GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH DAN BARTLETT

January 30–31, 2014
Washington, D.C.

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Riley: This is the Dan Bartlett interview as a part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. Thanks for coming to be with us here in Washington. We talked before the tape began running about the fundamental ground rules, but I'll just repeat for the record that we're talking under a veil of confidentiality. We're pleased to say after some two decades of time we've never had a breach of our confidences, so we want you to speak candidly to the record. I know in Washington that may seem to be a bold statement, but we're good for our word on these things, and we hope that you'll speak candidly, recognizing that the audience is not the two of us but people in future generations who want to come to understand this President and his Presidency as you lived it.

One of the things that we always like to do at the beginning is to find out a little about the people who came in to serve in a Presidential administration. So I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about your own background, your growing up and your family and things like that.

Bartlett: I grew up in what I guess is the smallest of the 254 counties in Texas, Rockwall County, which sounds very rural and rustic, and at the time it was, but now it's just a bedroom community of Dallas, Texas, because of the growth there. It's about halfway between Dallas and Tyler, Texas.

I was not raised in a family that was overly political. One of my buddies growing up, his dad was the mayor of Rockwall, and I worked on his campaign a little bit, but that was more out of boredom than any sort of passion for politics. In Texas there is a fork in the road usually somewhere between sixth and eighth grade where you either become a Longhorn or an Aggie. I took the—

Riley: You waited that late?

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: See, I'm from Alabama. You couldn't get that old.

Bartlett: Maybe it was earlier than that. Ended up going to the University of Texas. From where I was coming from I wasn't even attempting to put together the fact that I wouldn't be going to college, the home of the state government and politics there. It was only because I didn't want to go home for a summer—I had to get a job to stay in Austin—that a buddy of mine got me a job at the state capitol to work the legislative session there. I was good friends with members of the family of our state senator, who was a Democrat at the time, Ted Lyon [Jr.], and so I got a job

there. I started to get the political bug, and was watching Ann Richards, who was Governor of Texas at the time, and Bob Bullock, the legendary Lieutenant Governor. I worked on the Senate side and there was a big public debate about whether Texas should have a lottery and all the politics around that. It really sparked my interest in politics.

But I really had no path or understanding of how I was going to stay involved in it. Or frankly even if I was going to stay involved in politics. It was one of those things that just by happenstance the guy I met at the capitol turned out to be a good buddy of mine, got another job for some guy named Karl Rove, who at that time was not a household name but a pretty well-known name in political circles, direct mail, particularly as a direct mail consultant at the time. This would have been in 1991 going into 1992.

He got over there and was working only for a couple of weeks and said, "Hey, we've got more work over here and it pays better." That was my motive to go. It wasn't that I thought I was hitching onto a wagon that was going somewhere as much as it was to make a little bit more money.

It may have been literally my first week or two working over in Karl's office that I was answering the phone and some guy named George W. Bush was calling. That was going into the '92 cycle. We were doing a lot of regional direct mail for the Bush oil campaign at the time, and I was doing a lot of the research for it that would go into the direct mail pieces.

Riley: So you considered yourself a Republican at the time? You made the change?

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: So that was settled.

Bartlett: Yes. There were no doubts in my mind about my politics. It was interesting going to the University of Texas. I was a minority voice in most of my government classes. I was a government major and so had to go and defend my views quite a bit. But I never got involved in student politics or anything.

Riley: Any professors that you particularly looked up to or had a reaction to?

Bartlett: Yes, there was—I'm trying to remember his name now. [Robert] Luskin—

Nelson: Bob Luskin.

Bartlett: He did the campaigns. He had a campaigns class down there and I really took to him and working on that. We stayed in touch over the years. I think he is still there. But no, there wasn't a kind of galvanizing force, at least from my academic perspective.

Nelson: Was Daron Shaw there then?

Bartlett: No.

Nelson: Because he ended up working in the '04 campaign.

Bartlett: Oh, sure.

Nelson: Maybe others as well.

Bartlett: Yes. I actually saw him a few months ago.

Nelson: Did you?

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: So when you say you were in the minority, was that among students?

Bartlett: Yes. I distinctly remember in my government class during the '92 campaign they called us public enemy number one, two, and three—there were three of us. We sat at the back of the class. It was hilarious. One day he said, "Who is for Bush?" There were the three of us. We were the only three in the entire class. It was pretty funny. It kept us on our toes. But there wasn't, like I said, and you fast-forward a little bit. Before October '93, after the Bush oil stuff, we were working on quite a few statewide races, some larger races. There was a pretty obscure House member from the Texas legislature running for agriculture commissioner named Rick Perry. We worked on Rick Perry's campaign.

Interesting that my first taste of the nastiness of politics was that we ended up, Karl ended up, being the general consultant and direct mail provider for a mayor of Plano, Texas, who ended up running for the state senate seat against Florence Shapiro. She was running against our family friend, and mine. He was a conservative Democrat, but not conservative enough in the way the change was. It was a nasty, nasty race. Accusations were flying back and forth. Karl was earning his reputation in very early days of being in the middle of a lot of that.

Ted wouldn't talk to me for at least—Shapiro defeated him. It was years before he would talk to me, and even that I would work for Karl Rove, much less work on that campaign. I tried to stay out of that campaign as much as I could. But I remember one of the accusations was that Ted had accepted a gift from a big real estate developer in town and it was a Cadillac. Ted denied that, never heard about having a Cadillac. I had ridden in the Cadillac with my friend. It was one of those awkward moments. I didn't want to be a fact witness in this deal. But it was my first taste of how politics could get tough.

Nelson: At this time direct mail was cutting-edge campaign technology.

Bartlett: Oh sure, absolutely.

Nelson: What did you do?

Bartlett: I was really the one who was doing the fact checking. Knowing that—obviously it was a little bit under the radar, and what was good about direct mail at the time and which you're incapable of doing today is you could have silo conversations with constituencies. If you're running a political campaign, you're basically trying to stack up constituencies to get 51 percent of the vote. But knowing that if you just look on the conservative side of that you had libertarians, you have social conservatives. You don't want to alienate one as you try to recruit

another, and direct mail was a very precise, discrete way to deliver messages.

It was also a very discrete way to deliver negative messages against your opponent. Knowing that those would always get surfaced, it was important that we had all the substantiation of facts and things like that. A lot of my job was unearthing those facts and substantiating a lot of the mail pieces we were doing at the time. So it was just a lot of gofer-type work being the lowest man on the totem pole at Karl Rove and Company.

Nelson: What made Rove emerge as such a leading consultant in Texas, first of all? What was it that made him stand out from the others?

Bartlett: You hear a lot about Karl's bandwidth, just an unbelievable bandwidth. I've never seen somebody who could go from the big strategic conversation, direction, down to the minutia of dotting i's and crossing t's on a mail piece and not missing a step in between and doing that across multiple candidates and at a level of chutzpah or confidence that you know some consultants have and some don't. Which is interesting because—I don't know how much we will get into this—Karl's and my relationship over 20 years has evolved quite a bit.

In many respects, he is a deeply insecure person, but he always made up for those insecurities in how he gave advice to candidates. He overcompensated, I think, which played to his benefit. There is no lack of confidence in his views and in his direction. It was interesting to see him evolve from running his own company to becoming a part of the campaign and part of the staff and team. He was very different at Karl Rove and Company in his office there.

He was a consultant. He had his firm and he was consultant on the first campaign for Governor. He was an outside entity during the first term—during the entire Governorship. It was only when the Presidential campaign hit a certain point that he sold his company and became a member of the staff. He was a very volatile person when he ran his own company. There were stories of people hiding under desks. He has a very volcanic-type temper. Highs and lows. He could be one of the best people to be around, fun, but it was definitely a roller coaster.

Then when he came on board it was remarkable how that part of him never emerged again.

Nelson: You mean came on board in 2000?

Bartlett: Yes, throughout the Presidency. There were times when he had every right to explode. The pressure he was under during the leak investigation, things like that. Not even raise his voice.

Nelson: How do you account for that?

Bartlett: I don't know. To tell you the truth, I think he probably recognized it is a different sense when you're the boss running your own organization and you have hiring and firing capabilities. He had a big foot in a small pie on the campaign, and he was obviously a force, but he wasn't entirely in charge. Maybe that was the difference he kind of rationalized in his mind. But those of us who were veterans of his firm, we were all sort of like where is that? Everyone is kind of waiting. When will it happen? It never really did.

Nelson: What occurs to me is that Bush is not somebody who would want to see that behavior.

Bartlett: That's true. That's a fair point.

Nelson: The phone rings in '93 and it's George W. Bush.

Bartlett: Yes, the first time. The first phone call, now that I think about it, the first couple of days it was actually President [George H. W.] Bush 41. Yes, I guess it would have been—that's when it kind of registered: *Maybe this Karl Rove guy is somebody I should—I kind of got lucky here.*

Nelson: This is after Bush is out of office, Bush 41, or is he still President?

Bartlett: No, this is when he's running for reelection. These are my early days. This is before the run-up to the '92 election. I'm like, *Wow.* It was a little bit later that Bush 43 calls. It was a "Hey, is Karl there?" type thing. It was probably over that summer of 1993 when he came by the office and I met him for the first time.

Most people of my age at that time—I'm graduating from college. I want to get involved in politics. You're lucky to get an opportunity potentially to serve on one race. I was in a unique position, and Karl was very good to me to say, "If you really want to get involved in politics, you do need to get on a campaign." At that time there was the Kay Bailey Hutchison special election race for the U.S. Senate seat. Then there was this talk of a long-shot bid for Governor by this guy George W. Bush to take on a very formidable incumbent in Ann Richards.

Had I been smart and calculating about this, the smarter choice would have been to join Kay Bailey Hutchison's campaign. I had the opportunity to do one or the other. But I met George W. Bush. He came into the office and was just a normal guy. He was very friendly to me. In meeting him I thought, *I'd rather work for this guy.* So it was just dumb luck.

Actually I share this with a lot of young people now. I think people try to overengineer or orchestrate their career and say, "I have to do this because of that." Sometimes just trusting your instincts is good. That time it was just a gut instinct. I had already heard she was not particularly a nice person to work for, so that was an easy one. At that time, there were a lot of people who were very dismissive of his chances of winning the Governorship.

Nelson: You're good-looking enough, Dan, you could have been one of her purse boys. [*laughter*]

Bartlett: The stories around that—it could be a whole other day. A girlfriend at a later time was Kay Bailey's scheduler, and the stories are just outrageous. She's an interesting lady. So yes, when that started to take form it was really the nucleus of that campaign that started in Karl's office. We were preparing for him. He made the announcement that he was going to run for Governor exactly, I think, a year out from the Election Day in 1993. In October '93 two other staffers and I were feverishly trying to pull together what would be something that could be a part of his announcement speech, getting facts put together.

They hired a guy—he turned out to be the policy director from the Governor's office—[T.]

Vance McMahon, and Vance was working out of Andrews Kurth law firm in Houston. To tell the truth, I forgot how Karl got connected to Vance, but Vance came in, and at that time Israel Hernandez, the travel aide, was being hired up in Dallas.

At this time Bush is living in Dallas, and we're in Austin. That was really the beginning of that campaign. Brian Berry was brought on after that. The team started to be built, but that was the whole start.

Riley: Did you get a sense about why George W. Bush wanted to be Governor?

Bartlett: I didn't have the type of access at that point that I could understand what was making him tick. I would say that when I saw him either privately or even a little bit publicly in those early days it wasn't ever any of this, "I have to follow in the footsteps" or "I'm obligated to run."

Riley: Right.

Bartlett: It was more that we were fairly religious about the issues on which he was going to campaign, the four issues at the time: education reform, juvenile justice reform, welfare reform, and tort reform. But particularly education was one that he really came alive on.

Having grown up in Dallas and being a Rangers fan, I knew about his connections with the ball club and those things, and the building of the stadium, which was interesting. It all came full circle, because as it evolved I became the keeper of the record in all things Bush in the personal world, which was—when people ask me—I don't know if I'm jumping ahead. I'll be jumping back and forth.

Riley: That's why we do this for a day and a half.

Bartlett: I'm often asked about how did you, at your age, leapfrog several rungs of people and become part of the inner circle? Frankly, what did it more than anything—I'd like to sit here and tell you it was because I was that much smarter than everybody else, my brilliance kind of burst through, it was obvious. It really wasn't the case.

What happened was very early on in the campaign I picked up—we had the established gubernatorial campaign and its headquarters outside of Karl's now and it was being—it was operated. I was an early morning guy, so I would always get to the campaign office before anybody else, 6:30, 6:45 in the morning. I learned pretty quickly that Bush was an early guy. The phone would start ringing at the campaign headquarters. I could hear it ringing in every office. It wasn't ringing in mine, but I started to pick it up and it would be him. "Who's that?" He'd say, "Barty?" That's his nickname. That's when he started calling me "Barty." "What's going on down there?" I'd say, "I'm the only one here." He'd say, "God dang it."

We'd get going. But then he'd start asking me, "What's going on? What's in the papers?" I never really told people. He and I would talk almost every morning. He'd call the campaign and want to know what's going on, give me some scuttlebutt about what's happening. So for a guy who was coming in on a very entry-level position—I was in the policy apparatus at that time and helping again just as we were building out those four planks and what would constitute a campaign agenda and platform.

I was not in any position of authority or anything like that, but I had this back channel of communications with him that forged a little bit of a personal relationship with the candidate that really nobody else outside of the top leadership had. It wasn't for a while that people picked up on it. I would know stuff that was going on and I would tell him about stuff that was going on. It would be little stuff—obviously we're not talking about advice or strategy.

It would be more like, "What's Richard saying today? What's in the news? What's going on around there? Who's-dating-who?" type thing. So we kind of struck up a relationship. We'd talk sports or this or that. A level of familiarity and trust emerged. Somehow—I can't tell you when or how it officially happened, but through that process I started to become kind of the keeper of the record.

For some reason I became the ombudsman for all the kooks around. The Bush trilateral commission, any kind of conspiracy that was leveled against the Bush family, I took these calls and all that. He always had an interest in the type of incoming we'd get on that. Then that evolved over a period of time in which I slowly gained access to his circle of friends and his spheres of life, around his business career and those things.

As we were looking particularly, we knew that his reelection as Governor was going to be a testing ground for national Democrats. The speculation was very ripe at the time that they were going to test run some themes on him during the reelection. So we were preparing for the reelection. At that time I had left the Governor's office and went back to the reelection committee and served as issues director. But really my job was the defender of the record and those things, to anticipate and be prepared for attacks. They were using Gary Mauro as kind of a vessel for these attacks from the DNC [Democratic National Committee] and others.

It was through that process, preparing for that, that I gained a lot of access to—that's when I really forged my first relationship with Harriet Miers, because Harriet was his personal lawyer at the time. Between Harriet and me, we were doing a fairly methodical process. This is where I had the joy of picking up the National Guard account. That was actually while I was in the Governor's office because he was—Joe Allbaugh was chief of staff, and we were the liaison to the National Guard. Not as in the case of his own personal service, but as commander of the Texas National Guard. So my familiarity with how the National Guard worked through that process, the Governor's office, and then from a political standpoint, the ensuing allegations and attack around his own service.

That came up a bit in '94, but not anywhere near what we thought or anticipated in the future. It was through this process when I'm spending time out in Midland, Texas, and in Arlington with [John Thomas] Tom Schieffer and others who were part of the Texas Rangers baseball organization, with members of Harken Energy and others who were part of his career. I was just put in a unique position to essentially get to know more about George W. Bush than anybody else on our campaign staff outside of his family.

Riley: Right.

Bartlett: His race for Congress against Kent Hance, all of those different things. So it was through that opportunity and responsibilities that I just forged a relationship with him that was

probably unheard of for a staffer my age. It really was during that reelection campaign going into the Presidential campaign that I had one foot in policy but was starting to put another foot into the communications realm and developing a relationship with Karen [Hughes] that that all kind of evolved from.

Nelson: I have a question about ’94. That is, where did those four themes come from and how did they end up being *the* four themes? No matter what the question was, the answer was already there, those four.

Bartlett: Two things. One was Vance McMahon and Karl based on research in a pretty good—Karl’s network of state legislators both in the House and the Senate, knowing what was doable, what was ripe, what was from a standpoint of you didn’t want to put out an agenda that you couldn’t actually act upon. In all four of those areas there was a real appetite for reform. There was also a strategic analysis that we knew that based on her past campaigns she wanted this to be a contest of personalities, not one on substance.

What we couldn’t appreciate at the time, which was just gifted to us, was that she made no real attempt at trying to articulate a second-term agenda. That was just the biggest gift we could have ever—when she ran against [James] Mattox she was very good at, and very disciplined at, turning the terms of the debate around to personalities. I don’t think anybody expected George W. Bush at that time to be as disciplined as he turned out to be, to stay on those four issues. There was a strategy to say we know through research that these four issues resonate with the public. There is a real opportunity for change. It also gives him a safe harbor to say, “Look, keep staying on these. Don’t get pulled into the debate.”

Now, one challenge we did have that we lived up to the very last day in the White House: He is not a natural orator. To get his sea legs, Karl had a very smart strategy. We started in small towns and in small county seats where he was still kind of a rock star by name, but also the press wasn’t going to be as tough and he could get his sea legs. We spent a big majority of those early days just doing that, getting his sea legs in those rural county seats. It would be one reporter for the entire county. We’d sit down over a cup of coffee. It gave him a chance to really hone his message in an environment that was manageable.

My first—it’s a great story—I don’t know if it’s in any—didn’t Karen write a book about his—

Riley: Yes.

Bartlett: So many books. My first kind of crisis communication was when he shot the wrong bird. I was in charge of that event.

Riley: In charge of the hunt or the—?

Bartlett: Yes, the whole thing. One of the things we were hammering her on was the penal code got its largest rewrite in like 20 years. They started this whole state jail felony system. There were all those laws. It was going to lessen penalties for certain crimes, which in the long term was probably the right policy, but politically it was a real opportunity for us.

I remember the laws were to go into effect on the same day as opening day of dove season in the

fall campaign. So our logic was what a great photo op it would be to have law enforcement officials who have enforced us—we did this right outside of Houston, right outside of Harris County. We had prosecutors, country judges. We had a Bush law enforcement coalition come and do a dove hunt in the morning and then press conference, talking about we're going to be tough on crime, all these guys with guns, sheriffs and everything. This was going to be perfect. We were then going to do another press conference in Dallas later that day.

We knew also that Ann Richards always went on a dove hunt. The funny thing about that was Ann Richards was hunting on a piece of property from that old state senator who we had beaten who was my friend. She was hunting on property that I grew up hunting on myself. It came back to be an interesting perspective.

So we set up the event. President Bush, I want to say that he was just returning from—I think he had gone on a West Coast fundraising trip. I think he went out to California to raise money. They flew him in the night before. We were staying in—I think it was like a Motel 6. I remember because it was one of those where the door opens up right to the parking lot. The night before he says, "I haven't shot a shotgun—" he knew how to hunt. "I haven't done this in a while, and our version of dove hunting back in the day was what can we kill quicker, a case of beer or a dove out in West Texas?"

We had a shotgun there and it wasn't his because he had been in California. He didn't have time to go get his gun in Dallas and all that, which Ann Richards later tried to make a big deal of, that he had to borrow a gun. We go over the night before. I remember it was an overcast day. We get out there and it is like a circus. We had 20 cameras with us. It's hard enough to shoot a bird on a perfect day, but when you have this whole circus behind you—

Anyway, we're waiting. Finally there were three doves and there was a bird trailing. Shoots the bird. Everybody says, "Yes, shot the bird." All the lights were on us. No one knew at the time what had happened. There was a guide. The guide went out there and he obviously knew because he saw the—he freaked out and panicked and that's when he pulled out another bird that had been shot.

Riley: Substitute.

Bartlett: Substituted it. So Bush didn't know. None of us knew. We do the press conference, hammer on crime. I'm on cloud nine. This is one of the first events that I was in charge of and all that—me and another guy named Abel Guerra. We're back in the hotel packing the cars. He has to get to the airport because they're flying to Dallas to do another press conference. He's asking, "What are we hearing about Richards? What are they doing?"

I'm packing the car and I hear this, "Bartlett, get in here." Karen is in there. He says, "Did I shoot the wrong bird? Did I shoot the wrong bird? They're saying I shot the wrong bird." I had no idea. It turns out that the local Fox photographer or cameraman went back to the studio in Houston. They're doing the video and they're slowing it down and some guy in the production room who knows birds says, "Stop that. That's not a dove." They started looking at it and they're the ones who first detected it. They called Karen or the press office and said, "We believe that George W. Bush shot the wrong bird." It turned out to be this killdeer. By the end of the news

cycle you would have thought he shot a bald eagle. It was called a protected bird, but a killdeer is a very common bird. I don't want to be disrespectful, but they're not an endangered species by any stretch of the imagination.

He is freaking out. "What are we doing here?" This was Karen really showing her media chops. "You need to get on the phone with every one of these reporters and you have to make light of this." I remember Ken Herman from the Austin *American-Statesman* came. He was on the ground rolling, laughing about the whole thing. They came up with the phrase, "I'm glad I wasn't deer hunting or I might have shot a cow." He tried to really make fun of himself, but privately he was pissed at himself. There was no one else he could be mad at.

But the whole problem now was, did he violate the law? He said, "You have to go back to the 'scene of the crime' and figure this out." He gave me a blank check and signed it and said, "Whatever the fine is, fill it out. Let's take care of this." So I go back out to the field. They get on the plane. First he's like, "Oh, and Ann Richards is going to shoot a bird—" I said, "Don't worry, one thing I can be assured is they're not going to shoot any birds. I've been going to open-ended season there for a decade and there's never any birds." And he says, "I guarantee you, they're going to shoot a bird." Sure enough, it came out they all got bored up there. The media convinced Ann to shoot the gun in the air for a photo op, but she was just shooting the gun in the air, which turned out to be an interesting moment.

We get back. I go out to the field. This poor guide is beside himself. "I didn't know what to do. I panicked." He's fine. The game warden comes out there and he said, "I don't know what to do. No one has ever been caught on camera shooting a killdeer. We're going to have to go downtown." So we all get in cars, we all drive down to the magistrate's office downtown. We get in this room—

Riley: Downtown where?

Bartlett: Houston. We go in this room and they all say, "Look, we don't know what to do." I think, *OK, here's my first test.* They said, "It can be a—" We said, "We're not going to get off. We want him to pay." They said, "The maximum penalty is $1,000." I said, "Whoa, whoa, it was just a killdeer. A thousand dollars?" First they were saying we don't need to pay anything. I said, "No, we're going to pay something." They said, "Five dollars."

I said, "No, that's not—" So they said, "Give me a thousand dollars." Whoa, I don't know about that. So I came up with, "I remember from hunting a lot of times if you go over your limit and stuff it is usually about a $100 fine and then $35 of court fines or something like that." They all said, "That sounds very reasonable." So it turned out to be roughly around $135. I fill it out and they're all, I remember, "Can we take a picture with the check?" So we all take a picture with this George W. Bush check paying the fine.

Riley: Should have gotten one of those—

Bartlett: So we pay the fine. We get that done. I drive all the way back to Austin to the headquarters and everybody there just—"Oh, Bartlett, we send you on one freaking event, here it is, and you have him shoot the wrong bird." I said, "I can put the guy in the field. I can't pull the trigger." But there was a lot of anxiety that this was going to be the moment that we really

screwed up.

If you recall, the battleground for Texas at that time was east Texas because that's where you had Blue Dog Democrats, conservative Democrats. This is where the shift was really happening to Republicans. Essentially what it did, which we didn't fully appreciate in those early hours, but came to appreciate as the week unfolded, was it humanized George W. Bush. He made a mistake that a lot of hunters have all made a mistake doing. He owned up to it, he made fun of himself, and she was crass and, "Oh, poor George." Her handling of it—she shot the gun in the air as a photo op and the whole thing. What we thought was going to be a turning point for the worse actually galvanized a part of his personality and humanity that people at that time needed to see. It was really a fascinating development.

Nelson: I was thinking, Karen Hughes—and I don't know if she was the only one, but her quick reaction. I wonder to what extent that was based on her experience on the news—

Bartlett: Oh sure, there's no doubt about it. Her being a television reporter, those skills kicked in, and that's where I first began to learn how to do that part of the job, which I ultimately ended up doing later. She was really good on her toes. That was one of her real talents.

Nelson: She could see the second-day story and the third-day story.

Bartlett: Exactly.

Nelson: If you all didn't do what you did.

Bartlett: Exactly. As we were driving to the airport he was calling every one of those reporters and talking to them himself, not trying to spin it, just trying to make light of it. But you had a scene behind the scenes. He was calling me, "What's going on? What's going on?" I'm like—"Downtown? Why are you going downtown?" So for me personally it was—

Nelson: Baptism by fire.

Bartlett: It was.

Riley: But you came through it.

Bartlett: Oh, yes.

Riley: So it's a success story for you as well as for the Governor.

Bartlett: Absolutely. That was just kind of trusting my instincts and figuring it out. What I learned there was I liked being in the middle of the action. That was a high. I was still afraid for my job at that point.

Riley: You're how old at this point?

Bartlett: I was 21, 22 years old. Wet behind the ears.

Riley: Did Mr. Bush know that you had saved him about $800?

Bartlett: I told him the whole story.

Nelson: Probably thought you cost him $130.

Bartlett: We ended up doing stuff because we developed this personal relationship. I worked in the policy office. He was a big runner at the time. We were at an event on a Saturday morning when he was Governor and he was getting his knee scoped and he couldn't run in the Capitol 10,000, the big Austin race. I was going to run in it. We got to talking. He's a competitive guy, and he said, "How fast do you think you can run this thing?" I said, "I'm going to run it faster than you did last year." He goes, "I'll bet you a hundred bucks." I said, "Fine. I'll bet you a hundred bucks."

At that time I was not running fast enough to—he was a good runner at the time. That was on a Saturday morning. We were speaking to some law enforcement group there in Austin. By about ten o'clock on Monday morning the entire capitol knew that there was a bet between Governor Bush and me about whether—and he was going to be the honorary starter of it. I had three weeks to get in race shape. I remember he was at the starting line. I had headphones on. I like to run with music on. He said, "I've never seen anybody run a sub-42:30 with headphones on. I don't want to hear about any excuses about the crowds and all that." He was trying to get in my head.

So I got up at the very front. I panicked because that's where the fast guys go out. I ran the first mile like in six minutes and five seconds. Then I panicked that I was going to run out of—I ended up beating it. He always had a big barbeque at the mansion afterward. He signed my number—I have it somewhere. It said, "To Fleetfoot, great race." I have his check. Never cashed the check; I had it framed.

He's just competitive. It's that type of personal relationship that he really spent time on developing with his staff. When people ask me, "How did you stay with this guy this long? The average stay in the West Wing is what, for senior staff, a little over two years? Something like that. You do it for seven." It's these kinds of bonding relationships that started very early that made you endure.

Riley: Let me ask you a question about that. I'm taken by the extent to which your relationship with him develops out of these early morning phone calls and your ability—I guess if he ever sensed that you were trying to leverage those calls into something to feather your own nest he would have terminated them immediately.

Bartlett: Probably.

Riley: There was a sense of confidence that emerged from these things. I'm thinking about this in relation to the fact that he also had very close staffing relationships with women. He was surrounded by powerful women. I can't quite square those two things. It seems to me that the kind of relationship that you had with him was almost a kind of—you see the term "locker room" thrown around occasionally. The women aren't in the locker room. How do you reconcile these two aspects of this man's operating style when he's Governor?

Bartlett: He treated all of us the same. Unfortunately, Karen and they got pulled into the locker room probably more than they wanted to. It may be part of it. I don't want to get too—I don't

want you all to bring a couch in here and lie down, but my parents divorced at an early age. I was not close with my father. He only had daughters. I'm not going to say it was a father-son type of relationship, but we bonded in a way that was interesting.

What was interesting also was that things that he had a lot of passion for—for example, things that Karl for example wasn't very—Karl is a book man. He was a nerd. He didn't talk baseball or Longhorn football or this or that. In some way I think I filled a little bit of a void there with some of the folks. Not to say that there weren't others like Don Evans and people like that. I know there has been a lot of commentary about his relationship with powerful women and whether it came from his mother being such a dominant personality. Maybe so. But at the time it never looked like he was making a special effort to pull in strong women voices.

Riley: It was just a natural part of how he—

Bartlett: It really was.

Riley: Do you ever recall any circumstances where the women felt excluded from these types of communications? You could envision a situation in which these early morning conversations are going on, you're out running with the Governor. Maybe you're having breakfast at midnight after a long day at the capitol and the women aren't included. They might feel resentful of that.

Bartlett: If they weren't getting their own access at times, maybe so. You have to think about the personalities of these women. These weren't shrinking violets. Margaret Spellings, Margaret LaMontagne at the time, later Condi [Condoleezza Rice], Karen, and what was her name—she was on the campaign, [Jennifer] Dunn. She was a former 41. They could hold their own. That was part of the commonality of all these women; these weren't shrinking violets. Were there others who felt like they were on the outside looking in? Maybe, but I never detected it, nor was it raised, the idea that there's the good old boys and I can't break through.

Nelson: I have a couple of questions about '94. One is, at the beginning of the campaign—Bush had run for Congress once. Granted, it was 16 years earlier, and he had been involved in a pretty hands-on way on his father's Presidential campaigns, at least one of them, maybe both of them. What do you think he brought to his candidacy based on those earlier experiences, if anything? You say he was not ready for the big city in terms of oratorical ability, but what do you think he knew from experience that a candidate otherwise might not have known?

Bartlett: It really spanned the spectrum of little things, like details around events, things that he saw from his father. You show up on time, you stay late. You have to build—knowing what the pace of a candidate would be like, how we built his schedule, things like that. A candidate doing it for the first time just wouldn't know what questions to ask. So on the tactics of it there is a familiarity. Strategically, the lesson he mostly took away from his race for Congress was don't let your opponent define you.

He was very keen on responding to attacks, defending ourselves, and always having what is our message today. He was very tuned in to message discipline, what that meant, at a level that a candidate running for statewide office for the first time just wouldn't appreciate. So those things jump out at me. Essentially, when you're at that level, even though he wasn't the candidate, you can anticipate things that others can't. I always likened him to—I don't know if you play golf,

but a golfer's swing can either be a feel swing or they're mechanical. Bush doesn't have a mechanical swing. It is a feel. His feel and his instincts in those things were always good. He really knew when to trust them.

I would say that in that entire political career that I was involved with him I can only remember one period that I'm sure we'll get to later where his instincts let him down, and that was during Katrina. Every other time we were always better off trusting his instincts on things. You either have it, or you don't. Bill Clinton had it.

We knew that he was a fantastic—he got his energy in those things from being a retail politician and doing that part of the business. So in the early days he had a very definitive view of how he wanted to run campaigns. A lot of it was based on his loss and then how his father ran his own. Does that make sense?

Nelson: Yes, and I wonder too what he learned from running that first gubernatorial race against a very formidable candidate that stood him in good stead six years later.

Bartlett: You know, it probably was more than anything else the message discipline—that you have to really—he'd say, "I'm so tired of mentioning those four issues that I'm going to puke if I have to say them again." We'd say that's when it's just starting to push through. To have it validated. Then we passed laws in all four areas that really got cemented in his mind, as we prepared for a Presidential run, that you have to have that discipline. Particularly if you're going to beat somebody as formidable as Ann Richards. It just proved that that strategy could work.

Riley: He also wanted a disciplined organization around him. Is that correct?

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: Do you recall any instances—

Bartlett: Discipline—I actually think it started in the Governor's office. He wanted the anti-[John] Sununu organization. He did not want a gatekeeper. He always talked about how I'm going to have access to my staff. He always really blamed the fact that his father didn't get access to advice he needed at the time because Sununu and maybe other Chiefs of Staff, but Sununu's name always came up. He would serve too much as a gatekeeper and filtered what got to him.

Riley: This was as early as the—

Bartlett: Oh, yes. Absolutely. When he is Governor, his first year as Governor in 1995. He operated that office—Joe Allbaugh you would think was kind of like a security guard. He is a big, imposing guy, but he had no authority in keeping people from accessing Governor Bush. That was the style of management that he kept in place until his last days in office as President. What I said about sometimes you can overcorrect, I would say that—and I probably did myself. We took advantage of that access at times too much.

Riley: Early or late? Are you talking about Texas or D.C.?

Bartlett: Late. D.C. I'm sure you sat down with Andy [Card] and President Bush. He made it very clear to Andy, "You're not going to choke off my Texas people. I'm going to have access." I think with that signal, Andy didn't manage the Texas crew like he probably should have. We probably could have used a little more belt-tightening when it comes to me and Karen. Early on, Karen, Karl, me, and whatnot. There was a healthy, competitive tension between Karen and Karl and then later Karl and me. I was caught very much in the middle of that as you can probably imagine.

He was very firm very early on about the structure and the access. He also set a very clear tone early on about how he wanted to be—

Riley: Early on in Texas or—

Bartlett: Texas, I'm sorry. One of the projects I had early on was we were looking at Texas' economic development capabilities in the department—I don't remember—Texas Economic Development Department or Commerce or something like that. I was charged with helping pull together a modernization of that capability in Texas. I had written a four-page memo on this whole thing. He said, "Son, if you can't make your points in less than a page and a half, then you don't know what you're talking about." He gave me the memo back and said, "Go work on this."

People always viewed that as Bush is not intellectually in it, he just wants one-pagers or this or that. It was more a process to make you really try to understand what you're trying to communicate and what you're trying to recommend. If you can't succinctly make your point in a page and a half, that's on you, not on me. So it was a process that he pushed on us.

Punctuality was one of his biggest pet peeves that he picked up from his father. The rudest thing in the world is to make somebody wait. We left people on tarmacs who weren't on time. We left somebody in Abilene; I can't remember who it was. We're taking off. They weren't there; we're gone. He was legendary for that.

What was best about him from a management standpoint was you always knew where you stood with him. If he was mad, you were going to know. I used to say his temper was like a West Texas storm. It would come, it could be violent, but it was gone pretty quick. That was his style. He'd let you know. Then 10 minutes later there weren't any doubts about where you stood, and then that's behind us. Over life I've had a lot of different—not everybody is that way as a manager. He was very easy to read, Mrs. [Laura] Bush not. She was harder to read. I always tell people I was more afraid of her than him any day; she could be intimidating.

Riley: Oh, yes?

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: Give an example of that, even though it is out of the chronology.

Bartlett: You just never knew.

Nelson: It will take everybody by surprise.

Bartlett: She didn't suffer fools very gingerly—I'm trying to think of a specific anecdote. It was interesting, I was looking over the timeline. One of the events that is highlighted in there was election night 2004. The whole decision—in the middle of the night there was a breathless attempt to roll Bush out there and declare victory. There was a very small minority saying we can't do that. It was a pretty fierce debate. Laura Bush walked in and just said, "George, you can't go out there," and walked off. Everybody was like, "OK, we have the answer." [*laughter*] I was in the minority at the time on that view.

Riley: You cheered the decision, right? The tape doesn't pick up the action.

Bartlett: There's a whole story behind that night that I'm sure we'll get to. She was just hard to read. It was harder to tell where you stood with her. Always pleasant. Her tone never got high or low. You can read him; it's visceral. With her she just keeps her cards close to her chest. I have a deep amount of respect for her. I never had any indication that she didn't like me, but a lot of times you sat around wondering why when you'd get the call that the First Lady would like to talk to you. I would wrack my brain over a call from her. When he called us, not a big deal.

Nelson: You said that in '98 the national Democrats knew Bush was coming and tried to use that Garry Mauro campaign as a vehicle for attacking Bush. How did that manifest itself? What was Bush attacked for and how did you all handle that in '98?

Bartlett: There were themes around—they really started going against his business career, the Rangers and Harken and failed energy. It started in a way that Richards never really got any traction on, going after his biography. It was hard for them because it was hard for them to penetrate his first term. He had had bipartisan success. He had Bob Bullock essentially endorsing him for reelection over Garry Mauro. I think he was the godfather to one of Garry Mauro's children. Just unheard of political support in the state on both sides of the aisle, a track record that, as I said before, things all got acted upon. The state of the economy at the time was good. They really were testing the themes around his business career and other things that he basically had not done anything.

Then the National Guard stuff started to emerge again, not full-throated, but they were planting seeds around that as well. That gave us a relatively calm setting, and frankly we wanted some of these issues to surface so we could validate with election saying the voters heard that and it has been dismissed. We actually wanted to get some of that stuff on the table knowing we were going to win and win big. We could just sweep—it was pretty naïve on our part that that was going to solve those issues going into the Presidential.

Then the biggest lesson, the biggest thing that he really impressed upon us was that he wasn't going to make this mistake that Richards made, which was take for granted a second term. He was very aggressive, we were very aggressive, in articulating a second-term agenda and eschewing any sort of talk about national intentions or ambitions. We were very disciplined about that as well.

Nelson: At what point did you become the person whose job it was to—I'm thinking about this in terms of anticipatory opposition research of your own guy. When did that begin?

Bartlett: When I left the state house and joined the election committee, so this would have been

right after the ’97 legislative session completed. It would have been June of ’97-ish.

Nelson: When did you learn, for example, about drunk driving?

Bartlett: That was some time later. It was before the Presidential campaign started in earnest. I want to say it was after the ’98 reelection, but it could—no, now that I think about that, we discussed whether we should put it out there before the ’98 election and the decision was not to, which ultimately, in hindsight, was a mistake.

Riley: He made the decision himself?

Bartlett: He did.

Riley: You think Laura was complicit in that?

Bartlett: Probably, but I don’t fully accept his explanation. This was a big part of it. He didn’t want it out there sending a signal to his daughters that you can get away and still run and become President. I think in his heart of hearts he didn’t think it would get out. There had been investigative reporters and others, op [opposition] research guys digging all over Texas for stuff. He lived in Houston during the party days, Midland, Dallas. *They’ll never look in Kennebunkport, Maine.*

I hit him on that before. I said, “You just didn’t think you were going to get caught?” “Naw,” he’d bark at me. But there, in my heart of hearts, I truly believe that, which is any politician running—

Nelson: How did you find out about it?

Bartlett: Karen.

Nelson: How did she find out?

Bartlett: Him. I don’t remember the first day what it was like when he told them, but I remember there was a conversation about it. Karen called me. I don’t remember if I was actually where there was a huddle because what we should have done was done an event with Mothers Against Drunk Driving and couple it with an awareness campaign. I’ve had these. There was a discussion about that, but just decided not to do it. I don’t remember a big moment, but I remember Karen called me just as the decision had been made, or before, and wanted to get my feedback on it. But yes. I don’t know if that was one of those times where staff just didn’t push back hard enough.

There is always that perception that those who are closest—the current President is getting this criticism—they’re too loyal, they just tell them what they want to hear. Nothing could be further from the truth. We were the only ones who didn’t have the fear of walking in there and telling the President of the United States that he was wrong on something. I actually think there is a critical role for the most loyal and trusted aides to be there because they are the only ones who actually have that level of trust and comfort to deliver that.

Maybe in that moment we failed him because that was a long day when that came out. We can go through it because it was interesting. Whenever you want to.

Nelson: One last thing. One thing that seems to have worked is that there weren't stories coming out about when Bush was drinking heavily, bar fights or groping women or any of the things that I'm sure reporters were looking for in connection with somebody who at one time drank too much. Usually you'd think that would manifest itself in some bad behavior, but I don't remember anything like that.

Bartlett: I think the big fear—where they were going the most was during his days in Houston when he was in the Guard, he was living at the apartment complex where he met Laura Bush and we talked about it. He said, "Look—" He never feared that there was going to be some disclosure about him doing hard-core drugs, but he went to a lot of parties where drugs were being done. We always feared that somebody would say, "I saw him at a party doing—" line of attack. I talked to a lot of his buddies back then just to validate that if something like that emerged that we could have other voices say, "No, I was there" type stuff. I never really feared that there was something else out there, particularly after learning about the DUI [driving under the influence]. I knew that the DUI was. Outside of that—

Riley: Can I ask, was there anything else that we didn't find out about?

Bartlett: No, not that I know of. Look, he chased skirt and drank a lot, but not anything that I ever came across. I imagine there is a lot to discuss about the National Guard service. Was there a lot of favoritism happening in the National Guard, in Texas politics at the time? Absolutely. Did he ask for favors? No. Did he get preferential treatment in some circumstances? Or that some might consider he was? Hard to deny that the commanders at the time knew who he was and those things. But did he do what others didn't do and become a pilot and have to perform a lot more than most of them like Lloyd Bentsen's son who was a pencil pusher behind a desk? He did more.

Now, was he proud of his final year of service and was he committed? No. I don't think he liked that. There was a lot of did he show up type stuff, but did he abdicate his responsibilities? No. I never feared that there was—I talked to General [Walter B. Buck] Staudt before he died and the guys involved in this. That was a different time and culture and those guys were running hard, partying hard, and doing what they were doing. But it never dawned on me that—nor did I ever fear that there was going to be some sort of damning, explosive development around either of those two issues.

Now there were times when I was worried that our recollection and providing of events, how they unfolded, could be contradicted. The *60 Minutes* story made us all pause. The records were horrible, not just his but in general. I learned a lot of that as it was going through. I know people made accusations that I was destroying documents and all. It was just crazy talk. One particular individual said that they literally saw me at National Guard headquarters shredding, Joe Allbaugh and I were described—just crazy kind of allegations.

That was just a story that would never go away. It was amazing. Every single election some new element of that came up.

Riley: Did you have to trail this in Alabama also?

Bartlett: I never went to Alabama. I talked to people; I talked to his girlfriend at the time. There were very few people I didn't talk to, but I didn't have to travel to Alabama. I remember when we found those records that proved—the dentist report. I'll never forget my best line, "I don't know if you were there, but your teeth sure were." [*laughter*] He died laughing on that one. It was one that he used.

Riley: There were two or three things in general that I wanted to touch on, and I don't really even know how to ask a question about this. You're dealing with a Texan who has out-of-state roots also, Connecticut and Washington, D.C. That was used against him certainly in the Congressional race. Was it a problem for him? In your experience, you're a Texan I guess. Not born in Texas, but raised in Texas.

Bartlett: He used to remind me when I would question his credentials. "Where are you from? Illinois?" I'd say, "I was six months old when I got here." We'd fight over that.

Riley: But he was a Texan? Is a Texan?

Bartlett: You know, people can see through it if you're not. Actually even at times I think his father never until much later truly felt comfortable in his Texas roots. It was authentic. Did he have a little bit of a chip on his shoulder about it? Yes, because he probably hated the fact of where he was born and all that and wished that he was born in Midland. But based on his own passion and the validators being his friends and those who—almost all are going to say, "He's all right, he's one of us" early on. We'd laugh about it, and like I said we'd poke fun at it, but he never really got defensive about it.

Riley: Got you. The corollary issue is his education.

Bartlett: Right.

Riley: Which sort of relates to his own conception of his own intellect. A lot of people were criticizing him for his intellect or lack thereof. It strikes me—I'll just throw this out as a proposition. It's sort of conventionally Southern to wear your intellect lightly. Is that your understanding of the man that you came to know?

Bartlett: Yes. It's the difference between are you book smart and those things. His grades obviously weren't something he's proud of, but at the same time if you spent any time with him—it would have been a bigger issue if he actually wasn't smart. So you got reassured very early. My big challenge was that from the outset he is not a natural communicator, and the malaprops and those things exacerbated that narrative. But early on, his lesson in politics is lower expectations. They want to call me dumb? Call me dumb.

It was part of the strategy too, which we probably took to too high a level. But every time—we just got lucky in both cases that we were gifted such interesting opponents in Al Gore and John Kerry. Intellectually there couldn't have been a better contrast. Now, had there been another candidate that maybe could have gone toe-to-toe on that everyday man familiarity, that was always our calling card. May not like everything George W. Bush did, but I can relate to him,

have a beer with him. That always played to our benefit.

Nelson: I think [John] McCain might have been a tougher candidate in that way in the 2000 primaries. Harder to brand as an elitist.

Bartlett: Oh yes.

Nelson: Somebody who didn't know what real life was like.

Bartlett: Yes. Luckily he had other weaknesses that we were able to—I saw Senator McCain last week and we had lunch and talked about some of those old days. He totally underestimated Bush as a candidate. He admits it to this day.

Nelson: Did he tell you that?

Bartlett: We've talked about it before.

Nelson: I know we'll come back and fill in some blanks, but go with this if you will. What were the weaknesses McCain had, and in what ways did he underestimate Bush?

Bartlett: The hardest thing is that you couldn't really talk about his weaknesses publicly because people would always construe it as attacking his temperament because of his POW [prisoner of war] service. I have no idea if it has anything to do with this, but it was not hard to get under John McCain's skin. He is a volatile person who wears his emotion on his sleeve. He is about one of the most undisciplined, in that regard, candidates or political figures that I've seen and that we had seen. That was easy to exploit.

Then they had a terrible strategy in 2000. They didn't have a choice really, but his whole "straight talk express" and those things, it was the process of how he was running that became the reason he was running. I'm going to be the guy who is successful telling you how it is and all this. But when you basically cede control of your narrative to the media—he traveled with them every day. He let them in the bus. They controlled his message every day and we just took advantage of it completely.

I know there is a lot of talk about the dirty politics in South Carolina. I spent 21 days after we lost in New Hampshire. I got deployed to South Carolina and was part of the team on the ground there. Were there third-party activities going on there? Yes. Did we have control over it? No. But there were some things being said about Bush that I know McCain didn't have control over. I never was this blunt to McCain himself later, but what always worried me about him being President—I voted for him, but I was reluctant—was that on the big things, and this is hard for people to appreciate, the President only makes probably a handful of big, monumental decisions as President. You can count them on your hand, usually. I'd sleep well at night with John McCain making those big decisions. War, things like that, big stuff.

The Presidency is the millions of small decisions you make that are very relevant. I don't mean small in the sense they don't have consequences, but they're just routine. It takes an enormous amount of discipline and interest, which was interesting because a lot of people didn't think Bush had the intellectual firepower or interest to do that process. In fact it was quite the opposite. He

was very disciplined about taking every one of those little decisions very seriously. I just never trusted that McCain would. Those steer the direction of the Presidency more so than the big ones at times.

It's interesting. You just wouldn't think that his—and he told me, he said, "I couldn't let bad stories go. I'd get fired up." I said, "I know. We used to take advantage of it, Senator." When he would travel with us, later when he was endorsing us and running, he was just glued to the TV. "What are they saying?" And Bush is like, "This guy is going to pop. How does he do it?"

So in many respects we were—he posted the biggest threat to us coming out of New Hampshire. He was a flawed candidate, which was exposed not once but twice.

Nelson: What is it that McCain underestimated about Bush, and what do you think the source of that misunderstanding was?

Bartlett: I think it is this narrative. I think it's, *I'm smarter than him.* Particularly if you're a Senator. *Just get me in a debate with him and I'm going to do circles around this guy*. *It's clear that everybody is going to see that this guy is not smart and I am.* It's amazing how often people played into that narrative and stereotype and built strategies around it that turned out to be wrong every time. Really fascinating.

Now, how different would a campaign look if you took that more seriously? I don't know. You'd have to think about that. What type of campaign, more successful type of campaign, to run against him? Not sure. I think Gore's biggest mistake is that he didn't embrace Clinton. He could have done better with that.

Riley: We spent a lot of time asking the Clinton people why that happened. I think they scratch their heads over it too.

Bartlett: It's just amazing every step of the way how people underestimated George W. Bush throughout his political career. It all starts from the beginning. He wasn't supposed to run; [John Ellis] Jeb [Bush] was supposed to run. Jeb was the smart one. It's just funny. That whole narrative never went away.

Riley: Did George W. acknowledge this business with Jeb?

Bartlett: I don't know. As brothers go they're not particularly close. I'm not sure. That may have come out. You probably read that he was closer to Marvin [Bush] and Dora [Bush Koch]. There was a certain healthy competitiveness there I guess. I don't know how much the two of them talked about it. We talked about it a lot.

Riley: We need probably to tie up the Governorship. Let me pose the broad question to you. From hindsight, what are the things that we should pay most attention to out of the Governorship that have a bearing on our understanding of the man George W. Bush and then the President he becomes? Are there things that are underappreciated from that period that folks ought to pay attention to?

Bartlett: I'd say from a governing standpoint he really honed his abilities around personal

diplomacy with legislators. I know it has been documented, particularly the relationship he had with Bob Bullock and others. But he really honed a skill that paid off later with the likes of a Ted Kennedy or others when he got to Washington, D.C. He needed that experience and that time doing the legislative process and the minutia of legislative law making.

Karl gets as much credit for this as anyone, really having a strategic imperative around the Hispanic vote. We really made it a big priority to be the first Republican Governor to win El Paso County, for example. We spent a lot of time out there. Again, it wasn't forced. He was a natural at it. Everybody thought that was Jeb's calling card because of his marriage and his fluency in Spanish. Bush's "Spanglish" did him proud. There was an authenticity. But the strategy early on paid dividends big time when he ran for President and reelection and had inroads that have now been entirely eroded for the party. But I think people will look back at that and say Bush was on to something very early in his political career that if it had stayed on track could have altered future Presidential races. It has been a real missed opportunity for the party.

Fast-forward to when we embarked on comprehensive immigration reform. One thing that was clear, our views in Washington about immigration reform were largely shaped based on our experience in Texas. His living in West Texas, sharing 2,000 miles of border, the assimilation, the familiarity. Where we missed was that in the eight years that we were gone, Texas changed. Texas got pissed off about the immigrant, the Hispanic issue, in a way that we did not appreciate.

I got back to Texas in '08 and the schools, the hospital rooms, the things—in that short period of time the dynamic had shifted in Texas and we missed it. Really interesting. Now we can appreciate—when you're talking to a Congressman in northern Georgia and for the first time they get Hispanic voters there and they didn't know—so we understood their fears and we said, "We've got this. We know." What we didn't see was that even in states like Texas and Arizona, where assimilation ought to take place, there was a level of anger and unrest around this issue that we didn't appreciate.

Nelson: So by 2006 when he is pushing immigration reform, this change has already occurred.

Bartlett: And we missed it.

Nelson: I wonder. You mention the bipartisanship, cross partisanship, however you want to describe it, of Bush's style as Governor when he was elected in 2000. Because of the circumstances of that election there was a lot of public commentary that he ought to run more of that kind of Presidency. [Richard B.] Cheney at least is the one who is quoted as saying, "We thought about that for about 30 seconds and then decided we won, we're going to run it as a Republican administration." What about that? To the extent that Cheney's characterization is correct. I know there was No Child Left Behind and other across-the-aisle things—

Bartlett: And entrees to Ted Kennedy and early on that helped on No Child Left Behind, followed by a bipartisan vote on the tax bill.

Nelson: Was there any serious discussion, for example, of appointing a Cabinet with a substantial number of Democrats or any of these other things that might have sounded like the Bush style in Texas, which to people in Washington seemed to be the only style after an election like 2000?

Bartlett: I would say that what we learned very quickly was that we're not in Kansas anymore. Bipartisanship in Texas, where the ideological differences are much narrower than they are here—to be a Democrat in Texas is a little bit different from being a Democrat from California or New York, just the professionalism of partisanship here and the hardening of it. But there was talk. It was his instinct to try the government way, but you just get crushed by the realities. I think at times it was easy for me to say, because it wasn't my job to worry about vote counts on the Hill and in retaining control. But we were slaves to what was going to help in the midterm. The pressure was always put on us, and they always put that guilt on us. "We're going to lose our seat." It's hard, and I know every President deals with it, that pressure. It makes us do things that you look back on, like the Terri Schiavo deal, and you just think, *Really? We really did that?* You want to just pull your hair out over some of those decisions we made. But when you have those members of Congress and the Speaker, [John Dennis] Hastert, and all of them day in, day out, "This is going to kill us for sure. This is going to kill us. We have to win. You think you have it bad now? If we lose the House—"

It wears you down. I will tell you he never lost that. His instinct and impulse was always to do things that way. But just the crushing realities of politics here would always get us off of it.

Riley: Take us back—I'm trying to tie off some of the preliminaries. You were doing policy work for how long in the Governor's—

Bartlett: For the first two legislative sessions. Remember, in Texas every other year is a legislative session. So '95 was a legislative session, and I'm in the policy office, the assistant policy director, the number two guy. My job was not to really go deep on any of the issues but to make sure we were fulfilling all our campaign promises. So I had a finger in a lot of different issues that we were dealing with. There were a few that I spent more time on. I dealt with the National Guard stuff. Juvenile justice reform was something I spent an additional portion of time on. Then '96 is a nonlegislative session year. That's the one year I can remember actually having fun. It was just fun. The legislature is not in town, we're not having a campaign going on, an election. It probably was the only normal year. I was single at the time. It was a fun year.

Then in '97 you have a legislative session, which is a precursor to your run for reelection, and it was right after—I was still kind of fulfilling the same role. I would say in '97 I'm starting to spend more and more time with Karen and communications and bridging that. My title—after the legislative session in '97 was over, which was roughly around June of '97, I moved over to the campaign. I had the position of issues director. We wanted it to be vague enough that it was communications, policy, a little bit of everything. Dale Laine was the campaign manager. Karen was doing part time toward the end of both.

After we won reelection a lot of people reoriented themselves to the Governor's office, and then I broke off and started working out of Karl's office again as we started doing the preparatory work for the exploratory committee. There were a bunch of resolutions passed by Republicans around the country generating this authentic—I was one of a handful of guys who were generating that authentic—

Nelson: Spontaneous.

Bartlett: That spontaneous "front-porch" campaign it was called, which was bringing people in. So I was working with Karl on those things.

Riley: How soon?

Bartlett: Hours.

Riley: But the question is how early did the business of Presidential aspirations start intruding—or how early were you familiar with it? When did it start?

Bartlett: When I went to the reelection campaign for Governor. There was talk more in the Governor's office, but it was just talk. We were running our reelection campaign as a precursor to being ready to run for President. Had he made his decision? No. We were supposed—the whole MO [modus operandi] was assume—because I'd rather pull the plug on something that was ready to go as opposed to try and create something overnight.

Riley: Understand.

Bartlett: We all just assumed he was going to run, knowing that he had made this decision. So it wasn't a secret. We all knew he was going to. The way he accounts it is how it happened. When he ultimately decided to run—but we had all systems go. So there was no break from late '97 all the way through '99.

Riley: Got you. So tell us a little bit about this grassroots campaign to generate.

Bartlett: This was Karl's brainchild.

Riley: The call for a Bush Presidency.

Bartlett: He's like—we need to generate an enormous amount of enthusiasm about him running, like he's being drafted to run. It was identifying Republican members of states and Karl using his vast Rolodex of people he had worked for in direct mail or he had through his own college Republican—all the things he'd been through. We pulled every lever we had in the Bush-[J. Danforth] Quayle apparatus, the Bush 41 apparatus as well. We really leaned on that to generate these resolutions and get them voted on at state conventions and things like that, in addition to bringing in these folks on this front-porch campaign.

It was a combination of political people, policy people, and helping. That was Karl's brainchild, and I helped to execute the mechanics around a lot of that. There was a handful of us who did.

Riley: How did those operate, the front-porch campaign events? Who dreams them up? Who identifies—

Bartlett: At that point we had—I think even Condi—in each subject area somebody was designated and their job was, "OK, who are we going to tap, bring in?" Then work the calendar. As far as the resolution, we just divided up the country. I don't even remember what region I had. We divided up the states and said you have until X-day to get as many Republicans as you can to sign a petition to say he ought to run type thing. Classic grassroots campaigning without

there being a campaign.

Riley: Are you largely pushing on an open door?

Bartlett: Oh yes. It was easy, fun work.

Nelson: There is a legislative session in ’99 and I’m wondering. There are liberal Democrats in Texas. There is a national Democratic party. Both might have an interest in using this ’99 session to create problems for George W. Bush. Did that happen?

Bartlett: No, mainly through the relationship with the Speaker and the Lieutenant Governor. They just weren’t going to let it happen. There were some moments, but we didn’t worry about it. There were some nits and gnats that we had to deal with, but in the scheme of things it gave us a great platform to be governing.

Riley: You’ve already mentioned McCain a couple of times. Who did you view as the top threat in competition for the—

Bartlett: Early on we worried about Steve Forbes because of his money. Obviously McCain, but I remember early on a real preoccupation with Forbes, that he was just going to be able to blow through with his money. So there was a lot of focus on him. Then on McCain. But I remember in those early days it was a big focus of our time and attention. That’s why we thought it was so important on that first fundraising cycle that we put a big number out there. That was the one where everybody gasped when we put up the number. The “great expectations tour” was the name of that first swing through Iowa. Interesting, because as I was talking about earlier, lowering expectations. But it was hard to manage expectations during that time period. It was a whole new animal.

In large part on that first campaign I was on the road hardly at all. I was at headquarters. Really I was still technically—that’s when we brought Josh Bolten on. Let’s see how this actually worked. Formally I had one foot in policy, one foot in communication, but a little bit more in policy. Again, it was my job to—and then in charge of rapid response. Any attack on the Governor I was in charge of, because a lot of it was about his record, about those things. So I was running point on that. Part of that is a communications issue and part of that is a policy issue.

Karen is on the road. Josh not having a relationship with the Governor, I was the bellwether. They’re working on policies. I could quickly say that or this, so an interesting role. As the campaign unfolded, we got through the primaries, which is an interesting time for me personally because I got married in the middle of all this. I was a glutton for punishment.

So I get married in the 2000 Presidential campaign. I had twin boys during the reelect in ’04, and I had my third child literally the day after the ’07 State of the Union address I was in charge of. That was pretty much when the game was up.

Riley: I remember reading through the briefing books and seeing one article that said you and your wife were childless. I got through about 10 more pages and there were three children.

Bartlett: I'll never forget—this is classic Bush. This is like January 10th of '07. Whit [Bartlett]'s birth is the 24th, so the State of the Union was on January 23rd. It's a Sunday night or something. He calls the house and Allyson [Bartlett], my wife, answered the phone. "Yes, Mr. President."

She recounts the conversation: "Hi Ally, how's that baby coming along?" "Fine, Mr. President." He says, "You know I have this speech coming up?" She says, "Yes, sir, I do know that." He says, "Keep your legs crossed." She throws the phone to me, like, *Look, I don't need your help on this. Let me handle this part.* She's glaring at me.

But anyway, '99, right after the primary, I got married. There was a big issue around the gun debate I think it was. Somehow that became a focal point of the campaign. I remember because going on my honeymoon to Hawaii, we literally walk into our honeymoon suite and the phone is blowing up. She's like, "I've got my ring, I'm going to the pool. You can stay in here and take forever." So I spent the first day of our honeymoon in a hotel room dealing with some *New York Times* story, if I remember correctly, about Bush. Maybe it was on guns. I can't remember what it was. Something about guns, I remember, but I remember spending a significant period of the first day of my honeymoon dealing with the campaign. That's what you get for getting married in the middle of a Presidential campaign.

Riley: Exactly.

Bartlett: I don't know what other people have said about this, but there is a campaign and then there are debates. You cannot appreciate the level of stress and anxiety around Presidential debates.

Nelson: You're talking about all the debates?

Bartlett: Oh, yes. My role in the second, in '04, was different from the first term. I was in charge of rapid response, so literally during the middle of the debates I was the one as charges are being leveled we're putting out documents, refuting, and those things, but just on the candidate, on the team, it paralyzes campaigns. I just remember I played a more strategic role the second time around, more so than I did the first time. But there's no better process than a debate process, and every President—look what happened to President [Barack] Obama. It's a fascinating process to be involved in.

Riley: Mike had asked the question about—during the primary season as well?

Nelson: The primary as well, the Republican debates.

Bartlett: Oh, I'm sorry, yes.

Nelson: Same thing?

Bartlett: Not quite, because the multicandidate forum is easier to navigate. That one we had in South Carolina was—Brian Williams I think moderated it, and they served booze for an hour and a half before we got there to the entire audience. It was raucous. McCain lost his cool at that one. There were two memorable ones; that was one. There was a Larry King debate in South Carolina

during the primary and it was us, McCain, and Alan Keyes. This was when all the charges were flying about the personal attacks and those things. There were commercial breaks because it was the Larry King show.

In the first segment—we're all right there watching—Keyes just blisters McCain, I think on abortion or something, just hammer and tong going after him. They cut to break and McCain almost came over the table to strangle Alan Keyes. He was furious. We all just looked and said, "We're going to win this one." Look at this—he blew up. It was a disaster for McCain to the point where they sent McCain to the spin room afterward to try to clean it up. It was bad. That was one of the classic ones we had.

We knew he was going to attack us about all the dirty attacks on him. They had been putting out flyers attacking Bush. Bush knew. He said, "Your campaign is doing attacks as well." He pulled out a flyer. McCain said, "That's not our—" He was defiant.

Bush said, "It says, 'Paid for by John McCain' right here." McCain just got beet red. He was going to lose it. We knew we had him, but Alan Keyes helped us a lot that night. So the drama around the debates was just fascinating to say the least. I don't remember the primary ones. The first one or two everyone was gunning for him, but nowhere near—maybe at the time we thought, *Gosh, can't get any worse than this*. Nothing compares to the general election debates.

Riley: Let's take a break.

[BREAK]

Nelson: There were a couple of things Bush said during that debate season, one of which might have been in a debate that ended up becoming big stories. One was, "Who is your favorite philosopher?" He said, "Jesus Christ, because he changed my life." The other was, "Who is the leader of Pakistan?" et cetera. How do you—obviously the second one wasn't planned—wasn't calculated.

Bartlett: Nor was the first.

Nelson: Nor was the first, OK.

Bartlett: That's what I told you. Instincts. He froze. That is, he said, "I just pulled it out of my keister." That was not a planned answer. It was not a question we had anticipated. But considering where we were, which I believe was in Iowa, it was pretty safe territory. Even though he got ridiculed and lampooned by the *New York Times* we actually thought that kind of validated that it was a good instinct, but he froze.

Nelson: What I wonder is, so you're sitting there and you're hearing him say that. Are you thinking, *This is something we can use* or *This is something we're going to have to defend*?

Bartlett: Both. The [Pervez] Musharraf one was more troubling because that was like is he ready to be President. He was a little bit over his skis. That one was more troubling, and what made us worry a bit more. Ironically, years later I remember sitting in Pakistan with General Musharraf and President Bush and smoking cigars and laughing about that.

Nelson: Did you anticipate that something like that, where people who—

Bartlett: We tried to come up with as many gotcha angles, questions, things like that as we could, and you know you can't begin to prepare enough. If somebody wants to do that, they're going to be able to pull it off. I don't remember though, was the Musharraf one in an interview?

Nelson: That was in a radio interview.

Riley: It was with somebody who had a history—

Bartlett: He did, and that was on us—it was a guy out of Austin.

Nelson: Exactly.

Bartlett: A reporter out of Austin who had a history of doing it, so that was bad staff work, whoever that was.

Riley: Were you present for these meetings in the mansion, the policy meetings that were taking place, the front-porch campaign meetings?

Bartlett: Some, not all of them. I do remember the first time I met Dick Cheney because he came down for one of them. At the time I guess he was CEO [chief executive officer] of Halliburton.

Riley: I think so.

Bartlett: I learned pretty quickly about—so he comes out of the meeting first and I was outside out in the back of the mansion. He was pacing. I'm sitting there, see if I can generate some small talk. So I said, "Mr. Secretary, what time is your flight?" *God, I'm asking a guy who is CEO of Halliburton what time his flight is, like he's going to go jump on Southwest Airlines.* "I have my own plane." Silence. Crickets. He is perfectly comfortable with nothing being said, but I'm sitting there, *Blew that one. My one shot to establish rapport with the guy.*

I remember being in some meetings and not in others.

Riley: Do you have any recollection of the dynamic in those meetings? Is this a case where the Governor is in a listening mode?

Bartlett: No, he's hammering questions. Again, it comes back to this friend and foe alike all bought into the narrative that Bush was dumb. So they come in thinking, *I'll have to do a tutorial and teach him the ABCs of policy.* They'd get in there and Bush is firing questions about elements of the minutia of policy and they're on their heels. So it's not a passive environment at all. Quite the contrary.

Riley: And he's not in sales mode either.

Bartlett: The charm mode. He's not trying to sell his bona fides as an intellectual, no; it is more charm mode. But some of those folks who were brought down early on turned out to be some of the fiercest, loyalist of his defenders, the Al Hubbards of the world and people like that. The Vulcans, I think they were called, on the foreign policy side. I think it was that group that was particularly—that one was probably more—asking questions more than demonstrating ability.

Riley: Were there any famous blowups, or did you lose anybody in any of those episodes?

Bartlett: No, not to my knowledge.

Riley: I'm not signaling that I've heard anything, it just strikes me that with that many meetings and that many high-profile people, particularly if they come in and their preconceptions are at variance with their—

Bartlett: I don't know on the legislator side, but on the policy side, the ones who were brought in for policy discussions, none.

Riley: Do you recall the Governor at any point nixing—issuing instructions that this person is not going to—

Bartlett: I'm sure there was, but I don't remember. That would have been an edict to Karl. I don't remember.

Riley: What's the quickest way for somebody in a situation like that to find themselves on the outs?

Bartlett: The typical bragging, I'm smarter—talking tonally, condescending. That would be a quick way to get in that doghouse. Most people who came in who didn't know him quickly learned there has been a misconception of who he was.

Riley: When Josh was brought in, how did that work? Because you were the guy who had the track record with the Governor on policy issues.

Bartlett: Right.

Riley: Was it awkward for you suddenly to have a boss or a new boss, or somebody higher in the pecking order whose portfolio is—

Bartlett: It wasn't as awkward for me as it was for Vance because Vance was policy director over in the Governor's office. That was hard for Vance.

Riley: Why wasn't Vance elevated to a position as national policy director?

Bartlett: It's a whole different field. Vance was a smart guy who learned quickly over time about Texas politics. The learning curve and the time frame that we had—that's the same with me. We all not only recognized but welcomed the added firepower. I picked up Josh the first

time. He was with Goldman Sachs working out of London I believe. I picked him up at the airport after an overnight flight and I took him straight to an event in Austin.

We were doing some dinner deal at Shoreline Grill that the Governor had staffed. I met him literally off the plane and we hit it off. He was one of the best guys ever. That was the same for a lot of those early—whether it was Josh in that role later—I mean if you can't get along with Andy Card, then you need to look in the mirror. We were really, I don't know if the right word is blessed—grateful to have them. The personalities who got injected into our process early were really good people.

Interesting enough that the stagers on these days, Ted Cruz was a staffer on Josh's campaign policy staff. The irony was that if you ran a poll of campaign staff during that and you had to ask the question who was the most elitist, lazy, pompous ass on the staff, Ted Cruz would have won going away. Now he is the populist, everyman, Tea Party. It is an interesting transformation. It's a smart political strategy for him to win, and that's what it was, a strategy.

Anyway, the first molding of the Texas crew with the national crew was relatively seamless.

Riley: Who gets the credit for that?

Bartlett: Bush. He set the right tone. A lot of those folks Karl knew. All the overlap with his father—these weren't unfamiliar faces. I would say there was a squeaky wheel—David Beckwith didn't work out. I don't know if that has come up. He was a communications guy. To tell you the truth, several communications people didn't pan out with Karen. I remember the first campaign for Governor, Deborah Burstion-Wade was her name. She was a casualty. David Beckwith, who had a relationship with Karl, was a Bush guy. I think he worked on Kay Bailey Hutchison's race. He flamed out pretty early.

After Elizabeth Dole flamed out in the primary, that's when we recruited Ari Fleischer. Ari was a pretty squeaky wheel early on. That was a process—it is his personality—to get him acclimated. So not all of it was smooth and seamless, but for the most part, particularly the Joshes of the world, the Andys of the world, there was a quick chemistry.

Nelson: In their case it wouldn't have been treating Bush condescendingly.

Bartlett: Oh, no.

Nelson: What were the rough edges that Beckwith, for example, didn't smooth off?

Bartlett: It was not as much with Bush himself. This was more just staff not knowing our style. As I said, this may be more about Karen than it was about anybody else. How we go about things, the flip tone of comments. He had had some things he said in the press that just weren't our style. Ari had that a little bit too.

Riley: Was there a disrespect for Karen's role in the pecking order?

Bartlett: No, it was just she had a very strong point of view about the tone, how we were going to engage the press, and they kind of had their own identity, how they were going to do it. That

does come to a head.

Nelson: For example.

Bartlett: That tension, to the last day Ari was press secretary, never went away.

Nelson: For example, what kinds of things would Karen think were inconsistent?

Bartlett: I can't remember the exact quote, but it was something about one of our financial disclosures made early on and Beckwith said something, was quoted in the *New York Times* or some paper that sent everybody off, particularly Karen. He was gone maybe 30 days after that. I'd have to—

Riley: That's enough of a flag for somebody who is interested in the question to go search it out. I'm wondering about the question of leaks, which is a big one that we'll probably want to delve into later, although now might be the right time to do it. Is it the case that during the gubernatorial years there is a discipline within the communication apparatus so that there aren't people going around to speak to newspaper reporters then?

Bartlett: Yes, it was interesting. It was kind of unheard of for people to unilaterally engage the media, save one person—Karl. He always thought he was smart enough to not leave tracks, but we always knew, up to the final days. I could sniff out a Karl Rove quote from a mile away. It really wasn't an issue. It was only when we got into the Presidential stuff. Once we got in the White House we learned that that was a part of governing. The agencies and how you box in a President in the policy-making process, which we learned the hard way multiple times. But that wasn't a reality—and it wasn't as much during the Presidential campaign. We didn't have a problem with the core staff. It was always that layer right outside. It was just a challenge.

That was a reality we had to start understanding better and operating under. But relatively speaking, for a Presidential campaign we were pretty buttoned up.

Riley: That's what I thought.

Bartlett: Absolutely. It wasn't until we actually got into office that it became a bigger issue. Even, frankly, compared to Clinton, we ran a pretty good ship.

Riley: That's the fundamental basis for the question. There is a perception among people who study these things that you did run a tight ship. What we're interested in knowing is how does that happen? What are the predicates? You wonder if it is replicable. Can other administrations learn something from your experience?

Bartlett: There's a difference. We suffered like every President with agency leaks around issues, so DoD [Department of Defense] or State Department, that fight between those two agencies. But what we did avoid is that usually leaks within the White House come from a divided White House. I'll never forget Andy Card telling me about his first day on the job in the [Ronald] Reagan White House. There was a meeting in the Roosevelt Room without the President. He didn't know—he got there about 20 minutes early and the first person in the room is a lady putting place cards down. He says, "Where do I sit?" She says, "Well, are you [Edwin] Meese or

[James Addison] Baker [III]?" It depended on if you were a Meese guy or a Baker guy what side of the room you sat on. It was that clear.

He learned early on that that was a very—we did not have that. We had tension within the White House at times, but it was all done in family. There was a pretty healthy tension between Karl and Karen. I became kind of the interlocutor. There is some history on that going back to 1999 or 2000. The election, we thought, was over. The recount is underway. We're in the middle of the recount and Karen comes to me and says, "Look." At this point we're feeling pretty good about our chances. She said, "I'd really like you to be my deputy in the White House, be my number two and help me on all this." I was ecstatic because my passion was turning toward the communications side of things. I was battle-tested in dealing with the national media throughout the Presidential race. It was just more interesting to me rather than going back into policy, and I knew Karen's style.

She was a massive delegator. Karen is not a multitasker at all. She gets totally preoccupied with one thing, which was great for a deputy because then I got to do everything. She would go off on a speech and she'd spend days—she'd hole up for a day on a speech, so I knew the opportunity for growth for me was going to be great. Literally the next day Karl calls me into his office and says, "I'd really love for you to be my deputy. You know me, I'm worried about my bandwidth." Bullshit. "I'm worried about life balance with my family, I'm going to really try to approach this smartly, so I'm going to have to lean on my deputy," which I knew wasn't true. He can't delegate. Had I not gotten the offer from Karen I'd be still—

I had to tell him not only that I couldn't do it, but also that I'm going to go work for Karen and be her deputy. That was a massive blow to our relationship. He could rightly say you wouldn't be here today if it weren't for me giving you a job back then, and he's absolutely right. But then as Karl can do—he may have never gotten over it, but then he was going to find a way to use it to his advantage. So that's how I really started to play that interlocutor, which was important.

He and I met and did things on behalf of Karen more than the two of them did. We had different responsibilities. It was always great when his perspective and our perspective overlapped and we could do things, but there were times when his political agenda, his ability to think about the political objectives and our ability to try and communicate a narrative about the President and the Presidency, they're going to clash.

That kind of played its way out throughout the Presidency. There was tension and things like that, but never would we take that to the press. We knew that would do nothing but hurt our boss. We just got lucky that in almost every one of those key positions we had people who were there for the right reasons. We may have been loyal to a fault in putting too many Texans in key positions, but even the ones we supplemented with Washingtonians, they were true to the cause. When you think of somebody like Steve Hadley, you don't get any better than Steve Hadley—

Riley: Or self-effacing.

Bartlett: Larry Lindsey, complicated guy. Love him. He clumsily tried to leak things and we'd catch him. "Larry, this is not going to work." He'd go, "I didn't do it." I'd say, "I know you did." But their hearts were in the right place. I can't say that there was any magic recipe that we had

that made us better at it than others. I do think it is his style and the loyalty that he engenders. A lot of people also feel compelled to leak when they don't have access. But his open door became a very valuable tool to make people feel connected and part of the team and therefore you wouldn't be as incentivized.

Riley: Let's go ahead and follow this. There are pieces of the campaign that we may still want to come back to.

Nelson: Big pieces.

Riley: Big pieces of the campaign we'd want to come back to, but because we raised this issue a couple of times, and it is really important, let's go ahead and talk about this question of organization of the White House and the bringing in of the Texans and how they're salted in and how all of this works. Your take on this is that there are some access questions to the President that you felt like maybe weren't handled, in retrospect, in the best possible way.

Bartlett: I would just say that the President, and therefore Andy, overcorrected from the gatekeeper—

Riley: The Sununu.

Bartlett: What he witnessed with his father. If he were sitting here today he would dispute this, I'm certain.

Riley: Andy would?

Bartlett: No, Andy I don't think would. I think George W. Bush would dispute it. President Bush would say, "No, it's exactly what I wanted." He knew the tensions that we had. But Andy, I think, and I've talked to him a little bit about it, he should have managed us more tightly, and Josh did. Josh stripped Karl of his policy role and he managed us better and we were better for it. It's not fair to the process if at any given moment one of us who was close to him can circumvent that process by going straight to him. I think at times we probably—I can't think of one massive one where it was exploited, but there is no doubt that it was.

I'm sure I was as guilty as anybody. If I knew there was a big meeting that afternoon, I'd go in there at 6:30 in the morning and start to say, "We have this meeting. Can you believe they're going to bring this to your table?"

Riley: So you're replicating what you were doing in Texas. You'd have a few minutes to talk with him in the morning.

Bartlett: And he loved it. I think Andy in retrospect would probably wish he controlled that more.

Riley: Interesting. Let me give you the premise for the question. Mike and I come out of political science and studying the Presidency, particularly a lot on White House organization. There is a sense that you guys were enormously effective in the way that the structure was created. In some respects it is a little bit of a puzzle, because when we teach our classes there are these two classic

models of White House organization. There is the strong Chief of Staff, which is very hierarchical, where everything gets funneled up through him. Then there is the spokes of the wheel, where five or six or seven people have common access, and we always teach that that is a flawed model, but Presidents want accessibility.

Then we come to some departures from the model. The first Reagan White House, which for a while seemed to work well with the troika, not very long, and in your case, which is always puzzling when I'm trying to teach my classes because I say there was a very experienced Chief of Staff—

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: Yet there were people who seemed to have—

Bartlett: It was definitely a hybrid. He did wield considerable authority and respect. He was not neutered in the sense—I don't want to leave that impression. He ran a very good process, but I may be talking at the margin here. I live in the margin of 90 percent of the time, 98 percent of the time, it probably worked well. But I just felt like there were times when maybe in the structure—at the end of the day, the staff and the structure are always going to reflect the personality of the leader. Whether we had a different structure, those abuses—I don't want to say abuses because it might sound like there was some kind of nefarious motivation behind it. It's not. It's more human nature.

I don't want to overstate that. I would just state that Josh was not as deferential as Andy was to the access points, to the process. Whether it was how he decided to restructure with Karl's role, or what has not been very, I think, publicly discussed is a heavier hand in the national security process: how the President was being briefed about Iraq, how he was getting information, the flow of information. He really changed things for the better in my opinion.

Nelson: Josh did?

Bartlett: He did. There is a whole series of observations about the national security process. I'll just say that Condi's skill set very much fits being a Secretary of State more than it does a National Security Advisor. Steve was much more fit to be a National Security Advisor because you have to be an honest broker of a process, and she had a very strong point of view about things. That always was a problem in the first term. It always felt that she had her finger on the scale, which she did. It was hard for Andy to—but that's what the President wanted, so that's why it was that way. I just felt that at times we could have used a little more discipline.

Riley: I'm not—

Bartlett: Net/net it worked.

Riley: The last thing I want to do is to talk you out of the conclusions from your own experience. What I'm suggesting—

Bartlett: It's worthy of probing. I'm not just saying it was a flawed model. It was not. I just think, as any model has, it has the potential to have its faults.

Riley: It is important for us to hear this because it sort of confirms the general faults of the model, but the sort of glib picture from the outside from people who examine this from the press perspective is that it worked perfectly, that the transition was a seamless transition from Andy to Josh, when you're suggesting not that it wasn't seamless, but that there were some real differences in their approaches. Mike, am I overstating this?

Nelson: No, not at all.

Riley: I think it is the case that our colleagues think that you really didn't see a great deal of difference in the institutional behavior of the White House moving from the first one to the second one.

Bartlett: I thought it was significant.

Riley: We'll want to flesh that out. Let me stop on this because you said there were some campaign things before we get too far away from that.

Nelson: This is back to 2000, and I'm thinking about in general the strategy for winning a Republican nomination. Was that separate from the strategy from winning the general election, or was it all seamless? Why not start with that. Was George Bush running for November from the start?

Bartlett: Yes, and that's a luxury that is no longer afforded to a Republican candidate running for high office. That's the reality where our politics are, that you can't run a general election strategy—I think we're truly the last nominee, maybe in either party, but particularly the Republican Party now, that could run a general election strategy during a primary. So our whole goal was to back up from what it would take to win the election and then hope and pray that we didn't have to cede much ground in order to win the primary.

Nelson: I would say that that was an unusual strategy even then.

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: Even back then the conventional wisdom was you run to the right to get the nomination, then you move back to the center after the convention. So yours was explicitly designed to be one strategy for the entire campaign?

Bartlett: Yes. So what we would hopefully not have to compromise on in tone and agenda we made up for with what became famous later, shock and awe, of unbeatable. We tried to just overwhelm the process with "You can't beat this guy." That held true all the way up to New Hampshire.

Nelson: So you have a strategy. Then the unexpected occurs. How supple were you in adapting to that unexpected defeat?

Bartlett: I wasn't in the room in New Hampshire, I know Don Evans and others were, but this was the first true moment of what is this guy made of. We'd had our moments in the Governorship and that, but this is on a completely different stage. Was he going to blink? He

didn't. It was only later that I saw a similar moment, and that was on 9/11. This was in much different terms, but politically this is a gut-check moment. He didn't panic. He told everybody, "I know everybody is going to want me to fire everybody," and whatnot. We pivoted.

We knew that we had to be more frontal in our campaign with McCain. We had to find a way to exploit his weaknesses, as I discussed. But more than anything else, he doubled down. His focus, his relentless—we doubled the amount of events on his schedule. He was all in. That was a very telling moment for the campaign. Had he not sent those signals in those first minutes and hours of the defeat, the thing could have unraveled on us.

Nelson: The selection of Cheney for Vice President. Did you play a role in that? Did you observe how it was unfolding?

Bartlett: It was only in hindsight that we realized how sloppy a process it was. We very much assumed that when he was tasked with the job of vetting and running the selection process that that was going to be a very well-run situation. You know, for the most part maybe it was. If you talk to some of the people who were interviewed during that process they have their own views about that.

I particularly remember—what's his name, from Oklahoma, he was in the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. [Francis] Keating?

Nelson: Yes.

Bartlett: Was not very keen on the process. He was one of the candidates, and how Cheney handled that. I will just say from the standpoint of when Governor Bush was coming around to this notion of, *Hey, Cheney is the guy.* I thought from the standpoint of just as he looks at his ability to say, "I know where my deficiencies are, I know where my liabilities are," and this guy addresses them. It made sense on a lot of different levels.

What was very clear, very quickly, was that there wasn't a real vet of Vice President.

Riley: Of Cheney himself or of the process that he was using for other candidates?

Bartlett: I would say there was a decent process for the other candidates. I would say there was next to no process for him. Doctor? Yes. We talked to the doctor. We did that. But in the first 24 hours of his announcement the other side got their act together, started hammering us on his voting record, and all those things. We were going through boxes for the first time trying to figure out his votes and those things. It was not a tidy process at all.

Riley: Whose fault was that?

Bartlett: The person who was in charge of the selection process. I don't know who else. They said they had it all ready. We deferred all that to them.

Riley: Of course.

Nelson: Wasn't it in a sense Governor Bush's fault, too, for not insisting that the process be

followed?

Bartlett: Sure. I'll start there. We all assumed—I mean you have this perception that this guy is a buttoned-up guy, attention to detail. His staff was OK. Family was very involved. You only appreciate that later. So literally going through boxes of old voting records and trying to pull the thing together.

Nelson: Do you think that Cheney steered this process toward himself?

Bartlett: No.

Nelson: Not at all?

Bartlett: No.

Nelson: Unwillingly he was conscripted into doing it by Governor Bush?

Bartlett: I truly don't think he thought at the beginning of this process that in any way, shape, or form that he was going to be the Vice President nominee. Absolutely not.

Nelson: And nowhere during the process?

Bartlett: Maybe later.

Riley: He was still registered to vote in Texas, right?

Bartlett: Yes, that was a process—when the conversation starts going that way. But I don't think he was putting his finger on the scale of skewing the report on other candidates to make it look like I'm the only option.

Nelson: So what was Governor Keating's—you mentioned there were other—

Bartlett: My recollection was just the interview, the lack of follow-up. It was not as buttoned-up a process as we all probably would have hoped. You want them to be proud of being in the process even if they weren't picked. I know that wasn't the case with Keating, probably, and he has a personality where he'll share that with anybody who asks, which is probably one of the reasons why he was not chosen. [*laughter*]

[John] Danforth on the other hand—I don't know about the other ones—

Nelson: Danforth what?

Bartlett: I don't know if he felt that he was treated correctly, but he would be the type who would never talk about it.

Nelson: Did you assume all along that you would be running against Gore?

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: As the strategy for the year is being formulated, is it being formulated taking account of that? Were there things that you did plan out and did that year because you anticipated it would be Gore as your opponent?

Bartlett: Yes, and it was more about you assume Gore, you assume Clinton. So there was a lot of what turned out to be wasted time because it never really came to fruition. For the life of me I won't be able to explain why they did what they did. But we took it seriously. We did not expect him to be as poor a candidate as he turned out to be. So those were calling audibles along the way, when we figured that he wasn't a really good candidate. But we spent a lot of time on how are we going to run against the Clinton years and Clinton. We probably talked more about Clinton than we did Gore.

Nelson: Given how close the election was, it sounds to me by implication if Gore had run as good a campaign as you thought he would, he would have won.

Bartlett: He should have. The economy was sliding quickly, but there is a lag with voters. He should have won that election.

Nelson: You talked about the debates earlier and debate prep.

Bartlett: Just like Ann Richards should have won in 1994. There was one more cycle for Democrats to win in Texas. The fact that we were able to get through our primary in 2000 without having attacks. He was a reasonable alternative. Then it just came down to I feel more comfortable with this guy George W. Bush than I do Gore.

Riley: Let me interject a question here. Did you have a piece of the convention preparations or execution?

Bartlett: Yes. I wasn't in charge. [Michael] Gerson and those guys were writing the speech and doing those—one little funny anecdote. Back to Cheney. With his selection, the tradition is that the Vice President nominee arrives at the convention before the nominee at those things. So we're up in Philadelphia and we caught wind that the Vice President—Secretary Cheney at the time—was going to have Mary [Cheney], his daughter, join the staff on his campaign and I think be his travel aide.

So Ari and I are talking about that. We said, "Look, the press usually is pretty good about a sphere of privacy around family. This is the whole issue of his daughter's sexuality." Our fear was that if you put her on staff, all bets may be off. I talked to Karen about it. Everybody agreed that at least Secretary of Defense, Secretary Cheney ought to know that. We drew the short straw, Ari and I.

We met Secretary Cheney and Lynne Cheney at the airport arriving in Philadelphia for the convention. We're in the motorcade driving to the convention hall where he was going to do a practice run of his speech. Got to get this on the table. Ari is looking out the window. He is doing everything—*OK, I'm going into the buzz saw*. "Mr. Secretary, there is something I need to make you aware of," that kind of thing. "Obviously, you have control of who you want to be on your staff. The understanding is that you're considering that Mary is probably going to join the staff. Just want you to know that some media may take that as license to talk about and report on her

lifestyle and those things." Ari is still looking out the window.

There are like razors from Lynne Cheney coming through me, just like, *You are really going to raise this issue with us?* He said, "Thank you. Anything else?" Nope. So my early days with Dick Cheney. [*laughter*]

Nelson: Makes me wonder, did you ever have a conversation with Dick Cheney? Or you said something and it's over.

Bartlett: Oh, we did. We had some interesting ones. I always said about him in Washington and politics you get a lot of people who will stab you in the back. Dick Cheney was perfectly comfortable with stabbing you in the chest, which I appreciated. You always knew where you stood with him. You knew his views. At key times on the back end of decisions, he would admit when he was wrong, which is a pretty rare situation.

I can think of three different occasions. One wasn't an apology to me, but the issue about coming out for a Palestinian state. There was a big internal debate and Cheney was vehemently against it. Rose Garden speech, did it. Two days later he went and told the President, "You were right, I was wrong. It was the right move to make. It is the only way—" We also said [Yasser] Arafat has got to go.

The second one is when he shot Harry Whittington and he shut down all internal communication. We couldn't get hold of him, couldn't get hold of his staff. Only learned later that there were some back channel communications with Karl, but they decided that no one in the world would understand or have context for him accidentally shooting somebody while hunting except for one reporter at the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* who they couldn't find because she was on a drunk bender for 12 hours. It took that long to find her.

All the while the entire world at this point is saying, "The Vice President of the United States shot somebody and we can't get a comment." I had to go to the President and get the President to instruct him to talk to us. Two days later he apologized for it. He said, "I shouldn't have put you in that position, shouldn't have put the President in that position. You can appreciate what we were going through down there, I hope, but I erred in my judgment." He had no need to come to me or say anything like that.

The last one, which was probably the most important one, was the decision to go public with Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the 20th hijacker and the revelation of the program. There was a very heated, constructive mostly, debate around this topic that I remember at one point—we were on vacation on the Outer Banks in North Carolina with all my friends and family. We went with some of the families. They're all out on the beach and I'm in a skiff. [Editor's Note: That should read SCIF, for Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility.] They brought a security team with us and I'm in a secure skiff [SCIF] having these debates because it was over the summer.

David Addington and the Vice President at times questioned our patriotism, that we were going to destroy one of the most successful intelligence programs. My whole argument, as was Josh's and some others, is that if we want to save the program we have to talk about the program. The President ultimately made the decision to go forward. We did the big East Room disclosure of

that, gave the speech. Several days later the Vice President came up to my office, closed the door, and said, "You were right." It's pretty interesting. He'd duke it out, but he had an ability to reflect like that that you wouldn't expect.

Nelson: What was the aftermath of the Mary Cheney conversation? Did he put Mary Cheney—

Bartlett: He did.

Nelson: Was there any press?

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: Did it turn out to be of any consequence?

Bartlett: It was a little bit of a story, but not as much. We probably overreacted. I don't think he thought, *I'm smarter than you; I know this is not going to be a story.* It was more like, *I really don't tolerate you sitting here talking about a decision in our family about this, so go buzz off. If the press doesn't like it, screw them too.*

So here I am, young, cocky, thinking I'm smart. I have no idea what kind of lasting impression those interactions had on him about me. I have no idea. I know he knows where I was and the role I played on the [Irve Lewis] Libby decision, on the pardon. I pretty much believe that he probably doesn't forgive me or Josh or a few others who were pretty strong in arguing against a pardon. So that one more than anything else probably sticks in his craw to this day. The other ones he probably wouldn't even remember. Maybe he does about shooting Harry Whittington, but the other ones, who knows?

Riley: Since we're on the topic, Mike, did you want to ask a question about the debate prep?

Nelson: Actually, we'll come back to the debate prep, we'll come back to the DUI story, we'll come back to the five weeks after the election, but go ahead.

Riley: It was on Cheney—I think because we're on the topic maybe we ought to just get you to reflect a little bit about the popular conceptions about his role in the administration and your own sense about where those conceptions are right and where they're wrong and your own perception about the Vice President's general role in the administration, with the understanding that we have another day to talk about these particular points, to bore down on them.

Bartlett: I would say in areas where President Bush was least experienced, on foreign policy and those things, that he was going to have a disproportionate amount of influence and voice. Because of his background of being in the House and leadership he played a pretty heavy role in the strategy with the Congress. We didn't—I didn't—appreciate, I won't speak for others. He was always a backbencher in the leadership in the House, and he brought that perspective, kind of party brand. It wasn't an updated version. I don't know if that—

Nelson: He was never part of a Republican majority.

Bartlett: I don't believe he was.

Riley: No.

Bartlett: So his perspective was limited. I don't know if we appreciated that at the time and when he was giving advice. So as you would probably expect, as the arc of a Presidency, his influence was more substantial early on, and it just was to the point in the second term in which I think he was, on a lot of issues, irrelevant.

What I didn't appreciate, and I think maybe others didn't appreciate, was how much his staff was engaged in different areas, in departments and those things. I know there were some stories that came out, kind of like, *Wow, I didn't know that.* Some of it was overstated, others probably not, on appointments and those things. His hand in selecting the Cabinet was a pretty mixed record. [Paul] O'Neill as our Treasury Secretary was a disaster.

We're in the middle of a recession. He's the nicest guy. Secretary O'Neill comes in and he wants to brief the President on OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] workplace regulations at the Treasury Department. We're like, "What about the jobs report?" He was an old alum, a friend of the Vice President's. I think that is human nature. The places where you don't feel as comfortable, you're going to defer. As I said, that changed.

Probably for me, personally, the first issue I started bumping heads a little bit with the NS [National Security] staff was on the energy taskforce. Not as much the substance of it, this whole notion about the secrecy of it. That played out for many, many years because that went all the way, I think, to the Supreme Court. I remember him coming in with that kind of wry grin on his face, "Mr. President, did you see the Supreme Court ruling? We won."

He walked out. I said, "Yes, Mr. President, we won that battle but we lost the war," because that was the start of the whole thing. We degraded our abilities and powers of the Presidency because that fight that took many, many years weakened the Presidency, I think, more than it strengthened it. And it was over something that—it was clearly on principle. We weren't hiding anything. Shocking, breaking news: A Republican President met with oil companies about energy policy.

I was just sitting there thinking, *Why are we doing this to ourselves?* It was a principle. The principle was a right one, one that the Supreme Court ratified. It was frustrating because any member of Congress could have any meeting with anybody they want, secretly, and not have to disclose it. But we couldn't.

Nelson: There's what you're legally allowed to do and then it applies to policy versus the law. I agree.

Bartlett: And the way you're going to operate and manage. So did we defer to him too much on that? I think we did. Maybe to this day we disagree. Maybe Andy or others would disagree. But I will say as the years went on his influence waned. I can tell you that one of the more—not as contentious, but a difficult policy process, was the policy development around what ultimately became the surge of additional troops in Iraq.

The Vice President had a very strong view. A lot of people believed that he was for the surge; he wasn't necessarily against it. He and Scooter had a very specific perspective that we should take

sides in the fight between the Shi'a and Sunni. We should double down on the Shi'a. Ironically, when something is successful there are a thousand authors for the success. I think Condi has come out on the other end. She wasn't for it either, early on. She was very much influenced by [Philip] Zelikow.

Riley: Former Director of the Miller Center.

Bartlett: He was a very heavy hand. He was advisor during that period.

Riley: That is correct. He went back for about 18 months.

Bartlett: Phil came in and tried to lobby me and others during this process. Brilliant guy, but—what I described to President Bush, I and a few others—it was a ring-around-the-fire strategy, which is we need to pull out of the cities. We can't get in the middle of this. The State Department view? Phil was driving that view. Condi was a part of that view up until she wasn't, which is kind of, I guess, good staff. I'm getting off subject.

The Vice President's view—I'll never forget. We had a pretty interesting meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We went over to the Pentagon for this meeting. I remember riding over in the motorcade with the President and the Vice President and Steve Hadley. The strategy was good cop/bad cop classic. Let Bush be the good cop. Cheney would be the bad cop. We're trying to hear their views about the surge, about what to do. It wasn't even being called the surge at that point. Do we add more troops, do we not? All these different things.

We're about halfway through this meeting, and bad cop hadn't shown up yet to ask the tough questions and push back. Finally, the President had to be good cop and bad cop, which ultimately was the right thing. I just remember it was very irritating to the President. "Dang. We had this figured out."

Then I remember I was out. I left July of '07. I either came by to see the President or was on the phone with him. "You're not going to believe this. Cheney wants to bomb Syria." It essentially got to the point where, *Wow*. I always get asked the question, "Did Cheney really change post 9/11?" Obviously he did, or it was a part of him that was always there and we just never saw it. I don't know. He was pretty rigid in his views about those things. I'm not going to question the sincerity or the passion. I think he has been very clear why he felt those things.

He was usually very respectful about opposing views of that, but I think parts of his staff weren't as good at that. David Addington was a bully. You've heard. He did that a lot and threw that around and questioned people's patriotism and stuff like that, which was not helpful to the process. But through all of that the relationship between the two men itself was sturdy and maintained a level of—I mean everybody was asking, "Is Cheney really running these things?"

Cheney was always very deferential to the President, not only in public settings, quasi-public settings, like staff settings, but also privately. He never stepped outside of bounds, his role. He used his platform to make his case when there were private lunches and things like that. The President was always quick to call us after he'd come in. We'd go through the list of Cheney's views of the day. All that changed at the end over the pardon, but up to that point that relationship withstood a lot.

There were legitimate conversations around him being on the ticket the second time. I never felt that we would ever get to that, even if we had a plausible alternative. This was definitely the President's—it got complicated, obviously. Probably the other big tension to the relationship before the pardon was around Secretary [Donald] Rumsfeld and that decision.

Riley: Right.

Bartlett: Gosh, we need three days, four days.

Riley: We'll do it. These are digital recorders. They'll take it.

Bartlett: But the whole process and decision making around that. Cheney was fiercely loyal to Secretary Rumsfeld.

Nelson: Here's what I'm hearing, because the question was: How does what you observed of Cheney and his relationship with the President compare with what the perception was? The perception is that at the beginning Cheney was hypercompetent and Bush wisely delegated things to him, like the transition.

What I'm hearing is sort of at a minimum a kind of shading of that. Maybe he wasn't hypercompetent at the beginning in the transition, Cabinet selection, the way he handled the setup very early on of the energy taskforce and so on. Is that fair?

Bartlett: I think it is. In any of these things his power was overstated, his influence was overstated in one way, and it wasn't as close to reality, but he definitely had a stronger voice early on, and he undermined that in time and then lost credibility. I don't know if totally, but substantially, over some of these early—the public perception was still that we were confident. Internally it was kind of like, *Geez, another chink in Cheney's armor here. Come on guys, really?*

Nelson: So who was talking about replacing him in 2004 even as just something to consider?

Bartlett: This would just be Karl, me, Andy, Josh, maybe Ken Mehlman.

Nelson: That's a pretty influential group.

Bartlett: Yes, but those were the only ones he could trust to have that type of conversation with and know that it wouldn't go anywhere. This would not be set meetings where we were having conversations about Cheney, but on the plane, on a trip, and you're sitting there in the cabin of Air Force One and he'd say, "What should we do? Should we do this?"

Riley: Is the President party to these discussions?

Bartlett: Oh, yes, that's what I'm saying. It would be him saying—

Riley: Did you ever get the sense that he was leaning in the direction of wanting to replace him?

Bartlett: I don't think we could ever get our minds around it. How would we pull this thing off?

Nobody has ever—how would we pull this off outside of medical? Then who, and all that. Kicked around Condi a little bit.

Nelson: Peter Baker mentions [William] Frist.

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: Is it an advantage or a disadvantage, do you think, for the Vice President to be somebody who in effect doesn't have a political future, who from Day One says I'm out—

Bartlett: We definitely thought that was a virtue that I think turned into somewhat of a liability.

Riley: Is that right? How so?

Bartlett: Because if you don't feel like you're accountable—I would say net/net it was still a positive because if you look at history the corrosiveness that could happen when a Vice Presidential operation starts worrying about his own ambitions I can imagine it being very corrosive. So we didn't have to deal with that part of it. But the flip side being, "I don't care. I don't have to worry about—"

It may not be fair because I don't know. Who knows? Would that have changed? I could just imagine if Cheney actually were going to run the whole mantra would be, *I need to be on that wall.* He'd probably run a campaign that would be pretty consistent with who he was internally. Who knows?

Riley: All right. Anything back to the campaign? Shall we go back to that?

Nelson: Oh, yes. We can do that after lunch.

[BREAK]

Nelson: You mentioned earlier that just the presence of debates on the calendar alone disrupts a campaign. Could you talk more about debates and the general election campaign in 2000?

Bartlett: Yes, and you have to really break them down into two categories. One is the anxiety around the first time you do it as a challenger, and then it is a completely different dynamic and level of stress as an incumbent. You're dealing with different dynamics in both. With the Presidential debates during the general election in 2000 probably the image that comes to mind quicker than anything else is a baby calf on ice skates. [*laughing*] It is just this daunting task of how could you ever be fully prepared going against an incumbent Vice President. He and the team had to accept the fact that you couldn't be all-knowing.

So what were going to be the "on-ramps" and "off-ramps," as we called them? In the second term we called them "dig-outs." How am I going to dig out of this one? Something is going to

get thrown at you that you're not prepared for. Then it's the ebb and flow of you perform poorly in the first one and then it puts the pressure on the second one. We had all the drama around Gore with the earth-toned suits and the makeup. We had lost clearly and substantively the debate—

Nelson: The first debate.

Bartlett: But won because of all the sighing, and all the mannerisms of Gore saved us going into the second one. Then it was clearly—it's like in an athletic competition, you're clearly in somebody else's head. On paper this is one of those bouts where Bush had been a standing knockout, a standing eight count or something; we should have been knocked out. For whatever reason we held our own, and then the last debate, the town hall debate, where he kind of bum rushed him and all that. You just can't make this up. So just the drama.

So we had some theatrics in our primary as I described earlier with McCain, but it just took on a whole different level. It paralyzes the campaign for a good week or so. You're trying to prepare on the periphery of the campaign trail, long plane rides and things like that. As disciplined as Bush had been in a lot of areas, he didn't have a lot of patience for all the preparatory work that went into it. He clearly didn't the second time around. I can only describe it as Presidential-itis. One, *I know what the hell I'm talking about; I've done this job*. And they do. It's almost information overload. But secondly, more importantly, *My opponent is beneath me. I'm President.* It is exactly what happened to President Obama in his first debate. It is exactly what happened to Bush in his first debate against Kerry.

I'll tell you a story that we as a staff may have made a strategic blunder on that first debate down in Miami. This is the second term against Kerry. A hurricane had hit Florida prior to that debate, maybe a week or so prior. So we get down there. Again, the prep work was not to anybody's satisfaction except for the President's, because we didn't put enough time in. We used the same—Judd Gregg came in and so did Kerry. He did well at that. Just didn't feel like we were giving it the amount of attention it deserved. A lot of, "I got this."

So we decide on the day of the debate that to demonstrate confidence and all that we're going to do an event with relief workers. We were on a helo [helicopter]. I remember we had a helo ride that was almost an hour and 15 minutes. It beats you down. An hour and 15 both ways, if I recall, right around an hour. An hour and a half on the ground, where he's slinging ice and doing stuff. It's emotional. He got back to the hotel and he was tired. He was just kind of beat down. We're thinking that probably wasn't smart.

We got back around one o'clock or so. It wasn't until that night. I'll never forget this. I'm in my room packing my bag because we're going to leave right after the debate to go on the trail. A Secret Service guy comes in and says, "The President wants to see you. He's back in his room." He had taken a nap. He was getting a massage, so he is on a massage table. He's face-down, lying on the table on his stomach. He looks up. I say, "Mr. President." He looks up, kind of still foggy, and he says, "What did you want me to say about Kerry?" *Oh, no. This is not going to be good.*

So we sat there for probably 45 minutes to an hour just crashing on different points. What am I

going to say about this? What if he says this? It was just this sense of urgency. I'll never forget. I walked into the green room. We got to the side and Karen Hughes says, "You're green. What is wrong?" I said, "This is going to be bad." We knew.

"Why is it?" she said. I told her what happened. She says, "Oh, gosh." So we were all bracing for a bad night and we got one. He did not perform well.

Nelson: One criticism was that Bush showed up to debate a caricature of Kerry, long-winded—

Bartlett: That's right. But what it was more than anything else, it wasn't a strategic blunder as much as it was Presidential-itis, and it afflicts all of them. It is this notion—and they haven't sparred. They've gone through four years of "Yes, Mr. President."

Riley: You think Gore suffered from that?

Bartlett: Absolutely. All of them did. No doubt about it. Even as Vice President. President Obama did. Then it was like this sense of urgency with the second debate. So we come roaring back, do better in that one, and the third one was going to be declared the winner on these things. He won first—I think that third one was in Phoenix, Arizona. I remember sitting outside. The hotel had a big open area. He and I are sitting out there.

We had done a formal practice that morning. This may have been the day before. I think it was the [Robert] Schieffer interview because in my heyday I could do a dead-on Schieffer impersonation. So I was doing it and everybody was cracking up just to kind of keep it loose. Judd Gregg was just doing Kerry. But then I remember we spent about an hour and a half outside just with these dig-outs: How do I dig out of this one? How do I dig out of this? It was kind of like a boxer getting ready. How do I dodge? We knew he was good. Boy, you could cut the tension with a knife; just everybody on high game. Like I said, everything else kind of comes grinding to a halt.

Nelson: The second and third debates you mean?

Bartlett: Throughout that whole period.

Nelson: The Vice Presidential debate is always scheduled after the first debate.

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: And when you lose the first debate—

Bartlett: A lot of pressure on that one, yes.

Nelson: Were you involved at all in—because that debate in 2000 was in Danville, Kentucky, really off the beaten track.

Bartlett: In both occasions I parachuted in on the day off to help spin and do that part, but they were pretty—this might not surprise you—exclusive. Their group was kind of a tight-knit group. Mary was—I had lines of intelligence on what was going on and [Robert] Portman was very

important. He was involved in that. So we knew and felt good about that. He was so good against [Joseph] Lieberman. I think our expectations were lower that he could have a repeat performance, but everybody was heartened by his performance. That is his venue though. He's good at it.

Riley: I was going to ask about the President's preparation for speeches. You had talked earlier in Texas about your ability to hold him, to channel him into backwater areas to let him develop his oratorical skills. But he is a President who wasn't widely recognized for his oratory, at least in its delivery. There were speeches that were ranked very highly for their content. I'm wondering how hard is it to get a President to work on his oratorical skills, and did he have much patience for instruction on speeches and rhetoric?

Bartlett: Yes and no. Timing on those things was always everything, and who was giving the advice. We'd be doing State of the Union and a policy person like Margaret would be there. "Maybe put a little more emphasis on this, sir." "Stay in your lane, Spellings. We're not talking about education. If there's something wrong with the statistic you can talk about that. Stay in your lane." So there would be a lot of who has license to give feedback.

Riley: Who had license to give feedback?

Bartlett: Me, and Karen, and Mike, and depending on the day, Karl. Andy, I don't know how many times he went into a buzz saw. He'd tell Andy, "Stop. Write it down. I just don't even want to hear it." "OK." We'd bring in outside people on occasion too. But the backup I'll talk a little bit about from a communications standpoint.

We didn't do him a service. I'll say this. He was very intrigued by the evolution of Bill Clinton's speech skills. Remember, he was widely panned in the 1988 convention. He had different weaknesses from Bush, but he had weaknesses that he overcame and he became very good. So he was anxious to talk to him.

When they had their transition meeting, as always happens, he asked him. "How'd you get better at it?" Clinton said, "Two things. First, you're going to give a lot of speeches, so just practice. Practice more than anything else is going to make you better. Secondly, I learned how to take my time and to pause." He told him a trick. He said, "On every other sentence or maybe every third sentence, it was one or the other, when I hit a period I would count in my head—*one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three*—before I'd read the next sentence. It will be hard for you to pull that off, because it feels like an eternity."

I don't know if you've done public speaking. I do it now. To master the pause, which Clinton now is brilliant at. He said, "Pacing is everything in speechwriting." So he took that to heart. He took it, but what Clinton was good at, which Bush was never good at, was that while he was not a gifted speaker, he was an authentic communicator. It was always up to us to make sure that he really believed—Clinton could make the signing of a post office bill like the Gettysburg Address. He could take anything and at a moment's notice turn it around. You knew when Bush was mailing one in. One of the best speeches he ever gave was before the country and the Congress on September 20th.

Nelson: Oh, yes.

Bartlett: I remember talking to him. He called me from the limo on the way back to the White House. I stayed at the White House because I wanted to see the coverage on the networks. I said, "Great." He said, "I've never felt more comfortable in my life giving this speech." So it was always incumbent on us to make sure as much as possible—There are times when you can't avoid it; he's going to have to give a speech he doesn't want to give on a topic that he's not interested in. It was like fingernails on a chalkboard listening to it. But I will tell you this; this was not for lack of—he was very involved in the speechwriting process. He was very hands-on with Mike and the team as far as giving input in the front in big speeches and on others.

He would not just take something and just read it. I'll never forget one year. This was early on. The radio address is taped usually on Friday before the Saturday radio address, but we decided to turn the radio address into a live event. I don't know if it was a signing of a tax bill; it wasn't the first one, but it was some tax cut that we did. Nick Calio was still legislative director. He hadn't really looked in until the morning before.

My wife's two cousins came into town that weekend. We had gone out that Friday night, taken them out to dinner, probably were a little overserved bottles of wine. The next morning I didn't have my A game at all. They wanted to come watch. I'm trying to get them through security and I get the call from his assistant, "The President wants to see you now [*whispering*] and he's pissed."

OK. I leave them at the security. I run in. I thought we were just going to go to the Rose Garden and all that, so I didn't have a tie on. There was a strict coat-and-tie standard. There is a picture of him in which I'm standing at the doorway and he is behind his desk, yelling at me, going, "This is the biggest piece-of-shit speech I think I've ever read. Where's Calio?" Calio was hung over too, came in from something he was doing. They took us over to the private dining room. He didn't have a tie on either, so he can undress both of us saying, "This doesn't make sense. Who wrote this? Did you even look at this? There is no way, as a senior staffer to the President of the United States, did you actually put eyeballs—neither of you looked at this. Please tell me you didn't look at it, because if you told me you looked at it, then I think you're incompetent." Just one of these complete blowups.

Just to reiterate a point. Then on the big speeches he would bring the guys in on the front end, give them his thoughts. "This is what I'm trying to do. These are the things I want to touch on." Then there would be way stations. They would come back with an outline. For the State of the Union we would go over the outline before Christmas. There was a whole methodical process. He was very involved in it.

I think he did get better. He had his moments. He also had some spectacular crashes. Most of those were impromptu. I'll never forget, it probably was the longest eight seconds of my life. It was a national press conference where he was asked, "Have you ever made any mistakes?" and he just sat there at his desk. *Say something*. I just wanted to yell it. He comes off and it was one of the classic Bush lines. He goes, "Kind of got myself into a rhetorical cul-de-sac." I said, "Yes, that's one way of putting it."

It was a running joke. When we did press conferences with Tony Blair we would start to prep for them, and I'm telling him the question. It got to be a pattern, and finally Bush would go, "If you

hadn't picked up on a theme, Tony, Dan wants you to answer all the questions. He wants me to just stand there and smile." I would say, "Correct." That was actually what I wanted to happen. So he would joke about it and be good about it, but it ate up at least—the whole speechwriting process and management of it was half my day every day it seemed. It's a laborious process.

Riley: But he is very comfortable and very rhetorically gifted in a small group, informal setting.

Bartlett: I'll tell you, if you have any sort of hiccup in your delivery, and as I said, he has a tendency for these malaprops. People have argued in the past that he was dyslexic and all this, which he wasn't. But he is not naturally fluent. Then if you put on top of that every President has to have a governor or a filter to think—*I have to have that instant to think before I speak*. It was when he didn't that he said stuff like, "Bring them on," and we caused world headlines.

We learned you put a governor on, a split-hesitant-second governor on somebody who is already not fluent and they can become halting at times.

Riley: I see.

Bartlett: When you're in an environment like this—we'd hear, "How about you doing your job? If America saw this guy, he'd have 60 percent approval." I'd say yes, but if I were to record it and give to the press everything he said, he would have made 15 world headlines because he's much more loose. In that environment he can be natural. So we tried, trust me, to put him in environments where he was natural. During campaigns it would be a town hall, interacting with people, and he was strong. But when the formality of something came and he knew he had to think before he spoke, you could tell he was thinking before he spoke. It was just—it's a real talent.

You can even see Obama. Obama is a very good Teleprompter reader, but he is not nearly as articulate or eloquent when he is doing a press conference of those things. Clinton made it look easy. Reagan made it look easy. He was a trained actor. He knew. That was his profession before.

Nelson: I was thinking that the hardest kind of speech for both Clinton and Bush to communicate effectively is when it's from the Oval Office, just talking to the camera.

Bartlett: Oh, yes, it's a tough environment. We tried to get around it. We did several speeches to the nation with him standing in the Residence and different venues. We were constantly trying, but some always were required. Certain decisions, you had to do it from the Oval. That's how we got to one of the biggest—one reason I love the man as much as I do and one of the big regrets of my life was "Mission Accomplished" and that speech, because all the intentions that went into why we did it the way we did it were lost. The exact opposite narrative came out of it. Our whole point was that we did not want to do a declaratory speech like "Bush won," from the Oval Office. How do we make it about the troops, the guys who actually—

We got the story about the USS *Lincoln,* which had been on the longest deployment in the history of the Navy because they were in Afghanistan and had to turn around and go back to the Gulf, Iraq, 14 months in the water. Why don't we go out there and speak to them from there? Then you start thinking about the daunting task of delivering a speech to the nation from a

moving aircraft carrier. So I sent one of my team. One of my deputies was a former Emmy-winning producer they flew to Hawaii, got on the boat in Hawaii. Again, in all the texts it never said, "mission accomplished." In fact, erroneously, Don Rumsfeld takes credit for taking "mission accomplished" out of the speech, which is not true. It did not work that way.

Tommy Franks called and wanted some specific language in there about the end of combat operations. They wanted to send the signal to stop fighting. He was very deliberate about that, but we never had the language in there that said mission accomplished. I looked at every single draft of it. Scott Sforza, the guy who works for me, calls me from the ship and knows what was going on. I thought a million different things. Scott is on the phone calling me. I figure it's a novelty. He was calling me from the ship.

He says, "Hey, this is going to be great. I just want to run by you, the motto of the ship is 'mission accomplished' because they'd been at deployment for so long. Would you have any issue if we put a banner up on that?" I said, "It's their boat, dude. Do it." I didn't think twice about it. Now, did I say is it going to be in the tight shot for the speech in which that is going to be hanging over him? I didn't get into that detail. The rest is history. The President had multiple occasions where he could have thrown me, my staff, any of us under the bus for that. He never did. He just said, "That's fine. It's on me."

For it to come out that it was Bush declaring victory and all this. It was the exact opposite sentiment of him, and all of us, and what we attempted to do, and it just totally blew up in our face. But what it showed me about him as a man and as a leader and as my boss, he had our back. He didn't have to do that.

Riley: Let me ask you about one other piece of this that I think, in my own mind, is what contributed to these perceptions. That is his decision to take control of the plane or to be partly in control of the plane, wear a flight suit. As somebody who had had all this experience with all these questions about his National Guard service, was there ever a red flag raised about using that as the way to deliver—

Bartlett: To be frank with you, this was more of the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing. The advance team was in charge of getting him out there. They concocted this whole idea of him flying out there on that and he was comfortable. Frankly, I don't recall a lot of debate about whether he should or shouldn't do it. I don't remember until we got out there thinking, *Oh, he's going to.* All of us had to get on a plane of some sort. He was going to sit number two in a plane and was going to have the kind of Top Gun walk and the whole thing. We didn't, to be honest—this is another thing. We get more credit for good things. A lot of these things, *God, that was luck.* That wasn't as thought through as we all thought, as you may think.

Riley: My recollection is that the original returns on that piece of it were actually extraordinary because he looked terrific.

Bartlett: He looked like he knew what he was doing, and he did. It was only later when they couldn't find any weapons of mass destruction. One of my multiple moments I had, when Secretary Rumsfeld—we were outside the Oval Office and it was just another—the insurgency is cranking up. He says, "Dan, I just don't understand why we can't get any good news stories out

of Iraq. The progress—" I said, "Mr. Secretary, you find me one vial of WMD [weapon of mass destruction] and I promise you I will get you some good stories." [*laughter*] He didn't like that answer. That's just the fact.

There was nothing that drove me more to prematurely graying hair than this whole notion of Bush's communication skills and that stark contrast between those who would see him intimately in private sessions. You have to know by definition that since he got to where he was, he had communicative skills. He is a great retail politician. If he were in here, you'd be mesmerized by his personality and his ability to do that. Very Bill Clinton–esque in some respects. But some people are good microcommunicators and some are good at macro. He is not a macrocommunicator.

Riley: I will confess—Mike has heard this story. When I was down talking with Mark Langdale a couple of years ago, Mark arranged for me to join him and his wife, the President and Laura, at the private residence for a fundraising dinner for the institute. There were only about a dozen, fourteen people, a very wealthy Dallas donor. So I had an opportunity to do exactly as you suggest.

Bartlett: It's a different person.

Riley: It was an extraordinary evening, because it gives somebody who studies the institution and the people a sort of fly-on-the-wall picture of somebody that is rare, I think, for historians.

Bartlett: That's right.

Riley: I came to understand exactly what you know intuitively, which is his comfort and his exceptional capacity to connect with people in a room like that.

Bartlett: That's right.

Riley: As I reported to colleagues when I came out, I said, "This is how this man got to be President in the first place."

Bartlett: Except for a handful of times, the September 20th speech was one, we could probably find a couple of others, almost every memorable communications moment he had was spontaneous. The bullhorn moment, things like that, were done when he was just in that environment where he could instinctively act. So we tried to create as many of those opportunities to do that as opposed to doing the podium, the whole thing, the "blue goose," as we call it.

Nelson: What I heard you saying earlier was that if you took a session like the one that Russell is describing, the people in the room would be very impressed, but there would be pull quotes—

Bartlett: Oh, my God, are you kidding me? I'm sure he was talking—

Riley: Maybe, although part of what I was impressed by was the—and maybe it was because I was in the room. I have to understand that there are 15 and there is a scholar sitting over there that he's never met before, which may taint—

Bartlett: May calibrate.

Riley: It may calibrate what he says. But I was impressed because there were things that he said that I thought sent the kind of message that was very helpful to him to be communicated out.

Bartlett: Like you said, 97 percent. The 3 percent would dominate world headlines for a week.

Riley: Yes, once out of every 10 times.

Nelson: So you really couldn't take that small thing—

Bartlett: We tried. We would let a reporter sit in on something, sit in the back. He knew he's back there. It wasn't without attempts to—

Riley: We got off on this on debates and I keep wanting to pull us back.

Nelson: There are two pieces left on the election. One is the DUI incident. You had known the facts about this. I guess you had been hoping like George W. Bush that somehow nobody else would—

Bartlett: We were close. It was the Thursday before the election?

Nelson: Yes.

Bartlett: I'm sitting in my office in Austin at the headquarters and a guy who worked for me, who handled—we had the country broken up in regions. We had press people who were in charge of different—so Ken Lisaius went on to work for me in the White House and was in charge of the northeast, including Maine. He comes in and he says, "You're not going to believe this one. I got this call from a local Fox reporter from Maine claiming that she has that Bush got a DUI in Kennebunkport." I said, "Oh, really." Blood is draining out—

Nelson: In 1976 or something like that?

Bartlett: No, he was 40. It was later. I never knew all the details of it. I knew that he got it, I knew he was at a wedding or something, but I didn't know much about the details. He said, "She claims to have a record of it." Oh, a record. "She faxed it to me." So I said, "Bring that into me." Oh, yes. I get up; I walk down the hall. Don Evans is in, happens to be in Karl Rove's office. We're feeling good at this time, overnight tracks—any pollster will tell you that usually, historically, late deciders break to the challenger. If you haven't made your mind up about the incumbent that late, usually you can expect a two-to-one split on last-minute deciders. We're seeing that the latest—a week before they're starting to break our way. We're feeling cautiously optimistic. I think this is Thursday, right before.

So I go in and tell them. I recounted the story. They're all—by the time I got back to my office I have a call coming in from Carl Cameron, the national Fox news correspondent who had picked—he gets me on the phone. He says, "I know, Bartlett, you're going to confirm it."

"Confirm what?" I said, "Look, I'm trying to get hold of the road, will you hold?" He goes, "I

have to go on in three minutes." So I finally get ahold of Karen. It's the first time ever I think Karen was speechless. She is usually not speechless. She can fill a room.

I said, "Karen." She said, "OK, OK, let me get the Governor." He's literally going "30." So I have Carl Cameron in one ear and I have the other phone in the other ear and I have two minutes, I have got a minute and a half. Finally I get the Governor on and he says, "Yes, you can confirm it. Let's get going."

So literally he's talking. He puts down the phone, it goes live on the TV and breaks the story. All hell breaks loose. We're preparing a statement for him. He was out on the road, where he acknowledged what had happened. It's interesting. So you have all the media in the world descending upon Kennebunkport. You have everything crashing down about different details. So I got the Governor on the phone and I said, "You need to tell me again what were the details on this." It was me, Karen, and the Governor.

He said, "I was leaving this wedding party with my sister and Johnny Newcombe." The former Australian tennis star. Why he was with him I have no idea. He didn't remember how he had gotten in the car. But he had crossed the double line or whatever. He got pulled over. He said, "Look, they took me down. I didn't fight it, didn't do any of those things. Got probation or something as long as I didn't get in trouble again, and that was it."

I said OK. So I'm getting ready to—they said the front desk got a phone call. "There's a guy on the phone who claims to be the arresting officer of George W. Bush back then calling you from Kennebunkport. He's a retired police officer." OK, so I take the call. He told me who he was. He goes, "There's a bunch of people in my front yard. By the way, I'm a Bush fan." That's a good place to start. So then I said, "Look, you don't have to talk to them, but maybe the best way to handle this is that I'll put you on the phone with one reporter, a respected AP [Associated Press] reporter." At the time it was Ron Fournier. "Speak to Ron, and then potentially we'll have you do maybe one television interview with John King at CNN [Cable News Network]."

He said OK. I said, "This is your phone number? I'll get Ron to call you." But I said, "By the way, I just want to make sure. I've talked to the Governor about this. He kind of recounted the story." He said, "Well, if you call driving in Mrs. Smith's front yard as going across the line, I'll go with it." It wasn't Mrs. Smith. I forgot her name. I said, "That was 20 something years ago. I don't think you have to go into the details of what happened that night."

Karl has a view of this, and others do, that it completely stopped our momentum. I think it was a significant contributor to us losing the popular vote. We had a contingency of our own party that was still reluctant to vote George W., and this was a harsh reminder of his youth and not being ready and very at the last minute.

Nelson: Do you think the timing of this was coincidental?

Bartlett: No, not at all.

Nelson: How do you think the Fox reporter got the story?

Bartlett: From Democratic operatives in Maine.

Nelson: So you think they've been sitting on it?

Bartlett: They may have gotten the information late. I know Chris Lehane. I know some of the folks on their side who had ties back there. There is no doubt in my mind this was strategically planned. Now, do I think they had it for a year and sat on it to the very end? No. I think they came across it and then they—big blow. I don't know that it was a huddle around the table at the headquarters. It was local Democrats saying, "I'm going to get it" more than it was coordinated all the way to the top.

Nelson: So clearly, in hindsight, Bush had miscalculated.

Bartlett: Correct.

Nelson: It would have been better to surface this early.

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: Did he learn anything from that experience when other things came up later on? And the question was do we get out in front of this and take a short-term hit or—

Bartlett: Usually that was his instinct. We used to call it, "take out your own trash." So whether he—did he cite DUI every time? No. But yes, it had to be in his mind.

Riley: I wanted to pose a question. You may not have had a chance to look at all of this book. You're a busy man. But one of our colleagues has written an account of the communications operation under the Bush administration where she claims that you did a very fine job of long-term planning but weren't terribly adept at immediate—

Nelson: This is Martha Kumar?

Riley: Yes, Martha Kumar.

Bartlett: She's famous for her cookies or something. She always came with treats.

Riley: We outsource. We don't do cooking.

Bartlett: This is the way that I put it. I did read—I haven't read it again, but at the time, I remember when this came out. When you come into office, if you're a Republican, the standard-bearer for effective communications is Reagan, and so what you quickly learn is that because of the new media environment we're operating in, it's not really an accurate reference point. All he had to worry about is one sound bite on the evening news for ABC [American Broadcasting Company], NBC [National Broadcasting Company], the *New York Times,* and such. We're living at that time in a cable news environment, ultimately an Internet environment. So the Clintons were really our only reference point.

I talked to [George] Stephanopoulos and other guys there. We did our own audit. My conclusion was that—and they agreed with us. For many days of the early part of their administration they had no long-term plan. They literally woke up every day and decided what they were going to

talk about and what news they were going to make. I think they felt they were really adept at it, so they were in the news a lot. But the way I would look at it, when auditing, in any 120- or 180-day period or so, he was everywhere but he was nowhere because it was on all different topics, so nothing was really punching through.

Nelson: Yes.

Bartlett: So I likened it to the difference between being a day trader and a long-term investor. They were day traders. So what do you do in these situations? You overcorrect. We overcorrected, early on particularly, to *By God, we're going to show message discipline*. If it's sunny today we're talking about taxes. I don't care about anything else that is happening. We weren't adept enough early on with calling audibles and knowing when. So at times we probably made our guy look out of touch with what was happening on any given day and got us out of the news cycle.

I think we calibrated better over the years. I don't know if it was a structural deficiency as much as it was just an attitude, almost an overcorrection. But it is a valid critique.

Riley: I just wanted to give you an opportunity to—

Bartlett: A valid critique.

Nelson: The second term, my impression is that you did things a little differently.

Bartlett: Sure.

Nelson: You were more set up for rapid response.

Bartlett: Absolutely.

Nelson: So election night. Memories of that?

Bartlett: When? 2000? 2004?

Nelson: We'll get to 2004.

Bartlett: Election Day I remember I played golf with Matthew Dowd, who was our pollster at the time. You don't know how to feel on Election Day. Everybody has a knot in their stomach, but you're so tired you're just glad it's over regardless. We shared everybody's unfounded enthusiasm or optimism but didn't know what to really ground that in yet. The polls were all over the place.

Riley: So Dowd doesn't have a feeling one way or the other?

Bartlett: He knows it's going to be close. As the night progressed and I spent most of the night in his office, we were seeing the numbers, particularly in Florida. If I remember correctly, the analogy he used was it's like a ship with a massive hole in its hull. It's in dock, it's coming into the harbor, and we're trying to get to the dock as quickly as we possibly can because we're

hemorrhaging numbers as the results kept coming in. It's just a matter of whether we're going to get to the dock in time.

Nelson: This was after the state had been called? First for Gore and then for Bush?

Bartlett: Right.

Nelson: But you're saying even that doesn't look—

Bartlett: We'd all gone through—everybody is out there ready. He says he's not going to—so we're looking at this. He's doing back-of-the-envelope math. We're going to be on the outside looking in.

I remember my wife was with me. I took her out, we walked outside, walked down the block and back and I told her, "We have to prepare for not winning this election and not going to Washington. We're going to the next chapter in our lives." I don't know what I'm going to do. Get a job. I was really trying to prepare her for this. "We're not going to win this thing."

All of us were just—and it's weird. After, when it was clear that this thing was going to be a protracted fight, people just started deploying. Planes were full of lawyers and friends who were going on the ground. It was a ghost town pretty much in the campaign headquarters, but a handful of us had to stay back because he was there. It was just a surreal—that night, I was over in campaign headquarters. I was not over in the mansion at the time, so I can't give you a lot of the kind of stuff that has been pretty much reported on, Governor Bush's reactions and his interactions with Jeb. I know all about that, but I wasn't there to see it firsthand.

We all took our tone from him and tried to keep that stiff upper lip, but that was a rollercoaster like no other as far as the ebbs and flows of court rulings and counties and ballots. We were helpless.

Riley: You said yourself you were just glad that it was over, and then it's not over.

Bartlett: Then it's not over.

Riley: Your tank is completely empty.

Bartlett: You never had an overtime election like this. You can't even think straight. We had our advantages. The state originally was called for us; we could never have thought that Gore's team would mishandle it in so many different ways that they did, on military ballots, on things like that. Then if you look at who we sent into the battle and who they sent in, James Baker versus Warren Christopher. That's like bringing a knife to a gunfight. That's a powerful horse we have on our side. He was masterful at owning the message and those things.

We tried to act. There was a whole operation that was trying to prepare for the transition so we wouldn't be caught flatfooted. He was at his ranch. I talked to him on the phone a lot. "What are they saying?" Everyone is just looking for something. Nobody knew.

Riley: Is his mood good during this period?

Bartlett: Hard to tell. He said all the right things, but yes, he's as nervous as everybody else. I could paint a picture of him being stoic and all that, but we're all a mess.

Nelson: This is partly a legal fight and it's partly a communications—

Bartlett: Absolutely.

Nelson: Things like starting the transition.

Bartlett: Exactly.

Nelson: Were you involved in strategizing the communication side of that?

Bartlett: Yes. And it was very much without being over the top and presumptuous, but it was declared—we have to make him look like he's the guy who is fighting something that is inevitable. Getting ready for transition, I know we have this legal issue that will be resolved and we'll be headed to Washington. So the whole tempo and cadence of that. So I'd be reading out to the President, the President-elect got briefed on dot-dot-dot as he prepares for his transition on appointments and things like that.

Is that premature? Well, we've counted the votes, counted them again. Then you have this freaking howitzer down there in Florida in Jim Baker going out every day for his press conference. It was masterful, it really was. Just the styles of the two were so different. There was his reporting that what's his name, [David] Boies?

Nelson: David Boies.

Bartlett: David Boies getting emails from Gore as he's walking into an argument, stuff like that. Just the micro—and Bush was obviously not that way. He had about three calls a day with Baker. Allbaugh was on the ground there too. You'd have a regularly scheduled briefing. It was, "OK, you guys know what to do," just a real contrast in styles of management, which is interesting to see.

Nelson: So getting you into the White House. When did you have those daily, or consecutive-day conversations with Karen Hughes about the job you ended up taking, and then Karl Rove?

Bartlett: It was during the recount at campaign headquarters.

Nelson: So what do you do between—I mean the recount is resolved and—

Bartlett: Then I'm working on helping her to build out the staff and working on inauguration speeches. We're working on first-hundred-days plans. It's trying to pack—that's the whole—you're trying to do your personal as well, as we had an abbreviated period to get ready. During the transition we all were at a hotel not too far from here. We all were ensconced during that transition period. We were up here; it's just a blur. I can barely remember details.

Riley: The Vice President set up a transition operation in advance of this? Is my recollection of this—

Bartlett: Yes, they were here in Washington, definitely.

Nelson: In Alexandria.

Bartlett: It's common, though. Both sides had work being done in case. So it was just kind of accelerating what was already there.

Riley: What about, from your perspective, the transition decisions? Were there some problematic ones either on personnel or on policy?

Bartlett: The Clintons did a masterful job of setting us up with some doozies on the regulatory front. We stepped right into just about—I know arsenic was one that we just boom—we got here and we tried to rescind that one. "Bush wants to poison drinking water in America with arsenic." We were the gang that couldn't shoot straight on some of these regulatory things. It was probably the right policy, but the way they went about pushing them was typical of a second-term President. "We'll drop these torpedoes in the water and let them go." Boy, hook, line, and sinker, we just got nailed.

Some of the appointments—you may have to jog my memory on some. I mentioned O'Neill turned out not to be great. Our second crack at that, John Snow, turned out to be great. That's not on the transition. I'm trying to remember—Frist, we got leaned on pretty heavy on two appointments. [John] Ashcroft because he had lost to [Melvin] Carnahan. Trent Lott leaned on us heavy on Spence Abraham, who had lost. So Karl really pushed those two based on favors to the Senate leadership.

Riley: Did that leave an odd man out, particularly at Justice? I would think that usually an AG [Attorney General] appointment is one that a President—

Bartlett: The name of somebody who a lot of people thought of was Marc Racicot. I think there was another vetting issue with him. I'm sure there were probably people who were kind of a head scratch with John Ashcroft and Spence Abraham. Tommy Thompson was desperate to be head of transportation; didn't want to be head of HHS [Health and Human Services].

Norm Mineta was a Democrat. I'll never forget. It was just the worst part of Washington. Norm almost died while in office. He came down with a really bad infection—

Riley: Before your administration or after?

Bartlett: During, when he was Secretary of Transportation. He was over in Bethesda for two weeks or so. At one point—this may have been under Josh, I can't remember if it was Andy. I get a call, "Mr. President, you might want to go over there and say goodbye to him." And boy, the patriot—Tommy said he would be happy to go over and oversee the Department of Transportation while he's in the hospital. *You can't even wait until he dies?* It was unbelievable. He bounced back and he was fine.

Riley: I hope so. We're supposed to see him in about six weeks.

Bartlett: He's a sweet man. So transition—we had a handful of these Clinton regulations. I don't

have a great recollection of Cheney's role in this, but we recanted on the CO_2 pollution deal that we got just hammered on, and then on top of that we said we weren't going to sign Kyoto and our base loved it, but it got us off to a rocky start internationally.

Despite some good momentum on the tax cuts, that was a rough summer. It was interesting. At the time we thought the debate raging around stem cell and that whole speech and the internal debate around that—that was heady stuff for not knowing what was a month away. We gave that speech that summer, if I recall, a July-August time frame from the ranch in Texas. Margaret was very heavy in that process if I recall. Mike Gerson—there were a lot of strong views on that topic.

Riley: Somebody was tasked to work the issue. He's on our list.

Bartlett: I can picture him. Jay Lefkowitz.

Riley: That's it.

Bartlett: He did a very good job of running a great process. He played a really important role throughout on the policy side. He is a good hand. Gary Edson may have been involved in that too.

Riley: Let me draw you back and ask—you headed some place.

Nelson: It sounds like the point is pre-9/11 you had the time to focus on an issue that really wasn't a crisis kind of issue.

Bartlett: Yes, but what I was going to say is that despite those early successes it was a rough summer.

Nelson: You had 50 percent job approval on the Gallop poll on September 10th, which is the lowest of any President at that point.

Bartlett: Yes. And the Democrats are still bitter about the election. The tax cut—even though we got bipartisan support, that was a tough vote. Going into the fall, kids were back. We were trying to have the education conversation. That's why we were—

Riley: [Jim] Jeffords had jumped ship.

Bartlett: Oh yes, we had Jeffords. That's right. We had the Patient Protection Act, Charlie Norwood. Bush was in there twisting his arm on that one. Again, this is where we're still trying to feel our way on how to deal with our own members of Congress. We're trying to get our sea legs with them; when do you push back, when you don't. You're going into their midterms, so they remind you of that on a daily basis. "You're not on the ballot. We are, sir."

The other thing you can't appreciate, really, it's in hindsight, particularly our situation, coming off an exhausting election with an overtime. We're just exhausted. You don't appreciate what that does to decision making. You have an influx of new people coming in with the administration, but the ones who have their hand on the rudder are just tired. Andy had bloodshot

eyes.

Riley: Andy had not been around during the campaign though, right?

Bartlett: The last part. I guess from the recount on he really was. He seemed tired.

Riley: Two questions then about that original setup. One is, there were some people from Texas who either weren't put in positions that they might have wanted to be in or decided not to come up. Is that a problem?

Bartlett: There were a couple that were. Joe Allbaugh was particularly aggrieved that he wasn't Chief of Staff. It was absolutely the right decision.

Riley: Why is that?

Bartlett: The last six months he didn't acquit himself very well as campaign manager. At critical times he was absent from the field, literally. He'd would leave, go. He was in Montana or something. He didn't do a good job managing the campaign, and this was a whole new ball of wax. We needed somebody who had Washington experience. At a lot of different levels Andy was such the right choice, but there were people who liked Joe. There are just not enough slots for everyone. But yes, he in particular was bitter for a long time about that.

Riley: He did come. He just wasn't in the position. He was put in to head FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency]. He probably thought it was marginal. It turned out to be important.

Bartlett: Interesting how that turned out. He thought he should have been in the Cabinet. He probably thought he should have the Department of Transportation.

Riley: Others. We talked about policy director.

Bartlett: Vance came up for a while, but I don't believe he was really ambitious to be in one of those top roles, no.

Nelson: How did you all organize the communications office that was either identical to or different from previous Presidents? I know the press office, for example, was folded in; that had been different.

Bartlett: The part that was kind of hard was that the press secretary has to report to the President, but in reality, they always have another boss, and in this case, it was Karen and then subsequently me. That always rubbed every one of the press secretaries wrong, Ari particularly. He could never get over it. There were meetings that he didn't have access to. Plausible deniability is important. "I'm trying to help your credibility." He never agreed with it. There was always a lot of tension with Ari on that. I think Ari was a source of leaks early on because he wanted to prove to the press that he was in the know. He and I are great friends now, but it was not easy. That's a whole other story.

Riley: Is that atypical that the press secretary would be one removed from the President?

Bartlett: They're all Assistant to the President. They all have access. But I think in almost every case a [Michael] Deaver or Chief of Staff is pretty much in charge. What it basically was was first among equals. If there was an issue about communication to the press, he would listen to the view of Karen or me. We trumped. We were basically in charge.

I would say that as we set it up it was a fairly traditional setup as far as you had your press office, which I always described as dealing with a three-meter target, sort of the incoming for the national press. We had a communications office that was doing stuff like preparing for the hundred days after the State of the Union and the education initiative and working with the political people and legislative affairs, building out the programs. Then the other half of that was the production side, the guys who were working with advance on signage and doing more out. Then I have the actual speechwriting. The speechwriting was set up pretty traditionally as well.

Over time I had to build out a digital capability in the White House. We had some firsts there. Blogging happened. It became a tool while we were there later. And it's interesting, because there was always this perception that the White House is on the cutting edge of all these things, and it's more like academia. For reasons of security and other reasons, we were the last to change.

There were a lot of stories. When Obama came in they couldn't believe the lack of technology or the lack of this. It was the same when we were there. I'm fast-forwarding on policy, but to make a bigger point, to give you the sense for how things are in the White House. On the immigration debate we're getting killed. We're getting killed on the right and in the blogosphere. We're absent from the debate and where the conversation was taking place, so we have to have White House bloggers.

You would have thought I wanted to commit an act of war against somebody and wanted to shoot Scud missiles or something. The lawyers said, "Oh, a White House blogger!" These were two twenty-something-year-olds, smart, policy and communications people. You can't even count how many meetings we had with lawyers. They finally felt like they were making a big concession. They said, "We'll let you cut and paste preapproved talking points from the press briefings that we sign off on for you to use."

I said, "We're not going to do it at all because that's going to hurt us more than it is going to help us." Finally I just got frustrated with the process, so I took the two proposed bloggers. We went down to the Oval Office. "Mr. President, can I talk to you?" He said, "Come on in." I said, "I need your permission to let these two people make mistakes on your behalf." [*laughter*] He said, "What the hell are you talking about?"

So I explained to him. "They're not going to say everything right. We're getting killed." He said, "Let it rip." So I went by the lawyers and said, "I got my approval." This is the abuse of access, but in a good way. Now, it didn't change the course of the debate, but it was the first time we actually had a White House blogger. The process I had to go through to get that done—You can just imagine the times on these different decisions. It's a very conservative, risk-adverse institution. Maybe that's good, but we built out that capability over time.

After 9/11 we created these coalition information centers. Because this was a global issue

emanating out of Afghanistan and such, we woke up every morning already behind the eight ball on the news of the day. The Taliban and others were putting out crazy stuff. So that's why we developed in-market capabilities in Afghanistan. Then a lot of this was happening in Europe, so we set up one in Afghanistan partly with Blair's—we set one up in London and then we had the one here, which Jim Wilkinson and someone else ran for me just to help us get ahead of the news cycles so we're not waking up every day already on the defense. That was another structural thing that because of the times we had to adapt to.

Nelson: 9/11?

Riley: No, we can't get that far down the road yet. I have two other questions. You had suggested that there was this tension with Karl and Karen that had existed for some time. There was a good working relationship. How did that manifest itself once you get in the White House?

Bartlett: Both in meetings with the President and elsewhere we're trying to make strategic decisions about where the President should go and what he should say in those things. They're two dominant personalities with different views on that. It wouldn't spill out in an ugly way or anything like that, but it was a healthy tension. Their styles were so different.

Riley: The styles were different?

Bartlett: Karl is into the minutia of detail on everything, tactics, strategy, you name it, and oftentimes confused tactics and strategy. Karen could be aloof, could be distracted easily, or could get very preoccupied on things that she felt were important that maybe others didn't share. She had a fantastic creative mind and she would often say, "Mr. President, I've been thinking—" and we'd all duck. [*laughter*] And it used to drive Karl just crazy. She'd come up with an idea that wasn't half-baked with staff. Things like that.

So I attempted to navigate some of those tricky shoals on behalf of the two. It was almost unspoken. There were times that we would talk about it. "Would you please talk to Karl about this? He'll listen to you, not me," type stuff and vice versa.

Riley: Did it become problematic for the President himself? Would the President sometimes say to you—

Bartlett: He liked the healthy tension.

Riley: So he liked the healthy tension?

Bartlett: He'd say, "I get it. Let them blow off some steam." Later he knew there was tension between Karl and me. My communications director at the time, Nicolle Devenish, then Wallace, would play the interlocutor on that. That's when Karl—I had worked for him too long and I knew his playbook. I'll never forget, it was after the '04 reelection. He said, "Dan, I really think you ought to take that title as counselor to the President."

OK, you're not doing this because you really want me to be counselor. You obviously want somebody else to be communications director. I didn't say that, but I knew that was where he was going. "I really appreciate your confidence in me in thinking that I should have that. It's up

to the President to say." He said, "I'll put in a good word for you." I said, "Thanks, Karl."

You have to understand that ultimately—it's one thing for him and Karen to have a healthy tension as peers because they're the same age. When it got to the point where I was a peer of his—I mean I started as a freaking intern. I have to give him credit. I probably would not have shown him the level of patience and tolerance that he did to me. So late in the second term, where the President is in some cases taking my advice—another thing that Karl really didn't like was he was precluded from a lot of the national security meetings because of the tie; it would not be appropriate to have a political advisor in that. But he didn't like the fact that I was in those meetings. That really chafed him a lot.

Anyway, Nicolle was working to run the reelection campaign. The whole idea was he wanted to free up that spot and he said, "I wonder if Nicolle would be good at that job?" Nicolle and I were friends. I saw the value. I'll play on this strategy. Then he tried to get—this is when he was moving down to be Deputy Chief of Staff. He said, "Nicolle, you ought to take my old office and all that."

She said, "No, I'm Dan's deputy. I'm going to go over there." But he was trying to—so she ultimately had to play this role of—she would always come in and say, "Guess what Karl wants me to do?" He always had his ideas about how we should be doing the media operations.

Riley: We talked a little bit about Andy earlier, but I want to come back and deal with that more directly. That is, how did he get integrated into this ongoing operation with so many people who already had roles, even if they weren't formalized, in the White House? During the transition he comes in. Do you immediately see the virtues of having this person in this position? What were his strengths and weaknesses there?

Bartlett: He was beloved from Day One; he was respected from Day One. He just oozed competence and confidence of how this should happen. He had a tireless approach to the job. He was always accessible, it did not matter when, and always with a smile. He showed a level of patience—just the entire management style was perfect for our culture, for the demands of the time, and his experience.

I've seen this. He could rely upon past experience. So when I raised that issue earlier, it's not as if I'm saying that by any means his tenure as Chief of Staff was a failure. He talked often about it. "I'm sure the President is going to fire me today. He probably should. Please fire me today." But he would talk to me. "I've been here too long." He's not one to try to—he has a level of humility that was just perfect. Everybody who is in a job like that has an ego, but nothing compared to what it could have been. We were really fortunate in both Andy and Josh to have people who had, on a lot of different levels, the right temperament.

Riley: You get the sense that Andy—I have not met him. He did an interview for the Bush 41 project long before I came back. He's sort of avuncular. I'm not sure how I square that portrait with a White House Chief of Staff who has to exercise discipline in a process and among people. You've already said that you felt that that was one of his strong suits. Was he comfortable disciplining the process and the people in the White House?

Bartlett: He's one of those guys—particularly with Cabinet Secretaries, he would totally dress

them down and they'd walk out slapping each other on the back thinking they just had a beer together, where Josh was more assassin-like. [*laughter*] Was Josh's way probably more efficient? Yes. But most of the time Andy got there. He can do better telling the story, but he would always share with me—Rumsfeld would call him all the time and just trash him. He'd say, "You don't know what you're doing. I was Secretary. When I was Chief of Staff—why are you allowing people to do this?" You need to just put it on speaker. He was just getting lectured by the Secretary of Defense. "When are you going to do your job? This is horrible how you're doing it."

The stuff he tolerated and put up with was amazing. Andy would have a point of view on things, but he had maybe too much patience to let other people, the process, to be deferential. I think Josh had a little bit more of we need to get from A to B, and we're going to get to B. Now, you can be a part of this process, but we're getting there. It was a little more of a straight line.

I would say that Andy's approach was probably going to work better in those early days and such, as we're trying to get this team to mesh. It probably was the right style at the right time. It just stopped working after a while.

Riley: I see.

Bartlett: You just needed a different style. Andy would probably agree with that. His effectiveness waned in those last, final months.

Riley: Mike, did you have anything else?

Nelson: You mentioned how exhausted you and others were. How does that manifest itself in terms of the job?

Bartlett: It's hard to appreciate it while you're there. It was only after I left the White House and took an extended period of time that I truly appreciated how exhausted I was. You just have to think that you're not making as good decisions, that you're missing things that you otherwise wouldn't miss. I can't sit here and say, "Boy, if I weren't tired we would have done this differently," but in the cumulative effect of it I'm convinced that we just didn't staff things as well. The decision-making process probably wasn't what it could have been, as crisp. Can I quantify it? I can't. But every bit of my instinct and experience tells me that it had an impact.

Riley: What about the President himself? Are you seeing wear and tear on him? How is he adjusting to being President of the United States? Are you seeing changes in his temperament or the way he works with people?

Bartlett: No. There were days, particularly during the insurgency, when things were just bad. It's like, *OK, this is the day he's going to lose his shit.* [*laughter*] He'd just come in and go, "I'm fed up with it." It really tells me, and was a great learning, that you cannot be the President of the United States and not be a deeply optimistic person, just in your bones. I have to admit, I'm a nice guy, I'm a jovial guy, but I'm generally a glass half empty. I'm always looking for the downside of things.

Riley: We're so close.

Bartlett: I'm just that way. That's my DNA [deoxyribonucleic acid].

Riley: Drives my wife nuts. Is your wife an optimist or a pessimist?

Bartlett: She would say that I brought her down. [*laughter*]

Riley: Our wives need to talk.

Bartlett: I've probably worn her down. I think a good President has to be generally an optimistic person. They have to truly be able to look at things and say it's going to be better than yesterday. Particularly when we were going through—he'd come bounding through that Oval Office and I'd go, *Wow*. If there were ever a day where we'd all give you a pass to where you could just be pissed and just be down, it didn't happen. That doesn't mean that he wouldn't be mad or that he wouldn't have his moments, but in general. I think that was really the [Jimmy] Carter Presidency. He's not an optimistic man. Not that you and I couldn't be great Presidents. I'm sure we could.

Riley: You're sure you could be. Leave me out of that discussion.

Bartlett: It's just that he had an uncanny ability to keep a very optimistic view of things. That's not to say that the grime didn't get to him, and the sleepless nights. I remember it had been reported particularly during that period when we were going to send additional troops into Iraq, everything said don't do it. He had to wear a mouthpiece to bed because he was grinding his teeth so bad in the middle of the night.

I remember sitting through all of those holiday Christmas parties where he is sitting there and I know what he is grinding on. He's literally grinding his teeth. That's why he became just totally addicted to exercise and all that. It was his only release valve, really. He became even more disciplined. That can all make you unravel.

He likes the discipline. He likes the very predictive path. Even though that is a very unpredictable job, the areas that he could control he really liked to control. I like to eat now. I like my meetings here. We're going to start them on time. We're going to finish them on time. That was the only thing that he could rely upon to stay the same. He knew he could get his workout in or he'd do this or get this and do this. That's how he stayed sane through the process, it seems.

Nelson: 9/11?

Riley: I think so. I'm going to look here very quickly.

Nelson: I'm curious as to why you were on that trip. Did you travel much with the President?

Bartlett: Karen and I would trade off. If my recollection serves me right, she was supposed to be on the trip and then at the last minute there was a Habitat for Humanity event. I want to say Secretary [Melquíades] Martinez, head of Housing and Urban Development, was supposed to do it, and at the last minute couldn't and they asked if Karen could fill in. She said, "Hey, can you go on this trip? Because I have to go do this deal." So it was totally random. I would have been

on the next trip, not that trip.

Nelson: You said you were there for an ordinary sort of—

Bartlett: We were. We were getting slammed on education. We're trying to regain the narrative on education.

Nelson: Can you take us through that day as you experienced it?

Riley: You want to break first?

Bartlett: Yes.

[BREAK]

Riley: So we have you in Florida. Is that right?

Nelson: Sarasota?

Bartlett: That's right.

Nelson: Just this. When you were traveling in general, why were you there? What was the purpose of your presence? What was the added value of having you or Karen on the trip?

Bartlett: We didn't go on every single one, but it was basically for if there were last-minute changes to the message, we would work through that. So it was opportunities for us to work on the traveling press corps. I'd go to dinner with them. Probably went to dinner the night before with a couple of reporters, digging away at our narrative with them. Some of it could be easy, a good way to get time with the President on the plane, things like that, if you have stuff to cover with him. Part of it is in case something happens. There is an element of that as well.

Nelson: Had you been involved in the planning of this event in Florida?

Bartlett: My team would have been, absolutely. But as events go, it was a pretty cookie-cutter playbook we'd done a gazillion times. Go to the school, read to the children, make remarks.

Nelson: Something I've never seen is how that day was supposed to unfold. What was supposed to happen after he left that elementary school? Do you remember?

Bartlett: I have not a clue. That's a very good question. If it were a typical day we probably had two events like that, gave a speech. I wouldn't be surprised if we were doing a fundraiser for a local Congressman potentially that day. Maybe we did the night before. I do remember it was a real humid morning. We were staying near a golf course and he went for a jog that morning on the golf course. There have been plenty of accounts of how as we're pulling up to the school the first tower had been hit. We're all, like most people, puzzled by that. His first question was

around weather. He said, “The weather must be bad up there or something.” I said, “No, it’s a clear day.” He said, “Well, that doesn’t make any sense.” We were all left with, “Keep me posted.” We were scratching our heads over this. Then when the next plane hit and those things go.

Nelson: Did you know at the outset that it had been a 747 or passenger plane?

Bartlett: No.

Nelson: So you’re probably thinking a private plane went askew?

Bartlett: Something like that, yes.

Riley: Andy is there too. What is Andy doing there?

Bartlett: Again, early on either he traveled or the Deputy Chief of Staff traveled. We always had kind of a mini staff on the road, particularly for an overnight. A day trip he probably wouldn’t have been on it.

Riley: That’s kind of unusual for a Chief of Staff, isn’t it? Maybe I should turn to my senior academic colleague. My thinking is that usually the Chief is there to mind the store while the President is away, right?

Bartlett: Again, he may have had stuff—it’s an opportunity to spend time. It just depends. Karl traveled a lot, often as we traveled, because Karl traveled to protect the turf. There’s a little bit of that with Andy traveling too. He can make all of us behave on the road.

I don’t want to spend too much time just recanting history everybody knows, the public record.

Riley: What are the bits and pieces of it that we don’t know?

Bartlett: That’s what I mean.

Nelson: Certainly one of the first thoughts you must have is about the communications side of this.

Bartlett: Absolutely. That’s what—Ari and I were deciding. Ari is behind the media and had written on the back of a yellow pad saying, “Don’t take questions or don’t comment until we—” He’s being told. We had a debate about do we interrupt him or not. It’s like we have to interrupt him. That’s when he decided Andy is going to go in and whisper in his ear. He comes out after that. We didn’t appreciate what later became a big focus of should he have run out of the room, how he responded and all that. We didn’t have any time to think about those things. It became a whole industry in itself, speculation about why he didn’t. Who knows?

Riley: Which I think is terrifically unfair.

Bartlett: Oh, yes.

Riley: How are you supposed to—you have no idea what’s going on.

Bartlett: Exactly, which made it very difficult for us to put together some sort of remarks before we left the school, which he did. Again this gets back to you know when Bush isn't comfortable speaking. He wasn't comfortable. He didn't know, we really didn't know, what was going on. We had a couple of cracks at it, and each time we weren't—for good reason he hadn't gotten his footing yet. He couldn't speak with any sort of authority. He didn't feel comfortable doing it.

We get to the airport, and a motorcade ride with the President on a good day is a pretty brisk one. This one was a really fast one. At this point we do believe we're going back to Washington. It was only as we got to the plane—I can't remember if we were in the air or about to take off when the next hit was the Pentagon. The decision was we were not going to Washington. I remember we were taxiing down the runway. Again, typical procedure, it's a pretty steep ascent, but this was a dramatic ascent into the air. Pretty quickly we bank west and we're headed not to Washington.

At this point you get fog of war type stuff. Rumsfeld goes to the scene, so he's kind of out of commission. We have Bob Mueller [III] on literally his second day, I think, on the job as FBI Director. We're on the phone with him before we get there. As it was documented in the 9/11 Report, the comms [communications] on Air Force One weren't ideal. They functioned OK, but not great. They were trying to keep them open. In fact, you were talking about mobile devices. This was right at the beginning of Blackberry where there was one person, of course Karl, who had a Blackberry. He had a political Blackberry.

I remember as we're going up he was sending notes to all our wives on his Blackberry saying, "Dan's OK. He'll call when he can." He sent for each person. "He'll call when he can. We're all fine." But that's how we all communicated back to our spouses; it was Karl's Blackberry. He was the only one who had one and was the impetus of all of us getting them very quickly thereafter.

So we go west. I remember there was a scare—this is when there was a misinterpretation of somebody using the signal of "Angel" on Air Force One. There was this fear, so we get fighter aircraft escorts. There was a mis-report about the ranch being a target. He's trying to track down his parents, his daughters, and his wife. It's a pretty hectic swirling activity on Air Force One. We're getting the local coverage, so we're seeing all this stuff.

Nelson: From whatever local station you're—

Bartlett: Yes, you're picking them up as you go, basically, one of the nationals. We're deciding what we're going to do. We end up going to Barksdale Air Force Base. He is really anxious to get back. Cheney and everybody else are saying—at this point there are still hundreds of international inbound aircraft in the air. It is still too fluid of an environment. Trying to decide whether we were going to go to NORAD [North American Air Defense Command] in Colorado or to Offutt. Ideally, we would have gone to NORAD, but the logistics were too hard to work out. To get up to NORAD you have to have helos and all that. We didn't have assets because this was an unplanned stop. That was really what prompted us to go to Offutt.

We made the decision in Barksdale that we were going to shrink the size of the traveling party significantly. We had some Congressmen with us, and we had extra staffers. We had a

substantial press corps. I'll never forget, Ari and I knew we were going to cut it down to a very tight travel pool of press reporters. He said, "This is not going to go over well, because every one of those reporters is thinking, *I'm going to win a Pulitzer because I'm going to be with the President on 9/11*."

A particular person, the current press secretary to the President, Jay Carney, was working for *Time* magazine at the time. They're being told. They were on the tarmac out there. He goes ballistic. "You're panicking, Bartlett. That's what's going to go down in history, you panicking." I said, "You seem to be the only one panicking at this point. I'm sorry, man." Emotions with everybody were just raw. I can't blame him. Of course, this is a career-making—

Riley: Plus, they have no idea how they're going to get home.

Bartlett: They were stuck there for a while. I think we finally sent military aircraft. They got home the next day at some point.

Nelson: Why was that decision made to leave some people behind?

Bartlett: We didn't know how long we were going to be at a different place. It was accommodations. This was a fluid playbook, and we just had too big of a footprint. The logistics of moving people, things like that, we just didn't know.

Riley: There wasn't a fear of any kind of internal—

Bartlett: No, it was just more about mobility, flexibility. We left White House staff behind too. It wasn't just the media.

So we get to Offutt, and it is a very surreal kind of environment. This is where they monitor all the nuclear forces around the world. We go down below the ground. First, when we pull up, there sits the doomsday plane. Basically, if Washington gets decapitated, this is the plane the general gets up and conducts nuclear war. It's kind of a Cold War relic. It's just surreal, and it looks like the black dot Air Force One with all the technology on the top to conduct nuclear war. You're just as far away from Rockwall, Texas, where I grew up, as you could be.

This is the thing; it's just in general the first year. For the first six months or so I felt like Forrest Gump. I'm the guy in the picture who is not supposed to be there. The whole thing. So now you have this national historic moment unfolding right in front of your eyes, and it really hit home for me why the military and Secret Service do so much training. At moments like that you want it to be instinct, and they just act.

The stark contrast between those who had trained their whole careers for a moment like that and those who hadn't could not have been more obvious. I tell this to people all the time. In a crisis, the ability to divorce the personal from the professional, how do you compartmentalize this? It's very hard. You're sitting there trying to think of how you're going to advise the President during a period like this and then inevitably your mind drifts to your wife and what does this mean. It's not an easy process. All of us—I don't know if struggle is the right word, but had to deal with it. Then you see the other ones are just [snapping fingers]. They've trained themselves to do that. I didn't really appreciate that until later thinking back on it.

There were some—it was difficult. It really hit home to a lot of us. Harriet Miers was on that trip, if I recall, when we learned that Ted Olson's wife was on flight 93. I didn't know her well, but many of the people there did. Harriet was particularly close to her. So now we've lost somebody we all know. It's not a vague tragedy.

Nelson: Yes.

Bartlett: So all this is swirling. He really was the calm at the eye of the storm. He wasn't flying off the handle. There was a woman—we always had somebody from the Situation Room who traveled. They were kind of a dispatcher of news coming in and out. I can't remember her name. She had gray hair, a ponytail. I can picture her. She was the only one I knew who kind of lost control. We had to keep her away from the President. She just got pretty rattled over the whole deal. But in large part it was—there were a lot of hectic things going on, but as soon as you got in the cabin where the President was, it was pretty calm.

He was frustrated, not knowing, "Are we going to go back? Are we going to go back?" He's constantly calling in the guys, Andy and others, "What's happening in Washington?" We decided to. We spent a significant portion of that trip on the way back to Washington working on the speech that he would deliver. We were on the phone with those back at the White House, Mike Gerson, and Karen and those. A lot of debate back and forth about what tone to strike, how declaratory should we be.

Nelson: He had made remarks at Barksdale.

Bartlett: He did.

Nelson: And Offutt.

Bartlett: He did.

Nelson: Who wrote those?

Bartlett: We did, up there on the phone with Karen and those folks back in Washington.

Nelson: What was the purpose—did you have an idea of what each of those sets of remarks was supposed to accomplish?

Bartlett: Pretty minimum. It was basically just he's not in hiding. I'm here, I'm on top of it. Just I'm on top of it. That was our basic goal because it was such a fluid situation. We were fearing that what it was looking like was Bush is on the run.

Nelson: One thing you notice when you see something that is not done with high production value—

Bartlett: It was horrible.

Nelson: —is how most things are done with high production value. It sort of looked like—

Bartlett: What we did in the wake of that, we now have capability to speak live to the nation from Air Force One. So we're never in a situation where he can disappear. We built up the technology in the wake of that. They upgraded the other communications, things that needed to be upgraded. It goes back to this thing that as much as you think we would be on the edge of technology—we built a whole podium thing that could pop up and be much more official looking and not have that very crude basic look that we had, just little things. He didn't have things to present. It was not ideal.

Nelson: Something that there has been dispute over and the 9/11 Commission chose not to resolve was whether President Bush authorized shooting down planes if necessary. Can you shed any light on that?

Bartlett: It's my impression based on my recollection that in a conversation he had with the Vice President he gave that authority and then Cheney communicated it.

Nelson: OK.

Bartlett: I know there are people who have different opinions about that. That's how I remember it.

Riley: So just continue on. When do you end up—we left you at Offutt, so you're there.

Bartlett: That's the first time that he is truly able to convene what is now being viewed almost like a war cabinet.

Nelson: I wonder. He has been wanting to go back from the start. Why is it that now he is able to go back?

Bartlett: They feel that the air traffic—the grounding of planes—there was not a threat like that now. We didn't know if there was "another wave" or anything like that, but there wasn't a fear that there was an imminent threat of an aircraft.

Nelson: If they had said now it is still too dangerous—at that point would he have gone back?

Bartlett: The Secret Service wanted us to stay at Offutt for the night and he said absolutely not. So there was definitely some overriding of views.

Riley: Who is the "they"? Who specifically is communicating that the President is not safe to come back?

Bartlett: Early on the Vice President has a pretty strong view in talking to folks on the ground. You have the Secret Service giving their view, and they're always going to be the most risk averse.

Riley: Of course.

Bartlett: So it's coming from multiple choke points.

Riley: Who is the Secret Service person? It would be the head of the Secret Service who is communicating with him?

Bartlett: Yes, and I'm trying to remember. Eddie Marinzel, I think, was traveling with us that day.

Riley: That's checkable.

Bartlett: It was either Eddie or Nick; I think it was Eddie. So whether he is asking Eddie and Eddie is checking back, or if it's through the chief, through Andy—Andy is running point on that whole process, the decision, the advice that is being given.

Riley: Andy is still with him.

Bartlett: Yes, he's with us.

Riley: So Andy is still there, you're still there. Ari?

Bartlett: Ari is there.

Riley: Ari is still there.

Bartlett: Harriet Miers.

Riley: OK, Harriet is still there. We know that there are reports of support from abroad. Do those start coming in immediately?

Bartlett: Oh, sure.

Riley: They're coming to Air Force One then?

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: Or are they going to the White House and then being relayed to you?

Bartlett: Probably to the White House and then being relayed to us. But I do remember us getting those.

Riley: OK.

Bartlett: When we get to Offutt and they're showing that Russia is at DEFCON [DEFense CONdition] 3. So they're all raising their DEFCON levels without knowledge of what is happening, just on protocol. It is kind of a surreal thing to see. Then we're getting messages. "No, they're cooperating, they're communicating. They're this." At this point al-Qaeda's name is starting to be thrown around already.

Riley: Is that a name you were familiar with before 9/11?

Bartlett: Somewhat, but not intimately.

Riley: Are you attending security meetings at all before 9/11?

Bartlett: National security things on specific policy issues that we're looking at, ABM [anti-ballistic missiles] treaty things, but not intelligence briefings.

Riley: So how is the decision made that he is going back?

Bartlett: As I said, they had the opportunity to finally get everybody together at Offutt, got the review from the Secretary of Transportation and the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] that the U.S. airspace is under control under the command of the military. Once that was determined, that was the big turning point to say yes. There could be other, but it's absolutely critical to get the President back to the White House, back to Washington.

Riley: So you go back with him.

Bartlett: We did.

Nelson: What was your postmortem on the first two communications from the President to the nation?

Bartlett: Not good.

Nelson: What did you think had to be accomplished that night?

Bartlett: This is where there was definite tension. Karen really felt that we're still kind of in comforter, calming of the nation mode as opposed to Commander in Chief and preparing for war. There will be plenty of time for a war footing. My recollection is that the speechwriters particularly were of a different mind, felt we had to very early describe what had happened and who had done it and have more of a war declaration early.

When you have those kinds of split opinions, the compromise usually doesn't come out well. It probably wasn't our finest hour either. Again, it comes back to if there is not full alignment with the staff and with the President, it always reveals itself in his execution of it. It wasn't one of his better moments. Now a distracted mind, a fatigued mind and all that on top of everything else and we're doing this on a whim when you're used to being able to have a lot of preparatory work for an address to the nation. It was all on full display.

Nelson: None of his national security people were on the plane, right?

Bartlett: Correct.

Nelson: Did that create any difficulties?

Bartlett: I don't know if they would have done anything different.

Nelson: Was the President able to communicate with them?

Bartlett: Oh, sure.

Nelson: I'm thinking a lot of people are scattered, right?

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: The White House is effectively empty except for the bunker.

Bartlett: They had to evacuate, except for those who were underneath the house.

Riley: Had you been engaged in any contingency planning for—

Bartlett: We'd been briefed, but not to the extent that you would expect. We'd been briefed on espionage and things like that. But a terrorist attack on the White House? No. Not to my recollection.

Riley: I think you'd remember it.

Bartlett: Not on Air Force One or anything like that.

Riley: So you come back to Washington. What do you find?

Bartlett: I don't know if I want this in the history books, but I'll share. Back to this difference between the personal and the professional. We're writing the speech on our return trip to Washington. Not knowing what could also unfold, types of attacks, the President's medical staff led by a colonel named Dick Tubb, Air Force, great guy, we called him "Tubby," passed around to us a sleeve of pills.

He's saying, "We don't know if there could be a chemical or biological component to this, but we want to go ahead and take a proactive approach." I wasn't really, to be frank, paying attention to everything he was saying. I got the sleeve of pills, took the sleeve of pills, kept listening to the President. After about a minute, I don't think I saw anybody take the sleeve of pills. So I pick the sleeve up and it says, "Take one pill each day for the next seven days." I had taken all of them like a dumb ass, like a very ignorant person. I'm sitting there saying to myself, *I've just killed myself on Air Force One.*

I calmly pushed myself away, didn't tell anybody what I had just done. I go down the hallway; the medical staff has its own compartment on Air Force One. I went in and said, "Hey, Tubby." I'm not going to try to go through all their protocols, and he was a prankster. I said, "I took all the pills." He said, "It's not time for a prank." I said, "No, I took all the pills." He said, "Why?" I said, "I think we're beyond the why. I know I'm dumb. I'm an idiot." He said, "I've never had this happen. Go back in there, I think you'll be fine. I'll come get you."

"Think I'll be fine?" I thought he'd be pumping my stomach. So I go back in there, and of course within minutes I'm making up symptoms like sweaty palms, shortness of breath.

Riley: That's the optimist's reaction. The pessimist's reaction—

Bartlett: This is how you die of overdose or whatever. So finally, where is he? I go back in there and I kid you not, his staff had a big red medical book out. The other one is on the phone with

the CDC [Centers for Disease Control] saying, "We have evidence with lab rats." They're talking and I'm sitting there. I can't believe I did this.

Ultimately, he comes back and tells me to drink a full bottle of Pepto-Bismol. I said, "You're supposed to be the best doctor in the world and you give me Pepto-Bismol? Why don't you pump my stomach?" I turned out to be OK, but a little bit of a distraction in the middle of a national—

Nelson: You find yourself thinking this would be such a silly—

Bartlett: "In other news today, White House senior staffer—" [*laughter*] "—overdoses on Cipro."

Riley: Please do leave this in. This is very rich.

Bartlett: It's kind of divorcing the personal—

Riley: I'm surprised that they didn't give you ipecac or something to vomit it all up.

Bartlett: No, they did—when I left the White House the medical staff did a big prank with me involved with an empty package and all this.

So we got back to the White House. It was probably one of the more surreal images I've ever seen, coming into D.C. airspace with two F-16s on each side of Air Force One. He was so close. There's a picture. We're all looking out the window and he's giving the President the thumbs up. The President salutes him. You pull into D.C. airspace and it's abandoned. There is no one except for the emergency personnel around the Pentagon. Smoke is billowing out of the Pentagon. You think, *In America, in 2001? How?* It looked like a movie. I could not believe it.

So we go. We land at Andrews. Protocol—there are two Marine Ones and you're not supposed to know which one—I'm in the second one, and I have to be honest, I've never in my life wanted to have a sign that said, "He's in the other one." [*laughter*] It was tense. To be frank, it was scary. It was a weird feeling.

We get to the White House, and we had about 90 minutes or so before he was going to go out, or maybe 60 minutes. There are pictures of all of us. We're haggling over the language on what it was going to say and those things. Again, the compromise frankly didn't serve the President well. We're all trying to still find our footing, to be honest.

Riley: Sure.

Bartlett: I probably got home around 4:00 that morning, took a shower, was back at the White House by 6:30. That was the first time I saw my wife. The week just turned into a blur. Went over to the Pentagon with him. You could smell death. It was in the air. You could smell the burning that had taken place. It was jarring to see where the plane had just sheared the side of the Pentagon. There were offices—part of the office looked like it had been untouched, and the other part was just gone. It was one of those sights that I'll never forget.

This is really where President Bush was having difficulty keeping his emotions in check. A member of the impromptu press availability we did in the Oval Office—he was behind the desk I think at this point. He was about to break. I was just thinking, *Oh, please get through this, do not—I can't have the President of the United States dissembling on national TV on this.* Emotions were raw and on the surface. Some of that for the public to see was OK, but not too much.

Nelson: I remember, "I'm a loving guy."

Bartlett: That's what it was, exactly what it was.

Nelson: It was spontaneous?

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: I'm a loving guy, but—

Bartlett: Yes. It culminates on Friday. Andy has a wonderful way of talking about that day, the Friday after 9/11, where he talks about—you see all aspects of the job of a President. It started with the Cabinet in the morning, where he put them on a war footing, to going to the National Cathedral, which was a surreal—you had all the powers of government in the National Cathedral. I remember the horrific weather as we went in. The end of the service the sun literally, brilliantly broke through and the entire congregation is singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" as the doors swing open and this brilliant sunshine comes in as if the country had come together and healed. The symbolism of that was just overwhelming.

Then you have little things I'll never forget. I'm sitting directly behind Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, and his wife, Andrea Mitchell. They're doing the offering where you put in—here is the most powerful money man, and he had no money on him. He had to beg money from his wife to put into the offering. I said to my wife, "The Fed Chairman has no cash." [*laughter*] I don't know why I never forgot that. Just little things.

Then all the history of him going up to New York and the range of emotions then to culminate as he flies back to Camp David that night. Then he has his first war preparation meeting that Saturday morning at Camp David.

Nelson: You're talking about these things as though they just happened one after another. On September 12th are you planning what is the message we want to convey to the country?

Bartlett: We're literally going hour-by-hour or day-by-day. We're trying to make the decision when we're going to go to New York. We knew we had to get up there. This is in every natural disaster, Katrina—when do you go? When do you become more of a distraction than you become an enabler or helper? We were trying to figure that out. We're developing these events on the fly, bring in the New York delegation, Hillary Clinton, and all came to the Oval Office.

We went to the Pentagon. We're doing this very much on the fly, almost like on an hour-by-hour basis. The sequence of events gets fuzzy for me as far as what happened when. Then on top of that we have on multiple occasions some yahoo violating D.C. airspace and Secret Service

comes barreling in and grabs the President. That happened on multiple occasions.

Nelson: Really?

Bartlett: Oh, yes. Then the caste system within the White House emerges, which is who goes with him and who doesn't. My assistant, she never, they never, missed an opportunity to say, "Oh, don't worry about Dan. He gets to be taken, we're all cannon fodder." That's what they're briefing us on if something happens when we're away, where the rendezvous points are, all these different things, and having those conversations with your wife. You're telling her, "This is where I'm going to go if there is another incident, not you." She says, "Yes, you watch. I know where Camp David is. I'm going to show up and I'm going to stay there until they let me in." That was one of the rendezvous points. The tension with that hanging over, where you're just trying to do your job was difficult, to say the least.

Riley: It complicates your contingency planning because your expectation is not just that you're concerned about your own physical wellbeing, but how can you make a contingency plan if any minute another airplane may fall out of the sky, or another attack.

Bartlett: That's right, that's right. I do remember we're trying to find our new rhythm of this new life we're living in, and I remember all elements are working on their parts, so the big thing was financial terror. How are we going to choke off money of al-Qaeda? The Department of the Treasury, they're writing Executive orders to start on that path. I remember the President was at Camp David that weekend because they had that war camp meeting on that Saturday.

We were preparing for these Executive orders to be signed upon his return. I remember we're at the White House and the helo lands. He's in the Residence. The phone rings. He says, "I want Karen, you, and Ari to come to the Residence." Then he says, "You don't get it. This is the first strike in the War on Terror. It is with an Executive order to demonstrate the unconventional nature of the war, and we have to make a point of that. I want a Rose Garden ceremony tomorrow morning where I'm going to sign this. We're going to take action to shut down the finances of terrorism."

It was the first time that he was directing us as communications people. "You have to think differently now." So we did. The next morning we had a Rose Garden ceremony. That was him. He was saying we have to start thinking this way. Of course he had the benefit of having more briefings about how we're going to go about it. There was a learning curve for all of us to understand the new environment.

Nelson: The trip to New York, to Ground Zero. It strikes me that that could have gone horribly wrong. Were you there?

Bartlett: I was not.

Nelson: Were you watching it on television?

Bartlett: Oh sure, and talking to people.

Nelson: What was the plan? How was it supposed to go?

Bartlett: There was a lot of trust in [Rudolph] Giuliani, how we're going to do this thing. We knew we were going to go to the center where all the families were going to try to learn about the whereabouts of their loved ones. That's where he got the badge.

Back to the instincts on this. He is an elite athlete relative to his trade. But you're right. You didn't know what the emotions of the crowds would be and that whole dynamic. To a group that was very used to controlling events, we knew we were totally out of control. There was no way for us to know that he was going to climb up on what used to be a fire truck that was crushed and have this bullhorn moment with Bob Beckwith, the whole thing. None of that was choreographed.

Riley: But it suggests that you're more agile in your improvisation than maybe some of your scholarly observers.

Bartlett: Maybe so. But at some point there isn't a playbook. You're making it up as you go. To fast-forward a bit, we should have taken to heart how that played out when several years later we're dealing with Katrina. We overthought it.

Nelson: We'll come back to that. That was a very vulnerable moment when unexpectedly this gathering of exhausted, emotional—

Bartlett: First responders and all the others.

Nelson: New Yorkers. Everything.

Riley: Tell him where you're from, Mike.

Nelson: They're telling him basically, "Speak up." If he doesn't come up with—even when he has the bullhorn—where does that line come from? That is the high point of Bush's communications post-9/11.

Bartlett: Absolutely.

Nelson: If he doesn't come up with a line like that, it turns into exactly the opposite of what it was, what it did turn into.

Bartlett: That's what I was saying. It's like that when they ask LeBron James right before he hits a game-winning shot. "What were you thinking?" and he says, "I wasn't." We talked to him. "I just did it."

Nelson: So you hadn't heard him say it, "We're going to—"

Bartlett: No, no, we talked about it later. No, he had no idea that was going to be—"I wasn't thinking about it. It was just the first thing that came out of my mouth." Lucky it was—

Riley: This was before or after he had been with the victims?

Bartlett: I believe it was after.

Riley: So he had gone through this wrenching series of visitations.

Bartlett: Oh, yes.

Riley: He could have been numb from that experience too.

Bartlett: But it probably helped inspire the comment, "They're going to hear from all of us soon." He probably felt like he had them, he was carrying their—

Riley: Something we haven't asked you about in your relationship with him. The President is a very religious man. Are you?

Bartlett: That's interesting. Not in the sense—I was raised Catholic.

Riley: I didn't know that.

Bartlett: So Catholicism I think is—he is—I don't think he would use the words "born again," but definitely his faith was renewed in a way that was—I don't want to say evangelical. It's not Baptist, but there is a very open, evangelic element to his religion that I didn't have. But having said that, his faith was deeply impressive to me and impactful on me. I've always said you hear about Bush what kept his balance in life was the three F's: faith, family, and friends, and he was true to all three of those things and leaned on them hard during those periods of stress or whatever. That was his ballast.

We'd talk about it some, we joked some. "Bartlett, have you gotten into calisthenics yet, you Catholics?" I had the honor to meet Pope John Paul [II; Karol Wojtyla] with him before he died. For a Catholic, that's a pretty big deal. He was a pretty feeble man at the time. The custom for a Catholic is you kiss the papal ring. So there is this pretty memorable moment. I'm about to go down to kneel and kiss the papal ring and Bush leans in and goes, "He needs a lot of help, your holiness." Are you serious? [*laughter*] This is just classic Bush. "No, I'm joking. He's fine."

It was funny, because my wife was pregnant with our twins at the time and she couldn't sleep at night. So she is turning on C-SPAN [cable-satellite public affairs network] all night and there's a live broadcast from the Vatican. She timed it to see me meet the Pope. It was kind of a neat deal. So religion, we talked a lot about it. The early days with the stem cell thing, the faith, the ethics around it. It would come up, not in big settings. He wore it on his sleeve in the sense that it was unmistakable that he was a man of faith, but he didn't push it. You didn't ever feel like he was—if that makes sense.

Riley: My question was primarily we had discussed the almost unique way that you two bonded at the beginning. It had occurred to me that that might have been an additional factor in your relationship. But you're suggesting that your life in that area wasn't something that had a lot in common with his own experience. So that answers the question.

Did you get the sense that this was something that was particularly sustaining to him after 9/11? Did you see any overt manifestations of it changing? Is he making more religious references than he was?

Bartlett: No.

Nelson: I do remember how intentional he was about lifting up Islam.

Bartlett: That was knowing that there was this backlash going on in the country and that he had to be very mindful about that. We did the event over at the Islamic Center there off of Massachusetts. He was worried about that. So we thought about how we were going to help preach tolerance at a time when there was more vengeance in the air than there was tolerance, to say the least.

Nelson: I also remember the extent to which the compassionate conservative theme was infused with some Catholic thinking, sort of cultural life thinking. Was that your influence?

Bartlett: No. I would say probably more the heavier hand of Gerson, Pete Wehner, and some of those folks on staff. Bill McGurn later was a strong Catholic voice, internally. With issues around pro-life there were some natural places of commonality. But no, I didn't serve that role.

Nelson: How did your job change from 9/11 on, or did it?

Bartlett: It definitely did. Probably more than anything else, part of that was coordination across Cabinets. There was probably much more focus on the White House proper and the President messaging. After that, really trying to get our government around this task of communications and really spending a lot of time with folks at the Department of Defense on how are we doing this collectively. We didn't find our rhythm early on.

Probably the thing we struggled with the most in those early days was this notion of being on high alert or not, what kind of message should we—should people hunker down or should we—we had the whole alert risks. Ashcroft and him going out and rattling the cages on alert status and risks. That was a tough time in communications, particularly, whipsawing between how do we keep people on a sense of urgency, I guess, for lack of a better word, and then at the same time we needed our economy to function, we needed society to function. So you want people to get back to normal. Those are in complete contrast. We stumbled around on that for a while trying to get that right. It was very difficult, very difficult.

Nelson: It might have been just intrinsically difficult, not solvable. Just one of those things you have to live with.

Bartlett: Yes, like I said, trying to coordinate—I can't tell you the time frame of this, but when Ashcroft raised the threat level, from Russia. He was traveling overseas and I've never been more pissed in my life. There are two Davids on his staff. His chief of staff was David—I just remember there were the two Davids. [Ed. note: David Ayres and David Israelite] I remember getting the two Davids on the phone and ripping them. What I saw was we're the gang that can't shoot straight. The government is too big. Trying to control—

Then things got kinetic overseas and we made the decision about vetting journalists.

Nelson: Talk about that.

Riley: Let me ask a preliminary question about your—it may be that you're just up 18 hours a day and you're rushing from one thing to the next. Are there any opportunities for you or members of the staff to reflect back on? This is not the first time that the United States has been at war. Are there lessons from prior experience that we can learn from that will aid us in dealing with a different kind of environment?

Bartlett: There was a group, some of the speechwriters and researchers and Pete Wehner and others who tried to dig into some of those issues for us and provide some weigh stations or parameters. I wish I could give you—I have a recollection of us trying to look into history to help—then there were parts of it that were just so unprecedented that we have to make it up as we go.

Riley: Exactly.

Bartlett: But particularly the speechwriters as they're looking at Presidential rhetoric. There's no doubt there was a lot of research.

Riley: Do you remember if there was any discussion about the desirability of issuing a formal declaration of war at the time? Or was it just thought that the authorization for use of military force was sufficient?

Bartlett: I know in the Congressional negotiations there was a lot of discussion around that. It was felt that that was the appropriate action that we took. It's not memorable in the sense that it was like a very divisive kind of internal debate that crystalized in my mind and I could say, "Oh, yes, I remember." But there were conversations that Cheney was involved in. You get enough lawyers in the room, they'll make it a debate. I remember that meeting. Not as too monumental a moment or anything like that.

Riley: What about the Congressional opposition, the Democrats at the time? Are you getting signals from the Democrats that we're ready to follow this President now, or is it just more of the same from them?

Bartlett: No. Dick Gephardt was very instrumental in Congressional support for that first resolution, particularly when we got to Iraq. But also we were still in a period of a kind of post-9/11 honeymoon that didn't really begin to fray until sometime in the debate on Iraq, although there was substantial Democratic support. Typically it was only when things start going wrong that people started heading for the hills. That part of it got toxic really fast. A lot of revisionist history.

Nelson: One of the big things that happens in '02 is the development and then the rollout of the new Department of Homeland Security.

Bartlett: Oh, yes.

Nelson: I've seen references to that in the briefing book. Can you talk about that and your role in it?

Riley: How did you get tasked with this plan?

Bartlett: Yes, what did I do wrong? It was Joel Kaplan if I remember and Joe Hagin, and there was a handful of staffers that were tasked to this. What was very clear—the part that became, I don't know if it is controversial—there is no way we can have a process with our current Cabinet in which they were going to give up jurisdiction and responsibility for certain things. We knew we were going to have to cram it down their throats, which wasn't going to be fun, but it was absolutely necessary.

There was literally a group that met underneath the White House in the bunker working on this, and each day as we got closer we brought more people in.

Nelson: Who created that group?

Bartlett: It was under Andy Card. It was under the Chief. For some reason I want to say that Josh and Joel Kaplan—Joel Kaplan ended up being Deputy Chief of Staff.

Riley: That's what we've heard.

Nelson: Cabinet members didn't know this was happening?

Bartlett: Outside of [Thomas] Ridge, I don't know if we brought—I don't know if Rumsfeld and Colin Powell knew, but clearly the ones who were losing—no. We knew when we rolled this out we were going to have as much an internal fight as we were. Then if you could only think about their jurisdiction issues, you could only imagine Congress with all their jurisdictional committee issues. So we knew the only way this was going to—if we tried to do a consultative process the thing was not going to work.

Riley: How did you end up on it?

Bartlett: Just because there had to be a whole communications rollout of those things, but I share your sentiment.

Riley: As often happens in these interviews, people hear these questions differently than they're intended.

Bartlett: There was a high stakes, public policy rollout. It wasn't terribly surprising that I'm involved in it. Now those guys had been—I think Richard Falkenrath, maybe some other guys, were involved in it. I got more involved as we got closer to the actual rollout.

Riley: But the premise was that this was so radioactive within the departments that you couldn't even devise a plan and have them involved.

Bartlett: Correct. So literally the rollout of when are we going to tell So-and-So, at what point, how close to the actual speech and announcement. Then we just had to gird everybody present on down to meet some guys who are just going to be pissed both on Capitol Hill and in administration. It was kind of a "Katie, Bar the Door" type deal. But everybody felt it was the right decision. People don't think twice about it now, but at the time it definitely was a monumental shift. It was a bold yet risky move.

Riley: Your preparations were going on simultaneous to the development on the Hill of a—

Bartlett: That's what really chafed—

Riley: You're nodding yes. So the obvious question is that you're—as I recall, the administration is taking a position against the Hill initiative at the very same moment that you're in the bunker.

Bartlett: Elements being described of us not being entirely supportive of the way they were crafting it.

Riley: Exactly. So the way that this tends to get interpreted in the press and the conventional accounts is the administration opposed the creation of the department.

Bartlett: They were against it before they were for it?

Riley: That's right. But what I think I'm hearing is that in effect you were as for it as—

Bartlett: Not in the same form. They'd have gone about it in a different way. We knew we were never going to be able to control an incremental legislative process. The only way we were going to do it is if we had to basically come crashing down in a hard way with our own idea and proposal. And we were the ones with the 75 percent approval rating at the time.

Nelson: This intersects to some degree with the midterm election campaign, right?

Bartlett: Sure.

Nelson: Should all these DHS [Department of Homeland Security] employees have the same right to unionize—

Bartlett: Oh, yes. I forgot all about that. That got—

Nelson: You know—

Bartlett: What's his name? The one Democrat everybody—he's a vet, a POW, who lost his race after this?

Nelson: [Joseph Maxwell] Cleland.

Riley: Max Cleland.

Bartlett: Yes. The unionization issue, I wasn't really involved. I thought it was to a certain extent, to be frank, overblown. But those on Capitol Hill and some of the administration saw the value of it becoming an issue.

Nelson: In general, how was the job of the communications office affected by being in a midterm election year?

Bartlett: Big time. That's where that tension comes with Karl's operation. There were two general tensions. If you're running the political operation, you're looking out over the horizon of

all these constituencies you're trying to ingratiate yourself to, to be content to, and to ultimately gain advocacy from in the form of a vote or whatever it may be.

As I said, the ability to communicate with each of those is—where the tension between Karl and me comes is that Karl would be perfectly content if in the course of a week we'd have a different message every day to each one. As long as he's hitting his constituencies he feels good. So we have something that social conservatives like this day, next day—but I'm trying to take the picture of a communication that is what are we on a macro level communicating to the public? What is the narrative? That was always where the tension was.

We can't have all these events. We're talking to all these—it's scattered. Or it would be the other tension, mainline. So there is that tension, balancing these, micro targeting messaging with a macro narrative. That was what would reveal itself on a daily, weekly, monthly basis as we're trying to decide what we're going to say when, what events we're going to plan, scheduling meetings. We're looking six weeks out and trying to plan events, messaging calendar.

The second one is the demands put on the White House and on the President when it comes to helping during a midterm. The types of things in a perfect world you'd never agree to that you find yourself agreeing to. Some of those are horse trading on votes. So you get a vote and you promise you'll come to an event and you'll talk about X, or like the Terri Schiavo example. You just grit your teeth.

At times I used to attend meetings in the Senate and the House where there was the conference committee who were in charge to try to have some coordination and collaboration on message and those things, which worked about 10 percent of the time. So it was a challenge. That was one of the bigger challenges.

Nelson: From the outside it seems like one of the ways that the micro and the larger issue got in sync, or that the communications strategy was in sync, is that Bush played such an active role in that campaign and was hitting on some of the same issues day after day wherever he was campaigning. Is that accurate?

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: I'm thinking, first of all, this fight that ended up getting picked with the Democrats over the right to unionization. They sort of, I think, blundered into a fight they couldn't win.

Bartlett: They did.

Nelson: You also got the buildup to the Iraq War, the use of force resolution and so on that fall. I shouldn't be telling you stuff and asking if you agree; that isn't the way these work. Was that something you saw as squaring the circle, so to speak? Letting the President be as effective as he could be in helping Republicans win the Senate, which they did, while also pursuing a coherent communications strategy?

Bartlett: Yes, that definitely would be the case. We didn't always get it right. There would be times where, as I said, we were probably more deferential on what the message should be to the Hill. But every White House is plagued with that reality. It's just a fact. You're in a far better

position on the back end if you lose to say, "I did everything you guys wanted me to do," as opposed to saying, "If you would have just—when we asked you to do this," which is not sound strategy. It is just reality.

We probably one time kind of threw a wrench into that typical process around Rumsfeld and his stepping down, resignation as Cabinet Secretary, because he did it right after the '06 midterm when a lot of them preferred that we had done it before.

Riley: You're getting tired. Could we take about a ten-minute break and see if we can maybe come back for about an hour?

Nelson: It would be good for you to tell us what are we missing.

Bartlett: Between now and tomorrow I think some of these decisions around Rumsfeld and the Cabinet is a big one, Katrina is a big one. We had two Supreme Court nominations.

Nelson: Oh, yes.

Bartlett: I don't know if you care about that.

Nelson: Definitely.

Bartlett: I'm just throwing out ideas. You can take them in whatever sequence you want to.

Nelson: The reelect.

Bartlett: There is the reelect. There is election night of reelect.

Riley: You mentioned that twice.

Bartlett: I left out, missed the financial crisis. I was gone. [*laughter*]

Riley: We have [Henry] Paulson on that.

Bartlett: In fact, I have to call him back. I can't think if there's anything else.

Riley: Think about it. Give yourself 10 minutes to get rested up and we'll keep you for another hour and then let you go, if you're amenable to that much.

Bartlett: You bet.

[BREAK]

Riley: In Afghanistan we go from al-Qaeda to a shooting war. How involved are the community's people? What is the relationship with the Pentagon in this? Are relations good or

not?

Bartlett: A lot of involvement. [Victoria] Torie Clarke is at the Pentagon at this time. She was somebody I had an enormous amount of confidence in, worked well with her. Also a lot of communication with George Tenet and CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] because of the elements of their involvement and the combination, the integration, of their involvement. We also had these coalition information centers that were based in Afghanistan on the ground there. So there was a healthy level of coordination on the messaging front and those things. The cadence of messaging from Washington.

Riley: This is from the outset? Before they go in?

Bartlett: To a certain extent, yes. It's not perfect, to say the least. This is where—and we later learned with the situation in Iraq that this is nothing like in the 1991 Gulf War because in the Pan Arab media, the ability to control the narrative was far more difficult. Technology just leveled the playing field when it came to the ability for all different views to be shared. We were operating again in an unprecedented environment, but we felt pretty good about our plans.

As the military operations ensued, we knew that our challenge in the long term and in the short term was always going to be the impatience of the public, of the media, and so the period before the very abrupt fall of the Taliban was one in which people started doubting the strategy and the progress that was or wasn't being made. There were no panic buttons being pushed at the White House or within the halls of government, but an increasing amount of, "So this is going to work, right?"

You're always saying, "This is going to take time." We have to gird people for a period of time, but we also know that success breeds success. We have to show some action, some progress, which will buy us more time and patience. But I don't remember it getting to the point of crisis.

Nelson: The Governor and all of you who served with Bush as Governor come into the White House thinking, *We know about domestic policy, and this is going to be a domestic policy Presidency*. Now, less than a year into the first term, that has dramatically changed. Did you feel, others feel, like *This isn't my skill set? This isn't something I'm ready for,* or take steps to get ready?

Bartlett: No doubt that we all came in with that viewpoint and were kind of daunted and intimidated by that whole area of responsibility, only compounded by the fact of the events of 9/11 and what that meant for us. I will say, though, that we quickly learned that politics is politics. They had different names. We had to learn the accents and the language, but politics is politics. As soon as you understand what motivated the politics in these countries, we became pretty quickly—you have to learn the history and you have to know what has happened in the past. Presidents pick up on it really quickly because it's politics.

Nelson: That's really interesting.

Bartlett: It really is. Once you get over that hump in your mind and you just start thinking about it the way you think about the dynamics of Congress or a political race or gubernatorial race. In a lot of parts that's what it comes down to. Whether it be European politics and the players there—

what is different in the Middle East is that their time horizon is a heck of a lot longer than ours. They fight their battles and stuff over centuries. They're patient in getting revenge and those things. But learning about it—his personal diplomacy, he learned the players and what makes them tick. Those political skills come in handy.

There was a learning curve, but that was kind of an a-ha moment. This isn't much different from what we're used to. It's a different cast of characters, but they're political characters.

Riley: Was the President—I'll limit the question to Afghanistan right now, given your earlier response. Was he relatively patient at this time, or was he impatient?

Bartlett: No, he was patient. Throughout most of this process, particularly in Afghanistan, later in Iraq, I was kind of wishing he would get impatient at times when he showed patience. Maybe it is that optimism that drove that patience. But in those early days I don't recall that panic button being pushed, clearly not by him or by anybody else.

Riley: How early do you recall Iraq surfacing as a subject of conversation as the follow-on to Afghanistan?

Bartlett: I know the 9/11 Report and those things said it was raised in the hours afterward in that Saturday meeting by [Paul] Wolfowitz, but that is a footnote. It doesn't start really—I remember in the first year when the Iraqis violated air space, the no-fly zone. I remember he and Blair talked about that. But it wasn't even a low-grade fever at that point, not even really thought about. I have to say it was well after the fall of Kandahar and into that next year before it starts picking up in conversation.

Riley: I was just going to ask—as this becomes a part of the conversation is there a more complicated messaging problem with Iraq than there was in Afghanistan?

Bartlett: In the sense that where you had to get the public to take a logical—I wouldn't say a far leap, but a leap—was that this was no longer about finding those who did this against us on 9/11. It had to be a strategic shift in mindset that as a country we can no longer afford to allow threats to build and emanate; we have to confront them before they show up on our shores. That's not a natural—I don't know how good we were early on about being more explicit about that as opposed to just making a definitive case around weapons of mass destruction.

Riley: Right.

Bartlett: Clearly the nexus between weapons of mass destruction and what we believed it to be was enough ties to terrorism that it should concern us as a strategic threat to the region, and ultimately, potentially to our country. From purely a communications standpoint it would be easy for me to just say we've bitten off plenty to chew on; we need to—I know this has been covered in other places. When was that moment when it was debated and decided, or was it an evolution?

It was a rolling conversation that picked up steam. But we looked at it from a communications standpoint of we're going to have to find a way to stitch these things together in a way that is not intuitive.

Nelson: Yes.

Riley: I appreciate your commenting on the process when the decision was made because it lets us know where you were. But my question to you is more one about the communications strategy and how it had evolved. There's another factor here, which is in the aftermath of 9/11 you're dealing with a very pliable public in terms of a willingness to follow Presidential leadership.

One possibility is that in the aftermath of the success in Afghanistan there is an expectation that the public will continue to follow the President, and perhaps you don't have to—that logical leap that you're talking about is not a hard logical leap for the American people to make because they're willing to follow the President wherever he leads. Is that an assumption on your part at this time, or are you genuinely concerned about how you can develop a communications strategy to convince—

Bartlett: Could we have done the same political calculus, and did we have the time to say we know we have an enormous amount of good will with the public and they're going to follow us? Sure. Did we think that was a strategy in and of itself that was sustainable? No. We thought that to be durable and for it to be sustainable that we had to have a strong rationale and political support.

Riley: Let me ask a more refined question, Mike, and then I'll turn it over to you. You've already talked about the first year and the issues with the no-fly zone. There was at least an argument to be made that the action against Saddam [Hussein] was justified, not on weapons of mass destruction, but on the fact that he was—

Bartlett: Violations.

Riley: He had violated the terms of the truce effectively. How much consideration was given to moving in that direction as opposed to the question of weapons of mass destruction?

Bartlett: I think we would be hard-pressed to take a violation of air space six or eight months prior, after the fact, and say that was the reason why we're going to go and do a regime change. Now, could that justify a limited Cruise strike? A missile strike? Maybe. But if we felt that the regime was ultimately to be held accountable, the only way to hold them accountable is to remove them. It was going to have to be stronger than just that.

Riley: OK. But the threat, the core argument that you just enunciated, which was in a post-9/11 environment you can't allow threats to materialize on the horizon might have been affixed to this other argument about continuing violations of the truce.

Bartlett: True.

Riley: It's probably not as compelling an argument as weapons of mass destruction. I'm just trying to figure out whether it was considered and rejected as not being your strongest case, or were there multiple cases being made simultaneously?

Bartlett: I think there was just—in the intellectual momentum in foreign policy circles, those

more center-right and center-left overran this notion that we were lucky that these guys used airplanes and nothing more lethal. This notion of allowing the most dangerous weapons in the world to get in the hands of the most dangerous people in the world is a combination we can't afford to do.

Riley: Sure.

Bartlett: So there was a lot of momentum around that argument, which probably naturally leads you to what we did as far as making the case.

Nelson: In the January 2002 State of the Union you have the very memorable phrase as it turned out, introduced "axis of evil," referring to Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. That may be the only thing anybody remembers about that address.

Bartlett: The irony is that if you can only appreciate how little attention it got during the speech-making process.

Nelson: That's what I want you to talk about.

Bartlett: It comes back to, I think, a speechwriter, David Frum, and others through the editing process. In the original draft it was something different, and then through the editing process it became an axis of evil. People just thought of it as a witty turn of phrase more so than what we should have understood it to be, the historical implications. With all three of those being at different stages in foreign policy and in threat analysis and to lump them together—that's one you look back over in hindsight. It was not exactly how we thought that was going to play out.

And on top of that, I don't know if the timing of it—it was this national security document that was released around the doctrine of preemption, which again, was not something that as advisors who were about to say, "This is the next layer of our strategic execution of the War on Terror. We need to put this other—" The policy people had done it and put it out there. It fills this huge vacuum around this doctrine of preemption that you're with us or you're against us.

Sometimes we're not nearly as good as we think or that people gave us credit for. Wow, they're systematically rolling these things out, the Bush Doctrine. We barely have our arms around this thing.

Nelson: When you say David Frum put it in there, do you think he put it in there thinking it had policy implications or just thought it was a ringing phrase?

Bartlett: I think more the latter. Now, were there others who thought this has implications? As I said, I don't know which is worse, the fact that we didn't catch on to it, or let somebody slip it by us. I'm of the mindset that we didn't appreciate until the hours after the speech what we had just done.

Nelson: What did you mean to say, meaning the White House?

Bartlett: All we were trying to do is articulate there are threats out there. The nexus issue between the weapons and regimes that are not by any means friendly to the United States. But

what we didn't intend to do is to try and link them together in a way that they're some sort of axis that had to be confronted collectively, much like it was in history.

I can't recall Mike Gerson's view of that as we sit here today, but I think most people were—it went right by them.

Nelson: Frum wrote that speech?

Bartlett: He didn't write it, but he had a hand in that one.

Nelson: Tell me what the speechwriting operation was like.

Bartlett: That was the State of the Union address. That probably would have been—Mike had different ways of doing it, but he may have outsourced segments of the speech. You take this—and then he'll harmonize it and things like that. I do remember Frum was involved in that one. He was primarily, though, an economic writer for us. He wrote the economic speeches. He was writing all the speeches on tax cuts and those things, which makes it even a little more bizarre that he had a hand on that section of the speech.

Nelson: Is it hard to write words for somebody else?

Bartlett: It's a gift. Actually, that's what is interesting about David. He ultimately was a short-lived member of the speechwriting team, not because he wrote "axis of evil" but because he was too strongly rooted in his own voice and not the President's voice. That's a real art; that's a real gift to be able to lift yourself out of it and write for others. Mike was particularly—the four main speechwriters for the Presidency were Mike Gerson, Matt Scully, John McConnell, and Bill McGurn. All of them had a very great ability to capture his voice.

Riley: It's interesting, particularly in some of the speeches like the inaugural address, in which I guess Gerson had a big piece—

Bartlett: I'm not going to suggest that there were times where Bush was gravitating toward Gerson's language getting in there.

Riley: That was my question. In this book that we've given you with the speechwriters, we didn't have a Bush 43 speechwriter in attendance at the time; this transpired during the course of the administration. Many of those speechwriters envied Gerson because he could get his President to deliver speeches that they felt they couldn't get their Presidents to deliver, that there was a kind of finely crafted, elevated rhetoric—I'll look to Mike to make sure I'm not overstating this—that was in some ways more finely wrought than other Presidents would have felt comfortable delivering, which is a bit confusing to those of us on the outside. This is such a plainspoken President.

Bartlett: And if you put it against the narrative of expectations—

Riley: Exactly. So can you help us understand that?

Bartlett: At a very early stage in the process back in the campaign, they really had a bond. I

think why the President always trusted Mike was that Mike was not just a good speechwriter, he was a very thoughtful policy person too, in that he knew there was a foundation below that rhetoric that was consistent with President Bush's views. It never hurts to have a real spike-it-in-the-end-zone victory early on, and I'll tell you one of the most famous, awesome phrases that he came up with was "the soft bigotry of low expectations" when describing the education debate. That's Mike's line. The feedback he got on that was Bush knew he had somebody who was really good. *OK, I'm going to trust this guy.*

Riley: Yes.

Bartlett: Early on, some of those turns of phrases during the campaign really set him apart from the pack. So there was a level of trust there that was probably rare, you're right.

Riley: Interesting.

Nelson: You replaced Karen in April of that year I guess, April of 2002? I wonder, as long as we're talking about speeches, were you as involved in writing, editing, reviewing speeches as she was at least sometimes in writing?

Bartlett: She probably did more on the writing side herself. I was more of an editor. I probably actually spent more time with the speechwriters and with idea generation and those things, what we're trying to accomplish, but she would get frustrated. She'd say, "I'll just go, let me take it, let me go do my deal." I did a lot of therapy with Mike. [*laughter*]

Riley: Do tell.

Bartlett: That's hard. Probably the most frustrating—I don't know what Mike would say—was the first State of the Union address. I don't know if it is called—

Nelson: Economic address? Something like that.

Bartlett: They worked hard on it, and at the last minute everybody, Karen and others, decided it just wasn't good enough. There was a little bit of "I can fix this, Mr. President." They went up to Camp David. I think Mike was there, but that one was a pretty bruising process. I don't know if anybody felt like—the product may have been better than what we started with, but not a whole lot better. So there was always a little bit of tension there.

I had a very different style at first, I must admit. I was not by any stretch a gifted writer. I was pretty good at knowing his voice. I knew what he liked. So I had a very heavy point of view, but most of our job, my job, was running interference for the speechwriters, with policy, Cabinet and everybody else, keeping people at bay who wanted—they'll call me and say, "I'm getting banged up by So-and-So who wants us to say this. Can you help?" A lot of that process.

Nelson: So the speech is drafted and then it's circulated.

Bartlett: Yes, the Staff Secretary.

Nelson: Everybody wants to put this in, take this out, change the word.

Bartlett: We used to have over and unders on how many drafts. Forty-three drafts. It was painful.

Riley: Did you number the drafts, or not?

Bartlett: Oh, sure.

Riley: So in the library someplace there will be—

Bartlett: Should be.

Riley: Draft number 43.

Nelson: My sense is you had a different administrative style when you took over the office than Karen had. You described her as somebody who might just go get focused on one thing for a while.

Bartlett: Yes, we probably didn't—I was such a strong deputy in her operation. I don't know how noticeable it was. But it was definitely a different style. I had a lower profile too. She was a woman. She became a personality in and of herself more so than I either aspired to or became. I did TV, I did those things, but with her television reporter background, those things, it was something she naturally gravitated toward as well. So the whole organization took a little bit of a different profile when I took over.

Nelson: What were the changes you intended to bring about when you took over?

Bartlett: I guess—

Nelson: Maybe it was just continue the job you'd done as deputy, only now with a new title?

Bartlett: Every time I got a new job my biggest test was with him. He always was pretty good about when I got a new job, more responsibility. As much as I had that bond of trust with him, he put me through my paces. I'd have a good month or so where he would second-guess everything. "Oh really? You sure you want to? I'm testing you. We're putting you in a new job here. If you're going to do it—"

OK, am I going to stand my ground? He's going to push back a little more. I remember on more than one occasion throughout my career with him he would put me through my paces. But I do remember trying to make a concerted effort. Every White House deals with a disgruntled Cabinet. They don't get enough attention on that. I do remember going and having lunch with the Secretary [Elaine] Chao at the Department of Labor and trying to do outreach and make sure they think they have a voice going to Capitol Hill. That was another thing. They didn't feel they were listened to when I took over. I went up there quite a bit meeting with the leadership and those who were charged with message up there.

That's not to say that Karen was bad—just trying to reinforce some of that stuff. The shift came at a pretty important time. We had Iraq on the horizon and those things. Some of it was just trying to keep your head above things. A lot of us were operating that way.

Riley: Was her presence missed in ways in the White House? Not in terms of the formal job that she was performing, but more in terms of what she provided the President.

Bartlett: I probably felt, *Was the communications organization going to lose a strong voice at the table? Would I be able to be as effective as she was at times?* Sometimes she did it a little more bluntly, so in some ways my style was easier for people. But I was conscious to make sure we didn't lose any firepower either, because she was a force to be reckoned with. But net/net I think because she and I were so close and so seamless when we operated together, that people didn't view a big drop off, I hope. She was still—we made sure that she stayed involved on the periphery.

I'm trying to think of others on the Iraq issue. There was a bunch still there I guess. There were the 16 words in that State of the Union address, again a situation where looking back on it we had no appreciation at the time we were writing that part of the speech and all the fallout from that. There is a strong view to this day of people who would say the mistake was to ever disavow the 16 words when we did and how we did it. If you talk to people in—I'm trying to remember that speech. The British never backed down. It was their intelligence that we were leaning on. But I remember Condi coming back that morning before he left for Africa saying that we were going to lose the Agency entirely if we didn't recant the 16 words. That really became the impetus for us doing that at that time.

Nelson: How could you have held onto those words then? How could you continue to defend them if the CIA is going to back away from them? Realistically, did you have a choice there?

Bartlett: Some argued that the British were not backing off, that there was a disagreement. So there were people who were saying, "That's their advice. You don't have to take it."

Riley: Because the language itself was precise.

Bartlett: Correct.

Riley: There was a source cited, which in and of itself suggests an attention to detail in the issuance. But the costs were that you were asked by people to not do it?

Bartlett: Then we have Secretary Powell going before the United Nations and making his case. I sat over at the CIA with his team for two days as we vetted that speech. I know there was—always from our critics—a narrative pushed that we were purposefully trying to push the envelope, manipulation of the facts to try and get the outcome we wanted. It just wasn't the case, the way that the process played out.

I do remember vividly a meeting in the Situation Room that may have been on a Saturday morning with Scooter Libby, which had a presentation of the evidence. I remember all of us being entirely underwhelmed by it. *Really?* Gerson was in that meeting, myself. I think Karl was. I think Karen was there too, if I recall correctly. It really started raising questions, and that's when that famous—Tenet circles back and says, "No, Mr. President. This is a slam dunk."

Nelson: Some time in 2002, I guess, Bob Woodward's first book about Bush—the first of four, right?

Bartlett: He spent a lot of time with him, yes.

Nelson: I was going to say, and it was a very positive book.

Bartlett: The first one, yes.

Nelson: How did you all decide to cooperate with him?

Bartlett: We had enough old hands around who knew the process of a Woodward book, and that access gave you the best shot at shaping the narrative. What we always held out was whether Bush was going to play. We always held that to the very end to help him behave. Hadley and I were really the ones who tended that narrative the most and shepherded him through that process.

Riley: Is that right? But you said the old hands. Were you talking about Andy or—

Bartlett: Yes. Powell and Rumsfeld, all those.

Riley: They all say—

Bartlett: They all knew.

Riley: So Woodward is holding you hostage, right?

Bartlett: Of course. And he has—

Riley: He used to be on the Miller Center's governing council.

Bartlett: He has a whole process. He invites you over to his town home in Georgetown, this beautiful home that he has "mic'd up" [with a microphone] so you can sit there and have lunch. He says, "Don't worry, it's recording."

Riley: He has it "mic'd up?"

Bartlett: Yes, he tells you. "Let's talk, Dan." The classic thing that he does is he overwhelms you with data points. "I know at this point this was said." It just gets to the point you're like, *OK, I'll say uncle. I'll give. I'll tell you. I'll connect these dots for you.* We decided early on it was probably better to engage.

Riley: OK.

Bartlett: In one of those books I think we backed off some and didn't—the one after Iraq, going into the '04 reelect, was a challenging one. So we did a little bit of a jujitsu. We knew it was not an entirely favorable book, but we told everybody we bought it and put it on our campaign website and said it's a great book. Everybody is like, "Whoa. I thought it was bad." "No, we think it's great." It kind of worked. It was amazing that it worked. We almost tricked the press into thinking maybe it's not all that bad.

Nelson: That was the second book.

Bartlett: Right. *The Plan of Attack* was the name of it.

Nelson: The first one was *Bush at War*.

Bartlett: The second one was *Plan of Attack*, yes.

Nelson: This sounds like you're not just telling people on your own to talk to Woodward.

Bartlett: This was a very orchestrated, allied conversation.

Nelson: Tracing up to—

Bartlett: The boss.

Nelson: The President?

Bartlett: Absolutely. You don't decide to engage with Woodward unless everybody is on board. Bush would say, "You and Hadley shepherd this process and we'll decide later whether I'm going to participate."

Nelson: You say you sort of held out an interview with Bush to keep him—

Bartlett: As much as we could—

Nelson: You don't know what he's going to write, though.

Bartlett: No, of course not.

Nelson: Were you monitoring how this was going, what documents does he have, what he's asking? Are you giving him documents?

Bartlett: We did on occasion. We verified things. We would fact check for him. It was an intense relationship.

Riley: That's quite a racket the guy has, isn't it? You're nodding.

Bartlett: It's been criticized.

Riley: Oh, I know it's been criticized.

Bartlett: Absolutely. You think about just the man-hours and time, distraction, for major decision makers in government. Let me just tell you anybody who tells you that they were not preoccupied by a Bob Woodward book is lying to you. They all were majorly focused on what Woodward was up to and what he was going to write, to a person. Anybody who suggests otherwise is not being honest.

Nelson: Did anybody refuse to talk to him?

Bartlett: Dick Cheney did later. He participated in the first ones. There were probably people

who did. Rumsfeld would grumble, but even if he told us he wouldn't talk to him, I knew he was, or he'd have his guys talking to him.

Nelson: I can't imagine a more effective communication strategy, though, than if you know the book is going to be written to have this objective, hard-hitting investigative reporter write a validating account of what you're doing.

Bartlett: No doubt. We had a pretty positive narrative for the first—it was when the narrative didn't go so positive that it could be pretty harsh.

Riley: The next logical question is, does he get it right?

Bartlett: He gets a lot of the facts right. Some of the conclusions that he draws about the people I think he has missed on. I'd have to go back and really think about it to give you examples of that. He does come in with a pretty hard view of what he wants to get out of it.

Riley: Right.

Bartlett: It's not like he comes in with an entirely open mind. He has his own biases, as you would think.

Riley: Sure.

Bartlett: But you could persuade him; you could open his mind. Most times, if we felt like there was definitely—we were able to help shape it. I will say on *Plan of Attack* we were convinced at the end of the process that we knew it was going to be bad. We didn't want to validate it with Bush participating in it, and he got really mad. You could even tell. It was almost like he had written the book leaving places open. He just hammers the President in the end, and I took him to task. I said, "Bob, I know this is you pouting." We had these epic conversations. He and I turned out to be very good friends.

I'll never forget, after I announced that I was going to leave the White House, I said, "I'll come talk to you, get your advice. I don't know what I'm going to do." So I'm over at his house having lunch about staying in Washington. He said, "Dan, there's something about this town that after a while it kind of takes a part of your soul." I'm sitting there and this is Mr. Washington himself telling me this. I'm thinking, *Wow, pretty interesting.* It was one that stuck with me.

Hank Paulson was the other one. I was getting his advice. I thought a lot of people leaving government go the investment banking route. Or should I stay in Washington? He worked in the [Gerald] Ford administration.

He said, "Look, I felt it very important to leave Washington and go do something." I was very reluctant to be one of those what I call hangers-on, "I was in Bush 41—" They're a dime a dozen running around. You could probably pick five off the street in the next 10 minutes. I was *not* going to be one of those guys.

So anyway, the whole thing about WMD in Iraq was hard. It took its toll, but not nearly as much as—and we had the [Charles] Duelfer Report. We had those things we were dealing with, but it

really was the insurgency and the increased loss of U.S. lives over there that—that's why I was saying I hoped we, that the President, would be more impatient about what was going on.

Looking at charts you can justify one way or the other as far as levels of violence and this and metrics we were using to try and gauge our progress. Really just couldn't push back and see the forest for the trees here, that it just wasn't working. There were a lot of things, the shoulda, woulda, coulda aspects to the actual military operation. I think, and I've spoken to the President about this, that probably the most harmful development on the eve of the war was the opposition from the Turks, of shutting down Turkey.

I remember the President talking to the generals, Tommy Franks and the others—and this was different, much different in the Iraq situation than it was in Afghanistan. I sat in on almost every one of the meetings, where I didn't as much the first time around, Afghanistan.

Riley: Right.

Bartlett: I remember Tommy Franks saying, "Hey, it's going to be tougher, but we got it. Don't worry about that. Does it make it more complicated? Yes." But essentially we left the proverbial back door open into the Sunni strongholds in that way because we had to all come up through the south. We had no way to really come off the north and just allow them all to literally slip out the back door, complicating everything.

Riley: Was that a failure of diplomacy?

Bartlett: Don't say that to Powell. I don't know. It's hard. The politics for the Turks were tough.

Riley: Sure.

Bartlett: Could you call it? Obviously it was a failure. Who deserves the blame for that? Hard for me to tell, but clearly it was a critical component to the overall military strategy and it was rationalized at the time, but I think in looking back it was more harming than we could ever appreciate.

Riley: I also wanted to go back and ask you—you made a passing reference to accompanying Secretary Powell to the CIA headquarters to do his—can you tell us about that? Can you talk about what was going on in that meeting and the dynamics?

Bartlett: There was zero tension. It was a very collaborative effort in which everybody around the table was doing our level best. We would take it line by line. I'm going to say this; let's punch holes in it. It truly was a process that should make people proud because it was State Department, CIA, White House, all involved.

Riley: How many people were at the table?

Bartlett: Half a dozen or so. It was depending on the areas we were talking about. So it would be the core group of—I forget who Powell's speechwriters were at the time. Myself, and then they would bring experts in as needed. Tenet is coming in and out of the meeting. John McLaughlin was really—the number two guy at the CIA was at the table the entire time. Like I

said, he was adamant, as he has said publicly, that he wasn't going to stand up without having the absolute endorsement of the Agency.

Riley: Of course.

Bartlett: They viewed that as a welcoming process. So it was a very collaborative. It was one of my prouder moments—this sounds corny—this is how government should work. It was good.

Riley: Did some stuff get thrown out?

Bartlett: Oh sure. It's not about throwing out, it's just that's not as strong as this. It's not right.

Riley: I don't mean "thrown out." Some stuff is discarded from the speech because it doesn't stand up to scrutiny in the way that something else does. Is that it?

Bartlett: Right, or the sourcing. One of the things we were very—even President Bush—we really pushed to make sure that we could have a source for almost every position as opposed to just saying, "U.S. intelligence says," or asserting something as opposed to explaining the sourcing of it. That was both for the State of the Union address and for his—but it was a very laborious process.

So again, that comes back to you don't have a process like that if there is a vast conspiracy in the government to mislead the public to go to war. It's just crazy. But there are a lot of people in our country who really believe that.

Riley: I'm showing the limits of my recollection. The yellowcake claim was vetted in this session as well, or not? The 16-word claim or—

Bartlett: No, that was previous. That was one in which—

Riley: That had already been discarded by the time we come to this event?

Bartlett: That was used in the State of the Union address and process in which the CIA admits that they failed in their vetting of that. We, Hadley, tried to take the fall. What we ended up doing, again, we sourced British intelligence. This was the whole thing of that. We as speechwriters—I was one—we were saying, "I want to be able to cite," because the first draft of the speech just asserted these claims. I said no, and Karen was strong. We both said, "How do we know? What does this satellite photo show? Or British intelligence?"

This is where we came with that. It went through the CIA vetting process. After the fact we learned that that probably wasn't the best process that was followed. But again, that got back to, Why is the CIA recanting something the British intelligence is standing by? That's where the tension got between the two. Those who support Scooter Libby and the whole situation would argue today that had we just supported our strongest allies' intelligence operation and cited something that they were standing by, we'd have never gotten in the situation where Scooter Libby lied to the government, which he did.

Riley: Let's call it a day.

Nelson: I think we know we have enough time tomorrow morning to cover the things that are left and anything you might think of overnight. This isn't a deposition where you just respond to us.

Bartlett: I've been through that. [*laughter*] I will say, and we'll get into it tomorrow, of all the things I dealt with nothing compares to going before that grand jury during that leak investigation.

Riley: Oh, boy.

Bartlett: The most gut-wrenching process anybody would go through. The fact that Karl went through it, I think, four times is—I can't even fathom it. I went twice, and I don't wish it on my worst enemy. The whole dynamic around that—they're expecting—the one thing that makes it very difficult is that you have the prosecutors who are thoroughbred prosecutors, they're trying to drive to an outcome. That's what they're trained to do. You have a grand jury of D.C. citizens—

Riley: People walking around the street.

Bartlett: Yes, and no appreciation for the pace and level that ranking White House officials play at. I'm sitting there trying to explain why I don't remember the conversation on Air Force One with Secretary of State Colin Powell and they're all looking at me like, *Yeah, right, pal. It's the Secretary, it's Colin Powell and you don't remember?* You don't understand. The guy never shut up. Or, "You don't remember a conversation with Tim Russert?" I talked to Tim Russert five times a day every day it seemed. The volume—"You don't remember from 18 months ago this conversation on Friday afternoon?" *Really? I mean you really expect us?* These prosecutors would look at you like you're such a liar. And then you start second-guessing your own memory. It was not a fun process.

Nelson: And honestly, the grand jury is not a cross section of D.C. residents.

Bartlett: No, it's people who have time.

Nelson: They're government employees, they're retirees.

Riley: I lived in D.C. for a while and was summoned to serve on a grand jury, which terrified me because it is an open-ended, long-term commitment. So I show up thinking, *How the hell am I going to get out of this?* Fortunately at some point somebody comes to the front of the room and says, "We're short on service for a regular jury. If you'll subject yourself to this, then you'll get out of—"

What I came to understand from the people in the room was grand jury was like hitting the lottery. Everybody in that room wanted to be on a grand jury because you get paid over an extended period of time—

Bartlett: The government doesn't pay for your legal counsel, so all of us are digging into our own pockets to pay for this stuff. I remember my lawyer telling me before I went in, he said, "Now, the good thing—I can't be in there with you, but if you ever have a question you're

allowed to stop the proceeding and come out and talk to me and ask questions." The first 15 minutes I stopped the proceeding five times. He said, "I didn't want you to stop it this many times. This is not a good development." [*laughter*]

You meet with them before you go in and they give you a sense for where they're—they start throwing things out of left field, email that I hadn't seen and this and that. I didn't sleep at night. Then you have your day job, where you have real things going on. I don't know how Karl functioned. We were pretty convinced he was going to get indicted. There were a lot of difficult conversations with the President. Andy Card and I had to get special permission from the Special Prosecutor—we were not supposed to talk to anybody about the investigation. We had to get special permission. I said, "I have to advise the—" I told him, [Patrick] Fitzgerald. I said, "If you indict one of his senior aides, I have to be able to advise him. We can't just make this up instantly."

So he said, "OK, you and Andy—" There were only two of us, we were allowed to discuss, and I talked a lot with the President's personal lawyer about the different scenarios and those things so we could plan for a Libby indictment. I'll never forget, I was on my way to Texas. My family was already down there. I think it was over some holiday; it may have been Thanksgiving or something. I remember I flew from Reagan International down to Houston. I had to make a connection. I get off the plane and my phone just was blowing up with messages and all that. Four messages from my lawyer.

There was a big story out of Mike Isikoff in *Newsweek* that four indictments were imminent. I'm sitting there going, *OK, Scooter, Karl—am I going to be one of these?* I'll never forget. My hand is shaking. I can barely dial my lawyer's number, shaking, thinking he's telling me that you're going to be served and indicted. He called to tell me the story was wrong and that you're not going to—don't worry. There are moments like that. Good Lord.

Nelson: Ain't public service great!?

Bartlett: And you wonder why people don't want to.

Riley: At least there was no Special Prosecutor along.

Bartlett: I think it was $25,000 out of my pocket. I don't even want to know what Karl spent.

Riley: He made the same claim, as I recall, "You don't want to know." I'm sure it was awful.

Bartlett: His was in the hundreds of thousands.

Riley: The time has flown for us.

Bartlett: Me too. It actually has. Some kind of walk down memory lane.

Riley: We'll meet back here at 9:00 in the morning. Is that good for you?

January 31, 2014

Riley: We're on day two with Dan Bartlett. We've been talking over what we might talk about. Should I start with my big question? It's about George W. Bush and press relations in general, his relationship with the press. I'd like to go back to Texas and get you to reflect a little bit on what his relationship with the press was like in Texas, however you want to define it. If you want to make a distinction between print and visual media, that would be terrific. But it has become an important topic about the Presidency in general and this one in particular. So it would be good to have a baseline understanding of what his press relations were like in Texas, if you could track through the campaigns and how that evolved over time. I'm giving you a very open-ended topic. We could easily talk three hours about this.

Bartlett: Right. I think it is an important topic. You start with the baseline of his entry into statewide politics, running for Governor when not only are you in a contest against a nationally recognized and very entertaining opponent in Ann Richards. She was somebody who also enjoyed very good press relationships in the state.

Having said that, I mentioned in our previous conversation about a strategy that afforded George W. Bush to get his sea legs maybe out in some of the smaller markets. But I would say there was also a concerted effort to introduce him to and develop relationships with some of the key political reporters in the bigger markets as well, in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Austin.

I think across the board we had very good relationships with the press. One of the real challenges for a lot of Governors who end up running for President is that the jump from a state house press corps—it varies from state to state, but it has more mature and aggressive political press corps. But in large part I would say we had a very—Karen deserves a lot of credit for setting a tone of accessibility.

One of the real mantras that began in his days in Texas and then what we attempted to replicate to a certain extent here in Washington was based on this premise, that if we allow a reporter to cover the Governor's office or the White House and not George W. Bush, the person, that is to our own detriment. Our greatest asset was him. Much like when we talked about the different perception you get after you spend some intimate time with him in a more intimate setting. He is a very likable person. If you tend to like somebody, you're not instinctively going to be harsh against somebody.

It became a real asset in that first Presidential campaign juxtaposing against Al Gore, who had a very difficult relationship with his press corps. My job essentially during the Presidential campaign was to establish good, trusting relationships with the reporters who were on Al Gore's airplane, not ours. I knew their reporters in some respects better than—I was trying to get into their bylines and their stories, shaping theirs. So I spent a lot of time with them on the phone and in many cases in person. They really did not have access or respect or any sort of relationship with the Vice President.

In contrast, particularly in those early months, George W. Bush forged some important relationships with some key reporters, like at the time Frank Bruni at the *New York Times* who

was covering us; Ron Fournier of the Associated Press; David Gregory; Campbell Brown at NBC News; an off-air reporter for ABC news who is now on air, John Berman; Candy Crowley. There were about eight to ten reporters who were covering us, Dan Balz, the *Washington Post*. We really cultivated some good relationships that paid dividends at different points along the way in the Presidency.

Then to have all of those core reporters become part of the White House press corps, Judy Keen of *USA Today*. That became really critical to us when there were some serious inflection points in the early days of the Presidency. There were people who knew him, and really what you're looking for, and I say this a lot in my corporate life now when you talk to CEOs, or if it is a President. Every political candidate or officeholder or CEO is going to face a crisis. It's inevitable. The question is when that moment comes what you're really looking for more than anything else is the benefit of the doubt. You don't want people to rush to judgment and to the wrong judgments.

People can't do that unless they know you and have an understanding, have context to give you that. You have to have a license; you have to earn that right to have the benefit of the doubt. In politics that comes through—I wanted the Tim Russerts of the world or the David Gregorys to pause before they rush to judgment. That comes through building personal relationships.

We had a lot of ambition to maintain and grow that strategy during the Presidency. Frankly, it is really hard to pull off. I would say that every White House goes through it. You try to find ways to make accessibility; there is a lot of tension around Presidents in the past. There were all stories about how John [F.] Kennedy would kick back a cocktail off the record with reporters. The same being for 41 or President Reagan. The ability to—and talking stories, who was it? *U.S. News and World Report*? They did a book on Air Force One.

Nelson: Ken Walsh.

Bartlett: Ken Walsh has done some books about that. He told a great story about LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson] flying out to California for a fundraising trip. He had the first Air Force One with a shower on it. He had a couple of reporters in the front of the plane and he comes out buck naked drying off and basically told the boys, "You know, this trip is off the record," meaning whatever I do out in California is off the record. They're all kind of—"Yes, as long as you give us some stuff to write about on the way back, we'll be fine."

Those days are so long gone, complicated by the fact of what I said. Every major traditional news publication was creating their own blogging platform. There was a big tension in the White House about White House access and badges for White House bloggers. How do you define a reporter now? We tried to push that back on the news organization. That's not our problem, that's *your* problem. The *Washington Post* gets three badges. You decide who it is. Things like that.

So the ability to develop those relationships, and then there is the natural turnover of journalists, so you're having to push the reset button and you just can't re-create the types of relationship building that happened out on the campaign trail and in the Governor's—in the state house and those things. It was a real challenge. There's no doubt that—you can imagine the levels of

frustration, tension, that is just natural for any relationship between the highest level of government and the media. Ours was even more complicated with the situation like with the *New York Times* around the leaks and around things that we felt from a national security standpoint were damaging the country.

So if you can imagine me sitting in the Oval Office and the Vice President is saying, "We need to sue the *New York Times*." OK, so it's kind of like the secret task force. Even if we won we would have lost. We benefited early in his political career and we benefited probably in '04, again a situation where even with all that had happened in that first term, I think that net/net we had a better personal relationship with reporters than probably John Kerry did. But over time that became very difficult.

Then came this entire debate that was leveled more against the White House press corps and this notion did they do their jobs in the run-up to the Iraq War. Did they ask the right questions? Some of those reporters hate when I defend them because this wasn't a matter of not asking the right questions. This was a matter of a failure of intelligence. They asked the questions and we gave the best answers we had at the time. Could they have asked them in a different way and they would have unearthed flawed intelligence on behalf of the country? No. It took Presidential missions and bipartisan effort to dig into—the Duelfer Report, all those things, to truly understand where the failure was.

To suggest that—but anyway they held that burden now of defending themselves, and the defensiveness, which I know they took out on us later. Not purposely, but just human nature. So when things happened later, like Katrina and those things, I know it was a pent-up demand to prove that they could be tough. That's not to say that we didn't deserve tough scrutiny during Katrina or other things like that. It's just there was that added context from the first term. Does that give you some idea?

Riley: Sure. Did the President like dealing with reporters, or not? Was it a case-by-case basis?

Bartlett: Some. He had a lot of respect for those who took the job seriously. I know that's a throwaway line. You could argue that they all take the job seriously. Those who are serious about being fair, being tough. The one thing about Tim Russert, for example, with whom I developed a great relationship, as did the President, we knew that the one thing you could count on was that he was going to be tough on everybody. Did we always like what he did to us? No. But we knew the next guy was going to get it too. So there was a consistency of expectations.

Thoughtful reporters like Dan Balz may not believe everything you're giving him, but he'll give you an opportunity to make your case. Others may not follow that same tack. You know, we're doing this at the time when journalism is radically changing and pressure is put on. The President understood that. He didn't have a lot of patience for it, but he understood it, and there was some history as well.

You have to remember that during that Presidential run by his father, *Newsweek* and the wimp factor, and those things. There's a background there too. He thought the press was deeply unfair to his father. There is no doubt that that—so his level of skepticism and distrust was at a high level, but he understood strategically the value—it's different now. At least some politicians are

attempting—because of the democratization of information and the accessibility to communicate has so radically changed, people are attempting to do it outside the traditional means.

I don't think we're at a point where you can sustain success without dealing with traditional media. Particularly what was a lesson for me to learn very early on was the intricate and integral relationship between several of the national print organizations and television networks, particularly the *New York Times,* particularly on foreign policy, the *Washington Post* on political stories. The *Wall Street Journal* sometimes. But I'll tell you just for an example, the *New York Times* would be a big story on the campaign in which it was coming after us on an issue. They would post it online the night before. It would always be around nine o'clock central time, ten o'clock East Coast time. I could set my clock to within three minutes of it posting online that the *Today Show,* the *Early Show* and *GMA* [*Good Morning America*] were calling to say can you put somebody on to respond to the *New York Times*?

Their ability to shape the narrative for 30 million Americans every morning was substantial, and I think it still is. Less so, but still substantial. You ignore that at your own peril. I always tell that, so it's not an either/or proposition, and we tried to approach it that way in the White House, that you had to do both. Politicians today are testing the waters of doing just one, not both; I don't think we're there yet.

Nelson: You talked about bloggers associated with news organizations. What about something that came along while you were in office, the *Drudge Report* and other website-based new media where there was no affiliation with an established organization that had x number of passes?

Bartlett: They were a driving force, they were instrumental in, I think, our early defeat of immigration reform. We tactically had to adjust and we would on regular occasions invite them in, conservative bloggers to the White House. Not Matt Drudge, but platforms like that to help as much as possible.

I talked about the story yesterday of having our own bloggers, but we would invite those personalities in to attempt to shape the narrative to a certain extent and develop relationships, which drove the traditional press crazy. "Why are they—?" They didn't recognize them; they'd see them coming in the White House. "Why can't we have that access?" As we did with columnists who were straddling both platforms, new and old.

We'd take them over to the Residence, have coffee and do those things. Net/net those were still beneficial. It was not as easy as it probably was back in the day, but we tried to adapt to the changing landscape, maybe not as quickly, because I told you that risk aversion is just the institution of the White House. But we tried hard.

Nelson: Part of your operation was an office or a unit dealing with local and regional media.

Bartlett: Correct. And I say not only local and regional media. I would say one of the things that skews to benefit more Republican candidates than Democratic candidates was talk radio with a massive, almost—I don't want to use the words "stealth like," but under-the-radar-screen radio strategy. I spent three out of five days a week on talk radio, regional, conservative, just seven-minute hits here and there. We had talk radio days on a couple of occasions. We set up a big tent on the White House lawn and let them broadcast live from the White House.

I still get notes from commentators and from some of these regional players who just love—that has gone away, obviously. They still talk about it and their affinity for President Bush for doing those things. I think people know with [Sean] Hannity and all the others it's a very powerful platform. We leveraged it to its fullest extent, probably more so than any other President. I feel like we really leveraged it.

Nelson: This isn't your job to know the answer to, but why do you think talk radio is so overwhelmingly conservative? Why hasn't there been an audience for liberal talk radio?

Bartlett: You know, I think some of it is geographic and cultural in the sense of conservatives are located in the flyover states where you're sitting in cars for a lot longer doing commutes, doing things like that, where they're just more likely to be on the radio, where in urban areas you're on public transit, you're doing different things. I think there's some of that. But it's kind of a riddle. There have been several attempts on the left, and every one of them has failed. It's hard to think it skews older and the listening base does. I think if you look at the demographics of both ends of the ideological spectrum that theirs skews younger, which is a challenge for conservatives. I don't have all the answers for that.

Nelson: Nobody does. But it's a subject of curiosity, I think.

Riley: Press conferences.

Bartlett: Oh, yes.

Riley: Not a lot of press conferences?

Bartlett: Our strategy on press conferences was to do the bare minimum. What would pass this bill the best? The reason was not that he didn't want to talk to the press; he wasn't good at it. So if you're sitting there and have to devise a strategy, why would you pick a format in which your guy doesn't do well? But we knew as the institution you had to do them. We were constantly measuring ourselves about what would be a credible amount of press conference that we could get away with.

Riley: How do you calibrate that? Do you look at history?

Bartlett: Oh, yes. If we weren't tracking it, we knew that what's his name, the CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] radio guy—he keeps every statistic. Beard, big guy.

Riley: Somebody's going to be watching him.

Bartlett: We had a number of availabilities. They got it down to how many pool sprays in the Oval Office. We knew how many he had done in the East Room; it is a closely watched metric either by us or by others.

Nelson: Given that George Bush is so good at give-and-take in one kind of setting, what made press conferences a weakness for him?

Bartlett: Again, the stakes are higher, and it's the Governor. I don't want to paint with too broad

of a brush. He had some very successful press conferences where he did quite well, but net/net it was not his—he didn't like them. No President likes them. He was very much of the mindset—he was not somebody who could fake it very well.

So look, it was like a trip to the dentist. On the way out it wasn't that bad. I remember having that conversation after most of them. As isn't always the case, he did more in the second term than he did the first term, I believe. Statistics will prove that because you're somewhat liberated by *I don't have to run again, so if I make a mistake, ultimately it's not going to hurt*. So we tried to find other venues. I think we did one-on-one interviews and things. So people couldn't argue that we weren't out in the public or being asked the questions.

But it definitely was a defensive strategy. If you look at the current President, they're not doing very many either. In ability to shape the narrative and to push an agenda, I think it's always been overstated to a certain extent. I think it's increasingly not effective. So the press conference really serves one purpose now, and one purpose only, and that is public accountability. It's an important one. It should. This is the opportunity for the President to be—we don't have question time like the Prime Minister does, or those things, so I totally understand and value that role. But as a communications person, and I'm looking at the tools in the toolbox to help, that is not a very effective one, even if my guy was really good at it, because the press controls what they want to talk about. That gets back to what I said about—

Riley: You've already touched on this a little bit, but your preferences then would be—in lieu of the press conference. Somebody comes to you and says, "Look, the guy is not doing enough press conferences" Your response is you're doing what? What are the other things that you're doing to substitute for that?

Bartlett: Individual interviews, those types of things. We did a lot more of the impromptu pools type things. He always talked about it, and they all do. The press conference becomes more about the reporters than it does about the President. "He said no, David." We used to just laugh about it. Are they all primping over there now? Is David Gregory getting his hair just right? Almost in every case we totally predicted every question and who would ask them. That's the irony. They're very predictable. The whole pomp and circumstance around it he just mocked. Every President does. So it's the whole process of it that just—it's an eye roller, which diminishes its real purpose, which is the public accountability.

I don't know how that—in particular if you go in with technology. We did. I know this White House is letting regular Americans ask questions and answer them online, which we did. It's not nearly the same because you can filter questions and you can sit there and think about your response and type it in. It will be interesting to see how the Presidential press conference continues to evolve with future administrations.

Nelson: What about global media, which was another unit in the operation? I'm thinking in particular when President Bush is trying to build a large coalition of the willing or in other ways get the support of other countries. Had you all built the same kind of relationship with international media that made those requests when he needed them fall on fertile soil? I know it's not the media that decide what Spain is going to do, but—

Bartlett: As much as we were disgusted with the *New York Times,* the European media made them look like child's play, particularly when it came to George W. Bush. We had pretty low expectations. We developed some individual relations with David Frost in the UK [United Kingdom], a couple of platforms in Germany and even in France that we would take advantage of. But it was a cut-your-losses type approach. We were not going to be able to move the needle. We would exacerbate the problem by engaging with them more than we would fix it. We had good relations with the *FT* [*Financial Times*] and people who had correspondents here on a regular basis.

We'd do some media around Presidential trips to the regions, but the ROI [return on investment] was so low that it didn't get a lot of attention from us, to be honest. I had a group that monitored it and focused on it and tried to corral it and worked with the State Department and all that, but we had very low expectations.

Nelson: Are we ready for 2004?

Riley: No, we're not. I have another couple of questions about this. You mentioned the *New York Times* situation with some of the sensitive programs. That came up more than once during the course of the administration.

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: I wonder if you could back up, and this might be a good place for us to dig in a little bit, because those were kind of important episodes. Do you have recollections about your interactions with them on these occasions when they're contemplating publishing things that you believe are damaging to national security? Then there are these meetings in the White House with senior officials with the President I think trying to talk them out of—

Bartlett: Yes, literally the President.

Riley: Right. My recollection is succeeding in one instance—

Bartlett: And not in others.

Riley: You're nodding that that's right.

Bartlett: Yes, and so there was a considerable amount of conversation and debate about at what level of government—how do we escalate.

Riley: How does this come to you? Do they come to you and say, "This is what we're thinking about publishing"?

Bartlett: Yes. They give you an opportunity to respond. We knew, whether the story was emanating out of somebody covering Langley or whether it was—they would coordinate through the White House or some combination thereof. Quickly it would escalate to either our managing editor or others, then ultimately to [Arthur] Sulzberger [Jr.] himself and to where lawyers were involved. It is a very intense, firm, direct conversation. It's not confrontational, not shouting or anything like that, but we would share things in an attempt to—we had to declassify some things

just to demonstrate that we were not trying to hide, to persuade them not to give other things. We tried every tactic in the book. If you don't do this, we'll give you something else.

What it always came down to, the crux of the matter is they were saying you just don't want to be embarrassed by this going public, but what is our obligation when it comes to protecting national security? Usually we were more successful when we could give a compelling example or narrative in which American lives would be at risk, assets on the ground, either human intelligence, CIA assets, or military assets or some combination of both.

If it were just, "This is going to make it harder for us to do our job," that didn't resonate as much. So I would always, understanding what would work and what wouldn't, work with my counterparts in the agencies. They knew that too. [Bill] Harlow I think was his name, longtime spokesman at the CIA—we would only be successful if we could demonstrate that U.S. lives would be at risk.

Riley: These episodes I'm assuming must have involved some considerable back-and-forth.

Bartlett: Several weeks. We're talking multiple conversations within the White House at the highest levels. Typically what would happen is the structure of our day was always the President would have his intelligence briefing first thing in the morning, usually at 7:30. Bob Mueller, George Tenet, the principals themselves would be there with the CIA briefer, the Vice President, National Security Advisor and Chief of Staff.

Then on the heels of that I would be brought in to say, "OK, the things that they're looking at, is there anything that requires me to be brought into the loop?" Then after that we would have, for lack of a word, a message, a political meeting in which Karl and a few others would participate—Josh Bolten when he was doing domestic policy or Deputy Chief of Staff.

It would be in that format we would say what are we going to do about the *New York Times* and what are we going to do about this? We would have all the players there, all the principals there to have that conversation. That would happen multiple times during a three-week period or so. The *Times* never ambushed us and said, "We're printing this in an hour" type thing. It was a pretty protracted negotiation.

Riley: Then it would get escalated to the point where it was deemed necessary for the President himself to make an appeal to the publisher?

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: So there is considerable back-and-forth over a protracted period.

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: Then it is decided that the President himself needs to make the case to the senior leadership of the newspaper.

Bartlett: Correct.

Riley: Do you have specific recollections of these meetings? Are you present in these?

Bartlett: I was in some and not in others. Sometimes as a tactic we would say, "I'm not even going to let my communications people in, this is so sensitive." We tried everything. He would kick off the meeting and say, "I've asked the Director of the CIA to walk you through this. I just want you to know on my behalf the importance that we put on the risks to national security that we think is severe." So the tone is set. Then they would go to the Situation Room or wherever to do a fuller debrief.

Riley: OK.

Bartlett: We had mixed success.

Riley: Do you remember roughly how often these meetings took place?

Bartlett: With him I can only recall two or three where he was directly involved.

Riley: The public record I think indicates that, but I didn't know if there might be other instances of cases where things haven't become public yet.

Nelson: So there was at least one occasion when the President directly requested that something not be printed?

Bartlett: At least two or three occasions.

Nelson: And the result was that it was printed?

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: I can't remember which of the programs it was. Did you have the highest level of security clearance?

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: Throughout? From Day One?

Bartlett: Yes. Now, when the surveillance programs—I had the highest level, but there are compartmentalized programs. So I had to be brought in on several of those. I went over to the Agency, was fully briefed, and even saw videos of interrogations of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, talked to the interrogators in person, the people who actually did it. Two Justice Department officials, lawyers, were waterboarded, which I witnessed.

Riley: The purpose of your witnessing this was?

Bartlett: Interest.

Riley: This is when you're trying to develop a public case for this being an acceptable—

Bartlett: Right. Part of that was what type of rigor was behind the legal analysis interagency,

and they just opened inside and said we're going to actually go through this. I just said, "Could I come? I want to see this." Out of just pure fascination. It was remarkable to see somebody going through a process which they absolutely knew that the outcome was not going to be their death, they knew the purpose of it, and they still couldn't withstand it for more than 20 seconds. It's amazing to watch.

Riley: Sure.

Bartlett: Then to see the videos, particularly of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was a collegiate swimmer, had an unbelievable ability to hold his breath, and he would go minutes and just come up laughing. There were others that would break like that [snapping fingers].

Riley: Those tapes were preserved? Or were those among the ones that [José A.] Rodriguez [Jr.] had destroyed later?

Bartlett: I don't know how many are still in existence. I know that somewhere—

Riley: OK. Do you have any recollections of the episode at the Justice Department when the legal approval of some of these programs was retracted when John Ashcroft was in the hospital?

Bartlett: In real time, I do remember, it was a little bit after the fact, like the next day, where they had gone over to the hospital and did what they did. I just remember being in Andy Card's office with this incredulous, *Really?*

Riley: Andy is telling you what had happened?

Bartlett: Yes.

Nelson: And the incredulousness was about what these folks had done going over there?

Bartlett: Yes. I remember President Bush telling me about the conversation he had with Jim Comey when he attempted to resign. Those were very difficult times. It got close to being a real problem. Obviously the right result came, which was there was more extended negotiation and compromise. I just remember the Comey incident. Nobody was proud of how that all unfolded.

Riley: I was going to ask you about the President's—you have, I think, in some respects, a uniquely close relationship to the President that goes back to Texas. Do you recall his sense about this episode? Did he feel like the people in the Justice Department were hot-dogging on this? Was it his conception that they were genuinely conflicted about the steps that they were about to take to decertify the program?

The reason I ask the question is that in some discussions we hear people who had very high regard for Comey, and in other discussions we hear people who were sort of dismissive of him, consistent with the way that I frame the question right now. I wondered whether you had an opportunity to talk with the President—

Bartlett: Oh, sure. Comey had a very mixed reputation internally. I think there were definitely those who respected his views. I think others very much viewed him as all about Jim Comey. We

heard both sides of those. Probably allowed that at times to skew the picture. I think at the end of the day President Bush was pretty pissed off at everybody involved in the process, including White House staff. Al Gonzales' shop, the Vice President's shop, anybody who was involved. That it had to get to that point, he was pretty unhappy about it.

Riley: Of course.

Bartlett: It didn't help—I don't think Ashcroft was a strong voice in that process, so it created a vacuum to a certain extent. He is a dear friend, but not having a strong White House general counsel posed a problem.

Riley: Mike, is there anything else on this?

Nelson: No, I think—

Riley: Historically there are probably few things that are more important in the administration than this core issue of the domestic implications of the War on Terror. I don't know if there are other pieces of this that you want to address.

Bartlett: Probably one of the most responsible and effective internal voices through that entire process was Mike Hayden, who was at the NSA [National Security Agency] at the time, and ultimately CIA director. Probably the reason why he became CIA director, how he handled not only the process internally in clear English, that's one thing. He's very gifted at—for an Air Force intelligence officer to speak English if he's from Pittsburgh—he's a great guy. I don't know if he's on your list to speak to, but he should be. He really did a masterful, a credible job, of explaining how the program worked.

There are two real tranches of the program that continue to get focused on today. One is on listening technology with regard to telephones; the other is on email, the amount of data of email. He did an incredible job of explaining the scope, the policy implications. He was very critical in briefing the Congress. Some of us have very selective memories of those briefings. But he was an instrumental voice internally during that whole process. That's an important thing to make a note of.

Riley: Let me frame one more question on this. That is, did you sense President Bush himself grappled with these issues? Do you have any comments about his own internal calculus as a conservative, as a general principle, skeptical of big, intrusive government, balancing that against the demands of being Commander in Chief and the need to be as aggressive as possible in that kind of war?

Bartlett: He spoke a lot in historical terms. Our government has faced these moments in history. You think about the lengths our government went to in history, including World War II and internment camps for Japanese Americans. So he was mindful—it always felt like we never even really pushed the bounds of the lengths our government has gone to. He was sensitive to that. But also understanding that technology was such a game changer. Ultimately, when it came to the interrogation, one of the reasons why we decided to talk about it and disclose it was that he knew that in bits and pieces, dribbling out, that this was going to paint a very bad picture.

But when you talk about, for example, really what the program on the listening was doing, essentially you have—people didn't appreciate that probably about 75 percent of all wireless communication traffic in the world is routed through two switching stations in the United States, one in New Jersey and one in San Francisco.

Riley: Did you know that, Mike?

Nelson: No I didn't, and I'm from New Jersey.

Bartlett: This is how Mike Hayden used to describe it. If there is a bad guy in Yemen on a flip phone calling somebody in Afghanistan, the likelihood that that call is going to get routed through the United States is very high. So we have a whole laundry list of "dirty numbers," as they're called. So if a dirty number pops up, it lights up and it's calling another one. This is what Mike Hayden calls "home field advantage." This is what AT&T and Verizon—we wanted to have access to clip in and pick up those communications.

So that is taking place. We're taking advantage of that home field advantage, leveraging that home field advantage. So then you have a dirty phone also, and the dirty phone that you're tracking is in Yemen and just called somebody in Las Vegas. Maybe he called somebody in Houston. That's odd. Might we want to—that's when we go to the FISA [Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act] courts and say we have to figure out what this conversation is all about. It wasn't trying to find out the conversation between me and my wife, whether she is going to stop and pick up the groceries or not. It wasn't intrusive. It was driven by intelligence-led operation.

Mike was very good at explaining. I can remember the briefing like it was yesterday. The President would get these briefings and be reassured by them, but also understood that out of context and in increments it could be very damaging.

Riley: Let me ask you this just in terms of your own reflections. This has become, in some respects, a more publicly debated and hotly contested issue since you left office than when you were there.

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: Has the current administration been less than—I don't want to—

Bartlett: I think the first big surprise was there was a sense that when this administration got in, they were going to sweep clean all of these dangerous counterterrorism programs, everything from Guantanamo to interrogation to surveillance. To the chagrin of many in his base, it has been more of a ratification, as quietly as possible. They wake up every day hoping they don't have to talk about it. Now it has been thrust upon them to where they don't have a choice. They are grappling with the very same—you can't talk about it incrementally. You either talk about it all, or you don't. So they're struggling with that. I know why they are.

How they're trying to manage that behind the scenes with Congressional briefings in the various committees and those things—I'm not following it that closely. But the pressure being put on the Googles of the world and the Facebooks of the world, they're going to have to figure out, our country is going to have to figure out, what—the [Edward] Snowden leaks—I'm just very glad

I'm not involved. I'm very well aware of a time-honored tradition of all countries when it comes to surveilling others. We used to joke about it.

I remember we were at a G8 [Group of 8] in St. Petersburg. Russia and China are the two worst about it, and they're very clumsy in their attempts to eavesdrop. The Russians provide these big dachas for each of the state Presidents to stay in. So they're done, one of those eight-hour days, President Bush comes walking in. Jokingly we called Putin "Pootie-Poot." "God dang, Pootie-Poot just went on and on." We're all like, "Quiet!" We were all giving him the cut sign. He all of a sudden remembered and said, "Bartlett, stop talking about Putin that way." [*laughter*]

But I remember something was going on, something pretty heated in Iraq. We were in Russia, and Steve, Condi, and I had to have a classified conversation with the President. The only place they could guarantee it was in the limousine. It was turned on with the music up and we had to talk over the music. It was the only place the NSA and Secret Service, those guys, could guarantee that we weren't being picked up.

Riley: I remember doing an interview with one of the Clinton people, I think when somebody was traveling with Hillary. Maybe they went to Beijing at some point. One of them turned on the TV and saw herself. They had miswired the camera.

Bartlett: We tell the women if you're uncomfortable about being videoed then you should wear a bathing suit in the shower.

Riley: Is that right? Interesting. You just made a very compelling case for the need to deal with these things. Let me get this quick one in, Mike, and I'll turn the floor over to you. Did you have internal discussions about whether you ought to be proactive in making a big case for the security and surveillance needs in a new America? Maybe you did it and I just don't recall it having been done.

Bartlett: We did some. We tried at times. But the problem was that if it was too opaque in your articulation—

Riley: I understand.

Bartlett: More attention means any conversation about it we would get pushback because we're just giving more signposts to the enemy for how we're doing it and what we're doing and it gives them the ability to get better. That was the tension, though. You have a domestic political need in maintaining, growing, public understanding and support. At the same time, the more you talk about it publicly, the less effective the programs become.

Riley: The answer suggests this was sort of a naïve question, but I appreciate it. Mike, I'm going to turn the floor over to you. Run with it.

Nelson: Politics. Start wherever your role starts in thinking about and planning for the reelect. I gather there was never any doubt in your planning—

Bartlett: I think it started on January 21, 2001. It is a difference between mindset about reelect and then organizing for the reelect and really building out. In Karl's office he was typically

looking at different structure, how the campaign was going to operate outside of the White House, how it was going to communicate with the White House. We all had an enormous amount of confidence in Ken Mehlman being the campaign manager for the reelect. He had the President's confidence and all of ours.

We set up structures for weekly meetings. Nicole Wallace—Devenish at the time—was over there as the lead communications person, but with a direct feed into me.

Nelson: This was the so-called "breakfast club"?

Bartlett: Yes, there was that. That was an opportunity for us to sit down and say, "Let's look at the calendar. What are the big things we're going to do?" We did do that a lot over at Karl's. But then there was just the day in and day out coordination that was seamless and daily. It had to be when we really got into—when they had a nominee and we were nearing the general election.

The strategy always is that the President should be President all the way up to Election Day. The less he looks like he is a candidate, the more he looks like the President. At some point that switch is flipped, and you don't have a choice. You try to push that date out as far as possible.

Nelson: When did your involvement get intense?

Bartlett: That whole year.

Nelson: All of 2004?

Bartlett: Oh, yes.

Nelson: All of 2004, or the whole first term?

Bartlett: In 2004 it became more a part of my day of scheduling and messaging and thinking about briefing, the convention, what are we going to do there, really the building blocks of how are we going to use the State of the Union to set up the election. All those things. What are we going to talk about in the spring? What are we going to talk about in the summer? Then doing the various scenario planning on whoever emerged as the candidate on the other side and what strategies did we want to deploy during the primary to diminish any of the candidates who may emerge. So that was a full-time job in and of itself.

Nelson: Really. And the relationship between the White House and the RNC [Republican National Committee], the campaign, how does that work?

Bartlett: Karl's operation was obviously the tip of the spear of that interaction, but these are all very familiar people and staffers who populated the White House at times. It was very seamless. I would say that physically I probably went over to the campaign headquarters six times at most. Most of the meetings were at the White House. A lot of it we did while traveling. We'd go on a political trip and you'd have Ken Mehlman, me, and Karl. We would do meetings on Air Force One. He never stopped being President, so you had to do all of it at the same time.

Nelson: Was there a kind of a premise from January 21, 2001, that this is basically a 50/50

country and that the strategy should be that of building a 51 percent or a 52 percent majority, or was it a hope that you could have a Reagan-style reelect?

Bartlett: Particularly in the wake of Iraq and some other issues, it was going to be divisive. You weren't going to have one of these watershed moments. Having said that, we knew we were going to have to make inroads with certain constituencies or maintain Hispanics, minimize the youth vote, some parts of the youth vote, so we don't underperform as much as maybe previous Republicans. Bush ran a base reelection strategy. It was very clear to us that whoever was more motivated was going to win on turnout. That's inherent with almost any election.

But we also knew we had to make some key inroads into the constituencies where Republicans nationally didn't do well. Some of that was demographics like Hispanics; other was geographic. Our ability to surprise like we did in 2000 by winning West Virginia. We knew we wouldn't have that luxury anymore. All the states were known where we were going to be playing.

There was what Ken Mehlman and Matt Dowd and some of the folks did do, but we spent a lot of time looking on, which has been taken to a whole different level with Obama with evolution of targeting, the evolution of advertising. We were the first to really use Nielsen data and other data to better target our advertising to where our voters were. Advertising on the Golf Channel or things like that, the Outdoor Channel, because it showed that's where our people were, more so than the traditional bracket, the evening news, which we knew would skew to their voters, not our voters.

Nelson: Did you have a preference for who you wanted to run against? [Howard] Dean looked so strong throughout—

Riley: Predicate question. Was there ever a fear of a Republican in-party challenge?

Bartlett: No.

Riley: Fear of a third-party challenge.

Bartlett: No. The mechanics of that are very tough. I would have loved to have run against Howard Dean. That would have been fun, even before the scream. Kerry worried us more on paper than he ever did in person. You get worried about him, then you'd see him do something. You'd go, *OK,* because he's so ponderous. We knew that he would be out of our playbook. We didn't expect as many gifts as he gave us, but we also knew that he was formidable but beatable. I can't remember all the candidates who actually filed.

Nelson: John Edwards was the other one.

Bartlett: Early on—now that you mention that, I forgot that. There was a lot of conversation about John Edwards. Fresh face, moderate from the South, good orator.

Riley: Did you know about his downside?

Bartlett: No, not at the time. There's always buzz around all these guys, but not anywhere to the extent of what came out. But it didn't take long to see that his path to the nomination was a very

difficult one. He was definitely somebody you could really see the media rally behind and get very excited about, much like they did with Obama later.

Nelson: What's the difference between running a campaign in 2000 and then running a reelect? You were involved in both. The strategic challenges, the experience, whatever you noticed in the difference in character of the two campaigns.

Bartlett: It is such an inherent and explicit advantage. You don't appreciate it until you're there. It's JV [junior varsity] versus varsity. The assets: you get to roll up in Air Force One; the knowledge; the grassroots infrastructure is much more mature, the resources. Almost at every level it's an advantage. The flip side being that at any moment the world's problems fall on your desk and you have a disproportionate responsibility for it. So that part was always what kept us—things we couldn't anticipate or plan, particularly with as much as was stirred up around the world.

Jobs reports were agonizing every first Friday of every month. The issues coming out of Iraq, those things, things like that. Very late in the campaign the [Osama] bin Laden tape, those types of things. Those were the burdens of an incumbency. But I'd take them any day over being the challenger, any day.

That was why, again, I harped on this a little bit yesterday. It was just crazy the strategy that Al Gore deployed back then, that he didn't leverage that more than he did.

Nelson: What did you think the best strategy for the Democrats would have been in 2004? Did you think there was a path to victory if they had played their cards right?

Bartlett: Yes. They had to fight us to a draw. Maybe not a draw, but stay within credibility on national security. We boiled this thing down to who did you think would keep you safer. I always say this about elections. Whoever sets the terms of the debate typically wins the election. Those terms are set very early in the process.

We were very good in 2000, right after the primary giving a series of speeches that articulated the compassionate conservative agenda. They allowed us to build a narrative around George W. Bush. Gore was slow out of the gates. We then, using the power of the Presidency, set the terms of the debate around national security. A more credible Democrat who didn't gift us things like, "I was for the 87 million before I was against it," and all those things, to reset the terms of the debate around a domestic agenda that tapped into middle-class fears. That would have been much smarter, but they played right into our playbook, which frankly helped us get reelected, but didn't help us for our second-term agenda.

What I mean by that is, and I know I'm going to jump forward. We can go back. If you remember the first press conference as a second-term President George W. Bush, the answer, "I have a mandate. We're going to do Social Security reform," and everybody went, "Huh?" We had convinced ourselves, more people internally than less. I was kind of a lone voice. We ran on it. I remember telling President Bush and Karl, "You had a 53-minute stump speech. We had it down to 51 minutes of that was how we're going to kill those bastards overseas, and then two minutes where you would tick off all these other things we were going to do, like Social Security reform. If you call that a mandate on Social Security reform I'm with you, but come on."

So the public wasn't prepared. We had not prepped the public for a debate about Social Security. Nor did we have a mandate. Every second term the President overstates their second term mandate. We did. We ran on a very specific agenda. We convinced ourselves it was much broader. But the referendum to be rehired, so to speak, was around national security. Kerry did enough things that even though all the problems we had in Iraq and all that, people just weren't—we know this guy Bush. We don't like everything, but he shoots straight. We know where he comes from on these things. This other guy, things are a little too uncertain. We can't get a good read on where he's coming from on some of these fundamental issues around national security. That's why we won.

But we convinced ourselves that we had a broader mandate. I think we had not prepped the public for what we were offering on Social Security reform, one of the most difficult domestic political issues to deal with. Then if that wasn't hard enough, we went on to immigration reform. That was a lesson we learned the hard way.

Nelson: You mentioned yesterday that Election Day and election night turned out to be pretty suspenseful events. Were you referring to the exit polls that came out, or more than that?

Bartlett: I remember we're on our way back, and the first round of exit polls we were on Air Force One. I remember having to hold the piece of paper down for Karl. His hand was shaking as he was writing down the early results. It was like minus 14, minus 8, minus 9. We're just like, *You've got to be kidding me*.

Now, did we try to comfort ourselves with, "Hey, we've been here before. We've seen exit polls"? Yes. Did it feel like a punch in the gut? You bet. We all thought, *Wow*. We knew all the media had them, the other side had them. You could just imagine for that day John Kerry is looking in the mirror saying, "I'm the next President of the United States." We're all thinking, *Well, it was a good run.*

We weren't throwing in the towel, but at the same time it was very sobering. I remember getting off that helicopter at the White House and the President is going to take some time. He went up to the Residence. I actually went home to vote. Again, it was eerie. I remember having that conversation with my wife election night 2000 saying, "We'll pick up the pieces and figure out what we're going to do." I remember we walked the two blocks to the local church where we voted, having that conversation. "We'll move back to Texas. It will be all right. It was a great run," and dot, dot, dot. It was just eerie.

Then, as the second one came, they're starting to break down. The number crunchers were going down. Here we go again. This isn't right. These things are skewed. So as the night went on our optimism continued to grow, but we knew it was going to be a late night. What culminated as the night went on was because of the history of 2000 and the early calls there. Every news organization was willing to call one of the states, but none of them were willing to call all the states. So if you cobbled—this is where the debate internally came down to: If you took Fox's call on Ohio and AP's call on New Mexico and NBC's call on this, you could stitch together the electoral votes you needed to win. They were all reluctant.

So we had a very intense hour or so where we split up and called the various news organizations

where we're just hammering correspondents, anybody we could get on the phone with. "You all see it like we do? This thing is done." Basically, "Have the balls to call it." They wouldn't. It got increasingly frustrating that we couldn't get any of the news organizations. They would tell you privately, "Yes, we're seeing this too."

So we're set up in a war room, we're in the Residence, a makeshift war room with all the TVs there. It's a combination of staff and friends of the family. As the night went on the friends of the family kept drinking and got more boisterous in their advice. Particularly I remember a few. People were exhausted and they started rumming up. "We can't let them steal this election. They're going to go to Ohio. They're going to do these things." The last time around it was Katherine Harris in Florida. This year it was Ken Blackwell in Ohio, the Secretary of State in Ohio, and what was he going to do? So there was this debate.

They would debate, saying, "We need to go out and call this thing." I remember standing there and saying, "Do all of you see these TVs here? There is a little box down in the left corner that has the account. Most Americans know that you have to hit a certain threshold before you become President. None of these say that. Are we going to be the imperial President who walks out and declares victory prematurely? We can't do this."

"Oh, they're going to steal this thing." "Our lawyers are getting on planes." "We're going to let them take it from us. This what they want." It was back and forth, back and forth.

Then I get a text from Nicolle. She was over at the campaign. She said, "Call me now." I called her. She says, "Look, I got a back channel communication from Mike McCurry. Will you talk to him?" I said yes. So I called Mike. This is probably close to midnight now. He said, "Look, don't do anything crazy. Kerry will do the right thing. Edwards is pushing hard not to, to fight, but please just give us some time. We'll get there."

I said, "OK, Mike. You understand what you're asking?" He said, "Yes, I do." So I went back and shared that information. "Oh, the head fake." But mostly, as I told you—we brought the President down. We're doing most of this without his presence. He did come down and everybody made their arguments. Mrs. Bush came in and said, "George, you can't go out there." That was kind of it, which was good. [lets out a deep breath]

I remember Mary Matalin was asleep, lying on the floor. People were strewn around the whole room. It looked like a bomb had gone off in there. So the decision was to wait. I texted Mike and said, "Your wish has been granted. We're standing down tonight." The next morning we're all there. I'm trying to remember the reporter. It may have been Russert. I remember Mike calling. "He'll be calling. Kerry is going to call to concede."

So we're all hanging around the Oval Office and waiting and waiting. Then I could see it, "Bartlett, where's your man? Is this going to happen?" I said yes. Waiting. We waited a half an hour longer than we thought we were going to have to. Bush felt it was like three hours. Finally the call came in and he conceded. We went over to the Reagan Building, I think was where we did the victory speech. Once again, he was not afforded an election night victory speech, which we all kind of lamented. Karen and Mike and I, particularly Mike and Karen, we had a concession speech written, which was interesting. I'm sure it's at the library. Mike had written it

and we had tweaked it a bit. I don't think we ever showed the boss, the President.

Karen and I worked on the victory speech. What is interesting is that, for example, Karl has been labeled the architect in all that. You know who actually gave him that title? Karen Hughes. We were thumbing through it. Everybody thought—it had a little reference to everybody. That sounds good. She writes it in, never knowing he was going—which we didn't think through. There was a lot of, I'm trying to think of the right word. There were several people in the campaign who felt like—as always is the case—Karl got too much credit. Then the architect line reinforced it.

The Ken Mehlmans of the world, the Matt Dowds of the world I think felt not as appreciated. But that's one of those things. The hardest part of those jobs in the White House is the unintended consequences. You're trying to make decisions. To think through the multiple layers of impact was always a struggle.

Take for example this thing about the President you learn very quickly. This is why I keep talking about this, the governor that they have in their mind, this filter. You have multiple audiences. The "bring it on" comment by President Bush in a vacuum and the context was he was being asked about whether, as he viewed it, the U.S. military was capable of military victory. Basically he was wanting unequivocally for those in uniform to know I have your back, and bring it on, our guy's got it. Not considering how that could come across to other constituencies around the world, the bellicose nature of those comments. It's just one of those hard lessons you can only learn through experience, being a President, being in the White House, having to think through. That's the governor that starts getting applied to your thinking. You get better at it in time. You're sensitive to it.

That was a long night. You're thinking second term. You're exhausted, but you're elated. The pressure is off in so many ways. Just the validation, particularly with the recount and all that the first time. Probably seeing him in those days after was as gratifying as any other moment in my career with him.

Nelson: President Bush is quoted as having said to Karl Rove or Ken Mehlman, "I don't want a lonely landslide" or "I don't want a lonely victory." In other words, he really was telling them he wanted to see a Republican victory that would extend down the ballot. Did you have that sense that you're running a strategy not just for reelecting the President but also—

Bartlett: Oh sure, absolutely. Because ultimately it comes back to the ability to govern. That's a vote-counting exercise. We were particularly proud of not only bucking the trend, like we did in the first term, the first midterm. We were in for a whipping in '06, but the gains we made in Congress—we were equally, if not more—all the state legislatures around the country and Governorships that we were accumulating. We felt like we had a significant hand in that progress and those achievements.

It was maybe overstated at this time, calling this a kind of fundamental realignment that people associated with Karl, a little bit of hubris there. But in general there was definitely a mindset around to raise the type of money that would not only just lift his boat but lift a lot of boats, and to be able to invest that in a way that would benefit a lot of people in the party.

Nelson: One more thing about election night. That is, during that time when you were despairing on the assumption, I think, that the exit polls were correct, was attention being paid to the spreading perception in the news media that Kerry has probably won this election, the effect that might have on turnout in western time zones?

Bartlett: Oh, yes.

Nelson: How did that manifest itself in the way you all communicated?

Bartlett: As we started seeing what we thought were just glaring irregularities in the exit polls, the strategy was to smile and dial as many reporters as possible saying, "Wait a minute. You'd better pause. Your tone—" And of course the problem was that these exit numbers start leaking on Drudge Report, things like that, getting out there. Our regional teams, our regional media out in California worked really hard. "This is a campaign; this is a close race. This is not a done deal."

Hard to tell how much real impact that has, but it helped make the day go by faster. [*laughter*] You're looking for ways—it's like watching paint dry. So yes, we're all calling every contact we have in media everywhere. Was it useless spin? I don't know, but it felt good doing it. It made you feel like you were playing a role.

Riley: How did the exit polls get it so wrong?

Bartlett: I'm trying to remember how that all happened. I always confuse what happened in '04 with 2000, but boy they were. I'm trying to remember. It had something to do with modeling of base assumptions about turnout that were just—

Nelson: Turnout was up enormously in '04 compared to 2000, and I don't think they were expecting that. Both turnout operations were good, but yours was better.

Bartlett: Right.

Riley: I wondered the extent to which you were having to pay attention to the fact that the popular vote went against you in the 2000 election.

Bartlett: That was an important bellwether for us, that we not repeat that.

Riley: Not only that you not repeat it, but how do you thread the needle? You threaded the needle before and you don't want to have to thread the needle again. You want to make sure that you have a majority of the votes. So in some respects, 2000 isn't the template for what you want to repeat in 2004. Right?

Bartlett: That's why we thought we were far more sophisticated in our turnout model, in our approach. Absolutely. There was a level of confidence that—misplaced confidence the first time around and good confidence the second time around about that turnout model.

Riley: Were there states that you felt you could pick up in 2004 that you didn't pick up in 2000?

Bartlett: We all felt burned by New Mexico in 2000. All the focus was on Florida. We really felt like we got robbed in New Mexico, so that was a big one for us in '04. The other ones were just holding on to what we had. When all that was said and done we knew it was a Florida and Ohio deal again.

Nelson: The Kerry people were convinced that if it was a 50/50 election in the popular vote, they would have had the electoral college majority that year based on your state poll. So you really needed the three- or four-point national margin you had.

Bartlett: Fool's errand in '04 for statewide—the dalliance we did in California in 2000 was ridiculous. It may not have been as ridiculous in 2004, but our focus in Pennsylvania was—I don't know what we were reading. We spent disproportionately too much time there. There was a big internal debate about that always.

Riley: Who was the big advocate?

Bartlett: Karl was, as he was in California. I don't remember who else was, but I remember it was always back and forth with the President. "Why am I going here again? I've already—"

Riley: Is it the case that he truly believed that you could win it, or is he trying to suck Democratic resources there to keep them from deploying them elsewhere?

Bartlett: The California deal was more that—

Riley: And money.

Bartlett: Yes, in this case—there was a theory that we could outperform so much in the rural parts that you could overcome Philly.

Nelson: Every Republican Presidential candidate gets left at the altar by Pennsylvania. They all think this is the time.

Bartlett: Which has been the case, the reason for Democrats in Ohio and Missouri. They feel like, *Why can't we get over the top here?* That whole process. If I don't step in the state of New Hampshire again I will be a happy man. There are some that I just have no ambition to going back to—probably New Hampshire more than any, but Pennsylvania is pretty close behind.

Nelson: What you said about Bush claiming a mandate is really interesting. Was that spontaneous on his part in that victory speech? Is that part of the speech you all wrote?

Bartlett: This was a press conference.

Nelson: A press conference, OK.

Bartlett: See, that's things that—

Riley: Ah, that's the piece of evidence we were looking for.

Bartlett: Yes, we had an opening statement in the press conference. We had a debate about how

much we were going to come out of the gate on Social Security. I was concerned about overstating it, that we needed to—so then he punctuated it, if you recall, in this press conference. This is where he says, "I have political capital and I'm going to spend it." And he had this theory.

Riley: Plenty of capital, I think—maybe not.

Nelson: It was a bold plan.

Bartlett: He always had the theory that political capital cannot stay on the shelf; you had to spend it when you had it. We always used that theory, and this was part of that theory. I have political capital. I have to spend it.

I'd prefer that to be a conversation we'd have in the Oval Office. Not one that he shares with the public, because it came across as kind of bravado, by God, I won and we're going to get this. But there was definitely a view that you have to strike while the iron is hot. But again, on an issue like that, it just requires so much. And this is the modern day equivalent in some respects. Modern day, like it was 30 years ago.

The current is that President Obama confused his mandate around the health care reform, when in fact there wasn't really a public debate on that issue during the campaign. It began during the primary between him and Hillary Clinton on who was for a mandate or not. But it never really surfaced. Then because of the financial crisis in the general election, it never really was an issue in the general election, yet they came in—in fact I have a mandate to have the most fundamental change to the health care system in 40 years. The public wasn't there.

Nelson: Yes.

Bartlett: You can convince yourself with polling. We had polling that said that Social Security reform needed to be fixed, just like they had on health care. But the public had not been appropriately brought along on Social Security reform, and they obviously weren't brought along appropriately on health care reform. It's funny how history repeats itself and you can continue to make those types of fundamental mistakes. We should have spent a year, that first year that second term, prepping the battlefield for—the theory was, and it always comes back to the midterm election. We have to get the vote out of the way before '06. Let's do it in '05 so we have time to move on to other things that wouldn't be as divisive for midterm elections.

Nelson: My impression is that that campaign that you all rolled out for Social Security reform was the most elaborate, focused, communications effort for the entire Presidency, focused on one issue. Can you talk about that? First of all, the decision to invest that much of the President's political capital, if you will, or prestige on that issue. Then how you develop that campaign, the 60-day—

Bartlett: What we tried to do in a compressed time frame is to do something that probably could require a year's worth of public education. We very much viewed—you don't use the "legacy" word, it is always stricken from people's vocabulary because it sounds—I don't know. But we knew the first term, while there might be some domestic legacy around education and tax, that this was over the course of history domestically. If we could truly reform our—this was a unique

moment, a unique opportunity, and therefore it deserved the type of laser-like focus.

There was an understanding that we were behind. If we were going to create the type of environment to make it safe for Republicans to cast a vote and put enough pressure on Democrats to be forced to allow for a vote, it was going to have to be all hands on deck. We used every element of our political apparatus to push that. The one thing that was good is there was a lot of intellectual firepower in the conservative civil society about this issue. So we weren't coming in without voices out there.

The problem was, and this is always the problem of the legislative process, particularly in the modern day of political communications, is that every piece of major legislation has to start in the House, work its way to the Senate, moderate some in the Senate, and then cut a deal in the committee. The problem is—and this happened to Obama in health care, it happened to us on Social Security as well as on immigration reform, is that legislation that always comes out of the House of Representatives is never going to be ideal. But what happens is it comes back. Where the terms are set for the debate, and ordinarily it was set early in the process, usually it is set for the entire process, and usually that means in an election whoever set those terms has the advantage going into Election Day.

In this case it is the direct opposite. Something more extreme always comes out of the House, whether it's on the left or right. It is just the nature of the politics there. Then the White House is put into this kind of purgatory because they can't endorse. Because if you endorse the specifics of it, then you alienate yourself with the Senate. So you're endorsing a process. Yes, we want to see this move along.

This is why these things always get stalled right out of the gate. Joel Kaplan and I were always talking about this. You wish you could reverse-engineer process; do the committee process first, negotiate with House and Senate members, and then everybody grab hands and jump together and articulate the result. Our process doesn't allow for it.

From a communication and political standpoint we were in this inevitable position to say they're working on things in the committee and they pop up. Vote for this. They killed it right out of the gate. They framed this as our privatization of Social Security, these things. So we put everything into it, he put everything into it. We were probably the last to give up. We'd seen on the tax cut debate and others, just when you think it's not going to break you can get them to break. Granted, even though we were a freshly reelected President, we didn't have as much political capital as we did the first time. Later that year whatever domestic political capital we had went out the door post-Katrina.

I still think we miscalculated as far as how much the public was willing to move on an issue such as Social Security reform.

Riley: Let's do a break now.

[BREAK]

Nelson: I'm just checking the sequence because the Supreme Court, what seemed like a nomination became nominations—

Bartlett: That's right, because of [William] Rehnquist.

Nelson: So July 1, 2005, Justice [Sandra Day] O'Connor announces she is going to retire, and then 18 days later the President nominates John Roberts as an Associate Justice to replace O'Connor.

Bartlett: Right.

Nelson: It is the first time the President got to make a Supreme Court nomination. Did you have a strategy in place for when you got that opportunity?

Bartlett: In general, yes, we did. The process was one that I think did a good job, one thing because of a lot of activity around this front with the Federalist Society and others that there is a whole cottage industry around this whole process. So the type of candidates that were readily available to us were good. With Sandra Day O'Connor we had the first conversations around did you have to replace a woman with a woman, and diversity candidates were always a challenge. But through this process it became abundantly clear to us that John Roberts stood apart.

We're dealing with implicitly and explicitly the history of his father with David Souter, so this notion of we can't get this wrong—

Riley: The implication being that his father got it wrong with Souter.

Bartlett: Correct. Let's at least know that we're getting what we think we're going to get. The problem is those who aspire to at least be in the conversation have gotten a lot more deft at their opinions over the years to keep them not controversial, which is good because they're not controversial, but it's bad to try to understand where they're coming from. He had had experience with appointments and things as Governor, so this wasn't completely foreign. Obviously the stakes were a lot higher for the process.

That first time around there was a healthy debate between John Roberts and I believe [J.] Mike Luttig was his name. Vice President Cheney and some of his folks were more in favor of Luttig, more probably out of familiarity than anything else. There were relationships with those who had clerked with him and things like that. Luttig was a perfectly fine candidate. I will never forget—I was very involved after we made the decision in the preparatory parts for the nomination and for the hearing.

I remember we were probably only an hour through the first session and I basically called it off because it was like him bringing a gun to a knife fight. This guy was just masterful. I called the President and said, "We're in good shape. You have nothing to worry about." I think Rehnquist died on a Saturday night. I was at a buddy's house watching a UT [University of Texas] basketball game when I got the call that Rehnquist had died. I remember all that went into motion that Sunday and we made the decision to switch.

Nelson: Rehnquist dies September 3rd. I think basketball season—

Bartlett: No, it wouldn't have been basketball. You're right.

Nelson: It must have been a football game.

Riley: Even more important.

Bartlett: Exactly. It was over a weekend, though, I'm pretty sure.

Nelson: I don't have that here, but Rehnquist dies on September 3rd, and then three days later is when President Bush nominates Roberts Chief Justice.

Riley: So that must have been an easy call.

Bartlett: That was. But it definitely put pressure on the diversity pick for the next one. There was considerable—it was not a foregone conclusion it was going to be Harriet Miers, by any stretch. There were a lot of other candidates who were vetted and attempts to rationalize a couple of women on the Fifth Circuit. I don't remember all the names. I do know that there was a real attempt—it was only frankly almost a default that we think maybe it could be Harriet.

Riley: Did the President come up with that idea, or do you recall who did?

Bartlett: I don't remember who put it on the table initially, but everybody was kind of intrigued by it. We started doing the vet and looking back at her legal career. It was definitely a nontraditional approach, because usually for a whole host of reasons, mainly though that it is those lawyers who go up through the ranks of appellate review and do all the cases that way, and she was a corporate lawyer. She had managed a large firm; she had qualities. She was a pioneer in many respects in Texas and we really tried to build that narrative. We convinced ourselves that that was good enough. She was not gunning for it by any stretch. If you spent any time with Harriet—

Riley: We did.

Bartlett: It's not her personality at all. She is a salt of the earth woman and it pained all of us to see how that process played out. She did her level best to step up to the game, but Roberts and [Samuel] Alito and Luttig had spent an entire career thinking about these issues, understanding the nuances of them. We were asking her to do something that was just impossible.

Riley: As you indicated earlier, this Federalist Society network almost has a sense of entitlement to these positions.

Bartlett: No doubt about it.

Riley: She was not a part of that.

Bartlett: That's correct. So we were now challenged with that kind of echo chamber out there, which was not helpful. Where they were helpful was Roberts. They definitely were working against us, so the stakes were growing. She started her preparatory work.

Riley: Were you working with her on that?

Bartlett: Yes. We got to the actual rehearsal, putting the briefing papers together. But I was close to several lawyers in the counsel's office who were assigned to this task, and a few of them started coming to me early on going, "I don't know, Dan. The more we're in this it is like Constitution 101." So we started getting red flags. Then we had the first session, and 15 minutes into it I called the President and said, "There is no way. This isn't going to work." We were all coming to that conclusion, but it was crystal clear that it wasn't going to work.

Then it started to come around to the process of how do we gracefully exit this. I think Andy ultimately had the conversation with him and followed up with the President and sat down with her. I think that was the sequence of that. She showed up the next day like nothing had happened, back to her old job. Just the level of humility and character that she showed through that process and selflessness was incredible. A lot of us felt really bad about it, that we put her through that. But we had to recalibrate.

Then of course we come back to Alito, and our Federalist Society folks are all reinvigorated. He turned out to be highly competent and capable, but we missed an opportunity to put a conservative woman on the Court.

Nelson: I'm thinking—and I thought this when you said that the initial choice, when O'Connor retired, ended up being between Roberts and Luttig—that part of that filtering process that got it down to those two must have been looking at every available woman who was a federal appeals court judge or maybe even a state supreme court justice.

Bartlett: That's correct.

Nelson: And saying none of these will work.

Bartlett: That's correct. Then we looked at it again. Absolutely. We thought, *Should we go the politician route and put in a politician?* It was Priscilla Owen I know, state supreme court justice in Texas, who we put on the Fifth Circuit, but was controversial, even when we got her on the Fifth Circuit. There was another woman on that bench as well.

Riley: Edith Jones.

Bartlett: Exactly right, who had some humdingers out there. I remember going through her—there was a woman in California, if I remember, who was on—

Riley: I think Hispanic.

Bartlett: Maybe. I want to say African American. There was an intriguing candidate, but she had also had some wild stuff out there that she was quoted on in some of her rulings and stuff. I'm trying to remember the politicians we looked at. There was a woman attorney general. I know we tried. It was not without considerable effort.

Nelson: Did you come away thinking, *What's wrong with the Republican Party that we don't have any bench at all among women, African Americans, or Latinos who would be logical,*

plausible, confirmable nominees for the Supreme Court?

Bartlett: I think so. We convinced ourselves that we had done a decent job in other areas of government when it came to diversity picks, particularly with women, but no doubt about it, there was a level of frustration. I'll tell you though, in the scheme of things, that was obviously a frustration, but I was more frustrated when we were making picks for our Secretary of Treasury and around the Secretary of Defense. These were supposed to be traditional strengths of a Republican, and having just a dearth of good candidates that we ended up with O'Neill, and John Snow is a good friend, but that's the best we could do? You got to appreciate that a lot, that particularly those who come from Wall Street are actually Democrats, even though they make millions up there and you'd think naturally that they were Republicans. It was a herculean effort to convince Hank Paulson to take the job.

Then when we looked at the Secretary of Defense not only the first time, but as we were—I know it is on our list to talk about a replacement for Rumsfeld. There were just not a lot of good options. How can this be the case? This should be a bench wide and deep when it comes to Republicans and national security and military and defense. High on our list was Fred Smith at FedEx, military background. The Pentagon more than anything else is a logistical puzzle that you're trying to figure out, procurement. But he had had family health issues, including himself and I believe his daughter.

Nelson: I think the first time around it was his daughter or him, and then the second time around it was the other family member.

Bartlett: There was a lot of frustration by the President that we didn't have better talent to pick from in all those cases. Then there was the Federal Reserve, too. We had that process. We almost repeated the Harriet Miers mistake. [Ben Shalom] Bernanke was not necessarily the first. He was always right in there, but there was a little bit of momentum behind—who at the time was the head of our NEC [National Economic Council], Steve Friedman, former head of Goldman Sachs—as the pick. There were a couple of us who were strongly opposed to that, believing that we would have a similar situation, that he, even though with that pedigree, was not ready for that.

So the White House is sometimes—some of your best accomplishments are the ones that never see the light of day. [*laughter*] There were a lot of those, things you prevented.

Nelson: That's a great pull quote, among many others. This is a natural break point, and I'm going to say goodbye and only say I wish I didn't have to go.

Bartlett: We can do an inventory at the end of this, and if it requires us to get back together, maybe we can steal some more time.

Nelson: It can be in Bentonville, whatever is most convenient for you.

[Nelson leaves]

Riley: Did you also have a piece of the lower-level court business, or is there not a communications aspect to that?

Bartlett: The circuit court, yes. I had a team that was on that, and also who we had at the Justice Department, folks on that as well. It would pop up from time to time. One of the big headaches to manage and deal with was more on the U.S. attorney flap. I don't know if you remember that.

Riley: Of course I do.

Bartlett: Which was unfortunate on a lot of different levels.

Riley: Tell us what happened there.

Bartlett: It was clumsy execution in the sense that it is a pretty time-honored tradition that the President has the prerogative to appoint whom he would like to appoint. The way we went about it was spoon-feed it to our critics as fitting this narrative of how we went about things. Again, I feel like that situation ripened a lot because of not having a strong leader at the Justice Department. Ashcroft and Gonzales were different in a lot of different ways.

Gonzales' power was all based on his relationship with the President and not enough on his own bona fides and credentials, and that's hard to sustain.

Riley: His name was floated occasionally for Supreme Court nomination. Was that ever seriously considered?

Bartlett: It was. I think he was more interested in Attorney General. His legal credentials are even thinner when it comes to that type of position than even Harriet's were. I think he was basically a real estate attorney out of a law firm in Houston, and for a relatively brief period of time. It was hardly enough for Attorney General.

Riley: Yes.

Bartlett: So this issue pops. I remember we were at a summit somewhere in Mexico—it was a North American summit between Canada, us, and Mexico, and this is busting all out to a point where I had to—it was frustrating how I learned. Tony Snow was our press secretary at the time and could not be found anywhere. This was reaching critical mass, so I ended up having to do a press briefing down in Mexico on this issue.

I'm getting briefed up from people back here, Joel Kaplan and Dana Perino, who was the deputy press secretary at the time. Had a miserable briefing, which I later had to explain to a special investigator, a prosecutor who was put into this who ultimately came out—she concluded what everyone concluded, it was pretty clumsy but it was politics, and no legal laws were broken. That was when Tony Snow was sick. He had been in his bedroom, really sick. That's actually how I found out. His health declined very quickly.

There is just this moment—as these things pop up, you just look at each other and go what else is going to happen? If you think about it, some of these things we've touched on, and others not. You come in with the recession. You have 9/11. We had an anthrax attack, two Supreme Court Justices, shuttle disaster, Katrina, U.S. attorney flap, no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Vice President Cheney shoots somebody. At some point nothing surprises you. You just prepare for anything as you wake up every day. It's just crazy. You're almost numb to it, which is not a

good thing, because you use your senses, which I think probably contributed to our response on Katrina, that numbness.

Riley: That's the next thing on the list.

Bartlett: A big issue. How do you want to tackle it?

Riley: Well, you want to follow the chronology and get us where we want to go?

Bartlett: There's plenty of history about it.

Riley: I don't want to waste your time—

Bartlett: What was not recognized—there was a very tried and true playbook about hurricane preparation. So we followed that playbook. It worked successfully in Florida and ones that we had already gone through; this was not our first rodeo when it came to a hurricane. It initially was exacerbated by—and it seemed that almost any time something bad happened it happened during August when all of us were spread to the winds. So at this time, Andy Card is in New Hampshire or Maine. I was in Washington. The President is in Crawford. People were just spread about. Despite technology, it is not a good way to manage a crisis. So we're going into this weekend, but everybody felt generally good with the preparation going into it, and for the most part, everywhere except for New Orleans it turned out to be appropriate.

What happened in Alabama, Mississippi, and those states, while devastating—and I'll get back to it—there was a general recognition that the government response was adequate to it.

Riley: Right.

Bartlett: So the first wave goes through. I vividly remember Brian Williams down on Bourbon Street saying, "It looks like the Big Easy dodged the big one," because it wasn't until later that night when the levees broke. There was a moment of exhaling where it felt like the worst didn't come to fruition, even though it was still devastating. I remember going to Leland, Mississippi, and there's literally nothing left. It was one of the worst things I've ever seen. But we felt like, *OK*. But as that played out over the course of the next 24 hours, the picture began to change substantially.

Riley: The federal government, to the extent that you were monitoring it, had been following the standard protocols with its communications to the Governor in the states.

Bartlett: Oh yes, absolutely, at all the levels. And the briefings that took place with the White House and the President followed what would be a pretty typical cadence. Whatever the crisis may be that you find yourself in, your behavior is dictated by precedent and you train to precedent. What is the most difficult thing to do in a period like this is to know when you're in an unprecedented event and that the old playbook doesn't work.

So we just kept doing the old playbook harder and faster, and that's why FEMA kept tripping up on itself. Internally I knew that there was just going to be a general reluctance to have the President return from Texas. We had—

Riley: To return to Washington?

Bartlett: To Washington from Texas. We had had a long-scheduled speech to the troops in San Diego. I believe it was that Tuesday. The storm hit on Monday, speech on Tuesday. The first question, I think, was is he going to give the speech. That kind of political event we'd cancel, but during war, a speech to troops—at that time, the convention center and all the mayhem was not in full swing yet. So we justified it. This is when you get a string of PR [public relations] disasters that you really can't make up, in a sense.

I don't know if you remember all of them, but we got there. I was still here. We get out to San Diego and it was a classic big speech with the troops. We had prepared a comment about the storms at the top of it. We had an appropriate level of seriousness and importance before he gave a speech on the conduct of the war.

What had happened, though, is he got there and he's backstage. Rumsfeld had met us there. He was traveling separately and met us there. He had provided access to a reporter named Martha Raddatz with ABC, national security reporter. She was backstage, and the President, before he went on, they have all these warm-ups. Some country singer is there doing a warm-up act. He comes backstage, introduces himself to the President, and he says do you mind taking a picture of me with the guitar and all that. So the President gets his guitar. Martha Raddatz takes a picture of that, sends it back to the studio saying, "This is off the record." They ignored it. This is the big, "Bush was strumming his guitar while New Orleans was—"

Riley: I have no memory of that.

Bartlett: It was the beginning of a series. We had made the decision that morning, before the speech, that the President was going to return to Washington. He decided that he was going to stop in Texas on the way back. Literally, it was so he could get all the stuff. He was going to go to Crawford but come back to Washington. I was going to cut my losses. As long as he's coming back I'm fine. I wasn't going to make him fly directly back.

But the fact that he decided to stop in Crawford allowed for this next debate, which was, the pilots came and said we can take one of two routes. Should we fly over New Orleans? There was a conference call on this topic. I was against it, other people were, but they decided—and Scott McClellan, my old colleague, explains all this in his book—there is a part that he didn't explain—in which they decided to go and fly over it.

Riley: Why were you opposed to flying over?

Bartlett: The images, the whole notion, what good is that going to do unless you're going to stop. It sucks for them. Look at them down there. But that was all manageable. I got on the phone with Scott McClellan afterward and said, "Whatever you do, no pictures." [taps the table for emphasis] I told him, "Don't let the press up; they're going to want to be up there." So instead of letting the press up there, they released a White House photo of the President looking out the window down at the people. I'm like, *Are you kidding me? You might as well let the press up there if you're going to release a photo*. Scott McClellan fails to mention that decision.

So now we have the photo showing him out of touch looking from 30,000 feet or 10,000 feet,

whatever it was, down on the people who were suffering. We get back to Washington and there are multiple issues emerging. You have the general tension of, from conservatives, of a federalist approach to things. The responsibility lies with those at the local level. I remember having the conversation with the President. We were frustrated. It's the mayor's fault. He's not doing—finally just talked. All of America knows it and they know they're incompetent. That's why they want us to take it over. They know they're screwing up, but that's not enough. We have to do something.

What happened was the assets weren't on the ground. The Department of Defense was not interested in getting involved. Secretary Rumsfeld was not interested in getting involved in this. He never said that, but he was masterful at throwing sand in the gears of a policy-making process. So we burned a full day of debate around posse comitatus and legal authorities. He had no interest in sending troops down there. I remember saying to the President, "I don't care if we don't even give them ammunition. I don't care if you put corks in the end of the gun, just their presence will fix this thing. Just show up." We finally had to get to that point. We missed it by 18 hours. If we had made that decision and gotten them there 18 hours earlier, all of those images out of the Superdome and all that wouldn't have happened, in my opinion.

That was our fault here as far as not being quicker about those decisions and allowing politics, our political instincts and bias, the Governor, the Democrat, the this. Those things you look back on and you just kick yourself. Then we compound the problem, the challenge, when we went back to our old model. If you think about it, it makes perfect sense. We decide we're going to do a Presidential trip to the region.

Alabama was hit, Mississippi was hit, Louisiana was hit. Give it to the advance guys to set up the trip. If you're in Washington it's logical that you're going to start your trip going to Mississippi, going to Alabama to Mississippi, and you're going to end your day there. There wasn't an issue in Alabama. Things were going fine. If you had thought about it as go to where the crisis is—but we didn't. That allowed for the famous, "Heck of a job, Brownie," [Michael D. Brown] because we put him in a briefing with a bunch of people who were saying FEMA is doing a great job, but it's the first image—in fact, to back up, President Bush was getting to the point of being furious about the lack of speed with which we were moving.

Before we got on the plane he was in the Situation Room tearing people's blank up over, "We have to move faster. This is not acceptable. Things better start changing." I remember we're in the Oval Office, and I basically said, "What you just said down there you'd better say before we get on this helicopter." So he went out there and ripped into it to the press on his way to the helicopter. So that was setting the right tone. Then we totally undermined it all when we got to Mississippi or Alabama at the briefing and he's standing there, and it's just natural. Like I said yesterday, this is one time his instincts were just off a little bit. We didn't help; we put him in these situations.

So the first image from the region and he's sitting there saying, "Heck of a job, Brownie," which in context of there, at that point, FEMA was doing a heck of a job. Then we get to New Orleans and we have a real disaster, but then we have a leadership disaster. We pull up on Air Force One. What was his name? [Clarence Ray, Jr.] Nagin, the mayor. He shows up. The guy hadn't had a shower in two days, but he comes on Air Force One and he's like, "You want to take a shower?"

So we have the mayor taking a shower on Air Force One. We have the Governor, who—her husband was an old football coach, everybody called him "Coach"—was paranoid about the politics of everything. We had Karl Rove talking to [David] Vitter and other Republicans there that stirred up a lot of stuff.

Riley: Karl was not on-site down there, was he?

Bartlett: I think he was. The only thing these leaders were worried about, it seems, was that tourism was going to be killed, "And if there was anything, Mr. President, you could do about the tourism. So when he gets there, can you say something about tourism?" So that's when he says, "New Orleans is open for business. Come here." I remember when I used to be—this is still a vibrant—there couldn't have been a more discordant message, but he was listening to them and not what people were seeing on their screens.

Riley: Were you down there with him?

Bartlett: Yes, but we're all spread to the wind, and this thing is going real time.

Riley: So he's having to rely on his own instincts rather than having the chance to sit down and—

Bartlett: We didn't set him up for success, in the sense that we didn't put him in formats—it was kind of all on the fly, and the timing of these things—

Riley: So you're not able, because of the nature of the problem, to establish before you go down there a set of firm talking points. This is what we want to achieve.

Bartlett: And we're on this old model. We don't want to get in the way, and this and the deferential kind of approach to it as opposed to doing it like maybe Rudy Giuliani would have done it, like 9/11.

Riley: Is George Bush in this episode? Does his experience as Governor sort of hamper him? Is he being hyperdeferential?

Bartlett: Yes, to a certain extent. Also it was incredibly difficult to get good information. When you have a natural distrust for the media you didn't want to believe what the media was saying. That's why it was—one time, more than anything else—that I got burned by the media personally was that. The President had been in meetings all day long, around the clock. He was getting these briefings that I was increasingly frustrated with because I don't see it was seeing the forest for the trees on what was happening.

I told my team to pull together a disk so I could put on the computer all the images that are being shown by the networks. I don't know if it was on the plane ride down. It was somewhere. I showed it to him. He was like, *Geez*. It did it. I told that anecdote to, I think, *Time* magazine or something, and they portrayed it as Bush was clueless and it required Dan Bartlett who had to show him. That was not the case. It was more of an internal process that he was shown. He was not out of touch with those things. He knew there were issues.

Riley: But he needed to know what the American people's perception was of what was going on down there.

Bartlett: What they were seeing, yes.

Riley: What they were seeing.

Bartlett: Absolutely.

Riley: That makes sense.

Bartlett: But I got burned on it. The way that the story was written kind of burned me, and I went—we'll get to that in a minute. So on a lot of different levels we weren't on our political game. We executed a playbook that wasn't made for the moment. We had a couple of PR gaffs, a string of them that you couldn't make up. It was just a confluence of what could go wrong. It really was just amazing.

Riley: I'm trying to discern from your comments if in your perception these were preventable.

Bartlett: Some.

Riley: Some of them were, like the airplane picture for example.

Bartlett: All the political ones were preventable. The PR gaffs, those were preventable. If we had run a better process, the security issue would have been—

Riley: Interesting.

Bartlett: Would the evacuation and all those things, did we anticipate the levees breaking? Those things in hindsight are easy to flyspeck back and say—but that's BS [bullshit]. The ones that really did more lasting damage to the Presidency—

Riley: To the President?

Bartlett: To the President, are ones that on many of these occasions I thought we could have avoided.

Riley: The premise for the question is that there must be some problems Presidents have to confront for which there is no solution. You can game it however you want, you can have the most astute people in the world around you, you can make the finest calibrated predictions that you can make, and it still isn't going to fix the problem. It's just in the nature of things.

Bartlett: Yes.

Riley: If I'm hearing you correctly, you're saying that that might be relevant to the core issues on the ground in New Orleans, but certainly was not true of the political damage that was inflicted on the President.

Bartlett: When you think about it, we could have totally underestimated the severity of the

storm, all of those things. The analysis was just not capable of predicting what happened. It still could have been one of the finest moments of his Presidency, and it wasn't.

Much like it was on 9/11. You can say he failed on the intelligence. He failed all this. He could have had—I'm not saying you could re-create a bullhorn moment, but he was capable of being that leader at that time when the country needed him. Instead we exacerbated divisions within our country. They were accusing him of not caring because it was the blacks down in New Orleans, all these things that just spiraled out of control, which were just—that's the part that will always frustrate me. We didn't serve him better, putting him in a position—

As I said, even his own instincts were not on game. It was the cumulative effect of a Presidency, of dealing—almost becoming numb to some of these things, the unique politics of the situation, the gaffs. You put it all together. The policy-making process here in Washington around using, reinstalling security down there. If any two of those things happened, you would think it was crazy. About eight of them happened at one time. Then we overcorrected. We had hurricane Rita, I think, hit Texas shortly after.

The President says, "Bartlett, you're going to have me strapped to a wind pole out there. You'd better get your rain gear ready." He was down there in the middle of the storm at the evacuation center. That sucker was going to be airtight. The narrative coming out of this whole thing was horrific. I went up from Washington to New York and did a round with all the networks off camera.

Riley: This is after Katrina.

Bartlett: This is the next week, to try to start putting the pieces back together. I went to all the networks, the *Times*.

Riley: Who are you meeting there?

Bartlett: It would be all the on-air talent. So for NBC it would be Russert, [Matt] Lauer, all of them off-air in an editorial around a table.

Riley: What's your message?

Bartlett: I just tried to pick apart what was reality, what the President did. I was just spinning my ass off trying to fix this thing. The last meeting I had was with CBS. Mika Brzezinski was still at CBS at the time. She wasn't famous "Joe and Mika in the morning." She was just over there full of disgust and saying, "I can't believe—" and she dropped this whole racist thing and I jumped all over it. We got in a really heated debate about the President's attention and concern about the plight of African Americans and all this. It was as toxic as, I mentioned it yesterday, the relationship between the White House and the media.

The backdrop of all this is in the wake of Iraq and all that. We're going to level the score here. As I said, it was hard to push back because we were deserving of criticism. But that was by far—and I think I got in trouble. I said later that it was the nail in the political coffin of George W. Bush's tenure as President that we didn't recover from that. I don't think we did. Others would argue we did, but I don't believe we did.

Riley: What is his response to this afterward? You say he is angry, but are there certain steps taken to—

Bartlett: It whipsaws between—

Riley: I know Brownie gets canned eventually.

Bartlett: Yes, it whipsawed between complaining about the unfairness and arbitrariness of the coverage to being pissed off that we didn't handle it better. But then what do you do? Fire everybody? Start from scratch?

Riley: Not in the second term.

Bartlett: You pick yourself up. There is another issue coming right around the corner that you have to deal with. That is where he was—maybe you and I, as we said, wouldn't make a good President. We would grind on the glass half empty, and he was resilient. You know what? Screwed that one up. I always likened him to [Roland] Champ Bailey, better be this way on Sunday afternoon. If you're a defense back, you're going to get scored on, but the *next* play you'd better not be dwelling on the *last* play.

Riley: Sure.

Bartlett: That's the mindset you really ought to have, and that was definitely his mindset.

Riley: They call it a "short memory" if you make a mistake on the field.

Bartlett: Yes, you have to. Learn the lessons, but don't sit there beating yourself up, or you're going to get beat again.

Riley: Right.

Bartlett: So we have that, and what a mess for us to be dealing with as we go into a midterm election on top of what is going on with the insurgency. This kind of then gets resolved and now we're increasingly attempting to make a decision about the Secretary of Defense. A pretty regular conversation among a very small group of us to say—this picks up steam into the spring of '06—I think we were prepared to do something in the spring. If you remember what happened it was called the "generals' revolt."

This was when all the retired generals came out against Rumsfeld and tried to put pressure on the President. He basically said, "They don't know how bad they just screwed up, because I was inclined to do it, but if it ever looks like the military leadership can dictate to the civilian leadership who is going to be the Secretary of Defense, they're mistaken." He said, "I can't do it now." I think that's probably right.

Then it got to the point where—it looked like we were getting too close to November elections and he wasn't going to say—it looked like he was making a decision about the Secretary of Defense based on winning a midterm election. That decision will never square well with House Republicans.

Riley: Sure.

Bartlett: And Senate Republicans who felt like it would have helped them. So we were also dealing with the reality that we didn't have a lot of good candidates. I think President Bush also had in his book that we even flirted with the idea of trying to convince Jim Baker—figured that we could play on his ego and vanity that he would be literally the only person in American political history to have been Chief of Staff, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of Treasury, and Secretary of State. Wouldn't go. I think we got his dad to float the idea with Secretary Baker, and he didn't take the bait.

Then he was on the Iraq Study Group and trying to manage that process, which fell on Josh, Steve, and myself to try to navigate the shoals of that whole—the politics and dynamics around that—in which we worked, particularly Josh, Steve, and I very closely with Secretary Baker.

Secretary Baker didn't get into politics until he was 40, 41 years old, so he had had almost a 20-year career in practicing law. He practiced law in an office right next door to my father-in-law at Andrews Kurth in Houston. He knows my father-in-law very well. I'll never forget he came flying into the Oval Office one day. "Bartlett, why didn't you tell me that Tree is your father-in-law?" My father-in-law is 6 foot 8 and they call him Tree. So we got to be very—I have an enormous amount of respect for him personally and professionally, but we worked closely with him to try to—because he knew we weren't going to be able to sign off on every element of the Iraq Study Group, but we had to embrace enough of it to where their work wasn't ignored. Those were tough times.

We had [Addison Mitchell] Mitch McConnell coming in telling us that there is no appetite on Capitol Hill for Iraq right now. "You can't do this." This dovetails in the ultimate decision the President had to make about the surge of troops in Iraq. But before that just to pause and talk about Secretary Rumsfeld.

Riley: I'd like you to go back and talk about the general relationship between Rumsfeld and the White House, because the impression I get is that it was not always very smooth.

Bartlett: In the early days it was fine. You learned pretty quickly that this was a person who was a master of the process. Through the national security process I had episodic insight into—not regular, but what I did see was that he knew how to throw sand in the gears without being accountable for it.

He'd been in a meeting—"I was traveling for the last week in 14 different countries and I got this briefing last night. You can't expect me to be able to render an opinion on this." He would just slow things down they didn't want to make a decision on. Then he went through that phase when he was the rock star and doing the media briefings. When everything was going well, Rummy could do no wrong.

Riley: Did that rub people in the White House the wrong way?

Bartlett: Not early on. Later, as it wore thin, he kept trying to go to that playbook and people weren't buying it. I will say a real stark contrast between Don Rumsfeld the Secretary of Defense and Don Rumsfeld the person. It really hit home for me—at the height of his popularity he threw

a big Christmas party at his beautiful home in Kalorama, and all of Washington was invited. It was one of those classic surreal mixtures of government, politicians, and media and whatnot.

My wife and I went to the party. My wife is pregnant with twins, so she is miserably big and all that comes with that. Washington is an ugly town and most ugly at parties like this because it's all about—literally she almost got run over two or three times by people trying to get to somebody. It's who's who. She is totally ignored.

Don Rumsfeld saw this playing out and he is the host of this thing. He grabs my wife, takes her to a private study where he has pictures of all of his grandchildren, and sat there for 15 or 20 minutes talking to her about the benefits of parenthood in a way that—I mean I can say no wrong about Don Rumsfeld to my wife. His wife is the same way, just a level of decency and sincerity. Then he could just be the biggest ass at work.

I told you the stories of he used to call Andy Card and just ridicule him about how he was doing his job as Chief of Staff. He refused to take calls from Fran Townsend, who was head of our counterterrorism effort. Just would not talk to her. She is beneath me. Who is this person? Is she in the chain of command? She's staff.

Riley: That is the dismissive question.

Bartlett: So I always had the challenge of—I worked with his staff, [Victoria] Torie Clarke first, and then ultimately mostly with his chief of staff, Larry DiRita. Larry and I—we would always do our best to try and corral him. It came to a head on a couple of different occasions, but the big one was Abu Ghraib. When Abu Ghraib photos came out I get a call from either the *New York Times* or *Washington Post* and the reporter says, "Our reporting shows that the Secretary of Defense had possession and knowledge of the pictures for at least seven days before sharing them with the White House and the President. In the course of things is that acceptable?"

This is already an international incident. There is only one answer, that is, "No, of course it's not." I said let me get back to you. I go down to the Oval Office and explain to the boss how this was going to play out. He said, "What do you think?" I said, "This is why you have—"

Riley: Had you seen the pictures then?

Bartlett: Oh yes, they were public at this point. What they were doing is the ticktock, how did this happen? They were trying to re-create when did the government know? When did they know it? The scenario they were dealing with. They're saying, "Our reporting shows that—" The whole thing was that the Pentagon was trying to minimize it. As part of that reporting they said the Secretary of Defense sat on these, had possession of the photos, but didn't think it was worthy of the President's or the White House's attention.

I go down there and I say, "This is it." He says, "What do you think?" I said, "This is why you have Cabinet Secretaries. They take the bullets. It's just that simple." So I'm going to have to respond to them that the President wasn't satisfied with the process. He said, "Make sure you give them a heads-up that you're going to do that."

I call Larry and I tell him how this came down. He says, "I appreciate the heads-up." I didn't

appreciate how much the *New York Times* was going to play this up. So it's the next morning, bold type, "Bush rebukes Rumsfeld over Abu Ghraib." I always got to the office early. I usually got there at 6:30, 6:15 because the President was always there about 6:45 in the Oval. There is an intercom system throughout the White House, so on my desk it says, "Trailblazer departs White House," meaning he's walking over to the Oval Office.

His foot must not have been in the Oval Office for a second it seems before the phone rings and it's, "The President wants to see you." So I go down there and he's sitting behind the desk and smiling. He's like, "Get a load of this." He pushes a piece of paper across and it is a resignation letter from Rumsfeld. Then the phone rings and it's Rumsfeld. He called me and said you want to talk to him. Bush said, "This is a deft move by him. He's calling my hand." It's a classic play.

"Come on, Donny, you're not retiring, I'm not going to let you off that easy." He's grumbling on the other side, "Well, get your PR handlers under control" type bullshit. So even though he knew, it was a classic Rumsfeld move. He tried it one other time, I believe. He tried to resign twice, if I recall.

Riley: At least.

Bartlett: I mean formally, written and all. I think it was the second, one of the times, when we said, "I'm going to take you up on that." I really believe—I don't want to put this callously, but what was frustrating for me was that I really feel he lost interest in Iraq and what was happening and how it was happening. There just wasn't the level of urgency. There was always the willingness to explain something away as opposed to thinking that it needed to be fundamentally changed. As Josh took over as Chief of Staff and Josh went into the process, it was becoming crystal clear that that was the case.

It was, as we prepared, because that was right around the transition, him out and [Robert] Gates in, that we're working on the surge. He was a minimal contributor to that process. He just—I don't know how to describe it.

Riley: It sounds to me, and again based on the external accounts, that one way to understand this is sort of conventional Defense Department acceptance of the mission of going in someplace and conquering it and then it becomes somebody else's problem, phase four or whatever.

Bartlett: But you have to remember they fought vehemently to own phase four. There was a huge—between them and State Department. They were insistent. They put [Jay] Garner in there and later [L. Paul] Bremer, which was multiple layers of disaster. I'll never forget—at some point, from a process standpoint, Condi took a heavier role in coordinating. I remember that was put in a meeting and he went ballistic over that. "If she wants my office, have her come on over."

Riley: But it strikes me—the point is well taken. If they wanted ownership of it, then you would expect that they would take a great interest in it. Maybe not. Maybe that is a leap in logic. Maybe they wanted ownership of it just to have possession of the real estate and not to have—if their soldiers are going to be responsible for this, they don't want Powell or anybody else to—

Bartlett: I have an enormous amount of respect for and affinity for Tommy Franks, but I think he exited way too early from the scene. I don't know how much Rumsfeld had a say in that and

how that all played out. But that turned out to be an absolute critical decision to switch out the Secretary. You could argue we're a year late. Would that have entirely altered the course of what happened there? I don't know.

Riley: The President never seriously considered replacing him before '06?

Bartlett: We talked about it a little bit in '05, but not before the election in '04. The interesting thing was Powell was under the impression—when he said that he was going to step down—when he learned that Rumsfeld wasn't going to step down, then he tried to—"Oh no, I'm not going to—" "No, you actually already said you were going to do this and we already had plans in motion for Condi to move over," which was interesting to say the least.

Riley: How frustrated was Condi working with Rumsfeld when she was at SC [Security Council]?

Bartlett: Very. They all were. I won't say it was dysfunctional, but it was not harmonious by any means. Then where the real work actually—a lot of the real work was in what was called the Deputies Committee. The dynamic there was even worse. You had Rich Armitage, who was implicated in the leak investigation stuff. It was Wolfowitz, enough said. That's where Hadley really earned his stripes, dealing with all those guys. So it was not by any stretch a harmonious group. It made for very hard decision making.

Riley: This is sort of the puzzle then. It is widely recognized as being—you shied away from the word dysfunctional, but if it's not functioning properly, is it beyond the ability of the President to fix it at this point because of everything that is going on?

Bartlett: What we benefited by was that it was functioning fairly well early in the administration, the first term when the President needed it more. As you get into your second term, the President has a pretty strong idea about what—you almost work around that process—and you can. You manage the national security process more individually with people and on the issues and things like that.

Riley: But by the second term it has become relatively more functional, right?

Bartlett: And I think Josh and Steve really helped make it more functional.

Riley: But you don't have Powell at State—

Bartlett: Right. You have Condi there and then Gates comes in.

Riley: Eventually. But my question is more about the first term. Why is the President reluctant, if he's got something that verges on dysfunctional—

Bartlett: It's easy to say now, the dysfunction. At the time he probably liked some of the tension. It's creative tension. It's only in hindsight you see that could have been better.

Riley: Is it also the case that when you're in the middle of two shooting wars you don't have the luxury of saying, "We are going to change this."

Bartlett: No doubt about it.

Riley: To borrow his phrasing, you may not have the Secretary of Defense you want, but—

Bartlett: You go with the one you've got. You're in the middle of a war. Swapping out Secretary of Defense is a big hurdle. I think we actually used that too much as a crutch to not move quicker.

I'll tell you a quick story, just a classic Rumsfeld. We're all waiting outside the Oval Office to go into—it was one of these kind of jump-ball decisions. It was a split decision, so the President was going to have to decide it. So literally you have Rumsfeld, Cheney, Rice, Card, me, Steve Hadley all sitting out there. He was on the phone with somebody, so we're all waiting in that little outer room with the door closed. We're just shooting the breeze.

Rumsfeld turns to me, and he had done his homework. He knew I was on the other side of this. I can't even remember the issue, but I remember he says, "Danny—" he called me Danny. This is coming from the guy who was the youngest Secretary of Defense ever, and at this time I'm a 34 year-old communications director. "Remind me how old you are." [*laughter*] "Thirty-four years old, Mr. Secretary." He says, "Good golly, I have suits that are older than you are, son." Quickly, without missing a beat, I grab a lapel and said, "Yes, sir, and this must be one of them." Rumsfeld said, "Oh, Rummy got you." His point was don't screw with me, kid.

Riley: But that's a strange comment coming from a guy who had been in the same position.

Bartlett: Trust me, I know.

Riley: All right. Anything else that comes to your mind? At the end of these things I always tell people we never exhaust everything we could talk about, but we do a pretty good job of exhausting the person seated in the chair.

Bartlett: The only other thing—I was out of the White House but still somewhat involved—those final weeks of the Presidency around the pardon issue, he was miserable.

Riley: Because he doesn't like the idea of pardons?

Bartlett: He didn't like the process, when people he thought of as friends were using that friendship in order to bring forward their requests for pardons. Then it culminated with the Vice President leaning on him incredibly hard.

Riley: Of course.

Bartlett: The Vice President just couldn't imagine a scenario where he didn't pardon Scooter, to the point where the President instructed some of his internal lawyers to take a fresh look and really get down to the nub, did he or didn't he lie. Let's not ask ourselves why he did, what motivated it, but did he or didn't he. It was pretty clear. He asked Brett Kavanaugh, who now serves on the D.C. Circuit, who was our Staff Secretary at the time, to shepherd that process with another lawyer named Bill Burck who was a former U.S. attorney, assistant prosecutor. They both came back pretty clear. They brought Scooter in and let him make his case, the whole thing.

My view is that ultimately Scooter had the premise—it was based on the premise that he never felt there would be a scenario where reporters were going to be compelled to give up sources, because it had never happened, to the point where a reporter goes to jail. Never did we think Fitzgerald would go to those lengths. But it was clear.

The President then lessened the sentence, but did not fully pardon him. I remember the President calling me and talking to him. He was at Camp David his last weekend. All the family is there and he says, "I have the Vice President calling, leaning. Clay Johnson had somebody from the Department of Justice." I think he promised, gave every attention to the guy that he was going to get a pardon and we weren't going to. So he had Clay furious at him. "This is not how I envisioned ending my Presidency, dealing with this."

It was on top of the financial crisis. It was all the way up to the last day. I remember when I told him I was going to step down the spring of '07. He said, "This last year. You're kidding me. It's going to be a breeze. Nobody cares about me anymore. We'll go to the Beijing games, the Olympics." Little did either of us know about the financial crisis and that they were going to be burning at both ends right up to the last minute. Glad I didn't listen to him.

Riley: Were you getting calls from him during that time?

Bartlett: A little bit. But that's too hard. When you're out of the slipstream, you're out. I can talk to him on occasion and just say, "This is what you see from the outside," but it would be more personal, just, "Hey, what's going on? How are you?" On the pardon, that was more—I was there then. I knew a lot of the details. But when you're out, you're out. That one, to me that was really disappointing that he couldn't end the eight years on a higher note.

Riley: I guess it's in the nature of the business, given the fact that the pardons usually do sort of pile up. He had said that he didn't want to be in a situation of having—

Bartlett: I remember he talked to Obama about it when he became President. There should be a better process.

Riley: I think they've been more proactive in dealing with some of these things as they come along. But I don't know how you fix that, given the constitutional nature of the duties.

Bartlett: Right. Is that good?

Riley: Terrific. You have been most accommodating. It has been fascinating, and again, we could go on for three days. Here is what I would recommend. We'll go through the process of getting the transcript to you. Let's take a day or two to kind of decompress and look back on it. If you on reflecting on it think there are three or four things we just didn't touch on, it's the easiest thing in the world for me to pop up here or for Mike to come in from Tennessee, take two or three hours to just round things off.

If we've done what we need to do I've promised Margaret and the Foundation we're going to try to be as economical as we could be with people's time. You've been generous with us to give us a day and a half and I don't want to overstay that welcome. I think we've done terrific work and I know that people will find this enormously valuable once we get it in the position for them to

look at it.