WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH LOCKHART

September 19-20, 2005
Charlottesville, Virginia

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TRANSCRIPT

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Riley: I want to turn the air conditioner down while we're recording.

Maltese: Part of the tactic to get him to talk, right? Sweat the answers out of him.

Riley: That's right.

Lockhart: I've seen hotter lights than this.

Riley: All right.

Lockhart: One of the only things in the world I did better than [Mike] McCurry was I didn't sweat. I'm not a sweater. [*laughter*] At the time, I had much thicker hair. Because he had thinning hair, he really did sweat, and the photographers would just sit and wait. [*laughter*]

Riley: You know we're going to have to get that on tape.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: There are a couple of administrative things we do at the outset. The first is to repeat the fundamental ground rule. The interview is being conducted under a strict veil of confidentiality. Everybody who's sitting at the table today has taken a pledge to preserve the sanctity of the proceedings to make sure that nothing leaves the room. I'm pleased to say that we have an unblemished record of maintaining those confidences. We had a more extended conversation about this just before we began, but it's important for us to get on the record again that this is the fundamental ground rule. So I hope you will feel comfortable today in speaking candidly to history. This is not something that's going to show up in a headline anytime soon—probably never, but certainly not in the next few years.

The other thing we do as an aid to the transcriber is go around the room and have each person say a word or two and identify yourself so that the transcriber can differentiate the voices. I'm

Russell Riley. I'm an associate professor here at the Miller Center. I'm heading up the Clinton Presidential History Project.

Lockhart: I'm Joe Lockhart. I'm here to answer all of your very probing questions.

Maltese: I'm John Maltese, associate professor at the University of Georgia.

Morrisroe: Darby Morrisroe, assistant professor here at the Miller Center.

Bagchi: Nitu Bagchi. I create a brief report. I will be taking notes.

Martin: I'm Paul Martin. I'm an assistant professor at the Miller Center. It's a beautiful day in Charlottesville.

Riley: Great. Sound levels are fine?

Finch: Yes, great.

Riley: All right. I thought we would begin by getting some of your biography on the record, because even in the briefing materials, there were a couple of things—an interview you had done with Geraldo [Rivera], I think—but I don't trust that as a historical source. Maybe we'd better go back a little.

Lockhart: Sure.

Riley: Tell us a bit about your background and how you got into politics. Was your family politically active?

Lockhart: My parents both worked for NBC [National Broadcasting Company]. My mother got a job there in the '50s and worked on some of the original pioneering TV shows. She met my dad. He got into the business at NBC and worked his way up. She stayed home and had a bunch of kids.

Riley: They're from New York?

Lockhart: From New York, yes. They spent the first year and a half in a town called Little Neck, which is well known because it's the town next to where John McEnroe is from, and we're all like that. Then we moved out to suburban Rockland County, which is right next to Westchester County. I grew up around politics, because my father was the producer for NBC's convention coverage. I was actually just telling this story to someone last night. In 1972, the entire family spent the summer in a hotel in Miami Beach because both conventions, Democratic and Republican, were there in '72. In '76 we went to Kansas City and New York, '80, Detroit.

Maltese: Did you actually attend the conventions?

Lockhart: Yes. In 1972 I was 12, and my father got me a job at the Republican convention. I was working for Robert MacNeil and Jim Lehrer. I was basically the person who ran and got them lunch and ran scripts around. I had my first tear gas experience, which was wonderful. I thought they were all going to be like that, and I was disappointed along the way. I did various jobs. There was always something to do.

My dad took me to the New Hampshire primary in 1980, and this nice southern guy came in, said hello, and talked to me for a few minutes. He walked away, and I turned to someone and said, "Who was that?" It was Jimmy Carter. I was pretty aware of politics, but I had not heard of him yet.

The second part of the story is, as any young person is wont to do, I was very interested in what my dad did but absolutely didn't want to *do* what he did. I was a junior at Georgetown and lacked a certain direction in life, so I quit school. After about three months, my father decided that not speaking to me was a bad strategy. So he came down to Washington specifically to figure out what was going on with me. We had a conversation, and he asked me what I wanted to do. I basically told him that I was interested in politics and the media, but I didn't want to be like him, which was a charming way to treat your dad. We started talking, and he started describing how there were people in politics who got to tell the media what to do. I thought, *That's perfect*.

This is an absolutely true story. He had a friend at the White House who was gracious enough to talk to me, and I ended up volunteering on the campaign, and then eventually—

Riley: This is Carter?

Lockhart: The Carter campaign, 1980. I was 20. After probably four months of volunteering, I got a staff position, and that was it. From that point on, I would go to school in the spring and do a campaign in the fall. I did that for three years to graduate. I did two campaigns in Virginia and then got into the political system where I moved from campaign to campaign.

Riley: You finished at Georgetown?

Lockhart: Finished at Georgetown, yes.

Riley: Georgetown would seem to be a natural choice for somebody who was interested in politics. Did you go there because it was in Washington?

Lockhart: Yes. We had some family history there. One of my older sisters went there. Now, Georgetown had different ideas. I applied out of high school and was rejected. I applied as a transfer student from Roanoke College and was rejected. This might be telling as far as my future career: I ended up writing the president of the university a letter saying, "You're crazy, here's why you should take me. I don't really get this, there's clearly been a mistake." He wrote me back about six weeks later saying, "Okay, fine. Come."

Riley: Wow.

Lockhart: At the time, I thought that was just the most normal thing in the world. I've been told subsequently that it's not so normal. So that's how I went to Georgetown. Washington was a great place to be. If I had been at Ohio State and quit school and was working as a messenger—which is what I was doing—I wouldn't have fallen into what I did. So it was a good place to be.

Riley: What kind of work were you doing with the Carter campaign in '80 once you got on the payroll?

Lockhart: They divided the country up into four regions. There were four political desk officers who handled the politics, and then there were four press officers who managed the press operations in the regions. I had one of the regions. I had 11 people, who were on average ten to 15 years older than I was and who technically were supposed to call me and look to me for direction. The reality didn't quite work that way. It was like herding cats. That was my job.

Riley: Who did you report to?

Lockhart: I reported to a woman by the name of Linda Peek, who ran the media affairs office. She was originally from Alabama and was part of the early Carter crowd that came to Washington, ran the media affairs operational house, and then went over to the campaign to be the press secretary.

This will be historically instructive for people on how to get a job. I used to call her every day trying to come to work on the campaign for free, which was hard to do. I finally realized after about a month that her assistant was never going to put me through. So I figured out exactly when her assistant left. There was a five-minute period between when her assistant left and when she left, and she'd answer her own phone. I finally got her two nights in a row and she said, "I don't know how you keep getting through to me, but just show up." [*laughter*] I did.

Riley: It's a story of persistence.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: You seem to be very creative at managing your way around.

Lockhart: Yes. I view "no" as a provisional answer.

Riley: The Carter experience was not a terrifically positive experience for people who were working for him in 1980.

Lockhart: No, and I had no interaction with him. I was a very junior person, but even at that age I could tell it was not a happy place and not a happy group of people. There was a general disconnect between what the campaign and the political people thought he should do at that point, and what he as the President thought he should do. It was instructive because oftentimes you have a sound political strategy and your principal doesn't buy into it, and the problem is very often that principal's ego. Part of the problem there was the former President had a significant problem taking his opponent seriously, and it clouded his ability to execute a good campaign.

Oddly enough, with all his problems with the American public, he still could have won that election.

Riley: But it didn't turn you off politics?

Lockhart: No. It's a cliché to say that you get a bug, but I definitely got it.

Riley: So what do you do when you don't have a White House to go into in 1980?

Lockhart: Actually, it's funny. I haven't thought about this story for a while. I remember getting a call about ten days after the campaign from somebody in the White House saying, "Show up on Monday, we have a Schedule C job for you." I didn't know what that meant, and I said, "No, no, no, I'm taking some time off. I have to go back to school in January. I'm exhausted."

And they said, "No, no, no. Just show up on Monday, we have a Schedule—" I'm supposed to know what that is. A Schedule C job is a political appointee. Basically what they were saying was, "Show up on Monday, and you'll get a paycheck for the next three months, and you don't have to show up anymore." [*laughter*] But they couldn't say that. I'm the only person in the world to turn down a no-show job because I thought they actually wanted me to show up. And even adding a level of stupidity, I worked on the campaign, not in the White House. I think I got invited over to the White House once to deliver something—just the chance to walk around the building and say, "Hey, look, I have a pass!"

Not me, I turned it down. That should have been the end right there.

Riley: But it wasn't. What did you end up doing in this interval? You went back to school?

Lockhart: I went back to school. After working in the campaign, school was less exciting than it had been—and it never really was exciting. I figured I needed to get done as quickly as I could. But then I took a different direction and just decided to go when I felt like it, and I'd eventually finish. I tell people that senior year was the best three years of my life.

Then I just went and started doing campaigns. I did a Lieutenant Governor's race in Virginia in 1981, a guy by the name of Dick Davis. I went back to school, did Norman Sisisky's first campaign in Virginia, for Congress in 1982, and finally graduated in December. Then sometime in the spring I joined the [Walter] Mondale campaign and did that for almost two years.

Riley: And you were doing press work on each of these other campaigns also?

Lockhart: Yes. This will be something I'll redact. I got my first job as a press secretary in the 1981 campaign. I went down to Richmond and met with the campaign manager and made a powerful case for why I should be the campaign's press secretary. He let me finish, and then he said, "Well, sorry, you're not qualified, and the job's filled."

I said, "Do you have any other jobs?" He said, "Yes, we need a driver for the candidate." I said, "Fine, I know how to drive. I'll do it." I needed the work. I wanted to be in the campaign. I went

away and came back in two weeks. I walked in and said, "I'm ready to go. Where are we going?" The campaign manager said, "Oh, no, no, no. You're the press secretary now." I thought, *Great!*

I remember walking out of the office, and something made me turn and say, "What happened to the more qualified person?" He said, "She got a better job." I walked a couple more steps, stopped, turned, and said, "I have to know. What's the better job?"

This is the God's honest truth. She got hired as one of the characters in Busch Gardens where she got to sing and dance. [*laughter*] She got paid five times as much, and she thought it was a better job. That's how it happened.

Maltese: Ron Ziegler went from there.

Morrisroe: When you're seeking positions in these campaigns, are you looking for people you believe in ideologically, or are you looking to develop political expertise?

Lockhart: I think it's a combination of things. Candidly, for me ideology has probably always been the least important. I'd say the next one as far as importance is the significance of the actual campaign. You want to go to one that means something. Then the third is personal relationships—not necessarily with the candidate, but with— I know this campaign manager, or I know the media consultant. I work well with them. It's very much a word-of-mouth business. You move with people you know and have relationships with. I don't remember making a lot of decisions. There were certainly several campaigns on the Presidential level where multiple candidates were asking me to come help them. But I just can't think of a case where I decided I liked their position on this issue or that issue. It's been more of a business.

Riley: So you go to work for Mondale at a very early stage.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: What position were you?

Lockhart: My title was assistant press secretary, and when I got hired there was just a press secretary and a secretary, so my job was everything. I did a little of everything. I traveled with him. I started traveling about October, traveled full time.

Riley: This was October of—

Lockhart: Of '83. I was on the road a lot. We eventually had an office of 25 or 30 people, but almost to the end of '83 there were just a handful of us. It was a great experience for me as far as being able to do a hundred different things.

Riley: Right.

Martin: In this early period where you were testing out with different campaigns, did you ever pursue doing something other than press—outside of your driver job?

Lockhart: Within the campaigns? No.

Martin: Were you interested?

Lockhart: Not really. I think it's like anything else. Careers are born of accident rather than real design. You keep falling into things until you find something you're comfortable with and you have some ability at, and I was lucky enough to fall into the right thing at the beginning. I didn't see it as a stepping-stone to "I really want to be the campaign manager. I really want to be a candidate myself." I never really thought about that.

Riley: You indicated earlier that you thought the election results of 1980 were fixable for Carter. Did you ever see that possibility in 1984? Was it ever possible that Walter Mondale could have been elected?

Lockhart: Well, anything's possible. [*laughter*] No. One of the reasons I got to know the former Vice President as well as I did was that I was the same age as his kids. When they went on vacation, they hated having staff around. He just didn't want anyone from Washington anywhere near them. So someone came up with the bright idea of sending me as a friend of Teddy's [Theodore Mondale]. It was ridiculous. He knew what it was. I knew what it was. I became the vacation person.

I remember after the convention, we went up to northern Minnesota. There's actually a place in the United States that's four hours north of Duluth, and I have been there. The mosquitoes are bigger than the people. But we went. *Newsweek* came out with a poll showing Mondale ahead by two points. I remember taking it in to him, showing it to him, and the look on his face was like, "Yeah, right." A week later, there was a poll that showed him behind by 14. It was just one of those bounce aberration things. He was in the public eye and— But that was a time when the politics of the nation and the incumbency were insurmountable. Even a flawless campaign— I've worked on a lot of campaigns, and I've never worked on one that lost so comprehensively as the Mondale campaign. But it's probably one of the one or two best-run campaigns I've ever worked on. We just didn't have much of a chance.

Riley: One of the things we'll ask you to do—and I don't know whether now is the right time to do it or to move ahead chronologically—is to think about some of your campaign experiences comparatively. We'd love to hear from you, for example, to get a comparison of Mondale as a candidate as opposed to Clinton as a candidate.

Lockhart: Sure.

Riley: Do you want to handle that now, or hold off and maybe we'll do it after we—

Lockhart: I'll do it any way you want.

Riley: All right. Let's move ahead with the chronology, and then maybe we'll come back. We'll have a couple of points of comparison then.

Lockhart: Okay.

Riley: Do you have anything else you want to ask about ’84 in particular?

Lockhart: It was big when the word came in that we’d won Minnesota. That was a big moment in the sweep.

Martin: That is essential.

Lockhart: Because we almost lost.

Martin: Your description of him in that story about the polls showing him with two points ahead suggests he was very on top of the fact that he was losing.

Lockhart: Oh, he was. This probably *is* a good time for the comparison between Clinton and Mondale.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: He was a very good instinctive politician, as Clinton remains. He was never able to publicly project the real him, because as soon as the cameras went on he had this idea of how politicians should comport themselves, and it was counterproductive. It was stiff, it was cold. In fact, he was an extraordinarily warm human being, and if you saw him—particularly around his kids—you would be amazed at the difference between his public persona and his private persona.

Clinton, on the other hand, had an instinctive understanding that the most successful politicians are accessible politicians, that the public needs to get to know you before they’ll even think about voting for you, and that you have to be revealing.

Riley: On camera.

Lockhart: In public. On camera is the most specific. It got watered down to the “I feel your pain” stuff, but it’s not really that. It’s that he understands that politics, campaigning, is about relationships. Relationships are about both sides being accessible. Mondale understood politics. He understood what he was facing. He understood where the country was, so he understood how hard it was. He just wasn’t able to do what Clinton was able to do on the public side.

Riley: You said that Mondale—I don’t remember your exact phraseology—felt when the camera was on that there was a certain way a politician was supposed to behave. So for him it was a conditioned, or taught, or learned response.

Lockhart: Yes. Some of it was ethnic and cultural. He’s not a fiery Southern Baptist. He’s a Scandinavian from Minnesota who learned all these things. It’s funny, because very late in the campaign I figured out a way to soften him up. I wish I had thought of it earlier. When he did big

interviews with the networks, we put his wife on with him, because she had a way of softening him. Maybe we would have won Massachusetts if we had thought of this earlier. It would not have been life changing, but if a historian went back and looked at him on camera versus when the two of them were on, you'd find that there was a window into something. There was something there that if we had mined it earlier would have been beneficial to us.

Riley: Any other points of comparison? Mondale was a creature of the Senate.

Lockhart: Yes. I believe that Mondale was a very good politician with very good instincts, but his instincts were rooted in the end of a generation of politics, New Deal Democrats. Clinton's were the beginnings of the new. That's a whole debate that we can do another time about the left and the right and the Democratic Party. Clinton had a different orientation about what was basic to the Democratic Party than Mondale did, and I do think it's a generational thing. Anyone who says that Mondale was a bad politician just doesn't know him. He was at the end of an era though, and Clinton was the beginning, the very beginning of a new era of the way Democrats—at least successful Democrats—think.

Maltese: Clinton strikes me as being very involved with his campaign, almost directing it. Was Mondale involved in that same way, or was he more directed by advisors?

Lockhart: They were involved in different ways. I'm not even sure how to answer this. Clinton being involved in the campaign is a little overdone. I wasn't there in '92, but I was there in '96. Maybe it was because he was distracted by being President, but he was not involved in the day-to-day decisions. We would do a weekly meeting, and he'd sign off on things and then go back to being President.

Now, everything about being President is political, so you can't separate these things. It may have been that I wasn't at a level where I was involved in those discussions with Mondale, so I'm probably not the best person to ask about that. It's a situation where people would assume the logic of your question. It's probably right. I'm not sure.

Riley: Is there anything about Mondale's turn of mind with respect to Clinton that you want to comment on? We get reports of Clinton: voracious consumer of information, political and otherwise, voracious reader of almost everything.

Lockhart: Clinton had this sort of bifurcation. He was a very good people person and good with relationships, but then he had this academic side that was worthy of any academician. He had read everything. You could never reference something he hadn't read, and he used to send— On Monday mornings, you'd go in, and in your inbox would be four articles annotated with notes all the way through from the most obscure publications you'd never heard of, and you'd wonder, *When did he have time to read this and what am I supposed to do with it?* Plus, you couldn't read what he wrote.

Mondale was much more of a people person, relationships, than an academic—much more of an instinctual politician. I think this has the potential to be misinterpreted—and would be by someone who's not a fan of Clinton—but Clinton did understand the role of research and polling.

Not to tell him what he thought—he knew what he thought. But he was very clear that if he said something one way and 50 percent of the people were persuaded, and if he said it another way and 80 percent were persuaded, the second way was probably the better way to say it.

Mondale didn't want to know about that stuff. He just didn't. I think there was a caricature that grew up of Clinton that somehow he was the poll-driven President. But I don't ever remember a substantive discussion where we decided where we were going to be because of a poll. We would decide how we were going to write the speech based on research. And there were some issues where we'd decide, "We're for this, we're going to try to get it through Congress, but we're sure not giving a speech on it because it's not very popular." I think Clinton was a much more sophisticated, 21st-century politician, as opposed to Mondale who thought, *If I go into Illinois and these six people are for me, I got it.* We were right at the cusp of that not being true anymore.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: Certainly there were places where we went in and won because of organized labor, but there were certainly places we went in where we thought we had the place wired and it blew up in our faces.

Riley: Sure. We'll want to probe more on these questions about Clinton later, but now let's move on. What are you up to after '84?

Lockhart: Let's see. After '84 I took a job with Paul Simon, who was moving from the House to the Senate. I worked for him for six months. I loved Paul Simon, an incredible human being. You talk about an instinctual politician. He would go off on something, and I would tell him he was crazy. I'd say, "What are you doing?" Inevitably, he was three steps ahead of me, and at the end, I'd say, "Oh, so that's what you were thinking." He would never explain it to me while he was doing it, just to make me crazy.

But I had no taste at all for the Senate. I had done campaigns for five years, and the pace was different. They all pretended to be nice to each other. It was awful. So I took a temporary job with ABC News. I decided it was time to try the other side—in Chicago, which proved to be temporary, for six months. Then I went to CNN [Cable News Network] for two years in Washington. I did that because I liked working in television, it was interesting. I eventually grew tired of it, but I wanted to come back to Washington—that's where my friends were. And winter was approaching in Chicago and I'd heard bad things about it, so I came back to Washington to work for CNN.

Riley: What kind of work were you doing with CNN here? It was not on camera, was it?

Lockhart: No, no. It was all editing and producing.

Riley: And that brings us to '88, is that right?

Lockhart: Yes. I had a small dispute with my bosses at CNN. I wanted to work on their political coverage, and they said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," but we could never really work it out. It was more of a fight between Washington and Atlanta, and Atlanta was in control of the political coverage. I finally said, "I don't want to do this anymore," and I left. I was determined to stay in television for a while, but I had a contract with CNN, which I never thought they'd enforce. Wrong. Every time I talked to someone about a job, all of a sudden someone from CNN would call and say, "You really can't hire him." And that proved to be very persuasive.

So after many months of unemployment, I went to do the [Michael] Dukakis campaign because I needed a job. I thought I was done with politics, and after the Dukakis campaign, I *knew* I was done with politics. I literally did it because I couldn't find a job in TV because I was blocked for at least another year from taking a job.

It's funny. That was the year Chuck Robb ran for the Senate for the first time, and I knew him from Virginia. He called and said, "Come in and talk to me about this," and offered me a job. I called a friend of mine in New Hampshire whom I'd worked for before and whom I trust. I said, "What do you think? Should I do this?"

He kind of laughed and said, "You're not going to believe this, but I got a call yesterday from the Dukakis campaign saying they fired the press secretary. And I was just about to call you, because I'm not going to say yes until you say you'll come do it with me." So I said, "Okay, that solves my problem. I'll go do that." So I did that.

Riley: What was the timing of this?

Lockhart: This was, I'd say, April.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: Dukakis had basically wrapped up the nomination, and I got sent to Atlanta for three months to help put the convention together. Then I left Atlanta with Dukakis and traveled with him until Election Day.

Riley: What did you find when you got there?

Lockhart: Atlanta is a hot city in the summer, very hot.

Riley: Did the campaign look good to you when you arrived, or was it a shambles?

Lockhart: Well, I concentrated first on the convention. And any convention you go to two months before is a mess, but the infrastructure was there, and I think we actually put on a pretty good convention. I went out on my first trip with him the day after the convention. It was a three-day trip all over America. I remember coming back and going out to dinner with a bunch of my friends from CNN, which had been my last job. Dukakis at that point in most polls was up by 17 to 20 points. And they were all asking, "Where are you going to work in the White House?"

They're all good friends, so I could speak candidly with them, and I remember saying, "I'm not working in the White House. Really, I don't think this guy has a chance to win."

They were shocked, but it was because I spent three days with him as kind of a consumer. I'd never really heard him speak before, and he gave no compelling reason to vote for him beyond he knew how to run a government. That's just not how you win campaigns. And unfortunately—very unfortunately—that was right, because soon after that we went through our terrible August, watched the lead fall, and never really got back into the campaign.

It was a campaign where from the day I joined to Election Day, in three months we lost 30 points, so I did a good job. I managed to slip the blame for that.

Riley: Was he connecting with the people when he was out on the road, or is this just your visceral reaction?

Lockhart: Yes. It's funny. This will go back to Clinton. We used to go around, and as part of our traveling around the country when he was President, we'd meet all sorts of people. Everybody wanted two minutes with the President, and oftentimes it would be someone who's running for something. It would be the local congressional candidate, the local guy running for mayor, and shockingly enough, there were some people he hadn't met before.

He would go into the meeting—it would be just one person and him. I would never sit in these meetings. Then he would come out, and he would always say whether the man or the woman was going to win—after spending two minutes with them. I remember asking one day, "How are you so sure of that?" He said, "It's easy. You ask them a basic question: 'Why are you running? What are you going to do if you get elected?' The people who can answer you, they win. The people who are just running to run and have no sense of why they're running, they're going to lose."

That's oversimplified. There certainly are good people who have lost because the politics were against them or they ran a bad campaign or something happened. But after a three- or four-day period on the road with Dukakis, I didn't get a sense of what he wanted to do. It was a unique experience to be part of the campaign but not really know the candidate, and go out and listen. A lot of other things happened that contributed to his defeat, but you do need to have an overwhelming and burning desire to get the job. You also need to have some reason. I think the most successful Presidents are the ones who are the clearest about what they want to do, whether it's [Ronald] Reagan, who wanted to dismantle government, or Clinton, who wanted to build a better government. It was clear. I think the Bushes [George H. W. and George W.] in between are a little less clear, and that's the cause of some of their political misery.

Maltese: Did Mondale have a reason?

Lockhart: Yes, I think he did. But it was not compelling to the public. Mondale believed that the New Deal was the right way to go, and we needed to preserve and extend it. The public didn't agree with him, but I do think he had an overriding sense that we had built something very

important here and the Republicans were trying to tear it apart. The public just wasn't there. The public wanted it torn down.

Riley: You mention with respect to Mondale that when he got on camera, the woodenness was learned behavior from an earlier era.

Lockhart: Right.

Riley: Did the camera catch the real Dukakis?

Lockhart: Absolutely. Absolutely. There was no on camera and off camera. He's an incredibly decent, good person but not a warm person. And again, I don't know where that comes from, whether it's cultural or learned. But that was a case where he had one persona, and that's what we all saw. And as a political figure, it's not particularly appealing.

Martin: You referred to some of the other people like Bill Clinton or Mondale as having good political instincts. Paul Simon. What do you think about Dukakis's political instincts?

Lockhart: All you have to do is look at August to know that they were flawed. Dukakis had the view that people would generally figure things out for themselves. The facts speak for themselves, the right thing will always happen—because he was a self-made man who worked hard, and good things happened to him. But in politics that's a ridiculous notion. People believe what you tell them, and you have to make a case to them. People are very susceptible to being told things that aren't the case, and they're just as likely to believe something if it's told to them in a compelling way whether it's true or not true.

This may change at some point. People talk to me about how the Internet and information technology will change politics. It might if people spend as much time checking out their candidates as they do checking out a new dishwasher. "Let me go find some third-party validation on whether these claims are true. Let me find out what the best price is. Well, these two have this feature and that—"

But with political candidates it's, "Oh, well, I kind of like what he said on taxes." "What did he say?" "I don't know—he's against them."

But Dukakis had this naïve view: "If George Bush, Sr., says ridiculous, hurtful things about me, shame on him, and the public will punish him for it." That's just not how politics has ever worked. It's gotten worse in the last three decades, but I don't think it ever worked that way.

Martin: Did you and the other folks in the campaign try to persuade Dukakis to fight back a little bit?

Lockhart: Let's just say there was a plan B that was never taken up, that many of us thought was superior to plan A.

Martin: Do you want to go to plan B?

Lockhart: Plan B involved responding in a very aggressive way. It was the candidate's decision.

Riley: Anything else about '88?

Morrisroe: I have a question. In your travels and campaign work in '88, did you have occasion to run across Clinton or hear about him through second parties?

Lockhart: I knew a little about Clinton just because I was friendly with some of the Arkansas political people, not necessarily with Clinton. I knew Bruce Lindsey and his wife at the time, Bev Lindsey. Bev is a very good friend of mine, so I knew Bruce through her. I'm trying to think who else was out there. Clinton had a little core group who interacted with some of the other states and some of the people who worked in national politics.

I was in the convention hall when he gave his famous speech, or his famous two speeches, in Atlanta. I was not paying that close attention, because I think the Omni fit something like 17,000 people, and that night there were 28,000 delegate passes floating around. So half the people who were supposed to be in the hall couldn't get in. It was a little crazy. But I do remember it being one of the best recoveries I've ever seen. His *Tonight Show* performance caught my eye: *This guy knows what he's doing.*

But I didn't know very much about him beyond that. There was a little bit of a buzz. He went to Georgetown, he actually spoke at my sister's graduation—it must have been three months before he lost his reelection for Governor. It was 1980, I think. So I'd seen him, but there was no moment when I thought, *He's the one.*

Morrisroe: Knowing his team and the people he had around him at the time, what was your assessment of his staff?

Lockhart: Uniformly positive. You have a lot of people at campaigns who are very good. You have some people who hang around who aren't that good, and a lot of people in the middle. It's not just the Clinton staff. Democratic politics in Arkansas was serious business between [Dale] Bumpers and the [David and Mark] Pryors. These were smart people who knew what they were doing. There were no naïve staffers or candidates. They had a well-earned reputation for competence and savvy, and that was indeed the case.

Riley: Okay. So you get through the '88 campaign. Once again, you're with a losing effort.

Lockhart: Thank you for reminding me. [*laughter*] I'd forgotten that for almost four or five seconds.

Riley: So what do you decide to do with yourself at that point?

Lockhart: I decided I was tired of beating my head against the wall. I had one Republican friend in Washington who ran a public relations firm, and I got him to hire me. I thought, *You know what? I'm going to go work for these Republican guys.*

Riley: Sorry about that.

Lockhart: Let the record note that everyone else was acting weirdly. I sat here and did not wave my arms like a bird.

Riley: There's a motion detector.

Lockhart: Sure, whatever story you want to stick with. [*laughter*] This is when it got weird. Okay. You used a big word. I used "chaotic" when we were talking before about my career. I took the job in three weeks. After I took the job, the woman I was going to marry six months later got sent to London for three weeks for her job. She came back six years later. I joined her after a couple of months. So I lived in London for six years, did odd jobs.

It was funny, because in Washington I couldn't get a job in television. In London, it was the only kind of job I could get. I wasn't particularly interested in going back and doing that, but it was really the only thing I'd get hired for because the political system over there was different. I talked to some of the Labor people. Here was this American who had just lost three straight Presidential elections. They really didn't have room for me. As badly as they were doing, they thought, *Yes, there is a way to go further down*.

So I worked freelance for some American networks, and then I got a job at Sky TV, which was just starting. It's one of those cases where they were trying to sell their programs back to the U.S. networks, the Fox network in the States. It was all part of the [Rupert] Murdoch empire, and they decided they needed an American accent on the show. I showed up the day they decided that. I went through this great interview process where I thought I was interviewing for another job. And of course, because it was London, the interview took place at a pub, the senior management of the company all sitting in this pub drinking for a couple hours.

I remember the guy who brought me in. Finally, everybody left for a second. Someone had to go make a phone call, someone had to go to the bathroom. I grabbed the guy and said, "I hope you know I have no experience doing anything on camera. I thought this was for the other job." He looked at me and said, "I guess your CV [curriculum vitae] was kind of vague on that."

I said, "It wasn't vague, there was nothing in there. There was nothing vague about it." He said, "Don't worry about it. This is just television, relax."

So everybody else comes back to the table, including the head of the company, and this guy says, "Joe and I were just talking while you were gone, and he was telling me that he doesn't have a lot of on-camera experience, but he doesn't think it's going to be a problem." The next morning I was on television. Trust me, I couldn't make this up. It's true. I did that for two or three years.

Riley: How were you on camera?

Lockhart: I was awful. I was truly awful.

Riley: Was it learned behavior from you?

Lockhart: I was completely awful, and then I think I got to the point where I just was moderately awful, but it was only because some of the people helped me. It was the Mondale problem: *I'm on TV, I have to be serious.* They kept saying, "TV is not a serious business, relax." I was not accomplished, but they didn't fire me.

Maltese: And you didn't sweat.

Lockhart: I didn't, that's right. We're going to get to the sweating. And then I had an opportunity with my old firm to do a project in the Middle East. I'd never really been there before. I represented the finance ministry of a Middle Eastern country that was involved in a very complicated deal. So for three years I'd spend two weeks in London, two weeks in the Gulf, and go back and forth. At the end of three years of that I thought, *It's time to go home, and not to London.* In 1994, my daughter was born, and the two families got together and told us they were tired of flying to London to see the baby. So we were instructed to be home by the end of the year, and we were.

Riley: And you were.

Lockhart: Yes.

Martin: So you were out of the country for the next two campaigns.

Lockhart: I was in and out. During this period, my father was diagnosed with lung cancer and was very sick. So I spent much of '92 here with him, but not involved. I remember both the convention speech and the inaugural speech, but I didn't watch either of them. I heard them on the radio because I was doing something with him. It was very weird after all that time being involved in politics to not be involved in it.

I was in New York the night of the convention speech, and a bunch of people who worked for Clinton heard I was there and asked me to come over. But I just couldn't do it. It was strange, and I remember that the compromise on these things was listening to them on the radio because I didn't want to watch it. So I heard both of those things, but I was not in any way involved in the campaign.

Riley: Were you close to people who were?

Lockhart: Oh, yes. I knew everybody who was doing it, and it was fun to watch and to catch up with people occasionally. I'd worked with the whole team in one iteration or another, but having the ocean between us at that point was helpful for me mentally. It would have been even harder sitting in Washington.

Riley: Sure. Were you picking up anything distinctive? You're mostly in London, or you're doing the Middle East thing?

Lockhart: I was all over the place, but I watched it.

Riley: Are you picking up anything distinctive from people abroad? Are they surprised to see that Bush is faltering, or are they asking questions about Clinton?

Lockhart: As you get outside the United States, the view of our government and our political system becomes fairly simplistic. And I think in '92 there were a lot of people in Europe and in the Middle East—where I was going back and forth—who didn't quite understand how the American public could reject the guy who won the war. It seemed pretty simple, and they were confused. But Clinton was this interesting guy, so it was not like "You guys are all crazy."

But there was not a deep understanding of what domestically was causing Bush 41 his problems. I still have a whole group of friends who follow it from abroad, and you had the reverse in 2004. They just couldn't believe— They actually looked at John Kerry and did not see some of his campaigning flaws. They saw what he stood for, and they could not believe that the American public would stand up and reelect someone they thought was an absolute buffoon. That's why only Americans get to vote.

Riley: Right. So what are you doing then during the course of the first administration?

Maltese: You said you came back in '93.

Lockhart: I was moving back and forth, but I was in London through the beginning of '95. I came back. I rejoined my old public affairs firm. I spent 11 months there before I finally broke down and went to my first White House interview.

Riley: This was in D.C.?

Lockhart: This was in D.C. I got back and immediately some people in the White House wanted me to go do this job. Go work at the DNC [Democratic National Committee]—they need help. Go work at the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Services]—they need help. I was not interested. I remember this because one of the clients I was working on was Microsoft, and I was doing some low-level stuff for them.

On one particular day Bill Gates was coming to town, and I thought that was a big deal. Five minutes before he pulls up, the phone rings, and it's the White House. Someone said, "You need to get over here right now." I said, "I can't."

They said, "What could you possibly be doing?" I said, "Well, hold on a second. Do you want to talk to Mr. Gates?" I went over and saw them later in the day. It took several months to sort out, but they were interested in my coming and doing the campaign as the press secretary. I ended up doing that.

Riley: Who was the person—or maybe there was a cluster of people—looking after you and trying to draw you in?

Lockhart: Yes, it's interesting. I have a long-standing friendship and relationship with Mike McCurry, and I think Mike made it known to some other people in the White House that if it were up to him, I'd get the job. Mike's a pretty smart inside player. He knew that if he pushed too hard I wouldn't get it, and it almost happened. I almost didn't get it because of some internal politics. So he left it—he just basically said, "That's my choice, but I'm out of it." And he left it to a couple of other people whom I didn't know, whom I went over and actually had a real interview with. It was Doug Sosnik and Evelyn Lieberman.

Riley: This would have been '95?

Lockhart: Late '95. I remember this because I had Doug and Evelyn one day, and then two days later I had to go in and talk to Harold Ickes. I had met Harold before, and he's a memorable guy. It was in the November of the big snowstorm, and I had the most instructive minutes of my life as far as how a White House works.

Harold got a call from somebody at the Pentagon who was arranging who was to get picked up. Who's essential personnel in the White House and who isn't? Harold is oblivious to the fact that there are other people in the room, and I realized in five minutes who matters in the White House and who doesn't. Some of the people on the "doesn't matter" list were very surprising. It was almost, the better your title, the less likely the Range Rover was going to pick you up. He had it in his mind, *Here are the 15 people I need here at work. Everybody else, stay home.* That was interesting.

Maltese: You said you had a long-standing friendship with McCurry.

Lockhart: Yes.

Maltese: When did that date to?

Lockhart: I guess McCurry and I ran into each other as early as '83. He was working for John Glenn. He claims credit for me meeting my wife. It's not exactly true, but in the world of politics it's close enough—too close. It's too good a story to check in the world of journalism.

One of the things that happened was when we knocked Glenn out, it was right about the time we were looking to expand the Mondale staff. So I called McCurry and said, "Do you have anybody?" And he said, "Yes, there's this young woman who works for us who's great." We ended up hiring her, and that ended up being my wife. He claims all credit for that. I never have quite given him his due for that, but from that point on it was a little bit of back and forth.

When I got hired by the Dukakis campaign, I was not hired by Mike—he was at the DNC—but I was given to Mike to help with the convention. So we worked together for three months, putting the convention together. Then in '88 he worked for [Bruce] Babbitt, so we were in and around each other a lot. I'm sure his history is known to you. There was a false start on him going to the White House.

Riley: Yes.

Lockhart: There were a couple of things. He had a little trouble getting into the administration in the first place because of some of the work he'd done for Senator [Robert J.] Kerrey in '92. But he got in through some interventions.

Riley: Do you know who was making the interventions for him? Who was running interference?

Lockhart: I think his most vocal proponent was Tom Donilon, who was Warren Christopher's law partner and who was really running the day-to-day transition personnel in '92. I'm told there were some pretty interesting conversations between the transition and particularly the current junior Senator from New York, who remembered some of the things he'd said about the President-elect when he was working for Bob Kerrey.

But anyway, he went in, and then there was a shakeup in the White House where Dee Dee [Myers] was told she was leaving, but she got—all of that stuff. That's the first time I ever had a conversation with Mike about the White House. He had basically said, "I may be going over there. If I do, are you interested in a job?" I was in London at the time, and I said, "Probably." But then that didn't work. And when he did move over, there were enough ruffled feathers that he had to be smart. His strategy was to play the hand he had there. And there were very good people there.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: I think he did a nice job. So it was probably another six to eight months before we talked seriously about my going in and doing something. At that point, the campaign made sense.

Riley: You said you'd been interviewed, that you went to talk to Ickes in one instance.

Lockhart: Yes. I talked to Evelyn and Doug first.

Riley: Anything memorable about those conversations?

Lockhart: I don't know how well you know Evelyn and Doug, but there couldn't be two people who are more different. It was this great situation where Evelyn didn't say anything in the interview, and Doug, in his very aggressive way, was asking me questions. To be polite, I kept turning to Evelyn—like I would try to do here—and she kept saying, "Don't look at me. I didn't ask you the question." Which is perfect Evelyn.

When I came in in 1995, they were on the road to recovery, but I could tell this was a group that had been through some stuff. The war was going well and they had turned a corner, but there had been a lot of casualties. I could tell just by looking at people that this was a very difficult environment to work in, which was attractive to me.

Riley: I'd love to have that list that Harold Ickes—

Lockhart: Yes. I'd love to remember. I should have written it down, it really did tell all. Those were the three people who actually interviewed me, and then I went in one evening and talked to the President. When I was done with him, I went and talked to the Vice President. I've been around politics long enough. I assumed that once you get in and talk to the President, it's just a formality. Wrong. Not in that White House. It turns out Harold had another candidate. We had to work through that, and then it took another couple of weeks. But I eventually got the job.

Riley: The briefing materials characterize your conversations with the President and the Vice President. I wonder if you could elaborate a bit.

Lockhart: It was interesting. They were very different. My discussion with the President was not really a discussion, because discussion implies two-way interaction. It was more a kind of listen-only conference call: I listened, he talked. And he had a very detailed sense of the things that needed to get done. For me it was just a little window into his thinking at that moment.

He thought the people who worked for him dealt only with the elite press, and he talked about how important it was to talk to real people out in the states. You need to do this and you need to do that. Some of it was interesting. Some of it was stuff that probably wasn't worth paying that close attention to. But it was clear to me that, as far as he was concerned, he was fine with this. He was not taking a measure of me. He implied, "Okay, you've got the job. Here are some things I'm going to hold you accountable on."

The Vice President, on the other hand, whom I had met a couple of times here and there, conducted a real interview. He wasn't convinced, and he wanted to take a measure—I don't know if he played a role in being supportive, being neutral, being negative—but it was a very different experience. It was clear to me that the President was satisfied that I was okay, and this was really an opportunity for him to take a half hour away from everybody else and just talk, which he enjoyed.

Riley: About the campaign?

Lockhart: About the campaign, yes.

Maltese: That was your first meeting with Clinton?

Lockhart: Yes. I had probably met him someplace, but there was nothing memorable, so it really was.

Maltese: Was it a memorable first meeting?

Lockhart: Yes. I guess people watching *West Wing* for five years might devalue this a little, but walking into the Oval Office and having the President of the United States come up to you and say, "Come on, sit down. Let's talk," is pretty daunting. That may be why it was a one-way conversation. I'm not sure I *could* speak. I like to think that I can handle lots of different situations, but I was pleased that he had a lot to say because the surroundings were very

intimidating—which is odd, because by the end it became an office, a place where you got work done. But that's not how it is the first time you walk in.

Martin: Other than wanting someone who'd be willing to talk to the lower-level press, the small-town press, do you remember anything else he wanted you to do during the campaign?

Lockhart: No. He had this idea that somehow people were too focused on the big name reporters, and the real business of politics happens at the local level, and make sure that all gets done. I half expected him to go off on the press and all that. Never. Never. There was not a negative word in the entire session. There was a little reminiscing about when he ran for Governor. He was talking about things he used to do and his people used to do. I think he was frustrated that he didn't see that in this campaign because it was at a much more macro national level.

Who knows what his preparation for this was? It probably was about ten seconds, but I think he wanted first to make sure that I could get through a half hour and not fall over, and second, that I was at least open to this idea that it's not all about Washington, and it's not all about the Sunday shows, that there's a whole other world out there. It made an impression on me. When the President tells you he cares about this, you better care about it.

Riley: Was there any discussion at this stage about what the relationship would be between the White House proper and the campaign?

Lockhart: I think there was an assumption. I'm self-aware enough to know that there were probably other candidates out there who had more experience or could do this better or could do that better. But I think what most of the people at the White House got comfortable with was that I was someone who could work with McCurry, and we had a track record and a history. I was also someone who would not seek to shine the spotlight on myself as opposed to Mike or even the White House as a whole. That was very important. It was very important that the campaign fix in on a role, do it, but do it in a way that complements and supports the White House.

If you look back on campaigns that didn't work, there was a huge problem in '92, and I know about it only because I know some of the people. One day I was in my office in the White House, and they were cleaning out a filing cabinet. Someone from the '92 campaign had left a file in it, and there were several brutal memos back and forth between the campaign and Marlin Fitzwater about doing stuff. They were all very nice, but it was very clear there was not the cohesion that we sought to have in '96.

I think it took us a little while to figure out our role, but I quickly got very comfortable. A little bit of a circular game would go on. I focused most of my time and my staff's attention on what the opposition was doing, the [Robert] Dole campaign. And Mike very cleverly carved out the stuff he wanted to talk about and the stuff he didn't want to talk about. He'd say, "You have to talk to the campaign about that," and when it came to White House stuff, we didn't do very much talking about what was going on. So there was a little chasing your tail going on. But my general attitude was a mantra we had: Good policy is good politics. We'd basically let the White House do the policy stuff. Our job was to make sure that whenever the public thought of Bob Dole, it

wasn't a pleasant thought—which he's mentioned to me a few times over the years, because I actually know him fairly well.

Riley: How did you get the news that you had the job?

Lockhart: How did I get that news? I don't remember. I really don't. I don't remember who called. It would probably have been Evelyn, because she was the point person on all the discussions. I went to a campaign that didn't have a campaign manager.

Riley: Right.

Lockhart: It had about 50 fundraising staff and about three other people.

Riley: When did you make the transition?

Lockhart: This I do remember. I left my first day to go watch the first round of the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] basketball tournament—probably not a good career move, but I was going.

Riley: It worked.

Lockhart: I started in March.

Riley: Was it Georgetown you were going to see?

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: So you're loyal to your—

Lockhart: I am. That's when they used to get into the tournament.

Riley: There was not much structure to the campaign when you got there, and this was in March, right?

Lockhart: Yes. The campaign at that point was designed to do two things: one, raise money, which needed to be raised. I don't know that it was the most difficult thing in the world to raise $25 or $30 million, whatever it was, for an incumbent President, but it has to be raised, and with the $1,000 limit, it takes time. They basically took up most of the floor space, but there was also a very small communications operation designed to go out and support the President and defend against a series of attacks.

When I arrived, there was no campaign manager, and the President hadn't announced he was running for reelection. It's one of those great little tidbits that the President *never* announced he was running for reelection. I was actually one of the very strong proponents of the idea that it was ridiculous to take a day out of the President's life and bring him to the level of his opponent.

You're President, you don't have to say. It's assumed you're running. That gradually changed as the months went by, so that by convention time, we had what looked like a campaign staff.

And after the convention, it was a campaign. But again, most campaigns are about politics. Most of the political decisions were being made at the White House. I had my office, but I used to spend a lot of my time between meetings hanging around anyone's office in the White House I could think of, because in the White House there are only a couple of places where you're allowed to have these political meetings. One of them is called the Ward Room, which is just off the Mess, and I spent a lot of time in that room.

Riley: Why is that? I understand that there are legal restrictions, but I didn't realize there were designated places you can frequent.

Lockhart: Oh, yes. There are legal restrictions on where you can perform purely political activity. The residence is one of them. There were certainly times of day when the First Family didn't want us to come in and use their house to hold a meeting. So there were a couple of offices around the West Wing and in the Old Executive Office Building [OEOB] that could be used for pure politics.

Maltese: How would they get that designation? Do you know?

Lockhart: Who knows? During that time I used to get lost, and when you're on a visitor's pass, getting lost in the White House is not a good thing because there are guys with guns who are a little uptight. I don't know where the tradition comes from, but it's more than tradition, and as some of the investigations revealed, where the Vice President made this phone call became a very touchy issue. We spent a lot of time in this windowless room.

Riley: So most of the coordination that went on amounted to you physically going over.

Lockhart: Yes—physically or on the telephone.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: I quickly figured out who was doing what and who was who, and I assumed I'd come in and spend most of my time working with McCurry. But that was absolutely not the case. I rarely talked to Mike about the politics and the campaign. I eventually started traveling for the last couple months of the campaign to do the campaign political work, and then I spent a lot of time with Mike. But I really had two bosses. They were interchangeable, and it was good that there were two because I could always get quick decisions. If I wanted to do something, and if I got it cleared by either Rahm Emanuel or George Stephanopoulos, we'd do it. They didn't work for the campaign, but they had a strong interest in making sure the campaign was doing the right thing. There was a campaign structure. I had to work some things through the context of the campaign, but in most situations, I or a group of us would decide what we wanted to do, get clearance from the White House, and go do it.

Martin: Comparing this to your earlier three campaigns, it strikes me that it would be a very different experience with a candidate who wasn't traveling with you.

Lockhart: Yes, it was. I had a fear going in that it was going to be very bureaucratic and that I wouldn't have the freedom to do what I thought needed to be done. But that couldn't have been further from the truth. This was the most efficient political organization I'd ever been anywhere near, and it was because there were smart people at the top of the organization, people who were willing to make decisions.

If you look at campaigns that fail versus campaigns that succeed, the first place to look is always how they make decisions. The ones that fail are generally ones that have struggled until Election Day with who's deciding what. Who's responsible? How do we do this? The '96 Clinton campaign might be the most efficient campaign in at least a generation as far as knowing what it wanted to do, executing it, and having a very clear line of everyone knowing their job and their responsibilities, and being able to make decisions. For me, having come from three campaigns in the '80s that were various levels of structured chaos, it was a remarkable experience.

Martin: What was the extent of your responsibilities within the campaign?

Lockhart: I had a little management responsibility, very little. We had a communications office and a press office, and through a bunch of decisions—

Riley: Inside the campaign itself?

Lockhart: In the campaign. Ann Lewis was the communications director. I was the press secretary. Through some decisions that were made before I got there, a lot of the people who worked on the campaign worked directly for Ann, and that was great because I didn't have to worry about them.

Riley: Were they speechwriters?

Lockhart: These were speechwriters, regional press people, the guts of a communications operation. And that allowed me to do what I wanted to do: figure out what the campaign should be saying, particularly in the context of what our opponent was up to. I'd say if you asked my masters—who at that point were Rahm and George—what my job was, it was to make life as miserable as I could for Bob Dole every day, 24 hours a day. And that's pretty much what we focused on.

I knew much more about Dole's record at the end of that campaign than I knew about Clinton's. I spent more time talking to reporters covering Bob Dole than to reporters covering Clinton. When Dole released his big economic package and his tax cut, I had several reporters tell me that I knew more about his package than his own press people, because that was my focus. I figured the President was going to take care of the President's politics.

Maltese: How did that differ from what Ann Lewis was doing?

Lockhart: Ann was doing much more of what I'd call political communications. Ann is an institution in the Democratic Party, so she was making sure that all of the different parts of the Democratic constituency felt connected to the campaign. It was a very important job, because that's how you get killed when you're an incumbent, when you get eaten up from the ankles by your own people. And she had a very public spokesperson role. She was doing stuff on TV half the day.

That was very different from what I was doing, and the division worked very well, based on our personalities, our strengths, our weaknesses, our backgrounds, and the fact that it seemed to divide so nicely. There was no crossover pressure of who's doing what. I want that, you want that—which was good, because you normally have a lot of that no matter what organization you're working in.

Maltese: She also reported to Stephanopoulos and to Rahm Emanuel?

Lockhart: Yes. Again, when I say "report to," that was informal. There was no chart.

Maltese: Sure.

Lockhart: I'm not exactly sure where she— The largest piece of the campaign really reported to Harold at the White House, and my guess is that's probably where Ann thought her final sign-off was for things she wanted to do.

Riley: "Larger piece of the campaign" being the fundraising people?

Lockhart: Harold had day-to-day control over pretty much the whole campaign, but he wasn't all that interested in the day-to-day communications.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: If things were going very badly, I'm sure I would have heard from him, but on that front, things went pretty well. It seems to be something he deputized to George and Rahm: "You deal with this. This is what you do."

But different, though, from what Ann did, which was outreach to all the groups in the constituencies and the party. Harold was very interested in that. That was probably the way it worked but I don't know that for sure.

Riley: I'm trying to figure out the other large pieces of the campaign that we haven't already accounted for. Scheduling, I guess, must be—

Lockhart: Yes, but scheduling was just an offshoot of the White House. Legally, the work had to be done at the campaign, but there was no one at the campaign who was making decisions about, "Oh, we'll send the President in there tomorrow." This was a much more complicated decision that went up the chain. So there was scheduling.

Obviously, fundraising after the early primaries shifted to the DNC, so that left.

Riley: Was that Terry McAuliffe?

Lockhart: Terry McAuliffe, yes. So really what you had in the campaign was a communications operation and a political operation.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: You had lots of people who were out, who were directing field people, who were just doing politics, making sure that problems were being solved.

Riley: Is that Ann Lewis' area?

Lockhart: No. Craig Smith was running that. Craig's the guy the President brought from Arkansas who knows everybody everywhere. If you look at the structure of the campaign, Craig had a big piece of it, lots of people. Ann had a big piece of it, lots of people. I had a very high-profile piece of it—not lots of people, but an important part of it.

I'll get in trouble for this—there wasn't a whole lot else. I know there were a lot of people, and I know they're important, and they all did a great job. But that was really the nexus, I think, of the campaign—between Ann and Craig, as far as the bulk of the people.

Riley: Did you have a large opposition research staff reporting directly to you? Or was that coming from elsewhere?

Lockhart: They didn't report to me, but they sat in the office next to me. Let's just say I was their best customer.

Riley: He says with a sly grin.

Lockhart: Yes. I spent as much time sitting in their office as anybody else. And, again, there was a formal reporting structure, and then there was just the way things worked. The grin was not to imply that there was some tension, because there wasn't. It became very operational that their work intersected with my work more than anything else.

And there was two-way traffic. There were days when I'd go in there and say, "I need something on this," and they'd go—however they do it—find something. And then there were days they would come in and bring the sandwich cart, and I'd decide, "Mmm, I like that one. Let's do that today." [*laughter*]

Riley: Do you recall who some of these people were?

Lockhart: Oh, sure. A bunch of young men and women, and a breed unto themselves, the people who do opposition research. These are people who work generally about 22 hours a day, smoke an enormous number of cigarettes, and drink a lot of coffee. The stereotype is true.

They're just a different breed. The guy who ran it was a young guy named Tom Janenda, who is exceptionally smart and a hard worker who really understood the nexus of politics and media and information. Who else was over there? The other guys there were Dave Bocian and Chris Gillespie—all late 20s, early 30s, all having cut their teeth being someone's deputy in the last campaign.

Riley: Right.

Lockhart: Ruby Shamir was there. There was a separate operation at the DNC, but there were probably four of five of them—a guy by the name of Jim Doyle. They were very good. It was interesting for me, because I'd been out of politics for eight years. I'd been in a campaign in '88 where all of the mid-level people, of which I considered myself one, went on to run the next couple of campaigns. Gene Sperling, George Stephanopoulos—the whole group of people who became the Clinton young guys were all in mid-level jobs in Boston. I don't think there was any formal get-together, but there was a sense of *We're fighting the other side, and we have slingshots and they have artillery.*

But when I got back in '96, all of a sudden we had real weapons. We knew as much about the other guy as they knew about us. It was very different from what I had grown up in, at least on the Democratic side. Politics has changed a lot, but there was a distinct period in the '80s where Democrats fell behind as far as their tactical abilities to execute a campaign. And I believe it was the experience of '88 that refocused a group of young people in the party who just swore it was never going to happen that way again.

The result of that was the Clinton campaign in '92. And '96 just took this young, wild, crazy group of people, and they were very efficient. For anyone who's seen *The War Room*, '96 was the corporate version of that. It was calm, cool. There wasn't a lot of yelling, there wasn't a lot of emotion. But a pretty ruthlessly efficient campaign was executed.

Riley: Was most of what they were doing examining and dissecting a very long public career? Or was there also an element of digging around in the candidate's personal history?

Lockhart: It was mostly the public career. At first blush, people might be offended by people digging around financial deals, but context is everything. I'd say 80 percent of what they did was looking at Senate votes and this sort of thing, on issues we knew were going to be in the campaign. We knew he was going to attack us on issue X, so we'd go in and find out where he was on issue X.

Some of the best things we ever did were to undercut his own attacks with things he'd said. Running for President is, in some ways, trying to revise history a little bit: "Oh, yes, I was there before, but I was young," or "I was evolving." But in the context of this campaign, the issue the Republicans were pushing with all their might was the land deal in Arkansas—Whitewater. So we felt it was completely legitimate to take a look at some of the business deals Dole had done. And it's very interesting, because I have no doubt that a couple of them had nothing illegal—because I think he's an extraordinarily honorable guy. I don't think he's motivated by money.

I can say the same thing about Clinton. The joke about Whitewater was, "You think he was sitting around worrying about money?" He's in the wrong business. It just wasn't a motivating factor for him, but there were enough of the elements of what makes a political scandal in a couple of deals that it was worth looking at. They never really quite caught hold, and my guess is that it wasn't because the elements weren't there. It was because the press liked him, and they thought he couldn't win.

If for some reason Clinton had collapsed politically, and all of a sudden it looked like Dole was closing the gap to within two or three points, I guarantee they all would have gone and looked at these deals. But I think the general sense was, "The guy's going to lose. He's a good guy. We don't need to go down this road." Again, if you look at Whitewater in '92, it didn't get a lot of attention. It was only when the editors of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* sat around and said, "Hey, this guy's going to win. We'd better look at this."

Riley: That's commentary about the thrust that's contrary to conventional wisdom, at least from the outside. Maybe people like John—who have studied it more closely—would contest the point, but the popular understanding is if the press senses something dirty, they're going to try their best to—

Lockhart: I think they are if they think it matters. And in this particular case, I certainly didn't jump to the conclusion that the press was somehow in the tank for Bob Dole. They weren't. They gave him a hard time every day, and we helped them give him a hard time. But there's no campaign where two candidates are held to the same precise standard. These are flexible standards, and they move up and down with where the candidate is and what's going on in the campaign. In this campaign, the President was certainly held to a higher standard of ethical scrutiny.

I think if you put the same facts down on a piece of paper—this deal versus that deal—they both raised interesting questions. Neither one of them was really scandalous, but we don't get to decide that when we're not in the press. But I do think there's a sense that the more serious you are, the closer you are to becoming President, the higher the standard moves with it. So I don't think there are a lot of these "taking a flyer" stories on some issue, on people they don't think are going to get elected.

You could probably get an expert group of media people around the table and every single one of them would deny it. And they're all lying. Because it is true, I know it is. I've been doing this long enough to know. I've had conversations with people where I've pushed, and they've said, "If this ever gets close, we'll look at this. But give me a break." And then you say, "Well, what about Whitewater?" And they'll say, "He's the President." I'll say, "Okay, fine. I know the rules." It's not hard to figure out.

Now, with anything that's flexible or dynamic, you can get into a space where you think it's one thing and it becomes something you can get bitten by. But the idea that there's a static single standard that's applied to political candidates is ridiculous. It's just not true.

Martin: Can I ask you a couple of questions about the set of tools you used for making Dole's life miserable? Which ones were most effective?

Lockhart: The most effective tool was information, on a couple of levels. Opposition research has such a pejorative sound, but campaigns are about making the best case you can for whatever the candidate wants to do, has done, and will do. Information provides some perspective, because no candidate is going to say, "Here's my new tax plan. Here are the three great things it's going to do, and here are the four—" There's no side-effect clause. It's not like drug companies, which have to run ads that say quietly at the end, "This is going to make you throw up for a couple of days, but it's fine." It's just information. I think that was pretty standard.

The other thing we were able to do in '96 was take advantage of the fact that the Dole campaign never quite jelled, at least in how they dealt with the media. So we were often first to the gate with information, and that's a very important part of the psychology of reporting. It's not even reporting—it's human nature. The person who tells you something first gets the first crack at how you think about it.

So if I'm able to call up so-and-so from the *Boston Globe* who covers Bob Dole and say, "Here's what he's going to do tomorrow. He has this welfare reform proposal, and let me give you the five problems," it's just very hard for the guy, at eleven o'clock at night when he finally gets his information, to call and say, "I'm going to tell you about our great proposal." The reporters already think, *This thing sucks. Let me tell you the problems with it.*

I was telling you about this guy who ran the opposition race, Tom Janenda. He's a very calm guy. He called me about eight weeks after the campaign was over, and he was very excited. I said, "Tom, Tom, relax. What's going on?" He had just gotten a call from *Webster's,* and a word that he had invented was one of the words chosen. It was "prebuttal," whatever that means. That was the whole ethos of that campaign for us. We weren't going to wait until somebody charged us with something so we could respond. Every day we were going to start the conversation, even if it was about him.

It got a little ridiculous at times. You'd rebut a speech that he ended up not giving. But all these campaigns adjust with each cycle, because everybody learns and everybody figures out how they got gamed the last time. So each one is different. But if you look at the communications part of that particular campaign, we always stayed one step ahead of the Dole campaign. And they just never caught up. Trust me, I worked for Dukakis and I know. I knew the feeling from the other side, because I had it all through 1988. I could never make the argument I wanted to because I was also answering yesterday's thing.

Who knows where the next one will be? They're all different.

Martin: How did you know what he was going to do the next day? You seemed very successful at preempting him.

Lockhart: Well, people talk. You can't just show up in a city and all of a sudden have 10,000 people there and make an announcement. If you have people out in the field, you pick up where

he's going. So then it's a matter of trying to figure out what he's going to be talking about. There's a lot of information floating around out there, and sometimes it's reporters looking to get a head start on their next day. They'll call and say, "Okay, he's doing welfare reform tomorrow, what do you have?"

You say, "Give me an hour. I'll tell you what we have." I found this a little bit in the last campaign I did, the Kerry campaign. One of the biggest problems you have if you're the Dole campaign—or at a certain point if you're the Kerry campaign—is you need to convince the press that you have a plan and the plan will work. Because if they don't think you have a plan, then they report everything through the filter of "struggling campaign." One of the ways you do it sometimes is telling them more than you want to, saying, "Listen, here's my three-week plan. We're going to talk about this, we're going to talk about—"

Most of the time we found out what Dole was doing or what he was talking about by reading the newspaper. That's the single best source of knowing, because even if they're trying to keep it a secret, they've told the Senator from South Carolina, who wants to get in his hometown paper. So he calls a reporter in South Carolina where the speech is going to be and says, "Here's what he's going to say."

If you're smart enough to just read the paper or read the wires, you know. Very rarely in that campaign did Dole say something and we had to scramble to respond. Occasionally he'd do something—like the day he resigned from the Senate. That caught us by surprise. We didn't think that was happening. But almost every day, we knew. And there were certainly days when we really didn't care what he was talking about.

If you look at that campaign, one of the things that Dole got in hot water over—and I think we turned the temperature up on the water significantly—was some comments on tobacco. People think that he said something, and it became a big story. It didn't become a big story right away. This took weeks. It took weeks to reach—to borrow a phrase—the political tipping point, and it took a lot of work—a lot of conversations and a lot of pushing—to get it there. Because I genuinely thought his comments on the tobacco industry showed that he was out of touch on that particular issue. And then it became a big issue. But it didn't become a big issue on its own merits, because nothing does on its own.

There are very few things so interesting or egregious that they're just immediately an issue. They become an issue because campaigns push and shove and do something, and that's what a lot of our time was spent doing. I had no conscience problems, because you can go back and look at all the things we talked about. They were all about public policy. We never talked about his personal life. We never talked about anything to do with his military record. That was all off limits, and unfortunately, I think we learned—particularly in the second Clinton term, but also beyond that—there's nothing off limits.

Riley: Did you have stuff?

Lockhart: There was certainly material available, and it was not used.

Riley: I would think the calculus in some of that is it's explosive, right? It could blow up in your face as well as—

Lockhart: Sure, although the dynamic in politics now is that making a political charge is very low risk. People get so caught up in the "Did he or didn't he?" and "With whom and how many times?" that they forget to ask how did I get this information and what are they trying to do by giving it to me? I'm in no way trying to imply there's some skeleton in anyone's closet here. I'm just saying that information used to come into the campaign all the time from all different places, and the personal stuff was completely off limits—partly because we knew it wasn't going to work—people knew Bob Dole was a decent guy—and partly because it was just sickening to think that this is what you need to do to win a campaign.

But there are certainly those who practice that kind of politics extraordinarily well. If you look at the Bush dynasty—and I'm not talking about the principals, I'm talking about their lieutenants. They are masters at it, the Lee Atwater school of politics. Having been on the wrong end of that a couple of times, you know. There's a certain aroma to it that tells you where it's coming from.

Martin: Were you involved at all in creating ads?

Lockhart: No. That was another part of the building. You were asking me about significant people on the campaign. I completely forgot the most important person, Dick [Morris]!

Riley: We're coming back to that.

Lockhart: That's fine. I literally did forget. I was sitting there thinking, walking around in my mind to the different parts of the office, and I forgot that corner.

Riley: Well, let's head into that corner. I was going to get into that by asking if you were a party to the—was it Wednesday night meetings in the White House?

Lockhart: Yes, in the Yellow Oval.

Riley: Can you tell us something about those meetings?

Lockhart: Sure, because they weren't just in the campaign. They went through the second term. It generally was an hour, an hour and a half, specifically devoted to the President and a small group of people he trusted, talking about politics and nothing else. This wasn't about the welfare bill. It was about politics and whether we were doing what we needed to do to do our politics the right way.

It generally started out with a report from Doug Schoen on "We're in the field, this is what the public thinks. This is what they think of you. This is what they think of Republicans." There were a bunch of benchmarks you could watch week to week. During the campaign, that's when we'd often look at commercials. The President would see them, and he'd say, "I like that." That was not a very interactive session. It was generally, "Okay." I don't remember any time where he

said, "You need to change that." I don't really remember a time when he saw something he didn't like.

Martin: Was this before or after they went into the field of commercials?

Lockhart: They were in the field on a regular basis, so there was a fresh report every week.

Riley: You started attending these as soon as you were hired?

Lockhart: It took about a month before I wormed my way into those, but I found a back door.

Riley: Tell us about that. These were supposed to have been fairly—

Lockhart: They were pretty small. I did the, "How can I do my job if I'm not in these meetings? Every reporter in town knows the seating chart, so unless you want to cut my legs off, you have to invite me in." It took about three weeks. I had a few advocates helping me out. During the campaign you might look at some ads, and then there was a pretty free-wheeling discussion about what we were doing, what we were doing right, what we were doing wrong, and the President was the leader of it. There was nothing off limits. At times it was about this policy or that policy, but not in the context of how to get this through Congress. It was just, "How are people reacting to this? How are we doing on this?"

I mentioned before the seamlessness of the campaign. I did a little revisionist history there myself: I was remembering the campaign from the convention on. Before the convention, it was not seamless. There were warring factions, and it was only the convention that settled that when Dick left. From that point on, it really did run very smoothly. If Dick had been there, it might have been a better campaign, might have been a worse campaign. It was certainly smoother and more efficient, because you did not have two power centers. You had one.

Riley: Let's come back to the post-campaign meetings when we get to that stage and focus on the campaign stuff right here, if that's okay with everybody.

Lockhart: Sure.

Riley: When did you first meet Morris?

Lockhart: I met Dick probably the first or second day I was on the campaign. I was granted an audience—

Riley: He's no longer Charley by this point?

Lockhart: He's no longer Charley. He's out in the open, and I missed all that. In '94 I was in London. In '95 I knew what was going on by what I read in the paper, which means I didn't really know what was going on with a lot of things, because nobody knew about Dick for a while.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: He's a really interesting guy. Did I tell you he's a really interesting guy? He basically brought me into his office and told me he was running the campaign and that there were smart people in the White House and some not-so-smart people, and some not-so-smart people at the campaign. And I had a choice to make: I could be on his team or be on the other team and be on no team. I went back to my office and thought for a while, *What was that all about?* He was an interesting guy.

Riley: Had Mike prepared you for this?

Lockhart: A little bit, but I think Mike wanted me to go in cold, just to see my reaction. [*laughter*] Mike actually had a good relationship with Dick. Given all the cross pressure and problems, that was a pretty important link for a while, just to make sure that insanity didn't break out. But really, I was there only for about two months.

Dick is an extraordinarily bright guy who had a real clear sense of how he wanted the campaign to be run. There were times we'd do stuff that didn't make enormous sense to me, but there was no question: Here's what we're doing, and here's why we're doing it. But again, I missed most of the era of his influence. In March or April, as the political ship of Bill Clinton righted itself, at that moment, while Dick remained very important until the day he left, his influence started waning, because the crisis was over.

My guess is—and it's a guess, because I wasn't there—that two months after the government shutdown victory, he was having less and less influence on the Presidency. Certainly he was well entrenched in the campaign, but we woke up one day and he was gone.

Martin: Before he left, what were the principal fights within the campaign?

Lockhart: I think they were resource fights. Very broad brush. Dick thought every dollar should be spent either on a poll or on a TV commercial, and that we should be spending early. As I've been told, Harold had a view that we shouldn't spend that much money on that stuff, and it was a waste of money to do it early. I've seen a series of academic studies that can't agree on whether it was right to do it early, so nobody knows who won that fight. Except we won the election, so they both think they're right.

I think there was—not within the campaign but within the overall organization—some ideological tension over where the President should be. Some people thought he was moving too far to the center, the issues being the balanced budget, welfare reform. Some thought it was the greatest thing in the world—his lurch to the left was being righted. I think the President was fully aware of all this, thought it was good creative tension, and knew exactly what he was doing. I don't think there was anyone telling him what to do. He knew what he was doing.

Maltese: Did you see yourself taking a side in the warring factions or were you just observing?

Lockhart: No. If anything, Mike was my role model in this. I tried to steer clear of it, just because it just didn't make any sense. I've been in campaigns at war with each other. This was only interesting because the characters were so rich. Dick and Harold are two of the most interesting people you're ever going to meet, and when they're fighting with each other, you don't want it, but it's like a car wreck: you can't stop looking at it.

But having said all this stuff about warring, the campaign still ran pretty well. I will say we may have lacked some of Dick's strategic genius from the convention on, but we made up for it in efficiency.

Riley: How reliant was Dick on [Mark] Penn and Schoen for the data they were producing?

Lockhart: Dick is a data-driven political figure. I think he'd say he does not believe in instinct, he believes in data. It's interesting that his instincts were always backed up by his data. But he was a numbers person, and his skill was to take this higher sense of how you articulate things, match it with the numbers, and do something not a lot of people have been able to achieve.

Riley: There must have been a few of these Wednesday night meetings when the President and Morris were there together. Can you tell us a bit about the dynamic of these two people?

Lockhart: You could tell these guys had been around the track a couple of times. There was a little shorthand between the two of them that at times I didn't completely understand. Bill Clinton likes everyone he knows. He really does. He finds something in everyone. I always got the feeling that Dick was a little bit of the exception, but you could tell he trusted him. You could tell this is a guy who, when he'd been down a couple of times, had helped him out. But I don't think there was a lot of warmth and affection there.

Martin: Was there anybody other than Morris who seemed to understand the polling from an academic or scientific point of view?

Lockhart: It's funny, because one of the things that happened in the aftermath of Dick's leaving was the ascendancy of Mark Penn, in the President's mind, as a political wise man. I think Mark will certainly make the case that a lot of what Dick was pushing was coming from his work but was not recognized because Dick sucked all the oxygen out of every room he went in. Dick was kind of a one-man person until he left, and then others filled that gap, Mark being the biggest.

But one word of caution here is that the President really didn't need anybody to interpret a piece of academic research for him. He knew what it meant. He just knew, and he didn't always like it, which is why it's good not to be interpreting your own polls. You tend to want to get to the conclusion you want. He really didn't need an interpreter.

Martin: But he trusted the polls as being scientific.

Lockhart: Yes, he did. I never had reason to doubt that the President thought he was getting it straight.

Riley: And he was a consumer, not just of the cover sheet information, but also the—

Lockhart: He knew what page he wanted to turn to. There were things that, for him, keyed who were leading indicators of polls, and he knew exactly where to find them. I'd love to come up with an example, but I can't because it was too long ago. But it was pretty sophisticated.

Riley: Within the building itself, were there tensions about Morris's presence? I'm not talking about the White House, because I can understand what people felt, especially somebody like Stephanopoulos, who had a long history with the President.

Lockhart: Sure. Dick had a unique ability to antagonize almost anyone he came in contact with, and I think he did it on purpose. It was his MO [*modus operandi*], and I really doubt that he's going to be offended when he reads what I'm saying. (Note that I showed a sense of caring whether he was offended.) [*laughter*] So yes, he was a whirling dervish who created problems from room to room. But the thing I like to remember is that you take a step back from what could be a very difficult personality, and he was doing good work. We were on a glide path toward reelecting a President, and he was a big player in that.

Was I devastated when his personal life blew up? No, because I was already growing weary of the interpersonal battles going on. But can I sit here with a straight face and say he wasn't an important part of turning around the President's politics? No. He was.

Riley: Where were you? Were you on the train?

Lockhart: I was on the train.

Riley: And the news came through whom or to whom?

Lockhart: This is the first time I have to think carefully about how much I want to say. Well, I'll say everything and then—

Riley: Say everything, and then you'll have an opportunity to think it over.

Lockhart: Only because it might embarrass one person. We were on this train, and the train trip was probably the most successful three or four days of that campaign. It was one of the things that just worked. And of course, because it is the Clinton political world, when you're at the point where things couldn't be going better, something is about to happen. So it's Wednesday afternoon, I think, and Mike McCurry grabs me and says, "Come with me."

Riley: You're on a train.

Lockhart: We were on a train, and Mike wanted to go out and get fresh air. And he had found a great place on the train to get fresh air where no one else could find us. So we literally went back four cars. We went upstairs to go downstairs. We went outside the train at one point, to walk around this thing. I finally said, "What's up?" and he said, "I just want you to witness this phone conversation," and he picked up the cell phone and called Dick.

I could hear only Mike's side of this, and he said, "Uh huh, uh huh, really? Okay." And then I'll never forget this. I could hear Dick's high-pitched ranting in the background. He was yelling about the press, and Mike said, "Dick, Dick, stop. Hold on one second. Let me ask you one question. Do they have pictures?" I didn't know what the story was! All of a sudden, I heard complete silence on the other end. And Mike looked at me and said, "He's calling me back."

Two minutes later, he called back. "Yes, they have pictures." At this point, I don't think Dick had told anyone else. So there were now two of us who knew.

Riley: Mike filled you in, between the conversations, about what this was about?

Lockhart: Yes. He said, "Obviously, we're going to have to deal with this." And I think he went by himself. I don't think I went to this. Mike had a very good, strong, deep relationship with Evelyn Lieberman, who had gone from being Mike's deputy to—at this point—Mike's boss, the Deputy Chief of Staff. She never was Mike's deputy. It's just that's where she was placed for a while to fix something.

I was watching them from a distance and watched the look on her face. This was right at the end of the train trip where we split up, where I took the bulk of all the press and the staff, and McCurry, Evelyn, the military people, and the President took a helicopter into Chicago because it saved them an hour and a half. I guess they told the President on the helicopter, and that's about it.

I was not involved in the overnight intervention, but I had it recounted to me that Erskine [Bowles] led the effort to tell Dick he had to go—which was a little harder than it should have been. I think he felt he could survive this. There was, I think, a very small group of people dealing with him overnight, then he left the hotel early in the morning so no one could see.

Now, I know this is coming. You're walking around the lobby, and people are all talking about the acceptance speech, and saying, "Tell me about it," and all that. And I'm saying, "Ask me in an hour. What acceptance speech?"

Doug Sosnik and I had briefings set up that morning with the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post*, and maybe some others, basically to lay out our fall election strategy. It was an hour-and-a-half meeting where we had a presentation. We got about ten minutes into the first one, and my pager started going off. It was Harold.

The first page was just, "Call Harold." I ignored it. I'm in a meeting and I know what it's about. I'm trying not to give them some perfect piece of color of me freaking out. The second one was, "It's Harold. Get up to the suite." The third one is not repeatable, because it involves words that would offend young people who might read this.

Riley: We've interviewed Harold.

Lockhart: Then you probably heard them. Some of them are very short. Some of them, though— It's interesting how many variations he has on a single— He has 50 ways of using that one particular word, and I've heard all of them. So I excused myself and said to Doug, "You have to do the rest for yourself. I have to go upstairs."

I'll never forget. I went up, and sitting around the room were Mike and George and maybe Rahm and Erskine and Leon Panetta. We were going to have a meeting to decide how we were going to do this—how we were going to put this out, and how we were going to deal with it. I remember looking around the room, and to no one in particular, just being the new guy, saying, "This is unbelievable. We get to the point where we're really out of the woods, and this happens."

George looked at me and said, "Welcome to our world." That's exactly right. Just at the moment that we think we have this figured out, something always happens. And then we figured it out.

That was an interesting morning, because it's the only time McCurry and I ever had a substantive disagreement and a pretty healthy argument. My argument was that Dick worked for the campaign, he didn't work for the White House. So I should do this. I really didn't want to do it. Who wants to go up and take that kind of pelting? But Mike was adamant that he should do it. We argued, and this was in front of a bunch of people.

He was right. His ultimate argument was that nobody cares about Dick now. He's gone, he's history. Nobody really cares about the campaign. What people care about is what the President thinks about it. "And that's my job," he said. He was right, and he ended up winning it based on that. He was senior to me, so I would have done what he said anyway.

I got to play one small role in it though, which was to arrange for Joe Stiglitz, the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, to give a 45-minute briefing on the third quarter economic numbers before McCurry got up. [*laughter*] You've never seen more angry people in your life, all of whom had to sit through this. McCurry just kept turning to me while we were listening, saying, "This is good. I like this."

And then he went out and got pummeled, which you do. It's part of the job. And surprisingly, it was gone in about five days. It really was. Mike is a very bright guy, and he did understand that the story is not about who you think it is. It always comes back to the President, and if you get that part right, you can ride out a lot.

Riley: So how did you handle it? Could you have mishandled it at that point?

Lockhart: Oh, there's potential to mishandle all sorts of things. We could have tried to defend it. Our strategy, such as it was, ended up working only because we didn't try to defend it. We shrugged our shoulders and said, "You know what? We have a campaign to run, and he's not in it anymore. End of story." There are only so many ways you can come back and ask about that, unless there were substantive things, unless classified information was revealed or somehow campaign money that's actually taxpayers' money through matching funds was diverted for some— None of that was really there.

Riley: I raise the question in part just to follow your comment, because it is fairly remarkable—given the nature of what happened—that it didn't seem to have any significant impact at all.

Lockhart: Again, part of it is because the public elects a President, not his advisors, and as long as they don't break the law or do something deviant that involves the President, it's not that important to them. Most of the public didn't know who this guy was. And don't underestimate the President's speech that night. A lot of us sat around and said, "How are we going to do this?" and you could just see him off in the corner, saying, "Okay, this was going to be easy, but now it's going to be hard. Now I have a challenge. Now I'm going to blow that story off the front page by what I'm doing tonight."

And he rose to the challenge. He looked at the country and said, "This is what this campaign is about." Not, "I'm not talking about that other stuff." If it wasn't that, they would have been talking about Whitewater, they would have been talking about the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] files, they would have been talking about whatever it was they always talked about. He basically said, "This is what it's about," and the public agreed with him. They watched his speech, and by any academic measure they said, "The President is concentrating on what's important to me, not on what's important to a bunch of people in Washington I don't like anyway."

I was surprised, though. And the press tried. I say "the press" in a broad sense. There were elements of the press that tried to do something with this, but there was nowhere to go.

Maltese: Was that the low point of the campaign as far as you were concerned, or were there other bumps? Was there ever a point where you thought, *Oh, my God, we're in trouble?*

Lockhart: There was never a point that I didn't think we'd win—and that's unusual for me, because I'm not an optimistic person.

Riley: You didn't have much experience with winning.

Lockhart: Exactly. No, that was not the low point. I think the low point was the end. This was a weird time. It was a weird time for me because about ten days before the campaign ended, my mother died. So I got out of it for about four or five days and then came back. What happened was this brewing fundraising "scandal" (I say in quotation marks). There were a lot of stories, a lot of pieces coming out about various parts of the fundraising operation that were raising questions.

And we made a very unusual judgment in the Clinton world, very unusual. We made this judgment a couple of times, and every time it failed. Our judgment was that we were not going to engage. We were seven days from the election, and we were going to win this election if we just limped through the next seven days. It reminds me once again that you have to engage every time, no matter how close you are. It just created this sense in the press that we weren't engaging because we were sitting on some bombshell, on some awful scandal.

Then, moving forward a little bit, there was no engagement because as soon as the election was over, everybody went on vacation. I left. I wasn't employed by anyone anymore, and I had been handling some of the stuff. Now nobody was handling it, and it just spiraled out of control as opposed to being aggressively fought back. I guess that's the best way to put it.

All the instincts of that organization were that when someone takes you on, take them on. Don't sit back and say, "It will go away." This is one of those times when the philosophy was abandoned. I think the consensus—and it's not the craziest thought in the world—was, "We're seven days out. If we open up the books on all this stuff, it could have a terrible impact. Let's just ride it out."

Couple that with people taking their eye off the ball in the two weeks after the election, and you see we created 1997. It was a story that should have been dispensed with in a couple of weeks, and we spent a year talking about it.

Martin: Can I go back to a question about Dick Morris? You said earlier you had a meeting with him, and you thought one of his better points was that he was very clear about his strategy. Could you lay that out for us? What was Morris's strategy?

Lockhart: Yes. His strategy was dominating the center. I think the phrase "dynamic center" was one of his buzz phrases. Basically, he wanted to marginalize people within our party on the left and the right, and dare people in the center not to agree with us. That was step one.

Step two was he believed—and he was right about this—that the government does hugely complicated things that the public is just never going to get. So he wanted to have the government start doing things that people would get. We do lots of things to make sure kids know how to read and write and schools are good, but school uniforms tell people that the President understands what's going on in a classroom. I think they called things like the Family and Medical Leave Act "bite-size initiatives."

This was Dick's thinking, and it was actually very effective because it gave the public a sense of what Washington was doing, what the President's philosophy was. It was something they could digest and relate to. Dick didn't want to do big programs. He didn't want to do things that had a seven-point plan. He wanted a simple thing every day, and he wanted the public to go to bed every night saying, "That's a pretty good idea. He's working for me. Clinton's all right." I don't think it's any more complicated than that.

Martin: How did that translate tactically within the campaign?

Lockhart: A good and understandable strategy always translates into tactics being easy. It was very easy. We knew the four issues the public cared about, and we just had to keep coming back to them in a way that looked like not only was the record good and we were accomplishing things, but there was more where that came from. In an environment where you're also touting the fact that you're balancing the budget, which we were, all of these things can't have $20 billion price tags. That's why we had a bunch of these.

We were doing school uniforms, we were doing something else, and Dick had this idea for a 511 number where you could get certain information. Impolitely, one day in a meeting, I suggested we do a 311 number where the government guaranteed quality Chinese food within 30 minutes of anyplace in America. [*laughter*] Everybody in the room laughed but Dick. I just went back to my corner. I still think it's a good idea, and it wouldn't cost that much.

There was an absolute roadmap in that campaign for what we wanted to talk about, and it came in large part from Dick's strategic sense of how we wanted to present the President to the public.

Riley: Did the momentum of his early influence carry through the campaign?

Lockhart: Sure. The strategy didn't change. It's not like Dick left and we all got down and said, "God, let's get rid of that strategy. We're only up 20 points." The strategy worked, and he was a big part of it.

Maltese: So when you said his influence waned, it wasn't so much that the strategy was abandoned, it was more his personal—

Lockhart: Yes. It just made life easier when you could have one meeting instead of two, when you didn't have to go and have something blessed and have the first question be, "What does the other side think of it?" The bottom line is that even as it was sometimes difficult to navigate around this stance, when Dick was there, he got what he wanted. I can't remember too many fights he lost. And that strategic sense carried through Election Day. So if you're looking for the architect who drew up the plans for it, it was Dick. I've been in lots of campaigns where the plans were good and the implementation was awful. I'm not saying he was responsible for the President getting reelected, but he played an important role in it.

Morrisroe: The 1996 campaign was your first experience with Clinton as candidate. What were your observations of him in the field? Do any examples come to mind?

Lockhart: This is something I understand, but I'm not sure anybody else does. My observation was he's by far the best candidate I've ever seen, and not because he's the best speaker. I've seen better speakers. Dale Bumpers can run circles around him as far as giving a political speech.

But Clinton has this unique ability—and I didn't realize it until I started comparing him to others. If Al Gore had a little bit of this, it would have served him well. I call it the "internal calibration system"—the ability to walk into a room, look around, feel it, and say, "Okay, 87 percent—but I'm not going to go past that, because that's not going to work." Or, "This group needs 52 percent."

He was always right. It was because he actually worked at it, and he just knew. I'm not sure he would know from the opening of his speech, but he had an ability to sense where people were and not overdo it and not under-do it.

His ability to connect with people, frankly, I thought was fake when I went on the campaign. I thought, *This is a myth the White House has created.* I'd been traveling with him for, I don't

know, a month, and we pulled in to Paducah, Kentucky, one night. It was one o'clock in the morning. We'd all been up for about 17 hours, so naturally everybody told him to just go into the hotel. There were about two hundred people waiting outside. "Just go in the hotel." Of course, he does just the opposite. He goes and wants to meet all the people. Presidents don't come to Paducah very often. I understand why.

Riley: No good Chinese food.

Lockhart: I could have fixed that.

Riley: Three-one-one.

Lockhart: Three-one-one. You're all going to go dial it and see if this is a secret government program. So he's working the crowd, and we're all tired. All we want to do is get in this hotel so we can go to sleep. We're all saying, "Come on, come on." And all of a sudden he starts talking to a guy, and they have a very animated conversation that stretches into five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes. The press is saying, "We need to know who that guy is." I say, "Okay, I need to go find out who the guy is."

Finally he gets to the end of the rope line and starts walking inside, and I grab him. I say, "Everybody's wondering. You seemed to have a very animated conversation with that guy." It wasn't angry, it was just that they were very excited and seemed to know each other. I said, "Everybody's wondering who that guy was." And he said, "Oh, that's Charlie so-and-so."

I said, "Okay, help me here. Who's Charlie so-and-so?" And he said, "You're not going to believe this. Fifteen years ago, I was at a National Governors Association meeting, and I was assigned to write an education paper. Charlie was given to me by some other Governor to help me, and we went up and sat in a suite for four hours and wrote this paper. It was great."

He hadn't seen the guy since. He met this guy once in his life, and 15 years later, he walked into him. I don't think this guy was going to say, "Hey, I'm Charlie from—" He was saying, "Nice to meet you, Mr. President," and the President said, "Charlie! How are you?" And they literally talked about the paper they wrote together like they had done it the day before.

You just marvel. That's the moment I realized it's not something he works at. It's not a practiced skill. It's innate. He's actually someone who really listens when you're talking to him. People talk about how he has this look when you're talking to him like you're the only person in the world. It's true. People in general, but particularly in politics, are having the conversation but they're ten miles away dealing with some other problem. This is just part of going through the motions of "I'm a politician, I have to meet people." That's just not the case with him. I was a skeptic, and at 2:30 in the morning in Paducah, Kentucky, I became a believer.

Martin: There was a famous example toward the end of the campaign where he met the partial-birth abortion protestor in Louisiana.

Lockhart: I wasn't there for that, but there are a hundred of these. You just can't fake that. He's so open and receptive to other people's perspective, at times to his own detriment. When you have so many different points of view, it's sometimes hard to get to a decision. I wasn't around in the beginning, but I think that was part of the problem that resolved itself by the second term. But these things stay in there for a reason. I think for most people, as nice as those moments are, you can't keep more than a few of them in your head—but not him.

Riley: So you traveled with him a lot during the course of the campaign.

Lockhart: Yes. I traveled with him, I'd say, post-convention. I traveled with him sporadically before the convention. Mike and I had our own routine. Mike would do a little bit on the road for a briefing, and then Doug Sosnik and I would do the politics, which would take up most of it. There was still some benefit in trying to keep those two things separate.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: That's a nice way of saying they didn't want me talking about foreign policy.

Riley: What else were you finding out about him as you traveled with him? I mean the personal characteristics.

Lockhart: Just that a lot of the stuff you've read—that there was skepticism from the elite press about—was true. He's a genuinely interesting guy with a voracious appetite for information on almost any subject. He knows something about everything and generally knows a lot. I have a picture in my office of the two of us sitting in the office in Air Force One. It's interesting to me for two reasons. One, for someone who at times seems detached from what's going on in the world—there's all this political scandal, and he'll come in in the morning and say, "I feel great today." And you think, *You obviously haven't read the paper this morning.* But he's aware.

It's a picture of us just sitting there talking, and he has written in the inscription something along the lines of, "Look, for once I'm listening!" because I'm talking and he's not. I remember the picture. I know exactly when it was taken and this moment in our relationship. We were on Air Force One. The [Chicago] Bulls had just won the championship, and he was calling to talk to Michael Jordan and they couldn't find him. Michael Jordan was in the bathroom or something. So we had a lull while we were both just sitting on the phone.

We started talking about the NBA [National Basketball Association] finals, and I quickly realized that I knew more about professional basketball than he did. And did I ever take that opening! [*laughter*] We had done college basketball. He knows more on that than I do. Football he knows more than I do—and every other subject in the world. But I remember thinking, *Wow! There's one thing I know a little more about than he does.*

Then two weeks later, this picture shows up with the note. He knew what was going on, which means he was probably tanking. He probably did know more. Actually, I don't think he's capable of tanking.

Riley: You were a card player with him.

Lockhart: Yes. That was interesting because I had never played Hearts before. But I quickly figured out he's not the kind of guy you'd go in and have a meeting with to figure out what's on his mind. I always thought that the most important function I could serve with the outside world was constantly knowing what he was up to and what he was thinking and where he was on things. But he's not the kind of person who, if you schedule a 30-minute meeting with him every day, you're going to get that from. That's just not how his mind works. You schedule a 30-minute meeting, and if it's not some list of decisions, he's going to wander.

I noticed the first couple of times I traveled that he gets relaxed immediately when he starts playing cards. I watched a couple of smart people work a little business in. You have to be careful, because if he figures it out, he'll tell you to shut up. I realized this could be very useful for me, but I'd never played before. So I went and bought this stupid computer program.

Here's the problem: computers are very smart, but they're not very smart at playing Hearts, because you can pretty much game them. I don't know how much you know about Hearts, but I figured this out the wrong way. We were playing—probably the second time. I at least knew the rules, and we were playing, and I did something. And then I did something else. He'll let one thing go if you're new, but he will never let two things go.

He looked at Bruce Lindsey and said, "Another one of these guys who learned on a computer." I said, "How did you know that?" Then I got counseled on how you really play as opposed to how you play against the computer. To me it was useful.

This is one of the areas where Mike and I differed a bit. Mike tried very hard to keep the relationship businesslike, and I think they got along fine. They could have gotten along a lot better because they're both very bright people and have very interesting perspectives on a lot of different subjects—particularly things like religion and philosophy—that the President has a lot of knowledge of, as does Mike. But he made the decision that he wanted to be one step removed.

I thought about that, and it just didn't seem right for me. I needed access to what he was thinking, because a lot of what you rely on as the press secretary is the perception that you have access. You don't actually have to. There would be many times when I hadn't seen the President in three days, but I knew what he was up to. As long as they had the sense that you talked to him and were part of the inner circle (or whatever you want to call it), it bought you a lot of running room. As soon as they get the sense that you're not in the loop, you're dead.

I used to file stuff away and just ask. I would never ask a specific question. There would be some article in the paper, and I'd ask a broad question like, "What do you think of that?" All I wanted to do was get him talking. It was useful for me. I have no doubt that he probably knew what I was up to. It wasn't like some grand scheme to pry stuff out of him. It just was a sense that there were a few times when he would let his guard down and relax, and that was very useful for me. I never repeated 99.9 percent of the stuff he said. Occasionally there'd be something that should be used in some way, something I thought the public should know. It gave me confidence when we'd be in a meeting and he'd say something and I knew he was really there.

Or it was an early warning system for when someone else on the staff would say, "Well, we're going this way on that," and I'd say, "It just doesn't sound right." I'd think back, *I talked to him about this three days ago. This does not sound right.* I think in a lot of ways it saved me from having to walk out on a limb and then have to be saved from it because I didn't get it right. It was very useful.

Riley: Who else would he play cards with? Bruce?

Lockhart: He played with Bruce. The core group was Bruce, Doug Sosnik, who else? There were a lot of people who traveled intermittently. That was the core group that traveled all the time, and then there were always people—he could always grab someone. You were never short. You'd walk into the back of the plane and say, "The President's looking for someone to play cards with. Any takers?" That was not hard.

That was something of a double-edged sword. I never minded the long flights where you play for three or four hours at a time because you're going to Japan. You have to do something. You can't sleep the whole flight, and it was a good way to pass the time. But the dreaded call was when you get into some town at one o'clock in the morning. You're just about to go to your room, and you get a page saying, "Come to the suite." I'd like to think I'm being summoned to the suite because there's some political problem the President needs my perspective on or the world's about to blow up and he wants to know what I think. But it was generally because he wasn't ready to go to sleep and he wanted to play cards.

Some people can survive on two hours' sleep a night, some people can't. I would be in the latter category, but you can't always decide when you're going to get your access, and it's important. I think we're seeing it play out in the current environment, where reporters have made a judgment about this White House and the people who tell them things. They just don't think they're coming from the President anymore, and it's very hard to turn that around.

Riley: You also played on the helicopter, right?

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: You'd get in a few quick hands.

Lockhart: You'd get in a few quick hands—and in the limo.

Riley: In the limo?

Lockhart: Yes. It was always fun with cards on the lap, and in the limo there are cards everywhere. He has a comfortable seat, and we're all surrounding, and he's also very impatient. He thinks everybody is as smart as he is. You could, at any given time, stop and say to him, "Okay, the cards that are turned over, what are they?" He could tell you what they were.

Riley: He was counting cards.

Lockhart: Yes. He just knew. But I would think, *I'm relaxing now, I'm not going to count cards. I count things all day, like how many people are trying to kill you, so I don't need that right now.* You're sitting there, and your phone will ring. You're on the phone. You're sitting in this tiny corner, and he's saying, "Play, play." I'm saying "Okay! Okay!"

Riley: Did you ever get any good?

Lockhart: Well, I'll tell you one thing: they grabbed a bunch of stuff for a Smithsonian [National Museum of American History] exhibit—I think on Air Force One or something. He used to keep score on a little White House pad. And the one they grabbed was one where I won.

Riley: Congratulations.

Lockhart: I never finished in the middle of the pack. I generally either won or lost spectacularly. He admired my aggressiveness. He used to introduce me. They'd come in, and he'd say, "Hey, this is Bruce. He's a—" It comes to Joe, and he uses what we call the "West Coast offense"—you have to have something you're known for.

Riley: Exactly. I read somewhere in the materials that the game changed at the end. You stopped playing Hearts?

Lockhart: Yes. We stopped playing Hearts. Being President of the United States is ridiculous. Let's be serious. This is the story. He's staying at the Spielbergs' [Steven Spielberg and Kate Capshaw] house one night out in the Hamptons. We were doing some fundraisers, and when we'd go to particular places like that where there aren't really hotels, he'd stay in a private residence, and then we'd find someplace for a small group of reporters. So he was there. I think it was he and Hillary [Rodham Clinton] and Spielberg and his wife.

So they were just hanging out. They've known each other for a long time, although it sounds ridiculous that they're at the Spielbergs', but it's part of being President. Someone said, "Let's play cards," and Spielberg said, "Oh, there's this new game I learned."

Two days later, the President came back and was very excited. He said, "We're not playing Hearts anymore, we're playing this new thing." So we all had to learn something else. It wasn't that hard, and I think that's what he still plays. I used to travel with him three times a year. Now it's down to—at best—once a year. But I was out with him last July, I guess, on his book tour for four cities—and he has not come back to Hearts.

Riley: And this game is?

Lockhart: Well, the way it was named by Spielberg was very descriptive. It's a game called "Oh, Shit." The President described it as "Oh, Hell," and that's what it's become because he was the President. It's similar to Hearts. I don't know how to describe it. It's a game in which within a hand someone has to lose. So it's who loses the least.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: It can become very competitive. The only good story I'll tell on this is we were playing at Camp David during the Middle East peace talks. It was nine or ten o'clock at night, and they'd been at it all day. Someone decided everybody needed to go sit on the sidelines for a while. So we had a three-hour break before they were supposed to come back together, and we were playing. I think it was John Podesta and the President and Chelsea [Clinton] and me. It's one of these games where if you misplay early in the first two or three hands, you're pretty much out of it, and you go around 20 times.

I'd misplayed. I wasn't paying attention, and I misplayed and realized I couldn't win. But I realized I could actually tank on purpose and help someone. So I looked over at Chelsea and smiled, and she got it. There's a weird point system, but if you can get over 200 points, that's great, and the President was always talking about how he got 205 this or that. Well, through Chelsea's and my little collaboration, she got 233, and he didn't notice.

He was the only one at the table who didn't notice what I was doing. A couple of hours later, she said to him, "By the way, I was getting help there." And from that point on, he always talked about how the highest score of all time was Chelsea's, but she had help from Joe. At the risk of sounding stupid, it's one of his most endearing qualities. With everything else going on in the world—with these Middle East peace talks collapsing around him—he couldn't have put more of himself into— He can say, "Okay, I have to put that aside for now," and he can genuinely have fun with people he likes.

Riley: We have still some campaign stuff to wrap up, and I want to include this thread. Was there anything else he did recreationally that gave him a sense—?

Lockhart: It's funny, because golf is, I think, a misunderstood thing with Clinton. People think he lives for golf, but that's not true. If you follow his schedule closely, he doesn't play that often. He likes golf. He likes to play. I think what he fell in love with at the White House was this idea of a place he could go where no one would come out and bother him. When he'd go out to the little putting green in the back where he'd just do putting and chipping, you really took your life in your hands to go out and talk to him about something. It was risky business. It was just the one place.

He's the most accessible person you're ever going to meet. He's approachable, but there and the third floor of the residence you really have to have a good reason to bother him. I had to go out there a couple of times, and it's not fun. It really was a refuge. Golf, during the Presidency, was so important to him because it was a solid block of time—three or four hours—that he could get out and get away from the people he had to deal with all day long. I didn't really understand this until after he was out of office. I traveled with him a couple of times where we were supposed to play golf three days in a row. We'd play just once, because he had something he wanted to do more. But he liked the getting away.

Riley: There are some people who golf because they like to do business on the golf course.

Lockhart: Right.

Riley: He wasn't one of those people.

Lockhart: No. He didn't like to do political business.

Riley: No.

Lockhart: He'd go out, and he'd be in full storytelling mode. But it was relaxing rather than trying to do business. You really, really had to have a good reason to make him take a cell-phone call from the golf course. I had to do this once. We were just outside Montreal, and he was doing a little bilateral meeting with [Jean] Chrétien. And, as always, he had something to say to the press. It was in a weird spot where I got separated from him, so I didn't hear it. When he talked to the press, I was always next to him. So I had to have it repeated back to me.

Someone asked him about the Northern Ireland peace talks, and he was explaining something. He was making a very positive point but sort of cautioning. He said, "It's a little bit like the Irish bar where they finish the argument, and then the door of the bar hits them on the way—" I knew what he meant, but everyone else in the world heard, "All Irish are drunks."

Everybody came running back, and they all came to find me, and I said, "What are you all worked up about?" They read me what he said, and I said, "Okay. I need to walk away for a few minutes. I'll be back."

So I went in and I had to say, "You have to clarify this. You have to say you're sorry you phrased it just that way." He talked for a while. I listened for a while, and then I repeated it. He then talked for a little longer. I listened. He had a few more things to say—colorful. Because he knew what he meant. I knew what he meant, and he hated the idea that it was the "gotcha game," and they had him. He finished expressing his frustration with some of the macro issues involved in White House press relations and said, "Okay, where do I need to go to say I'm sorry?" I said, "Why don't you quit after nine o'clock and come over here, and we'll set it up?" He said, "Okay, fine, great."

Riley: But he had to take out his frustration on you first?

Lockhart: Oh, yes. That was a big part of the game between us—to get him to yell at me rather than to express frustration in front of the press.

Riley: This was something I was going to save for later but since the issue's raised, his anger. Did he have a temper?

Lockhart: Sure. He had a pretty explosive—but predictable—temper. I'd been around him. I knew what frustrated him, what made him mad. And it really was just blowing off steam. You work around a lot of people with tempers. You work around a lot of people who are important and some people who are just downright mean. He doesn't fit that category. There were probably five or six times that he got so frustrated he could tell he crossed the line being too hard on

someone, and it was predictable. Two or three hours later, he would take that person aside and privately apologize. It never happened that he didn't.

I wasn't there for this story, but I think it's true. There was a guy on the campaign in '92 named Jeff Eller. Jeff was the guy who did all the big town meetings. He'd convince local TV stations to put the event on, and he did a big one in California where he had stations from all over the state linked up. It was a thing of beauty. Clinton did the event, did perfectly. Everybody was happy. He walked outside, and some reporter yelled at him, "Hey, did you hear about this?" So Clinton mouthed off about some other issue. So now the town meeting wasn't news anymore.

Apparently Jeff had just had enough. So Clinton walked by and said, "That was pretty good, wasn't it?" And Jeff said, "Well, we just spent $100,000, and not a single person in this state's ever going to see it because of what you just said." Clinton thought, *Okay, I have to let him know who's the candidate here and who's the staffer*, and apparently he let loose. Jeff's an adult, but it's no fun getting yelled at. Clinton walked on and was genuinely mad at him. But he gets frustrated most when he realizes he's made a mistake. So he kept walking.

The story is that he turned to Bruce and said something like, "Well, he's right. Can you have someone check on him once every hour for the next day or so? I can't have that guy jumping out the window. I need him." I've heard the story from Jeff and from Bruce, so I think it's true.

Riley: There are some bits and pieces of the campaign stuff I want to go back to. One is to ask you—and it may sound like a very academic kind of question but I'll pose it anyway. When you were doing the kind of opposition work you were doing on Dole in '96, were you ever self-consciously reflecting on your experience with Walter Mondale? Were there things about running a campaign for somebody who had a very long Senate career that you took incoming and decided you could give this what they want?

Lockhart: It's funny, because if I was reflecting on a campaign, it wasn't Mondale, it was Dukakis. I was reflecting on a campaign that basically said, "There are two places to be in the campaign structure. You can be on the offensive. You can be aggressive. You can be on your front foot. Or you can be passive, defensive, and on your back foot."

Remember, there was a lot of negative stuff flying around about Clinton at this time. You had the FBI file story. You had more Whitewater stuff. There's another one I can't remember.

Riley: Paula Jones.

Lockhart: Paula Jones was still hanging out, and there was one other scandal. But our view was that you can sit back and answer all those charges, or you can create a more compelling storyline. And that's what we tried to do. I learned that in '88, when it was done to us. Now, I do think there are boundaries to how you do that. In '88, it was done in a way that was clearly outside the boundaries. The Atwater stories about the psychiatric records that didn't exist—since Michael Dukakis had never *seen* a psychiatrist (therapy might have helped him)—and all the weird stuff about his personal life. If any of that happened in that campaign, it didn't happen anywhere near where we were working. So I guess it's appropriate aggressiveness.

Riley: As we discovered later, for some fairly good reasons there were concerns about the pace of the fundraising activity. In fact, I think this may have been one of Harold's differences with Dick Morris. It was great to have all that early TV out there, but somebody was going to have to pay for it.

Lockhart: Right.

Riley: From your perch at the campaign, were you ever concerned about this activity level?

Lockhart: It's ironic, because one of the projects I got fully immersed in early was just the opposite: it was raising questions about Dole's fundraising. Dole wasn't taking in the money in a way that was against the rules. (I'm not using the word *illegal* here, because that's not for me to decide.) What happened was, he had a tough primary and wrapped it up in late February, maybe early March. Then he had to get all the way to the convention and run a campaign with no money. And they were certainly violating the spirit of the law in the way they spent their money.

We made it a huge project to try to tie him up with that. Our attitude was, "If you're out of money, stop campaigning. The rules are the rules." We were living by them—even though we had no opponent. So we spent a good two months (with limited success) raising the issue of his fundraising. As I think back on it, I remember at the time some of our guys being less than comfortable with it. But no one ever said—I get paid to put two and two together, and I didn't hear, "Maybe there's some aggressive stuff pushing the spirit of the law on our side too."

I had a sense that, given where we were, it was a little bit of overkill. But having been on so many losing Presidential elections, I thought, *If something bad can happen, it will*. And money is an important part of getting your message out. The problems did not seep to my level until the reporters brought them to my attention. If you take a step back and look at everything Congress found out, you'll see that there were some overly aggressive people, but there was no fundamental or systematic perversion of the rules. There were no illegal acts except for a couple of very narrow ones that did not get traced back to the White House. There were certainly some things that were aggressive.

Riley: I guess the biggest PR [public relations] thing was the Buddhist temple.

Lockhart: Yes, that and the White House sleepovers. They were the things that seemed to stay with us. I wouldn't call the Buddhist temple overly aggressive. I'd put that in the category of bad staff work. It happens. You're making a hundred decisions a day, but in every event you do, you have to close your eyes and say, "How is this going to look on the evening news?"

And that didn't look good. There was no one more ethical in the administration than the Vice President, and he got nailed on this one because he didn't have the sense that it didn't feel right. He might somewhere have had the sense that it didn't feel right but went ahead and did it anyway. It's just very unfair that he became a focal point, given that he really is a straight arrow. But it happens.

Riley: Were you involved in trying to manage the press reaction to that?

Lockhart: Not so much that because the Vice President had his own people, and he took his own counsel on that. I think he made some mistakes. I think his session in the briefing room went against certainly the counsel of some of his staff—and to the extent that he listened to it, the counsel of some of us on our side.

Riley: That's the no controlling—

Lockhart: —legal authority, yes. And that did not help him. There was a somewhat compartmentalized view of these stories, because one of the things Mike did was divide and basically say, "I don't want to deal with this." He brought somebody in, which limited some of the success of it. All of the best minds in the White House were not put against this problem. I think there was a sense from the very beginning that we could just ride this one out, which was a fundamental mistake. It was only very late in the process that it got the full attention it deserved.

Martin: You mentioned that Dole's resignation from the Senate took you by surprise. How did that affect your job after the resignation?

Lockhart: It was interesting because it happened shortly after I got there and was one of the first times I went over to the White House. Leon Panetta called a meeting, and Dick was there. All the campaign people were trying to figure out how we wanted to deal with it. We didn't have a lot of trouble. We were pretty straightforward.

But it did spawn probably the most controversial ad in the campaign, which became the so-called "quitter ad." I got mixed up in that because Ann Devroy of the *Washington Post*—who was kind of the pit bull reporter—called me two hours after the script was written. I don't know who told her about it. She said, "Are you putting up an ad calling Bob Dole a quitter?" I said no. I thought that's how the game is played: if she has a little bit more, then I have to give a little more. She said okay.

Well, the next day, she was telling everybody in the press room that I'm a liar. I'm still fine. We sorted it out. It was not a problem. The ad did *not* say that, but there certainly was a sense that he was walking away. I actually think it was one of the least effective ads we had, but it made the point. You take an ad and show it to a bunch of people. They say, "Yes, we get that, we like that." But what ad makers often forget is that it's like doing a test in a laboratory. You put an ad on, they watch cable TV, a bunch of people are talking about it at the bar that night, and they see it a whole different way the next day. That's when the testing should be done, two days after. But that's a whole other argument.

We were most worried about the Dole campaign in those two days, because if Dole could break free of his Senate ties and mentality, that would be a problem for us. What we found out with time was that he left the building, but his mind didn't leave the building. He was a Senator. That's a great thing, and he should be praised for that, but Senators don't get elected President. That mindset just doesn't work for presenting yourself to be President.

I don't remember all this in great detail, but three days after he quit the Senate, he did something that was so Senatorial that everybody said, "Ah, it's just the same Bob Dole. Don't worry." We still had to beat him. We still had to get up every day and implement this campaign, but the idea that he was going to recreate himself fizzled within a couple of days. In some ways, it would have been stupid. He was fine the way he was. He just wasn't going to beat Bill Clinton at that time in that context.

Morrisroe: Can we turn to the section on the Vice President? How was he as a candidate?

Lockhart: The Vice President? For himself or as a—

Morrisroe: On the '96.

Lockhart: Oh, he was great. I talked about Clinton's ability to calibrate. The Vice President has two speeds, and when he puts it into his second speed, he's like a Baptist preacher, and it was very effective at the end of the campaign. I remember we had probably three days, two days before the election in '96. We went into Cleveland, and they filled an arena with 25,000 people. The Vice President speaks before the President. Most people had never seen this routine before, including me. The Vice President got up and gave a speech where you literally thought the roof was going to come off the building.

Then Clinton got up and acted like he didn't know what to do. He gave, by comparison, a very measured, modest speech. It was all anybody talked about until Election Day. He was really good at making the case for Clinton. There was none of the 2000 nonsense we all went through. He was the best. Since then, Hillary has developed her own persona. If you can't have the President and you want the one person who can get up and get a crowd going about him, she's the best right now.

But in '96, the Vice President was by far the best and always a positive part of the campaign. He was a very important advisor to the President. It waned over time as the President got more comfortable in his own sense and his own judgment, and as the Vice President started thinking about his own career. But the Vice President had the ability to deliver a message to the President that none of the staff could, and it was important.

Riley: The Vice President and the First Lady were also attending the Wednesday night meetings during the campaign, is that correct?

Lockhart: The Vice President was. I don't remember the First Lady ever being at one. She may have been at some before, but I went to them for many years, and I don't remember her being there.

Riley: Was the Vice President an active participant?

Lockhart: Yes. Absolutely.

Riley: Did you get the sense that he was somebody whose political counsel the President valued?

Lockhart: Yes. Absolutely. I don't think he was as politically sophisticated as the President, but he had a very solid sense of the intersection of our agenda and politics.

Riley: But in terms of consumption of data, he was not as focused on the numbers.

Lockhart: No, he was not. I think he had a sense of his own instincts of the right thing to do and was not as big a consumer. By the time he was running for himself, he might have been in a different place. He had a different perspective, and it was a very valuable one.

Morrisroe: During the campaign, did you have a relationship with the Vice President's staff?

Lockhart: Yes. Some of my closer friends who worked in the White House were on the Vice President's staff, so that was a pretty easy thing for me. I probably talked more with him during the campaign, because it was political season. By the time I became press secretary in '98, he had taken his step out of his traditional Vice President role and was doing politics a lot of the time. So there was not that much interaction.

Maltese: What about the debates? Were you involved in the preparation for those?

Lockhart: Yes.

Maltese: Was it a similar sort of preparation to previous campaigns you'd been in?

Lockhart: Yes. There are a couple of stories on the debate prep. I was not part of the core team. There's a group of professional debate prep people now, and they're very smart and very good at what they do. They create all these big books, and it's way too much reading for me.

We were in Chautauqua for the first one, and the debate prep was going very badly. For whatever reason, the President was having trouble focusing. I think he knew he could beat Bob Dole in a debate, but we all knew that if he didn't prepare himself the right way, it could be a problem. I remember Paul Begala coming out. I had left a little earlier and was just sitting at a computer, and Paul came out and was complaining, "This can really go bad."

I don't know where the idea came from—him or me—but we realized we just needed to scare him a little bit. So Paul and I sat down and wrote the mythical *New York Times* story from the day after the debate where he had really done badly. It was so much fun to write. It wrote itself. I was saying, "Let me write this paragraph, I got this one." We went in and showed it to him. It's not the only thing. There were lots of other things going on. We had three days of prep. He wanted one day. He was thinking, *I'm not checking into this process until I need to be here.* But I remember him looking at this and it registering: this could happen. It was part of getting him ready.

The other debate preps were much easier, because he was much more focused. We made them shorter. It was a mistake to make him come up for three days. We made them shorter, and he was much more focused. The one reasonably funny story—although it may not be funny to

everyone—was we did a series of full-blown mock debates. The President would stop every once in a while and complain out loud to everyone, "It's not fair, George Mitchell has notes." Who said it was fair?

We all had our assigned questions to ask. As I was walking in, George Stephanopoulos grabbed me and said, "Don't ask your question. Ask a question about same-sex marriage." He knew that Clinton just wasn't right on this. There was the perception in the country that he didn't support the Defense of Marriage Act. The staff had given him the bill at one o'clock in the morning on Saturday. The reality was he did support it. He was given the document, and he just didn't think about it. He signed it.

But then a lot of people who were not in the same ideological place and a little embarrassed—some of our Ivy League colleagues at the White House—put out the story that the President didn't really want to sign it but signed it for political reasons. That just infuriated him, because he believed. He signed it because he thought it was the right thing to do. I disagree with him, but he thought it was the right thing to do.

I knew what George was doing. I'm going to be the guy who gets the President crazy. I decided there's just so often I'm going to get screamed at. So while I was sitting there, I came up with my plan. I was sitting next to a kid I worked with in a previous campaign. He's a young, athletic, really good-looking guy, 27, 28 years old.

I got called on and I did this routine. I said, "Mr. President, I voted for you last time. I really want to vote for you this time, but I'm just not sure I can and I want to tell you why. I want you to meet—" And I turned and put my arm around the guy. I said, "I want you to meet my friend Angus. Angus and I love each other, and because of what you've signed into law, I can't—" I went through this whole heartfelt thing. The kicker was Clinton turned and mouthed to someone on the side, "I didn't know Joe was gay." [*laughter*] And I thought, *I performed well*.

He started to answer the question and then turned and started yelling at George—with reason. George is the one he blamed for signing it in the middle of the night. It was George's call. But I got out of being the person who got yelled at that day. Poor Angus. That kid turned nine colors of red in front of all those people—and there were cameras everywhere.

Riley: Was there ever a point during the campaign that you got in trouble or they reeled you in?

Lockhart: Yes. I got in trouble one day at a debate prep. I can't remember exactly. Newt Gingrich had said something about the President. It was something that should have been left alone, and I was planning to leave it alone. Then somebody else on the campaign grabbed me and said, "You really have to go after him for this." I said, "Okay, fine," but I didn't process enough to think about it.

I delivered the attack, and it backfired. It was not a big deal, but the press jumped all over me because I hadn't fully thought it through. I walked in, and McCurry was standing ten feet away just watching this, smiling. He said something like, "Isn't it fun leading with your chin?"

One day something happened on Whitewater. There was an ironclad rule that the campaign didn't talk about Whitewater because it wasn't a political issue. I said maybe half a sentence, something about the President being cleared on something. Some reporter grabbed me, and I said, "Well, that's one less thing Bob Dole has to talk about." I had a little trip to the woodshed on that one because it broke the rule, but nothing bad.

Riley: Just a couple more questions about the campaign before we move on. I wanted to ask how you went about developing relationships with members of the press at this time. You'd been away for a good while, and my assumption is that you probably didn't have a lot of personal contacts with the people who were covering the campaign before you came in.

I don't know much about this subject, so I guess my question is, do you come in and your professional relationship automatically develops because you're in the position you're in and they're in the position they're in? Or do you come in and have some friends helping you navigate the waters? Do you do some things proactively to cultivate relationships with certain people? If so, who was it you were particularly interested in trying to cultivate at this time?

Lockhart: That's a broad question. I think it's like any professional relationship. It's not that much different than if I took a job at IBM [International Business Machines], and suddenly the ten reporters who cover IBM for a living and I have a relationship—whether we want to or not.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: But I firmly believe that it's easier to deal with people you have a personal relationship with, somebody you get to know a little bit. And the nice part about a campaign is it does ramp up, so in March you can go out to lunch three or four times a week with reporters, whereas in September, you don't even have lunch. I targeted or was targeted by probably a dozen reporters. Some I knew a little, some I didn't know at all.

They were in two categories. One was a small group of elite newspaper and television reporters, a radio reporter or two, and some columnists who—by virtue of who they are and who they write or report for—get access. I wanted to meet them so I would have access to them. Maybe that's five or six people who at that moment I considered important. Then there are probably five or six other people—and this group grew over time—who are not in that tier of automatic access and who viewed me a little bit as a backdoor way into the White House, someone who was more accessible than, say, Mike was, because of his schedule.

Riley: Right.

Lockhart: It served the campaign's purposes to have those relationships. So over a month or two, there were probably a dozen reporters I'd made an effort to get to know a little better. It was interesting because I got off the political train, but a bunch of reporters stayed on. So a lot of people I knew as young, struggling reporters were now the bosses because they stayed in it another six or seven years. So I felt like I had enough relationships. You don't need to go into the campaign knowing all the reporters. You develop a relationship very quickly, just based on the professional back and forth.

Maltese: Were there some especially important reporters you would turn to first?

Lockhart: This all evolves. I'm trying to remember. In 1996, probably the one reporter it was important to have a good relationship with and to be able to reach at all times was John King. He was at the AP [Associated Press] at the time, and as far as rapidly getting information to other people, that was state of the art. It's not anymore. Now with the explosion of the Internet and other news sources and cable TV, he's one of many. But in that campaign, John was important because he worked for the AP and because of how much he knew about politics, and, just as important, how much everybody else knew that John knew.

You could have a transaction very quickly with him if you had something you knew was significant and he recognized that. Or, if you had to sell it a little bit, it saved a lot of time just to have him write something rather than having to go through and talk to 15 people individually and convince them that this was significant. Now, the flip side was that John's a very sophisticated guy. There were times we'd try to sell him something that really wasn't anything, and he'd laugh at us.

I'm not sure who it would be now. I'm not in the day-to-day business. There have been lots of twists and turns. The ABC morning note has become very important because of who reads it. And there's the whole blog movement now that people are watching closely. So I don't know how you'd do it now. But in '96, when something happened, it was important to get to John, whatever our side was going to say or do or whatever information we had.

Riley: There were two things that the President had asked you to do. One was related to local.

Lockhart: Right.

Riley: How do you go about making good on the local press angle?

Lockhart: Probably not as aggressively as he would have liked, but thankfully no one told him. That was mostly working through the states. I'm actually glad that he and I had the conversation because it was pretty compelling when I'd get the state press secretaries on the phone and was able to tell them honestly, "This is what the President wants. The President is not interested in seeing you on *Hardball* tonight. He's interested in making sure the weekly newspapers get what they need." That was useful. I guarantee, though, we didn't do as much as he wanted us to.

Riley: The second thing was maybe not directly a Presidential edict, but it was your understanding that a large part of your role was this opposition business. How do you start developing relationships with the team covering the other candidate?

Lockhart: That's where you have to get creative. You can't always reach them. Blackberrys [personal digital assistants] were not ubiquitous then. It's gotten so much easier now. Then we had to actually find them. The cell phone was the first way, but if they're sitting watching a speech or they've turned off their phone, you don't always get them that way. We got pretty

creative. We had people go and put written material under their hotel room doors at two o'clock in the morning. We'd have people meet their bus.

We had someone at every speech he gave. And again, it wasn't high tech. They'd just hold their cell phone up, and we'd listen to it. There was one infamous moment when Dole went over to the guy and said, "Who are you talking to?" He said, "My mother," and Dole grabbed the phone. It was one of us. But it was not high tech. We had a sense that it was important to keep finding ways to deliver our side of the message, and failure to do that wasn't acceptable.

Riley: Do you recall any instances that the press covering the Dole campaign felt you'd crossed the line in terms of being too aggressive?

Lockhart: No, I don't think so. I think their view was that they were grownups, and they'd take what they wanted and discard what they didn't want. And we weren't calling them at three o'clock in the morning—most nights. I wasn't calling them, someone else was. I think—on balance—they thought it was a resource. And again, on these days it was not some staffer of mine calling them. I was calling them. I was making the calls, and they were free to use the information or not. Some did, some didn't.

Maltese: What was Clinton's relationship with the press during the campaign? You said before that you acted as the person he would get angry at to keep that from being—

Lockhart: Yes. That was more when I got into the White House. Clinton has had a hundred different variations of his relationship with the press. I would say he knew we were pretty disciplined during the campaign. His job was to give the speeches, provide the visual images. The ads were working. He didn't need to enter into extended dialogue with the press during that period. There were other times that you need to. Maybe you should all the time, but during the crunch time of the campaign, it didn't make a lot of sense. So it wasn't particularly warm during that period. It wasn't particularly strained either.

One of the things about a campaign and the press is the press does take on the mood of the campaign. When you're on a losing campaign, the press is in a bad mood. It's not that they want the guy to win or lose. It's just something about covering something that isn't working, and when you're winning and things are working, there's a better feeling.

Riley: Sure.

Martin: One thing about that, though. It seems to be the case that if a person wins, the people who were covering the campaign get to cover the White House.

Lockhart: Right. Some, certainly. There's a great journalistic debate or journalistic ethics debate (I hesitated there, because it sounded a little oxymoronic) about how you should do this. One school of thought says you have to be there all the time to have the relationship. Another school of thought says you have to rotate back and forth so you don't get too close and allow your own professional—

And like many journalistic debates, it never gets resolved because it's never seriously debated. Everyone has their own plan. They don't stick with it. You never know who's with you and who's not with you. If journalists were to cover their own internal debate the way they cover a policy debate, it would be a pretty bad story. They do things their way.

Riley: How disappointed was the campaign that you didn't reach the 50 percent threshold? Was that a clearly defined mission for the campaign?

Lockhart: I don't know. I can't speak for the President, because I never really talked to him about that. I wasn't. We had a task. The task was to run up the biggest number of electoral votes we could, and we did it. And whatever happened, whatever caused the popular vote slippage—which is just as likely to have been some of our people staying home as people rallying against us—I never gave it a second thought. I remember taking some time off and coming back and reading these stories about how bad it was that we didn't get to 50. Nobody ever said that to me from the inside.

Riley: As a press secretary, you organized your activities on a national level—or were you organizing yourself principally on an Electoral College basis? Were you thinking, *I have to devote attention to California newspapers*?

Lockhart: Both. The national press is there. They're a very important part of how the campaign is perceived. So we spent a lot of time there, but we also spent a lot of time and effort working on the 18 to 24 states, whatever it was, in '96. We completely ignored the 36 other states. You generally send some young, willing 23-year-old in, just to show the flag. But no resource or effort went into it.

Martin: I was reading part of the background material about the late campaign, and you're quoted in the *Boston Globe* talking about a shift toward more positive messages, somewhere around October through the rest of the campaign. Do you remember that period or—

Lockhart: In '96?

Martin: Yes, during the '96 campaign. What had caused this shift in strategy? I think both campaigns—

Lockhart: I think Dole's campaign realized there really wasn't anything working for them, and they eventually did what a lot of candidates do at that point: they let candidate X be candidate X. Let Dole be Dole. It can't get worse. And I think that worked for him. It often does work at the end to at least bring the faithful back. Certainly Mondale did better near the end. The crowds were much bigger. There was much more excitement—same for Dukakis. It translates into some votes but not that many. It's not determinative.

But if you look at our campaign, there were two main pieces: what Clinton did and what the ads were. The Clinton stuff was all positive. It was positive all the way through. He very rarely mentioned Dole. This was the candidate who never declared that he was running. He was just being President—that was our strategy. At a certain point there was only so much you could do

to drive up Dole's negatives. They were at a place where he couldn't win. So it made sense to go back to where we started. All of this early ad stuff in '95 was largely positive. It was only when Dole was the nominee that it took a negative turn.

Martin: Do you think it was easy to paint Dole in a negative way, given the way he was portrayed on, say, *Saturday Night Live*?

Lockhart: I think there's a broader principle here, which is that it's very easy to take the press's own preconceptions and reinforce them. It's very hard to contradict the press's preconception. A lot of what you're doing in a campaign is trying to wear down the bad preconceptions day by day, and you actually can change some of them.

Dole conducted himself very well in the campaign, and if you were keeping a running score of who lost their temper more in that campaign, Clinton did, in a way that the public saw. But there were many more stories about Dole because there was this idea that he was a volcano ready to blow. And as soon as there's even a hint of it, it's a story.

Clinton had his own issues, and—you know this—it works both for you and against you. But when you look at this at the varying levels on which you're trying to run the campaign, you're trying to reinforce your positives and reinforce the other guy's negatives. To the extent that you have negatives, you're trying to change the perception. The press is an important constituency that you work on to try to change, because they deliver this to a lot of people.

Riley: How quickly did you start talking with the administration about staying over and doing something after the campaign?

Lockhart: I don't know. I think a month went by. I remember I went over to Mike McCurry's house for dinner maybe a month after the election, and it was the first time he ever even raised it. It was assumed that if I wanted to come in, there would be something. What it was, I don't know. I was actively looking for another job. About a month out, I had a number of options, but I'd narrowed it down to either taking this corporate job or going back into the White House.

It took me about six weeks to figure out what I wanted to do. Once I figured it out, it took the White House about a month. It was really the end of January before this all worked itself out. I started, I think, after the second Inauguration.

Riley: Yes, and you were shepherding a position, were you not?

Lockhart: Yes. I accepted the job on a Friday to come in and fill the job of someone who was leaving, but she was not leaving yet. She was going to leave within a couple of weeks.

Riley: This was a press job or—?

Lockhart: Yes. This was the deputy press secretary, a woman named Mary Ellen Glynn, who had come from the State Department with Mike, and eventually went to the UN [United Nations]

—but I think there was some other place she thought she was going first. So we had a logjam, because her new job took five months to work out, and I was sitting with not a lot to do.

But on my first weekend, before I even started, Mike called me and said, "This nomination's in trouble, will you help?" It was Alexis Herman for Secretary of Labor, and it turned out to be a very challenging piece of political business. It took about four months. It feels like it was four years. It was touch and go, but she was confirmed.

Riley: Where were you positioned? Did you have an office at this point?

Lockhart: No. I actually shared a desk in the Old Executive Office Building with the guy who did the clips. He worked nights, and I came in during the day. It was great, because I had to use his voicemail, so we were checking each other's messages. He was a 24-year-old kid who had a lot of people calling wondering what he was doing on Friday and Saturday night. So I sat there part of the time, and then I would just camp out. The guy who was running the confirmation process was the staff secretary, and he had a big office, and I would just sit on his couch for hours on end and work from there.

Riley: Yes.

Lockhart: But it was not the best environment, and, to be honest, I had some second thoughts. I had been offered a number of jobs, but the job that interested me was with AOL [America Online]. I believe they were interested in me because they were going through a crisis, which they resolved shortly after I turned them down. It was a technological problem, so it wasn't something I helped them with. But they continued on their meteoric rise, and there were some less than helpful people there who would occasionally remind me how much money I'd turned away—and within the first three months of sharing a desk with the clip guy, we were up around $6 or $7 million. At its worst point, we were up at about $50 million. Once things settled down in the White House, it never really bothered me. While I was sharing a desk with the clip guy it was a little annoying. [*laughter*] It did get to the point where I thought I might have to go find something else to do, and actually, it was amazing how once I lined something up, everything sort of broke free.

Maltese: It was just Herman's confirmation you were working on?

Lockhart: As they were trying to find something for me to do they said, "You can do all the nominations," but that was really the only one that was in trouble. There were others that hit a logjam because of political reasons not involving the nominee. Hers was because there were people raising ethical questions about her business dealings, and we had to sort through that.

Riley: So you were doing research on this or just straight-up press relations? Or are you dealing with Capitol Hill?

Lockhart: There were probably four or five investigative reporters assigned to this story, and this was their only story. It was a full-time job**,** just keeping up with what they were being told and trying to get rid of the stuff that wasn't true, trying to put it in perspective. It was touchy.

Martin: Can I ask one last question about the campaign?

Riley: Sure.

Martin: When Bob Dole was still Senate Majority Leader, did the Senate Democrats coordinate with the campaign at all? They tied him up quite a bit.

Lockhart: Oh, sure. There was a lot of coordination between us and the House, with all parts of the Democratic Party. The more interesting part was what the Senate Republicans did to him. They cooked him. They allowed the President, in a three-day period, to have three bill signings: the [Edward M.] Kennedy-[Nancy] Kassebaum insurance portability, welfare reform, and raising the minimum. If you're a New Democrat, you can't ask for any more. We did it on three consecutive days, and it was because the Republicans decided at the leadership level that Dole couldn't win and they wanted to save Congress. So his own colleagues killed him, and we were only too happy to take the opening.

I think that happened in mid-August, and the election just had a feel of being over. We knew we had to get through the debates. We were confident Clinton would do well but not overly confident. In the coordination department, I think we did fine. He didn't do so well.

Riley: Do you want to talk about anything on the Herman nomination? You said it was touchy.

Lockhart: It's funny. The one thing I learned on that—which was useful to learn on what really was a second-tier issue as opposed to a first-tier White House issue—was the difference between speaking for a campaign and for the White House. And I learned it the hard way. Behind all of these allegations was a crazy businessman from Cameroon who had had some business dealings with her. I never quite got to the bottom of where the falling-out was, but he was trying to leverage these charges into getting money out of her business.

I remember one day a reporter calling me and saying, "What do you make of this guy?" And I said, "The guy's a liar." Give me a break. Anyone can say anything. So *USA Today* runs a story the next day saying "White House calls so-and-so a liar." Three days later, the court papers come. I'm being sued for $10 million for libel or slander.

That went nowhere, but it was instructive for me that it's a whole different game when you speak for the U.S. government as opposed to a candidate or a political organization. That was a real lesson for me. I'm sure there were times I said things when it seemed like I didn't remember that lesson, but—

Riley: So you get through that, and finally the deputy position opens up for you.

Lockhart: Right.

Riley: Did you inherit a particular portfolio when you came in? Did you have understandings with McCurry about exactly what your portfolio would include?

Lockhart: I didn't necessarily have any particular issues. The guy who was the other deputy had come from OMB [Office of Management and Budget] and was very happy to keep the economic budget issues, which I was very happy with, too, because they're pretty dense, and it would have been hard to jump in. It's not impossible to learn—and I did learn it, but not right off the bat. So we divided the world up so that he would take budget issues, I would take political issues, and the stuff in the middle we'd figure out as we went along.

As far as understandings about what was going to happen, there really weren't any. Mike was pretty up-front about the fact that he wasn't in a position to say, "When I leave, you'll get this job." The only thing he was in a position to say was, "I'm not staying for the whole second term." That was the extent of it, and it was clear to me that if I wanted his job when he left, I had to earn it. That's pretty much how it happened, I think.

Maltese: You talked about how efficient the campaign was. When he was reelected and started serving the second term, was there that same sort of efficiency, or did things begin to—?

Lockhart: Well, things were tough early in 1997 because we were so on our heels over the campaign finance investigation. The Republican Congress, if nothing else, had the ability to disrupt the White House, and they would do it all the time. Subpoenas just floated around like anything. They came to your desk every day: "Gather papers on this."

It was designed to disrupt, and it did. So it really took a good part of that year before I felt like we turned around and were back on the offense. We had some pretty significant legislative victories in 1997, but it all seemed to be overshadowed by the aftermath of the campaign.

Riley: You got a decent office? Did you have to move out of the desk?

Lockhart: I got my own office down in the lower press office, which is probably more accurately described as a nice closet. That didn't bother me. It was fine for me. The challenge to that location is the way the geography works. The press secretary's office is half a step above the lower press office, which is connected to the briefing room. The two deputy press secretaries sit in the two offices in that lower press office, and it's very difficult to get serious work done because there's always a reporter coming in and out. That's why you're there, it's part of the job. You're like the McDonald's guy who serves fast food, but you also have other things you have to do. So that was a challenge.

I remember when I got the press secretary job, my first reaction over the first couple of days. I had another deputy who sat upstairs and did the management, and I called her in a couple of times. She said, "What do you need?" I said, "I just don't want to be alone. Just sit here for a while. It's spooky having all this time to myself." But I grew to need it and enjoy it.

It was pretty much chaos in the office. There was always something flying around, and it really was being literally the front line of the White House defense on any given day. But it was a hell of a lot of fun, too, on good days and bad days. As far as practicing your craft, it would be like a doctor wanting to do an emergency room shift. That's how it felt.

Riley: Did you have briefing responsibilities?

Lockhart: It evolved where when Mike wasn't available, I would do the briefing. But Mike was a workhorse, and he did not like not doing the briefing. He enjoyed it and rightfully so. It wasn't as though he liked to take days off. So it didn't happen that often.

It's like being a substitute teacher—it's the worst, because no one takes you seriously. They all think you're an idiot, so they all save up for it and nothing good can come of it. But you have to do it when he takes a vacation or on days when he gets called to do something else. You have to do it. And on a lot of these days, you get no warning: "In two hours you have to do the briefing." But it was still fun. I felt like I had to demonstrate that I could do it.

Morrisroe: How would you describe McCurry's relationship with the White House press corps?

Lockhart: Mostly positive. At times they'd get tired of each other, so it could be a little uncomfortable. But the press made the judgment on Mike that, one, he had access to the President, and two, he was honest, and he would give it to everyone straight no matter what, which meant he got cut a lot of slack. Even when they'd get mad at him for something, it would never last very long—and in reverse.

I shouldn't speak for him, but I will anyway. He got tired of the game near the end, and it really took a toll on him—not physically. Physically he was worn out, but everybody was. And he stayed probably nine months to a year longer than he wanted to because of all the [Monica] Lewinsky stuff. I think that, by the end, he just didn't like it nearly as much as when he started.

I remember Helen Thomas saying to me on my first or second day, "So how'd you like your first briefing?" I said, "I loved it, Helen, it was great." She said, "They all say that at the beginning." And then she said, "It's going to be an albatross. Trust me, they all say that at the beginning."

Martin: Could I ask you a question on motivation? If someone like yourself—going into this deputy press secretary position, then later into press secretary—has these lucrative outside offers—literally millions of dollars—and the job is that painful—and for you specifically (you mentioned earlier that ideology wasn't one of your main attractions to a candidate like Bill Clinton), why stay in the job?

Lockhart: Where were you when I needed you? [*laughter*] Why didn't I think of it that way? No. Everybody is wired differently, and I happened to think what I was doing was important. And I happened to think it was an opportunity that was going to come only once. I made the judgment that, as nice as lucrative jobs were, with nice material things, there was some possibility that after the White House, that could work out. But it wasn't as important as what I was doing and not just because it was important for the country. It was important to me to prove that I could do it. It was a challenge, a personal challenge.

The funny thing is, I know a lot of guys who made the other decision and went into business and were very successful—who used to call me, and we'd talk because they're my friends. And I'm pretty convinced that every one of them would have traded positions with me.

It actually took me a lot longer than I thought to make the decision. I thought it would be an easy decision, but it wasn't, because it also involved time away from my family. My daughter was two when I did the campaign, at the age where if you weren't around her every day, it would take her a while to warm back up to you, even though you're a parent. And I'd be off for seven days, eight days, five days. Or even when I was in town, I'd get home at midnight.

The transition off the campaign, back home, was difficult with her. She was two years old. She didn't say anything; I could just feel it. So all of those things put together made it more difficult than I thought. But for people who knew me, my decision was pretty predictable.

Riley: What was the most difficult thing you had to deal with as deputy press secretary? You were in that job for about a year as deputy? June '97 to—

Lockhart: A year and a half. I'll give a broader answer. One of the nice things about being press secretary is that there's a certain expectation about what they need to deal with. In many ways, being the press secretary was easier than being the deputy press secretary. No one cares if they wake up the deputy. And the idiotic questions I used to get asked at 3:30 in the morning constantly amazed me. Everyone at the White House thought you were on call 24 hours a day. Staff people would call me at all hours. The demands were different, but in some ways I think more demanding, than being the press secretary, where there's some expectation that you just don't ask this. Let someone else deal with that. Not everything rises to that.

I can't answer the most difficult thing, but clearly we faced a very difficult moment in January of 1998 when the Lewinsky story broke. I had a very frank and interesting conversation with Mike, and his advice for me was, "Stay away from this. We'll get somebody to come in and answer all these questions." Implicit in the advice was, *You have a very real chance of killing your chance of getting my job if you take this on*. I appreciated the advice, I understood it, but there was just no way I was going to stay away from that, because the Presidency was at stake. That was a very difficult time.

Martin: Why did that fall to you rather than directly to Mike McCurry at that point?

Lockhart: Because during the campaign finance investigation, Mike had very successfully developed a system where he said, "You know what? I'm not dealing with that. I'm dealing with the government. If you have a question about a scandal, I've appointed this person to deal with the scandal." In finance, it was Lanny Davis. But Lanny had left, so we sat around trying to figure out who was going to do this. Mike had a guy he thought could do it, and I remember saying that we just couldn't. I thought we suffered a little bit at times by not putting the most senior people on the campaign finance issue, because this was, as far as its political risk, exponentially more dangerous to us.

Riley: I know we're going to want to park on that a little bit, but maybe we'll hold off on the Lewinsky business and deal with anything else that comes up in '97. I mistakenly asked you the question in terms of your roles rather than the time frame.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: You arrived in June of '97, so you were there about six months before Lewinsky became an issue. What kinds of things were occupying most of your time in '97? Do you have a recollection, or was it just potpourri?

Lockhart: It was potpourri. We had a budget process, which is not the sexiest thing in the world, but it was important and it was our domestic agenda. We had to talk about it. I just took the assignment, and it ended up taking a lot of our time. I did all the communications around the President's race initiative, which was a very interesting process and project. It never quite jelled into something that I think the President was satisfied with, but it was very interesting working with the group he put together.

Riley: Did you ask for that assignment, or did it just find its way to you?

Lockhart: I probably asked for it, because I looked at the various things we were doing, and that one stood out as a potential problem.

Riley: Explain why you thought it could be a problem.

Lockhart: Because it was the President of the United States, who was a lightning rod for criticism among about 40 percent of the country, and he decided he wanted to talk about race. It didn't exactly come from the conservative political handbook, like we're going to take the conservative approach here and take on only easy issues. It's the hardest issue there is, and he was saying, "Not only are we going to talk about it, I'm going to make it a centerpiece."

I knew just talking about race was a political risk. But it had an even bigger risk, which was the caricature of Clinton as a guy who liked to talk about things but didn't deliver anything. And this one was ripe for a bunch of talk, talk that's hard and potentially very divisive and then there's nothing at the end. So it struck me—and this is my memory. For all I know, I was told I had to do it, and I just created this in my head. But it did strike me that this needed attention.

Martin: It seems like you were in charge of putting out fires, or when there's trouble, Joe Lockhart gets the nod.

Lockhart: That's probably right. My colleague did more of the substantive issues. The trick was not getting so drawn into it that you had no substantive background. Again, in addition to working long hours and many days, and being devoted to the job and the President, I also had an ambition. I probably didn't do it quite the way I should have. I also should have been spending time learning about foreign policy. I ended up being stuck in the mud a lot, but it had to be done, because what I certainly learned—and I think a lot of other people learned in the campaign

finance stuff—is if you just leave it there, it's like some rapidly spreading bacteria. You just have to find a way to stop it.

Riley: Just to clarify. You did or did not have a piece of the campaign finance management?

Lockhart: I did not. I had no official role. Although, in the second half of the year, I had thoughts that I let people know about.

Riley: The reason I pose the question is this. One of the things that happen in the administration fairly frequently is that you have a scandal crop up, and there seems to be created a team of managers to handle it—partly, I've gotten the sense, just to have an able group dealing with something, but also to isolate the bacteria, if you will. Because if you're involved in the group discussing this, the next time around, when the subpoenas come out, your name is likely to be on the list.

So let's talk about campaign finance. Were you warned that you didn't want to get into that because Ken Starr and his bunch were going to be on top of you?

Lockhart: No, and again this is pretty hazy with me. I think to the extent that Mike and I talked about it, his advice was, "This is a sinking ship, don't get on it. We messed it up, and now we're just doing complete damage control. We're not doing what we normally do, which is take something bad and try to turn it into something that works for us." That was his advice.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: My involvement in it was just episodic: there's this happening, can I help here as opposed to being part of the team? The concept of the team is right but not necessarily because of subpoenas. I was involved in a lot of these things, and the only thing I was ever interviewed about was the Alexis Herman issue. I never got a subpoena, was never deposed, and was all over some of these things.

I think they had some naïve view that the press person doesn't participate in the process, he just gets told what to say, which was not the case. But I'm glad for their omission and errors, because I did save a lot of money that way. I think really underlying the philosophy was that the "bacteria"—to keep flogging that—can infect everybody else's work. And from the President on down, there was a sense that the only real way we'll lose here is if we stop doing the work we were sent here to do.

These teams were set up to make sure that 99 percent of the White House didn't have to worry beyond reading bad stories and having to watch bad cable TV. Nothing from these so-called scandals could touch their work. And by and large, it worked.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: I don't know how well, because I wasn't that involved in campaign finance, and because of my peculiar role of sitting down on the front line, that would come into my life

occasionally. But I do know when we fast-forward to Lewinsky, this was eight to ten people out of the entire White House, and no one else was welcome in the meetings. You just were not part of this, and you were not allowed to weigh in. We did it, and for better or worse, on a regular basis, it was a small group of people.

Riley: Did you have any piece of the Whitewater portfolio?

Lockhart: Whitewater was pretty much done. And to the extent that there were aftershocks on Whitewater, that was dealt with in the counsel's office. There was a press person who worked for the White House counsel, and on most days it didn't rise to the level. There was obviously a series of events that happened in the Paula Jones case, separate and apart, which, again, was mostly counsel's office. But at least until we got into 1998, they were not important enough to warrant a lot of attention.

Riley: I'm trying to look back and recall if there were any things—in particular in '97—that we're clearly omitting.

Lockhart: Yes, I'm sure there are, but you know you—

Martin: Just to follow up on the race initiative. You saw it as a potential problem, and I'm curious what your office did in terms of press to try to keep it from being a problem.

Lockhart: There are a couple of answers to that. When I say "problem," that's too simplistic. I saw it as a great opportunity, too, because I knew how important this was to the President. But I knew this was one we just couldn't leave alone. It needed management. At the beginning, I think the press was very skeptical about it. The way we solved that was by overwhelming them.

This was the week every reporter in town got to talk to the President. He did five television interviews after a speech, back to back. He talked to the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*—and on this one, I knew. It wasn't my decision, but it was my recommendation that got signed off on: the President was the best salesman for this. I couldn't convince them that this was real. He could though, and we were very aggressive in making the President available, which doesn't happen very often in the White House, in any White House. It's usually, you take a number, and you get in and get to chat with the President. If you agree you're going to write something about race, you can talk to him.

On the back end—and this went on for a while—we did a lot of work on expectations about the final report. We did not handle that particularly well, because it ended up not fulfilling what the President wanted. But I think from a PR perspective, we didn't pay that high a price. So many things had happened. And I do think that when the press looked at this—again, I'm saying "the press" with a broad brush. They looked at it and said, "You know what? For what it was, it was a pretty good thing. It took a lot of guts to get up there and give a series of major speeches about race, given how explosive it is."

It's one of the reasons they didn't make that big a deal about, "Where's the final report? Where are the recommendations?" They thought he started a pretty interesting debate, and it was up to the country to decide whether they wanted to continue having it.

Martin: Did you work at all with minority press?

Lockhart: Yes.

Martin: How did that go? Was that a new inroad?

Lockhart: No. I think if you're a Democrat, you're wise to stay in touch with the constituencies that are traditionally with you. African Americans are one. There's a group of African-American reporters called the Trotter Group. I'm not even sure where that came from. They were in and out of the White House many times over the years—certainly a couple of times around this initiative, because it was something of high interest to them. It's always tricky to say, "Okay, we're talking about race now, so let's bring in the Black reporters." But it's an issue they cared about. I think on balance—and I'm not unbiased here, because I was involved with this. But on balance we managed to get a lot out of this with not a lot of political fallout. And with something this explosive, that's not such a bad result.

Riley: I plucked out the pages from the Library Foundation or the library's list of accomplishments for that—

Lockhart: So this is good.

Riley: I thought I would just let you look—you would have started somewhere around in here. You may want to eyeball that very quickly and see if it sparks any specific memories of your handling or managing any particular aspects. If not, we can just move on.

Lockhart: It's funny how you don't remember the things that work. This is a pretty impressive list of things, particularly the Balanced Budget Agreement.

Riley: Those stories write themselves.

Lockhart: Yes, and at the time, it was apt, playing the fireman role. Good news went to another desk. Bad news came to my desk.

Riley: Right.

Lockhart: And my desk was clearing for a big one at the end of the year.

Riley: That's what it sounds like.

Martin: Saving your energy.

Riley: We've read in the briefing materials that you were actually late to work on the morning the big story broke.

Lockhart: Yes. That's true.

Riley: There was some sickness in your family.

Lockhart: I was generally one of the first people in every day. I think Mike had a little bit of a heads-up on the Lewinsky story a day and a half, two days before. I can't really remember the byplay between us, but I vaguely remember him indicating to me that something was up, but he couldn't tell me about it yet. That was unusual for Mike, because he's very forthcoming. As soon as he knew something, he would generally tell me—not because he thought I had an institutional right to know, he just couldn't keep a secret. He would find something out, and he trusted that it would stop there. It did help me do my job.

I'll give you an example. When we got to impeachment, as everyone remembers, the President launched a military strike on Afghanistan and Sudan. By a freak thing, I was supposed to go to Martha's Vineyard, and Mike was supposed to stay in Washington for the vacation. But Mike went up. It had nothing to do with anything, because we didn't know what we were doing yet. He got a briefing at 8:00 in the morning on what we were doing. He called me at 8:30 and said, "I really can't tell you why, but you might want to schedule a lunch outside the office today right around 1:50." That was it. So I called my friend at the *New York Times* and said, "Do you want to have lunch today?" We sat there, and I knew full well something was happening, but I didn't know what it was.

I had a reputation for knowing what was going on, and he didn't want to put me in the position of sitting there when people figured out what was going on and having to say, "I can't tell you." So he just said, "Get out of the building, and we'll handle it from up here. We're fine. We don't need any help from you." That's instructive. I think I had a slight idea that there was something up but no heightened sense of worry.

Riley: There was noise—the Sunday morning programs were—

Lockhart: Yes, but there had been noise for a while. And again, when you sit in there, particularly on the front line, every third day there's a rumor of some scandal about to break. Most of them never happen, and most of these bombshells turn out to be little ripples. So you get somewhat jaded, but you know it's always a possibility.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: I was not a consumer of the [Matt] *Drudge Report* or anything like that, so I wasn't following that either. I went home late, and my daughter was sick. It was not a big deal in the history of parenthood, but it's the first time she'd had the flu. We were both up with her until about five o'clock in the morning, when both of us proceeded to get sick. I slept for about an hour, and at 9:15, 9:30, I got up and called the office. I said, "Is there anything going on?" They

thought I was being funny, because they'd been in hell for two hours. I said, "I really don't know what's going on, and I wasn't planning on coming in today"—wrong on both fronts.

I was there about 20 minutes later. That's how I found out. I hadn't even seen the paper. It had been sitting on the front stoop. It was odd—nobody called. I think everybody just assumed no one was going to say anything until we all regrouped at the White House. I don't know where all the weird calls were going, but they weren't coming to me that night. I literally slept through the worst of the first part of it.

Martin: You said you think Mike got a heads-up from somebody before the story came out.
Lockhart: Yes.

Martin: How does something like that work in terms of the relationship between you and the press?

Lockhart: Well, the major newspapers—I guess out of some sort of professional courtesy—will always let you know at the latest possible moment if they have something. A lot of the time it's because they need to ask you for a comment and get the obligatory "no comment" or whatever. Sometimes it's just as a courtesy, because the reality is, when the *Post* or the *Times* has a news-making story, everybody has to play catch-up, which means everybody in the press office at ten o'clock at night has to shift into action. We have to figure out what it is. Sometimes it's the product of something good—somebody leaked the new tax package. But someone has to get up to speed on it so we can tell everybody else, "Yes, this is right," and, "No, that's wrong." So there's an element both of getting a comment and of courtesy.

I don't think Mike and I have ever had a detailed conversation about this. I just think I assumed that at some time late in the evening, the *Post* called him—and I may even have read this in someone's account. It just didn't seem worth going back to with us. I think he had probably a six- or seven-hour head start on the rest of us. Mike's a pretty cool operator. He didn't see any reason to have a crisis meeting. He knew that in the short term we weren't going to know anything, so he didn't call everybody into the office. He left everybody alone and said, "We'll deal with it in the morning."

Martin: Is it a situation where the press also has to trust you that you're not going to hold a press conference and beat them to the punch?

Lockhart: Yes. If the *Washington Post* calls you and says, "Heads up. We have a big story on this for tomorrow," and all of a sudden the *New York Times* has the story—and the only way they could have found out is from you—you don't get that courtesy anymore. There are no real rules here. It's customs that get changed a little. But there are times when, to generate attention to something, you give information to one paper so that they'll use it prominently. And the reverse courtesy is just letting other people know, "By the way, you're going to get a call at ten o'clock tonight. You're screwed for tomorrow, but you're going to get this call."

Martin: Have a nice day.

Lockhart: So you shouldn't be drunk, and you should know a lot about welfare reform. That's all I can say. [*laughter*]

Martin: Were there particular papers you had better relationships with, with which you would reciprocate information?

Lockhart: My relationships were very rarely based on the news hour. I had different relationships depending on who the people were. There were some people I trusted, there were some people I didn't. There was a small but growing—and it's grown expansively—conservative right-wing media I did not trust at all. I had some very good friends who worked in some of those places, but I didn't extend a lot of professional courtesy because I believed their mission was not even-handed journalism. But in all the other big papers, it just depended on the person.

There were times that if at the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* one reporter was on duty or covering a particular kind of story, they might get different treatment than another, just because of the personal— Everybody gets treated professionally, but with some people, if you've developed a level of trust, you can be more open. With some people, you can't. Some people are damn good reporters, and as long as you're careful, you can have a very good relationship with them. But you have to be careful. It's not like they lie, they're just not personally trustworthy.

Riley: Let's go back to the morning. You come in with one or two hours' sleep. Can you walk us through what happens that day?

Lockhart: Yes. It was not surprising that it was an unusual day at the White House. At this point, I'd been in the Clinton world for only a couple of years—not even a couple—so I was less traumatized. A lot of stuff happens in the White House. There are a lot of days that you come in, and you think this guy is falling, and you know what? You have too much to do. It's a vibrant place that's very hard to rattle.

Well, this day, the place was rattled. You could just tell that everybody was—saying "in a state of shock" would be overdoing it—in a state of high anxiety, because no one knew anything about this. It was very explosive, and nobody had heard from the President. As a group, we didn't know what he was going to say. We knew that the independent counsel would do almost anything to bring the President down, so there was some presumption that maybe this was bullshit. But there was also a sense that if there was something to it, we had big trouble on our hands.

I think I've said this before, so this will not be new, but the single illustrative moment for me on that day was that we—of course, given our luck—had three interviews scheduled: one with Jim Lehrer, one with Mara Liasson of NPR [National Public Radio], and one with Morton Kondracke, who was writing for somebody at that point.

So Mike and I and some others met the group of people on the senior staff who worried about these things, and we reached the decision to recommend to the President that he not cancel them, that that would show the one thing we didn't want to show, which is somehow they're able to modify his behavior.

Getting the President ready for an interview or for a press conference is generally something everybody on the White House staff and their cousins think they should be involved in. So in getting ready for one of these things, one of the biggest jobs I used to have was being the doorkeeper and telling ten staff people, "No, sorry," and people who were more senior to me, "Sorry, you can't come in." It's ridiculous. You get 20 people in the room, and no work gets done. That was always a problem.

Not this day. I remember going over to the Oval, and the President's executive assistant saying, "Just go on back." I walked in the room, and I was by myself. A couple minutes later, the President walked in and it was just the two of us. I was thinking, *Where is everybody?* I think McCurry came. I think Rahm came.

Riley: What kind of small talk is going on with the President at this point?

Lockhart: Oh, I'm telling you, I could accurately describe every inch of my shoes because my eyes were firmly planted on them. [*laughter*] It was pretty clear that without the White House counsel there, we weren't going to have a substantive conversation. And, in fact, he came in for a minute and left. It really wasn't that awkward because I do remember he emerged a while later. By that point it was just me and Mike, and I'd say Rahm and probably Chuck Ruff, the White House counsel.

Riley: Erskine?

Lockhart: I don't think so. The people who didn't have a stomach for this just didn't show. It was a kind of gut-check afternoon, and all the people who screamed at me about how important it was for them to be in this were nowhere to be found. I remember Chuck Ruff came in, and it was clear to me that he didn't know a whole lot. But he knew more than we did about what was going on.

Riley: Do you remember how you got that sense?

Lockhart: He talked to us. While we were waiting for the President to come back, we were saying, "Chuck, what do we say here? What's going on?" He said he wasn't clear on what the true story was, that he was certain it didn't involve anything illegal, but that it was his impression that there was something personally embarrassing to the President that he would have to face.

The President came in. He's someone who has handled enormous amounts of pressure, enormous numbers of political attacks, the responsibility of being in the White House. He was rattled. My guess at the time was that he just didn't know— You could see it running through his head: *What is this woman going to say about me? Now they're going to believe everything she says.* Whether any of it is true is immaterial to where we were at that moment.

But we went through the briefing, and it was very businesslike. We made the decision that we were not going to litigate this on television, and we were going to talk about the State of the

Union speech coming up. If you go back and look at the Jim Lehrer interview, Jim was tough, but after five minutes of getting no information he moved to other stuff. We were glad we did it.

The *News Hour* people wanted to send the interview back live to their bureau so the people there could watch it, and they had an arrangement with ABC that they'd use ABC's lines to send it back. Well, ABC—being the highly ethical organization they are—said, "Sure, you can use our lines," and they proceeded to put it on the air live. So everybody saw it!

I don't know how much they put on, but all of a sudden I walk out of the first interview—and we have an hour before the next one—and all these reporters start saying to me, "We think the President was playing games with the tense of what he was saying: 'There's nothing going on *now*.'" I said, "How do you know what he said? You weren't—" They said, "Oh, ABC put it up so we could all see it."

So we had to go back in and talk to him about the tense problem because they all thought he was playing games. You can pass a lot of judgment on him for that five days and what he said and didn't say, but I don't think he really was in a position to be that cute.

We got through the rest of the interviews. The President went back to whatever it was he was doing, and that was really the first time we had a chance to sit down and try to figure out what was going on.

Riley: Did anybody in that core group remember Lewinsky or know her?

Lockhart: I'm trying to remember, because there was just a weird set of people who did know her based on where people worked.

Riley: Where she was—

Lockhart: It's interesting. The person who eventually became my deputy when I got the press secretary job was Leon Panetta's assistant. It was her birthday party where this all started. She happened to have the wrong birthday and ended up spending five days in the grand jury.

Riley: Yes. I suppose part of my question was also, of course, there were reports—not just among people who had worked with Lewinsky—that there was a small group of people close to the President who had begun to be concerned that she was a clutch, and she—

Lockhart: My guess is that all those reports are accurate, and it was all before I got there. I guess there were a lot of people comparing tidbits over the next couple of days, things like, "Well, I know her from this," and people putting things together, none of this being a very positive way to go about doing business.

Riley: And the President was not talking to you or others in this group at all about this.

Lockhart: No.

Riley: With the counsel perhaps, but since Chuck Ruff is not here—

Lockhart: Right. Really, the only thing I remember him saying in the room was, "I don't know what this woman is saying about me. What worries me is I don't know what she's saying. She could be saying anything." We were in kind of an odd place where there were a lot of people who were determined to believe what they wanted to believe, and I think he gave those people enough to work with.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: And then there were people who were in the place of, "I don't really believe that, but we have to work through this," and they worked through it.

Riley: You're getting ready to go with the State of the Union address. I guess I'm trying to get as much of your recollection as I can of that first week. My guess is some of this stuff blurs—

Lockhart: Yes, it does blur. I think the story came out in the middle of the week, Tuesday or Wednesday. I'm not sure. I remember the weekend feeling critical. I would say Saturday was the day when it started moving toward the scenario of the President being forced to resign. CNN, in particular, was very aggressive on this, and I was particularly aggressive with them in countering what they were saying.

And it turns out, when push came to shove, I found out exactly where this came from. Someone had had a dinner party the night before where a bunch of old white guys—who didn't work in the administration, but who were wise men, had been in or out—knew Clinton. Some of them were close enough to the President that they might even have spoken to him. They had a theoretical discussion about "If he needs to resign, how does that work?" Blah, blah, blah. Then a couple of people started talking to reporters about it, and it was as though it were some official meeting, when it was someone's dinner party. It took a while to decipher all that.

The weekend felt like we were trying to keep the dam from bursting while trying to figure out what we were going to do. It was a difficult weekend, but I think we kept the dam from bursting. We woke up Monday morning and he was still President—which, if you watched the news Saturday morning, you weren't completely sure would be the case.

Riley: I don't want you to lose track of where you're going, but you said that you vigorously pushed back against CNN. Can you describe how you go about doing that? Do you call the reporter who pushed the story?

Lockhart: You generally call the reporter. In this case, I called the reporter, called some other people at CNN, and said in very colorful language that they didn't know what they were talking about and that they were making fools of themselves on television. And as I picked up on where this came from and put it together, it gave me a lot of ammunition to go back and say, "I know you're hearing it from this person, who heard it from that person who was at a dinner party last night, that the President wasn't at, nor were any of the people advising him. There are a lot of people who think they're advising him who aren't."

Now the interesting part about what we do next is that the President went off on his own and sought the counsel of some old friends, not his White House staff. So when he got up and talked on Monday, it was certainly news to me that that was now the strategy. There was not the normal sense we'd had in the White House, where there was a process we went through to develop a strategy, agree upon it, and then implement it. Everything was a little off.

Riley: This was Monday a week out.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: I'm a little lost at this point because I had forgotten that. Who was he talking with?

Lockhart: He spent the weekend with Linda Bloodworth [Thomason] and her husband.

Riley: Harry Thomason.

Lockhart: Harry Thomason. And I believe that James Carville was part of those conversations. I don't know who else. At this point, this situation was not being managed through the White House structure. The Chief of Staff was not calling meetings and bringing everyone in and saying, "Here's what we're going to do. Here's what we're going to say." It just wasn't happening.

Morrisroe: Was it a source of concern for you that these decision-making processes were taking place outside the White House?

Lockhart: It was a concern that there was very little information being developed. There didn't seem to be a coherent strategy to fight back. But it's not like I was going to march over to the residence and say, "Excuse me, point of process here, sir." There wasn't a lot of time to think.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: This was a tidal wave going over us. You talk about fires. Every 15 minutes there was a new one. Just trying to keep things together was the primary concern.

Riley: Right. You implied that there was a shift in emphasis or strategy by that Monday. You said he was saying things—

Lockhart: Well, certainly when the President went out and told the country that he "hadn't had sex with that woman," we all said, "Okay, that's our—"

Morrisroe: So that was him telling the world and the staff and all of you simultaneously.

Lockhart: That's when I found out. That's the first time the question had been directly answered for me.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: You're going to ask a whole bunch of people the same question, I'm sure. I'll be interested to see what their answer is. I believe that's the first time most people heard about it.

Riley: Did you believe what he was saying when he told you that?

Lockhart: Yes, I think I did actually, and I think that was probably pretty naïve. This will sound—I'm not sure what the right word is, because I do think that government service and what I was doing is important. But it was almost beside the point whether I believed him. My job wasn't to make a moral judgment about the President. I believed at that time that this was someone who was doing a lot of good for a lot of people, who was in the process of being thrown out of office in what amounted to a coup over personal behavior. To me it was okay if he did it or if he didn't do it.

Maltese: I'm trying to remember the timeline of "I did not have sexual relations—"

Lockhart: That's a Monday.

Maltese: So there was quite a long time between those three interviews he gave.

Lockhart: Oh, yes. And there was a whole weekend of weekend shows. The whole cycle worked its way through.

Maltese: Stephanopoulos, I think, said on television during that time that if it were true, Clinton should resign.

Lockhart: Yes. A lot of people did.

Maltese: Were you as angry at Stephanopoulos as you were at CNN? Were you calling up George?

Lockhart: Probably. George probably just didn't take my call. [*laughter*] He knew what I was going to say. This is a shift F7, right. You know, the really interesting academic question—and I don't have an answer to it, but I'll pose it. (I think I know the answer, and it goes against every grain of conventional wisdom as far as communications is concerned.)

Consider this possibility. What if he stood up and told the truth? I'm pretty convinced that within three weeks he wouldn't have been President. This was not complicated. There was only one group of people who, if they went soft, he was out, and that was Senate Democrats. If you had ten Senate Democrats standing up saying, "This guy has to go," he had to go. He may not have believed that, but before any evidence is heard you have an impeachable majority.

Riley: Right.

Lockhart: I don't know the answer to how much of this was calculated or how much wasn't. I just don't know, and I've never asked. This is a post-game analysis. At the time, I wasn't aware of any of this dynamic. I was just trying to do my job every day. But I do believe that if what he said, say, at the prayer breakfast a year later was said that day—even if it was said with that much sincerity and that much grief—he probably wouldn't have survived.

Maltese: That's supposedly what Dick Morris told him. At least that's one story—that he was in touch with Morris, that—

Lockhart: That's probably a story Dick has told.

Morrisroe: Did the speech change the mood in the White House at all among the staff?

Lockhart: Yes. I think it gave everybody something to hold on to. We thought, *Okay, fine. He says it's not true, it's not true. Let's get back to work*. There really was a sense that that was a turning point. People basically wanted to hear him address it, and there was no universal sense of judgment. Some people judged him much more harshly than others. Some people didn't care about his personal life. Some people were morally repelled by it. But from that point on, we knew we had a job to do, and it's still stunning to me on this day that nobody left. It says a lot about how much we knew about the other side and how ruthless they were and how hard we were going to fight against allowing them to get their way.

Riley: So at this point you become a member of the response team, or the reaction team.

Lockhart: Right.

Riley: Who was in the group?

Lockhart: Let's see. It was a bunch of lawyers. Chuck Ruff had three or four lawyers who were particularly adept at this kind of work. Some lawyers were brought in from the outside. There was just no rhyme or reason to it. The regulars in the group were Doug Sosnik, Paul Begala, and me. I'm sure there were more.

And then there were irregulars. Mike would stick his head in occasionally just to keep up to speed on some things, but generally he relied on me or Doug to keep him informed.

Riley: Are you in on all of the meetings, or is there a cluster of lawyers, a smaller group, that he's consulting with?

Lockhart: There's another dynamic going on at this point. We'd lost the privilege case that said if you're a White House lawyer you don't have the privilege of your private conversations. So I think our team did a good job of sharing information. The problem was there was a private legal team that had a whole other mission in life. That was the David Kendall team. I'm not one of the people who think badly of any of those people. They're all good lawyers, they're all good people, and I think they did their best to keep us informed. They just had a different mission.

Ours was to preserve the President's political standing. Theirs was to keep the President from going to jail. There were times when those two things didn't go together, but not nearly as often as everybody thought. There were constant stories about the battles between the lawyers and the political people. I was one of the political people, and the stories were way overblown. There were heated arguments over strategy and access to things, but it was not the kind of personally destructive thing that was written about so confidently in the paper. Most days we were on the same page, and the days we weren't, we worked it out.

Maltese: What sort of access did you have to Clinton during this period?

Lockhart: Same as always.

Maltese: And prior to Lewinsky, were you as deputy press secretary meeting quite often with the President?

Lockhart: I met with him before. I was generally part of the briefing teams for media stuff, and I was the deputy press secretary. But he knew me as the campaign press secretary, the political guy. And as a student of politics, he liked watching the rough and tumble of the campaign. I don't think I was viewed as standing in for Mike. I had my own standing but in a very narrow way. He didn't ask me questions about what we should do in Bosnia. He would talk to me about party stuff and political stuff because that's the box he had me in. That didn't change much.

We didn't do a lot of work with the President on this issue. We'd go in and get him ready on five subjects, and then it would come to this. It would be basically, "Here's what they're saying today, here's your non-answer." He was fine. He did not want to have this played out every night on the news with him as a talker. So it was just a matter of coming up with something new and different about saying nothing.

Maltese: And you're not playing Hearts or Oh, Hell! or whatever the game was during that period.

Lockhart: I would say that there wasn't really any of that during that first week, maybe ten days. I don't know exactly when it returned to semi-normal, but it wasn't long. So, yes, we were. This is not like we'd schedule "At six o'clock, let's all get together," because this was in down time, on a plane or on the helicopter. I'm certain the next time I got on the helicopter, he pulled out the cards. He didn't sit there morosely saying, "I can't believe what's happened to me." We just got on with it.

Riley: I don't have many recollections about the specifics of the timeline from there.

Lockhart: He sounds like a politician. [*laughter*]

Riley: So I don't know how to ask you any specific questions about the pieces that happened beyond that. Are there any notable—

Lockhart: I think there are, from both the arc of the story and my particular role in this. On a very significant night, I believe—and I'm not the only one who believes it—this shifted a little. There's always a lot going on at the White House. There was even more going on now, because we were doing our normal stuff, and we had all this other stuff going on.

I remember leaving, probably at about ten o'clock, just because I couldn't take any more. I knew I'd be getting calls all the way home, but I was at the physical exhaustion point of having to move to a new location. I turned the radio on. I very rarely listen to the news radio in the car. That was my ten minutes each way. But I did turn it on.

There was a report in the *Dallas Morning News* that talked about how one of the White House stewards had witnessed something between Clinton and Lewinsky and had told the grand jury about it. This was a pretty big development, and the *Dallas Morning News* had it, which struck me as odd. Not that the *Dallas Morning News* isn't a good newspaper. They have great reporters there, but the *Post* had been leading the charge. If somebody wanted to give out that piece of information, I would have thought it would be in the *Post.*

So on my way home, I got in touch with one of the lawyers, who got in touch with the lawyer for the steward, who said the guy hadn't even testified yet. Or he got asked a different question that he answered that to. It was completely wrong, and we could be confident that it was completely wrong. I remember getting that about the time I got home, and then starting to try to push the rock up the mountain of all this. I found a *Dallas Morning News* reporter whom I knew well at home, and I said, "Listen, you need to get to the office and fix this, because you guys are going to be sucking wind tomorrow, and we're going to be unmerciful to you if you don't fix this. It's not true, and I know it's not true."

She got my message, because she could tell I was confident they were wrong. So they swung into action. Then it was just everybody else—the AP. I remember talking to the *Nightline* producer during a commercial while they were on. They didn't say the story was wrong, but they gave the White House perspective on it while they were on the air.

This went on until, I don't know, 3:30, four o'clock in the morning, when finally I went to bed. It was one of those great things where the *Dallas Morning News* got spooked by the story, by us pushing back so hard, so they pulled it. But everybody in the world knew they had already reported it, so they ended up having to run a correction in the newspaper of a story that hadn't been in the newspaper. Everybody said, "Wow! That's never happened before." And they did correct it. Very late into the night they basically said, "Just kidding—just trying to see if you're all reading."

The next piece will tell you that I'm not sitting here saying I turned this thing around, because it's the next thing that really did—in some ways, at least for Democrats. I remember going to sleep for about an hour, but I had one more thing I had to do, which was get up the next morning. That was the day the First Lady was on the *Today Show*. I didn't brief her. I briefed her staff person, and basically she said, "Call me before I go on if anything's happened overnight."

So I picked up, and I said, "Well, a few things have happened." I explained the whole thing to her. And I think the combination of her full-throated defense of her husband on the *Today Show,* and this idea that not all the information coming out of the independent counsel's office could be trusted, caused a lot of reporters to take a breath. All of a sudden, they realized you can't just throw any shit out there that you hear on the street.

I think the *Dallas Morning News* was very embarrassed by this. And it turns out that their sourcing was awful. It was Joe diGenova talking to Victoria Toensing—and, in their defense, they never told the reporter that they knew this. They just said, "I heard this. You should check it out." And then it got all mixed up in another context. It was just a mess, and that felt a little like a combination of these things happening that everybody took a collective breath and said, "Maybe we shouldn't run him out of office this week. Maybe we should stop and figure out what we have here," and—everything's relative in life—things calmed down a little.

Then we got into a full-scale trench war with the independent counsel's office, which went on from that moment to the moment his report came out. Every two or three days he'd leak out some awful piece of information, and we'd kick the shit out of him for doing it.

On balance, in the public relations war, our guy came out better than he did. In the legal war, our lawyers—in addition to being angry at the way they acted—were constantly amazed at how they were giving their case away. It was a painful time for everyone, but from a real PR point of view, it ended up backfiring on them. When they finally came to the climactic moment and said, "Here it is," everybody had heard all of it. What they hadn't heard was our defense, and that's when we launched our real defense because that's when we knew, *Okay, this is the totality of what they're charging us with.*

It was one of the serious, substantive arguments we'd had with the lawyers over how to do this. For a week or two I had been, with others, trying to convince David Kendall that if he's going to have a report, we need a report. His stuff will be old, but we know we can detail real problems with their cases, and that will be new. David took the very logical and defensible view, "I don't want to argue a brief until I've seen the charges. I don't want to fight ghost charges."

Unfortunately for a bunch of lawyers and a few other people, he changed his mind at about six o'clock the night before the Starr Report was released. So there was a whole group of people who got no sleep. But if you look at the coverage of that day and the next, people were interested that there was this Starr Report, and going to page 283 and finding something salacious. (And there's an index for it.) But what they hadn't been exposed to, particularly the reporters, was our point-by-point rebuttal. And that further shifted the debate—never to our advantage but leveling it a little more.

And then I think—and I'm skipping way ahead here—the ultimate mistake the independent counsel made was releasing the videotape. That killed it for them. It was over at that moment. It's one of these things where we didn't know how people would react. I'd love to say we were really smart and we knew we'd baited him into this and we really wanted it. We did not want it. But we did do one thing that did, I think, help a little.

I don't know where these stories came from. They didn't come from us, but all the stories that came out two or three days before the videotape was going to be released that talked about the President's explosive temper and ranting and raving and all that were just some right-wing nut out there bloviating on. We made a conscious decision not to deny it. And if you don't deny it and you're not aggressive, they pretty much think it's true, and we knew that.

So for three days people were expecting this out-of-control, rabid, crazy man, and when they actually saw it, they basically made the judgment that the only crazy people were the ones asking the questions. The President was calm and respectful. A couple of times he pushed back where it was appropriate, but it was really, *Why are you making us watch this?* There were a lot of other moments where we had some jeopardy because this happened or that happened, but from the public's point of view, that's the moment it turned. I don't know that we knew whether we'd get impeached, but we had a pretty good sense we were not going to get removed.

Maltese: In the short run, the State of the Union must have been another turning point.

Lockhart: Sure. That's a big thing I forgot, and I'm glad you bring it up. To the extent that we tried to deal with this strategically, it became very clear how we needed to position this. You have the independent counsel over here. He's crazy. He's trying to kill the President. It's all about politics. But guess what? The President's a big guy, he can handle it. He is not going to be deterred from doing your business. The people's business is paramount here, and our strategy became just demonstrating that on a daily basis.

It turned out that the thing we were most worried about—having to give the State of the Union—became the biggest gift ever given to us. You talk about playing right to Bill Clinton's strength! It was very important. There were lots of little things that happened, and I put the *Dallas Morning News* story as a little thing. Hillary's defense and the State of the Union were not, for most Americans. It was basically, *He's still doing my business. I'm doing pretty well since this guy's been in. And if his wife says it's all right, what do I care?*

It didn't mean they weren't still interested in the details. A great thing to track—if someone ever wanted to go back to do this—is cable news viewership and amount of time devoted to the Lewinsky scandal. Because I think most normal people would think that it was a straight lineup, that people got more and more interested in this, and as it came to a constitutional climax in the United States Senate with the President being judged, it would reach its point. It went straight up until the report was released, and everybody knew every sexual thing that had happened. As soon as everybody knew all that and there was no more innuendo, it went down.

I remember having this conversation with MSNBC one day. The guy I talked to wasn't smart enough to know I was making fun of him. I just called. I don't even know who I got. Their whole thing was "White House in Crisis." That was their graphic for a year. How you stay in crisis for a year I don't know.

We had a press conference one day with the President of Nigeria. So here's the President, subjected to the press, answering questions from a free press that can ask anything they want. About two questions into it, they cut away to go to another story. So I just picked up the phone

and said to some guy, "This is Joe Lockhart, the White House press secretary. I assume this means the White House isn't in crisis anymore, because you've gone to the story about the dog stranded in the flood in that town in Pennsylvania."

The guy said, "Who are you?" I said, "This is who I am. I want some assurance from you that the White House isn't in crisis now." I didn't get anywhere. The White House stayed in crisis for another three months.

Martin: Can I ask a follow-up question on the *Dallas Morning News* incident? What could you have done in response if they had played the story falsely?

Lockhart: This goes against the grain of what you're supposed to do in these situations: at all costs keep bad things out of the newspaper if you're working for a politician or a corporation. This was good for us. It was good for us that they printed it, because it gave everyone else, I think, some pause and made them think, *You know what? The rules are here for a reason.*

The first ten days of this with reporters was like the Wild West. There were no rules, because everyone was afraid they were going to be the last one to figure out the President had just gone to the helicopter and gone home. I shouldn't blame it all on the *Dallas Morning News,* because there was one other incident I was involved in with the *Wall Street Journal,* where they had information about some other steward and printed a story. Their reporter called me at four o'clock and said, "Here's what I have. What can you do?"

I said, "How much time do I have?" He said, "You have two hours." I said, "Listen, I'm probably going to come back and say 'No comment,' but let me try." So I went through the lawyer. About 5:30, I got a call that it was not true. Now a lot of the times when I check these things, I find that either they won't tell me or it is true, and I say, "I can't help you with that."

So I called him back and said, "I'm glad you called. This is a bad one. I'm going to explain to you why you can't run this story," blah, blah, blah. He paused. I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "We just posted it on the Internet."

This is a guy I'd been dealing with for years, and I said, "Then why did you bother calling me?" He basically said that his bureau chief panicked, thinking that someone was going to beat them to the story, and without waiting for the response—and before the deadline they'd given the White House—they printed the story. I jumped up and down and screamed and yelled and was sitting there with a big smile on my face knowing this was good. Because I then told everyone I could think of. We went out as public as we could to say, "This is what the *Wall Street Journal* did. This is what the pressure of the Internet is doing to these journalists."

It was just self-righteous garbage, but it was part of sending the message that they were not getting the story right. There was certainly a story here. There was certainly stuff to get, but that didn't excuse getting stuff wrong. And if they *did* get stuff wrong, we were not going to sit around and say, "Oh, boy, they got that wrong, but there's other stuff out there so we really should sit back and just—"

No. Our defense was to be offensive, and I think the combination of those two things had some impact. Reporters can speak for themselves. Editors can speak for themselves. But I had a sense that that was a piece.

There were a lot of other things, and the State of the Union really is an important part of it. I can't believe I forgot that. That was the most powerful message: "You know what? I'm the President. There are 535 people in this room. None of them is the President. None of them is going to get me out of here." The President looked at the country and said, "You and I understand each other. We'll get through this other stuff, but this is what I'm focused on."

Riley: Was there ever any serious consideration given to addressing the scandal in the beginning stages?

Lockhart: No. None. It's not like the President hadn't said anything at all so the public was tuning in to say, "What is it?" The President said, "Here's what I'm going to say. Here's my response, and I'm not saying anything more about it."

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: So I don't think there was any expectation from the public. There certainly was among the press corps, because they all wanted the game out. I don't remember any discussion. At that point, still being the deputy, I wasn't as privy to the conversations as I might have been a year later, but I don't remember any.

Riley: At what point in this process do you stop and say to yourself, *I think it happened*?

Lockhart: I guess maybe two points. This is all happening January, February, March. In July, Mike, the President, and Erskine all started having serious discussions about Mike leaving and me taking over. It didn't give me any pause. It's not like I thought, *I don't want to take this job*, but I do remember reflecting a little. It was announced I got the job, and that afternoon I went on vacation for a week. I think I thought about it then. Plus there was a whole round of media coverage about the shift, and a lot of people were asking me that very question. I answered—probably not as fully responsive as I could have been, but appropriate given the situation.

But I wasn't fully aware of what had actually gone on until that weekend before he was deposed in August. Frankly, I think that's when a lot of people found out. Again, we were all operating under the assumption that something embarrassing had happened. Chuck's a pretty smart guy. I think he had a good sense of the situation, although I don't think he knew the details. But it was only when the private legal team decided it was time to float some stuff in the newspaper that we all knew what it was.

Morrisroe: Given that the credibility and reputation of a press secretary are largely dependent on access to information and telling the press the truth, were there any repercussions for you or your office's relationship with the press corps that you either did not know what happened or that you had provided them information that turned out to be false?

Lockhart: There were a couple of cases. In one case in particular, through misunderstanding, I think the *Washington Post* thought I misled them. I had a pretty good, deep relationship with them, and when, off the record, I walked them through exactly what happened—

It was a weird story. It was a Saturday. Generally Mike would work into the early afternoon on Saturday and would be out on Sunday because he was very involved in his church. I generally would work all day Saturday, and if he needed me on Sunday, I would do whatever he needed. This Saturday, for whatever reason—I had something in the morning—we decided to split the day. He said, "I'll do the morning, you come in the afternoon and relieve me when you can, and then I'm going to go. Try to take a couple of hours."

I came in and he was in the middle of a back-and-forth with the *Post* over the issue of whether the President's legal team had ever hired any private investigators to look into the lives of people who were making these accusations. He and I had a shorthand conversation about what the position was, and I just didn't understand him. I thought he was telling me the answer was no, when what he was telling me was, "They're not saying, but you should count on the answer being yes."

But I just didn't get that. So when the reporter called later in the day and said, "What do you know about this?" I said, "I know that it's not true, and you can count on that." But it turns out on Monday it *was* true. And the weird thing about it, the reason I then had to do something about it is some of the reporters started writing that the counsel's office had lied to the press office, which was not true at all. They had been very honest. They had told Mike, but in the game of telephone we were playing, I just didn't understand what he was telling me. Frankly, it wasn't that big a deal as far as these things go.

I think there was a dual dynamic. Mike was still the press secretary, and Mike had been very public about saying, "I'm not answering questions on this. This is a legal matter that I'm not qualified to talk about." I was as helpful as I could be behind the scenes. I was engaging on this but not standing up at the podium. So I think while the admonitions to me about how risky this was professionally were wise, it just didn't work out that way.

In fact, I think if I had spent the year sitting on the sidelines saying, "I'm not helping you with this," it might have posed just the biggest risk. It ended up not being an issue. I think my instinct at the time was right, which is, when you get into these situations, you don't pick and choose. It's like the athlete who decides he's going to go only half speed so he doesn't get hurt and then gets hurt. I was making some important point, and now I forget—but it was important.

Riley: It might come back to you in a minute.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: Mike did make a couple of comments here and there about this. At one point, he recalled somebody asking him if there was a simple explanation for what had happened. He said, "If there had been a simple explanation, we probably would have already heard it." I don't remember where that came in the sequence of things. Did that get him in the doghouse at the time?

Lockhart: No. As I said before, I thought it was stunning that no one left. I think the President had a full understanding of the situation he put his staff in and gave us a lot of running room. There was no such thing as something like that getting you in the doghouse, because I think he understood this was a problem he had created, in some ways. It got taken from him and made into something it shouldn't have been, but I don't remember anything during that time being a source of concern of, "Oh, what's the President going to say?" He understood that we had jobs to do, and there are some times you have to acknowledge the obvious.

Riley: Sure. After the grand jury testimony, a public statement was made. Were you involved?

Lockhart: I might have been vaguely involved with another draft, but again, this was a time where the group who worked with the President was not inclusive. Mike wasn't really involved either. He wandered over a couple of times to see what they were doing, but it really was people he trusted and who had been around him for a long time. It would be fair to say that the majority of his staff did not agree with his aggressive approach. But a lot of us weren't asked what we thought.

Maltese: I think I read that Ann Lewis was given the responsibility for answering questions about this at some point, and that it no longer came out of the press office. Is that correct?

Lockhart: Not on this issue. I think she picked up some pieces here and there, but I don't think at this point. I remember Ann having the point on some of the campaign finance stuff, particularly the White House sleepovers, but not necessarily on Lewinsky.

Riley: Were you at all involved in the damage control after the President made that statement?

Lockhart: I was involved in answering questions from reporters. It didn't really matter what the White House staff thought at that point. The conventional wisdom quickly formed that the President had made a mistake, and we were back into "Let's try to change the dynamic here."

Martin: You said the response from your office was to just get back into the regular job, and that seems to be what you tried to do. If the strategy was to try to derail the Presidency, from your vantage point, did you see certain aspects of the Presidency—offices within the White House—more derailed than others?

Lockhart: No. I'm not sure people believe me when I say this, but this started in January. It ended in the middle of the next February. People didn't have time to focus on this. I think people who worked in the Domestic Policy Council or the NSA [National Security Agency]—in the places where real work got done, as opposed to what I did—were frustrated, frustrated that great public policy ideas were not getting the attention they deserved.

Mike and I, much to the chagrin of the networks, played around with them a little bit at the beginning. From January 21 on, all of a sudden Mike's briefings were on all the networks. We just made the decision that if they wanted to take it live, we were going to put up a policy person.

The first day we had a guy who had been trying to explain something to me for a year and a half, and I couldn't get what he was talking about. So I figured he'd be perfect.

He was a guy from Gene Sperling's office. It's some strange thing with the tax law where if you do school bonds a certain way, you can leverage a dollar into five dollars. I've never figured out how you can do that and how it can be legal, and it's mind numbing. He did a 25-minute explanation of that on live television, and everyone in America thought, *This President's a smart guy*. We did it the next day with somebody else, and they finally figured out that they shouldn't come to it live until they saw McCurry up there sweating.

Riley: I don't think we got your story on the record about McCurry sweating. You might want to record that here now.

Lockhart: It's a half in jest question. If anybody ever asked me if there was anything I did better than McCurry, I said I didn't sweat as much as he did. Particularly during this time, the still photographers would sit and wait. Mike had a certain spot where it would come down the side of his face when there were too many people in the room and the lights had been on for too long. They would wait and wait and wait, and as soon as he reached to wipe the sweat, every camera in the room would go off. That's the picture they wanted. So that's my answer, too. I didn't sweat there.

Martin: There's a great pairing between that story and the fact that you could take advantage of news routines and place a policy person when you knew they were going to cover Mike McCurry's press briefings live. That's one of the questions political scientists have asked: how much political figures—in the White House in particular—and the press can figure out one another's routines and take advantage of them.

Lockhart: I did something, and I can send you to this. I did a post-election thing at Annenberg [School for Communication] after the Kerry campaign, and I think I offended a lot of people in the room. It was a bunch of political professionals, and I described reporters and campaign professionals as very skilled manipulators who know that they're manipulators and know they're being manipulated. It's a question on any given day of who's manipulating better. The answer is, everybody knows everything about the other side and their routine, and it's manipulate or be manipulated. You do what you need to do to get your message across.

If it's understanding how the news cycle works, so be it. If the example is putting out bad news on Friday afternoon, or stuff you'd rather most people didn't spend a lot of time during a workday looking at, it happens.

But it's a two-way street. Reporters have become highly sensitive and highly skilled in understanding how the political process works and taking advantage of it.

Martin: Did you ever try to change your routines so the press couldn't take advantage of them?

Lockhart: Let's just say we were very aware of how they did their business, and we tried to work in a way that maximized our chance of succeeding. That sounds like one of my old answers.

Riley: I'm going to ask you a specific question in this regard about something that happened in early '98. This is not for press consumption but for history. There was a lot of back and forth over whether the picture of the Clintons on the beach had been orchestrated—

Lockhart: I saw that article come in. Here's the absolute truth on it. It was not orchestrated, because it if had been I would have orchestrated it. I was on that trip. There was nobody else who would think of trying to arrange some sort of photo op. Here was my thinking on this: it was one of those things where, when I first saw the picture—all of a sudden it showed up someplace—I thought, *Oh God, I'm in trouble. As soon as they see it, they're going to call and start yelling at me. "How did this happen?" blah, blah, blah.*

You have to remember one thing here: the entire White House pool system, the protective coverage of the President, is a deal. The President doesn't want these people traveling around with him. He *really* doesn't want them, but the way you sell it to him is, "Okay, fine. If you let these people follow you around and protectively sit in somebody else's house, what you won't get is people hiding in the bushes and taking that."

So when something like this happens, his response is, "Well, screw these guys. If they want to sit in the bushes, at least we're not going to give them a ride *to* the bushes." He has a point there. So I thought, *Great, now I'm in trouble.* And then I looked at it for a little bit, and I thought, *It's not the worst thing in the world.*

But I knew that—even if my heart wasn't completely in it—I had to go crazy. I had to denounce the practice. I don't expect the press to believe me on this, but it was in their interest. Because if the President got to the point where he believed that people were going to be hiding in the bushes, there would be no protective. And I think there's a historical reason why the President should not be wandering around by himself without someone there to record it—if something good happens, if something bad happens, or even if something tragic happens. There is a reason we do it the way we do.

One of the reasons I went as crazy as I did was it wasn't just some random person who flew in to get that picture. It was someone in the White House pool who got out of the pool, got out of wherever he was supposed to be, wandered into the bushes, and took the picture. It was a little bit of message sending. The debate over it was ridiculous. It was absolutely the best example of a bunch of people who know nothing talking endlessly about something where they have no information. But that's Washington. The less you know, the more there is to say. It's the great rule in Washington that the person who knows the least speaks first.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: I know the two of them. Are they capable of coming up with some scheme like "Boy, this would really work"? Maybe. But they're not capable of pulling it off themselves. They

would have called me and said, "What if we could do a picture like this?" And then we would have had a discussion. It just never happened. But again, it's another one of those stories that's too good to check.

Riley: In the time remaining, I'd like to go back through '98. There are some other pieces of '98 that get swamped because of what happened.

Lockhart: There were Middle East peace talks and things like that. We balanced the budget.

Riley: Yes, and maybe return to the impeachment. This doesn't quite rise to that level, but you went with the Clintons on the trip to Africa, and that's historically important. I'd like to hear from you.

Lockhart: Well, it's funny, because there are basically two primary deputy press secretaries, and you split the foreign trips. They're planned well in advance, so you generally know. You do this at the beginning of the year. Every once in a while, one gets added. So Barry Toiv and I sat down at the beginning of the year and basically said, "How are we going to do this?" We flipped a coin over who got to pick first.

The two real trips that year were to China and to Africa. Everyone was talking about the China trip, but something inside me said, "You know what? I'll get to China someday. I'm not sure I'll ever be able to see this much of Africa." You talk about being lucky and making the right decision. It was by far the most interesting trip I took with him in five years. It was just amazing, seeing a continent you could never see that way unless the President of the United States invites you along for the ride.

It had huge symbolic value. A lot of important policy stuff happened along the way—just by virtue of the fact that the President was there. Then we had an unusual last day, with the judge throwing out the Paula Jones case. It's typical of the way things were: the more important something is, the less value it's given. The more salacious something is, the more value. It was an interesting 12 hours, because it does encapsulate for me a lot of what's wrong with the media and the White House. Everybody has their own blame.

We had a prescheduled interview with Sam Donaldson for *Prime Time Live*. There had been a school shooting in Arkansas, where half a dozen or a dozen kids were killed. It's crazy but it was during that time when there was a spate of these, and I can't distinguish among them. They were doing a special on it. We agreed to give Sam 30 minutes, and he could ask whatever he wanted. This was a legitimate big story. There wasn't much going on, so he asked him a little bit about the Africa trip.

As we're walking into the interview, I think it was Bruce Lindsey—who was on the trip—pulled us aside and said he'd just gotten a call from Bob Bennett, saying that the judge was throwing out the case. We walk into this interview with Sam Donaldson, the three of us knowing what's about to be announced, but we're sure not going to say anything. It was not our place to announce this to the world.

So Sam does the interview. It's a great interview. He runs downstairs, and the news breaks. Sam's a bit of a character, I love Sam. He takes the videocassette, and he starts going around to all the other reporters yelling, "Anyone want to buy an interview? Anyone want to buy an interview? I'll give it to you cheap. I have no use for this now." [*laughter*]

In the time I spent with him in the aftermath of this (and it was not a lot of time, because I had to go off and do some other things), the President was pretty restrained. This was not a guy jumping for joy. He was clearly relieved, and I think he felt vindicated. But it was not like he was euphoric. It's another example of somebody having a camera trained on him, and they had brought all these crafts up to the room, and he picked out some things to buy. He's sitting there playing the little bongo drum. You can't argue with that picture.

The last part of that night just leaves me speechless. McCurry and I had planned, on the last night of this trip, to go out to dinner with a bunch of reporters, but we got busy. We were dealing with all this stuff. We took care of it. We showed up at dinner. It's Bill Plante from CBS and three or four other people, and Maureen Dowd, who's out on this trip. She doesn't normally travel with us, but she's a prominent columnist. We show up at the table, and they've ordered some very nice champagne. They're drinking champagne, and they say to us, "Do you want a glass?" I think I said yes, and McCurry said no, or maybe we both said yes.

We sat and had dinner, and it was very nice. They were asking, "How do you feel?" and we said, "We're not working tonight, let's have dinner." We had a great dinner. Then she leads her column the next day with, "White House aides were seen drinking champagne in the aftermath of the news." I thought, *Well, it's true we were seen. We were seen by you. You ordered it. You ordered it before we got there!* That's the ethos now—"close enough."

Riley: You figure after the bass hits that lure several times, it would learn not to rise to the bait, wouldn't you?

Lockhart: Yes, well. It was just odd that we had this historic trip, and if you were just a normal American who reads the newspaper or listens to the radio, watches TV, it was completely obliterated by some crazy story out of Arkansas that never should have gotten so out of hand. The historical significance of that trip and our commitment to Africa is so much more important than anything that ever happened or didn't happen in Arkansas. But that's how it works.

Riley: You were on all aspects of the trip.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: You were traveling with the President all over.

Lockhart: I did everything, but when we did the safari, we separated into four different groups, and I went off with a bunch of members of Congress and did a different one.

Riley: All right. You were with him in—was it Ghana where you had this huge—?

Lockhart: Oh, yes. It was Ghana. You often hear about crowds of a million people and there really are 150,000. We walked into the square. First off, it's about half an hour in from the airport, and all the way it is ten people deep on both sides of the road, and it's 120 degrees in the shade. We come into this public square, and it's the largest group of people I've ever seen anywhere. That started the trip, and then that got repeated.

It was an unusual trip for the staff because in the first couple of countries we went to, Ghana—and I can't remember the second one because we ended up getting a hotel in Uganda. In the first couple of places, there weren't enough hotel rooms for everybody. It was very limited, and the White House has particular security arrangements. I'm not sure what the problem was, but we took this unique approach to the trip. Rather than stay in a hotel, we'd just fly every night, which for the President was not a big problem, because he has a nice bedroom with a shower. We were in day three of the trip before any of us saw a shower, and the White House staff is not what you'd call a group of rugged outdoorsmen. It was gross, and I think finally the President ordered us to stay someplace because he didn't want to come back to our part of the plane.

But it was amazing, and two or three of the most memorable moments of my entire White House time were on that trip in those 13 days. Walking into Ghana was amazing. We went to South Africa, and at this point the President and Nelson Mandela had a really special relationship. It's even grown more. It's amazing to watch the two of them together. They did their photo op, and then the President walked off to go to the next thing.

Man, there were three of us on the staff standing there, and Mandela just did one of these, and he walked us in and showed us the cell. You think, *Okay, where else does this happen?* Maybe you'd get to see it but to have him sitting and describing all of the stuff? We then went to—I can't remember what they call it in Senegal—it was the outpost where the slaves departed from. The contrast was so palpable between what this was and what this meant and what we spent most of our time arguing about. It seemed for a short time to be an oasis of sanity.

McCurry had had a really hard time during the campaign finance stuff on a trip to Brazil, where he basically invited the press to all go home—and he said he'd pay for the tickets. All they cared about was some latest thing. And we weren't even in Rio. We were in Brasilia, which is a dull place architecturally. But in Africa, the reporters just couldn't deny what they were seeing. They had to accept the significance of it.

It was weird that it was a good piece of news at the end. We got back on the plane. It was this wonderful trip, and we thought, *Why couldn't this have happened tomorrow?* Even though it was good, ultimately, it didn't end the case. It really was a reminder that we were going home and back into the cesspool.

Riley: Was this also the trip where the President went to Rwanda?

Lockhart: Yes. It's amazing the things you forget. That was amazing—we'd seen pictures of these things, and we could see the stadium only at a distance where much of the genocide was committed. But what I could see close up was him interacting with people. Rwanda is an issue

that he's conflicted on. It's not as simple as it's been portrayed in some popular accounts. He'll tell you that if he could change one thing, that's where he would start. It was fascinating.

Morrisroe: Do you have any recollection about President Clinton's reaction to his experiences there?

Lockhart: I've been on a lot of trips with him. He loves every place he goes, whether it's Peoria or Peru. He really does. There's just something that excites him about every place. I don't have anything to back this up, but I felt at the end of this trip that it changed him, and I think you see it to this day. His life's work now is not about resolving ethnic differences in Eastern Europe. If you look at what he's doing, it all goes back to Africa as the laboratory for fixing it. I think that was already there, but I think the trip put it together for him. It would be a good question to put to him. But I think I'm right.

Riley: There was a discussion at one point of having a formal address apologizing for slavery.

Lockhart: There was chatter. I don't remember the meeting, but I'm not going to say that this never came up in a meeting. There was a discussion, and to tell you the truth, I don't remember exactly how he handled it. But it seemed at the time to be just right. I think we knew he knew how to put this sort of thing in perspective and do it right. He didn't need us to trumpet, "Formal apology coming at two o'clock." From our point of view, we were worried about making sure that the expectations stayed under control. We knew he'd do fine, and he did.

Riley: Let us deal with one other subject today, and then we'll break. We've had a long day. You mentioned, obviously, moving into the post of press secretary. What preceded that? Did you reach a point where it was a foregone conclusion that it was going to be your job?

Lockhart: No, not really. I actually reached the point where I thought I couldn't wait any longer. There was no animosity at all toward Mike. Mike was the person who put me there. And I understood why he was staying. But I really was feeling that my opportunity was passing. You didn't have time to ruminate all afternoon about *Oh, what's going to happen to me?* But in that rare moment, I thought, *I'd really like this to happen*. I actually started thinking about what else I could do, and—like a lot of things—things just worked out.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: There was no formal process. I've told the story recently that there were two things, once I got the job, that should have given me pause. One was that as soon as I told McCurry I was going to do it, he started smiling and didn't stop for four weeks. The second—and much more interesting—is nobody else applied for it. [*laughter*]

Can you imagine a job that pays 125 grand, that's ten feet from the Oval Office, and no one else applied? No one else was interviewed. There was no announcement put up on the board. That gave me a little pause. The job was gratifying in so many ways, and the process was too, because it was very informal, and there really wasn't, as far as I know, a wide net cast. It was just an

assumption that when the President sat down and thought about it, he would say, "Of course," which I think is what he said. At least that's what I was told.

There may have been some process that no one told me about, and everybody else had nanny problems or something. But it was in the middle of some of the worst times, and it was not unfathomable that the President would make a decision that he needed someone new. Every President goes through the same process when he thinks about a press secretary—if he's hiring his first, he turns to his Chief of Staff and says, "Call Bill Moyers and see what he's doing." I don't know why. It's just something about the guy that everybody wants him. And if someone's leaving, they say, "Call Bill Moyers and see if he's interested in coming back." So I think we probably went through the Bill Moyers period, and thankfully he said no.

Actually, I don't even think that happened. But as I said, it was not unfathomable that he would want to make a statement with the new person as a fresh start, and hiring me made no statement. Hiring me made the statement that he wanted to keep going in the same direction. So I worried a little about that but not much. I figured it was either going to work out or it wasn't, and it was one of those jobs where it's good news, bad news. The good news is you got the job. The bad news is you got the job.

Riley: We've made a great deal of progress and I think we're well poised to get—

Lockhart: Get those last couple of years.

Morrisroe: Yes.

September 20, 2005

Riley: This is day two of the Joe Lockhart interview. Did anything occur to you last night, or were you recuperating?

Lockhart: No. I don't think so. I thought more about what's to come. I don't think there's anything looking back.

Riley: One preliminary question occurred to me yesterday just as a softball way of getting back into things. There were a couple of things going on in the popular culture that related to the President that I wondered whether you guys were paying any attention to. One was the publication of *Primary Colors* and subsequently the film. The other thing was *Wag the Dog,*

which comes back a little bit beyond where we're headed. Were you paying any attention to these things? Was there chatter inside the White House about who wrote this?

Lockhart: *Primary Colors* was published during the first term as a book, which is when it really got buzz. I wasn't there. I think this was '95, and I was part of the people wondering who it was. But not having been there, I had no idea who it was, and I didn't care.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: *Wag the Dog* was a bit of a nuisance, and we didn't know how much of a nuisance because we didn't know what was going to happen in December of 1998. But it really didn't take up much of our time. We did have occasional books thrown together by right-wing publishers that we'd have to pay attention to, by a series of people.

The only thing I'll tell you on *Primary Colors* is it reminds me of a story. On Mike McCurry's last trip, we were coming back from someplace. I can't remember where, but it was overseas so we had an overnight flight. Everybody crashed by about two A.M., but Mike was kind of wired and wanted to stay up. We went back to the cabin. Everyone was asleep around us, and we had been sampling the Air Force One wine for a couple of hours at this point.

There are phones all over, and you pick one up and tell someone, "I'm in the main cabin. Can you put this movie on?" I think it was Mike's idea. He decided as his last thing that he wanted to see *Primary Colors.* He looked at me and said, "What's the President going to do if he comes back and sees me? Is he going to fire me? This is my last trip." It's a decent movie, but there was something about the circumstances. We literally woke half the people up laughing, just because of the things that happen and where we were watching it. That was the only impact.

Riley: Any follow-up on that? I guess we can head back into the chronology then.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: We got through the Starr Report that comes out in September of '98, and maybe the thing for you to do is pick up the story there. The midterm elections are coming up, and there may have been something in the September/October frame that you'd like—

Lockhart: As we get a little bit further into the story, my knowledge becomes more first hand, but some of this stuff I was a step removed from because I was not the press secretary. This part is a good example. If you look at the whole Lewinsky matter, there were two points where the President was in real political jeopardy—a few more things happening or things turning a different way, and the result could have been different.

The first was in that first seven, eight days. The second was in about the seven days after his speech to the nation. He went off on vacation. All of a sudden, he didn't have any way to show that he was doing the people's business and to create an alternative storyline, and Democratic Senators started getting a little squishy. We got all sorts of reports about what was happening at

caucus meetings, with Senators getting up and saying, "Maybe we need to tell him it's time to go."

Riley: This is immediately after his public—

Lockhart: Yes. This is August 17 through, say, August 25. From his perspective, I think this may have been the moment of most strain, because he went off on vacation, didn't have his work to occupy him, and had some family issues to deal with very directly and painfully. So this was a critical moment and a moment of jeopardy. People can choose to believe what they want to believe. It did not have an impact on the decision to launch the military attacks because that all happened within a day or so. An opportunity presented itself. But in the *Wag the Dog* popular culture world, a lot of people didn't believe that and were very open about not believing it.

That was a reminder that—despite all the personal and political issues—there was still just one President. He still had to come to work and make these decisions. And it foreshadowed a series of these decisions that can best be described as saying, "There's something we need to do. No one's going to believe our motives for doing it, but wouldn't it be worse if we didn't do it because no one would believe our motives?" This would repeat itself several times in the next four or five months. So this was a very critical time, but I'm not the best firsthand source of it because, as I said yesterday, I did not go on the vacation.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: Mike and the person who probably has the best insight into this particular time is Doug Sosnik. I don't know if you've talked to him, but this is a time you should press him on because he really was the person talking to the President every day. It's where most of my information has come from, but it's better to come from him.

Riley: So you become press secretary in October.

Lockhart: Right. I think I started October 2, and almost simultaneous with my first briefing was the convening of the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment hearings, the same day within half an hour. So even for those who are not very subtle or who miss things, it was pretty clear what I'd be dealing with first.

Riley: And that's occupying all of your time or most of your time at this point.

Lockhart: Well, not necessarily. I had gone from being immersed in the Lewinsky scandal until I was given the job at the end of July. I came back from my vacation the beginning of August and I checked out—I went to national security school for six weeks. It was fascinating in some ways, and I'm sure there are people interested in foreign policy who would die for this opportunity to sit for three hours at a time with the experts in every field who are actually doing the work. It was mind numbing, but I had to do it.

Riley: Did you design a program for yourself?

Lockhart: No. They did it for me.

Riley: They being?

Lockhart: The NSC [National Security Council].

Riley: With Sandy Berger?

Lockhart: It was Sandy Berger's team, but I went and met with all the senior directors of the NSC, and we went region by region, country by country. There are two or three places in the world where your language is so important—the Middle East, China, Taiwan, Cyprus—that if your intonation is off by a degree, people might die. There might be riots in the street. So I had to pay special attention to that.

We had a bit of a problem because Mike went off on vacation, and we had the Kenya bombing. There was a big debate over whether I should step in or stay in my program. We left it to Mike as the boss to make the decision, and he said, "Let somebody else do it. Don't start before you're ready, and get ready."

Riley: The NSC has a press officer?

Lockhart: Yes. They have several. I don't know how this White House does it, but we generally had a press officer who was a political appointee, and then one or two people who came from somewhere else in the government. For a while we had a guy by the name of David Johnson, who is now the Ambassador to someplace important. I can't remember, but he came from the State Department.

The person I brought in was a guy by the name of P.J. [Philip J.] Crowley, who was a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force, who was loaned to us from the Pentagon, and was very useful to me. In that period we decided Lieutenant Colonel Crowley was going to be the briefer for a week. And he did an amazing job of handling the situation. I stayed in the background and went to school all day.

Riley: One of the things I had in my notes was a question about how you educate yourself on issues, especially foreign policy. So this leads right into it. Can you tell us more about the process, who was involved, and what you were putting yourself through?

Lockhart: Foreign policy was my focus. I spent a little time with the domestic people, but I had been working with them for years and was much more involved. A lot of this just had to do with Mike's strength, because his strength and personal interest was foreign policy. I left it alone. He didn't need my help on that. He needed my help paying attention to other things. I was a bit of a blank slate, and it really was like going to school. It was like doing an advanced four- to six-week seminar. It was fascinating, but it was hard to take all of it in because there was so much.

We'd go over to the Old Executive Office Building, and they were brutal. The NSC would get all their interns together, and we'd do these mock briefings, and it would generally take me about

five minutes to lose my cool in every one of them. They would say, "You're not going out until you can get through one of these without yelling at one of these 20-year-olds." [*laughter*] They knew *exactly* the way to phrase something to get me to fall into a trap. I'd sit and look out at this room filled with college students who knew more about foreign policy than I did, and it pissed me off.

I guess that was the most organized preparation. I also made the rounds of the Washington media elite. I went over and had tea with the editors of the *Washington Post* and met with the *New York Times* Washington bureau, just as a courtesy.

Riley: Are they taking you to school too?

Lockhart: Oh, no. There was tea involved, so it was all very pleasant. They waited until I walked out the door to kill me on something else. The only practice briefings I did were with the NSC people. I felt reasonably confident that I could handle the briefing process—until the moment I walked up there and then I lost my confidence. It was just a matter of trying to stay on top of so many things.

On the broader question of how you prepare, the press secretary has a briefing book every day. Everybody has his or her own thing. The only change I made from Mike's book—and I made it after the second day because I kept fumbling around—was having them alphabetize the different issues because I couldn't find anything. The trick to doing this is not to look like you're looking for something, because like everything in life, it's a confidence game. If they think you have to refer to something— It's looking at someone while you're looking down. But you have to find the page, so my contribution to the job of the press secretary and the book was coming up with putting them in alphabetical order so it would be easier for me.

They'd divide it up on foreign policy and domestic policy, and on any given day, you'd have background information for 30 or 40 different issues. You had suggested ways to talk about it. But if something's going on between Taiwan and China, it's not suggested language, it's "Use it or we'll shoot you" language. The best way I can describe it is as accumulated knowledge. Every day I'd read the whole briefing book, which meant that on many days I was reading the same briefing on an issue for the fifth or sixth time. So it wouldn't take me very long. And every day there'd be three or four new ones I'd really focus on. You learn all of this over time.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: It's not like you had an academic trajectory of hoping to get to knowledge by final-exam day. It was a rolling process. It was funny, because I had occasion to go back and look for a briefing recently. I was looking for a piece of information, and I started reading through some of these. I honestly read them and thought, *How did you know this? How did you know all this stuff?* It just finds a way. And like a lot of things, as things become less of an issue, they get purged from your brain. It's a constant process of study.

I really did learn a lot from Mike, but the most important thing was the preparation. He had a particular way of preparing. At about 10:30, 11:00 in the morning, about an hour, an hour and a

half before the briefing, he'd disappear. He had a place. A few people knew where the hiding spot was. I eventually figured it out. He'd sit quietly by himself and read.

Riley: In the Old Executive Office?

Lockhart: Yes. It was this little outdoor alcove over at the Old EOB, and he'd just sit by himself. That was the only way he could do it, because when you're in the office people are coming and going. I was better in the office because it actually helped me to have people coming and going so I could ask them things.

I left the job in October of 2000, and people have always said, "Why didn't you stay until the end?" There were a couple reasons for it, but the biggest reason was there was about a two- or three-week period that I could no longer do the preparation, and I was just lucky not to make a huge mistake. You have to have some skill in how it all works, but it's mostly whether you've done the reading and the thinking and the checking. You've gone around the building and you've read something, and it doesn't feel right. You go check with a couple of people, and you find out it's not right. That's how you keep from making a mistake.

Riley: Who's preparing the book for you?

Lockhart: I had one staffer who had the job. I know there were a couple of people, a young woman and a young man. Actually, there were three people during my time who had it. I'm not quite sure what else they did later in the day, but all morning that's all they did. Hopefully by 11:00, 11:30, I was presented with the book.

Deciding what went in it was a collaborative process. We'd go through our meetings in the morning, and by 9:30 I would have met the press after going to four or five meetings. Then I'd sit with my staff, and I would basically say, "I need briefing materials on these six issues. I know this is important today." Then they would call around to all the Cabinet agencies, to the different councils in the White House, and ask for things. The rest of the government would also say, "Listen, we know this is going on, and we want to get you something on it." It was just collating and pulling all the stuff together into one briefing book.

Maltese: Talk a little more about those morning routines. The gaggle would be about 9:00, 9:30?

Lockhart: Sure. I had a very predictable routine in the morning. I'd be in sometime between 6:30 and 7:00. When I got in, on my desk I had two documents that I'd read in the morning. One is the newspaper clips. To get in the White House you come in a side door, and as you come in, on your right there's the Situation Room. I'd go in there every morning and get my intelligence package. This is the thing you're never allowed to let out of your sight. I used to leave it on my desk all the time, and I got written up 50 times or so by the Secret Service.

So I would have those two things. I'd read the clips first, which should tell you what my orientation was. That was the biggest danger to me, not what some terrorist cell might be doing someplace in the world that I can't talk about anyway. I'd get through as much of the intelligence as I could. I'd generally get through about half of it, and I'd read the rest of it before the briefing.

Then we had a meeting at 7:30 every morning in the Chief of Staff's office, six or seven of us, which was basically the meeting that determined what was going to happen that day—whether we were going to change something, whether we were going to stick with the plan. It was the people responsible for running the White House and, therefore, the government.

Riley: And this is Erskine's bill at this point to get the stuff early.

Lockhart: Erskine and I overlapped for about a week.

Riley: Oh, is that all?

Lockhart: This was John's meeting. Erskine was less of a meeting person than John was. I think there was about a week of overlap.

Riley: Sure.

Maltese: And the six people were?

Lockhart: Let's see. At any given time the people change, but at the beginning it was Doug Sosnik, John Podesta, Gene Sperling, who had the economic portfolio, and Bruce Reed, who had the rest of the portfolio. It did not include the NSC, because they were separate. Both John and I did our business with the NSC separately, for whatever reason. It just worked out that way. Bob Rubin was a frequent attendee, then Larry Summers when Rubin left. I'm sure I'm forgetting someone significant, but this was a place where business was transacted quickly and without a lot of back-and-forth posturing.

From there we'd go to a 7:45 meeting of the senior staff—which was basically the 22 or 23 assistants to the President and a hodgepodge of other people—in the Roosevelt Room. That was a bigger meeting, a go-around-the room meeting. John would open it up. If there was something he wanted the staff to know he'd tell them, and then people would go around the room saying, "Here's what my department's doing today." Important, but more of a reporting.

I would come out of that, try to get a couple of things done, and then meet around 8:00, 8:15 with the NSC press staff. They would have come out of their own meetings, know what was going on in the world overnight, and come and brief me. We'd do a back-and-forth. Then at 8:30 there was a budget meeting, which I liked to spend as much time in as I could, only because domestic policy evolved completely through the budget process. We'd gotten to the point where they weren't doing individual appropriations bills anymore, so every piece of policy was tied up in the omnibus. This would start early in the year. These meetings were supposed to happen only during budget season, but they ended up happening every day of the year.

Then I would go back at nine o'clock or so to my office and meet quickly with my staff to make sure I was ready for the gaggle. We'd do the gaggle, which is the press coming into the press secretary's office. It's on the record, but it's very informal. It's a very useful session for all parties involved. I was supposed to tell them, "Here's what the President's doing." They could ask me questions about anything they wanted, but it generally included what the President was

doing that day. It was an exchange of information that allowed me to then go and make a determination with the other senior staff about whether our plan for the day still made sense.

There were days we'd want to talk about the Farm Bill, and I could tell from the gaggle that nobody was interested in it. More times than not, we'd just do what we were going to do, but there were some times it was important to adjust.

When I say "adjust," a perfect example would be if I were in the White House today—today being the day that Hurricane Rita is bearing down. No matter what the President was talking about, I'd probably make the recommendation that he open his speech with a couple of paragraphs on what the federal government's doing to ready the citizens of Florida and how quickly we'll be able to move in to help, just because that's what's going on.

The current White House is adept at so many things. This is one thing they've never quite figured out. They don't seem quite as nimble. They like to develop their long-range plan and stick with it, and I think they were hurt in the Katrina aftermath by the fact that it didn't fit anyplace. There was nobody who had the job of saying, "Hey, everybody else is talking about this and we're not." It's just an interesting point.

Maltese: So the plan for the day would be discussed at the Roosevelt Room meeting.

Lockhart: The plan for the day would be discussed at the 7:30 meeting—discussed as in worked out. The Roosevelt Room was more reporting on "Here's what we're doing today." That was not necessarily the place where if the Legislative Affairs Office disagreed, they'd raise their hand and say, "We disagree with that." They would have to find some other forum. They could say, "Listen, that may create a problem," but this was a large meeting, and it takes a while to get through 22 reports. It was not a very interactive meeting.

Maltese: You would communicate the line in another meeting.

Lockhart: Sure. When they came to me, I'd say, "Here's what we're doing today, and here's what we're saying about it," and maybe something about, "and here are some other issues the press might be interested in today."

Maltese: If things changed after the gaggle, you would just email or call?

Lockhart: If things were radically different. Some of this is just the geography. I tended to just walk around past the Oval and stick my head in—at first it was Rahm Emanuel's and then Doug Sosnik's office—and say, "Listen, I think we have to rethink this." And if they agreed, then we just walked down to the Chief of Staff's office. It was very informal.

One of the interesting things is information is at a premium in any organization, so people would always come to the morning meeting to find out what was going on because it helped them do their jobs. But it was surprising for me, after I started doing the briefing, to realize that the vast majority of the White House staff watched the briefing not to critique my style or to see what the press was interested in but to figure out what was going on in their own building. It was

impossible to communicate some of these things to the entire staff in a way that was timely, so when the briefing rolled around again, I was just a little surprised. I'd get emails from people, and it was clear they'd been watching—watching as a way to keep up. They were working on economic policy and would need to know the broader stuff that's going on.

Maltese: I guess that's the positive effect of televising it.

Lockhart: Sure. Oh, sure.

Maltese: Were there negatives? Would you have preferred not to have the briefings televised?

Lockhart: There were days I wished there weren't briefings. No. I could talk for hours on this, so I'll keep it to there are positives and negatives. The positives are it makes the White House more accountable, and it allows people who have an interest to watch in real time. The negative is it has changed the nature of the briefing. It's now more of a cat-and-mouse game than a place where you can exchange information. I think it just makes the press secretary's job harder, because it means the kind of informal exchange of information that's better done off camera now has to be done on a one-on-one basis, and it just takes more time.

Morrisroe: Given the role you describe of the briefing as an internal White House educator, did you have any problems or concerns with the information provided to you being essentially advocacy?

Lockhart: Sure. Absolutely. Yes.

Morrisroe: And how do you insure against that?

Lockhart: The easiest way to describe that is that there is a very large internal reporter aspect to the press secretary and the press secretary's office. I don't want to describe it as one person being this super reporter going around, and I don't remember many occasions of people actively trying to mislead. But different people in different parts of the government had a different agenda, and they were not shy about using the press secretary's office to promote that agenda.

One of the harder parts of the job was to take a step back and realize that even though the Department of Education tells you this is what the President's proposing, you need to go around and figure it out—like calling the OMB and saying, "Are we really spending this much money?" They'd laugh and say no, so you'd get to a place where you were actually portraying accurate information as opposed to wishful thinking information.

Riley: Let me follow up on that. I can't remember if it's in your biography or the way the job was described in one of the pieces in the briefing book. You're not just responsible for developing and selling the White House's message, but also for managing the press operations of the executive branch of the government. Tell us how you were coordinating what you were doing with the departments. My assumption is it must have been through the press officers in the various departments.

Lockhart: Yes. I had probably 30 people working directly for me and the management of that operation, and anyone who knows me and knows my lack of management skills will understand that this was done by others. I had a couple of people who filled the role, but for most of the time I was press secretary, there was a woman by the name of Jennifer Palmieri, whose job it was to manage the press office, the press operations. The nice thing about the White House is the Department of Education public affairs staff was probably five times the size of mine, but we had a little influence over there. When the White House called and said, "This is what we want you to concentrate on today," they generally would pay attention to it—not always. But there was some weight to the press secretary's office no matter who was calling from the office, because it presumably meant this is what the President wanted.

You could make the argument that at certain times thousands of people were an arm of the White House and, therefore, the White House press office. That was done in a fairly traditional way with conference calls and regular staying in touch. It was not without its occasional conflict. I had more than one, fewer than 10,000, arguments with agency public affairs officers. And if I wasn't satisfied with the conversation with the Cabinet Secretary—

Riley: Any of them famously difficult in this regard? Famously independent, we'll put it that way.

Lockhart: Some of the most colorful conversations I had were with Andrew Cuomo, followed very closely in second place by Barry McCaffrey. I liked both of them, and we ended up, at the end of every one of our colorful disputes, with our relationship being fine and actually getting better. They're very strong-willed people who were not comfortable with the idea that anyone—I think Bob Reich said at one point in the first term that he refused to take any more phone calls from people under 30. It was a bunch of 20-year-olds telling him what to do, and he was from Harvard, and he didn't have to listen. There was an element of chafing. I'm sure you've talked to enough of the Cabinet members to understand that dynamic of—

Riley: Oh, absolutely. It comes up with regard to the Congressional Affairs people.

Lockhart: Yes. Yes.

Riley: If you talk with them, they will tell you that there are certain departments or agencies that are famous freelancers, and my question was along the same lines—whether your experience of freelancing overlaps with some holier than—

Lockhart: Yes. There were certainly some very active freelancers, and then some who would never do anything unless they had it signed off at the White House. I'll give you a good example of how sometimes the White House just has to take something over because otherwise it won't work—and it's a little surprising, given all the different things we did in coordination.

I got a call. This was in '99, 2000 maybe. I don't remember. I got a call one night at three o'clock in the morning from the Situation Room, who had just heard from the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] that John F. Kennedy, Jr.'s plane was missing. Now, is that a national security crisis? No, but I know enough about the media to know what kind of media storm that

was going to create. The good news on this particular one is that it was a good three hours before the first reporter heard of it.

Riley: Who calls? Is it somebody out of the press office?

Lockhart: No. It's someone in the Situation Room. They have a hard job. They sit there all night, and they have to make judgments about who to call and when. And this was obviously the right judgment.

Riley: They're picking this up from press accounts?

Lockhart: No. They're picking this up from the FAA. How the FAA found out, I don't know. I guess there was a scheduled landing time that was missed.

Riley: Right, but I'm trying to track whether the FAA routinely reports to this Situation Room, or if they just go to someone else.

Lockhart: I think given what they knew about this, someone at the FAA said, "I'm calling someone at the White House. Otherwise, I won't have a job tomorrow." But I don't really know that. This was one where we actually had an advantage, because we had a couple of hours to get ready. I think the first conference call was at five o'clock in the morning, and by an hour later, my team was in place at the White House. I remember it was a Friday night to Saturday morning, and I knew that this was going to be a huge deal. We were so ready.

There's a guy at NBC who has very good contacts with the FAA, so he'd been reporting this for an hour and a half on MSNBC, but at that point they were fairly new, so they didn't have a huge audience. Other journalists were not even picking it up yet. We had built this structure to get ready to deal with the deluge. At 8:30 in the morning, I was tired of waiting. I told somebody to get John King on the phone so I could tell him about it. That started the day. This was the time before Fox ascendancy, when every newsroom had CNN on.

Riley: Right.

Lockhart: Basically, we got every part of the government that had anything to do with this, *anything* to do with this, on an hourly conference call. It was at the top of the hour, every hour, and we exchanged information. We imposed an ironclad rule that only one person in the government would be talking about this, and that was [Rear] Admiral [Richard] Larrabee of the Coast Guard. He was on the call. I talked to him once an hour, and in order to try to keep real information out there, he would make himself available every couple of hours, and he did.

Every once in a while someone would have someone from some part of the government, and they would be shut down immediately. I was supposed to go down to my house in Virginia that day, and I thought, *Well, that's out for the weekend*. But it ended up working so well that at two o'clock in the afternoon, I looked around and said, "You guys have this covered. I'm going." And I went. I monitored it from down there for the rest of the weekend, and because we had a little time, because the structure was built properly, it worked.

There were very difficult moments in that story as the week went on, and the thing that we put together worked from the beginning until the end of the story. There are lots of examples of things that didn't work, but that was one that I think recognizes how coordination can work and reinforces the point about how indispensable the executive, the White House, is as far as coordinating. It just doesn't make sense to say, "Okay, FEMA's [Federal Emergency Management Agency] in charge of this, and they'll coordinate the other agencies." Agencies don't take direction from other agencies. They do from the White House—kicking and screaming sometimes.

Maltese: Just a couple more things about the transition to press secretary. Did it hurt or help that you'd been deputy?

Lockhart: A little of both. I think it helped me because I wasn't starting from scratch and I knew a lot of stuff just from being around. It hurt a little in the sense that I wasn't in that box yet for them. They didn't have the attitude of "Oh, he's the press secretary, I have to treat him this way." So it took a little while to get people out of looking at me as the number two. I didn't have the honeymoon that somebody might have had who'd come in from the outside.

Maltese: Did it hurt being perceived as the bad cop?

Lockhart: It might have. I'm not sure. It certainly was the perception, and it was accurate. I would often have the TV on in the background, and when something came on that was wrong or offensive to me, I'd just pick up the phone and call whoever it was and get in their face. And that's just the way you transact business. It was nothing personal. It wasn't ugly or anything. It was, "Where'd you get that information? That's not true," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And I remember I'd been in the press secretary office for about a week, and one of the things is—I think I mentioned it yesterday—you're sitting in a room by yourself all of a sudden as opposed to this big room with thousands of people coming and going—or what seemed like thousands. It was probably four or five who were allowed. And I saw something that was wrong, and I called the reporter. He pushed back a little bit, I pushed back hard. I don't even remember the specifics, and it's not important. But I remember the news organization then gathering a bunch of information and formally coming back to me.

I realized that there's a big difference between when you're the deputy press secretary calling to complain and when you're the press secretary. When you're the press secretary, they think the White House—and by extension the President—is complaining about something. I had to make myself stop doing that. In fact, what I started to do was just wander downstairs and find a bad cop, saying, "We need to push back on this, but I can't do it."

Maltese: Who was your bad cop?

Lockhart: My deputy, Jake Seward, and he was a much more pleasant bad cop than I was.

Riley: Now everybody talked about your sense of humor in the appointment period.

Lockhart: Occasionally.

Maltese: And did you consciously change the structure of the office at all? There are some charts in the briefing materials that look like there was a fairly major change in the organization of the press office when you took over.

Lockhart: There certainly was a major change in the personnel of the press office. It was my attitude that, with the changing of the press secretary, it was probably a pretty good idea to revitalize the staff. There were a lot of people who wanted to leave anyway. They had hung on because of loyalty to Mike. I really had no one I had to push out, but I did see it as an opportunity to breathe some new life into the office.

That office had been through so much over the previous six years—but particularly in the last year and a half—and had dealt so much in the day-to-day scandal stuff that in some ways the press office had lost its proactive strategic role in the White House. And my first goal was to revitalize it.

I did that through paying attention to a part of the White House—and some of this, it even sounds coming out of my mouth like it's a criticism of Mike, and it's not. Most of this is that there was so much going on, and during his time, he had a series of colleagues who were very good strategic communication thinkers—first with George there and then Rahm and a group of other people. A lot of people were leaving at around the time that Erskine left. Rahm left, and a series of other people left, and there was a strategic void as far as how we deal with the press and how we use the President from a communications point of view.

One of my original goals was that the press office would fill that void because I thought it was the right thing to do and it was appropriate. So we made some moves. Bringing Jake over from Gene Sperling's operation was a big piece of that, because he was well respected both in the press and within the building. I think people were surprised that I filled my deputy press secretary for operations with Jennifer Palmieri, because she'd never worked in any press office. She had worked in the scheduling office and in the Chief of Staff's office, which is exactly why I wanted her. I knew how to do my things, but I wasn't as adept at how the building worked as I could have been, and she knew everything about how the building worked and could get anything done at any time. I had the sense—both with people and with the office in and of itself—that I wanted to have more influence. I wanted to stick our nose into more places than we were at the time.

Maltese: It looks like media affairs used to be a separate shop and became part of the press office under you.

Lockhart: Well, no. Media affairs got separated at one point, and I don't know when it came back in. As far as I was concerned, it was always part of the press office. I think it was just managed differently. I remember this now. Media affairs was taken out of the press secretary's job and put under someone else at the beginning when there was the George, Dee Dee, Jeff Eller arrangement. By the time I got there, that had been put right, but I thought that was one area in

particular that we could revitalize, and we made some changes. We brought some new people in, and I think it worked fairly well.

Morrisroe: The National Security Council has press officers, and you mentioned before that at least with respect to the '96 campaign finance issue, the White House counsel's office had someone. Can you talk about those arrangements and whether they were part of your office and simply staffed out to those other offices?

Lockhart: No. This thing evolved during the Clinton administration where each of the heads of some council decided they needed their own press officer. It actually worked well during my time. They did not work for me. Several people at the NSC didn't work for me. The White House counsel's office did not work for me.

Riley: Did you have any clearance in those appointments or did they just make them?

Lockhart: It was a collaborative process. Very rarely was there disagreement. Occasionally. Gene Sperling's National Economic Council had a press officer, and they all worked for their council. But they very rarely did things without coordinating with us. It just made no sense for them. And when I talk about the meetings of my staff, they would come to that. They were always there and involved because they very much wanted to know the broader picture themselves and how their principals work and initiatives fit into that.

Riley: Did you have any notable mishaps in your daily briefs?

Lockhart: I think probably the biggest substantive one—as opposed to personally embarrassing—a whole other story, which we won't get to—is instructive of how mistakes are made.

We were doing an announcement one day on the federal role in the Human Genome Project—really big stuff that I had no idea what they were talking about. I knew we were doing it, but I hadn't read my material yet. I walked out of my office at about 7:25 to go to my first meeting, and standing there was a really nice guy named Peter Maer from CBS Radio. Peter said, "I hear you're doing something on the Human Genome Project today." And I said, "Yes, we're doing something with Tony Blair about the government's role in patenting these things, but ask me about it at the gaggle."

Well, I guess someone had told him that the government was going to restrict the patents on the sequencing—on the actual sequence—to take all the profit out of it for the companies that were involved in it, and he took my answer as confirming that. So I go off to my meetings blissfully ignorant of what is going on. And by the time I get back, CBS is on the air with this report saying we're doing this. But we're not, and one of the financial wire people told me that the first indication for the market opening was I was going to take $10 billion of market cap off the biotech index because of what I'd said. So that was the first mistake.

The second mistake was spending 15 minutes trying to figure out the human genome process with just two little pieces of paper and thinking, *Okay, I've got it now*. That was a big one. It

takes more than 15 minutes. So I brought the gaggle in, and they all wanted to say, "What about this?" And I said, "No, no, no, that's not true."

I guess my explanation of it not being true was even more confusing, because the market opened and went down even further. I finally realized I had just completely messed this up. I called the President's science advisor, who got two Nobel Prize winners on the phone. We put them on the phone with the reporters, and in my briefing I just said, "Don't ask me about this. I'm not smart enough to answer these questions."

They sorted it out, and I thought at the end of the day that I had fixed it. There were some stories. The *Wall Street Journal* did a little story about how I had messed it up and blah, blah, blah. (I didn't talk to that reporter again for a year.) Anyway, I thought everything worked its way out. I figured markets go up, markets go down.

About five years later, I show up for a paid speech. It's some venture capital group. I don't talk about finance, so I didn't ask for many details about who they were. I don't talk about venture capital, I talk about politics. So I'm going to talk to them about politics.

I sit down at the table about 20 minutes before the speech is supposed to start, and I'm just making small talk with the people. I said, "What kind of venture capital?" and they said, "Oh, we're in biotech." I said, "Oh, I once messed up something like that." And they all looked at me like I was— And I said, "But that's all right."

Then they explained to me that it's *never* come back. And there were four people at the table who had between them lost personally $10 or $15 million. Then they said, "Come on up and speak." That was fun. I scrapped my prepared speech and talked about how sorry I was.

Riley: It must make you feel good that you'll probably never make another $10 million error.

Lockhart: I don't know about that. I don't want to sell myself short here. But I think you're right.

Martin: You mentioned earlier that sometimes the White House might shift what you were planning to do based on the early morning gaggle. Could you give us some examples or types of things that would make the White House shift what they were planning to do?

Lockhart: Sure. The easiest is the example I used: if there's some sort of natural disaster. If we knew something was going to be top of mind for the American public, we always thought it was useful to have the President address it. For those who think that's an artificial response, it's not. The federal government is always moving to solve these problems, but the public doesn't see that and they want to know what's happening. Then it's the President's job to say, "Yes, we recognize it's a problem, and here are the ten things we're doing."

Some of it is what I'd call political substance. We'd want to talk about the Patients' Bill of Rights, but overnight there'd be some rumblings of a budget deal on the Hill, and it would seem crazy to be talking about oranges when everyone else was talking about apples.

You had to impose a certain discipline on yourself here. You didn't want to just throw out your strategic plan for the month every morning. I had some interesting back-and-forth with the Chief of Staff occasionally on this. It was his job to make sure we stuck to our plan. I would push him: "Let's be agile enough to take advantage of this opportunity" or "We have this problem coming down."

Ultimately, it's the President's decision, but it was the Chief of Staff's decision to take it to the President. Most of the time we came to an agreement. Some of the time we couldn't agree, and in those cases, sometimes I was right, sometimes he was right. There was no rhyme or reason to it. Sometimes there'd be a legal development. It was a three-ring circus on the legal front, and very rarely would we make a decision in the morning based on some newspaper story we were going to have the President talk about, but occasionally.

That's the micro. I have a good example of the next level up: anticipating a story that's about to become big—feeling that, and trying to position yourself so you look like you're on top of it. I remember some time in 1999. It could have been a little later, a little earlier. There was a storyline developing about computer security and worms. It's just not the kind of thing the President was sitting fussing about on a daily basis. He was not computer literate, and this just wasn't an issue that had risen to him yet. But it was something the government was working pretty hard on at various levels because it was a very serious problem.

I remember one morning sitting in a meeting, and it just hit me that we had to get out ahead of this. There were five or six of us, and I said, "We have to have a computer summit. We have to have a bunch of CEOs come in, and the hacker with the ponytail, and they have to sit around the table with the President. We just have to do this!" Everybody nodded and resisted for five minutes, and then finally said, "Yes, okay, we have to do this." Two days later, we did it.

This sticks in my head because when I left the White House and went to work for a technology company, it was amazing how many people came up to me and said things like, "We were so impressed when you guys put together that huge conference on computer security, and the President was on top of it. It just reassured us out here."

I didn't have the heart to say that I literally said in a meeting, "We need a guy with a ponytail," because don't all hackers have ponytails? And we got him. We got a guy with a ponytail, and he was the big hit. He went out and talked to the press and was on cable TV for three days. But the bottom line for my purposes was I knew the government was doing a lot, but sometimes you have to add the imprint of the President as a message to the public that we get the problem and here's what we're trying to do to fix it.

Riley: I'm going to steer us back to the chronology if I can. We were headed toward a constitutional crisis.

Lockhart: We were.

Riley: All of this other information we certainly need, but I don't want to get so far away from the chronology that we don't get the story. There was a lot of discussion during the impeachment proceedings about the possibility of developing an alternative strategy of censure.

Lockhart: Right. Let me do one thing here, because I'll forget this, and it really is important. People tend to want to put impeachment in a silo like there was nothing else going on. And there was a lot going on.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: I remember this because I had been on the job for about ten days, and we went up to Wye River and had the Middle East peace talks with [Benjamin] Netanyahu and [Yasser] Arafat. That was extraordinarily instructive for me in both how difficult that problem was and how difficult it was for the President to manage multiple fronts. This was a time when we went to a place and closeted ourselves. We'd go early in the morning and stay until late at night. We worked very hard to get an agreement—and eventually got an agreement.

The most interesting part about that—well, there were two things. One is, that's when I really learned how to speak at great length and say nothing, which served me very well at the Camp David talks. I'd go out three times a day and talk for an hour. No one could precisely pin down anything I said. But the very interesting part of that was the last day. There were lots of great moments in there.

Netanyahu had brought Ariel Sharon for political reasons, and Sharon—he's not quite as big a guy today as he was then, but he was a big guy. He used to come and—as a way of showing disrespect for the Palestinians—he would sit in the middle of the room where they were talking and go to sleep and snore. He'd just sit. They were in this big room, and he'd just sit down and go to sleep. He wouldn't talk to the Palestinians, and he made a point of doing that. King Hussein [bin Talal] of Jordan came in and gave a very emotional speech. He really moved the talks along, although he died soon after that.

But the most interesting part was the morning. They reached an agreement at about 6:30 in the morning, and everybody was very pleased. I knew that the next part of the news cycle was starting at 7:00 with the morning show, so I went to Sandy Berger and Dennis Ross and said, "Can we announce this?" They said, "Announce it," so I went and told the press.

Again, this is all in a big open room probably three times the size of this. I saw a lot of frowns on people's faces and a lot of people huddling, talking, and I could tell something was up. I went over and grabbed Sandy, and I said, "What's going on?" He said, "Well, the Israelis are reneging because they want Jonathan Pollard."

I looked at him, and he looked at me, and he said, "Thank goodness we haven't told anyone there was an agreement." I said, "Sandy, I just told everyone," and he said, "Why'd you do that?" I said, "Because you told me to," and that logic was undeniable to him, seeing as half the room had heard him tell me to go tell everyone.

The next 12 hours or so constituted one of the most amazing games of political chicken I've ever seen, and there were a lot of players involved. The Israelis were reaching out to different parts of the government. At one point, someone got in touch with the Vice President, who started freelancing himself a little bit, and there was beginning to be momentum around giving them what they wanted. I remember thinking—not from a foreign policy point of view, but from a press point of view—we'd get killed if we did it.

It felt for a couple of hours like it was me screaming, "We can't do this!" and George Tenet saying, "If you do it I'll quit." Then sanity came back in as everyone thought it through. I think the President just decided, "Okay. Let's let Netanyahu sweat for a while." Eight hours later, he came back and said, "Okay, just kidding. Let's go sign this agreement."

That was a piece of what was going on.

Riley: This is a case where—because your sensors are out in the press community—you're able to communicate to the political White House—

Lockhart: It's sensors, and it's also just a political sense that was maybe somewhat unencumbered by the facts and a little more sensitive than some of the foreign policy team. I knew it would play into the worst perception of Bill Clinton that he would abandon principle to get something he wanted. It was my sense that we absolutely couldn't do it—again, unencumbered by the facts. I didn't even know who Pollard was. I knew he was some sort of spy.

Riley: Sure. But it's a fascinating question, because the backdrop of this, of course, is the perception that the President may be trying to strike a deal to save his neck politically, right? We got to this story because I posed the question to you about impeachment.

Lockhart: No. I don't think it's true. In fact, I know it's not true, having sat for hundreds of hours in these peace talks—that the Middle East was somehow a piece of his personal political legacy as opposed to a place in the world where he desperately thought his skills could bring about an agreement. It's definitely the latter, but there was certainly a political perception that it was the former, and that was a big part of what was screaming in my radar that we couldn't do this.

In this time period we also reached a balanced budget agreement that turned out to be a surplus, but who cares about that? That doesn't matter. I think the way to get out of the silo is to look at the next two months on three tracks. One is a completely political track—the midterm elections—which most people thought should have sent the message to the Republicans to stop impeachment.

The second is impeachment, and the third is what was going on with Iraq. All of these things were happening at the same time. The midterms went away, so it became a dual track, and every decision we made on either track affected the other and was very much a part of trying to figure out how we talked about things on a daily basis.

Riley: Do you want to follow through on those tracks?

Lockhart: Sure.

Riley: I'm not sure how best to do this.

Lockhart: I'll tell the story in my own way, and you can poke at it.

Riley: Good.

Lockhart: The midterm elections happened, and I think almost everybody in the White House woke up the next morning thinking, *Well, impeachment's going to go away.* I will give one person credit for not knowing that. But the President's Chief of Staff, John Podesta, was in exactly the other place. John is a contrarian, so I'm never quite sure how much of it was "I'm just going to stake out this position," but he was adamant: "We're still getting impeached. They are not going to stop. I don't know if they have the votes, but they're not going to stop."

And of course he was right. They threw Gingrich over and decided, "We're still going to do this." And there was a very intense political process to try to turn some moderate Republicans, which was very unsuccessful. Separately, we were moving through Saddam Hussein's intractability on inspections toward some military conflict with Iraq. There was a constant low-level chatter of "wag the dog" and "Is he going to pull another Tomahawk attack to get out of some political crisis?"

I think the best way to describe the dynamic is to get very specific and talk about a couple of days, because there was about a 36-hour period two weeks or so before impeachment and then the impeachment day. We were in Israel. We'd gone over for bilateral talks with Netanyahu, and then we were going to Gaza, which—absent the rest of the drama in the world—was an unbelievably historic event—the President of the United States going to the Palestinian National Congress in Gaza, and touring Gaza as no other world leader had. But other stuff was going on.

I remember we were in the King David Hotel, and it was morning. I'm not sure what Doug Sosnik's job title was, but he was basically the smartest political guy in the White House, and he had gotten a call, I think from Congressman Jack Quinn. It might have been someone else, but it was some Congressman we knew who was a key Republican holdout, and if the Republicans broke his legs, a bunch of them would fall. He had gotten the news very early in the morning that Quinn had put the word out. And if it's not Jack Quinn, I'll correct this. I'll go back and find it, because it's important and I don't want to malign him. He shouldn't be maligned, but I do think it was him.

So we had to go in and tell the President, and this was just one of those moments that are hard to describe accurately—Doug having to tell him, "You're going to be impeached." But, as comes with the job, he couldn't sit around worrying about it. We were going to Gaza, and then we were going home.

Riley: Were you around when the news came to him?

Lockhart: I walked in. I think he had already told him when I walked in.

Riley: Was the President angry at this point?

Lockhart: I've seen a lot of different Presidential reactions. This was more like someone did something that took the wind out of him. Not angry, just resigned.

Riley: Right.

Lockhart: I don't remember. The President's temper was generally inversely proportional to how important something was. The thing he used to lose his temper over the most was not being able to find his glasses. Those blow-ups would be of epic proportions. On important things, he tended to be somewhat stoic, and I believe that was one of those moments. But I don't know that I was in the room for the whole thing.

Anyway, we go to Gaza. It's exactly what Bill Clinton wanted to be President for, to be involved in that kind of moment.

Riley: Right.

Lockhart: Then we go back and we get on the plane.

Riley: Can I interrupt and ask one other question? Was there any self-pity involved at this point? "Damn it, here I am doing this. I wish I could enjoy the moment."

Lockhart: No, I don't think so. There certainly were moments of self-pity, but it's my sense—and I may be just convincing myself of this—that at the really important moments, he was much clearer in thinking and not—he was definitely in the moment in Gaza. As he was giving his speech, I don't think he was thinking about Jack Quinn.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: On the flight back there were two very important but separate things going on. In the front of the plane, the President had his national security team—some of them with him in the room, some of them via some sort of very high-tech secure conference call. There was a very detailed discussion about what was going on in Iraq, and the President was being asked to make his decision on whether to launch an attack. I don't believe he made the decision in that call, but it was very clear, from the parts of it I heard, that he was being given option A, option A, and option A. Or you could take option B and do nothing—and that's not a very good option.

Back in the middle cabin, where some of the political aides were, our prediction of the dams breaking once Jack Quinn went was absolutely right. The phone would ring every five minutes with some other Congressman who'd come out and said he was going to vote for impeachment. We knew there were probably 15 or 20 members waiting to see.

I do remember at one point the meeting up front took a little break for some reason, and I was wandering back and forth. On Air Force One, as you come down the aisle, they have some couches backed to the wall so you're sitting looking into the middle of the plane.

Sandy Berger was sitting there with a forlorn look on his face, and I walked by and said, "Sandy, what's wrong?" And he said, "This is just really hard. This is a really hard thing." I looked at him and said, "Sandy, you think things are tough up here, you should see what's going on back there," and he laughed once I explained it. We got every bit of confirmation we needed that we were going to be impeached, and we got every bit of confirmation on one flight, on one plane, that we were going to war.

I remember Sandy coming out at another point—this conversation started with Sandy and me. I think someone else may have come and joined us, but I don't remember who it was. Sandy basically very plaintively said, "What do we do?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "If we do this, no one will believe why we're doing it, and if we don't do this we're abdicating."

I said, "Then, Sandy, this is a very easy decision. Which position would you rather defend in history—that we didn't do something because we'd get criticized for it or doing something and being criticized?" And he kind of shrugged. He knew it. It's not like he was looking for advice. He was just venting a little.

We landed at the typical 3:00 A.M. at Andrews. I got off the plane, and I remember walking out and thinking I knew three things. One was we were getting impeached. Two, we were going to war, and it was my job to convince the country that the first thing had nothing to do with the second thing. That became the challenge. We had these two things going on almost parallel—but intersecting—tracks, moving toward each other. I guess I had some hope that they intersected at the right time. But my hope was not fulfilled, because they intersected at exactly the same time.

Riley: Did you have conversations with the President directly about this dilemma to get his sense of how best to operate?

Lockhart: Only in the sense of something similar to that conversation with Sandy—more me than him. At this point he was not in a talkative mood about how these things related to each other. I think he thought that just saying it in front of anyone was dangerous.

Riley: Was there polling done on these things?

Lockhart: I'm sure there was, but I don't remember looking at any of it. At this point I just don't remember having a lot of time beyond looking at the top line—what's our job approval? And as long as that didn't collapse, I didn't have time for the rest of it.

Riley: But not anything operationally about foreign policy.

Lockhart: Oh, no, no, no. This is easily checkable, and I'll leave it to you to find out. But I just don't remember any of it. I don't want to say that there wasn't, because it's so checkable. But I don't remember during this period ever having any discussion or hearing of any decision that

wasn't based on principle and instinct rather than any data. Very rarely did any of the polling get out of the domestic area.

Martin: You spoke earlier yesterday about sometimes using the polling not to make decisions, but for guidance about how to communicate these things.

Lockhart: Right, and I don't remember during this two- or three-month period having a conversation with the President's pollster. This was separate.

Riley: That would still have been Mark Penn?

Lockhart: Yes. I'm sure the President would talk to him occasionally, because the President was always trying to check in with different people about how we were doing and all of that. But I don't remember him or his data having a place at that point.

Riley: I had asked earlier about the censure. Was there an active White House effort to poll this?

Lockhart: Absolutely. But I don't remember exactly. At first we were pushing back on censure and then we realized that impeachment was inevitable, and from a political point of view, we altered our strategy to try to find a solution that came short of the President being impeached. At this point we believed we could defeat impeachment in the Senate—the President would be acquitted—but it didn't take advanced political brain surgery credentials to know that just the impeachment itself was a big problem for the President. Frankly, I wasn't very involved in that. That was more the counsel's office, the Chief of Staff's office, and the Congressional Affairs office. I was just doing my dance on "They can do whatever they want, but the President's sticking to his job."

Riley: We've gotten the lead-up to the question of military action. Is there anything you can tell us about how you make the announcement that this is happening?

Lockhart: Yes. We almost launched the action—again, I want to say a week before. It might have been two—it's all fuzzy now. It was one of those weird days at the White House. The President gave the go-ahead on a Friday night to launch the strike. There were very few people who knew about this, so Friday night through Saturday morning was just kind of odd, walking around with all of your colleagues knowing that there are B52s in the air about to start a military action, and you're talking about whether the coffee is good.

The first bombs were supposed to drop at around ten o'clock in the morning or something, and at about 9:15 I got a frantic call from the NSC saying, "Get down to Sandy Berger's office." Literally they were 45 minutes from dropping the first bombs, and Saddam had gone on TV and basically said, "I'll let the inspectors back in." So there was a 15-minute period of having to decide whether to turn them around, and the decision was made.

Sandy gathered his group of people—and I was not a decision-maker, I was just there to watch the decision being made—and they came up with a recommendation to the President, the President signed off on it, and they turned everything around. I don't remember whether we told

everybody about that. I think we did, because press pools were positioned at all the places where planes would take off. They were also told they weren't allowed to report, but when people see 25 B52s taking off, they don't think they're out on exercises.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: We were clear that we were ready to do it, and we turned the planes around. The following week had a surreal quality since we'd been through this exercise—and, again, I don't know whether it was exactly a week, but it might have been, because it was another Saturday. I remember we interrupted college football, which bothered some people.

I made this up that afternoon as we were doing it, because it just seemed ridiculous to do it another way, and it's actually the way this White House has just adopted. You obviously don't want to give them any warning that it's coming, so you don't say anything beforehand. But when CNN has live pictures of bombs dropping in Baghdad, you don't want the White House line to be, "We're not commenting on whether we're at war." You want enough time to go by that you have some initial assessment of how it went before the President speaks to the country about it.

So I worked out the system where, three minutes before we thought CNN would have their first picture (because we knew exactly where these planes were), I went down to the briefing room and said, "We've launched this attack," blah, blah, blah. "I'm not taking any questions. The President will be down in a couple of hours." So we weren't in the awkward position of bombs dropping but the White House saying, "No comment."

That was a Saturday, I remember. And either the next Saturday or the Saturday after that it stopped. This was December 19, impeachment day. And that was a pretty interesting day on a bunch of fronts. It was weird. I'm well practiced at telling this story. I tell it a lot because people always want to know what that day was like. So there will probably be some things in it that are irrelevant but amusing.

It's hard for people to understand that this started as a relatively normal day at the White House. It was Saturday, so everybody was in. Everybody was always in on Saturdays. I know the President was getting impeached that day and it was a historically significant event, but two weeks before that we had stopped worrying about the House and started working the Senate. The Senate hadn't at all figured out what they were going to do. They were talking about how they were going to do it. There were very preliminary skirmishes going on because we had stopped worrying about the House. People were going about their business, very aware of the elephant sitting in the middle of the room, but not paying much attention to it.

Morning goes by. In the 24 hours before impeachment, there's an increasingly loud rumor mill developing on the Hill about this politician being outed, that politician being outed, and a lot of stuff is happening that we don't know about within the Republican caucus. We're hearing now that the stories are more about a particular person. There are stories about Bob Livingston, and this and that.

But at the White House we hear that stuff all the time. Once a week I'd get a story about some black baby the President had apparently fathered somewhere along the line—and from a serious reporter. I'd say, "Go try someplace else."

Riley: I saw that movie.

Lockhart: Yes, exactly. So I'm not sure any of us took that much notice of it. Others may have. I was pretty focused on trying to get through the day. So obviously we were a little surprised when Bob Livingston got up on the floor of the House and resigned. We were all separate. We didn't gather to watch this. We were all in our offices doing our jobs. The President was over in the residence doing something. He wasn't watching.

But I had it on in my office, and I remember hearing him say it. I had someone sitting on the couch, and I said, "Did I just hear that right? Did he just resign?" It took all of about ten seconds—and this rarely happened in the White House—for full-scale total panic, for this reason. It was at that very moment that I put their entire strategy together. I should have put it together before. I just wasn't thinking enough about it.

Three or four days before this, the Republicans had shifted their political strategy. The place to go and find it most directly is an op-ed by Tom DeLay in the *Washington Post*, I think, that made some great argument. Then the morning of the impeachment, E.J. Dionne had a column that basically laid out their strategy. I read it but discounted it a little bit.

They were implying a classic bait and switch. For months, they'd argued that what the House was doing was no big deal. It was like a grand jury preparing an indictment. You can indict a ham sandwich, blah, blah, whatever the cliché is. The real work where the President would have due process is in the Senate. So don't worry so much about what we're doing here. We're just going through the motions. It's no big deal.

Two or three days before the actual impeachment vote, it very subtly began to shift, and it was full throated by Friday night, Saturday morning: any President who's impeached is so embarrassing to the nation that he should resign. I had started to pick that up on Friday and started pushing back. I was aware of it in some part of my mind, but I viewed it as something they were doing tactically as opposed to their total strategy.

Saturday we found out it was their total strategy. DeLay looked at Livingston and thought, *Okay, this can actually work for us. Get underneath the bus. We're going to run over you. And this is going to help us get the President.* Again, it didn't take a great thinker to put together that if someone commits some personal, private act that's distasteful or immoral, and he's the leader of the Republicans and he should resign, then the Democrat should do the same.

We quickly gathered. I ran over to the Oval. The President had heard and was on his way over. We were waiting for somebody, and I remember making small talk. I remember asking the President what he thought—not what we were going to say. "What do you think? What do you make of all this?" He's a good person to ask that question.

It's funny, because he just started to talk, and we weren't even all there yet. The meeting was just people milling around. I remember after his second sentence, I reached over and grabbed one of his little note cards, because I wanted to start writing it down. He was saying exactly what should have been said. He may have thought this through already, but in my mind, this was a genuine moment from the President, and that's how I was going to position it. So I just wrote down on this little card what he said.

Then everyone got there, and I said, "I have what I need here. This is what I think we should do." And everybody said, "Go do it." I walked right out, I mean literally. I went by my office and said, "Tell everyone to be at the stakeout in two minutes, because I'm going to convey the President's reaction to Livingston's resignation."

This is all part of the record. What he said was that things had gone too far, that this cycle of the politics of personal destruction had spun out of control, and that Livingston was a good man who had made a mistake, and he should reconsider and stay. That cut the legs out of their argument. The President was saying, "No, no, no. Not only am I not going to resign, I don't want him to resign either. I want him to stay. I want to work with him on the country's business and get things done."

I said earlier that there were moments of political jeopardy, but I left that one out because I figured I'd tell this in chronological order. That was ten minutes of pretty heavy jeopardy for the President. And it was in my mind that it was going to take the pundit community about half an hour to put all this together and start the full-throated cry, and I was desperate to get out in front of that.

Riley: Yes.

Lockhart: Even if I went out and was using hand signals and had nothing to say, it seemed that if that was allowed to marinate in the political stew, it was awful for us. The President's original instincts actually turned that story away from him and to, "Well, if this is how the Republicans want to do it, they can do it that way."

One of the really interesting parts about that day was the next place I went. There was a meeting in the Roosevelt Room that I was a little late for because I had been dealing with the Livingston thing. Most of the domestic policy advisors to the President were meeting about the State of the Union speech. This was roughly a month before the State of the Union, but because of the way it gets written, and because of the way the OMB has to vet all new initiatives, they pretty much have to decide about a month in advance what the new ones are going to be. You know, "There are six things the President will do, and tonight I tell you we're going to wipe out poverty in 20 years, and here's how we're going to do it."

This was a very useful and important meeting for me, because my job in the State of the Union process, as well as others, was to take these new initiatives and tease them out over this month so that by the time we got to the State of the Union, the public would know most of what the President was going to say, and it has built support. It has created an environment that looks like

the President has these ideas, and they get a lot of press. People think he has a chance to get these things through.

You always hold back a bit so there's a little drama that night, but I describe it as my meeting where I get to go to the candy store and decide, "Ooh, I get this candy for this week, I get that for next week." It's the one time in the struggle for control of the news business that the White House has all the advantages. Once they give the speech, Congress regains some of the advantages, but in that period where you're one day telling this newspaper about this new program, and another day—

And I remember just sitting in that meeting and actually having the thought, *This is the only reason why we're still here, because this meeting is going on. Most of the people in this building are not worried about the nonsense that I worry about all day long and are actually delivering on the promise.*

As I remember it, that warm feeling that enveloped me didn't stay very long, because one of my deputies came in and grabbed me and said, "You're needed at the NSC." I remember walking out and saying something along the lines of, "If one more thing happens today, my head's going to explode." And she turned to me and said, "Then don't go into this meeting." She had been told what was going on.

I went in, and there was a group of people from the NSC with a very simple message. They'd had a meeting that morning of the Joint Chiefs, and all the people involved in this were about to recommend to the President to terminate the military action because they had achieved their objective. They hit all the targets.

The meeting in itself was a little comical, because I was a little incredulous. I just decided I was going to express my opinion. I said, "You're telling me that we launched this thing a week ago, and I got up there with a straight face and said it has nothing to do with impeachment. We're going to get impeached today, and I have to put the President out to declare victory—and we're going to do this with a straight face?"

They were very straight about it. I said, "Listen, this is serious stuff. This is the recommendation of the Pentagon, blah, blah, blah, and we're not going to put people in harm's way." Ramadan was coming up, and there were all these reasons why it was the right—

I proceeded to go through this process of, "Well, let's look at the targets. Can't we hit a couple of them again? Can't we just extend this into tomorrow?" They decided I wasn't a very serious person, and I should be put in the corner.

I walked out of the room, and it was very much the bookend of getting off Air Force One knowing that these things just can't get out of each other's way. But literally—except for the political people who have to think through some of them—they had nothing to do with each other. There were only two or three people in the White House—and I guess the President—who were aware of what was going on in the other silo. It was just a few of us who used to walk back and forth, me because I had to, others because—

You take someone like the President's Chief of Staff, who's a remarkable combination of foreign policy instincts and domestic policy expertise that had grown over time, and one of the best political minds in Washington. He knew everything. But by and large, everybody was just doing their little thing and not paying attention to the other. They literally couldn't get out of the way. Because part of my job was to be operational, I just started thinking, *Okay, this is what the rest of this day looks like.*

The sidebar is we had decided the day before that our message on impeachment was that it was a totally partisan act, not a constitutional act. This is not a statesman-like act. It's a partisan political act by a bunch of right-wing partisan hacks. We made the decision that we were going to bring down the Democratic members of Congress to make that point. We were quite aware of the risk that we were making it look like a rally, and we knew that we'd take some heat for it. But it was the right thing to do.

Riley: Whose idea do you think this was?

Lockhart: Oh, I know whose idea it was, and I will defend the idea. I remember sitting in a meeting, and the idea was developing in my head that maybe we should bring the Democrats down. The person sitting next to me, who was Ann Lewis, said it. But she was right. I'm not sure that she ever got dimed on that, but there was a lot of, "That was a dumb thing to do."

It was a smart thing to do. Sometimes in politics your short-term needs are so pressing that you have to put your long-term needs aside for a minute. I wasn't silly or naïve enough to think that this wouldn't be misinterpreted, but I knew that the public needed to see that Congress didn't act against the President, Republicans in Congress did. That short-term need was so pressing that we had to do it.

I had two more events that day, the Democratic pep rally and the Commander-in-Chief declaring victory in war. Sometimes you're constrained by the equipment you have, and I remember getting into a discussion about how there was really only one nice-looking Presidential podium. The question was how to get it from the South Lawn into the Roosevelt Room in a way that didn't look like this was the portable Presidency.

We had that discussion, and my conversation with Sandy Berger came to mind: when you can't explain something, you just do the right thing and hope that over time people will understand why you did it. So we did. We went, and he did what looked like a little pep rally. And as I've said to many people, it's memorable because the Vice President got up and said he was the best President in the history of the United States—and then spent two and a half years trying to disprove that theory. For what it was designed to do, it was executed as well as it could have been. I know all the criticism about it, and if I was in charge of the White House—which I wasn't—if I had to do it all over again, I would.

It did lead to one of the more bizarre events of all time though. The White House social office has protocol for everything: foreign head of state coming in, head of mission coming in. You

have a different kind of event depending on what it is, and it's all written down someplace. It's not just made up.

Well, they didn't have protocol for the day the President's getting impeached, and we invited the Democrats down for tea and cookies in the East Room. It was just the most bizarre thing, because it's a room that fits 600 people or so, and you have 110 members. So it looks like it's a sparsely attended party—like nobody wanted to come. But we had all the Democratic members who were in town. It's not like we had guys who were saying, "I'm not coming." They all bought into this and came down, but nobody knew what to do.

A number of members of Congress were staring at their shoes, and there's a guy, Congressman Bill Pascrell from Paterson, New Jersey. I know Paterson because I grew up near there, but I'd never met Bill Pascrell. I vaguely knew who he was because I had seen him on TV once. I walk in the room, and he's 20 feet away from me. He marches over, and I'm thinking, "Oh, he's going to yell at me." But he just starts hugging me, and I'm saying, "Congressman, what are you doing?" These are 150 highly trained political people, and none of them knew what to do. Finally the President came in, and Congressman [Richard] Gephardt gave a very emotional speech to his caucus with the President. The President was very good, and they all marched out.

Riley: The cameras are not on inside.

Lockhart: No. There were a lot of other things going on that day. If you look at Hillary's career, that was a pretty important day because they had a caucus meeting that morning, the day of impeachment, and the decision was made for Hillary to go out from the White House. Not the Chief of Staff, not the Vice President, not the head of Congressional—Hillary went up and gave the speech, and she won some hearts and minds that morning.

So we go out and do the thing. It is what it is. It was not criticized right away. It took a couple of days. A lot of Democratic Senators were offended by it. Then we basically parked the President in the Oval Office for 20 minutes, got rid of all the Democratic members of Congress, brought over all the generals, and went into the Roosevelt Room. On one level, it was so surreal that we could flip so quickly, but on another level it was an accurate reflection of what had been going on in the White House for the last three months.

That's where I came down. The press wants accuracy, they want to know what's going on. They're getting it today. Now, of course, that's not really what they wanted. I think we got off pretty easy on that. There wasn't much, "What are these guys doing?"

There are two postscripts to this that are personally amusing. I pretty much held it together all day, but it was very busy, a lot of pressure on everyone in the White House. That day I felt a lot of personal pressure to perform, not make any mistakes, and make the right decisions. I got a call from someone on my staff saying so-and-so at some station wants to know why Steven Tyler from the band Aerosmith is in the Oval Office. I said, "You have to be kidding me! Well, have we checked?" They said, "Well, yes, we did check, and he's up there right now and he's wearing leopard-skin pants or something." [*laughter*]

I'm thinking he's in there with the President. So I just started totally losing it saying, "Who's in charge around here? Do we have to always make this—" It turns out the President had been gone for two hours. Tyler was in town for a concert, and someone had arranged for a tour. He was just being given a tour of the Oval Office. It really was no big deal, but of all the things going on to set me off, that's the one that did.

The last thing I remember—and this is very memorable, as I think I've said through the day—The President had an extraordinarily capable guy working for him, counselor Doug Sosnik, who has one of the best political minds I've ever come across. He was a good friend to me at the White House at the time and he's a good friend now.

I finally finished, and when I got back to my office, having done all this stuff, he was sitting in the chair across from my desk. There's a little bar in the White House press, and he had opened two beers and said, "Sit down, relax." I sat down with a fairly exhausted look on my face, and he looked over at me, and I'll never forget what he said. You have to know Doug to understand the full meaning of this, but he leaned back and looked at me and said, "Except for getting impeached, we had a pretty good day."

That pretty much sums up the whole experience for me. And he was right. We did everything we could to manage a really bad situation, and we did nothing to undermine our position as far as the President and the Senate. We did nothing to open us up to what would have been the real and valid criticism that the President's personal problems were affecting his ability to run the country. That was the constant test for us: if we allow self-pity or preoccupation or personal preservation to take precedence over what he was supposed to be doing, then we knew we'd lost. And by that measure we did fine.

Riley: So you go through the holidays.

Lockhart: There were holidays that year? I don't remember those.

Riley: Maybe they canceled Christmas that year.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: And then you have the Senate to deal with.

Lockhart: Right.

Riley: Anything in particular that you want to talk about with respect to that?

Lockhart: I think by this point a lot of people involved in this had the same attitude, which was fatigue. I think the country had fatigue, but we more than anybody. We pretty much knew that we had the votes, but who wants to lose and say we didn't work hard enough at it? But it was a real struggle at this point to keep our head in that game.

Riley: Sure.

Lockhart: This had gone on for so long and had taken up so much. I felt during that time that there was a little bit of going through the motions on my part as far as criticizing the Senate for doing this and doing that. And [Thomas] Daschle had his own strategy for trying to maneuver this, and it was sometimes at odds with us. Sometimes it was at odds with us publicly, and privately we weren't really at odds. But we couldn't be making one argument for six months and then all of a sudden say, "Oh, just kidding. Now Daschle thinks we should do this." There were a lot of games being played, but my memory is people were tired of it.

Riley: And there was never any serious possibility that the Senate was going to do anything by this stage. Maybe earlier—

Lockhart: I think that having survived the three scares in 1998, no, there was no serious—Although the United States Senate is a funny place, and we never lost sight of that. It's a place in Washington where you still have a lot of independent-minded people, and we were very aware that a brushfire could quickly become a forest fire.

And we shouldn't forget that there were several efforts to reopen the case with the House committee—the secret evidence room where they were taking people and showing them things, and the Juanita Broderick story that was personally very distasteful, I think, for all involved. So it's not like things calmed down. I do think we and everyone involved lost a little passion for this.

Riley: Yes.

Lockhart: It just seemed like a slow march to the middle of February to get this thing settled.

Riley: Were there any specific instances where you had dealings with members of the Senate either because of something you said in a briefing where they got their hackles up or—

Lockhart: Oh, I had one moment with Trent Lott standing outside the Oval. He's a very thin-skinned guy. He's one of the few people who, if you say something bad about him, actually takes it personally and doesn't understand that it's part of the back and forth. I was standing with my back up against the wall, so he didn't push me into the wall, but he was giving me the finger in the chest about how I have to stop lying about them.

I was saying, "Well, you know, Senator, I'm just trying to tell the truth as I see it." He finally wandered off, and two of his Republican colleagues walked over to me and said, "Don't listen to him." [*laughter*] No, we had really, really healthy communications with the Democratic leaders, so when I went out and pushed them a little, I think they understood it was part of the defense strategy and it was not meant to try to undermine their authority. We couldn't have undermined their—they had it, we didn't.

Riley: Anything worth talking about with regard to the actual proceedings? Any specific questions?

Lockhart: The defense strategy shifted. This was always a political matter, but it became a legal/political matter, and the legal team making the arguments took complete ascendancy at one point. We got an idea and recruited Dale Bumpers to go down and give a speech, which I think was very successful. This lawyer was doing this issue, that lawyer was doing that issue. There were all these great stories coming back from the proceedings of what kind of candy Strom Thurmond had given Cheryl Mills that morning, which was the most bizarre thing, the flirting that went on between those two—or it was one way. But every morning, he'd come out with a different kind of candy and give it to her.

Riley: And given what we've learned about Strom later—

Lockhart: Yes. So that was slightly amusing. There was a little bit of drama around Chuck Ruff's presentation, because he didn't share it with anyone.

Riley: Oh, really?

Lockhart: I don't think he shared it with the President, but I know that Bruce and Cheryl were gently trying to push, asking, "What are you going to say?" I went up a couple of times and said, "Chuck, what are you going to say?" And he replied, "Watch it on TV. It will be good." And it was. I had seen the other presentations in advance. I knew what they were arguing, but Chuck was an independent guy, and it was very important to him not only that he do this on his own, but also that it be known that he did it on his own. It was to the President's advantage that it was not a personal ego thing.

Riley: Any particular disappointments among the voters? Somebody you lost who you—

Lockhart: Not really. We knew this was going to be party line. It went as expected.

Riley: Okay.

Lockhart: Here's one thing that John Podesta and I had a pretty healthy disagreement about. About a week out, we knew we were going to win, and it was interesting that when the Senate voted, there was no celebration at the White House. It was like someone who's subjected to 40 lashes. When the 40th lash hits, he doesn't say, "Let's party." He says, "That hurt. I'm going to go rest someplace because they're going to stop hitting me now."

But the press couldn't get that. They thought this was a big political victory for the President and we were going to party it up. We were all going to have our bongo drums like the President had on the Paula Jones decision. I remember making this decision on the fly in a briefing one day, and I took some heat from John for it, because he thought it was way too glib on a serious subject.

I was being pushed on this thing, and someone said to me, "Joe, of course next week when the vote comes down and it comes out as expected, there's going to be a lot of gloating here." I just thought about it for a second and blurted out, "I don't know if you're aware of this, but the

President officially proclaimed the White House a gloat-free zone this morning, and there will be no gloating." It was glib, so John wasn't very happy.

But it ended up actually working, because they ended up repeating it, and it was a way of giving them a window into how we really felt. Every reporter came up to me and said, "What did you mean by that?" This was personal, off-the-record conversation, so I said, "We all feel like shit. We're going to feel better that we don't have to deal with this anymore, but nobody's happy about it."

We had a couple of incidents the day of the actual Senate vote. They were all looking for evidence of a White House party, that we were all going crazy now. I got an email from somebody. Thank God they sent me the email saying, "I don't know if you know this, but Sidney Blumenthal and a couple of his staff are in Lafayette Park smoking cigars." Sidney was the favorite whipping boy of the White House press corps. I put out an emergency call to Sidney to do two things. One, put out the cigar. Two, get your ass back in the White House now.

He came into my office and said, "What's up?" I said, "Sidney, do you know how many camera crews were sitting 25 feet away from you, and if they just managed to turn to the right they would have seen you?" And he looked at me like *Oh, I guess I didn't think about that.*

Riley: [*laughs*] Well, maybe he didn't realize that the White House grounds' proper gloat-free zone—

Lockhart: Didn't extend to Lafayette Park, yes. Thank goodness Sidney didn't make that argument at that point, because he would have gone through the big plate-glass window.

The second thing was I was the self-proclaimed enforcer of the gloat-free zone, but it also seemed crazy to me that all these people who had worked so hard for so long would not be able to get together in a way to at least recognize the shared pain. I had gone to John Podesta earlier in the week and said, "John, I think we should all get together. My house is big enough. Why don't we just invite the smallish 30, 40 team and do that?"

John went back and forth five times. He first said yes, and then every four hours I'd get a call saying, "It's canceled," "It's on," "It's canceled." I'll never forget. I had something to do out of the building. I went over to the State Department for something. This was Friday afternoon. I got a call from my assistant saying, "Okay. John says it's on. And someone from the Oval said that the President's coming, so I called your wife and said, 'The President's coming to your house tomorrow night.'"

I put the phone down and thought, *This is going to take—what?—about 15 seconds before this rings?* Took about ten. She was screaming at me, "What do you mean the President's coming?" I immediately went back and said, "The President's not coming to our house. That would undermine the whole thing." But it happened to be Cheryl Mills' birthday, so we had a birthday party that night, and it was the absolute right thing to do. It wasn't a wild party. It was very subdued, but people had done important things in defending the President, and it was the right thing to recognize it. It never got out.

But that's how sensitive we were to it. Less than 24 hours before 50 people were supposed to show up at my house they weren't coming, and then all of a sudden they were.

Riley: You clear that, and then you have more foreign policy things coming up, right?

Lockhart: Yes. Yes.

Riley: Kosovo's almost immediately on the heels of this.

Lockhart: Yes. And that's a completely different context and situation than Iraq. This is something that's perceived as maybe not a politically smart thing to do, but as reflective of the President's thinking and the President's principle. There are a couple of interesting parts of it.

Those 70 days gave me more insight into the President and his growth as President than any other time. It also gave me further insight into the deteriorating media in the country. The decision was made to launch this effort and to do it using air power alone, not using ground troops. There was a lot of criticism of that, of the President being afraid of body bags. The reality from my perspective, in all these discussions, was that it was something the President believed. But for 67, 68 days there was unmerciful criticism from all sides of the President's strategy, and what I saw was a completely different President than the one I'd read about in the beginning and even the one I'd seen starting in 1996—someone who was patient and certain of his own decisions. It was interesting to watch.

I was only told what it was like at the beginning, but it seemed kind of chaotic, with the President at times sending mixed signals and seeming unsure and creating more chaos than necessary. Whether that's true is for others to determine. It was very interesting to watch, as the criticism mounted and mounted, each layer or group—first the political people wondering about this and then some of the military people.

I don't remember the sequence, but at various times there were various groups in the room saying to the President, "We're not sure about this. We may need to look at something else." The President was very stoic. He was the one person who reassured the team that this plan made sense and we were going to stick with it. "I don't care what they say about me. What could be worse than what they said about me last year? We're going to stick with it." And it did work, which was very instructive, I think. If you look at the Presidency, this is a pretty important period for getting some insight into his abilities.

As for the media, it became a joke. Just turning on the TV—if it wasn't tragic, it would have been funny. The media just became a forum for anyone—whatever they knew, whatever standing they had—it didn't matter who they were. Everyone had the same standing to criticize what was going on. I tried to channel a little of the President's stoicism, and it was frustrating for me. But from doing my job, it was relatively easy. My job was to reflect the President, and that's what I did. I said, "The President's very patient. The President is determined to succeed, and he thinks this plan is right and thinks it will work."

There were some bumps at the beginning of the road from my end of it. It's one of those things where you won't find it hard to believe that this is a bad start to a day. I walked into the Situation Room to get my intelligence book, and the officer of the night said, "You might want to pay attention to the Blair/Clinton transcript. Pay special attention to that." I said, "Oh, great, why?" And he said, "Because they were talking about you." I said, "What were they talking about me? Why would they be talking about me?" And he said, "Read it."

Apparently they got on the phone for 30 minutes at the beginning of this, and Alastair Campbell and I came in for some pretty direct criticism about why the communications effort was so bad. This was three or four days in, and they were absolutely right. It *was* bad, and their forcing us to look at it was shocking to me.

I wouldn't do it again this way, but we had made a political decision that seemed right at the time—this was not going to be a U.S.-led force. This was a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] force, and NATO would talk about what was going on. I just assumed NATO was capable of it. I talked to them three or four times a day, a nice guy named Jamie Shea, very competent. But it wasn't working, and two of the leaders of NATO got after us pretty hard about making it work. I remember then checking and finding out that while the U.S. Pentagon has hundreds, if not thousands, of public affairs officers, NATO had three, and they were trying to orchestrate an international news operation with them. They just couldn't do it.

So we ended up organizing with—I think I called the British, the French, the Italians, the Germans. I may have left somebody out. We each sent in five or six of the top people of our government, and they literally got on a plane that day. I found three people—one was a political guy, one was a military guy, and I said, "You're going—get on a plane right now and fix that."

It took a little while, but we ended up getting it done. It just was bad staff work. We should have thought of this in advance, but we didn't. A little bit was the hangover of all the impeachment stuff. We lost some ground before we gained it back, but I think we eventually gained it back on the "being able to deliver our message" side. This quickly devolved from whether NATO could do it into the peanut gallery cheap shot about the strategy. But it worked.

Riley: Sure. Any particular follow-up on that? There are at least three big pieces I'd like to get you to talk about, which probably means we're going to gloss over some things that we don't want to talk about. The three big things are heading into 2000 what the First Lady is doing, then the Vice President's relationship with the President and how that's evolving in your sense, examining it from the campaign. The other is the Elian Gonzalez business in Miami, which seems to be another instance where you're battling a very different kind of media culture than may have existed in years before.

Lockhart: Let me start with that one, because to me that's the most interesting. I think I've articulated this sense that in our government, on any big issue, the White House has to play a lead role. We made a mistake on Elian Gonzalez, a big mistake. It happened over Thanksgiving weekend, a lot of us were off. That doesn't excuse any of us, because while I didn't make the initial decision, I sat with it for months and let it keep going.

The decision was that we were going to allow INS and [Department of] Justice to handle this, and we were going to actively stay out of it because it was so highly charged politically. And 95 percent of the time, that's the wrong decision, but you still make it occasionally. We ended up living with a bad decision, and then with a department in our government that didn't have the confidence to take bold action and wanted to play things out and play it safe. That's what allowed this to become the national nightmare it became.

I do believe this was a White House mistake, not a Justice Department mistake. Based on the facts, if we had been more aggressive we would have had this done by Christmas. But we publicly made the decision that we were staying out of it, that it was a matter for law enforcement. Our relationship with law enforcement was strained at best, and we allowed this thing to snowball out of control.

We eventually took control of it, and this was something I was very involved in, probably just because it had become such a PR nightmare. I got very substantively involved in that decision. I had a series of conversations with John Podesta about needing to wrap this up, and I think he was convinced in—I don't remember the exact timeframe, but the nexus shifted very radically. Instead of taking reports from the Justice Department, the White House was now dictating what was going to be done.

The President was going to Oklahoma City for the opening of the memorial park to commemorate the five-year anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing, and the Attorney General was also attending. The decision was made that the Attorney General and the President would fly back to Washington together and try to resolve how we were going to deal with this issue.

I remember John calling me. I don't even remember who else was on the trip, but someone who was the acting Chief of Staff was, and he said, "You need to get in that meeting." I said, "Why?" He said, "I know what a hard-ass you are on this issue. Do not let them out of that room until there's a decision that we're taking that kid." I said, "I get it, boss."

It was a fascinating meeting. It's hard to have a meeting in the office on Air Force One because it's so loud, and the President doesn't hear particularly well. Janet Reno is the most soft-spoken woman in the world. There was nothing personally strained about the session, but it was one of these things where the President was on edge a little bit, just trying to hear her.

She started by just talking about Miami and how bad this had been, and it was moving. She couldn't get through it. She was crying, talking about what a great city Miami was and how much it meant to her and how this had pulled at her in so many different ways, and how difficult it was. I tried to use my influence to get to the decision, and there was a lot of talk back and forth about other possibilities. I believe that in that meeting I did my job by pushing it back to, "Do we have a decision?" And they made a decision.

I think they talked again subsequently about how to do the operational stuff. That might have been a Thursday, because I knew Easter was coming up. We did this Easter Sunday morning—I

remember Saturday being on a conference call with John and the Justice people and the law enforcement people and signing off on the plan.

It was weird, because I knew it was going to happen early in the morning, but I didn't think it was going to happen that early. It happened while I was driving to work at 5:00 A.M. It was one of those things where I didn't want to stay all night at work because everybody was watching. Everybody knew something was up. So I purposely left work at about eleven o'clock on Saturday, and made a big show of saying goodbye to the press that was still there. I knew I was going to go home and sleep for a couple of hours and then come right back, but I didn't want to come in too early. So I missed it. I got in the office, and they were replaying it. So I saw it, but from, say, 5:30 to five of seven, we were pretty satisfied. The kid was out safely, the right thing was done.

But everything changed at seven o'clock when Reuters or the AP released a photo of the kid with the gun near his head. It doesn't take a genius to figure out okay, we have a problem here. It took us a little bit to get going on the solution though. We were just talking about this the other day. Elian's father was represented by Greg Craig, and Greg had retained a woman named Ricki Seidman, who had worked in the White House at various places and was very plugged in all over the Clinton world. She was helping Greg with the press and communications.

I was working with my colleague, Joel Johnson, who had come down from Daschle's office after impeachment. I don't know whose job he took, but he was a counselor, a big strategic thinker. We were just looking at each other like *We have to do something. We're getting killed here on this picture.* Joel is very close to Ricki from when they worked on the Hill together. So I said, "Call Ricki and see what's going on."

He called her, and he was expecting some brutal scene of "What's going on? The kid's traumatized!" But we were on a conference call, and Ricki was saying, "Everything's great. He's pushing them on the swing right now. He's the happiest kid in the world." And before I could say anything, Joel said, "Well, could you take a damn picture of that for us?" And she said, "Yes, I guess I could."

We hung up, and she called back a few minutes later and said something like, "Can you get one of the White House photographers to come up?" Joel lost it and said, "There's a 7-11 right outside the place. Go in and buy one of those disposable cameras and take a picture!" So she went to the 7-11 and did it, and while she was doing that—I let Joel do this because I was afraid that it would be a little too dangerous for the White House press secretary to call some camera store. But there's a Ritz Camera about three blocks from the White House, and he managed to find somebody there and got them to open it early. She ran down with this little disposable camera. I hate to say, but this is how it all works. She got it developed, and we said, "Here's the address of AP. Just take it to their photo desk. Get it there as fast as you can."

And magically, an hour later, on the air were these idyllic pictures of father and son, and it got a lot better very quickly. But it was a 7-11 disposable camera and Ritz Camera who did the—and on the one-hour developing? It didn't take them an hour. [*laughter*]

Riley: Was there a problem with who was going to pay the bill for this?

Lockhart: Somebody covered it. I guess if a gift is under $10 it can be accepted, and it was a gift to us.

Riley: I'm surprised that Kenneth Starr didn't subpoena the—

Lockhart: Yes, well, he'll have another three years before he hears that story. He'll be back.

Riley: All right. You have a very unusual situation with two campaigns being generated out of the White House.

Lockhart: Yes. Hillary. I think I've repeated over and over, lots of stuff swirls around the White House, and the press secretary's office is rumor central. I started hearing this stuff about Hillary running for the Senate, and I thought it was the most ridiculous thing I'd ever heard. I didn't think there was anything to it. At this point, I've known the First Lady for four and a half years. I have, I think, a very positive relationship—not a close relationship, she does not confide in me—but certainly a very friendly relationship.

We are leaving one morning to go someplace, and she just happens to be leaving around the same time. We're waiting for the President, and she's standing talking to someone. I'm walking over with my bag, getting ready to go on some trip, and she turns and makes a beeline for me. She says, "I didn't know you were from New York." I said, "Yes, I'm from New York," and she said, "Well, what part?" I told her, and she started asking me very detailed questions about voting patterns in my county. I didn't know a damn thing about it. I hadn't lived there in 20 years, but I told her what I knew. She asked me about the county chairman, who was a guy I knew, and I said, "Yes, yes, this guy," and she said, "Great, great, have a good trip." And she walked away. I remember turning to the person next to me and saying, "She's running. Am I the last one to know?" It was strange, but it frankly didn't intersect with my life much.

Riley: Did you get the sense that the President thought this was a good idea?

Lockhart: Yes. Now you can delve into why—whether it was some combination of pride or "Listen, I've messed up here. I'm going to be supportive of anything she wants." I don't know what the calculation was, but he was very positive. It was also a very positive outlet for his own political— If you think of 2000, which was by most accounts a pretty good year for Clinton as far as how things worked. It got back post-Presidency.

Riley: That was 2001.

Lockhart: Yes, 2001. I personally think that given the fact that the Vice President wasn't interested in his political counsel, if he had not had Hillary running, it could have been a very difficult time for him. But there was lots of room for mischief, him trying to find some way in to talk to this person or that person, because it's a passion of his and he lives and breathes it. The fact that Hillary was running and the fact that the Vice President had no interest in what the

President thought—or had an active interest in doing something contrary to what the President thought—was very healthy.

Riley: Your inside view is precisely that the Vice President had no interest in the President's—

Lockhart: That's shorthanding it. The Vice President's political team had access to the President's thinking, and they tapped that access. They talked to him on a pretty regular basis. I think the Vice President, in a personal way, got it into his head that it wasn't enough to win the Presidency. He needed to win it on his own and without the help of the President. And they somehow worked themselves into an emotional position where they viewed the President as the enemy as opposed to a potential ally, and they couldn't get out of that.

I think the Vice President's staff had a less personal and a clearer understanding of the negatives that the President brought to the Vice President, and in some ways they missed the positives. But whatever the motivations or whatever the validity of their thinking, the reality was they were going their own way. This was not an effort they wanted the President involved in in any real way.

Even if Bill Bradley had gotten the nomination instead of Al Gore, and if Bradley had done that to Clinton, Clinton would have felt, *But I have stuff to offer here. I've done this.* So I think there would have been some frustration. It was harder because the President felt a sense of personal closeness and loyalty to the Vice President. He very much wanted to help him and was frustrated by the fact that the help was not being sought.

Maltese: Did you witness strains in the relationship during the impeachment proceedings between Gore and the President?

Lockhart: Not so much. It wasn't so much the impeachment. I think it was much broader. Here's the best way to look at the strains in the relationship and where it really got strained. When the Vice President and the President talked directly to each other with no one else in the room, they tended to get on the same page quickly. When the Vice President started traveling almost full time campaigning, all of their information about each other came from other people. I think with the Vice President it came from his family members, who were particularly injured by the President's behavior, and from staffers.

What happened was they stopped talking to each other. And I believe that had a serious negative impact on the relationship. The President was offended at times by this. When the Vice President announced, he seemed to go out of his way to do a series of interviews the night before the announcement that dealt directly with how he felt about the President and his behavior. I remember we were in Paris for something the day the VP was supposed to announce. They had sent over a copy of the speech, and it was gratuitous. We told them that the President was not happy with what he said. And in fact they changed a good bit of it.

But—not to overdo this—the President was happy to campaign for him, which he did. The convention speech the President gave was an important point in the Vice President's campaign, as far as setting the table that then the Vice President very effectively took advantage of and put

himself back in the race. It was one of those times that the stories about the strains were always exaggerated, but they were not without some factual basis.

Maltese: Gore asked you to join the campaign at some point, didn't he?

Lockhart: Not the campaign. He asked me to join his Vice President's office when I was still a deputy press secretary. His communications director, a good friend of mine, went on maternity leave. She was going to be gone for three or four weeks, and they asked me to fill in for her, which I did. So I worked on his operation for three or four weeks. Just before she was coming back, they asked me to stay permanently, and I wasn't interested.

I explained it to everybody but Gore because Gore then didn't speak to me for a while. But my calculation was pretty simple. When I get in some cause or fight, I like to stick it through. And going to work for the Vice President was, in effect, devoting at least the next six years of my life to it, because I expected he'd win. And if he won, I would stay with it. But I was running out of time on my ability to stay in government. I thought it was a logical reason for not doing it.

It happened at a time when he was beginning to see the world as "us versus them," and I was openly choosing them. And that strained our relationship for a while.

Riley: How do you evaluate Gore as a candidate and a public figure compared to Clinton?

Lockhart: If you watched Gore behind the scenes, you had a sense that he would have made a good President. He had all of the wherewithal. He was pretty decisive at most times. He would get somewhat indecisive when it came to purely political matters, but he's a well-rounded expert on many policy issues.

But you just can't compare the two of them as political candidates. One is naturally gifted. I think yesterday I used whatever metaphor you want—the calibration. Clinton would move smoothly between gears. He was a ten-speed, refined, sophisticated political machine. Gore had two speeds. It was either slow or fast. And most of the problems he got into were when he was 10 percent off here, where he was too hard or he was too—

Look at the debates. The first debate he was too fast. The second debate he was too slow. The third debate he didn't know what to do. Clinton was open to helping, but it was helping around the margins because he instinctively knew how to do this. Gore had to learn it, because he didn't have the same instincts as Clinton. So as political creatures, they were night and day.

Riley: The [Joseph I.] Lieberman selection as Vice President—how did that resonate in the White House?

Lockhart: This happened when we were on vacation on Martha's Vineyard, and it was a pretty interesting time because I was the most senior person there. And that person takes on an additional set of responsibilities as the traveling Chief of Staff. The President wants to go play golf. I have to tell the people, "This is what's going to happen, here's what we're going to do."

I think we were up there for almost two weeks, and during that time, we were holding very secret peace talks every morning with President [Hafez al-] Assad of Syria. And it was this running thing: "Why doesn't the President play golf anymore? Why don't we see him until three o'clock in the afternoon?" I would always just shrug my shoulders and say, "He felt like just working at home this morning." In reality, he was on these five-hour calls, which I was on with him.

So I was spending a lot more time that I ever even wanted to or thought I would in their little—they were staying in a three-bedroom house, not a vast thing. It was a vast estate of four or five of these beautiful—but smaller—houses. I remember going up and getting there about 20 minutes early for the Syrian call the morning the announcement was made. And it was a very interesting dynamic, because the President thought it was the best thing he'd ever heard of. He thought it was the smartest thing he'd ever done.

I was holding my tongue a little bit—a little bit, not a lot—and he said to me, "What do you think?" I said, "Well, let me be the cynic here. I think this is going to be perceived by a lot of the press as blah, blah, blah," then just completely telling him what I thought. We went back and forth a little bit, and he looked at me like I was crazy. He said, "You're crazy. This is so smart. Lieberman is such a good man, blah, blah, blah." So this went back and forth.

I'm going to shorthand what Hillary said, because it wasn't exactly this. But this is what I took away from it. At one point, she looked at him and looked at me and shook her head and turned to me and said, "He's the only guy in America who thinks that right now." And he looked at her and said, "No, I'm right. This is great." We looked at each other and said, "Okay, whatever."

As soon as I heard it, I had a well-formed opinion. This was the best and boldest way to stick his thumb in the President's eye, because Lieberman was the guy who led the Democratic charge on, "This guy may not be morally fit to be President." Historians and political scientists can argue whether it was a good choice, but narrowly, on those grounds, I think it said a lot more about Gore and his relationship with the President than it did about who he wanted to be his Vice President.

Riley: There was a piece of the *Frontline* interview we have in the book where you make the statement that the President and Mrs. Clinton didn't have very good Washington radar.

Lockhart: Right.

Riley: I wonder if you could talk a little bit more—

Lockhart: Sure—particularly the President. Washington is a funny place. I grew up professionally in it, so I think my radar is a little better developed than his. It's a little bit of what we used to call the "Sally Quinn syndrome" in the White House. It's these people who—through some self-proclaimed sense of accomplishment or identity—have decided they're the permanent establishment.

I was always completely amused by Sally Quinn in particular—because she was the one who led the charge that, "Clinton needs to go because we just don't do this in Washington, this sort of

infidelity thing." A brief look at her own career would suggest that perhaps it's done more than she let on, and a brief look at other leading figures in the journalism world, in the ambassador ranks—the hypocrisy just takes your breath away. Washington is a town built on hypocrisy. It's a town built on situational ethics and shifting allegiances and loyalty, and there's a rhyme and reason to it. Washington hands have a sense of that.

It was my belief that Clinton never quite figured it out and never mastered it and didn't want to. He just felt it was elitist crap. But he would have been better served if he'd spent more time figuring out. I think Hillary was better at it, particularly later.

Riley: She actually spent some time in Washington when he had not, other than just—

Lockhart: Right. It's a Washington that's evolved. One side example of this is three times a year we'd have to write speeches for him for press dinners, which is a chore. I swear, half the stuff we wrote that we *knew* was funny—funny to people in Washington, wouldn't be funny to anyone outside Washington—he never got. His idea of funny was telling a story about Billy Bob and the two frogs. About ten minutes later, you're laughing. You don't know where it started, but it's a great story. Five minutes later, you don't even realize what he just told you. It's much more southern storytelling.

Washington is about taking backhanded slaps at people. My colleague Joel Johnson used to have a particular kind of joke he'd always write. He called it the "classic Washington misdirection joke." His favorite one was the President's at a dinner, and he says, "I want to recognize John McCain here. Everyone in America knows about his service to this country, the torturous imprisonment of seven and a half years. John, I'm sorry you're still in the Republican caucus." It's just playing off something else, and everybody in Washington thinks it's hilarious.

Clinton would look at that and say, "I'll say it if you want me to, but it's not funny." And my job would be, "It's not funny, but you're so good you can sell it, can't you?" And he'd look at me and say, "I can sell it." And that's how we'd do this. For someone so politically aware, I just don't think he ever quite got—

His block on getting it was his contempt for it. His idea was, "You know what? All these people here, what have they ever done? I ran a state. I was 30 years old, and I was running a state. I've been doing this all my life. I'm President of the United States, and I somehow have to suck up to you because you have a townhouse in Georgetown? I don't think so."

I don't know that anything turns out differently if it's a more well-developed sense, but I think that was a bit of a blind spot for him. Frankly, if you asked him the same question, I bet he wouldn't answer that way. But if you said to him, "Some people have said this," I think he'd admit it.

Riley: I wanted to follow up on something you happened to mention over dinner last night, which is that you were with the President—I think in Australia—on September 11.

Lockhart: On the eleventh, yes.

Riley: There's an interesting historical element to what his thinking was as this was unfolding.

Lockhart: Yes.

Riley: Can you tell us a bit about his reaction, where you were, what you were doing?

Lockhart: We were in a place called Port Douglas, Australia. The only reason I was there was the President went to Australia once or twice when he was President, but I had either left the White House or hadn't been there yet, and I'd never been to Australia.

I traveled with him occasionally, and at one point he said something to me like, "Is there someplace you've always wanted to go?" I said, "Yes, Australia." And he said, "Next time I go, you're coming with me." Two months later I got a call from his office saying, "We're going to Australia, we're doing all this stuff," and it was great. We went to Sydney, Melbourne, and Port Douglas. Port Douglas was two days of rest and relaxation, just playing golf.

Actually, this just reminded me of a story. Getting through a round of golf with the President takes a long time because it's a social event for him. It's not that he takes extra shots or anything, he just likes to stand and talk a lot. And on this particular round, he was taking special care to coach me, and I'm not the most coachable person in the world.

We played well into the dark. It's pitch black. The pro comes up to me on the 18th hole and reaches into my bag and says, "I'm taking a couple of your balls, just go with this." I hit my shot, and the pro just takes it in his cart and drops it 300 yards down in the middle of the fairway, puts it down. The next shot he puts right next to the pin. And for the rest of the night—I'm trying to create the mood of the night—the President keeps talking about, "That was so unbelievable on that hole! I can't believe you just— It was dark, and you didn't—" I'm just sitting there saying, "Whatever." [*laughter*]

Then we went to dinner, and it was a typical Clinton dinner. There were six or seven of us at the table. Sitting at the next table is a kind of extended family. It seems like there's at least two generations, maybe three. At one point one of them gets up the nerve to come over and talk to the President. Of course, there's some weird, tortured connection where he knows something about their town. And before you know it, the tables are all moved and they're sitting with us. So we have a raucous dinner, with people going back and forth.

Then he decides he wants to walk through the town. So we walk through the town. It doesn't matter where you are in the world, Clinton walking through a town means that if it's a town of 200 people, 800 people are there. We went into a bar that had live music. He walked out and was talking to people, signing autographs. I stayed in and listened to the band, and at one point I looked over my shoulder at him, and the man had gone completely white.

He was on the phone with Bruce Lindsey or Cheryl Mills, I think, and they were describing what was going on. But they didn't know very much yet. They just said that a plane had gone into the

World Trade Center. He said, "Let's go home. Let's put the TV on so we can at least see what's going on." Then the news came on, and there were a couple of different dynamics happening.

One was I sat there and thought, *They've hit the World Trade Center, and they've hit the Pentagon*—and you do your own personal calculation. The World Trade Center—we did prosecute the guys who hit it the first time. The Pentagon is where we launched the missiles against al Qaida. I thought, *Hmm, third target, maybe it's us*. I turned to the head of his Secret Service detail and said, "You guys are a big pain in the ass sometimes, but I'm really glad you and your guns are here." He looked at me and said, "Oh, no one told you? The Australians took our guns at the airport." I said, "So it's just us. We're going to take them on, right?" He said, "No, they're sending a SWAT [Special Weapons and Tactics] team now, but they're not here yet." He was nervous, but he wasn't going to say anything. I was thinking, *Okay, great. I'll just be over here watching TV*.

Obviously, everybody had their own trauma that afternoon. One level of the dynamic was we couldn't find Chelsea. It was very difficult to get a call through to the States. We were getting about two an hour through. We knew she had been downtown, but we didn't know exactly where. She was seeing a friend at a Morgan Stanley office that morning. They had three of them: one right in the middle of the bad stuff. It turns out she was at one a little bit uptown and ended up walking uptown with almost everybody else.

It was hours before she could make contact with her mother, and it was a bit of a hairy time. I made the decision to be a little vague on that and just say, "Yes, she's fine, but she's having trouble getting to a phone." It was six hours before—maybe four hours, maybe eight hours, a long time—before I was confident that what I had told him was the truth.

The second level was—well, this is overstating it, but this was the most dramatic reminder to him that he wasn't President anymore, because he wanted to be operational. He looked at the first picture and said, "It's [Osama] bin Laden," and he immediately started talking about what needed to be done. But there was no one to talk to except me and a couple of others. I think it was very difficult for him.

We had to figure out how to get home. I think we expected that the military would immediately take care of us. It took them a little time, took some prodding to get that done. It was actually the Secret Service who convinced some people at the White House that it was not really smart to have a former President not on U.S. soil right now. He just wanted to spring into action and had no place to channel it.

Condi [Condoleezza] Rice called a couple of times in the two days, but not to get his opinion, just to give a cursory briefing. On the one hand, I think he was very appreciative that she'd take the time—with everything else going on—to tell him what was going on. But he was frustrated that there was never, "What do you think, sir?" because he thought a lot. Once we got back, once he had something to do, everything changed.

Riley: You said you got on a cargo plane.

Lockhart: Yes. We got on one of these cargo planes with no windows, really loud, and sitting on the plastic fences they use sometimes as seats. I never quite got all of the details, but I know that a trip we could have done in, say, 23 hours took 28 hours because there was a part of the Middle East we weren't allowed to fly over. We switched planes in Guam. The second plane was about the same, but landed 28 hours later, having been virtually out of touch with the most impactful story in a generation. We landed in Newburgh, I think, New York, at a military base and then drove down to Chappaqua.

Riley: It must have been one of the only airplanes in the air.

Lockhart: Yes. Sure. It was just very strange—first getting caught up on what's happened in the last 24 hours. Everybody on the trip was concerned and worried about their own families. I remember feeling like he was a bit of a caged animal at that point. But once we got back to the house and he was presented with some options—you can go into this Red Cross center, you can do that—he changed. He had something to do.

I had to go back to Washington to deal with my own family. In addition to being a horrible tragedy, it underlined the fact that that part of his life was over. I think it was important in helping him think through what the next part of his life was. He certainly has his hand in a lot of things now.

Riley: We have to close. What about your time in the White House are you most proud of?

Lockhart: I'll answer that a couple of ways. From a personal point of view, never succumbing to the short-term temptation to not tell the truth. It's there every day, and in the short term could make your life easier. I stayed on the right side of that line, which may sound easy but is not.

From a broader point of view, the dominant event of my time in the White House was an unjustified political effort to remove the President from office for things that would have set a horrible precedent in our country going forward, and would have fundamentally undermined our democracy. I will remain proud of being part of the effort to stop that. I understand that it's hard to stand up and say you're proud of a negative, but I am.

Riley: Any specific regrets or disappointments?

Lockhart: There's part of me that wishes I was there from day one, although what I take from the administration is all pretty much in the second term, and I have a feeling I wouldn't have made it to the second term. I would have burned out. So it's not that serious a regret. Not really. You know, there's always more that the President could have gotten done if we had done more to help him or support him. But contrary to at least the conventional wisdom when he left, he got a lot done. That is made clearer with every day the current President serves as our President. Sometimes you need a negative contrast to shine a light on some very positive things. I had expected it was going to take 50 years and historians taking a look. It's happening in front of our eyes.

Riley: The other thing I would add to that is that it helps to have a close perspective from somebody who's involved. And the other important thing that historians will have is the firsthand testimony of people who were there to help us find our way through what paper may or may not exist.

Lockhart: I can tell you this. One challenge for historians on this President is, for instance, if they ever want to find a piece of paper I generated, don't bother looking. They don't exist. I didn't keep them. I didn't have a bank account that could support the legal fees that keeping paper would have— My commitment to history is stronger than you might think, but it was not that strong.

Riley: We hear this repeatedly, and of course that's the very fundamental reason why we do what we do. I always tell people at this stage—these others have heard this—that we never exhaust all the possible topics, but we usually do a pretty good job of exhausting the interviewee and the other people around the table.

Lockhart: If I fall asleep on the way back to Washington, you're all responsible. [*laughter*]

Riley: Especially given the fact that you weren't feeling very well yesterday afternoon, you've given us an awful lot to work with.

Lockhart: Some of it's even true.

Martin: We sort through it.

Riley: We've enjoyed hearing it, but more importantly, there's a great deal of wonderful information here for people to parse through in the future. We are glad you agreed to do this. I know that there were some things in '99 and 2000 that we just barely touched on. If you look at the document and see some easy places to pack in a written supplement, if you want to just sit down at a computer and hammer out a couple of paragraphs, we'd be happy to append that.