EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH NICK LITTLEFIELD

May 4, 2008
Boston, Massachusetts

Interviewer
James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT

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Young: This is the second day of the interviews with Nick Littlefield, May 4, in Boston.

Littlefield: At the end of yesterday—although I was tired and at the end of my rope in terms of being vivid—I had walked through the essentials of the collapse of the Democratic healthcare initiative in 1994.

That leads us up to the election of 1994, and Senator Kennedy's own election campaign and then what happened after he won reelection and came back to Washington to face the [Newton] Gingrich revolution, and a Democratic Party that was utterly demoralized and a President who really wasn't sure what to do. All the tea leaves suggested Clinton was going to adopt many of the elements of the Republican revolution as a way of saving himself and his relevance as President in this new Gingrich era.

The first part of this is what I knew about the Kennedy election, which I'm sure you'll have many people talking about. I was in Washington all summer, of course, and we were fighting around the clock to salvage health reform. Actually, there was no August recess, because the Senate was held in session, and when the Senate was finally let go for a very short recess just before Labor Day, all the staffs working on healthcare stayed behind to try to salvage healthcare one more time. Senator [George] Mitchell was trying to put together a consensus bill with the mainstream group, the Republicans and the key Democrats, including Senator Kennedy.

We were in Washington totally focused on healthcare while the election campaign was unfolding in Massachusetts. Kennedy was running against a very rich, very handsome, respected business leader, Mitt Romney, son of the former Governor of Michigan. Romney was a very tough opponent—or it seemed he would be. He was very smart, with a joint degree from Harvard Law School and Harvard Business School, and he had gone to Bain Capital and earned tens of millions of dollars as a venture-capital, private-equity investor. He was new to politics, and there were ways in which he wouldn't be the ideal candidate that it seemed he was going to be.

In any event, Senator Kennedy was so focused on Washington that he didn't really engage in the campaign. He was all-consumed by health reform right up until Labor Day, when he did go back. At that point, Romney had actually caught up to Kennedy in the polls. And although no Kennedy had ever lost an election in Massachusetts, it actually seemed possible that Romney could beat

Ted Kennedy. Kennedy hadn't had any competitive elections for the last two or three terms, so he hadn't really had to do the major campaigning and the major advertising that you do when you're introducing yourself to a whole state population, or reminding them of who you are and what you mean to them.

He also had the lingering problems of the Palm Beach episode, and generally seeming to be part of the Democratic establishment, which all across the country was getting ready to be thrown out of the House, the Senate, whatever. It looked like it was going to be a very tough election in September. The staff kept going on healthcare until it finally collapsed at the end of September, and Senator Kennedy was so dedicated to healthcare that although he knew he had a tough election, he was going to do everything he possibly could do about it, and that meant during September, continuing to work—working with Mitchell, with the mainstream group, with the public interest advocates who were on the side of doing health reform.

Health reform was finally pulled down at the end of September, and in October Congress finally recessed. They had come back for a couple of weeks toward the end of September, the beginning of October, and then recessed around October 10 or so for the election. Kennedy came back to Massachusetts and indeed was involved in a very close election.

There had been a primary in the middle of September, and Kennedy came back that night. Romney, of course, had won his primary and appeared to be very strong. Kennedy was exhausted from the healthcare stuff. He arrived in Massachusetts late and seemed tired. Everybody picked up on it. Did he really want this? Was he tired? Was he over the hill? Was he part of the worn-out Democratic majority that had been in power for so long?

Then in October, when the Senate finally adjourned and Kennedy came back to Massachusetts and really started campaigning, everything in the election changed. He poured it on full-bore, campaigning all over the state, morning, noon, and night. Family members came back, Washington allies from the labor movement and the consumer movement, advocates of women's rights, the environmentalists, the civil rights groups—everybody came. This was the election for the old progressive coalition.

The Senator gave a major speech at Faneuil Hall in the middle of this period, and he defined what it was to be a Democrat, how it was fighting on the side of the little guy, on the side of the people against the powerful, as I said yesterday—fighting for their jobs, their healthcare, their education, fighting against discrimination. He defined what we stood for as Democrats in the clearest imaginable way in that speech.

Then there were two debates with Romney, and Kennedy just knocked them out of the park. Romney seemed confused. Romney didn't seem to know how the Senate worked. Kennedy was at his best, talking about legislation, about how the Senate worked, about what he had done and the fights he had led and that he would continue to lead. After the debate, Kennedy began to pull away, and he ended up winning by his usual margin, in the 15-point range. As I said yesterday, I think he got 57, 58 points.

I'd say that the last three-and-a-half weeks of campaigning really did firm up in his mind that the way to win as a Democrat was to stand for what Democrats have always stood for: the [Franklin]

Roosevelt/[John F.] Kennedy/[Harry S.] Truman coalition fighting for the working people, for the little guys and their most basic needs. Kennedy came back to Washington after that election in his own way recommitted to the causes he had championed his whole career.

That's, of course, in total contrast to what the rest of the Democratic Party was feeling at that point, because the Democratic Party overall had suffered the worst defeat in its history. As I said yesterday, I think they lost 60 seats in the House. They went from a 40- or 50-seat majority—let's see. The House went from 258 Democrats and 176 Republicans to 236 Republicans and 198 Democrats, a shift of 60 seats. The Senate went from 55 Democrats and 45 Republicans to 52-48, and then two other Democrats switched parties. So the turnaround was nine Senators.

The Governors went from 30 to 18, Democratic advantage, to a 30 to 19 Republican advantage, and no Republican incumbent Congressman, Senator, or Governor lost anywhere in the country. That's amazing. That's how enormous this Republican tsunami was that swept the country.

They knocked out all sorts of titans of the Democratic Party: Governor [Mario] Cuomo was defeated, the Speaker, Tom Foley, was defeated on the west coast. Governor Ann Richards of Texas was defeated by none other than George W. Bush, a first-time candidate for Governor.

This was a devastating loss for the Democrats in the Senate, the House, governorships, everywhere. I took leave from my Senate job and worked for the last ten days of the campaign and Election Day out in the field, in Gloucester, an old, small Massachusetts city with a fishing industry, north of Boston. I went there because I knew that if I could meet with voters up there, I would really meet with the heart of who the Democratic Party was trying to appeal to: working people, middle- to low-income people who had real needs and counted on the government to help them with better schools, jobs, the economy, healthcare.

I got to talk to a lot of them about Kennedy and about what he stood for, his overall message. I also came back validated in terms of where Kennedy was headed and where we would be headed when we got back to Washington. But immediately upon getting back to Washington, we were beginning to hear from other Democrats, "Oh, my God. We have to change everything. We have to be more like the Republicans; we have to abandon our advocacy of the working people in face of tax cuts and smaller government." The Gingrich revolution was in full sway, starting with the election.

Young: Nobody predicted this?

Littlefield: At the very end, on Monday before the election, Adam Clymer wrote an article in the *New York Times* saying the Republicans might win the House, but nobody thought it was going to be anything like this. It never had been. The Democrats had controlled the House for 40 years. They had an 80-seat majority, a 70-seat majority, which they lost, a switch of some 60 seats. We never thought we would lose the Senate. We had a five-seat majority in the Senate, and we didn't expect that every one of the Democratic Senators except Kennedy, who had tough elections, would lose. [Harris] Wofford lost, having just won. It was catastrophic from the Democratic standpoint.

Young: Were you hearing from the Senator how he interpreted this result? Or was he taken by surprise, too?

Littlefield: Oh, everybody was surprised, everyone was stunned. Let me see if I can describe the Senator in these situations. This was a political catastrophe. He had been the chairman; we were counting on working with the President to finally do all sorts of things that hadn't been doable when there was a Republican President.

I had gone to Washington to be the staff director, not to be the minority counsel. God knows the Senator had seen it all, but I think what's always true with him is he just soldiers on. He's faced much worse things than having his party lose control of Washington. So he just goes on, he just continues.

You arrive there and say, "Okay, what are we going to do?" We had meetings with him right away; there was no time off. He basically said, "I just got reelected by standing up for what Democrats have always believed in." Everyone says, "Massachusetts is a very different state, and you're a Kennedy." It is true he's a Kennedy, and that's a great advantage in Massachusetts. But it isn't true that Massachusetts is all that different, despite the fact that Massachusetts voted for [George] McGovern. It was always known as one of the most liberal states and one of the most Democratic states.

We had a Republican Governor for some time, from 1990 to 2008 in fact—18 years, three different Republican Governors; a Republican Governor was reelected in the election Kennedy was running in. If you look around the state to the suburban communities and the smaller working-class cities, Massachusetts has all the same economic issues and the same education and healthcare issues as anyplace else. So the Kennedy message really did resonate. They wanted to know he stood for something. They were interested in someone who was very clear on where he stood and wasn't vacillating and triangulating and becoming more of a Republican than the Republicans. He was clear that he was a Democrat; that's what he was.

Young: And interested in them rather than Washington.

Littlefield: Yes, it was all about fighting for them, fighting for the little guy, fighting for the people versus the powerful. That clichéd message really, really is what carried the day for him—that plus, obviously, people thought that with his influence, having been there as long as he'd been there, he knew how to make the place work.

Senator Kennedy is incredibly well known for his constituent service. He really works on taking care of people back in the state. If you have a problem, you call the Kennedy office. If you have an immigration issue, you call the Kennedy office. If you're a business that needs to apply for a small business research grant, you call the Kennedy office—and they come through time and time and time again.

Young: Not the [John] Kerry office.

Littlefield: I'm speaking of the Kennedy office.

Young: Yes, but I mean this is the contrast.

Littlefield: Yes. Everyone says there's a contrast, although I'm sure the Kerry office delivers for people, too. It's just not as well known for doing that as Kennedy's office is. Plus, Kennedy, with

his power in healthcare matters, National Institutes of Health grants and budgets and education, student loans—all the things he worked on are very big in Massachusetts. Healthcare and education are two of the biggest industries, so a lot of people who work in those industries know what he means to them.

So yes, he has a whole lot of clout and all that power brought to bear on behalf of Massachusetts, and yes, he's great delivering the bacon for Massachusetts and services for Massachusetts residents when they need help. But when there's a big wave like this—as there was all across the country—you can't expect that one place is going to be different from every place else unless there's a reason for it, and the reason for it was that people understood that they wanted to vote for Kennedy. They knew where he stood, and they wanted that kind of advocacy to continue.

He was very sure about what he'd just seen, what he'd experienced in Massachusetts, so he just took it in stride. There was nothing to do about it except put your head down and go forward the way he always had in the face of the losses of his brothers, the way he always had in the face of personal difficulties. His work always kept going, no matter what distractions there were, no matter what the circumstances were. You just adapted your strategy.

But the odd thing or the thing that was really quite remarkable to me was here we are two days after the catastrophic loss, and Gingrich is saying he's going to enact the Contract with America. He's not going to compromise any of it, and he has the votes, one would think, to do it. Kennedy is basically saying, "Okay, let's just keep going the way we were before. We can't let these bad things happen. We're going to keep going with our normal agenda. We want to get healthcare done; let's figure out what we can do. We want to get the minimum wage raised; let's figure out how to do that. We want to get education legislation moved along; we want to protect Medicare; we want to do what we were always going to do."

Yes, there was a new world he had to work in, but he wasn't changing his objectives; he was going to keep going. That's the unique quality about him: he just keeps his head down, working forward. He and I talked about how we were going to approach this situation. We wanted to keep going with our legislation, and we had to persuade our colleagues that the best policy was to stand up strong as Democrats.

Young: There was also another part of it. What was he predicting the Republicans in the Senate would do with the House coming on so strong about the Contract with America? Surely he must have been anticipating a major effort to block, as well as keeping on his own agenda, to stop—

Littlefield: Yes, no question about it, but that went without saying. We didn't even need to discuss that. Obviously, if the Republicans were going to do what they were going to try to do—abolish the Department of Education and decimate the federal education budget and student loans and support for elementary secondary schools—if the Republicans were going to try to privatize Medicare and decimate the Medicare budget so seniors wouldn't have the kind of healthcare they'd had, or if they did, they'd have to pay a lot more for it—if they were going to try to abolish the minimum wage, it went without saying that we were going to resist it. We didn't have to speak about that so much. We had to talk about how we were going to go around and shore up the Democrats, but we didn't have to speak about the resistance because that went without saying.

The question was whether we would keep going with our affirmative agenda, because normally one would say, "We can't possibly raise the minimum wage in the face of Republicans who want to abolish it."

Dick Armey, the Majority Leader, was saying, "Over my dead body will we raise the minimum wage. We shouldn't even have one." Then there was all this deregulation, anti-labor stuff they wanted to do—it was all in the Contract. We didn't really have to say we were going to stop this, stop that, stop this. We knew we were obviously going to do that.

The question was whether we could rally Democrats around being strong, to resist and keep going toward the basic goals of Democrats. We approached it very systematically. We put together the different pieces. Kennedy wanted to reach out to all sorts of people whose judgment and observations he respected, to get their take on exactly what had happened with this election, and what we needed to do to sell our message more effectively in the country, what we needed to do in the Congress, in the Senate, to represent that direction.

He literally reached out to everybody he had talked to over his career who was around, who could be reached. We had meetings, dinners, breakfasts, lunches. We met with probably 50 or 100 people whose judgment he respected, about the defeat and about where Democrats were headed and what we should do about it. These are all described in great length in this draft of a book, which I'll obviously make available to your papers.

There was a fascinating afternoon with John Kenneth Galbraith, which I just loved. We had very interesting dinners with people like Doris Kearns Goodwin, Alan Brinkley, and Bob Kuttner, when we really dug into what had happened. We had meetings with people like Robert Coles and Michael Sandel, intellectuals, academics, people from unions, people from all the advocacy community, members of Congress. We really explored. Kennedy wanted to absorb what liberals, what observers of American politics, felt about that moment about the Democratic Party and what really had happened.

Young: It wasn't only about why the Democrats lost; it was really about what we should do. But implicit in that is the sense that they had lost their way. Is that correct?

Littlefield: They'd lost their connection to their voters. They had been in power for a long time, and healthcare hadn't gotten done, so people said, "What's the point?" There was corruption. As I mentioned yesterday, in the House that had gotten a lot of publicity, a lot of attention, and it seemed that it was time for a change, for trying something new.

This was the end result of the call for less government; the government is the problem. The Democrats were associated with a bloated, ineffective government, and they'd lost their connection to the workers. You could predict what many of the people we met with were going to say, depending on what their latest book was about. Michael Sandel, a very popular professor at Harvard, is all about the sense of community, and how the Democrats had to rebuild this sense of their association with the community. People are out fighting for themselves now as opposed to pulling together as a community. We had to reestablish the idea of community.

Galbraith's was a screed against powerful economic interests represented by the Republicans. He has a wonderful analogy that I remember vividly. He says government is always a burden when

it's helping people with healthcare or education, but it's never a burden when it's spending money on defense contracts or shoring up the oil industry or what have you. It's this complete hypocrisy about the role of government as a burden—but, as he says, the Republicans get away with it.

He also says the Republican strategy is to discourage people so they don't vote. And as he pointed out, 40% of the electorate voted, and the Republicans got 21% of that overall. They got slightly more than half the votes overall, but it was only overall of 40%. So the strategy of discouraging people and making them think there was no point meant the Democrats stayed home and Republicans won.

He was very affectionate about Kennedy. Galbraith lived in an old house that hadn't been updated—I'm sure it had been painted, but it probably hadn't been changed since the 1930s. We went in to have tea, and Galbraith was working on his next book. He brought out pictures of Ted Kennedy and him when Galbraith was the Ambassador to India under President Kennedy. It was very affectionate. It was just fascinating. He talked for an hour, just kept going, and Kennedy and I were fascinated. That's one of the delights of being Kennedy, and it's also one of the delights of working for Kennedy. Remarkable people make themselves available to you all the time, whether it's prime ministers or professors or authors or whatever.

Young: But for a number of people, what they said was, in a way, predictable. I can imagine a recipient of all these views thinking *I can't possibly reform the community, do all of this and do all of that.* That's what's going on in Kennedy's head.

Littlefield: Yes, but he's hearing from everybody that we have to fight back, and we have to push on for the working people.

Young: I asked Galbraith once, "Is Kennedy really a liberal? Do you think he's a true liberal?" Ken said, "He's as liberal as he can be and still be effective."

Littlefield: That's beautiful. That's great. I would say he's a liberal, and he figures out how to be effective—I'd put it that way. He's always going to stick to his liberal principles. He's not going to pull back on them to be effective. He's going to figure out how to be effective and maintain them.

He'll compromise, yes, but only a temporary compromise. The goal is still the basic objective of better schools, better wages, better healthcare. He does these conversations to get the substance right, as I said yesterday. This is the first of the three parts of his effort. We always started by getting the substance right, and he wanted to check it every which way. In a way it's both substance and politics, but then he had to go and figure out where the rest of the Democrats were.

He met with Senator [Thomas] Daschle, who had just defeated Senator [Christopher] Dodd, Kennedy's friend, in the election to be the leader of the Democrats. Then he met with other Democratic Senators. Then he went over to the House and met with Dick Gephardt, the Democratic leader over there, and with a whole bunch of other Democratic House members.

Basically with these people it was to take their temperature and to say he was committed to going forward in this very strong way, to continue the agenda of working families and jobs,

education, and healthcare. It was not going to be helpful to let the Republicans get their way. Kennedy was laying down his marker on this, but he knew it wasn't up to him at the end of the day. He had to persuade these people to join him. In the House there was very little they could do, so ultimately it was going to be about the Senate.

At the same time, we knew the President was the key person at this point. He was the only firewall that could ultimately stop the Gingrich revolution. Maybe we could stop it in the Senate, but at the end of the day we needed the President to do his bit as well. We knew that the President was key to this. And so for the time between November and Christmas, all the time the Congress was getting organized to start back in January, we were planning how we were going to handle President [William J.] Clinton.

We decided to have a meeting with him at the appropriate time. We knew he was going to give a radio speech in December, after he'd absorbed all this defeat, and we wanted to get in to see him before that happened. We didn't want to go too early. We'd learned that with Clinton, you want to get to him close to the point when a decision's going to be made, because he changes direction so often. There was an amusing story in that regard, about a Supreme Court nomination.

Clinton had two Supreme Court nominations. He appointed Justice [Ruth Bader] Ginsburg from New York and Stephen Breyer from Massachusetts. Kennedy was pushing Breyer for the first vacancy, which ended up being filled by Ginsburg. Kennedy had brought Breyer to Clinton's attention, Breyer had been interviewed, and Kennedy thought he was in pretty good shape.

But the morning of the announcement, he heard it was going to be Ginsburg. He later figured out that [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan, who was pushing Ginsburg, had gone to see Clinton that morning. So Kennedy said to me, "If we ever have another chance, I want to be the last person to see Clinton before he makes the announcement."

Sure enough, a year later there was another vacancy, and Kennedy was pushing Breyer. He reminded me, "Where's Clinton going to be? When is he making the announcement?" He was going to make the announcement at noon on a particular day. Kennedy said, "Find out what Clinton's schedule is, and see if there's a way I can get in to see him."

It turned out that immediately before he was going to make the announcement, Clinton was giving a speech to a group of educators at the Hyatt Hotel on Capitol Hill. Kennedy figured out who the educators were and got himself invited to speak at the event. He went there just as Clinton was speaking and followed him out into the hall, buttonholed him, and said, "I hope it's going to be Breyer; he's the right guy."

Clinton had two or three other people on his list at that point, but sure enough, Clinton went back, and it was Breyer. Kennedy always thought with Clinton you had to get in to see him right at the last moment. Who knows whether that was dispositive in this case, but it was interesting about Clinton.

Young: Well, there were also the cards that keep reminding him.

Littlefield: You've heard all of that, yes.

Young: No, I haven't heard much about it.

Littlefield: There was a whole campaign for Breyer. I wasn't involved in that.

Young: The Senator said, "You get Nick to talk about that. I don't need to talk about it."

Littlefield: About Breyer?

Young: About the cards, the playing cards.

Littlefield: Remind me about the cards.

Young: This is somewhat of a diversion. You were talking about how you got to Clinton by trying to be the last. This is another reference. There were also ways to keep reminding the President of things he wanted the President to do, or at least that's my understanding of what the cards were about.

Littlefield: You mean where he would write notes on cards and get them to Clinton? Yes, and Clinton would put them in his pocket. There were many, many times. Later on, in 1995—or maybe it was '96 —Clinton was going to come out with a budget, and we were afraid he was going to give away the store. Kennedy had been down to meet with Clinton three or four times, to argue, "Don't put out a budget that's going to be like the Republican budget, because then when we fight, we don't have any ground to stand on. If we've already conceded halfway, we'll be conceding even more to get a final deal. Don't do it!"

But Clinton was determined to do it. Kennedy went down two or three times, and one time he persuaded Clinton to postpone. Clinton said, "Okay, I'll postpone for a week and see what you can do."

I now remember. The budget was supposed to come out the next day, and we were sure it was going to be bad. Clinton's staff had been instructed to make sure Kennedy didn't get to see him. So we couldn't get in. But again we figured out Clinton's schedule. It turned out he was going to swear in police officers on the South Lawn of the White House on one of the days before the budget was supposed to come out. There were going to be new police officers from all over the country invited in for the swearing in. This was part of his "100,000 more cops on the street" legislation, and this was the big moment because these police officers were going to be sworn in.

There was a group from Massachusetts, so Kennedy arranged to attend this event with the Massachusetts troopers, and to sit in the front row. He knew that if Clinton saw him, Clinton couldn't resist talking to him, and then Kennedy would be able to buttonhole him.

So Kennedy sat in the front row, Clinton saw him, and after the speech Kennedy went over and they started chatting. Clinton beckoned him along. They walked all the way back to the Oval Office, across the whole lawn, went into the Oval Office and spent 45 minutes there, with Clinton's staff outside. [George] Stephanopoulos, [Harold] Ickes—all these people were just furious. How had Kennedy gotten in?

Because he liked Kennedy so much, the President couldn't resist inviting him in, and sure enough, out of that came this week-long postponement of the budget. Eventually the budget came out, and it was not all that helpful, but Kennedy once again had persistently figured out how to get to Clinton, to make an impact on him. Clinton couldn't say no to anybody, let alone Kennedy, Clinton being the guy who always wanted to please, right?

Kennedy was very effective dealing with Clinton, because they genuinely like each other. There's a lot of bigger-than-life political savvy in both of them.

Back to '94, when we were preparing for the meeting with Clinton before the radio address, we talked to many of Kennedy's friends who worked for Clinton to try to get his temperature and figure out what was going to work with him. He was getting ready to basically adopt the Republican agenda, the Gingrich agenda. He was going to cut taxes, make smaller government—obviously not to the extent that Gingrich was, but he thought the way to survive and to work as a Democrat was to be like the Republicans, to send out vibes that we had heard the message: less government, less taxes.

Young: So he thought that was the message, that was the mandate.

Littlefield: Yes. That was the message Clinton took out of the election. Again, in this book I have quote after quote in much, much more detail. But the broad theme is that Kennedy is getting set for January and trying to rally the Democratic troops to the extent he's able. That was setting up the defensive strategy to keep Gingrich's stuff from happening, and that meant House, Senate, Clinton.

The meeting with Clinton was one of the most unforgettable moments of my time in the ten years I was down there. We worked on it for weeks, as I say.

Young: Talk about that.

Littlefield: It was in the middle of December, a couple of days before the radio address. We prepared a two-page memo that laid out what we believed Clinton should be about. We talked to Leon Panetta beforehand, to [Robert] Reich, to Alice Rivlin, who was the OMB [Office of Management and Budget] secretary, to Tom Glynn. Kennedy and I met everybody we could who worked for Clinton.

This is his preparation. I'm not sure I talked about that adequately. He would never go to a meeting without knowing exactly what he wanted to achieve and having done all the background work to make sure he knew where the person he was trying to affect was coming from.

So he knew he just couldn't go in and give his message to Clinton. He had to know exactly where Clinton's head was and take a read on what was going to appeal to Clinton. The general advice—and this was Kennedy's feeling as well—was that the way to appeal to Clinton was on a political level: how Kennedy had won his election, how had he done it.

That was what was going to appeal to Clinton, not just telling him, "Democrats stand for this." We had to make a political argument. So basically, the first part of this outline we prepared, and the first part of Kennedy's presentation to the President was about the politics in his race, and

how he had won by defending these Democratic principles of fighting for the working people, fighting hard so there was no doubt where he stood on jobs, education, healthcare, our mantra, five words: working families, jobs, education, and healthcare.

The idea we put together for this meeting was to find some symbolic thing for each of these—jobs, education, and healthcare—that was really meaningful but also would resonate with people and would be memorable as an idea. One of the things we had also learned from our conversations with people, and which we knew anyway, was that Democrats weren't effectively communicating who they were and what they stood for.

First off, the Republicans had this vast network of radio talk shows: Rush Limbaugh and the religious right-wing churches. They were much better organized at getting their message out. We did have the President, and the President has the best chance to get a message out of any politician. So we wanted to give the President ideas for things he could champion, things that would represent the Democratic commitment to working people, jobs, education, and healthcare.

On jobs, we came in with the minimum wage. We said the President should be for raising the minimum wage. The President was noncommittal on that. We said on education the President should say, "Not one cent cut from education." We explained what that meant. We knew the Republicans were going to try to cut elementary and secondary aid; we knew they were going to abolish the Department of Education—or try to—and we knew they were going to cut student loans.

So it seemed "not one cent cut" was an easy message point. Why in the world are we cutting education funds? We thought that would work with Clinton. We also talked about Medicare, which we knew the Republicans were going to try to undo. But our two main messages were education and minimum wage.

Young: You said at the beginning that it was a fascinating experience. Do you remember it well enough to talk about it?

Littlefield: Kennedy and I drove down there in mid-December. We went into the White House West Wing, which is very modest, a residential-like structure attached to the west side of the White House, where the Oval Office is and the Cabinet Office, the Roosevelt Room. There are some offices for staff on the first and second floors.

We went in and waited briefly, and then Harold Ickes and Pat Griffin, the Director of Legislative Affairs for the President, and the Chief of Staff, Leon Panetta, joined us. It was early evening. We thought the meeting was going to be in the Oval Office, but it turned out it was going to be upstairs in the President's residence. So we went through the West Wing, along the portico next to the Rose Garden, into the White House on the ground floor, and took the elevator up to the third floor. There we went into the President's private study, which was decorated in very rich red Victorian furniture, wallpaper, and everything. It was obviously done in the style of President [Abraham] Lincoln.

It was the Senator, me, Ickes, Panetta, Griffin, and the President. The President had obviously been warned about what we were going to say. We sat down in a big circle around a coffee table, and the President started right away, "I take it you want us to stick with the working family

themes." That's when Kennedy went into his campaign and said, "Yes, we laid the building blocks to return to the Senate—strength and security for middle class and working families—and we have to find policy positions to symbolize this commitment: no cuts to Medicare, keep going on healthcare, no cuts to college aid, no cuts to education."

This is when the President got going and actually suggested, "What about the idea of total tax deductibility for all college expenses?" Obviously the President was trying to appeal to the Senator by taking him even one step further than the Senator had suggested. The President said, "The Republicans are talking about capital gains tax cuts. Why don't we talk about tax cuts for education?" This, in fact, became one of the President's signature ideas: tax cuts, but tax cuts for a social purpose, tax cuts that make college tuition deductible. That as a strategy became something that the President did for the rest of his term. So he was obviously mulling that over: targeted tax cuts for social purposes.

The President had been warned that Kennedy was going to be talking about the minimum wage, so the President jumped right into it and said, "Why don't we talk about raising the minimum wage and indexing it so it keeps getting raised?"

And once again—this is interesting—the President was trying to anticipate and take the Senator one step beyond even where he was going. This was how the President decided to deal with Kennedy. Clinton didn't want this to be an argumentative, contentious meeting. He was taking Kennedy one step further than Kennedy was even prepared to ask him to go. There was literally no disagreement in the meeting.

Young: I thought he was very cool to the idea of raising the minimum wage.

Littlefield: He mentioned it in the meeting, but he didn't commit to it. He threw it out as an idea, saying, "Let's talk about raising it, and if they're talking about indexing capital gains, why don't we talk about indexing the minimum wage?" He was taking it one step beyond.

Young: He was taking their agenda in the capital gains tax cut and proposing—

Littlefield: Right. The capital gains tax cut, but indexing the minimum wage.

Young: Tax cuts for a social purpose.

Littlefield: Right. We didn't necessarily expect Clinton to do these things. Clinton wanted to not be out-liberalized by Kennedy in this meeting, but it didn't bear necessarily on what Clinton was actually going to do. But it was Clinton's style, so it was not at all a meeting where we had to persuade him of anything. He was saying all the right things without committing to anything.

Young: But you were down there to get him committed, weren't you?

Littlefield: Yes, but we couldn't get him committed. This attitude shows Kennedy's respect for the President and the awe he has for the Presidency. He wasn't going to say, "Are you saying you're definitely going to do this?" We'll talk about that later, but right now it was, "Here's what we stand for; here's what happened in my campaign; here's what I think you should do."

But before we could even say what we wanted to do, the President was already there. The President was incredibly friendly; he disagreed with nothing. Kennedy came away quite impressed. Kennedy came outside and the car was waiting for us. He pulled out the tape recorder. He always dictated his immediate recollections of important events and important meetings. I know Carey Parker has all these tapes, which have been transcribed.

Young: Yes. He shared some of them with us.

Littlefield: Those are probably the most current. That's gone on for 40 years, I believe: every time he comes from a very important meeting, or something very important happens, he takes out his tape recorder and dictates. That's an oral history that's contemporaneous.

Clinton didn't say he would do any of these things. This was his strategy for the meeting. Clinton, of course, is famous for making people feel he's heard what they have to say, and even agrees with them, but then going ahead in his own way, in a different direction.

The next day, December 15, the President made his ten-minute televised address. Actually, we felt he hadn't given away anything in the speech, so we were pleased. He talked about stagnant wages, he talked about his "middle class bill of rights," and actually he did talk about college tuition being tax deductible—that one was in there. He didn't talk about the minimum wage, but the headlines were that he had outlined a plan for tax breaks and for a middle class bill of rights. The analysis was that he was moving to blunt the Republican tax-cutting message, but his tax cuts were targeted to education and job training. He said if mortgage interest is tax-deductible, so should education tuition be tax-deductible.

He also was proposing tax cuts, $500 for each child, expanding IRAs for American families earning less than $100,000. He had a broad series of targeted tax cuts, and he was not talking about paying for them by cutting Medicare or Medicaid, which had been suggested earlier that he was going to do. There was no new healthcare initiative proposed, and there was no mention of minimum wage.

Kennedy had also urged that Clinton talk about expansion of healthcare. That was one other topic that had come up in the meeting, and we didn't get anywhere on that. But we ended up getting Clinton's support ultimately for Kennedy-[Nancy] Kassebaum and ultimately for the minimum wage.

Then came the Christmas break, and Kennedy had done all the preparation he could do to hit the ground running in January. The other side of it was all the work in the Senate to get things ready. The committee was changing hands; there was a big cut to the budget; we had to lay off two thirds of the staff.

Young: That was very painful.

Littlefield: It was very painful and very difficult. It's not as if our staff was that big to begin with, and we were supposed to be overseeing half the government; we had all these big areas to be responsible for oversight and legislating in. So it wasn't as if we had extra staff, and we had to lay off two thirds of it. We ended up with basically one person in each of the four areas, as opposed to three. That handicapped us somewhat, but we knew what we wanted to do, and it was

all ready to go. The Senator also began working with the Republicans, looking for cosponsors of the next step in healthcare. This is when he met with Senator Nancy Kassebaum.

Young: She succeeded him.

Littlefield: She succeeded him as the chair of the committee, and she was a very nice person, a very pleasant person, very reasonable. She and Kennedy got along, so there was every likelihood that there could be a bipartisan agreement. He worked very hard with her. She was now the chairman, she called the shots. She cut the staff by two thirds. She gave back some of our funds to the Senate—she was so tight with money, being a Kansas conservative Republican, that not only did we switch places and budgets as we moved to the minority, but she also cut another 25% off the budget and gave it back to the Senate.

Senator Kennedy met with Senator Kassebaum on several occasions. He talked on the phone when she was back in Kansas to go over the plans for the committee: what would be the subcommittees, what were the budgets, and shouldn't we do health reform, and try to pick up what we had worked on in the markup in the committee in the spring of '94, when the Clinton health plan was being considered by the committee. Shouldn't we pick up the things there had been agreement on and try to move them separately?

That was the beginning of what became the Kassebaum-Kennedy health regulation legislation that ultimately passed in 1996. Kennedy worked the relationship with Senator Kassebaum very effectively, and we ended up with broad support. And she stuck with us when we got to the floor, even though Senator [Robert] Dole, her colleague from Kansas, was against it, because he didn't want expanded regulation of health insurers. As I said yesterday, the two key elements were minimizing the exclusions that people would have in their health insurance from preexisting conditions, and making health insurance portable, so that if you lose your job you can take your health insurance with you. The law did both of those things.

We worked with Senator Kassebaum for weeks to get it drafted (the inside game), and then worked with all the health advocacy groups to get a coalition—the outside game, if you will. We ended up working with Kassebaum and got it through the committee with a number of Republicans supporting it during 1995. We finally got it to the floor in '96 and forced it through the Senate, along with the minimum wage. But that's later on in the story.

In the period between the election and January, Kennedy was in full throttle, persuading people to stand up against the Republicans and defend against Gingrich, and also laying the groundwork to go forward with his own positive agenda around healthcare and the minimum wage particularly.

On minimum wage, we'd had the discussion with Clinton. He was noncommittal, although he had suggested maybe we should do something about it, but he wasn't committing to it by any means. In January of '95, Rose Kennedy died, and this was just before his State of the Union speech. Clinton called Kennedy that night to express his condolences, and after they talked about Rose Kennedy, Senator Kennedy said, "I hope you're going to include the minimum wage in your State of the Union speech."

Even in the sadness of losing his mother at 104, Kennedy was using that occasion to buttonhole the President on minimum wage. I'm not sure of the timing of this, but the Democrats in the Senate weren't all that clear about wanting to raise the minimum wage.

On the healthcare front, Senator Kennedy and Senator Kassebaum had sat next to each other, she as the minority ranking member and Kennedy as the chairman. They had held 45 hearings on healthcare during '93 and '94, and there were 15 day-long executive sessions to report the Clinton health bill through the committee. Kennedy and Senator Kassebaum had spent a lot of time sitting next to each other discussing health reform, so when he suggested to her that they ought to try to build on that, even in this new era, she was very willing.

Mrs. Kennedy died on January 22, at 104 years old. The funeral was Tuesday, and that was also the day of the State of the Union. The President delivered the State of the Union and did say that he was in general support of a minimum wage increase. He did not say how much it would be. Kennedy had been working for $1.50. White House staff was implying, after Kennedy and the President talked Sunday night after his mother died, a 75-cent increase. We weren't going to be happy if the President said 75 cents, so the White House compromised with us, to say nothing about the amount.

The Senator stayed home for a week on the Cape; he came back to Washington on Monday or Tuesday the following week. The first thing he did was go to a joint meeting of the Democratic leaders of the House and the Senate, which was being held in a windowless room in the House side of the Capitol. Kennedy was late getting there, because he had just come back from Boston. The meeting was early, and Kennedy was included because they were going to discuss the minimum wage. Normally he wasn't on leadership at that point. Daschle was the new Democratic leader, and Gephardt was the House leader.

Kennedy walked in, and they were talking about the minimum wage, and the general feeling was that it wasn't a good idea for Democrats to be supporting the minimum wage because it was the wrong signal in view of the elections. It was old politics, it was only going to help the poor, it couldn't possibly succeed. Kennedy literally blew up. It was a small room, with probably 25 people in it—staff and leadership, House and Senate members, Democrats only.

He was still wrought up over his mother's death and just getting back—just raw emotions, and he let it out. It was a full tirade, which you normally don't hear him do in front of his colleagues, although occasionally it happens. This was nonstop: "I can't believe what I'm hearing. If there's one cause the Democrats should stand up and fight for, it's wages of working people. If we aren't going to fight for wages of working people, who will? The economy's thriving, corporate profits are at an all-time high, CEO salaries are through the roof, and we can't afford to increase the minimum wage by 50 cents a year?"

He was in full red-faced volume in this small room, as if he was addressing a crowd of 10,000 on the steps of the Capitol: "Who are we afraid of, the NFIB [National Federation of Independent Business]? The public supports increasing the minimum wage; it's way below what it should be. I can't believe what I'm hearing, that we can't be for the minimum wage because it's going to help only the poor. If we don't fight for the poor, who will? If we don't stand for low-income

Americans, who will? If we fight this, we'll win it, and we'll win it in a Republican Congress. And if we don't, we don't deserve to call ourselves Democrats."

Everyone was a little embarrassed because it was so loud and unusual. When he finished, when he stopped, there was dead silence, as if the air and the energy had been sucked out of the room. Then one of the House members said, "I think we get how the Senator feels about this one," which was a way to break the tension. This was from the heart, from the gut, and it clearly had a major impact. They didn't want to hear it, because they were the survivors of this tsunami.

Young: They wanted to be associated with something for the middle class, not something for the poor.

Littlefield: Yes, exactly. It had an effect, obviously. It was about a half hour, but Kennedy also had a way of breaking the ice himself. He laughed after he finished, and the discussion about minimum wage was over. He got up and yucked it up with people as he walked out. He had to squeeze his way out of the room.

The group agreed to try to see if they could get broader support in the caucus for a minimum wage increase and how much it was going to be. The next week or two was Kennedy at his best, working all over, back and forth between the House and the Senate. Individual members didn't want to do it; they didn't want to be for it; it was old politics. The President was committed to something but not everything; Labor wanted $1.50 over three years, 50 cents a year.

Kennedy came up with a great compromise. He figured that $1 was about all he could get, so maybe what he would do was $1 over two years, which also ought to satisfy Labor. They were for $1.50 over three years, but they could understand they were getting their first two years, then we'd come back to fight for the third year later. He thought they would go for it, and it was also within the range of what the Democratic Senators would go for.

But we still didn't quite have it. Conservative Senator [John] Breaux was saying 50 cents the first year and 25 cents the next, because the White House was saying 75 cents. That was better than Breaux's first proposal, which had been 25, 25, 25. That's what we were hearing from the White House. The Senator went to the Labor people and tested 50 cents, 50 cents, and he talked to some of his political people, and he talked to the economists. This was a full-scale effort on his part, to get the Democrats committed to it, to get the President committed to it, and to get the advocacy community to sign off on whatever the amount was going to be.

Young: And it sounds like this is uphill.

Littlefield: It's uphill to get it in in the first place, with the President and with the Senate. It's impossible to get it for $1.50. The Senator went to another meeting at the White House, on welfare reform, and he buttonholed the President. The President told him, "I did what you asked me to do in the State of the Union, and 50, 50 is okay with me." So the White House had moved from 75 to $1.

We came back and met with the House members, but they still weren't sold on 50, 50. The Senator talked to David Bonior, who was waiting to hear back from Daschle, who Kennedy was

also talking to about what the Senate would agree to. Bonior said, "What about 45, 45, which gets us a 90 cent increase, which is better than 75 cents?"

What made that such a shrewd idea was that the last time the minimum wage had been increased, under the first President [George H.W.] Bush, a Republican, it had been voted on by Republicans and was 45, 45. So this would enable Kennedy to say, "This is the same increase we did under a conservative President Bush, so if we could do it then, we ought to be able to do it now."

But Kennedy had to sell Lane Kirkland, the head of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]. So we had to go meet with him and ask if they would accept 45, 45. Back to Gephardt, back to the President, and by Thursday—Remember, he'd come back to town on Tuesday morning. By Thursday, it looked as if everybody would fall in line at 45, 45. Friday there was a press conference in the Rose Garden to announce that all the Democrats had agreed on 45, 45.

So within two weeks of his mother's death 12 or 13 days before, when he first raised it with the President since he talked to him about it in December—and with Labor at $1.50 and most of the Democratic caucus not wanting to do it all—Kennedy had navigated all these differences and achieved consensus among all these players. One week of that time—well, eight days—he'd been in Hyannis Port preparing for his mother's funeral and dealing with the family. Then he came back, and on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, he put together a Democratic Party united behind a 45, 45, with Labor supporting it.

On Friday, February 3, in the Rose Garden, the President, surrounded by Democrats, including Kennedy, announced that he would propose raising the minimum wage from $4.25 to $5.15. There were no Republicans there, but it was the first time—the only time up to that point since the election—that Democrats had come together as a united force to lay down a specific marker against the Republican juggernaut. Later in the morning, at 11 o'clock, in a small room in the basement of the Senate Russell Building, the advocacy groups—the Women's Legal Defense Fund and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and dozens of others—came together with their statements of support for 45 cents.

Twenty-five groups came to the meeting. The Senator had wanted to get everybody committed to this so we wouldn't have any more backbiting about how much it was going to be. We had the President, the Democrats, all the advocacy community, the inside game and the outside game; we had the communications message, and we had the substance all done. It all came together.

Kennedy then went to the floor—that was one more piece. He went to the floor of the Senate that Friday and announced that the Democrats and the President had all agreed to support raising the minimum wage, and he pointed out that more than 85% of the Republicans in the Senate in 1989 had supported raising the minimum wage by that same 90 cents, to go into effect in '90 and '91, but that wasn't enough.

The conventional wisdom was that minimum wage still had no chance, because the Republicans and House Majority leader Dick Armey were saying, "Over my dead body." But Kennedy had mobilized the entire Democratic Party, the Congress, the House, and the advocacy community behind this message initiative—within a week of the President's State of the Union speech.

When he started, there wasn't a single person who would have bet that Clinton would be for it, let alone House or Senate Democrats. And if they were, they'd never be for anything that Labor or the interest groups could ever agree to.

Young: Was it done?

Littlefield: Minimum wage was increased a year and a half later, but Kennedy worked on it that whole time.

Young: So it had to have been done with Republican votes.

Littlefield: It was done over the resistance of Republicans, but ultimately Kennedy made it impossible for Republicans to be against it. That's a whole other story.

Young: Well, I think now that you've started on minimum wage, you should finish that story.

Littlefield: I can finish minimum wage. This is a good story. This captures his legislative genius.

Young: Absolutely.

Littlefield: Remember, there was a parallel initiative going on at the same time, which was Kennedy getting the healthcare bill done. So Kennedy is moving these two—minimum wage and healthcare regulation, the pre-existing condition/portability issues, the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill—at a time when no one thinks the Democrats can possibly ever get anything passed. The House is in control of the Gingrich revolution, and they're all about the Contract with America, which is about abolishing the minimum wage and minimizing regulation of private-sector health insurers—undoing any regulations that exist. They were going to get rid of them. That's what the Republicans were about in 1995.

And Kennedy is now heading right into the jaws of this juggernaut with two affirmative initiatives. It seems almost impossible. People would have said this was absolutely, absurdly impossible. But Kennedy knew that if we didn't do this, who were we? If we didn't do this, what were we standing for?

Now at the same time—which is a whole other story, five times as long as the minimum wage story—is Kennedy's leadership of the resistance to the Contract with America, as one thing from the Contract after another passed in the House. Kennedy led an effort in the Senate to stop it. Essentially, none of the items in the Contract with America—all of which were passed in the House in the first 100 days—made it through the Senate, despite the fact that when the year started, anyone would have said that most of them would make it through, because there simply was this state of utter demoralization on the part of the Democrats, in the Senate as well as the House.

Kennedy was tireless on the floor, in the back rooms, with the media, getting his arguments together with the advocacy and public interest groups, and he prevailed over and over again. He blocked, essentially, all of the most extreme measures he opposed. So we're now going to stick to minimum wage.

Young: Before we go to the end of the story on minimum wage, you referred to this meeting about bringing the advocacy groups together. Did he have a difficult job persuading some of them to accept the minimum wage compromise?

Littlefield: Yes, particularly Labor, which wanted $1.50, three 50-cent increases. He had to meet with all of them individually. But once we had the deal with the President, he wanted to lock it in with the advocacy community, and he wanted them all to come to this press conference and give written statements.

Young: They had to understand it was this or nothing.

Littlefield: It was this or nothing; this is what it was. He wanted them on the record right then and there so there couldn't be a lot of complaining and moaning later. There might be bitching and moaning, but they couldn't back off. He knew he needed a united front. You couldn't get this thing done unless you had the politics and the message right. You have the substance with 45, 45. It worked because it was the same as what had happened in 1990, the first minimum wage increase in ten years. Each time the minimum wage had fallen way below its historic level in relation to wages and cost of living, so it was crucial that something be done. The first compromise he made was to go from three years to two, and then he went from 50 cents to 45 cents. This is more than the President wanted initially, but everybody came together around this amount.

So we spent the year of 1995 working around the minimum wage proposal. We were always back to the three key strategies: substance, politics, and press—politics including inside game and outside game. We had to mobilize all our arguments for the minimum wage. It was going to take every ounce of strength the Senator had to pull together the impact of the minimum wage on people in this country and why it was so important.

We had to analyze the case against the minimum wage, the argument that jobs would be lost. We had to bring in key economists to talk about that. We had to analyze how the minimum wage would affect different segments of the American community: women, children, minorities, immigrants, working people, union members, people earning more than the minimum wage.

As I said yesterday, there's a big impact on jobs all the way up the chain, and we had to bring in as broad a coalition as possible. We finally introduced the bill in March '95. We had to do the substance, and we had to get a majority of members of the House and Senate to support the legislation, and that was going to mean we needed a grassroots campaign all across the country.

We looked back at the campaign we had run in 1989, when the minimum wage had last been raised, and also going back to 1979, when it had been raised the time before that—all Kennedy initiatives. Unlike education, there's no ongoing organization dedicated to the proposition that we have to keep raising the minimum wage. There are groups that advocate for education, groups that advocate for healthcare, groups that advocate for labor issues. They are in existence all the time; they have networks all across the country.

But there's no one organization that's about getting the minimum wage increased. Everybody's interested in it. If you represent women you're interested in it, if you represent children you're interested in it, if you represent immigrants you're interested in it. But you have a dozen other

issues that are more important in a way, that are more about your particular area. So we had to build a coalition each time we raised the minimum wage. We had to create an organized coalition to be the army to support the legislation. We had to create an *ad hoc* coalition to support the minimum wage.

In 1989, Leon Scholl, the retired executive director of the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action], had agreed to come out of retirement to coordinate this coalition, and we got him to do so again in '95. We had to create a steering committee of notable leaders; we had to pull together all the groups to join the coalition. We went over who had been on the steering committee back in '89: it was Marian Edelman from the Children's Defense Fund, Lane Kirkland from the AFL, John Mack from the Urban League, Arthur Flemming, who had previously been a Republican HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare] Secretary in the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower administration.

We wanted to have bipartisanship where we could, so we needed a steering committee. We also needed to have a big press event with the steering committee. We needed to get interest groups together, as many of the groups from each of the key areas as we could. We held meetings every week, starting in about February of 1995, in the Labor Committee hearing room, to coordinate the reinstitution of the minimum wage campaign committee. Every Monday morning we met at 11:00 all through '95 and '96 to coordinate grassroots activity, keep track of the vote count.

Our first task was to get as many of the advocacy groups as possible, from the civil rights area, children's, women's, church, health—everything. Then we would take assignments to meet with members of Congress to pull together the broad support. We wanted to have meetings both in Washington and locally, because the members are often more interested and affected by what happens locally. Then we'd get word back from the local meetings to the state chapter, and that would go to the national chapter. These meetings would happen when people were home on recess, and the message was the same: Democrats are united behind a 90-cent increase, and it's an important issue to mobilize Democrats and then Republicans.

Meanwhile, Kennedy was working one-on-one with other key Democrats, to get their support for the 90 cents. Kennedy wasn't going to leave any stone unturned. He went door-to-door all over the Senate. He talked to every single Democratic Senator. He scheduled meetings with them to obtain their commitment to vote for the minimum wage increase and their advice on how to make it happen. He also went door-to-door in the House—and it's unheard of for such a senior Democratic Senator to go over to the House. He'd done that in 1990 when we were doing the first national service legislation. People were surprised; they thought it was great. As a courtesy, he always went to the offices of the people he was meeting with, regardless of seniority; rarely would he ask them to come to his office. All during the spring of '95, he was buttonholing members and meeting with them.

Young: These were Democratic members?

Littlefield: Democrats, yes. Then we needed a PR strategy; Kennedy wanted events to publicize, to attract attention to the minimum wage, so people would begin to feel that it was really taking hold. We had events of all kinds. We had press conferences to announce the introduction. We invited sponsors and Cabinet officers, House and Senate members, and individuals from across

the country to tell their stories about why they needed it. We couldn't have hearings because we didn't control the Senate, so we had public meetings and press conferences, rallies, and forums.

One school of thought is that if you bring a celebrity to a press conference it gets attended, but sometimes the celebrity overshadows the issue. We've had celebrities over the years, but I think we all believed that for this one we wanted people who were affected by the fact that the minimum wage wasn't enough to get them out of poverty.

Sometimes for press events we were inside the Capitol, and sometimes we were outside. If we were outside, we had nice views of the Capitol dome, but the Senator didn't really like being outside because you couldn't hear if the wind was blowing; it was hard. There were places where you could get TV cameras, but you really were taking your chances that it would work. And if you were going to be on the steps of the Capitol, you needed hundreds, if not thousands, of people to make an impact. So everything had to be planned, where to have it. This coalition kept meeting, the grassroots activity kept going, we kept the drumbeat in the press; we did events every other week, bringing people in.

We wanted to bring the whole thing to a crescendo in '96, when we were going to make our run at it. We had forums, one in the Senate caucus room that I remember very well, bringing in a whole series of people from all over the country who were affected by the minimum wage. Labor was very much involved with this.

Young: Were Hispanic groups or ethnic groups?

Littlefield: Yes, everybody. The head of the AFL-CIO shifted at that time from Lane Kirkland to John Sweeney, and we persuaded the AFL to come up with a legislative plan, which was run under the caption "America needs a raise." This became the visual for our campaign. They did posters, they did T-shirts, they did rallies, and in the spring of '96, when we were really building this thing to a crescendo, we did an enormous "America needs a raise" rally on the steps of the Capitol, with thousands of people.

These events kept this issue alive when the main focus was on Gingrich cutting the government, and Gingrich and Clinton were warring over shutting down the government. So while all the defensive resistance was going on, we were mobilizing this campaign around the minimum wage. There were op-eds, talk shows, meetings with editorial boards, letters to the editor. We tried to match how good the conservatives were at the grassroots, and we tried to get the President to speak about it.

Young: Were you doing much television?

Littlefield: No ads. We didn't have any money. It all had to be free press, so it was all grassroots activity. Except for whatever Labor did, there were no ads. We knew we'd need unanimous support among Democrats, and we wanted to get some Republicans who would feel the pressure. Jim Jeffords, the Republican from Vermont, had always supported minimum wage increases, and eventually he agreed to be a cosponsor of the bill, so we had one Republican bipartisan Senator.

The conservative Democrats were not sure whether they were going to support us. Senator [Samuel] Nunn, Senator [Dale] Bumpers, Senator [Ernest F.] Hollings, the southern Senators,

Senator Breaux—we just didn't know what they were going to do. They were still complaining that this was the old Democrats and this was an old issue. Daschle was by then helping us with the whip count, and the office of Senator [Wendell H.] Ford from Kentucky was working with us on getting a whip count of Democrats so we could make sure we had them all.

Young: How did Daschle feel about this?

Littlefield: He had agreed finally to do it. He was part of the group that agreed to do it in that week after the State of the Union speech in '94. We knew we had about 35 to 40 Democratic votes, but we didn't know if we had all 45. We wanted to see if we could get a test vote on the minimum wage somehow, without actually risking it. So we thought we should start with a "Sense of the Senate" resolution. Kennedy had this idea. The only way to find out if these conservative Democrats were going to vote with us was to try this Sense of the Senate. It would just be a vote on the proposition of whether the minimum wage should be raised. It would not actually be a vote on whether to raise it.

We thought this might give these conservative Democrats a little bit of cover. They could vote on the proposition that something should happen, and if anybody criticized them for it, they could say, "We didn't vote to actually do it." We were trying to basically get them into this thing with the least pain possible from their standpoint, so we'd know where they stood and whether we even had a chance.

We finally had a chance to offer this on July 31, 1995, on the Defense Appropriations Bill. Senator Kennedy went down to offer his resolution. Three Senators were absent, two Republicans and one Democrat. The resolution was defeated by a vote of 49 to 48. We won four Republicans: Jeffords, [Arlen] Specter, Ben "Nighthorse" Campbell, the Senator from Colorado, and John Warner. We were jubilant. We were defeated 49 to 48, but we had gotten all the Democrats.

Bob Kerrey actually voted the wrong way, and that's why we lost. It didn't really matter that we lost or won—all the Democrats voted with us except for Bob Kerrey, who later told us it had been a mistake. He thought the vote was on a motion to table the resolution, so he voted no, whereas in fact it was a vote on the resolution. So his no vote was a no, and we lost because of that confusion. He was gone from the floor by the time we figured it out, and it was too late to get him to change his mind, although he told us he would.

We thought we had made real progress, because we now had all the Democrats on record as supporting this sense of the Senate. We thought that once we had a majority of the Senate, it would be harder for the opposition. Kennedy could say, "Why are you filibustering a majority of the Senate?"

The next legislative step he took was on the budget, in October of 1995. We get to offer amendments, and they get to be voted on. It was chaos—amendment, vote; amendment, vote; amendment, vote; amendment, vote. When the Democratic leadership was trying to organize their strategy on the budget, Kennedy persuaded them that the minimum wage should be the key Democratic issue on the subject of jobs and wages. This was a message amendment, and we worked with the leadership to assign different amendments to different Democrats.

Senator Kerry of Massachusetts was up for reelection in 1996, and he wanted to offer this to give him some visibility. So he offered the minimum wage as a sense of the Senate on October 27. It was a nonbinding resolution. All it did was call for a vote—there should be a vote on whether to raise the minimum wage. However, since it was not germane to the budget, it would be subject to a point of order to exclude the vote from being taken. And in order to overrule the parliamentarian, who would say that it was not germane to the budget, we needed to get 60 votes, three fifths, under the Senate rules.

Kennedy's idea was to do it this way because everyone knew we couldn't get 60 votes. This would be a very easy pass vote for the Democrats, because they can say to their people, "We gave the progressives their vote, but we knew it didn't mean anything because it couldn't possibly pass, because it wasn't going to get 60." Since it called for a vote, this was one step closer to actually doing it than the one they voted for earlier.

Senator Kerry raised the amendment, the vote was held, the resolution was blocked by a point of order, a motion was made and supported to waive the point of order by a 51 to 48 vote. We had now gained Senator Bob Kerrey, who had voted wrong the first time, and the two Maine state Republicans, [William S.] Cohen and [Olympia] Snowe. Now we had a majority of the Senate on record for a resolution that a vote on raising the minimum wage should be held. This was one more step, major progress. This was really something, but this is what it took.

We now are ready to offer the minimum wage on the floor, if we can ever get an opening in the parliamentary process, under the rules, to offer it. Senator Dole, who's now getting ready to run for President in 1996, knows that we have the votes to pass it. We have a majority of the votes. Dole can't let a vote on minimum wage happen now, because it would be way too embarrassing since he's the leader of the Republicans, and his constituents, conservative Republicans, hate the minimum wage. He's running in primaries all over the country, starting in New Hampshire, and since his whole claim to fame is that he's the master of the Senate, he can't run for President as a Republican in these primaries with the Senate having voted to increase the minimum wage.

The first thing he does is keep the Senate out of session until February 27, two whole months, so he can essentially lock up the nomination before he has to face the nightmare of Kennedy's juggernaut coming at him with the minimum wage. It was also helpful to us because there had been these government shutdowns, which were preoccupying everybody, and people might think it was a distraction to go off on the minimum wage. So it helped us to have this time off.

In any event, it put the pressure on Dole, because when the Senate came back into session, Dole had to control the Senate completely, which meant every time there was an issue on the floor, he had to close off the opportunity for Kennedy to offer this amendment. So Dole had to strategize to fill the amendment tree with first- and second-degree amendments. You're only allowed two amendments to any matter, a first-degree and a second-degree. So he had to fill the tree, so to speak, which means he had to be on his guard. Any time there was an issue on the floor, he had to immediately get recognized or have one of his people recognized to offer a first-degree amendment and then a second-degree amendment, so there would be no room for Kennedy to offer the minimum wage, which he was now going to do at the first opportunity.

The Senate came back into session in March, end of February, and Kennedy started going to the press and announcing that he was going to offer the minimum wage amendment, the first opening he had. He made a big public display to create interest and to create pressure on Dole. Kennedy knew that if at any time he was successful in offering the amendment, Dole would pull the underlying legislation from the floor, which he could do as Majority Leader, thereby killing the underlying bill, and there would be nothing to vote on.

So Dole had to stop this. He couldn't let Kennedy do it, or it would kill his campaign for the Presidency, or so everyone thought. Kennedy now had Dole in a trap, because if Dole wanted to pass legislation—which is what he was claiming he was so good at—for his Presidential campaign, he had the risk that if Kennedy got a minimum wage amendment up, Dole had to pull his whole bill down to avoid the amendment vote. There's no other way to avoid the amendment vote. During March everybody was saying, "What's wrong with Kennedy? Why isn't he offering the amendment?" And the press was building up pressure saying he was just joking, he didn't really have the votes.

The week of March 25 was the last time to offer the minimum wage before a two-week Easter recess. The Energy Committee had brought legislation to the floor on a Utah Wilderness Bill, which was also going to create a federal park at the Presidio area in San Francisco, big environmental legislation. Some Democratic environmentalists opposed the Utah bill, and others wanted more federal parks added to it.

Dole wanted to bring the Utah Wilderness Bill to passage, but Democrats had the votes to continue their filibuster, apparently, on the Utah Wilderness/Presidio Bill. So Dole really couldn't do that. Democrats could also offer the minimum wage amendment, but we knew that if we were to win that, or if Dole thought we were going to win it, he would pull the underlying bill down. Or we would lose the minimum wage in conference, because everyone wanted to do these parks bills. They were popular.

We heard at one point that if we got our minimum wage amendment on the floor, Senator Kassebaum was going to offer a second-degree amendment to allow states to opt out of the minimum wage. We were very worried about that, but we were planning for Senator Kennedy to try to lay down the minimum wage vote on this Utah Park bill and take our chances.

This was going to be on Tuesday morning at 10:30. Kennedy and the leadership organized a whole series of Democrats to come to the floor to speak. We had [Paul] Wellstone for 30 minutes, Dodd for 10, [Paul] Simon for 10, [Barbara] Mikulski for 10, John Kerry for 20, [Carl] Levin for 10, [Thomas] Harkin for 10, Daschle for 25, Kennedy, [Barbara] Boxer, and [Patty] Murray. The whole Labor Committee was going to be down there arguing for the minimum wage. In the beginning of the week, Senator [Trent] Lott, standing in for Senator Dole, who was campaigning, announced that on Tuesday we would resume the Presidio/Utah legislation, and Senator Daschle or a Democrat would be prepared to offer an amendment at 10:30. So the stage was set.

At 10:30 the next day, however, the Republican leadership changed their mind and decided they didn't want to take a chance on the minimum wage after all. So they pursued a strategy to foreclose any Democratic attempt to offer the amendment. Lott asked for unanimous consent that

he substitute the Utah Wilderness Bill—a whole *new* Utah Wilderness Bill—to be considered as original text on the Senate floor, replacing the underlying bill, and thus opening the substitute to further amendment. Lott planned to fill in the amendment slots on this new bill.

The deal had been struck with respect to the original Utah bill, and Lott thought he could foreclose us by offering this substitute, which would be original text, and he would immediately fill the tree with amendments so we wouldn't be able to get in after all.

However, it turned out that Senator Lott was operating under a mistaken parliamentary impression—which Kennedy alone discovered—that the substitute would be open for amendments. He thought his substitute would be open for amendments, so he then asked unanimous consent of the Senate to go off the Utah bill and into other morning business until 12:30.

Young: Who is he?

Littlefield: Lott, who's there in place of Dole.

Young: Now, Kennedy had said he was operating—

Littlefield: Kennedy understood. I don't think he told Dole.

Young: Oh, he didn't say it.

Littlefield: I don't think so. Kennedy objected to going into morning business, and he reiterated his understanding that Daschle was to be recognized at 10:30 to offer an amendment. He said that Daschle had designated him in his stead, and the amendment to be offered was to increase the minimum wage. Kennedy then did one of his speeches about, "We are seeing the commitment of our Republican friends—which cannot be separated from the Republican who's on the ballot out in the state of California, Senator Dole—that on the matter of workers' fairness, we're not even, as Republicans, going to permit you to vote on the minimum wage or to discuss it on the floor of the Senate. We're going to use all the parliamentary means of denying working families the chance to get any kind of increase in the minimum wage."

He continued on that theme, "Why, they won't even let there be a vote on the minimum wage. In the past we've increased it; it's been bipartisan. Why can't we do it now?" Kerry and Wellstone came down.

Senator [Donald] Nickles, the Republican from Oklahoma, said, "The implication from the remarks of the Senator from Massachusetts is that if we do not increase the minimum wage, we do not care about low income people. I find that to be offensive."

They went to lunch. Every Tuesday all the Senators from each party get together at lunches. Dole was back in Washington, and they thought they had a plan to block Kennedy. They'd worked on it with their parliamentarians all during this time.

So when the Senate session resumed at 2:00 that afternoon, Lott and Dole arranged to have two amendments filed to the [Frank] Murkowski Utah Wilderness substitute, a first-degree and a

second-degree. They thought that the substitute closed off the original bill, and that by filling the available amendment spots to the substitute, they had closed off any opportunities for amendments for the underlying bill, which had been substituted for. Kennedy thought otherwise. He was confident that Senator Dole had overlooked the fact that there was still an opportunity to offer an amendment to the original underlying Utah Wilderness legislation.

Young: Now he's saying this on the floor?

Littlefield: No. He was confident. This is what Kennedy believed, and he said, "I believe they've missed something. There's an opening to offer the minimum wage to the underlying bill, because there are no amendments to the underlying bill other than the substitute. They've substituted revised text, but that still leaves open the underlying bill."

He asked me during the lunch to check with the Democratic floor strategist without letting the Republicans know what we were doing, without giving away our strategy. I checked with the Democratic floor staff, and they assumed that Dole and the Republican parliamentarian had eliminated the possibility of additional Democratic amendments. They were skeptical of Kennedy's interpretation of the rules.

I went and found Kennedy during the lunch and reported to him that the Senate Democratic floor staff did not believe he, in fact, had the option to offer amendments to the underlying bill once the substitute had been agreed to. The Senator was frustrated. He said he knew he was right, and I should check with other parliamentary experts. He went back to lunch. I reached out to the other parliamentary experts we relied on at the Congressional Research Service.

They thought the Senator was right. We could not, of course, discuss this with the chief parliamentarian, who was Dole's guy, a Republican, They would tell Senator Dole, who would have remedied the situation by exercising his right to priority recognition and offering his own first- and second-degree amendments to fill the vacant amendment slots on the underlying bill.

Young: So you had to keep it secret.

Littlefield: Yes. I reported back to Kennedy. He conferred with Daschle, and they agreed that later that afternoon they would strike, take their chance. Daschle would be recognized; he, in turn, would recognize Kennedy, and Kennedy would offer the minimum wage amendment to the underlying original Utah Wilderness Bill. Then, to make sure there would be no second-degree amendment to the Kennedy amendment to the underlying Utah Wilderness Bill that would undercut a clean vote on the minimum wage, Kennedy would recognize John Kerry, who would immediately offer a second-degree minimum wage amendment to the first-degree minimum wage amendment, which would change the Kennedy amendment only very slightly, leaving a clean vote on the minimum wage, which would be on Kerry's second-degree amendment, as the order of business on the underlying substitute.

Following the Kerry amendment, Daschle would then immediately offer a cloture petition on the Kennedy amendment, signed by 15 Senators, which would require a vote on the minimum wage amendment two days later, March 28. We knew we wouldn't get our 60 votes, but there would be a chance, actually, for a recorded vote on whether to raise the minimum wage. This is the first time we'd been able to do that.

After the caucus lunch, the Senate debate resumed on the Utah/Presidio Bill. Dole came to the floor and, as expected, offered two amendments to the Murkowski substitute. Thinking that he had now blocked Kennedy's minimum wage amendment, he confidently allowed Senator Daschle to be recognized.

"Sooner or later," Daschle said, "we will have a vote on the minimum wage. Sooner or later it has to be resolved, and my preference is to do it sooner. This vehicle affords us the opportunity to do that. I yield to my colleague from Massachusetts." Kennedy then took the floor and, as planned, offered his amendment to raise the minimum wage to the underlying original Murkowski Utah Wilderness Bill.

Senator Kerry then stood up. Kennedy yielded to him, and he offered the second-degree amendment to the Kennedy amendment. Both amendments raised the minimum wage 45 cents each year—the difference was that instead of having the increase go up on July 4, Kerry's amendment was July 5 in both years. That made it different. [*laughs*]

Kerry then moved to table his amendment. A tabling motion takes precedence over any other matter and must be voted on immediately without debate. Senator Dole, who was off the floor, rushed back in and immediately put a quorum call to block a vote on Kerry's tabling motion. For several hours, the Senate was in a quorum call, and no debate was allowed while Dole explored his options.

After three hours Dole came back to the floor, his strategy decided on. He would persuade all Republicans to vote against Kerry's motion to table the minimum wage amendment. By doing so, he could deny the Democrats the ability to claim they had a meaningful vote on the minimum wage. So all Republicans would vote against tabling, allowing debate on the minimum wage to go forward but not voting up or down on the substance.

The problem for Dole was that it would leave the Kennedy and Kerry first- and second-degree minimum wage amendments as one of the orders of business on the underlying Utah Wilderness legislation. So we're getting there. This is what happens in the Senate, and this is why Kennedy is so good. This is something you probably haven't heard in this level of detail: Kennedy's genius as a parliamentarian—as smart as anybody in the building.

Young: Keep going.

Littlefield: At this point, we had the Murkowski substitute with two place-holding first-degree amendments, and the underlying original Murkowski bill, with the Kennedy and Kerry minimum wage amendments. At some time, if the Utah Wilderness Bill were still on the floor, those amendments would need to be voted on.

Dole simply announced that he would pull the Utah bill from the floor entirely and send it to the Senate Finance Committee for further action, thus killing the Utah Wilderness Bill for the time being, but also eliminating his problem with the minimum wage amendments. So Dole had avoided, for that day only, a vote on the minimum wage, but at the cost of having to pull the Utah/Presidio Wilderness Bill entirely. Sacrificing the Wilderness Bill was a big price for Dole to pay, because the bill contained the creation of as many as 24 other national parks across the country. It was very popular among Senators.

The next day, Dole turned to the line-item veto legislation, which the Senate promptly approved. [Robert] Byrd, who opposes line-item vetoes, gave a two-hour speech, referring to the Bible, Aristotle, Alexander Hamilton, Daniel Webster, the fall of Rome and the United States Constitution. Senator Byrd is single-minded about preserving the power of Congress, and the line-item veto gives the President the power. His arguments didn't prevail, but Byrd was ultimately vindicated when the Supreme Court struck down the line-item veto as unconstitutional.

Now we have a cloture vote scheduled on the minimum wage for Thursday, March 28, but there was no debate on the minimum wage since Dole pulled the Utah bill down. Now we have Kennedy going to the floor and making a speech linking Dole's Presidential campaign to the minimum wage struggle. Kennedy gives one of his great Senate speeches: "Senator Dole is leading the filibuster; he's the one who could end it. Thumbs up, and 13 million wage earners get their first pay raise in five years; thumbs down, and 13 million wage earners go on living in poverty, because the minimum wage is not a living wage." And on he goes.

"Senator Dole locks up the nomination, and the first thing he does is lock out the 13 million Americans who are only asking for the fair minimum wage they deserve." This is pretty rough stuff for a guy who's running for President. "Speaker Gingrich and Senator Dole make a remarkable couple. It's like Bonnie [Parker] and Clyde [Barrow] writing the Republican platform. Newt Gingrich wants to repeal the ban on assault weapons, and Bob Dole wants to block any increases in the minimum wage."

Senator Murkowski came to the defense of Senator Dole, complaining that the strategy of putting the minimum wage onto his National Parks bill was unconscionable, political opportunism at its worst. It was delaying what he described as "the most significant environmental measure to come before the Senate."

Nickles followed Murkowski. Kennedy took the floor again and quoted Bob Dole from 1974: "I am pleased to support the conference report of the minimum wage bill: a living wage for a day's work is a hallmark of the American economic philosophy." This is 1974. Then he quoted Bob Dole from May 1989, "I have said that as a Republican, I am not going to stand here and say you could live on $3.25 an hour or $4.55 an hour. To be sure, I am all for helping the working people; I have spent my public life supporting causes on behalf of the working people. The working people deserve a wage increase.

"Mr. President," Kennedy said, "where is that Bob Dole?" Shortly thereafter the cloture vote was held, and the Democrats picked up eight Republicans to go with the 47 Democrats, for a total of 55 votes, up from 51 during the last vote in October.

Young: Yes.

Littlefield: And now we had [Alfonse] D'Amato of New York, [Mark] Hatfield of Oregon, Jeffords, Specter, [Rick] Santorum of Pennsylvania, Snowe, Cohen, and [William] Roth of Delaware. The strategy was working. We had failed to obtain the 60 votes necessary to end a filibuster, but we'd made progress. We had 55 votes in the Senate, and now we would wait for our next opportunity to strike. Everybody went home for two weeks for the Easter recess. At this

point, as soon as the Senate comes back, we're going to be relentless on Dole on the minimum wage again.

At this point Clinton understood that his administration needed the Senate, because the Senate was helping Clinton with his campaign against Dole by making Dole look like such a fool. There was press covering the Senate in a way there never normally is, because that's where Dole is, and he's the Republican nominee. And as you know, there's a whole team of Presidential campaign reporters who cover the candidate every single day. We had not only the normal Congressional coverage, but we had the Presidential campaign coverage going on in the Senate, and Kennedy had the whole thing tied up around his minimum wage.

At that point, Clinton was not triangulating. He loved what was happening in the Senate, and he wanted to work with the Senate. All during the recess we kept shoring up our arguments. Kennedy kept getting more economic information about the minimum wage. We met with the House people to see what the House strategy could be.

Young: At what point was the argument made by the opponents—or was it made at this time?—about the historical statistic that when you raise the wage, employment goes down? You had dealt with that earlier?

Littlefield: We dealt with it from the very beginning. We knew that issue cold. We had every study that showed that the last time the minimum wage was increased, five years before, employment hadn't gone down; it had gone up. We had statistics going back to the first minimum wage. We had charts showing all the way back to the first minimum wage that historically, if you look at employment, it really doesn't go down. We were looking at macroeconomic numbers. I'm sure there are numbers that show that in some places sometimes it goes down, but we showed that it always came back up.

Congress reconvened after the Easter recess, and now the first bill on the floor was the Immigration Reform Bill. Republican Senator [Alan] Simpson, Kennedy's friend from the Judiciary Committee, was going to floor-manage the bill, and since it was an immigration bill, Kennedy was automatically the floor manager for the Democrats. So he was there on the floor, running the show for the Democrats, which was perfect, because he had both his health bill and the minimum wage ready for the floor—both of which Dole was trying to avoid votes on.

On the floor, they talk about and debate immigration. Kennedy gives occasional speeches on minimum wage and healthcare, but basically it's immigration. Kennedy's trying to offer minimum wage to immigration, and he's tying up the immigration bill. It actually turns out that within a day or so of the immigration bill coming to the floor, since Kennedy was constantly offering the minimum wage, Dole was thinking maybe he needed to pull it down.

But Kennedy resisted and said there were amendments to the immigration bill and he was prepared to enter into a time agreement. He told Dole that if he was worried about how long a minimum wage amendment would take, he would enter into a time agreement of 30 minutes on it. Then Dole said he was going to replace immigration. (I was wrong when I said the immigration debate went on for very long. Right now, Dole was seeing that he couldn't really

control the situation, so he was talking about bringing it down because Kennedy was still going to offer the minimum wage.)

So Dole announced that he was going to replace the immigration bill with a conference report on anti-terrorism. But the anti-terrorism bill wasn't as strong as Kennedy wanted it to be. There was general criticism of the terrorist bill, so Dole was losing ground on that.

Then Dole went to the floor and said, "We're not going to debate the immigration bill; it's being held hostage now because of the minimum wage amendments. They have the gall to stand up and say they want to move ahead on illegal immigration, but we know what's happening."

Meanwhile, the coalition-inspired grassroots pressure on the minimum wage issue was paying off. Thirteen House Republicans announced in the *New York Times* that they had broken ranks on the issue of the minimum wage, and House leaders—who had resisted a Democratic demand from Gephardt in the House to have a minimum wage vote—were understood to be uncertain about whether they would win one if it were allowed to happen. This was great.

Dole was spending the Easter recess at some resort in Florida. He had been overheard saying to a reporter that he hadn't thought about what should be done on the minimum wage. This comment was accompanied in newspapers by Dole in a bathing suit at a pool at his condominium in Bal Harbour. This was not helpful to his campaign.

Then the *New York Times* reported that there were 20 House Republicans prepared to vote for the minimum wage, and then the Democratic House leadership released a poll showing 84% of Americans supported raising the minimum wage. The pincer movement on minimum wage was coming together.

This was '96, a year later. Gingrich had already been in power for a year. They had done everything in the House, but the Senate hadn't done the Contract with America. Now some of the House Republicans were getting worried about the election, because they hadn't done anything. They hadn't actually gotten the laws changed that they intended.

In the meanwhile, on April 18, the Kassebaum-Kennedy Health Insurance Regulation Bill passed the Senate over Dole's furious objections. He allowed a vote to occur, although he opposed it as firmly as he could. He lost. Kassebaum is standing with Kennedy, and they pass the health bill. So now we're left with just the minimum wage still to do. Dole, on April 21, is asked on CBS *Face the Nation*, "Will there be an increase in the minimum wage?" He replies, "I assume there will. There are enough Republicans in the House saying they're going to vote for it, that it looks like the House is going to pass the minimum wage."

Young: This is Dole speaking?

Littlefield: Dole. Dole announced that his strategy now, as it had been with the healthcare bill, would be to add other measures to the legislation that he didn't think unions would like. It was clear now that Dole had lost control of the Senate: he had lost the health bill and the minimum wage had become inevitable.

This was Kennedy's strategy: it now was inevitable that the minimum wage legislation would be enacted. But Dole still resisted, joking about how he would weigh the bill down with measures that the proponents would hate. He had no idea how to turn a losing hand into a winning hand. He could have done that either by recognizing the handwriting on the wall sooner and packaging the legislation in a way that he could enthusiastically support it, or he could have fought to the end to make sure he kept control of the Republican defectors.

He did have his big majority in the Senate, so he should have been able to do that, but he misplayed his hand from the beginning. He got himself outmaneuvered on the floor on minimum wage and in the press on healthcare, and ultimately, the master legislator turned out to be not very good at corralling his troops.

We saw Senator Dole affable on the one hand, but with a fierce temper and vicious tongue on the other. He was essentially disengaged from the Senate even though his mastery of the Senate was supposed to be the cornerstone of his campaign. He never really sat down with his colleagues to anticipate what Kennedy had in store for them. He was unprepared. After every move Kennedy made, Dole had to call a recess and retreat to his office with a parliamentarian and the rest of his leadership team to work out a strategy of how to respond. He was left holding the bag on the minimum wage when he and his staff neglected to block Senator Kennedy from offering the amendment in the obscure procedural maneuver, which should have been noted by Senator Dole and his parliamentarian.

He was buffeted between his better instincts on the one hand and the conservatives he had to appeal to to win the nomination, particularly Senator [William Philip] Gramm from Texas, who was constantly challenging Dole to be more in tune with the House revolution and Gingrich. Dole did have better instincts. He was a moderate Republican who had been for civil rights, for the minimum wage, for the Americans with Disabilities Act. It was a disaster for Dole's candidacy, and on April 22, Kennedy was back on the floor demanding an up or down vote. Polls were in favor.

On April 25, the Republican leadership in the House conceded that they'd have to allow an amendment on the minimum wage, although Armey was still leading the resistance in the House. Tom DeLay caused a furor when he declared, "Emotional appeals about working families trying to get by on $4.25 an hour are hard to resist, but fortunately, such families don't really exist." The Democrats jumped on that.

On the floor of the Senate, however, Dole and the Republicans were still denying Kennedy the chance to offer the minimum wage amendment. The strategy was to deny recognition to any individual who had not pledged that the amendment he or she was going to offer would be relevant to the immigration bill, which they brought back on the floor.

"The only matters we could vote on would be those that were going to be understood or cleared beforehand not to include the minimum wage," Senator Kennedy said. "The matter is all the more urgent, because statements have been made by Gingrich and Armey that there will not be any vote on the minimum wage in the House, despite what people think."

On Friday, April 26, Democrats in the House tried again to require the House to vote on the minimum wage. The motion failed, 220 to 200, although 13 Republicans sided with the Democrats. Armey said, "I will resist an increase in the minimum wage with every fiber of my being." John Boehner, the Republican conference chairman said, "I'll commit suicide before I vote on a clean minimum wage bill."

Young: So the state of play now is—?

Littlefield: The struggle is still ongoing, and there's now even a problem with health reform. The Republicans have changed their mind; they're not going to do that after all—and they control things. That ultimately did get it figured out.

Dole has figured out how to continue to block Kennedy on the immigration bill with his strategy of refusing to allow recognition for any Senator who planned to offer any amendment other than an immigration amendment. On Friday, he filed a cloture petition to end debate on the immigration bill, and that closed off all other amendments except amendments germane to immigration. So there couldn't be an amendment to the immigration bill for the minimum wage.

Kennedy tried, however, to offer the minimum wage to the immigration bill. Dole first blocked the amendment by refusing to recognize anyone who had not already shown the parliamentarian the amendment that was to be offered, and then he filed his cloture petition. Kennedy was back on the floor every day making speeches about the minimum wage, rehashing all the maneuvers Dole engaged in to avoid a vote on the issue, going back to the week before the Easter recess, with the national parks legislation. Kennedy gave a long speech mocking the extent that Dole had undone amendments that had been adopted, etc. That was a hilarious speech by Kennedy, recounting this whole history.

We now get to cloture on the immigration bill. Kennedy gives another minimum wage speech in which he says that in the 1960 campaign against Richard Nixon, John Kennedy ran an ad calling for an increase in the minimum wage. In the ad he sat in front of the camera and said, "Mr. Nixon has said that a $1.25 minimum wage is extreme. That's $50 a week. What's extreme about that? I believe the next Congress and the President should pass a minimum wage for $1.25 an hour. Americans must be paid enough to live."

Senator Kennedy said, "I'm reminded of the same issue before us today. This Friday, May 3, is the 35th anniversary of Bob Dole's vote against President Kennedy's legislation raising the minimum wage from $1 to $1.25. Bob Dole and Richard Nixon were wrong to oppose President Kennedy's minimum wage hike 35 years ago, and I believe Bob Dole and Richard Armey are wrong to oppose President Clinton's minimum wage hike today."

On May 1, Gingrich reversed course again. Facing reality and more defections, he told moderate Republicans he would drop his resistance to a vote on the minimum wage, but all wasn't smooth among House Republicans. Now there was beginning to be criticism of Gingrich. D'Amato said, "Gingrich is smart, but he misreads the elections. People did not vote to cut funds for education and the environment and programs they care about. They voted for evolution, not revolution."

The revolution began to break down during the budget fight and government shutdown in December 1995, and now it was happening even more dramatically. Republicans were now

lashing out at Gingrich and Armey. “It’s a southern anti-union attitude that appeals to the mentality of hillbillies at a revival meeting,” representative Peter King, Republican of New York, said. “Republican leadership has gone out of their way to appease whacko militias. I don’t know of any Republican leader who has attacked the militia leaders, and yet they attack union bosses.”

On May 7, Dole had an amendment to repeal the gas tax. Daschle had indicated to Dole that he would let the gas tax come up on the floor if Kennedy could offer the minimum wage amendment. Dole suggested he’d offer another anti-union amendment. Kennedy came to the floor and said he’d take up the gas tax if he could take up the minimum wage. Dole objected.

This is now May, so we’ve had a month and a half—with Dole running for President—when he’s been tied down by Kennedy on a hopelessly unpopular position. Dole and Kennedy kept coming back and forth to the floor to discuss what to do. By May 8, the Senate had been tied up for six weeks by Senator Dole’s objection to allowing a vote on the minimum wage. The parks bill hadn’t happened; the immigration bill hadn’t been finished.

President Clinton decided he wanted to put aside politics for three months. Kennedy said, “Let the anti-union bill go through, the President will veto it. We should go ahead and get the minimum wage, get the gas tax repealed, and pass the anti-union thing. But the President will veto it.”

I think the Democrats were the ones pushing the gas tax, but Dole was ready to do it. Now they were arguing about these three bills: the gas tax, the anti-union bill, and the minimum wage. The next day, Dole and Kennedy were back on the floor. Kennedy reiterated his desire to work out an agreement to take up the gas tax and the minimum wage, but he didn’t want to take up the anti-union bill. Other Senators came to the floor. Senator [John] McCain came to the floor and had a very testy exchange with Kennedy.

Young: On minimum wage?

Littlefield: Yes, around this whole thing. The frustration with Kennedy was building among all the Republicans because everything was tied up. Just as a point of interest, several times while I was in the Senate, there had been an edge to the exchanges between McCain and Kennedy unlike the more competitive exchanges Kennedy engaged in with Dole, [John] Chafee, and [Orrin] Hatch. McCain had a temper, and he didn’t have the sense of collegiality where you can argue with somebody and then go off the floor and throw your arms around him. That’s the way Dole, Chafee, and Hatch work the Senate.

On May 9, Clinton blamed Dole for gridlock and said they should work out something so all these bills could be passed, but he would veto the anti-union bill. Dole was changing his mind again, and when asked whether he’d allow votes on the three separate bills, he said, “I might, I might not.” That will take care of that.

Gridlock continued through the week of May 6. Kennedy kept after the minimum wage issue every day the Senate was in session. He introduced copies of supportive editorials from all over the country, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlanta Journal, St. Louis Post Dispatch, San Francisco Chronicle, St. Petersburg Times*. There was breadth and depth of support among editorial boards for a higher minimum wage—why are Republicans obstructing

action on this? Kennedy gave a speech on the floor about Dole: "A number of commentators have pointed out that the Senate seems to be in the doldrums. I believe the normal spelling leaves out the 'E' in doldrums."

Then he recited from the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* and defined doldrums as "a state of inactivity or stagnation, a belt of calms and light, baffling winds, or a dull, listless depressed mood, low spirits." He added, "The way for Senator Dole to find his way out of the doldrums is clear: raise the minimum wage."

Dole could claim he was succeeding in his tactics of blocking the vote on the minimum wage. From March 26, when he had been outmaneuvered by Kennedy on the Utah/Presidio vote, he clearly hadn't gotten anything done, and he'd used every parliamentary maneuver. It was gridlock and doldrums.

A new CNN poll taken on May 8 and 9 showed Democrats with a seven-point lead over Republicans for support in Congress, and Dole's Presidential campaign was in such dire straits that sources reported in the *New York Times* that he was removing himself from his day-to-day duties as Senate Majority Leader to be free of activity and his responsibilities in the Senate to campaign across the country.

Kennedy kept going to the floor, and then on May 15, the defining act of the 1996 Presidential election occurred. Senator Dole surprised the political world by announcing that he would resign from the Senate to campaign full-time for the Presidency—the realities of Capitol Hill. Of course, once he resigned from the Senate, he floundered in the campaign terribly with nothing to do, nothing to show, nothing to say.

Young: So the minimum wage was left in limbo?

Littlefield: No.

Young: Lott replaced Dole?

Littlefield: Lott replaced Dole, but the realities of the times and the realities of Capitol Hill enabled Democrats to keep Dole from running as he had expected to, as the man who could get things done on big issues. Instead, he was coming across as the man who couldn't get the Senate out of gridlock. He was not confronting Bill Clinton; he was scrapping with Ted Kennedy.

Dole was leaving the House Republican leadership, as reported in his daily talking points on May 16, according to *Congress Daily*, because, he had recently commented, "My God, I'm tired of listening to minimum wage. Isn't there anything else in the world?" [*laughter*]

By April these press clips about Kennedy noted the impact he was having on the Presidential campaign, on the Republican agenda, and his ability to advance his own Democratic initiatives on healthcare and the minimum wage, even in the minority.

David Shribman, editor of the *Boston Globe*'s Washington bureau and previously a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, had not been enthusiastic about Kennedy previously in writing. He wrote, "So the Red Sox are hopeless, the Bruins are hapless, the Celtics are history. Isn't there anybody

from Massachusetts leading anything? It turns out there is, and it's happening in the least likely place, at the least likely time. Out there on the floor of the Senate is a familiar face, Kennedy of Massachusetts. The White House is occupied by a moderate Democrat, the Congress is controlled by devoutly conservative Republicans, and yet Senator Edward M. Kennedy has the Senate lined up behind him on a healthcare bill, and just might get the chamber to vote to raise the minimum wage. The last lion of liberalism is holding forth, holding everything up, and holding sway."

On May 20, the vote on the minimum wage was finally scheduled in the House. They proposed a bill that would exempt small businesses from the minimum wage entirely, as well as exempt small businesses from paying workers overtime. The Democrats in the House talked about this as a giant hoax, a giveaway to business lobbyists. The Republican bill effectively exempted two-thirds of American businesses from having to pay their workers the minimum wage or overtime. The Republicans were going to try to attach this poison pill to the minimum wage. In an *ABC News* poll, Americans disapproved of the Republican Congress by a 60-35 majority.

After the Memorial Day recess, Dole was going to be there for one more week, because he had given himself a little time before he resigned. The Congress returned on June 3. Dole was going to try one more time to pass a Constitutional amendment to balance the budget, as his last grand gesture. That had failed by one vote in 1995, but Dole could call it back.

We had the health bill going with very complicated back-and-forth negotiations. We were now in the middle of June, and Kennedy was still pressing the minimum wage as well as the health bill. They were back-and-forth with leadership about what to do about the minimum wage. Kennedy went to a meeting of leading Democratic Senators, and the conclusion of the meeting was that we needed to get an agreement on minimum wage even if the anti-union thing were part of it—or else we'd go back to try to offer the minimum wage increase again on every bill on the floor. Lott was now the Majority Leader.

Young: Is the agreement on the 45 cents breaking up?

Littlefield: No, no, no—the agreement meeting was just on whether to offer it. There's been this hiatus while they'd been trying to work out the relationship among the gas tax, the anti-union bill, and the minimum wage. It wasn't going to happen while Dole was there, and Dole, as his last order of business, tried the balanced-budget thing.

Young: So Lott's now in.

Littlefield: Lott's now in, and some package of these bills is going to be voted on. Kennedy goes to the floor, "Mr. President, I am unpersuaded by Senator Lott's position that this is a Gordian Knot, and that it has been languishing here. The reason it has been languishing is those who, for over a year and a half, have denied this body the opportunity to vote on the minimum wage when we have been able to demonstrate, in previous votes, a majority will vote for the increase."

There's back-and-forth with Lott about trying to work something out. Meanwhile, there's more back-and-forth on the healthcare bill, which was by then very complicated because the Republicans were trying to add health savings accounts, a right-wing healthcare strategy that liberals don't like.

After the July 4 recess, there came a break on the minimum wage on July 9. Lott approached Daschle with a proposal. There would be an up-or-down vote on the minimum wage after the July 4 recess. The Republicans would get to offer one amendment, similar to the watered-down minimum wage amendment that had been actually defeated in the House.

Young: The "poison pill" amendment?

Littlefield: Yes. That amendment would delay the implementation of the minimum wage for six months for every new employee, and would exclude millions of workers from any minimum wage at all. Daschle told Kennedy, "We'll do everything to stop it. If we can't stop it in the Senate, we'll stop it if it comes back in conference."

Then on Tuesday, June 25, Kennedy went to the floor to explain the breakthrough on minimum wage and that the vote would be right after the July recess, July 8 or 9. Republicans would get one amendment and the Democrats would get one amendment. Following the minimum wage, the Republicans would get to call up the anti-labor proposal, and both proposals would be voted on no later than July 10.

Daschle invited Kennedy to meet with Lott to clarify the proposal. The three men met in Daschle's office for an hour. Lott started off, "Let's work that healthcare thing out. There's a broad agreement on portability and preexisting conditions. The only disagreement is on the health savings accounts."

We were juggling both balls.

On Friday, June 28, Kennedy went to the floor to lay out the case to defeat the watering down amendment the Republicans were offering to the minimum wage. Meanwhile, Kennedy and his staff were using the recess to line up votes against the amendment to the bill, which was going to be the first order of business when the Senate reconvened on July 8.

He spent the July recess working with outside groups. The AFL finally had an ad campaign on the minimum wage, which they ran in districts of swing Republicans. Then the National Federation of Independent Businesses, the small business lobby, responded with ads attacking the minimum-wage increase. Kennedy and the leadership were counting votes to see how they were going to do on the watering down amendment.

On July 8, the Senate came into session at 12:30 p.m. The body was called to order by Strom Thurmond, president pro tem, and the daily morning prayer was delivered. Lott was recognized as Majority Leader. He asked for a period of morning business until 3:30, with Kennedy in control of the time from 12:30 to 2:00, and the Republicans from 2:00 to 3:30. Following the morning business, he said, "The Senate will begin consideration of HR-3448, the small business tax package legislation," which is what they were then calling the minimum wage. "No votes will occur until 2:15 on Tuesday. On Tuesday, the Senate will begin a consideration of the TEAM Act [Teamwork for Employees and Managers]." That's the anti-union amendment.

"Senators should be reminded that under a previous order, the Senate will also vote on passage of the Department of Defense authorization bill, at 9:30 on Wednesday, although I should note—because of the likelihood of a signing at the White House, of the church burning legislation—"

That's another piece of legislation Kennedy did in co-sponsorship with right-wing North Carolina Republican Lauch Faircloth.

Young: Yes.

Littlefield: I'm sure you've heard the stories about that. That's a remarkable achievement.

"Immediately following the White House bill signing," Lott went on, "the Senate will proceed to the House of Representatives for a joint meeting of Congress to hear an address by the Prime Minister of Israel."

Senator Lott was in his element. At last, after five months of stalemate, the minimum wage was coming to the floor for a vote, and he was in charge. Kennedy was the next Senator to speak. "Mr. President, tomorrow, July 9, is minimum wage day in the United States Senate. The Senate will finally have an up-or-down vote on a fair increase in the minimum wage. Now the long-overdue vote is about to take place, but the Republican obstruction has not ended. Opponents of the minimum wage have devised a shameless trick to prevent as much of the increase as possible by delaying it and by denying it to large numbers of deserving American workers.

"The NFIB has mounted a campaign in support of the Republican amendment. They say, 'This is our last chance and best hope for stopping a minimum wage increase this year.'"

Kennedy spoke about the minimum wage for an hour. He included letters of endorsement he had obtained from the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], the Urban League, the National Hispanic Leadership Institute, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Migrant Legal Action Committee. He included statements from over 100 economists endorsing the increase, including three Nobel winners. He reviewed all the arguments he had developed over the past 18 months, and new ones. He called it a women's issue, because 65% of individuals receiving the minimum wage were women.

Lott said he would not support the minimum wage. Kassebaum spoke on the floor and said she would vote against the minimum wage increase because it would cost jobs.

On Tuesday, July 9, the debate continued after lunch with more speeches. Senators Gramm of Texas, [Daniel] Coats of Indiana, and Hatch of Utah spoke against the increase. Harkin, [Jesse Francis] Bingaman, and Moynihan were for it. Two votes were taken. The first, on the watering down amendment offered by Republican Senator [Christopher] Bond, lost, 52 to 47. Specter, Hatfield, Campbell, and Jeffords broke with Lott to oppose the amendment. D'Amato voted against the Bond amendment as well, but only after he knew it had already lost. He waited to see whether his vote would count.

Later in the day, the Senate voted on the minimum wage increase itself. The vote was 74 to 24 in favor, on the vote to pass the minimum wage.

Young: You're breaking up.

Littlefield: I'm breaking up for a moment. The vote was 74 to 24 in favor. On the vote to pass the minimum wage, 27 Republicans joined all the Democrats to vote for the increase. [*pause*]

Young: That's amazing.

Littlefield: After the vote, Senators Daschle and Kennedy, joined by Vice President Gore, celebrated in a press conference in the press gallery. "Today's vote means that millions of Americans will get the long-overdue increase they deserve," Senator Kennedy said.

On July 31, the House and Senate conferees on the minimum wage agreed on a final package of tax provisions to be added to the minimum wage increase on August 1, with the final compromises worked out. The Kennedy-Kassebaum health bill went to the floor of the House and was adopted by a vote of 421 to 2. The immigration legislation was reported from conference, but without participation of Democrats, who promised to oppose it on the floor.

Young: Was Kennedy a conferee?

Littlefield: Yes. Democrats objected to the Senate and House provisions that would require $5,000 tuition to be paid to local school districts by illegal immigrants for any of their children attending public schools. The provision, the Democrats pointed out, was obviously unworkable because by paying the tax the illegal immigrants would be identifying themselves, clearly the first step leading to deportation proceedings. Democrats promised to oppose it.

The Democratic Senate's talking points that morning trumpeted, "Bringing home the gold on minimum wage and healthcare security. We're at the finish line. Today, Friday, August 2, the Senate is expected to vote on the final version of the minimum wage bill and the Kennedy-Kassebaum health portability bill, two of the Democrats' priorities." House Democrats wrote, "Democrats chalk up another victory with minimum wage."

Senator Kennedy went to the floor Friday, August 2, first on the health insurance conference report—although there was another wrinkle. Republicans, without anyone else knowing about it, had included an extension of the patent for a drug called Lodine. This particular special-interest provision would give the manufacturer of Lodine two additional years of patent protection. The Democrats on the Conference Committee for the health bill hadn't seen it. Kennedy called attention to it.

Later Kennedy went back to the floor to say that he was pleased to announce that the Lodine special-interest patent-extension provision, now that it had been exposed, had been dropped from the healthcare legislation. [*laughs*] They could now turn to the healthcare conference report, with a vote at 6:00 p.m.

Kennedy then turned to the minimum wage. "This day has been a long time coming," he said. "Eighteen months ago, in February 1995, I introduced legislation to raise the minimum wage to $5.65 an hour, in three 50-cent increments, and joined Senator Daschle one month later to introduce S-413, which would have raised the minimum wage by 90 cents in two increments. A year ago, on July 31, 1995, I offered a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that the Senate should take up the minimum wage increase before the end of the year. It received only two Republican votes and was defeated."

Senator Kassebaum spoke once more on the healthcare bill. The enrollment on the healthcare bill was corrected to eliminate the special-interest Lodine patent-extension provision, and the votes were taken back-to-back on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill, and the minimum wage increase.

Kennedy said, "The question is agreed to on the Conference Report of HR-3103, the health insurance portability. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays on the minimum wage increase, HR-3448, the Small Business Tax Relief Act."

The presiding officer said, "Is there a sufficient second?" There is a sufficient second. The presiding officer: "The question is first on agreeing to the Conference Report on HR-3103, the healthcare bill." Roll was called. The presiding officer: "Are there any other Senators in the chamber desiring to vote?" The result was announced: yeas 98, nays 0.

Next—the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 Conference Report. The roll was called. "The question is on agreeing to the adoption of the Conference Report. The yeas and nays have been ordered, the clerk will call the roll." The roll was called, the votes were cast, the result was announced: yeas 76, nays 22. The Conference Report was agreed to. All Democrats and more than half of all Republican Senators voted to increase the minimum wage, from $4.35 to $5.15 an hour.

Senator Kennedy was recognized, "Mr. President, in the last half hour we've experienced a double-header victory for the American people: healthcare, and a raise in the minimum wage. In a sense, both these bills had nine lives—and they needed all of them—but they have come to a successful resolution this evening and hopefully they will be on the President's desk in the very near future."

Senator Kennedy went on to praise Senators Daschle, Kassebaum, [Thomas] Harkin, Wellstone, [Peter] Domenici, Simon, Mikulski, Dodd, Breaux, House Minority Leader Gephardt, Congressman [John, Jr.] Dingell, Congressman [Henry] Waxman, Secretary of Labor Robert Reich and his staff, organizations including the U.S. Catholic Conference, the Women's Legal Defense Fund, the Mon Valley Unemployed Council, the Business and Professional Women USA, the AFL-CIO. And then Senator Kennedy and Senator Kassebaum went upstairs to the Senate press gallery to appear live on the *McNeil-Lehrer News Hour* to discuss the healthcare bill and the minimum wage.

Earlier in the day, President Clinton had called Senator Kennedy to congratulate him on the healthcare bill and the minimum wage. The Senator thanked the President for speaking to the issue of minimum wage in his State of the Union Address at the beginning of the year before, and for standing firm on medical savings accounts, the health bill.

"What's the next step on health?" the President asked the Senator. "The unemployed, allowing the uninsured to buy into a pool, restoring coverage for immigrants, more money for community health centers, mental health, or do we need a broad-based public health program? It's amazing about the Republicans; they get a conscience only when they get a problem in their own family."

Young: Let's break now.

[BREAK]

Young: We're resuming after lunch.

Littlefield: Having gotten through minimum wage before lunch, we don't have much time left, so we're going to do some miscellaneous stories that pick up on yesterday: the Senate and how it works and how Kennedy works in the Senate. We will cover the long story of the Kennedy-Kassebaum health bill, which proceeds in parallel to the story of the minimum wage in 1995 and '96, in our next session.

We talked about the procedural issues and the substance and the policy and the politics of public relations, but I wanted to relate just a couple of anecdotes that have stayed in my head about how things worked in the Senate.

When I first got there in 1989, having left my law firm, I showed up at the Labor Committee, and after about a month or two, Senator [David] Durenberger, the moderate Republican from Minnesota, asked me after a hearing if I could come to his office. He wanted to speak to me. I didn't know what he was going to talk about. I had no idea why he would want to speak to me. No Republican Senator previously had asked to speak to me in his office. I was a staff person for Kennedy, and there's a big hierarchy between Senators and staff. And between Senators and staff for other Senators, there's even more of a line. And between Democratic staff and Republican Senators, there's even *more* of a line.

So this seemed weird, but I was glad to go. I was excited because I was new to the Senate, and that was a big deal.

I went and waited outside his office. Durenberger showed up and asked his secretary to bring me in. I went into his inner sanctum, his private Senate office, and sat opposite him at his desk. He said, "I'm really interested in why you came to Washington. What was it about working in the Senate that led you to give up your work in a law firm where you were probably making a lot more money? I'm thinking the reason you came must be that you're one of those Kennedy people who really want to get things done in government. You're coming down here to get bills passed and get things done—that's what Kennedy's all about. You wanted to come to Washington to be like Kennedy: you wanted to pass laws."

I said yes. He said, "Well, I want to tell you something, just so you have it in your mind. The Republicans on the committee and in the Senate come to Washington to make sure that you and Kennedy don't pass any laws. That's why they come to Washington. At the end of the day, if they can go home and say to their family or to their constituents that they stopped you from passing a law, that's going to make them totally satisfied. That's their objective. I just wanted you to know that."

Well, thank you, Senator Durenberger, for that bit of intelligence about your colleagues.

That was it. He said, "I just wanted you to know this." That's quite an unusual conversation, to put it mildly.

Young: Was he pulling your leg?

Littlefield: No, absolutely not. He was telling me his experience among the Republicans. He understood the kind of person I must be because of what he knew about Kennedy. He knew I went to Harvard, so I was probably one of those activist progressives who wanted to pass legislation.

Young: And who actually did.

Littlefield: I did, ultimately, right. I think he was always uncomfortable as a Republican. I think he could have been a Democrat. At that time, '89, there was no Republican revolution yet. There had been [Ronald] Reagan, but the Senate had not been taken over by the right-wingers who wanted to tear down the government and for whom the agenda was a lot more than just stopping Kennedy—it was undoing everything that had been done since the beginning of the 20th century to expand the government. That idea was nowhere in sight, at least in the Senate.

The Senate was run by the Doles and the Howard Bakers and the Domenicis, all semi-moderates. He was just saying, "You should know: they're happy if they stop you. They're not trying to pass bills. Just know that's what they're trying to do: stop you. That's where they get their kicks. That's why they're elected, that's why they want to come to Washington."

It was just a perspective on the Republicans, which seems dated now, of course, because they've been so much more aggressive with their own agenda. But at the time, that's what he thought the agenda was.

Young: This was just friendly information.

Littlefield: Friendly information, yes. He just didn't want me to be confused about what they were about. I remember one year, August of '89, my first year. These are some of the experiences from the first year as I was beginning to understand things in the Senate.

One of the ways the Senate works, obviously, is compromise and horse-trading. It was August, and we had been working on a whole series of healthcare reauthorization bills like women's health, minority health, breast and cervical cancer, rural health, professional health training—probably six or eight health bills we needed to get through.

It was the last night before the August recess, which meant we had a whole month of recess about to start. We had a list of about eight or ten of these bills we wanted to get through. They had gone through the committee, they had been through the House, and they were finally ready to be voted on and approved in the Senate. At one point we tried to bring the whole number of them to the floor to get approval by unanimous consent, and we learned that when we tried to pass the bills through the Senate, there was an objection by one of the Senators.

What happens is they "hotline" the bill to see if anybody's going to object. If anybody objects, that holds it up because it triggers a filibuster, and you have to take three days to break the cloture vote. You have to get three-fifths of the Senate, etc.

We later learned that Senator [Jesse] Helms of North Carolina had decided to block all these routine health measures even though Senator Hatch, who was the ranking member of the committee, was for them. Helms was determined to block them. He just wanted to punish the liberals, punish the people who were trying to pass legislation. He was what Durenberger had been describing: stop everything at all costs. He was the worst of them. He was the most extreme of them all.

I didn't know what to do. I was in the cloakroom with Kennedy, and we were commiserating about what we were going to do. Senator [Joseph] Biden came over and said, "What's up?" Senator Kennedy said, "Helms is holding up about eight or ten healthcare bills that we need to get done. There are people waiting for these programs to get restarted." Biden said, "Hmmm, I think I might be able to help you."

It turned out that Senator Helms had nominated a candidate for the federal bench in North Carolina, and Bush had sent him up. Biden was the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and Biden, knowing how Helms operated, had decided to hold up Helms' judge and not confirm him, even though the candidate had passed muster and was okay to be confirmed. Biden knew that at some point he would probably want something from Helms. He was holding this judge in reserve, so he was aware that he now had a chip to trade with Helms. This would work only if Helms wanted something, which normally wasn't the case.

It got to be about midnight, and we still hadn't gotten any resolution. We still had these health bills that Helms hadn't agreed to pass. Biden said, "Let's just see." So he went out of the cloakroom and over to Helms. Kennedy and I watched him go over there, and we saw him talking to Helms. We didn't know what he was talking about, because at that point we didn't know he had this judge in reserve.

Shortly after that, Biden came back to Kennedy and me and said, "There's a possibility of a trade." He said Kennedy should give him a list of the healthcare bills being held up by Helms, and Biden would take the list to Helms to see if he could get him to back down. Biden still hadn't told us about the judge. I had an envelope in my pocket, and I wrote down the names of the ten bills and the bill numbers and gave it to Kennedy, who gave it to Biden. Biden went away, and about a half an hour later he came back with the envelope. After each of the bills was the notation, "Okay, J.H." (That's J.H. for Jesse Helms.)

That's when Biden told Kennedy and me that Helms agreed to go along with approving the bills in return for Senator Biden allowing the judge to go through. We took the envelope to the parliamentarian, and it was the official record of Helms having approved the bills. The holds were lifted, and they went through and the bills were signed into law that very evening. Senator Helms got his judge.

The interesting, amusing purpose of that story is that horse trading is a major feature of life in the Senate. The story about Hatch and the down-winders is another horse-trading story that same year.

There's a group of hotel workers in Massachusetts whose leader is a very outspoken, aggressive, active labor leader named Domenic Bozzotto. This was in '89. The hotel workers wanted to be able to negotiate as a group. They had a labor law problem, some quirk that wouldn't allow hotel workers to strike or to bargain as a group. Kennedy couldn't get the law changed to correct that quirk. He'd been trying for a year, and Domenic was getting more and more worked up. He was beginning to sit in in Kennedy's office. Even though Kennedy was his friend, that was the only place he had to go to complain. His people got very worked up.

Hotel workers are a big group around here in Boston, and it was a big problem for Kennedy. Every time he came back to Massachusetts they'd picket him, and he couldn't get Hatch to change the labor law. Hatch wasn't going to open up the labor law—that was just unheard of, for Hatch especially—to expand the rights of workers and unions. It was just not going to happen.

But it got much worse because Domenic became more and more obstreperous. Kennedy and I went to Hatch on the floor one night—again, one of those late-night deals—and he said, "Orrin, you have to help me with this. Every time I go back to Massachusetts they're picketing me. I've done everything I can. If you won't make this happen, I'm stuck."

Hatch, Kennedy's friend and colleague and compatriot in passing important healthcare legislation, said, "You know the labor laws. I'm not going to change the labor law. But let's talk about what might be possible in return." Kennedy said to Hatch, "What's on your mind? What is there that we could possibly work on?"

Hatch said, "Ah ha! the down-winders. There's a fund to compensate people who have been exposed to nuclear contamination of some sort because they were downwind of a nuclear test blast years back." For some reason that compensation fund either didn't have enough money in it or it wasn't available to the down-winders in Utah. It was available to the people in Nevada, but not Utah.

Kennedy, who has always been a supporter of these compensation acts, said, "I might be able to help with this." Right then and there they made a deal. Hatch would help get the hotel workers' labor fix, incorporate it into law, and Kennedy would expand the compensation for people who had been downwind of nuclear contamination.

There's something the Republicans never would have done—a labor law change, an expansion of labor law to give more rights to a group of workers. But it happened because Kennedy and Hatch could work out deals like that. That's just one of the ways in which the Senate and Senators work together, one of the many ways.

We've seen on the minimum wage a totally different way, obviously, to get things done. But horse trading is a way. Big legislative juggernauts are another way.

This will be my last point. Kennedy always talked to me about the chemistry of the Senate. I don't know if he's talked to you about that. He uses that noun to describe what makes the Senate

tick. He always says you have to understand the chemistry, because things that could happen one day might never happen again. Things that couldn't happen on one day might be able to happen the next day. Part of how he operates in the Senate is always to understand the chemistry of the place, as he puts it— that's his word.

I talked yesterday about the national service legislation from 1993 or '94, the AmeriCorps legislation, the second national service bill we did while I was there, the Clinton bill we had worked out from the time of Clinton taking over the Presidency. We had to overcome a filibuster on that legislation, and we worked and worked and worked, but we didn't quite have enough votes.

Then we began to think we would have enough votes. Kennedy at one time went over and said, "Now's the time to offer this. I think we have it." There had been a lot of press coverage as Republicans were beginning to come on board the national service legislation. We won it, and as we were walking back to his office from the Capitol to the Russell building, he said, "Today was a perfect example of how the chemistry of the place works. Something that couldn't have passed yesterday today had just enough attention in the press, just enough focus on a couple of members, that you could feel the air was out of the balloon for the people who wanted to oppose national service. There was a moment when it could happen."

Kennedy said the moment was today, and we were exactly right to do it then. Even tomorrow it might have lost its steam. The other side—the people who didn't want to spend the money and didn't want to give Clinton anything—could have been in the ascendancy again the next day. His point is you have to seize the moment in a Democracy like this, in a body like the Senate, where it's so difficult to get things through, because any one person can hold it up for a week. If the Majority Leader is not going to let you have a bill, because it's going to hold the Senate up for a week, and he doesn't have that much time to waste.

Kennedy said, "So much of it comes down to the chemistry of the place, understanding the people and what motivates them, what makes them vote a certain way at a certain time." As we talk through bills, there will be lots of discussion about when the chemistry is right to do a particular thing.

In this whole minimum wage story, you could see it. I was even feeling it as I was going through it. People might think, *Heck, stop holding up the Senate. You have parks, you have immigration, you have all these things, and you're holding them all up so you can have your minimum wage? Work something out, Kennedy, don't hold up everything.*

I think he knew exactly how far he could push it. And when he was worried about that, that's when he said, "Okay, we'll go for this deal: you can do immigration and we won't offer the minimum wage." He knew how much delay the system could bear, and he knew when the whole body or the public would turn against him. It's this sense of understanding the timing, understanding how far you can push an issue and for how long, that's one of the elements of his remarkable skills as a legislator.

Young: He's a very observant person, isn't he?

Littlefield: Yes. He picks up everything.

Young: I've noticed that.

Littlefield: And doesn't forget it: it's there to be drawn on when he needs it. He calibrates it all somehow. So should we pause?

Young: We should pause.