “Senator, how is such and such going?” And they’d say, “Oh, you didn’t know I lost in ’94.” [laughter] So I would do that. In reality, not just in my dreams, I’d go to meetings in Washington, particularly right after that, and I’d be sitting in a room with what I thought were Senators, and I would even start to second-guess myself, like, I think they’re still a Senator, or did I black it out? Did they actually lose?

In fact, at the Clinton Library, the dedication, at the lunch afterwards, we were seated at a table with Congressman [James] Bilbray, who lost in ’94. His daughter worked in legislative affairs at the time, so at least they had employment in the family from the Administration. But it happens.

**Riley:** It was a grim time right after this. You said that night you were telling the President and he’s sort of quiet, and you didn’t report much more reaction beyond that.

**Baggett:** Yes.

**Riley:** You see him the next day. Tell us what the environment is like in the White House over the next couple of days, and how that information gets absorbed, and how you begin to develop a reaction. I realize that your time is short. You’d already announced that you were going to leave?

**Baggett:** I had. I may have just blocked it out. I don’t have strong recollections about specific reactions and all. We did have, and I can’t remember if it was the day after or the next week or whatever, we started to have some meetings with him. My recollection is it was some
combination of the political, like Harold, Doug, me, some of the legislative affairs people, probably Pat Griffin, and communications people, met to talk through some of it. I can’t remember now, but I have some recollection of the President meeting with some of the congressional leaders, but I don’t have a strong recollection on that.

So we went through some series of meetings, just to try to, I think, help him sort through what had happened, lessons learned-type meetings. But I think he spent a few weeks in his own mind trying to sort through what went on, could we have done anything differently. What does that say about the next Congress coming in and our agenda? But that’s really what I remember from going forward from that.

Riley: And you’re hearing from your party constituency out in the country, feeding back information to you? Are they angry? Are they disoriented? Are they trying to give you encouragement?

Baggett: I don’t really remember. Certainly, one of the messages was, thank heavens we have the White House at least. It’s sort of like when we lost the Senate before, at least we had the House, if we didn’t have the White House and the Senate. So you kind of fall back to what you have to work with and what’s going to be possible now. What things have to be moved off the agenda.

As I recall, that was one of the other things I need to check on, what we talked about yesterday, which was what you could do through executive order because you weren’t going to be able to get the same type of legislative agenda through. So what other options did you have about what you can do with government if you didn’t control the legislative branch? People started to take a look at that.

Tenpas: I was wondering if you could comment on how the various investigations, like the Vince Foster, Whitewater, were there any concrete ways in which those investigations or mishaps, or tragedies affected White House operations, or—?

Baggett: Other than sequestering garbage.

Riley: Now, did we get that on the record, by the way? Poopy diapers?

Baggett: I think we did put the diapers on the record. As we said yesterday, it certainly affected the type of notes you kept, records you kept. It made you more aware that there was a different standard at work. Whether you believed in right-wing conspiracies or not, you had to understand that we were more prone to investigations on pretty much anything that occurred. I think that realization, I don’t know if it made people more cautious or what, but it definitely registered that this is something that had to be dealt with.

I’m not sure whether the legislative affairs staff had to deal with things differently or not in terms of some of the oversight Congress was going into. All the [Dan] Burton stuff came later. After the Republicans took over, I think it probably had a much greater effect, those investigations on
the White House, because then you had to be concerned about congressional investigators getting into the mix just for the sake of getting into the mix. So that, I’m sure, affected them.

One of the things, and this doesn’t relate to the investigation of it, but the Vince Foster suicide I think really sent shock waves through the White House because even—I didn’t know Vince. I had met him, he was at senior staff meetings and I’d see him occasionally—but even those of us who didn’t know him from Arkansas, and didn’t work with him on a daily basis, it’s like, every time I did see him, this appeared to be the most well-adjusted, happy person you could ever be around. I don’t have a lot of experience with depression, and we were still in that period where everything was so overwhelming that you just didn’t have a perspective.

Even for me, it was sort of scary to say, could you actually be just a regular, functioning, appearing to be well-adjusted person, and then suddenly kill yourself? Then there was all the talk about how affected he was by the negative press, which is, unfortunately, a reality that you live with. That was just scary, that you could lose that much perspective. So I think people were—a lot of the things that happened, you sort of absorbed it and moved on. That, I’d say, took a few days before anybody moved on at a normal pace. But as far as the investigation part, most everything was controlled out of the counsel’s office so it didn’t affect the rest of us too much. But as we also indicated, for a lot of the people who just happened to be in meetings, you had obvious concerns on the Whitewater stuff. I would think that had to affect a lot of people who were pulled into it, who didn’t have any direct involvement in it but got pulled into it because of the investigations.

Riley: Did you become careful about the subjects that you discussed out of fear that if somebody, if you had conversations—

Baggett: I didn’t. I don’t think most people—I couldn’t speak for the rest of the people.

Riley: I didn’t know, whether given the fact that you’ve got this investigation on something like Whitewater going on, if you think, I don’t even want to have a water cooler chat with somebody on this because if they get pulled in, then I’m going to get pulled in.

Baggett: Right. There wasn’t a lot of chitchat about it. I remember one time when the President called me, one of those late-night calls, it was during some round of the Paula Jones stuff. I remember him saying, “Could you believe what she was saying?” I’m thinking, I don’t really want to hear this. It wasn’t anything substantive to it. I’d just go, “Really.” This is not something you wanted to have—you did not want to have a conversation with the principals about anything that was under investigation. I was fortunate that that was the only type of thing I had to fend off.

This is one of the incidents someone got fired for. When David Watkins went in the helicopter to check out the golf course in Thurmont, Maryland, I happened to be in Alabama, giving a speech in Birmingham at a political fund-raiser, and I’d given the speech. I heard briefly a news report on this, but I hadn’t spoken with anyone at the White House about what actually occurred and what was going to happen as a result of it. When I left the fund-raiser that night, a camera crew was there and was asking me about the elections or something. They asked me three or four questions. Very innocuous, nothing you’d really think about it.
I was staying at my brother’s house. We got home and the local news, the 10 o’clock news was coming on, and the teaser before it came on was “White House official speaks out on helicopter incident.” I said to Cal, “I want to make sure I see this because I haven’t heard what statement they’re putting out,” and it was me. [laughter] It’s something like, “I don’t know the details of this. Obviously, the President would never condone—” Suddenly anything you said could become “White House official says” and then all of a sudden you’re in the middle of one of these, commenting on an incident at the White House. But in terms of the ongoing day-to-day business, I think it didn’t overly affect us.

Riley: I can’t remember, the reinitiation of the Independent Counsel statute occurred before or after you became—

Baggett: Let me elaborate on one other thing. The thing that did affect us, though, was being—you do have something. I do think there’s validity to how isolated you can become in the White House, because for the most part, with the schedule that you have, you don’t actually, even for all these meetings, even when you meet with outside people, they come into the White House. So other than when you’re occasionally out giving speeches or something, you’re not out in the real world working every day and all, and it doesn’t feel as real there. So it’s easy to get desensitized to what normal people are hearing about what’s going on.

When you travel outside the beltway and you see what’s getting through—so while our day-to-day activities weren’t affected so much by the investigations, the public opinion we were dealing with, what they were hearing about the Administration, they think all we’re doing is dealing with investigations and incidents, not what he was elected to do and worrying about their problems. So in that respect, that was the atmosphere we had to deal in. It affected what we did politically that way, but not in terms of every day in the White House.

Riley: That’s an important point. I was going to ask about the internal decisions to sign a renewed Independent Counsel statute. Were you involved in any of those discussions?

Baggett: No. We were never—the bright lines that we had in terms of things we never involved ourselves in politically were defense, or foreign policy, and particularly Justice Department. We didn’t have meetings with any of them, and we didn’t sit in on meetings to do with anything that was being considered at Justice. The only recollection I have of anything that sort of crossed over that a little bit were the Cuban refugees.

Riley: You said yesterday, I think at lunch, that you had been in the situation room—

Baggett: Right, we were there when we were discussing what to do about everyone coming in, and there was a political component to it in terms of the Cuban community in south Florida. So we were consulted because of that and stayed active on that issue, arranging briefings and that type of thing, but we weren’t involved in the Independent Counsel.

Riley: I would guess, you said also defense or security issues, but surely on budget questions—
Baggett: Yes, on budget, and in the case of California, for example, defense spending is a huge political issue in California for the employers there. In that respect we did get involved on things like that.

Riley: I would guess that you probably had a significant role in the development or staging process for the State of the Union message in ’94. Is that an incorrect guess?

Baggett: No. We did more in terms of what we’d call the rollout afterwards. We were involved to some extent, but the speech itself and everything around it centered more with legislative affairs and communications. The consultants were certainly involved in terms of polling and the phrasing of different messages that you were trying to deliver through the State of the Union. Our role centered more on, okay, now that you’ve said what you’re going to do, who’s going to go out and talk about it in the country?

So typically, the day after the State of the Union, you’d have all the Cabinet Secretaries fan out and doing the message component that you wanted to emphasize that first day out of the box. You would have the President and the Vice President doing something as well. So we helped coordinate that part of it.

Riley: Were you asked to look at the speech in advance to make comments on it?

Baggett: We didn’t.

Tenpas: Did you ever do any vetting in speeches, say for instance if he was going to a district that you knew a lot about?

Baggett: Occasionally, not on a regular basis.

Tenpas: Labor speeches?

Baggett: Particularly—labor speeches, I did. If there was some issue that we knew going in had a political sensitivity to it, they might ask us to take a look at the draft, and I did on labor speeches. We had good relations with the speechwriters and they were pretty good about coming in advance to ask what issues he should be hitting on. So they would talk to us up front. Then, very often would run it by me afterward.

Riley: Can you tell us what role Bruce Lindsey plays in the Administration while you’re there? Bruce is a guy who evidently is very close to the President, but I don’t have a very good sense about exactly what he did.

Baggett: A little bit of everything. I don’t even know what Bruce’s formal title was.

Riley: He was personnel director originally, then he was deputy counsel.

Baggett: I think it was deputy counsel. He operated out of the counsel’s office, but he was the one person, even beyond Mack McLarty, that you could go to Bruce and say, “Here’s what we’re
thinking of for the President. Is he going to go for this? What do you think? Is it the type of thing he'd do? Does he like this person? Has he ever met this person?” So he was a good sounding board. Bruce was almost a roving staff person and troubleshooter. He would come into the room where he felt like he was needed and help out on various initiatives, but he operated, I guess, formally out of the—and it was great for the personnel thing, particularly early on. As I said, you had Mike Whouley and some of the others making sure campaign staffers got taken care of. But beyond that you also needed somebody—There were a lot of people who weren’t in the campaign, there were just people that he knew from way back and you had to know if that was a good thing or a bad thing, and Bruce seemed to know all that.

He was also the one who traveled with him a lot, not every trip, but almost every trip, and he was senior enough that you could be assured that he was around. So if there was somebody that we knew, those of us on the political staff might not be in the room when something was occurring. You’d say to Bruce, “Here’s what you’ve got to watch out for, either make sure this person does talk to the President, or doesn’t talk to the President, or here’s what they’re going to be asking for,” that type of thing. So he was sort of an elevated body man. He was there and was a peer to the President, so he could talk with him about most anything.

**Riley:** Do you know if there was ever any consideration of putting him in a more advanced position in the Administration, like a Chief of Staff?

**Baggett:** I don’t know.

**Riley:** He’s somebody that had the President’s confidence so much, I just wonder why they kept him buried in one of these other positions.

**Baggett:** I don’t know. It could have been that he said no to them. I really don’t know. My impression was always he could have had whatever he wanted. I don’t know that to be the case. As I said, in Harold’s case, everybody thought Harold was going to be right in from the beginning, and Deputy Chief of Staff or Chief of Staff, from the beginning, and that didn’t happen. So I don’t really know.

I do know that initially I worked with his wife—she worked on the inaugural committee with us—I can’t remember if she ever moved up. I think she may have stayed home in Arkansas with the kids. I think they eventually got divorced. Because they were still married when it started and they had two daughters, 12 or 13, or teenagers, they were in that age range. I don’t know if he didn’t want to take on any more substantive role because of that.

**Riley:** I’ve got some things scribbled down that I think we still have time to go back and pick up. One of my notes indicates that the head of the National Labor Relations Board was changed while you were there. Were you at all involved? I know absolutely nothing about this.

**Baggett:** Right. We were involved in, as I recall—[William] Gould was from California. We were involved in introducing him around and getting the comfort levels up with everyone in terms of the business community, as well as making sure labor was okay on it. But that was unusual, that was really only because Joe and I had a labor background. Typically, we weren’t
involved in confirmation processes. For members of the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] or other appointments like that, personnel would vet the candidates with us, that they had come through and it looked as though these were good people, and then they would run them by us, we’d run them by the constituencies to make sure there wasn’t anything that hadn’t come out before, but that was pretty much the extent of what we did on the confirmation side. Legislative Affairs pretty much handled all of that.

**Riley:** When did you decide that you were going to leave?

**Baggett:** With this lengthy interview process that I had with Rahm, at the beginning, I pretty much said going in that I’d love to have the opportunity to do it, but that I was realistic, I could only do this for about two years, that I didn’t think I could sustain it much more than that. When we went from McLarty to Panetta, and there were all these rumors of the shake-up and everything, I went to see Leon and I said, “If you want to make a change, feel free to make the change. I’m not here to try to preempt any of that. But I did want you to know, my plans are, and have always been, to leave at the end of this year because I can’t sustain the family and this type of job.” He said, “No, I don’t have any plans to change you, but is there something else that you would like to do because we’d love to keep you.”

I said, “Thank you for the offer but quite honestly, any type of job that I could do on a limited time is probably something I don’t want to do because it’s not as interesting. So I think it’s better if I just step aside and let someone else have the opportunity.” Then the problem, when you’re there, you don’t actually have time to think about what you’re going to do next, whether it’s inside government or outside government.

I started to try to talk to people, some as they would come in during the fall, people who had served in other Administrations and then went into the private sector, people who had left, like Roy Neel, Howard Paster. So they told me things they would consider. I really didn’t want to lobby. And I remember Gene Eidenberg who had served in the Carter Administration, who was with MCI at the time. He said, “One thing you have to be realistic about is, if you want to make big money, and with the experience that you have, there’s probably going to be some lobbying component to it.” So I told him that I had had an offer, that the President of the bricklayers union who is the co-chairman of the International Masonry Institute had come to me to say we’d like to have you come head up the Institute. The person who’s there is going to be retiring, and you should consider this. I said, “I’ve sort of done that. I’ve done the union thing. I really thought I’d go try my hand in business.” He said, “If you want to spend time with your family, and you can go back to the same pension plan, which is a great pension plan, then my advice would be, you’re better off doing the Institute thing because you know enough about it, but there’s enough new component to it, because I’m dealing with the business side as well, that you should do something like that.” That’s what I eventually decided to do.

**Riley:** And it was located in Annapolis at the time?

**Baggett:** At the time it was located in Washington. So I said to them, “If you’re serious about—” because we had also made the decision that, as much as we loved Washington, it was just not an easy place to raise children. As we started to look around in suburbs, it was like, well, if we were
going to move to a house-house, it was better to go to someplace that’s considered a real place, like Annapolis, not a suburb. So I said to IMI [International Masonry Institute], “If you’re serious about utilizing this historic house that you have in Annapolis, then I’ll consider it.” They said, “If you can make it work as a headquarters, you can operate out of there.” So it took me three years before we finally got the headquarters established there, and I commuted to [Washington] D.C. in the meantime.

They changed the restrictions later, but at that point we still had the ethics restrictions where you couldn’t lobby, I think it was five years that you couldn't come back and lobby the agency you worked for. There was one year on that, and it was five years for an agency that you had direct responsibility. So I couldn’t have gone to the Labor Department to lobby for something. So it was fine to be outside Washington, and that’s what I decided to do, and left at the end of that December.

Tenpas: Can we talk a little bit about working in the White House in terms of the HR [human resources] part of it. Is there a personnel system? Are there annual reviews? Did you have the opportunity to train your successor? Those kinds of questions.

Baggett: There probably are HR functions, but I don’t recall any of them. No, you don’t train your successor.

Tenpas: Yours was Doug Sosnik.

Baggett: Right. It’s funny. As I said earlier, you have to fill out so many forms that seem to relate more to clearances than they do to personnel functions. So there are governmental policies in place that you have to adhere to, but it’s such an atypical job situation. You’re working, God only knows how many hours a week. There’s really no time to take vacations. That was one of the biggest surprises when we came into it. I really thought it was going to be more like when you work for the House or the Senate, where you know when the recesses are scheduled and that’s as slow as it gets, so that you know that in August you could get away if you needed to. You have those—Fourth of July is usually a safe time, but at the White House, actually when Congress leaves, it’s like everybody turns their attention on you. You just never get an opportunity to leave. So I don’t recall any strong—actually David Watkins, who ended up leaving, oversaw all that part of the White House, in terms of personnel.

Tenpas: There were no annual reviews, performance-based—

Baggett: No.

Tenpas: In looking back, what would you say some of your biggest accomplishments were as being director of the Office of Political Affairs?

Baggett: This is going to be a broad category, but I guess the area that I felt best about, that I would take any credit for is, one of the things I tried to avoid is what the Carter Administration got tagged with, people coming in from outside Washington who didn’t understand how Washington worked, and failing to get things accomplished because they ignored the
Washington establishment, thinking they could sort of bluff their way into it. I think my experience in Washington helped keep the institutional part above the party, the party structure, organized constituencies, and get them integrated and at the same time, not “dis” the campaign people who helped get him there, the supporters from outside Washington, and marry those two groups. I think that’s probably the best thing that I contributed to when I was there.

Obviously, losing the ’94 election is probably what I would consider the biggest failure in the time I was there.

**Tenpas:** Can you think of any special challenges that are associated with being a woman in the White House that made the job more or less difficult?

**Baggett:** I think the biggest challenge that women face in senior positions, both in the White House and outside, is the fact that, particularly if you have children, it’s a 24-hour a day job. It’s not that you can’t do it, but it’s difficult to pay the price every day, in terms of what the opportunity costs. The juggle is too much. You end up not feeling that you’re doing a good job at work, and you don’t feel like you’re giving your family what you need to give your family. So that’s the most difficult thing, by far.

Then I guess the other thing would be, you have to have a certain amount of—there’s a healthy dose of aggression needed to operate in the White House atmosphere. I think for women, it’s always a challenge to be assertive and not come across as being a bitch. I think that’s harder for women, and striking that balance is probably the challenge that—and some people do it very well—but that would be one of the biggest challenges.

**Riley:** One of the things that we talked about over dinner last night was the President’s perceptions abroad. Did you travel abroad with President Clinton?

**Baggett:** I did not. The perceptions that we picked up were after I left the White House and when we would travel to Greece and Morocco. We traveled to quite a few countries after I left. It was striking. He’s so highly respected outside the country, even today. When we would talk with people they would ask us for copies of specific speeches that they had seen on CNN [Cable News Network], and they think he is such a leader. Part of this, I was an observer at the elections in Bosnia—

**Riley:** On what—

**Baggett:** I was part of the State Department delegation. I think it would have been about ’95, it was presidential elections. The voters, when they saw we were from the United States, would say—actually, it may have been later than ’95 because it was during the time the impeachment hearings were going on. They would say, “Oh, what’s going to happen to President Clinton? Please don’t let anything happen to him because he has saved us.” They really looked up to him, and people were so puzzled as to why he was being impeached when he had done so much good in the world. They thought the charges that he was being brought up on were just ridiculous.
Who cared about his private life or his sex life when he was doing so much good? So they were hard-pressed to understand that.

Later, after Bush became President, then it was more of a comparison. They felt Bush was not as effective a world leader and they were very disappointed that the United States could select someone like Bush as President, and they wished you could have Bill Clinton back. That was, I think it safe to say, just universal with everybody we came in contact with.

Tenpas: I was wondering if you could talk about how you felt the media treated the Clinton Presidency in the first two years, and maybe you specifically, and then the Administration and its accomplishments.

Baggett: I think, and I don’t know if I’ll distinguish between the first two years and later years, but the media in general, I thought—I think every Administration probably thinks they get a bum rap from the media. In Clinton’s case, I think there may be something to the fact there are more reporters that may lean Democratic, and it’s almost like they feel like they have to bend over backwards to be fair, so they’re even more critical of Democratic Presidents. But I don’t think he got—they would focus on, every incident that came up became a “gate,” so it would be travelgate and it was, it almost trivialized things that were really serious. To compare the firing of some travel office employees to Watergate seemed to be silly. I don’t think they really did check out things very well. They did tend to report what they were given without looking into it very much. Now, having said that, do I think they treat Bush any differently? Not really. I think it may just come from the competitiveness of the media. I think one of the ways we were—talk radio probably hit its stride with Clinton as President. Certainly, well, particularly in the areas like Alabama and some of the areas that have gone more Republican now, the types of things that you get away with saying on public airwaves, which are completely untrue, but you can just say it, and people take it as truth because you couldn’t say it if it wasn’t true.

The majority of the American people, I think, believe that it has to be true for you to say something on public airwaves, and that’s just not the case. I think that has contributed to the cynicism that we see that people have about, well, society in general, but certainly about their elected officials and government. I think long term it’s a huge disservice, and I don’t know when we get to see the pendulum swing back. I know there have been attempts to do liberal talk radio, but they haven’t taken yet. So there’s no counterbalance. That’s how I viewed it.

Riley: I remember my question. You have a long history with the Democratic Party, and I’m curious about your observations about Bill Clinton’s legacy for the Democratic Party.

Baggett: I don’t know that I’d qualify this as a legacy, but I think the most important function that he performed for the Democratic Party was, I guess, his analogy as the comeback kid. Because if he can come back like this and bring the party up, there is life there and we can say what we believe and move forward. Democrats had become—the party itself, I think, had begun to just feel like there was no hope, and he really restored hope to the Democratic Party, the
official party. When you think about it, this is ironic because the DLC—it’s interesting, when we talked about the DLC yesterday. Al From is a friend and in fact lives close to me in Annapolis.

I was at a dinner party with him and some of his supporters. It was actually for Tom Carper, who is now Senator from Delaware. They were talking gushing over Al From and how the DLC had saved Democrats, and how they made ’92 possible, and Bill Clinton’s election. Well, hello? Ron Brown? It was almost as if we were describing two different—it’s like John Edwards’ two Americas, two different worlds. No, we did that. I’m sure the DLC feels the same way about him, but the DNC, and the Democratic Party, capital D for both the DLC and the DNC—I think he restored hope and made them feel like, even with our differences on some of the policy stuff, that we could win again, and our message does resonate with the American people.

Riley: Do you have observations about Gore’s race and his loss in 2000? Were you involved in that campaign at all?

Baggett: Just at the very end. I was saying to Katie, I went down the last couple of weeks, they asked me to go down to Tennessee, and there really wasn’t anything—it was pretty apparent that he hadn’t kept up with Tennessee and hadn’t really maintained. He had gone one way and Tennessee had gone the other way, and we weren’t going to repair that at the last minute. I think he made a big mistake in distancing himself from Clinton. It had been viewed as a team effort, I think, what was accomplished with the Administration. So it was somewhat difficult for him to try to run on the record of accomplishment while keeping Bill Clinton at arm’s length.

I think that didn’t have resonance. So he just wasn’t that engaging. It wasn’t enough to not be Bush, and if you were going to distance yourself from the person you accomplished the past four years with, I think it made voters somewhat question, what is he going to be? I don’t have any observations beyond that. Structurally, things were there, it was hard to get that excited about Al Gore.

Riley: Mrs. Clinton’s future? Do you think she has what it takes to be President?

Baggett: I think she has what it takes to be President. I think the key will be whether she can survive—and I think she can get the nomination. Whether or not she could be elected has to do with how much the opponents demonize her. It would be hard to believe things could get nastier, but it will be nastier. My husband made an interesting observation, though, when we were looking at the polls yesterday and likely candidates in 2008. If you said, for example, Clinton-[Rudy] Giuliani match-up, he said, “I always thought it would be a huge mistake to have Hillary Clinton as the nominee just because of what the other side, how polarized we would be, but the fact of the matter is, the country is so polarized now, can it get any worse?” And I don’t know the answer to that. I’ve thought she wouldn’t do it because I can’t believe she’s willing to put herself through it. You’re sure to have everything resurrected, all the bad stuff for both of them. Now, it may be that she decides—I think she will be under incredible pressure from her friends and supporters to do it. At the end, the possibility of being the first woman President may prove to be too irresistible to resist.

Riley: Would you go back in?
Baggett: I don’t know. I don’t know. That would be a tough one.

Riley: Wait until you get those girls in college and then—

Baggett: Now, compared to being around teenagers, this may look a little better. [laughter]

Riley: Piece of cake. Joan, I think we’ve reached our concluding point. We’re very grateful, again, for all your time and your observations. It’s been a lot of fun for us and we’ve learned a great deal. I always say at this point that we haven’t exhausted all the possibilities we could talk about, but we’ve probably exhausted the people at the table. You’ve been a good sport to let us take so much of your time.

Baggett: I’ll send you my therapy bill. [laughter]

Riley: Maybe we should bill you?

Baggett: You should probably bill me for therapy. I haven’t talked about some of those things for a long time.

Riley: Your husband said there were some things that you still haven’t talked about, I wasn’t moved to ask those questions about second term. I think we'll let that pass. So thanks.