GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH CLAY JOHNSON

February 11–12, 2014
Charlottesville, Virginia

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To cite an interview, please use the following general format: [name of interviewee] Interview, [date of interview], George W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA

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Riley: This is the Clay Johnson interview, as part of the George W. Bush Oral History Project. We've talked before the recorder came on, about the basic ground rules, but the most important one, I'll repeat for the record, is the confidentiality of the proceedings. You're the only person who's allowed to report what goes on here, until the transcript is cleared for use. We've also talked about your travails in getting here and we're grateful for your coming to Charlottesville for the interview. It saves us a lot of work here.

Johnson: Honored to be asked.

Riley: We appreciate it. You said you have some things to say about President Bush, or George Bush, I guess, since you've known him since before he was President. Why don't we start with your general reflections, and this will be informal, and we'll just carry on from there.

Johnson: Great. One thing about George Bush versus President Bush—The Presidency is so awe-inspiring, the position, not only in America but in the world, and it makes no difference how long you've known the President; once he's in that office it's "Mr. President," and it's "President Bush." Even when I was with him alone, or my wife and I were with him and Laura [Bush], he'd encourage me to call him George, when it was just us, but I generally called him Mr. President, even with us. Now, when I'm with others, I call him whatever the others are calling him.

Perry: But he encouraged you to call him by his first name?

Johnson: Yes, always, even when he was President. But he honored that office, those responsibilities, so highly; he took them so seriously that not just I, but everybody who worked with him felt it was their responsibility to do the same, and so you always wore a coat and tie to honor the office, honor the responsibility, and honor the position.

Perry: Except for his family, who of course would have known him his whole life, either parents or younger siblings, were you the only person who had known him the longest, going back to prep school days, and with him as Governor, and with him as President? So there would have been no one in the Presidency with him who had known him longer, except for family?

Johnson: That's true. There were people who served in his administration. [Robert J.] Rob Dieter, who just moved into Austin, who was at Andover, started in the 11th grade, and George

Bush and I started in the 10th grade. He was an ambassador. But in the Presidency, and certainly not in Austin—I'm the only one because of location who fit that description.

When he asked me to go to work with him—I'll talk about that a little later—to go down and help him set up his administration, the election for Governor was not over yet. It was in August that he asked me to go down there and help him set up his administration, and he explained what that meant. I said, "Great. How long is that going to take?" He said, "Probably a year and a half." So I'm in for a year and a half. Well, 14 years later—[*laughter*] It's just phenomenal, challenging, awesome, highs, lows—It was such an honor to be a part of all of that.

Let me talk about Bush. Who is this guy, George Bush? You've heard 60 or 70 people talk about him.

Riley: Oh, no, some of the [William J.] Clinton people talked about him too.

Johnson: President [Barack] Obama talks about him. It's not a speech if you can't throw a few hand grenades.

Riley: I'm sorry, go ahead.

Johnson: His staff when he was Governor and his staff when he was President always tried to give him a very thoughtful Christmas gift. In Texas, we gave him some longhorn calves one year and we gave him some handmade boots. Harriet Miers was taking the lead on one Christmas gift when he was President. I had an idea for it and I said, "Why don't you get a bowl, poll the senior staff, ask them what adjectives they would use to describe George W. Bush, and have them engraved on a bowl." She said, "That's kind of an interesting idea." I said, "There will be about six or seven adjectives and it will fit on a bowl. It will be nice. It will be, without being said, this is what the staff thinks of you." Well, here's the list of adjectives that people came up with. We got the list and I said, "Harriet, I don't know how many there are, but we have to cut this list down. Some of these are more important than others." We talked through them, and they're all equally important.

The adjectives that the staff used to describe him were, in no particular order: "principled, leader, inspirational, compassionate, dedicated, resolute, visionary, steadfast, honorable, loyal, incisive, generous, energetic, funny, gracious, kind, optimistic, strong, insightful, courageous, motivating, tireless, selfless, caring, genuine, hopeful, faithful, reassuring, devoted, content, personable, thoughtful, respectful, focused. " My favorite, as you'll come to understand over the next 24 hours, is "results oriented." We couldn't decide to cut any of those out. The bowl—I think maybe she had already bought the bowl—the bowl is like this. The engraver was—[*laughter*]

Riley: It was too small a medium.

Johnson: Those were the adjectives. I need to go count them up. There's a whole lot. It occurs to me, did anybody really think he'd be President when he was 15 years old? No. Bill Clinton started thinking about it, as I've read in some books, started planning on what it would take to be President, probably when he was 15. There were 240 people in our graduating class at Andover, and if you asked the 240 to pick the 10 people who were really memorable for you, George Bush would have been on, I'll bet, a third or half the people's lists, and a lot of it would have been

people not necessarily like him. There were different circles of people, but he was just one of these people who stood out, and this has helped me to understand why he did. He was just a very notable person. He has been along the way, and in leadership roles. He didn't run for an office until he was—Well, he ran for Congress and lost, but then he ran for Governor and then President. But he didn't run for any of these leadership positions that he had at Andover and at Yale.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: People just asked him to take these positions because they thought he would be good at it. Again, I'll talk about that a little bit later. There are a lot of dimensions to George Bush; that's one major point to be made. Another one is that, much to my aggravation and everybody else's in the administration, a hundred percent of the time when anybody went in to meet President Bush who hadn't already had the opportunity to meet him, when that person came out of the Oval Office and saw the person who had arranged the meeting, or they went back to that person's office, a hundred percent of the time they would say something very similar to, "He's nothing like I thought he was going to be."

One of my points to be made during this next day or so is that our communications department must have been pathetic. I'm not enough of a communications expert to critique it, but I know that their primary job was to have perception and reality be the same, with regards to what kind of person and what kind of President George W. Bush was. It was this huge distinction, this huge difference. America wasn't served by that discrepancy. I hope that one of the things, with your work and study, time will serve him well, as the perception starts jiving with reality, and people will understand the true depth of this person and the depth of what he was able to contribute as President.

Let me now talk about various qualities of note about George W. Bush, not necessarily in any order. Every policy person who worked with him as Governor or as President said the same thing about him. When a policy person comes in, there's a meeting and he's to be briefed on some subject: national security, agricultural things in Texas, whatever it is. By definition, the Governor or President knows the least about that topic of anybody in the room. But if you'd ask the policy people at the end of the meeting, out of earshot of the President, "Who is the most valuable member at that meeting?" he would say, "Not me, the briefer, for bringing all of the relevant facts to light, but the Governor or the President." And the reason is that he has this uncanny ability to get at the essence of just about every issue really quickly, and sometimes, the policy person had really thought that the essence of this issue was this, when in fact it had been that. He just is always trying to burrow down to, what is this thing really all about? It's not that he's trying to oversimplify.

I taught an entrepreneurship program when I was working with him in the Governor's office, an entrepreneurship program at Texas in my spare time. I was given the curriculum. The first assignment in this entrepreneurship program was to assume that you're eight years old and you set up a lemonade stand. When you go through the exercise of a lemonade stand, you go through all the same hoops and hollers and drills that you'd do if you were starting Microsoft or Apple. It's the same issues. George Bush, innately, tries to get it down to—It belittles the importance of the work, but he gets it down to the lemonade stand basics.

One of my early favorite stories about him was—George Shultz, Secretary of many different departments, had set up a meeting to brief him on National Security matters, particularly in regards to Defense. He was still Governor. The meeting was at the Governor's Mansion. I wasn't in there but [Condoleezza] Condi Rice and Vance McMahan, who was the head of his policy office in the Governor's office, both told me this story and it's identical. Shultz and Brent Scowcroft and Condi, and people of that ilk, were in this meeting, and by definition, as I said, George Bush knows the least of anything. They're talking about all this stuff and he's hearing all these things about guns and troop strength and so forth, and he stops him about 15 or 20 minutes into the meeting and says, "Wait a minute. Let me ask you something. What's the purpose of the Defense Department? What's the definition of success? How do they measure success over there?"

As I heard the story told, there was stunned silence and it seemed like minutes—It was probably 10 seconds—and George Shultz, who was the chair of the meeting, said, "Governor, we're stunned that we can't answer that question." I think, if we had a good answer for that, there are things our country has been involved in that we probably wouldn't have been involved in, and there are things we should have been involved in where we chose not to be involved because the definition of success wasn't very clear overall, for what we spend our military moneys for.

I heard that story when he was still Governor—He wasn't President yet—and it just struck me as so thematic about why governments don't work. Governments don't work primarily because they have no goals. They don't have desired things they're trying to accomplish, because it's hard. It's harder to do it that way than just to pass a bill and get some money and declare victory. But he fights that temptation and can't sit still if he can't articulate succinctly what it is we're really trying to do.

Perry: Where does that come from, do you think? Does that come from personality, from training, family?

Johnson: I don't know. He went to Harvard Business School and he's the first President with an MBA [master of business administration degree]. Maybe it's coming from that. I went to the Sloan School at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and audited some courses at Harvard, and I'm sure he got some of it from there. But he was a bottom-line person who could kind of cut through the intellectual hoi polloi and other stuff and get at the essence of things before that.

When we talk about what basic qualities from Andover served him well, I'll kind of reflect on it then. I think too much is made about he's the first MBA President. I'm a typical graduate of a business school; he's not. Business schools don't teach leadership. They get at it; they touch on it. The difference between leaders and managers is not black and white. I'm a typical graduate of a high-end business school; he's not. In other words, would we want the government to run like a business? Somebody told me when I was in business school that there are so many people in the world who are making money in spite of themselves. To be like a businessman is not the goal here.

But anyway, getting at the essence of something—It started when he was Governor. What's the purpose of the Defense Department? I heard him tell the story himself, that when they were

talking about the Middle East, he decided the real issue here is—words to this effect—that [Yasser] Arafat's a liar. Isn't the bottom line that if Arafat's involved, our expectation is zero? We can't accomplish anything as long as Arafat—Isn't that the essence of what we're dealing with? This country, that country, it doesn't make any difference how smart you are, as long as it involves Arafat for resolution. He can't be trusted, period.

It's not like he intends to be this way. He just gets it down to the bottom line. I was known as Mr. Results-oriented. What's the goal? Whenever the President would use the word "results" in a speech, and there were several of us sitting around watching it on television, I was such a Mr. Results guy that people would say, "Clay, he's using your word there." So here I am, Mr. Results, and we were giving a briefing to him, which nobody had ever done in any prior Presidency, briefing the President on management-related things. That was a favor he granted me, but it did serve a great purpose, because it raised the elevation of management in the eyes of everybody in the administration.

We had ways of grading things: red, yellow, green. Green was good and yellow, not quite so good; red was bad. We were talking about all the green scores that had been achieved, and how we just had so many greens now and so few greens before. He stopped us and said, "Let me ask you something. When you get to all green, does the government work better?" So here's Mr. Results—me—being asked the most basic "results" question by the President. There were 40, 50 people in the room, all the deputy secretaries of all the agencies. I said, "You know, I have to tell you, the answer is not necessarily." You can have all green scores for your work and still not be as effective as you should be.

The next week, I sat down with the deputy secretary at Labor, which had earned a lot of green ratings. I said, "Let me ask you something. What are you working on?" He said, "Da, da, da, blah, blah." I said, "If you get to green on all these things, does the Labor Department work better?" He couldn't assure me it did. So the President just got right to the primary question: are we working to get good scores or be more effective, because the former might not equal the latter.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: It's the ability to get at the essence. One thing is he's a man of substance. He's not somebody who wants to talk a good game and pass bills and get credit for false accomplishments. He's in the reality of things, the truth, the substance. Is it really going to work better? He kept using the phrase, "Leave it better than you found it." *Really* better, not kind of better, not the suggestion of better. How can I quantify—We had this many people who had a problem, now we have this fewer number of people. Or we had this many people with an opportunity; now we have this many more people with the same opportunity. Tangibly, quantifiably, how is this really going to impact us? What are we really trying to accomplish in the Middle East? What are we really trying to accomplish with education? He had a way of cutting through everything and getting at that.

I kept a journal. They tell you not to keep journals or diaries because it's subpoenable, and nobody talks about it, but I kept one. Not like "Joe said to Susan on this date," but just, *Who woulda thunk it?* Or, *Gosh, isn't this unusual*? These kinds of things.

Riley: Where is the journal?

Johnson: I have it at home. I thought about writing a book, and I actually did two drafts, on what you need to know to make the government work better. It can be done in less than a hundred pages. But I decided that the real way to make the government work better is not to write a book; the real way to make the government work better is when some President gets elected who's really serious about it, to get in and influence the thinking.

Riley: Go ahead.

Johnson: The Secret Service code word for the President was "Pathfinder." I don't know how they come up with code names, but that kind of—Where are we trying to go? What are we really trying to do in the Middle East? What are we trying to do with the President's management agenda? What are we trying to do with space policy? A lot of these things keep coming back to getting at the essence of what are we trying to accomplish? What are we trying to do? What are the opportunities? What are the obstacles? Wisdom, getting at the essence of things.

Energy. Andy Card, the Chief of Staff, used to say, "The President just had his annual physical at Walter Reed. I'd like to say that his physical fitness level is a model for us all, but it's so far past being a model for us mere mortals that it's shameful." He was not a fitness person when he was at Andover. He was overweight. He didn't exercise. He was a good athlete, not a varsity-in-every-sport kind of athlete. He's very coordinated and plays all sports well. He loves to play and give it his all. He was just always in motion, always going.

Why is that relevant? Well, one of the things that started when he was Governor—He was running against Ann Richards, so they did all kinds of research on Ann Richards, and one of the things they noticed was that she had very few meetings during the day with her staff, when they were trying to deal with specific things, compared to other Governors. I guess there's some standard for how many meetings someone has. At the Presidential level, there were always reports of President Clinton having a schedule like this, and he'd never really end up meeting with all the people he was scheduled to meet with, because he's an undisciplined person. Any 20-minute meeting could last an hour and a half. How can you run a railroad like that, a Presidential railroad?

The President had a very tight schedule: at eight o'clock, this would happen; at 8:10, this would happen; at 8:25, this meeting; and then something, something, something. The Chiefs of Staff, his personal assistant, his executive assistant, would set it up to make that happen. It's grueling. You'd turn off thinking about one subject and turn on to another subject. He had briefing papers to read every night prior to meetings.

His energy level allows him to say grace over so many issues in a day, where an average exalted person of the caliber to be elected President would not be able to do this. As he describes it, the President has to make a lot of important decisions. That's the primary thing the President does. The President serves as a symbol and is a source of this and a source of that, but the real bottom line of the Presidency, according to President Bush, is that Presidents make decisions. I bet you he was able to make more decisions than most Presidents or Governors. He was always at full

capacity. He wasn't bedraggled; he wasn't tired. You've got all the barrels blazing with George W. Bush, whenever you had a meeting with him.

The other example of energy is the President on Friday, September 14, 2001. It was the Friday after 9/11. The day was maybe one of the most impactful, important, substantive days with regard to this country and for the President, than any other single day. In the morning he had a briefing with Bob Mueller, the new head of the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], to redefine the agency's mission.

Then he went to the National Cathedral to give a speech to the nation. The President is not a good actor; he's not a good pretender. He's not good at platitudes, but he didn't need to be then because he was speaking from his toes and America knew it, and they needed it. Just like when he threw out that first pitch in the World Series, the fact that he threw it right down the middle, strike, and America's confidence level went from—Three hundred million people, and their confidence level—A guy throws a pitch and the confidence level goes from 38 to 88 or something? It was unbelievable. That shows you the power of the President.

Then he went to Ground Zero and most of that was unscripted, you probably heard. I'm sure you've heard from Condi and Karen [Hughes] about how he went back and spent three hours or so with all the families, not for anybody's benefit except those families. Condi and Karen probably told you that they were so exhausted from the day and so emotionally wrought from being with all those family members of the victims of 9/11, the ones that they could identify, that they had to take turns attending to the President. But the President didn't take turns; he was the President for the entire day, and America was better for it. Physically, a normal President couldn't have done that. He was the right guy at the right time in so many respects, starting with the energy level required. He had all the great abilities to inspire, but it would have been irrelevant if he didn't have the energy to get up and be that kind of a person. His energy level is unbelievable.

He honored the work of the Presidency, stayed on schedule, did the homework. The work is so important that he can't take a night off and say, I'm not going to read the briefing book. He does the assignments. He doesn't just show up for class and sit through the lectures. At Andover, we started off behind. We were certainly in the middle of the class, maybe just a notch or two above, but not much, after about a year there. He always did the work. And his grades were better than [John] Kerry's and [Albert, Jr.] Gore's were at their schools. If he didn't do well, it wasn't because he didn't do the work; it was because it was hard. He did well. He was not a shirker.

He focuses on results. He's a do-the-right-thing and focus-on-results—He's very responsible. He's not going to cut corners. He's not going to say, "Gosh, I sneaked out a B on that one." "Gosh, I don't know how I got that." He was asked to be the head cheerleader at Andover. I don't know who asked him or how that was determined. The position is not "Sis boom bah," at football games. It's the head of school spirit, and it manifests itself throughout the year in different ways. A friend of mine and George's, Mike Wood, who lives in Washington, is the only person who's ever had to succeed George Bush twice. He succeeded him as president of our fraternity at Yale, and he succeeded him as the head cheerleader at Andover, and he said, "I'm here to tell you, it's impossible to follow him." He told this story about when there was an assembly at Andover at the end of our senior year. They were announcing the head cheerleader,

Mike Wood, at the end of this assembly, so they were asking Mike to come up and be recognized. He was walking down the aisle, proud of being a cheerleader, and Mr. [G. Grenville] Benedict, who was the dean of students, was in charge of the program, was saying, "I want to congratulate George Bush and his other cheerleaders here. I've been at this school 40-some odd years, and school spirit has never been higher." Mike Wood said, "I'm walking down the aisle and I'm being told, 'You have no chance in hell of doing half the job George Bush did.'" I wouldn't have known whether it was high or low or whatever, but Benedict, with the 40-year perspective, said that there were things going on spirit-wise that I just didn't know.

He was the president of our fraternity. He didn't seek that. Somebody said, "We would like to make you the president," somebody who picks the leaders. He was the commissioner of the stickball league. It was great fun. It was very informal, and he wore a top hat when he'd go around and watch the games, goofy stuff, because he was a good commissioner. He was a good head cheerleader. He adds energy. He adds a focus on what we're trying to do. People say he's a "people person." I hate that phrase. What does that mean, you're a people person? You have people figured out? I'm a people and you're a people, and so we can kind of— Is someone who's not a people person less of a people? I don't know what that really means. I'll talk about that in a second.

Anyway, do the right thing, focus on the bottom line, focus on the results. He would say, "Clay, I want you to find the best people." I said, "I don't know anything about politics." He said, "That's why I'm asking you to do this. I've got other people who can do politics. You find the best people to do these things." If it came ever to politics or the merits, what the person could do for America or Texas, the merits won out, without exception. He told [David] Petraeus, "You do the right thing in Iraq. I'll take care of the politics." Don't try to be a political person. And with [Henry] Paulson, he told Paulson—He couldn't tell [Ben Shalom] Bernanke directly, because he's an independent person—"You figure it out. Forget what our belief in capitalism is and all that. You find out what we need to do to get out of this thing, to save our country and our financial system, and I'll handle all the drift." It was like, what's the job? Not, how will it appear? Let's take care of the challenge.

He rarely interceded his personal opinion about who ought to be a certain appointee, an ambassador or something else. There was one that was unusual because he and [Richard B.] Cheney were both involved. It was a good friend of Cheney's and a wonderful guy, a guy from Wyoming, who had had an environmental position in the [George H. W.] Bush 41 administration. Cheney had mentioned to President Bush that he hoped this guy would be able to serve as the Assistant Secretary for a particular environmental position at Interior, because he was qualified for it and he's a really good guy and he's a close friend of the Vice President. The President had never said anything to me ahead of time about a prospective appointee, but in this case he said, "Next week we're going to be talking about So-and-So. I hope you take a really close look at So-and-So, because I understand he'd be a really good candidate for this." I was stunned. He had never said anything like that to me before, or since. But Cheney was there. The Vice President was there, so it was for Cheney's benefit, but it was also a message to me.

We looked at the person, and that person was wonderful and eminently qualified, but he was associated with some decision that hadn't been his, back in the 41 administration, and so the environmentalists thought he was the devil. If he were appointed to this position in this other

department, the environmentalists would never let him be successful there. He'd be playing defense the whole time. There was another environmental position at the State Department, and this would be fabulous for him, too, and he could do wonderful things and he'd be challenged by it.

Bush had basically said, and Cheney believed, that this was the guy they wanted in this position in Interior. We went in there and said, "Mr. President, we've got a recommendation that you may not like, but just hear us out. This guy is really qualified for this position at Interior, but he will not be successful, due to no reason of his own," and we explained how it was. "He will have every opportunity to be successful and will be fabulously so for this similar position at the State Department. The person we recommend for this position in the Interior Department is this other person who doesn't have the baggage."

At these meetings, nine times out of ten, I'm sitting in the Oval Office—The President's here, the Vice President's here, Andy Card is there. I'm on a sofa here and my staff is here. I'm sitting here talking to the President about this—I explained this to him, he looks over at Dick, they nod, then he says, "OK, good job." I bet you that doesn't happen with other Presidents. If an administration is going to be successful, our people have to be successful at doing what the President and his policy people want them to do, and if they're not going to be successful, then he or she is the wrong person for that position. I don't care who they are. That was the essence of his approach to appointments.

Sometimes there were the boards or commissions where half plus one of the people on the board need to be of the party in the majority.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: So when we're picking the Democrats, we'd usually work with the minority leader to pick the person that they recommend. We try to make sure they don't glow in the dark and they're not communists.

They had recommended several people for Democratic positions on a board. These are unpaid boards, but important for the subject at hand. We went ahead and did that, and then we had found the person we wanted to put on the board for the Republican, and they rejected them, so our Legislative Affairs people were really incensed. You know, it was understood that they'd have their guys and we'd have our guys, and they turned in their guys. They hadn't been confirmed yet. Our Legislative Affairs people wanted to recommend that we withdraw the name of the Democrat because they didn't live up to their part of the bargain. So we explained this to the President, "We want your permission to withdraw their names, because it's time to show them that you're the President; they're not the President." This was in the first year of the administration. "You're the one who makes the recommendations. You're the boss; they're not. You're important; they're not."

I was going on and on about this. He listened to me and he said, "Clay, let me stop you there. This is about spite, isn't it?" The President's here and the Vice President's here. I said, "Spite? Yes, I guess it is about spite, and Mr. President. We are asking you to join us in this spiteful action. It will teach them a lesson. It feels so good to tell them that you're the important one;

they're not the important one. It makes us feel powerful. Sir, join us today in this spiteful action. Authorize this spiteful action." A little chuckling, not much. He said, "Clay, we're bigger than spite." It had nothing to do with the board. He said, "Let's just work this out and not play these games." Some of this stuff about appointments can be silly. It can be stupid. No, no, this is about making America better. No, no, let's figure out the best thing to do here. Come on, let's talk about it.

There was a Cabinet meeting after Katrina. A couple of people were reporting on Katrina and what their departments were involved in, on Katrina, and they started off bad-mouthing the Governor of Louisiana, and the mayor, and told him these people were pathetic, really pathetic. Not Mississippi, but Louisiana was just the Keystone Cops. The President stopped them. These were Cabinet Secretaries he's talking to, among other Cabinet Secretaries. He stopped them and said, "Hey, no, let's not go there." He said, "Everything you're saying is true. But we deal with what is. We can't say we wish it wasn't so. It's so." Our goals are still the same. We have high standards. Our goals are fine. We're here. Let's talk about what we're doing here. I don't want to know why life is hard. Life is hard. It's something different every day. Life is hard. What are we doing? He just didn't want to complain. The results are everything. I don't care about hearing about how inept those people are.

I'd run across these quotes, and I would write them down because it was so salient to the way I think of the Presidency and the federal government in general. [Benjamin] Franklin said, "Well done is better than well said." [Abraham] Lincoln said how good plans are nice but good results are better. We're not here to pretend and make good efforts; we're here to get stuff done. That's the kind of person Bush was. I bet he will be considered to be one of the most results-oriented Presidents. His energy and focus on results allow him to be positive, upbeat. He adds energy. He's not a fretter. After 9/11, he said," OK, what do we need to do?" It's not like, "Oh, gosh, I've been dealt another bad hand. My God, how many—Isn't there supposed to be random distribution? Who's dealing me these cards?" He wanted the responsibility especially for the politics. He didn't want somebody else to take the fade on the politics.

Another aspect of this is his focus on how stuff is being implemented. Margaret Spellings and others who are good friends of mine would talk about their policy meetings. If it was 60/40 on what was the right thing to do, which is often the case—There's no such thing as a perfect policy—he would make a really strong point to the senior people involved. He'd say, "OK, we're going to do this now. This is what we're going to do. Because it's not guaranteed of success—Nothing ever is a guaranteed success—it's going to depend on our ability to implement this thing really well. What one person is in charge of successfully implementing whatever it is we just decided to do? Maybe you don't know right now, but decide this and let me know within the week. Not only do I want to know who it is, but I want to know their email address and their phone number, because I might want to call them and check in and see how things are going."

And the person to be in charge is not somebody who's going to work at and do everything he or she can to do a good job. No, we're not here to work as hard as we can and as well as we can; we're here to get this done. A couple of the pundits and the people who write about the Presidency commented about the nature of the people he had on his team, in agencies and the White House. I was not involved in working with Andy to set up the White House staff. He did

that. Presidential Personnel did work with Josh [Bolten] to help him select his team, but Andy wanted to do it all himself.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: Well, Dan Henninger, for the *Wall Street Journal*, made a comment about how President Bush is good at surrounding himself with people who are good at producing. That started with President Bush setting a standard. Those are the kind of people he liked, and I knew that, having done it for years with him. That's the kind of people he liked to have on his team; whereas President Obama doesn't have that bias and I don't think President Clinton had that bias, but it was definitely Bush 43's bias. That was his inclination and the way he wanted it to be approached. That's the kind of people he put around himself.

The focus was on substance and on doing the right thing. This is the kind of thing I wouldn't write down in a journal. Somebody came in from out of the hinterlands to be interviewed for some position, and I was talking to him. This is when Bush was Governor. I said, "How is it going?" He said fine. I said, "How do you think the Governor is doing?" He said, "Oh, fine, really good." I said, "What did you mean, really good?" He said, "Well, in our little town, at Christmas, we get together, dress up and lampoon everything. We make fun of what's going on in the news, that kind of thing. Every year, the highlight of this show is, usually, our making fun of what goes on in Austin, and for the life of us, we could not find anything to lampoon coming out of Austin." Bush had been Governor for three years. He said, "They were doing things that you, as a citizen of Texas, want the government to do." They're working on things and making progress, and the speaker of the house and the lieutenant Governor were both Democrats. But good stuff was happening. A government that's not lampoonable? That's unheard of. [*laughter*]

Another perspective on this, on results being such a priority and the essence of the man—is I think Katrina, the failure to implement. Yes, the leaders in Louisiana were pathetic. Forget it, we're supposed to be able to overcome those things. We couldn't, initially. Relative to the expectations Bush has for getting things done, the difference between what he would have expected and what he got from his team—The deficit was bigger with Katrina than probably anywhere else.

Another subject: his genuine interest in people. The President, and Laura too—Laura's even better at it than he is, remarkably so—are so genuinely interested in whoever they are meeting. Not because this person can help him. He just likes people, and he likes you so much that he's struck by you—male, female, tall, short, high, low—and he remembers you. And you know he has an interest in you and that it's genuine. It's not because it will help him to be interested in people; it's just genuine.

Besides the fact that he remembers people's names, so what? Let me give you an example. In our fraternity, "Deke," [Delta Kappa Epsilon]—Fraternities were not a big deal at Yale and never really have been, because the college system provides a lot of the benefits that a fraternity does—there was some hazing. Rush lasts a week and hazing lasts two weeks and it's kind of pathetic. You pledge in your sophomore year. One of the things they did at the beginning was sit the 50 pledges down and say, "This is the worst class of pledges that we've had ever had in the history of this fraternity. We just can't believe how pathetic you are. You all are terrible. You all

are so interested in yourselves. You're not interested in the group. You're probably not going to make friends with each other. Smith, get up. I want you to go around the room here and name the pledges whose names you know."

Smith would get up, and out of 50 he could name six or seven. Jones knew 11 out of 50. Somebody else knew five. Then they got to Bush, and they stopped him at 20. And he hadn't studied it because he knew, or he hadn't done the little mnemonic things so he could remember the names. He probably was friends with 45 of the 50, just from his freshman year and the beginning of sophomore year. Freshmen never run with juniors and seniors, in high school or college, or vice versa. He spent as much time in seniors' and juniors' rooms, playing cards and what all. It was the same thing at Andover. What is that? I don't know. It's notable. I can't tell you why, but I do know that one of the reasons you're going to say he stands out, looking back 50 years, or 45 years, is for those kinds of qualities.

Another part of this is—I remember reading Paul Johnson's book on intellectuals, pointy-headed intellectuals. He said that intellectuals tend to group people together. You're in X-Y-Z group, or you're in A-B-C group. You're the numbers that describe you; you're concepts and substrata and so forth, not real people. Everybody is a real person for George. That's the main thing. On September 14, 2001, meeting with the families of the known deceased for two or three hours, nobody else mattered except those people. It wasn't for the good of America, but it was for those people. He needed to serve those people, because they had paid an unfathomable price, and they deserved every bit of their President, to be the healer-in-chief, consoler-in-chief. It wasn't like, well, there are 800 people here, so I said hello to 800 people and made them feel good and then went off and dealt with another group of people. These are real people who have real needs that I can address.

Josh Bolten. I met Josh the first time he came to Austin. He was coming in to interview with the President about being his policy guy for the campaign, and then the Governor was going to take him to a basketball game that night. George asked me to go with him, and somebody else, maybe a state senator. I visited with Josh later, and he said, "I was so stunned by Governor Bush." I said, "Why?" This was later when he was President. He said, "He has real friends. Very few Presidents have friends that they've had for life." They have friends that they have made in their Presidential world or their Senatorial world, but they're really not so close to—I mean, they bring them out for nostalgia purposes.

And it wasn't just me he was referring to, because there were people who would invite him to Christmas parties and receptions, from Midland and such. I guess that's really unusual. Now you all know, and you've done these studies of Presidents—I can't appreciate how unusual it is, but his interest in people and how that's reciprocated, and those friendships stay. A friendship is a friendship and the person is the person, and they have these shared experiences. It's not like, well, I can't really benefit from him anymore so I'll just move on.

Riley: Sure.

Johnson: His relationships with world leaders—I asked him one time early on, "Can you really establish a relationship with Presidents of these different countries?" Or are you so handled and they're so handled, that you're there, "Hello, Mr. President. We sure do like your country.

Would you please do A, B, C?" He said, "No, you can, and it's really important." I read that President Obama is not friends with any world leaders. Bush is really close to a bunch of them and it made a huge difference. After 9/11, the ability to pick up the phone and not go through the National Security Advisor, through the Secretary of State, to say, "All right, Tony [Blair], we're going to do this. Not only the ability to communicate, but also the ability to make decisions—It's just invaluable to be able to do that. It's not like, "America will be well served if I can be friendly with this person," so you force yourself. No, it's establishing who's capable of real friendship, who's capable of real honest communication. He had that with the people he needed to, who were capable of reciprocating.

He doesn't let hate get in the way of things. He doesn't hate his opponents. He had little regard for Senator [Harry] Reid. Senator Reid one time called him a liar in the press. Then Reid called him that night at the White House and said, "I want to apologize, sir, for calling you a liar," and the President told him, "Harry, I really appreciate you calling. It just didn't sound like you, and I appreciate you calling me, really. Thanks." Then Reid called him a liar the next day. Well, Bush's reaction to that is OK, I just have to lower my expectations. It's like maybe Arafat's a liar, and you just have to manage it, respond, and act accordingly. But he doesn't hate him. [John] McCain is a hater. Trent Lott hates people, the people against him. With Bush it's he's a person; I don't hate him. I can't trust him, I can't deal with him, I can't count on him, but I don't hate him. Some people need that hate, I guess. Maybe it's a little adrenaline rush or something. Bush has other ways to get the adrenaline pumping.

He's a people person, sometimes to a fault. I believe some people were promoted to jobs within the administration who shouldn't have been. Several in Communications. I remember when Bush was Governor there was a fellow who had been the assistant secretary of state, which is not a meaningless role. You're the senior person dealing with places like Mexico, and you're the head elections officer for Texas. There was a fellow, a reasonably talented person, and the Governor said, "Why don't we make So-and-So secretary of state? Because [Alberto] Al Gonzales had been secretary of state and he was going to run for the Supreme Court, or he was being appointed to the Supreme Court, one of the two. He said, "He deserves it. He's done a good job. He deserves to be secretary of state." I said, "Governor, we're not here to figure out who deserves this. The key is who's the best secretary of state for you and the state of Texas." It's not this guy. It's people like So-and-So, and So-and-So, and So-and-So. He said, "OK, that's a good point." But his first thought was loyalty.

Scott McClellan. He'd done a good job as a number two. Well, oftentimes, the number two is not the guy who ought to be the number one. During Katrina there were people who were brought in to key positions to be policy advisors. They had done a reasonably good job as a deputy secretary or some such, but when Katrina hit, all of a sudden our best wasn't good enough, or we didn't even have our best there. If things weren't blowing up all over, it would have been OK, but things were blowing up and we needed way beyond what we used to think was the best. And he just hadn't been discerning enough or critical enough in looking for the best people. It was loyalty. I think he's, in some cases, loyal to a fault.

Courage. If you're full of energy, and in your prime physically, you can be more courageous than if you feel you've lost it. I think of him as being a very courageous person. The decision to

go with the surge when everybody else was saying let's do anti-surge, let's go backward in terms of troop strength. He wasn't glad that we were at war, but he was glad it occurred on his watch.

In 2001, for 9/11, there could not have been a better team of people in the key positions to help him deal with this for America: [Donald] Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense, Cheney, who had been Secretary of Defense, was Vice President, General [Colin] Powell, Secretary of State. This is for the big boys. This was prime time. And he had prime-time people for the meltdown in 2008. You had Bernanke, who studied financial meltdowns his entire life. You want to throw a financial meltdown? Bring it on. And you have Paulson, who doesn't know anything about financial meltdowns, but he could get on the phone and get anybody or everybody in Wall Street to do anything that needed to be done, in minutes. So twice, the people you would most—If you had 10 years of hindsight to think about who would have been perfect to have in there, who were the best you could imagine? It's those three people there and those two people. Bush had them.

Bush loved to meet with the White House Fellows twice a year. I oversaw the program. I don't know if you know about it.

Riley: Yes.

Johnson: It started with [Lyndon] Johnson. The President loved meeting with them. Originally, his meeting is scheduled for 20 minutes, which is a fairly normal time period for a meeting. But it invariably would run an hour and a half long. His meetings never ran long. After about two of these, they would schedule for 20 minutes, but they'd leave the next hour open. He loved meeting with them. He would talk to them, and answer questions.

Perry: So he would gather all of them together, the whole class?

Johnson: There are usually 12 or 15 people and we would gather in the Roosevelt Room. He would come in, sit at the head of the table, and talk to them. The person who ran the thing worked for me and we worked, over the years, to change it. It's really fun to work on. Somebody said, "Mr. President, have you met—" Maybe it was Tony Blair's successor, or some other President of some other country. This guy asked the President, "Have you met this person yet? I've heard he's really smart." He said, "I haven't met him, but let me tell you something funny. Tony Blair asked me the other day if I'd ever met him. He said, 'I think you'll like him a lot. He's really smart.' It made me think, and I told Tony, and I'm telling you all now, we've already got lots of smart people. In fact, we know how to solve almost all the problems we face. What we don't have very much of is the courage to implement the solutions we know will work, because they're either politically disastrous in the short-term or they're expensive, risk-of-life, or something. It's like the challenge Lincoln had. We're going to go to war? People are going to die? About 614,000 people died because of this, the most of any war. If we had to do that all over again, would we do that again?" It's about courage, the courage to do what's required to fix the problem.

At the beginning of his second term, for the State of the Union Address in January 2005. Mike Leavitt, Secretary of HHS [Health and Human Services], went to Andy Card, and I went to the speechwriters, or maybe we both went to the speechwriters—and recommended that the President stand up and say, "Here's what I want to be held accountable for getting done in the

next four years. Hold me accountable for this." The speechwriters were kind of intrigued by it, but the Andy Cards of the world were horrified at the thought of being that clear about our goals and that exposed to a risk of falling short.

The President asked me one time, "Clay, why do we want to highlight what doesn't work with all this transparency?" I said, "Because, sir, highlighting it will guarantee that it will eventually work." People are embarrassed that these things don't work to the extent to which they don't work, and when you highlight the degree to which it doesn't work, people reprioritize and work on it and find solutions. There were hundreds of examples of this in the management agenda world. We highlighted the fact, and GAO [U.S. Government Accountability Office] helped, that HUD [Housing & Urban Development] was a totally dysfunctional agency, and when we left, it was totally functional. We just did a better job than anybody else, with GAO's help, highlighting how bad it was.

At the end of the administration, they were putting together a list of what we had accomplished, about a hundred things. One of them was we had introduced legislation to reform Social Security; that was considered an accomplishment. My note to the group was anybody can introduce legislation. I think we need to say we failed. We were unable to do what we wanted to do, which was to reform Social Security. That's what this is. Introducing legislation isn't an accomplishment. It was thoughts like that from me that led—I read somewhere that "Clay is considered to be the OMB [Office of Management and Budget] gadfly." You betcha, capital G, coming at you.

[redacted]

Perry: [redacted]

Johnson: [redacted]

Riley: [redacted]

Johnson: When Ridge decided to leave, I did say to him, "Mr. President, this is not going to be fun for you, but I recommend that you seriously consider me to be the Secretary of Homeland Security." I knew more about it than anybody else, because I had worked with the department's transition. I knew a lot about it and I'm the most results-oriented person you can have. But it was a really bad recommendation because I'm politically tone-deaf. The idea of Bush's lifelong friend being made Secretary of Homeland Security—What is the world coming to? What are his bona fides in this area? And the answer is, "Well, let me explain it to you," and you'd have to

take too long to explain this. Politically, it was a bad idea. I ended up saying, "Let me withdraw that recommendation, Mr. President. Your goal, and we'll help you, is to find someone who's even better than I would be." I think [Michael] Chertoff was a good Secretary of Homeland Security.

I believe Paul O'Neill was a mediocre Secretary of the Treasury. He was somebody who didn't really go through the process. He was a friend of Cheney's from the General Motors board. One of the things we say about the general qualities you look for in somebody to be the Treasury Secretary is, they'd be comfortable being George Bush's Secretary of whatever, versus *The* Secretary of whatever. O'Neill wanted to be *The* Secretary of Treasury. There wasn't enough vetting of that issue. Cheney just said, "He's the guy." He just didn't work well. They could have pulled the plug on him and gone in a different direction, but he kept threatening to leave. Card and people would say things to him and he'd say, "A one-way ticket back to Pittsburgh is $400. I can be on a plane this afternoon." Card finally got to the point where the next time he said it to him, he was going to give him $400.

[Stephen J.] Steve Hadley called me one day and said, "Clay, the President wants me to send some people over to show you this great set of goals we've developed for Iraq and it's right up your alley. Here are all the things we want to accomplish: infrastructures, rule of law, education. Here's the definition of success, desired outcomes, and we're rating red, yellow, or green for how we're performing." "Good," I said. "Thank you." Two people came over and they were very impressive. Then I asked the two guys he sent over, "Has Bremer seen these?" They shook their heads no. I said, "Bremer doesn't know what our goals are? You've got to be kidding me. Well, then this is worthless." At the end of the administration, the last two years, Josh went through an exercise where they asked all the Cabinet Secretaries to define what their goals were for the last two years. They worked with them and a lot of them were saying such things as, "We're going to introduce legislation." I said, "No, we don't *introduce* legislation; we're going to *pass* legislation. We're going to get stuff done here, come on." They finally put together something that was reasonably desired outcome oriented.

Joel Kaplan, Deputy Secretary of State, a wonderful guy, was the head of that project. I said, "OK, so what sort of follow-up are you going to have?" He said, "None." "What? You're not going to follow up to keep reviewing what progress you're making?" He said no. I said, "Well, it's worthless, totally worthless. The reason to have a goal is to drive behavior. You're not going to drive behavior like this." President Bush focused on results, but his White House became less focused on it at the end. Accountability really didn't exist. And if it didn't exist in this White House for this President, in a normal Presidency in a normal White House, it doesn't exist at all, which is a really sad state of affairs. The lack of real attention to desired outcomes is what is wrong with our government.

All right, so that's my little talk about Bush. Let me talk about my relationship with him.

Riley: Do you want to go all the way to the beginning?

Johnson: This is sort of in general. Mostly, I'm going to focus on my relationship with him when he's in high public office.

Riley: OK. You don't mind entertaining questions later on about earlier?

Johnson: No.

Riley: Terrific.

Johnson: I'm going to go back through this in chronological order. But jump in here too if you want to.

My wife and I were in Florida for a couple of days last month, to visit the Bushes. They rent a house there in January, in Boca Grande. It's great. Other people are there, and they're there for five weeks or four weeks, and it's all guests, there's no time alone, and it's fun. It's a good chance to visit and catch up. He gets up early, I get up early, and so we were talking about different things and there was a little lull in the conversation. I said, "Do you ever wake up and ask yourself, 'Was I really President of the United States?'" He said, "All the time." I said, "When you're the President, you don't have time to reflect."

I was not stunned that he ran for President. For me the sort of "wow" time was when he ran for and was elected Governor of Texas, and was a really good Governor. Once you've done those things, the Presidency is not a crazy aspiration.

I remember when he'd been Governor about two years, and went to Dallas to talk to a group of YPO members, Young Presidents' Organization. It's a group that's been around 50, 60 years, and you are qualified to be considered for membership if you're the president of a company above a certain size with at least so many employees, before you're 40, and you have to get out of it when you're 50. If you're a president of a company before you're 40, you're probably in over your head, and so misery loves company, and you can learn from each other. It's really a good organization.

Governor Bush knew a lot of the people in the Dallas chapter of YPO, so he's up there talking to his friends. He said, "I bet you all are sitting there, looking at me thinking, *How did this guy get to be Governor of Texas*? Well, let me tell you, I'm standing here looking at you all, thinking, *How did these guys get to be so rich*?" [*laughter*] Maybe life is full of incredulity, you know? How did this happen?

He and I have always been friends. When you come in at Andover at age 15, there are 750 students overall and about 20 people from Texas, about 3 percent. Most of the Texans are homesick and have never been to New England before, so you get the facebook out, the real facebook.

Perry: The hardcopy facebook.

Johnson: The hardcopy facebook. Look, there's some Texans here, and so you look them up, and you understand what each other is going through.

Perry: He came in tenth grade. Had you already been there in ninth grade?

Johnson: No.

Perry: You came in tenth grade as well?

Johnson: We both came in tenth grade.

Perry: Was that unusual, to come in sort of like senior high?

Johnson: No. There were 240 students in our class. About 100 to 120 of those started in the ninth grade.

Perry: About half had started.

Johnson: About 40 percent started in the ninth grade.

Perry: Made it full high school.

Johnson: And then about 60 percent of the class came in sophomore year, and a few came in as juniors, and a few postgraduate students.

Perry: So you were both new at the same time.

Johnson: Right. And he was just George Bush, the person. I mean he was not from an important family—His grandfather had been a Senator in Connecticut, but unless you were from Connecticut or from an adjoining state, you didn't know about that. He was just George Bush from Texas.

Riley: Clay, what about your own background?

Johnson: How did I end up at Andover?

Riley: Yes. Did your family have connections there?

Johnson: No. I grew up in Fort Worth. My father was born in Corsicana, Texas, and at age two or three, my grandfather moved the family to Fort Worth. My grandfather was a surgeon. Every doctor was a surgeon in Fort Worth, and so my father grew up and he went to prep school. He went to five or six prep schools. He was born in 1903, so when he was 15, it was 1918. Now, to tell you how noncurious I am, I never asked him why he went to five or six prep schools. Nobody goes to five or six prep schools up East. He went to Exeter for a while, and he went to Princeton Prep, which became Lawrenceville, and something and something.

Riley: From Texas.

Johnson: From Texas.

Perry: And for high school only, or grade school?

Johnson: High school.

Perry: So he went to several for high school.

Johnson: I know he was asked or instructed or encouraged to leave because of a bottle of vodka on a train one time, but who got the idea that he ought to go up East? Anyway, he got tired of going to prep school, so he just stopped going. Somebody told him something about Sewanee, so he got on a train and showed up there.

Riley: They give you a gown and you start attending class?

Johnson: I don't know, but he was there two years and he got tired of that, so then he came home and went to work. So he had decided to give up education. I have three sisters; I was the only son. My father adored me; I mean, rightfully so.

Perry: Who wouldn't?

Johnson: I mean, yes. We were very close. I always interpreted it as he wanted me to have the education that he didn't have. I was a really good student in the Texas and Fort Worth public schools. He had this idea that Andover and Yale was about as good an education as you could get. It turns out he was right. I don't remember the day when he started talking about going East to school, but the next thing I knew, I was being tutored once a week for a year, in the ninth grade, to take the admissions test and raise my academic level. I was making straight A's anyway, so what are you going to do? How much better than straight A's can you make?

I got in, went to Andover, and I went from making all A's to making C's and D's for a year. Then when it came time to go to college, I applied to Yale and Stanford, and somehow I got into both. I'd never seen Yale or Stanford, I thought my father really would like me to go to Yale, so why not Yale? I'm going to go to Yale.

Riley: But it wasn't coordinated with Bush.

Johnson: It wasn't coordinated with Bush. I remember vividly how you'd get the college acceptance letters as they came in. Everybody's checking their post office boxes at the same time, and you'd get a big envelope or a little envelope. I remember we opened it at the same time. He was probably over there and I was here, and we both got in. Within a week, I saw him and he said, "Do you want to room together?" I said, "That will be great. I've already talked to this fellow, Rob Dieter"—who was a friend of mine, an acquaintance of his—"about rooming together. How about the three of us? Can we room together? Can we pick roommates?" He said yes, so the three of us from Andover were together all four years.

Perry: Were you getting to know his family at all at this time? Did you ever go visit in Texas or visit with his grandparents on the East Coast?

Johnson: No. It was hard to get away from the campus at Andover. As a sidenote, I have identical twin sons who are now 40. We were taking them on their college tours. My wife took

one son and I took the other son so they'd have independent college tours. They looked at the same schools. One went north to south; the other one went south to north. When each of us was in Boston, my wife with one son and me with the other, we went to show Andover to them and the thing both of them noticed about Andover was, when you go into the natatorium or the indoor track, they display for each event the Andover records, Andover-Exeter dual competition records, and the current national records. My sons were blown away with the national prep records, the point being made very indirectly but very clearly that they want to have national caliber people here. Don't get too carried away that you ran a six-minute mile if the national prep record is 3:58.What a place!

In my junior year—They called it Upper Middle year—in October, Andover was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. John Kemper, who was the headmaster, was on the cover of *TIME* magazine, and the subject was private schools. It was about private schools in general but it was particularly about Andover. I'm sitting there, a sophomore, in my second year, reading this article, and it's telling me that I'm going to maybe the finest prep school in the world. I think, *Well, I can't waste this*. It was pretty heady stuff.

Riley: Sure.

Johnson: It was incredible, some of the experiences. It was a phenomenal school. Bush and I were good friends from the beginning. He was one of my half-dozen best friends there, and I was one of his 40 best friends.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: There were 35 people who went to Yale from our class, about 35 went to Harvard, about 20 to Princeton, 20 to Stanford.

I remember the guy we had who was our history professor, a guy named Tom Lyons. The first year he taught there was our senior year, and he taught the single most important course at Andover, which was American History, senior year. He had gone to Brown, played football, was injured playing football, and paralyzed from the waist down his whole adult life. He came to visit President Bush out of retirement. I remember him standing at the blackboard in his fabulous course about American history. He had key points written on the board. He'd be asking some questions and people were not quite getting the point, and he took those crutches, both crutches, and just banged them about three or four times on the blackboard about, "What's written here is—" *boom, boom, boom*. They weren't into protecting our sense of worth.

Tom Lyons—that was in 1964. Go to 2004. Forty years later, he retires, and some people in our class had arranged to have Tom Lyons and six or so Andover alums from our class meet with the President. Here's Tom Lyons, who has taught American History, which, by definition has to include a lot about the Presidency. The President is sitting here and Tom Lyons was sitting where Cheney would sit or the visiting world leader would sit, and there are Andover alums here and I'm sitting over here. Lyons has taught American history for 40 years, and he's now sitting in the Oval Office and one of his former students is the President. He looked like, *Just pinch me. I can't believe it. I'm in a dreamworld*.

The President starts talking what he does as President. He's talking about aspects of the Presidency Tom Lyons had no earthly idea about—You know, he'd called up someone-or-other in China about something, and he'd called Tony Blair on this, and then he got a Senator to confer on that, and he's talking about things getting done, and Lyons is just amazed. It was such fun to watch this.

Perry: There must have been photos taken of this session.

Johnson: Well, there was one taken in the Oval Office, and then we took some as we left when we were outside. I think Lyons was just stunned. He'd taught a President.

Riley: Probably not the guy he thought was going to be President.

Perry: Did you talk about classes with George Bush?

Johnson: You mean work?

Perry: Yes. When you were in school, did you talk about your assignments? Did you talk about the personalities of these teachers? Particularly history—Did you talk about American history?

Johnson: You're working hard and there's not much time to reflect on what's the lesson from history? We didn't sit around and say, "What's it all about?" I loved biology at Andover, and I don't remember talking about biology. I remember my Bible course. It was the first time anybody ever told me, "You know, Jesus was supposedly born of a virgin birth, but they used to say that about a lot of people. If you wanted to say somebody was really important, you'd say born of a virgin. So we maybe ought not to take that literally." What? The Bible is not literal? Anyway, you were exposed to so many things for the first time.

Riley: Of course.

Johnson: Which is the point.

Perry: How about politics? Well, first of all I should ask you, what did you and the future President talk about?

Johnson: It had nothing to do with school.

Riley: Girls?

Johnson: Or sports, maybe, or God, just really working hard, or that test was really hard.

Perry: Not current events, not things in the news?

Johnson: No. We were all at Andover when [John F.] Kennedy was killed, and he was killed in our state. Everybody remembers where they were and that was a focus of attention. But you're working really hard to stay up and to learn what you're supposed to be learning, and you're not given much time to reflect on the big picture here. It's a different philosophy now, about education.

Perry: What was your background in terms of religion and politics and your family?

Johnson: Well, everybody in Texas was a Democrat, except for about 20 people. I don't remember ever talking about politics with my family. Until John Tower ran for the Senate, there were really no Republicans. There weren't very many. That was in the '60s. Religion, we went to the Episcopal Church. It was high Episcopal, so there was communion every Sunday. I'm not particularly religious. My mother taught Sunday school for a couple of years.

Perry: Was chapel compulsory at Andover?

Johnson: Yes, it was compulsory. Everything was compulsory at Andover. The meals were compulsory. You could miss five things a trimester. Pick it. You want to miss a class, you want to miss a meal, you want to miss an assembly or church?

Perry: And no questions asked? You could pick five things? All right, but once you did six of something?

Johnson: Let me see, there was a general assembly in the middle of the morning on Thursday, and one on Saturday morning. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, you had chapel, and then on Sunday you had a church service.

Perry: And form of dress?

Johnson: Coat and tie.

Perry: But we understand the future President sometimes departed from that.

Johnson: No, it was always coat and tie. It may not be something you would wear with your parents, a coat and tie, but it had to be a shirt with a collar. It was looser at Yale, because I don't think the shirt had to have a collar.

Riley: And when did you finish Andover?

Johnson: Sixty-four.

Riley: Sixty-four. So it's too early for the kinds of things that preoccupied the '60s. That may come up at Yale.

Johnson: Our senior year at Yale, Martin Luther King was assassinated in March.

Perry: April.

Johnson: Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in June, when we were about to graduate. We didn't talk a lot about politics. You were just working hard. Of course, I didn't ask my father why he went to six prep schools, so maybe I wasn't very curious.

Perry: What about the draft? Were there discussions about it?

Johnson: We paid a lot of attention to the draft and what we were going to do. I was 1Y. I was not going to be called up because I had a bad knee. I was going to be called up only in case of a national emergency. Everybody else was trying to make plans. Those two events, particularly King, and then Bobby Kennedy, were profound—I remember graduating and thinking, *Is this America still? What's going on here?*

That summer and the whole next year was so different from an intoxicant standpoint. When we were at Yale, beer and hard liquor were the highs of choice in the class of '68. If I had started the next year, they would have said other things were the high of choice. Then, there were all the protests.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: We were one of the last all-male classes.

Riley: Tell us about George Bush as a college student.

Johnson: First of all, he was just George Bush. He wasn't son of George H. W. Bush. There was none of that going on. When we were freshmen in 1964, his father was running for Senate. His grandfather was retired and might have been deceased by then. He was running for Senate and he was defeated. George never talked about his family. He was just George Bush from Texas. Maybe a few people knew of the family connections.

It was a few days before Election Day, and George said, "I'm going to go home for Tuesday." I said, "What for?" He said, "It's Election Day. I'm going to go home because my father is running for the Senate." I guess I knew, but I thought, *You know, what's he doing that for?* He went home and then he came back and he didn't talk much about it. He was just another guy. He had a couple of cousins at Andover, one a year older, one a year or two younger, but just a guy.

Riley: And your schooling at this time—Are your interests coinciding, or are they beginning to diverge at all, in terms of what classes you were taking?

Johnson: He was an American Studies major at Yale. The major I had was called Industrial Administration when I started it, and in the second or third year, they changed the name to Administrative Sciences. It was kind of a liberal arts version of a business degree, where you took economics and psychology and statistics and other things. I couldn't see myself going into science, but I was good at math and numbers, and I liked the analytical reasoning stuff.

George was taking courses like haiku. This was a gut. I know you all never took gut courses. haiku, and he took the History of American Oratory. I remember he was giving a lot of speeches in that class. He loved history and took a lot of history classes, and American Studies classes and sociology. I took more mathematical, analytical courses.

I got interested, my senior year, in organizational behavior [OB]. Chris Argyris was at Yale. Anyway, that's why I went to the Sloan School, because they were very strong in OB. I got interested in psychology. One of the best courses I took at Yale was an art history course taught by Vincent Scully. He was on sabbatical that year, so the course was taught by his teaching assistant, and I still thought it was one of the best courses I took, just with his slides and notes.

They encouraged you to expand your thinking, so I took those expansive kinds of courses, as did George. They just were different ones.

Riley: At Andover there is, in all the accounts, a lot of emphasis on these extracurricular things. Does that carry over at Yale?

Johnson: First of all, when we got to Yale, we thought—I think this was the first class where 50-plus percent of the student body went to public school, so we thought, *Well, we're so well educated, let's just sort of cruise here freshman year and let these public school boys catch up.* About 30 days into the semester it was like, *Man, I don't know about that catching up thing. I don't know how they're doing, but we're falling behind.* We realized there was going to be no coasting for us. The academics were tough, no matter where you came from. You've got to stand up and do what you've got to do, and it's a lot of work. There was no, if you just show up you get a B. That came about in the late '60s and early '70s.

He played varsity sports at Andover, baseball and basketball. I don't know if he played varsity football or not, maybe he did. Maybe it was club football. He was also head cheerleader. At Yale, the residential colleges have intramural sports, and he played intramural football. I don't know what he did in the winter. In the spring he played baseball the first few years. He played freshman baseball, and varsity baseball sophomore year. He was trying to be a pitcher, but he rarely got into a game.

There was one game when Yale was behind 10 runs, and the coach signaled to Bush, "Bush, warm up." So Bush is finally getting in. He's out there on the sidelines warming up. Then the coach called time out, and instead of putting Bush in as the pitcher of record, he had the second baseman move over to pitch, and then he put in another second baseman. Bush decided, when they were asking the second baseman who hasn't pitched a lick so far this season, to pitch, over somebody who's supposed to be a pitcher, *I get it*. I think he treaded water through that season.

Riley: Not much more baseball.

Johnson: Then he took up rugby. I think it was a club sport; not a varsity sport. He played club rugby for a couple of years. He was president of our fraternity. He was in a senior society, a secret society, which I don't know much about because it was secret.

Perry: Is that Skull and Bones?

Johnson: It was. They call those "aboveground" societies. There are aboveground and belowground societies. Above-grounds had their own facilities. So he was in Skull and Bones. It's not a big obligation but it's a night a week, and maybe other things. I was in a below-ground society called Gin and Tonic. I don't know why it got that name. It had been around for a while. There were some nice people in it. I'm glad I did it. It was the same kind of thing where you get to know each other, but it was not very formal. We rented a place out on the beach. It was less intense.

Perry: But he didn't do any campus politics?

Johnson: No. He just wasn't interested in it. I never heard him talk about wanting to run for anything. About 1973, he was in Houston and I was down there for something, we were having lunch, and he said he had been thinking about running for state senator. I said, "You? That's the first time I've ever heard you mention an interest in politics." There are 150 state reps now, and 31 senators.

He said, "I was thinking about running, but I've decided not to." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because I'm just not ready." I said, "What do you mean you're not ready?" He said, "Well, I was going to run. I was all excited about it, and then I got a phone call from a fellow named Walter Mischer." He owned a bunch of banks, a wheeler-and-dealer in Houston, and his right-hand man was a guy named [Charles W.] Chuck Jenness, Chuck "Big Tuna" Jenness. "Big Tuna called me and said, 'George, my boss wants to take you to lunch.'"

So they had lunch and a little chitchat and then he said, "I understand you're running for state senator." He said, "Yes, sir, I am." He said, "Well, that's good. I think you'd be a good one, but I like the guy who's in there now. I like him. You're more talented than he is, smarter, but I like this fellow and I like him because he tends to vote the way I hope he would vote, real reliable, and so you'd be doing me a big favor if you didn't run against him. If you do decide to run, he'll beat you. I'll make sure he beats you. But you'd be doing me a favor if you didn't run, so what I suggest you do is not run for that. I suggest you run over here and be a state rep. Pick a district and run and I'm certain you'll get elected, *very* certain you'll get elected. Pick three committees you want to be on, and I'll make sure you're on those committees." George said, "That's really good and interesting. Let me think about it and I'll get back to you."

He said, "I got home and I thought, *Did he just tell me all that?*" He'll make sure I'll get beat; he'll make sure I'm in, and he'll make sure I'm on these committees. Is that really the way it works? It's not the best man who wins? He said, "I realized I don't have a clue what this is about." That was in the early '70s.

In the early '90s, 25 years later he's Governor of Texas and 36 years after that, he's the President of the United States. He did run for U.S. Congress. You probably heard about that.

Riley: Well, in-between. So, you finished Yale.

Johnson: Yes, we finished Yale. I went right to business school for two years, and then I got married between my first and second year of business school, to a girl from Texas, and we moved back to Dallas. He went to Houston. Laura lived in one part of the apartment complex, and he lived in the other. He was a National Guard fighter pilot, and drove an MG [M.G. Car Company Limited], and life was pretty good, if that's what you're interested in.

Perry: Were you keeping up with him all during that time?

Johnson: A couple times a year.

Perry: You'd see him or talk to him?

Johnson: Maybe I'd see him. I was in Boston during that year, and married. I didn't see him much when he was in Houston. Then he went to Harvard, '73, and '74, something like that, and

then he went to Midland. So we're in Dallas, he's in Midland, and we would see him a couple times a year. He'd come to Dallas maybe, and my wife got him dates on a couple of occasions. We did invite him to come to a party we were involved in putting on, a fund-raising thing. That was a couple of times a year. And we went out to Midland when he and Laura got married. That was such a whirlwind thing, from introduction to—

Perry: Did he talk to you about that? Obviously, it didn't take with the people you had set him up with, so when he finally finds Laura, does he call in great excitement?

Johnson: No.

Perry: Or say, "Guess what? I've met Miss Right"?

Johnson: I think he might have called and said, "We're getting married. I want you to come out here." I'm sure he did that, but he didn't say, "I met Laura." Before he could make the phone call, he was engaged.

Perry: And you were at the wedding, which was very small.

Johnson: Yes, we were at the wedding.

Perry: Was that the first time that you had met his parents?

Johnson: No, I had met his parents before.

Perry: When was that?

Johnson: Let's see, one time when we were at Yale, we were driving through Houston, and we went by their house, and maybe we played golf or tennis and his parents were there. They came to Andover a couple of times, and came to Yale a few times.

Perry: What did you think of them and what did you see in their relationship and their interaction?

Johnson: I thought they were very nice and friendly. I really hadn't met the brothers. I knew they were brothers and I might see them and be in the same room, but they were younger, and two or three years age difference at that age means that they don't exist.

The relationship with his parents, the President talks publicly about having the benefit of unconditional love. That's for real. He would occasionally—I mean, he talked about a couple of arguments, a couple of times he got crosswise with his dad, and maybe his mother, who was trying to get him to do something and he wasn't liking it. But all those kids—and they raised their daughters that way too. They were given a lot of loose rein, messed up, nothing egregious, but there's great family bonding there. Everybody was encouraged to go out and do their own thing. I don't think any of the Bush kids have tried to trade on their father or grandfather's name or work or reputation. He never did—as I say, he was just George Bush from Texas. He was never interested in politics, never showed any unusual interest, any significant interest in politics,

but it had to be, with all that stuff going on, because all of a sudden out of the blue, he was thinking about running for state office.

Riley: When you say he wasn't interested in politics, that is not just in running, but politics wasn't a standard part of your discussions, about Washington?

Johnson: No, it wasn't. We just didn't. When I grew up, John Connally's son was my best friend, in Fort Worth—[John B., III] Johnny Connally. So the most important political person I knew, most noticeably from a political family, was Johnny Connally, not George Bush.

Riley: And did he also go off to prep school, or did he stay in Texas?

Johnson: He stayed in Austin after his dad was Governor, and graduated there, went to UT [University of Texas] and UT Law School, and remains a lawyer. I guess he's in the oil business in Houston.

Riley: You had even mentioned Clinton before, that he goes to Boys Nation, he took a picture with John Kennedy, that there's a sense that politics is in that guy's blood, and that everything he does at Georgetown, everything he does at Oxford, revolves around politics.

Johnson: Keeping a list of names at Georgetown, that he wanted to—

Riley: That's exactly right.

Perry: Running for office.

Riley: Now you're describing for us what may be the most polar opposite.

Johnson: Right. We didn't know what we wanted to do when we were 18 or 20.

Riley: Did you know what you wanted to be?

Perry: I always wanted to be an oral historian. [*laughter*]

Johnson: Oh, please, come on.

Perry: No, but I did want to always study and read about political science and history.

Johnson: I remember he went into the Air National Guard. He did that in Houston. He was working with some nonprofit, social agency. A guy I know who was a year ahead of us at Yale, Mike Brooks, was talking to me once about George. Mike Brooks was at Harvard Business School, and in his second year he worked in the admissions office at the business school, and he ran into George somewhere. This was about '72 or '73, and George was up to nothing in particular, doing his nonprofit stuff and had just finished his time as a fighter pilot. Brooks said, "Bush, where are you going to be five years from now? You ought to go to business school." You need to get a focus here, aim higher, though that wasn't the word he was using, as he recounted to me. And so Bush said, "Well, that's kind of interesting, maybe." He then started to inquire about how you go about applying to business school.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: He applied, got in, and I think he got a lot out of it. He applied himself and got in. But again, the prototypical product of business school is me, not him. He left and he thought about going to Alaska. He'd been there for a summer, but it was just too rough-and-tumble, too off-the-beaten-path, so he decided the next best thing to Alaska, but tolerable, would be Midland. And by the way, his dad did that. People have psychoanalyzed that. Was he trying to follow in his Dad's footsteps? I don't know. I only took introductory psychology. I don't know. He wanted to get out and make something of himself and didn't know what it was. None of the brothers has ever attempted to trade on their family, and so he wouldn't have wanted to use connections to succeed.

He went to Midland and he'd been out there six or nine months, and I was talking to him and I said, "Are you making any money?" He said, "I made some pretty good money this week." I said, "How?" And he said, "Good poker game last night, a really good poker game." I said, "Harvard Business School, good poker game?" Donny Evans would know. You probably talked to him and got a lot of input about what he was thinking about in those years. What he was thinking about doing, what he wanted to be when he really grew up, I don't know. The whole thing about alcohol, when they gave up drinking when he turned 40, I read that or heard that, or he told me he'd given it up and I said OK. I never knew he drank too much. By his own admission he did, and Donny would have said he, too, drank too much, but I wasn't aware of that.

Riley: Sure.

Johnson: I'm just not familiar with what was going on in detail when he was in his twenties and early thirties.

Riley: At Yale, was he a big partier?

Johnson: He was average. He didn't have a lot of dates. He was dating a girl from Houston pretty seriously; in fact, they thought about getting engaged. Our fraternity house was right next to Davenport College, so he'd go there and play pool and so forth, so he drank an average amount, but he wasn't more or less rowdy. I read an article somewhere that made reference to a picture floating around out there, with Bush dancing naked on the top of a table. I said that didn't happen, for two reasons: One, he doesn't like to dance, and two, he's not one for public display of his body. You know, it's not pretty.

Perry: He's not [Vladimir] Putin.

Johnson: He was not exceptional in his partying. He took the kind of courses that Yale hoped you'd take, to really dig into something and take these other related things. He met a lot of different people. He was in some leadership positions, but those positions sought him out.

Riley: Leadership positions in…?

Johnson: Fraternity. He might have also been captain of the Davenport touch football team.

Riley: But no interest in student government or anything like that? Was there an open disdain for those types?

Johnson: Well, it was pretty liberal then. You wouldn't have conservative speakers, although Bill Buckley was a fixture there. Political government—I guess there were some people who would run for office. But they would have speakers come and he would agree or disagree. Maybe he went to hear a few speakers, but it just wasn't an interest of his.

Riley: OK, gotcha.

Johnson: He just had no interest in politics.

Riley: One other question along these lines: I'm curious about his own intellect and sort of disdain for pretension among people who openly display their intellect, which I've always thought of as sort of a southern thing. Maybe it's not, but I just wanted to throw the idea out for you. Barbara and I both have had the opportunity to be in the President's company, in private capacities, and had exactly the experience that you had suggested, that the private Bush and the Bush that is communicated more broadly seem—

Johnson: He's so different from what you imagined?

Riley: They seem to be two very different things. I know, based on 50 to 60 interviews, that the man is smarter than people give him credit for being. I'm trying to figure out, was this a feature of his life at Yale? Was there a disdain for the damned professors who are liberal? Was there a scarring episode for him at Andover that sent him down this path?

Johnson: The only thing I remember, and I'd forgotten about it until you talked about a scarring incident, was maybe Sloane Coffin—Remember Sloane Coffin?

Riley: Yes, sure.

Johnson: He ran into Coffin after his dad lost an election, didn't he? And Coffin, without being asked, said, "Your dad got beat by a better man," or something. We didn't think of liberal professors, I mean, they were all liberal. There were some great professors, without anything about liberal or conservative, but nobody likes somebody who might believe *I'm a higher caliber human being than you are, because I know all the manners, and I know more, and I don't speak with a southern drawl.* Nobody likes somebody like that. He really doesn't. It's just being able to look at: What's the quality of a person? What's really the essence of this person? Everybody is a human being. Everybody has worth. Some have good ideas, bad ideas, but don't put on airs.

Riley: Sure.

Johnson: So it didn't cause him to then proactively, aggressively, take an anti-intellectual stance. I think it's just that this person is a really good man. Just because you've got three PhDs in something doesn't make you a really good man. You might be the world's biggest whatever and have three PhDs, or you might be a fabulous person in spite of the fact that you have three PhDs. He ran in West Texas. I think maybe it's the West Texas part of him, but again, this is sort of psychoanalyzing it.

Riley: We're permitted.

Johnson: I'm not qualified to do it. There's a lot of Bubbas, particularly in West Texas. You've got guys with bellies and they're talking kind of slow, and maybe they drive up in a pickup truck or some such. Meanwhile, you'd better double check every so often that you've still got your wallet. When you ask a little later, "Who was that guy?" "Well, he owns, you know, all of Brewster County, and is worth about $400 billion." "That guy?" It's not how they handle the Queen's English; it's how smart they are, how wise they are, how good they are with people.

I used to talk to the White House fellows about lessons of history at the beginning of the year. I said, "I'm going to be the first person you're going to talk to and the last person, in this year you're here, and if you were going to be given a final exam about what you learned about leadership—You're not going to be given a final exam but if you were, I'm going to give you, in my little talk right now, what the answers would be. I'm going to tell you what you're here to learn about. I'm not going to have you spend a year here hoping you learned this; you're going to learn these things. Your challenge is to learn what else, maybe some other things that are important besides these things, but also examples that really drive it home to you. The primary lesson from history is that the kind of person you are has more to do with your success than what you know. It's going to determine how you respond to bad news, how you respond to good news, how you respond to great wealth, great poverty, great whatever."

There's a lot of common man in George Bush, a lot. I might not have used that phrase about him until just now, but it applies. I talked earlier about how he knows that these parents of victims of 9/11 are real people, and they have needs, and he can help address those needs. They aren't numbers. He's not thinking of them in intellectual terms. He puts everything in common-man terms. But that doesn't mean he oversimplifies.

Riley: Sure.

Johnson: Which can be misinterpreted as thinking about it in overly simplistic terms. "Does the green stuff make the government work better, Clay?" Not now, but it will. I just could not believe how we'd gotten off base with that. So I don't think it's that he was on a tirade or he was offended or he was turned off by the intellectuals so became anti-intellectual. He's just smart, and he went to Harvard, Yale, and Andover.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: And he competed well academically at those places and has the best relevant intelligence of anybody the policy people under the President had ever worked with. "What's the essence here?" Arafat's a liar, period. Is there anything more important than that with regards to Palestine? Probably not.

Riley: I'm struck by your use earlier, of the term we often hear him using, which is if somebody's a good man. How does somebody fit the definition for George Bush, of being a good man? I think I know the answer.

Johnson: I think it is, They handle the basics. They tell the truth. They work hard. They're interested in leaving their community better than they found it. All the basic stuff. He was raised that way.

Midland is an incredible place. I know very little bit about it other than the two times I've flown out there. Literally, if you go to sleep and wake up on final approach, you'll swear you're landing on the moon. It's the surface of the moon, and then you start seeing some green where the yards are. It's way out there. It's like an oasis. In Midland they felt that their school kids didn't have the opportunities that some of the big-city school kids had. So the community got together and raised some money so they could take their school kids and send them to Austin, to the Texas State History Museum, and they could do all these things other kids around the state got to do.

I was in a meeting once with an educator and we were talking about doing a program, statewide, like the one Midland has. He said, "Don't ever try to emulate Midland." Midland is unusual. It's one of a kind, in terms of the civic commitment. Midland pulls together as a community—what's the phrase? "Nobody's doing well if we're not all doing well." There's great civic pride, and everybody's doing the right thing. There is no limit to how big the pie is, so if my piece is the biggest, it's not going to take away from you. Everybody is expansive in their thinking.

There's just a whole lot of common man in George Bush. He was raised like that. He was raised around people. I think that's what it is, as opposed to being turned off by intellectuals.

Riley: So there was never any question in your mind that this guy was a Texan.

Johnson: Yes, right.

Riley: With his father, there was always that question about whether he was fundamentally a Texan.

Johnson: Well, yes, in that he wasn't raised as a Texan. He didn't ascend into adulthood as a Texan; he did that in World War II. But I think the Bush thing might have been—Bush was not a typical Texan. His dad was not a typical Texan. Someone who went to Yale and Harvard and Andover and MIT is not a typical Texan either. Maybe a typical Texan is somebody who went to six prep schools and never graduated.

Riley: Maybe so. Well, we've gotten you back into Texas. Are there any pieces of the earlier story that we need to talk about?

Johnson: We talked about the relevant characteristics. I've got a comment or two about that. I want to finish up a couple things about my relationship with him, if I could.

Riley: Go ahead.

Johnson: Every President has, I won't call it a best friend, but a confidant. Bush doesn't have best friends; he has a lot of really, really good friends. I was/am one of his many good friends. There were things I was able to do that others would have been reluctant to do, and there were some things that provided some extra challenges for him and me that had to be worked through. I

could be more candid with him than others could be. For instance, he used to say—He'd do this all the time—Somebody would do a good job and he'd say, "Thanks for that."

I had occasion to think about that. I first addressed this when I was the president of a mail-order company, at the Horchow Collection. Roger Horchow used to thank people and I said, "Roger, it's like you're thanking them for them helping make you richer." And he said, "I don't mean it that way." I said, "Maybe what you should be doing is congratulating them. They have goals that they want to accomplish. They want to be a good customer service person, so they really serve the customer. They're doing an exceptional job of what they're trying to do well. Isn't congratulations better than thanks, or maybe it's both?" So when I would see the President and Governor Bush say, "Thanks for doing that," I'd say, "They work for the State Department or they're trying to make America safer. 'Congratulations' strikes me as more appropriate, and more valuable for the person you're trying to express some positive sentiment to." He said, "Maybe. Let me think about it."

A month or two later he said, "You know that 'congratulations' thing? What I've started doing now is I say, 'Good job.'" Which is a more common form of congratulations. He said, "I think you're right. I think that's more valuable and it's a stronger message." Andy Card wouldn't be trying to tell him, or Josh wouldn't be trying to tell him about the way he expressed himself. Another example: I'd say, "How did you make a particular decision?" He said, "I like to make decisions based on gut feel." I heard this a couple of times in a short period of time. I talked to him alone, and said, "You've got to stop saying, 'gut feeling.' It makes you sound really stupid. Gut feel? You're just kind of winging it? No, we don't need somebody winging it up here."

I said, "Let me tell you what that is." Every policy person, when they're talking about you, says you are the wisest person they've ever worked with, the most valuable member of every meeting. You get the essence of something. You think that's gut feel, but that's not gut feel. That's having vision, being able to just understand what's really going on. I never heard him say "gut feel" again.

He used to say to me—I mentioned this earlier—that So-and-So has "earned a particular appointment." I could rebut that with, "But he's not going to be successful." I could have conversations with him about appointments that no one else would have. He's one of the few Presidents who actually met with his personnel staff on a weekly basis. Most Presidents' personnel people met with the Chief of Staff, and the Chief of Staff then met with the President. It was important for President Bush to be directly involved, and he wasn't doing it for my benefit. That's the way he wanted to run the railroad. It was really important.

Riley: So he's not doing that just because you're an old college friend.

Johnson: Right. When I went to him—It's been written about in his own book, except he wrote about it wrong—When I told him that the White House was functioning like a CF [clusterfuck]. What he didn't say was it was about Katrina. From about the second day after the storm it was a disaster and nobody seemed to be doing anything about it. Rome was burning. I called to say, "I'd like to visit." He said, "OK, come over for lunch." I told him, "This is a disaster, and this person in charge of that is a joke. Nobody's going to follow his lead. Agencies are only going to

pay attention to somebody they think has substance and they talk for you. This guy doesn't talk for you because he's just not very smart."

Nobody else was having that conversation with him. Rome was burning. Margaret Spellings knew it and also likened it to a CF. but no one was confronting the President with it.

When Bush was running for President the first time. I said, "Who's in charge of quality control here in this campaign? There's nobody in charge of quality control." A senior campaign person said, "Well, nobody is, officially." I said, "Who is, unofficially?" He said, "Normally, it's the candidate's wife." Not designated as such but maybe as with Nancy Reagan, it's "How dare you give Ronnie [Ronald Reagan] a speech like that?" I think a confidant, maybe somebody with some gadfly tendencies, is a good thing to have around. Also, the confidant can make funny remarks about things that other people can't make to help keep everybody from taking themselves too seriously.

An example, when he lands on the aircraft carrier with the "Mission Accomplished" banner up. He gets out of the plane and he's wearing that flight suit, kind of swaggering around in the thing. He gets home four or five days later, we're getting ready to start a meeting, and I said, "Mr. President, that was quite a show there on the aircraft carrier," and he said, "Yes, it was really something to be out there." I said, "I have a question about that flight suit." He said, "Yes?" I said, "Did you put a codpiece in that thing?" [*laughter*] There were four or five people standing around in the Oval Office. I'm not thinking about it, but I'm sure someone's thinking, *This is all being recorded. Jesus!* He laughed. I said, "Actually, don't answer that question, but what's all that about?" He said, "Marketing." [*laughter*]

At the beginning of the administration, Bush is still Governor, and he wasn't even officially elected President yet, and there's some discussion in the Governor's mansion—Cheney's there, and the President-elect, and they've been talking. They called me in to discuss how the Presidential Personnel process will work. The Governor says to me, "Clay, Dick and I have been talking about how, when I'm declared the President-elect, how we're going to pick sub-Cabinet members." It wasn't said, but Dick had been adamant, and took the Secretary of Defense position with Bush 41 with the primary condition that he be allowed to pick all the DoD [Department of Defense] sub-Cabinet, 100 percent, without interference from Presidential Personnel. I didn't realize that until afterward, but he'd been obviously saying to the President, if you do Don Rumsfeld, nobody needs to tell Don Rumsfeld who to select. If you do Colin Powell, nobody's going to tell Colin Powell who to select.

We will have senior people as Cabinet officers and they're going to know a lot of good people and they ought to be picking their own people, as opposed to recommending people to me to recommend to the President. How is that going to work? I said, "I'm not concerned about it at all. Obviously, the people like Rumsfeld and Powell are going to have a lot of great ideas. Probably 100 percent of the people picked will be coming from them, but I think there's value to—and not only I think there's value, but Jim Baker, George Shultz, and these people I've talked to, suggest that the process should be: What do you want the person to do? What kind of person is best qualified to do that? Who else is going to be on the team? Who's there to consider? Who do you recommend? Who else might be qualified but not recommended? You can have that same process if all the names come from a person, and it still could work. PPO

[White House Presidential Personnel Office] can and should ensure the process is results oriented." We started using a phrase "You've got to do it with them, not to them." It's amazing how many issues that applies to.

He was thinking Presidential Personnel shouldn't get involved on DoD and Department of State appointments. So where we left it was what Jim Baker, George Shultz and these people were very clear about, you can't just turn it over to this Cabinet Secretary, nor can you turn it over solely to the President's staff. They have to do it together. It's messier and less efficient, but they have to do it together. I said, "These people you asked me to talk to say it's going to be a joint effort. That's what I'm trying to do, and I'd recommend, unless you order me otherwise, that we do it this way. I'm very confident that I can make that work and that they'll be very pleased with the role that we play." He said, "OK, but let's just be sensitive."

In the first days of the transition I had heard that Cheney was having somebody brought in to talk to about being Secretary of Education. I heard this from somebody at the coffee machine. So I called and left word with Cheney's assistant, and said I understood someone was coming down and I'd like to hear what he liked about this person. He came down to see me and said this person was coming in to talk to him. I said, "I'd like to sit in on that. I think he's a fine candidate, but I'd like the left hand and the right hand to know what's going on here. That's one point. The other point is what you may not know is this person has been indicted nine times, never found guilty, but it all has to do with management of money." He said, "Well, I guess his chances of getting the job, then, are pretty low." I said, "That would be my thinking." The point is we developed a process everyone was comfortable with.

We had one really painful disagreement. A fellow who worked for me went to jail, and the President could have commuted his sentence. I think it was warranted, but he chose not to do it. David Safavian is a wonderful young man. He knew [Jack] Abramoff. He had his own relationship with Abramoff previously. I think maybe they worked for the same law firm. All their prior relationships and prior dealings had been blessed when he was chief of staff at GSA [General Services Administration]; then he came to work at OMB. Our legal counsel blessed him. And there was no evidence of any unfavorable decisions being made on behalf of Abramoff.

He was tried, convicted, and the case was thrown out because of this unreasonable, unprofessional behavior on the part of Justice. They reindicted and retried him, found him guilty again. Bush had already commuted Scooter [Irve Lewis] Libby's sentence, but chose not to— What do you call it?

Riley: With Scooter it was commutation rather than pardon.

Johnson: I mean not pardon. Bush had already commuted Scooter's sentence but hadn't pardoned him, and so David sought a commutation and I recommended and supported it with Fred Fielding, the White House Counsel, who was handling those things. They did not indicate there was any problem with it at all. They didn't say this isn't going to happen because the facts were not whatever. I never heard one fact from him that suggested there was going to be a problem. But the President decided to pass on all pardons and commutations. The President

didn't enjoy passing on David, where I was involved. I didn't enjoy David having to go to jail. I feel terrible for David. I feel like I'm somewhat at fault for it.

David doesn't feel that way. David tells me he was never going to plead guilty. They offered him a no-jail-time deal: "If you plead guilty, we'll say that you don't have to go to jail." He said, "I'm innocent; I'm not going to accept a guilty plea." My thought was, *If he knew that it was never going to be commuted, he would have taken the no-jail time*, but he said, "No, I wouldn't have ever done that." It wasn't fun. It was difficult.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: There's good news and bad news. Those kinds of confidant relationships or longtime friendships can be abused. I went to great lengths not to take advantage of them. The President has longtime relationships with other people that he didn't ask to be in the White House, and to work as closely with him as I was asked to work with him. I can imagine several reasons for that, one of which was they didn't have as much to bring to these nonpolitical areas as I had. Anyway, it was some good news and bad news and there's nothing automatic about it that says it will always work.

Riley: All right. We're at a good stopping point and we've made good progress this morning.

Johnson: Good.

[BREAK]

Riley: We've started back. Do you want to pick up with your—

Johnson: Well, I went through the general stuff. Do you want to go back now and start with the framework of your questionnaire?

Riley: That will be fine. Sure, that's perfect. Again, not that we're going to feel strictly wedded to the topics there. Barbara, is there anything else from the early years that we missed or that you want to go back to?

Perry: Let me double check here.

Johnson: I want to talk about—I referred to it a little bit—the qualities that were obvious, or were present there in the late teens. I want to talk about that more specifically.

Perry: That would be great.

Johnson: I referred to these earlier, maybe not all of them, so let me just go through what I think is the complete list of them. There is the people thing. It's not people skills or being a "people person," it's just his genuine interest in people. When he's meeting with somebody, he's not

thinking, *This is somebody who can help me, George Bush, do something*, where there's ulterior motive, or some long-term benefit to be derived. He just likes the people. The upbeat, positive, glass-is-always-half-full piece. There are people who, when they hit the ground, that's the way they hit it.

Perry: They're hardwired.

Johnson: Hardwired, yes. The energy thing that was manifested in so many different ways, but it just allows him to be at his best. It's the kind of energy that doesn't take away from others. I understand Clinton sucks the energy out of a place when he walks in, drawing it all to him. Bush, as I've described, adds energy to a place when he walks into it. He's very up-front, "Here I am, warts and all," comfortable in his own skin, self-deprecating, easy to be around. He's very responsible. He follows through and always does his work. I never knew him to cut a corner. He was responsible. His grades were his grades and his athletic performance was his own. He wasn't blaming others for what he did or didn't do. For all those reasons, he typically found himself in leadership positions. He didn't run for anything until he ran for Congress, but was the president of this and the head of that.

Another general observation is, if you ask the 240 members of our Andover class who stands out, who was memorable from those days, I think a big percentage of them would say George Bush. He's one of the people they would mention. He's the kind of person who has 30 or 40 really good friends, and I might have six people like that.

Gentlemen's Quarterly did an article about him when he was running for President the first time. The writer called and asked me if I was surprised that he was a serious contender for the President of the United States. I said, "You mean did anybody predict it? Did anybody think this was going to happen? No. But I'm more surprised that *Gentlemen's Quarterly* wants to do an article about what he wears than the fact that he might be President of the United States." If they only knew that his attitude was: *Which one of these soiled, yet-to-be-washed T-shirts am I going to wear today?*

Perry: This relates to so much of what Clay has said, and that is that the President himself has famously described his behavior when he was young and irresponsible, as young and irresponsible. Yet, you're not really seeing him—You're seeing him as young, but you're not seeing him as being terribly irresponsible, if at all irresponsible, in prep school or college. But he would describe himself that way, maybe from behavior that you didn't see, related to his alcohol use, for example.

Johnson: That would have been in his twenties and thirties.

Perry: Right. Is there some defining—Other than his story about the alcohol, and then waking up after Laura's supposed ultimatum, and saying no more John Barleycorn, what is it that causes him to move from, in his mind, young and irresponsible, to this mature George Bush that you know as running for Governor and running for President?

Johnson: I don't know. At the convention when he was nominated, they were looking for people to sit down with Chris Matthews and—Who's the guy on NBC?

Perry: Brian Williams?

Johnson: It was Brian Williams and Chris Matthews. Somebody said, "Clay, would you go down and let them talk to you about Bush?" I said, "You mean in private?" He said, "No, on national television." I said, "Well, OK, but you're going to get what you asked for." Chris Matthews asked me that question. He said, "My feeling has always been that he was like [Sir John] Falstaff," and he went into some [William] Shakespeare analogy. My sons were there watching this on television. My sons told me later, "Oh, my God, my father has no earthly idea who Falstaff is."

Perry: It was a beer, wasn't it?

Johnson: Yes. I'm thinking, *I'm glad I really convinced you all that I'm really something here*. I told him, "I don't know about this Falstaff reference. All I know is—I don't know how you all were, but when I had children, all of a sudden, it was a time for me to become different." You start thinking about things differently. You just have a different time frame. Your priorities change, and you find this thing that all of a sudden you're doing instinctively, paternal instincts. Mother Nature kicks in and it's really incredible. I've got to believe that had a tremendous amount to do with it. The kids were born in '81 or thereabouts. His epiphany with alcohol came in '86.

He talked about religion? The only reason I know he's religious is I read about it. The minister he had in Dallas, Mark Craig—We went to the same church—is a wonderful guy, and the last minister at Camp David was also a very inspirational guy. I know how much George liked ministers and talking about biblical teachings, but I don't think of him as being some overtly religious person. But I read it so often that it must be true that he reads the Bible on a daily basis, and so he is religious.

I can't say this happened or this event—I just don't know. I was talking to a woman friend of mine, and she doesn't drink, and I asked her, "When did you stop drinking?" She described some ultimate experience where she had been drinking a lot and these awful public things happened that wouldn't have happened if she hadn't been drinking, and she woke up the next morning and said, "That's it. No more." So it happens. If there was a "that's it" thing with George, because of Laura or whatever, that's what it was, but I personally don't have the firsthand knowledge of what caused him to move not just a degree or two but pretty significantly. And he's remained off liquor, really focused on his health, ever since.

Riley: When you were listing the adjectives on the bowl, which is quite an array of terms, if I heard correctly, one of them was "content." Did I get that right?

Johnson: Yes.

Riley: That one surprised me a little bit. I'm wondering if you have any comments about the relationship that has to the person you know and why that word worked its way onto the bowl.

Johnson: What I interpret content to mean, and I don't know who said it and for what reason they proposed it—I think it was that he's very comfortable with who he is. He's not trying to behave like *I want people to like me*. We talk about it in general qualities to look for in people

who serve in these important positions. You have to find people who have the discipline and the courage and the will to do the right thing when it may not be the popular thing, because our political system rewards short-term benefits, not long-term. Invariably, the long-term answer is a long-term answer. It's true mathematically. In anything that is all systematic, the things that maximize the value or the output of a system—welfare system, housing system—the long-term best thing for the system is going to be detrimental to the system short-term. Our reward structure with the government, employees, political, works against that. He's not trying to avoid tough decisions in the short-term because he wants to be popular today.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: He's going to do the right thing and leave it better than he found it. I mentioned that admonition earlier today: Leave it better than you found it. Isn't that what everything is all about? He talks about that all the time.

Riley: I'm interested in this because it speaks to another concept apart from the words that you listed before, which is the notion of ambition. I'm curious about George Bush's ambition, both as a young man and how that develops over time, because I don't think you can get to be President of the United States without having some level of ambition in some form. I don't know that it always manifests itself in the same way with everybody. I remember our popular concepts of Lincoln are of a sort of remote statesman, and yet one of the people close to him said that his ambition was almost boundless.

Johnson: His ambition to do great things, or his ambition to be a wealthy person, or his ambition to be a great person?

Riley: I don't know. I'm leaving it open-ended. Maybe what I'm trying to get you to think about and comment on is what was his ambition?

Johnson: Well, I know when he was being talked about as a candidate for President, so much of that had to do with name recognition from his father. Friends of theirs, primarily females, like a longtime friend of his and Laura's and a couple who lived with them in Midland for a long time, were really distressed that he was going to run for President. They would go talk to him and say, "Don't run. It's going to put such stress on your family and the girls. It's not fair for the girls and Laura." And these weren't just in passing, shallow comments. Are you sure you want to do this? They were really concerned about it and really argued for him not to do it.

His response was, "I agree totally. It's a really serious decision to make. My only question is, if not me, who? If you tell me that there's somebody who can do for America what I think I can do, or somebody who we'd feel as good about being President as some people who would like me to be President, I'd in a second say OK, I don't need to be President. I don't need to be President for self-validation." I think there was a huge piece of it that was for the good of America or to leave it better than he found it, which we talked about a lot.

Maybe there was some tie to the way his dad and his granddad had served the country. And some of his relatives on his mother's side were well known in this industry or that industry, the Walkers. You know, "We come from that stock and we need to be people of consequence." There's a calling there. The words seem to make sense, but I don't have any firsthand evidence,

that I saw him do something, and the only interpretation to me is there was a calling. He felt called upon. A light shone. I don't know that. Those are just my thoughts about it.

Riley: Well, I appreciate it. It's a little bit of a puzzle from the outside, particularly if you look at his early years and his early development, because there's very little sign that this was something that he felt destined to do, so it's a puzzle trying to trace where the call appears to him and what are the roots of the call.

Johnson: In terms of this being destined to happen, I don't think he feels anything is destined to happen, where he could have just been there, he could have just shown up and then somehow found himself to be a candidate for President.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: Maybe he had an interest in this thing. He explored it a little bit when he decided not to run for state office, and then he explored it a little bit and did run for Congress. Those are two negatives, one neutral, and one negative experience that say no, the voters have decided you're somebody they can do without. So when did he start thinking of himself in different terms? Psychoanalysis? I don't know. When his father called him to Washington: I need your help. I, your father, need help from you, my son. That's a pretty powerful event in life. Maybe it's unconditional love. He never felt unloved. It was the most expressive form of outreach, from his father to him. "I need you." Not because I love you, but I *need* you. And he helped make his father's White House work better. And after that he did very good work as the general partner of the Rangers.

Perry: Did he ever talk about unfinished business with his father's administration, the loss that his father suffered to Clinton? You've talked about so many people restoring dignity to that office. There is a sense that people put together that linkage.

Johnson: I don't know that I ever heard the President talk about restoring dignity, i.e., "That bozo who defeated my father—We need to restore it to the place it was when my father was the President." I've never heard him talk about it that way or even suggest that that was his perspective. It's just that the Presidency is to be deferred to and honored and respected, so when you're there, the railroads run on time, you make really smart decisions, you have briefing books that are unparalleled, you do your homework, you work hard, meetings start on time, end on time, you get the best people, you leave it better than you found it. We're here for a reason. We're not here to pass time, we're not here to work at stuff. We're here to make a difference. He takes that really, really seriously. How that might have in fact played out within his brain, I don't have the slightest idea.

Perry: That description that you've given several times today, of the trains running on time and doing the homework, and all of that—There's a certain zealotry to that, almost like a convert to a religion becomes super wedded to that religion and its tenets. I'm wondering if there's something along those lines. Again, I would go back to his saying, himself, that he was irresponsible. Then it's as though when he became responsible, he was super responsible and wanted everybody around him to be super responsible.

Johnson: No.

Perry: No?

Johnson: No.

Riley: Good try.

Perry: Here are some lovely parting gifts.

Johnson: No, I think he thinks that we're here to make decisions that can influence the quality of our country and our life in this country. It's very serious business and so we show up and we take everything very seriously. We laugh, we're going to kid each other—Talk about somebody who has the general day-in and day-out qualities of being the captain of the touch football team—I mean he just can keep it going, the high energy and esprit de corps. He's just wonderful at that and it's just natural, a sixth sense. No, it's not a religious thing. It's just we're here and we're going to do this work. We're going to make good decisions and work hard.

Perry: And he had that already, certainly in the Governorship—You saw that, I'm sure—and to the same extent as in the White House.

Johnson: Even more so, just because it has to be.

Riley: The one idea I was going to toss out is that in some respects politics is the family business. It strikes me that one plausible way of looking at his life path is that maybe he's not sure he wants to go into the family business. Certainly, there are not many signs of it early on. He wants to try out other things. He goes to Midland and does some of these other things. I was formulating the question at the moment that you mentioned the call that went out to him, I guess in 1991, from his father telling him that he needed his help. Under those circumstances, maybe he finds that he's got a facility for the family business and that there's a place in the universe for somebody with his skill set, and maybe that explains how he gets into this.

Johnson: I don't know. It would be entirely speculation. I don't know who would be the best people to talk to, probably people you've already talked to.

Riley: Well, the President himself, we haven't talked with him.

Johnson: He went to Washington in '91, from Midland, didn't he?

Riley: I don't remember.

Johnson: Anyway, I'm thinking about people like Don Evans.

Riley: That's something we can track down. Let me, in the interest of time, because I'm mindful of the clock and we have a lot of ground still to cover—The Texas Governor—Were you involved in the campaign for Governor?

Johnson: No. Again, I'm someone who keeps away from politics. Andy Card's comment about me—In my presence he told some reporter, "Clay is as apolitical as you can be and still work in this environment." I had nothing to do with the campaign.

Riley: But you were involved in the Governorship as the appointment secretary—Is that the proper name?

Johnson: It's called the head of the appointments office.

Riley: Head of the appointments office. Tell us how that was presented to you and what your considerations were in accepting the job.

Johnson: It was August, I remember vividly. I don't remember the exact date, but it was August of 1994. The polls were beginning to turn and show him moving up pretty steadily. Ann Richards was beginning to feel a little pressure and not handling it well. Anyway, he had called and said, "Why don't you and Anne go get a hamburger with Laura and me?" We went to a place called Solly's Barbecue in a northern suburb of Dallas.

He said, "I'm really feeling good about this election. I think I'm going to win this, and when I do, I've got to set up an administration. I'd like you to come down. You could be what they call the head of my appointments office, to help me appoint people to help run the state of Texas." It's an odd form of government we have in Texas. We're citizen-centric. He said, "I'd like you do that." I said, "I'm honored. I don't know what that means. But if you think I can do it and want me to do it, yes, I'd be honored to do that. I remind you of the obvious, which is I don't know anything about politics and I'm not good around it." He said, "That's why I want you to do it. I'll get somebody else, Karl and the like, to make sure we don't do anything stupid politically, but I want you to find the best people."

He was heavily influenced by Bill Clements, when he ran for and was elected Governor in 1979. He had a fellow named Tobin Armstrong—Anne Armstrong was Ambassador to the Court of St. James; her husband was Tobin Armstrong. They had a multigenerational ranch of some consequence in South Texas. Tobin was Clements' appointments person, and he had a young second-in-command, a guy named [Charles Patrick] Pat Oles, who is a successful real estate guy in Austin now. They did a great job by most everybody's account of the way they picked appointments. He said that they really did it well. It made a huge difference, and really got people's attention. "This thing doesn't have to be done poorly every time. It can be done well, and I think you're the guy to do it." I said, "Great."

Riley: Were you in a financial position to do that?

Johnson: Yes. When Nieman Marcus bought Horchow out, I cashed in a phantom stock interest, so it was the first time I had some money, not go-to-hell money, but I had some money. So when I agreed to do it I said, "I'll do it for a dollar a year," because I was the head of the board of a school of note in Dallas, St. Martin's School, and I wanted to continue to do that and to be able to go back and forth as I pleased. There was something else I was involved in, in Dallas, not financially beneficial but something I wanted to continue being involved in. I wanted the flexibility to come and go, so I would get an apartment and commute. I took my incremental expenses associated with the commute, grossed it up and added a dollar, and it was $45,000 a year. So I said, "I'll do it for $45,000 a year, which is a dollar more than it costs me." I think the regular salary would have been $90,000 or so. He said OK. That's what I agreed to do. Then,

when we got into it, it took about a year. There are about as many state appointments as there are federal appointments, about 3,000.

Riley: Wow.

Johnson: Three-thousand plus, because of the way the Texas government is set up. I figured we would have made the first round of appointments in about 18 months, and so I'd do this for about 18 months and then hand it off. Fourteen years later—And he asked me to be his chief of staff, which is jumping ahead, but he asked me to be his chief of staff four and a half years later. I really liked the personnel stuff. I'd never done it professionally but I'm really good at it, if I do say so, in terms of organizing a process. Everybody was telling us, "Nobody has seen appointments like this." I was really proud. I was doing good work. Joe Allbaugh went over to run the campaign. Bush asked me to be his chief of staff, and he did that because the legislature was not in session, so my political naiveté wouldn't pose a risk. I would just be maintaining the Governor's presence in all the things he needed to be involved in.

Riley: That risk being an apolitical person in a job with the legislature in session?

Johnson: Right. I'd be sitting there saying, "What the 'F' do you want to do that for?"

Riley: Gotcha. What was your working relationship with the Governor in the appointments process?

Johnson: Very good. He charged me with finding the best people, so we put together a staff of different kinds of people. We had one woman who was like 70 and one woman who was 26, and we had some guys with no experience, and some with experience. It was great. We developed a process—and it turned out that we did the exact same thing in the federal government. The meetings we held were the same.

There was a routine to it, very disciplined. Here's this open position. Statutorily, this board in the state of Texas—These are people who are members of boards that run the agencies. The board does this and that and so forth. So we want somebody statutorily who can do these things. In particular, we're trying to get the board to do more or less of this or that, which means we're looking to add more people who are from this part of the state, or not from that part of the state, or who have this firsthand knowledge, or don't have any bias or knowledge at all, so they can just be good ombudsmen, wise people. And in light of that, here's the person we recommend, who best fits that target, and here are a couple of other people of note whom you might want to be considered, and I'm going to explain why we're not going to recommend this person versus that. What's in it for the Governor? What sort of political flak might be associated with it? I took about a minute each, and we talked about 20 people or so in 20 minutes. See you next week.

We would meet a couple of times a week in the beginning, when there were a lot of these positions to fill. Margaret Spellings—her name was Margaret La Montagne then, worked in the appointments office about half the time, and handled all the education appointments, and she was his education policy advisor. We were really good, and had a lot of fun doing it. He had great regard for the work and the quality of decisions. They all had to be confirmed by the senate, so I had to go down and talk to senators about it, and I did OK.

Riley: Did you find yourself surprised by your friend as Governor? Did he surprise you in his competencies? This is somebody that you had evidently engaged in pranks with in prep school towel snapping, and now he's running the second largest state in the country.

Johnson: Yes, when he decided he was running for Governor it was like, this is not a logical extension; this is not a logical step up. But it was really clear, when he'd gone to Washington and he came back and he was managing partner of the Rangers, that he was doing some things very well that 10 years before he couldn't have done as well. So as I said, running for President wasn't the big *What?* It was running for Governor, being elected, and then being a damn good one, really good. They're not lampooning him at the little town Christmas follies shows. Pretty soon you get over it and you say, OK, he's the real deal on a day-to-day basis here, for six months.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: And he surrounds himself with really smart people and it's working.

Riley: Any difficulties you run into?

Johnson: With him, in terms of the way he ran the Governorship?

Riley: Did you find yourself at cross-purposes with him ever?

Johnson: I talked about the cross-purposes with the President, but I had really none with him as Governor. There never were cross-purposes, because my reason for not recommending somebody or for recommending somebody who maybe wouldn't have been his first choice was always sound, and he could always agree with the logic and the wisdom of it. And if Karl or the political shop ever disagreed with it—They never did—we always worked that out with them, and he could see it, so we had the respect of the political office, and vice versa. We got a lot of input and a lot of suggestions from them. It was a good team effort.

Riley: The team generally worked well?

Johnson: Very well.

Riley: There weren't factions or problems in the Governor's office?

Johnson: In the Governor's office? Not just my department, but the Governor's?

Riley: Yes.

Johnson: No. Joe Allbaugh was the chief of staff, and I think Joe and Karl and Karen had differences of opinion in the Presidency, but I don't think they did in the Governor's office.

Riley: He had strong women around him in staff positions. Did that strike you as unusual, or did everybody seem to respect the women in the operation?

Johnson: They were great. We had sensitivity training about sexual harassment, sensitivity training about language, about how to create an environment that's not sexually harassing. By state law, everybody was required to have 60 minutes of training, so we had this lecture. "Any questions?" Somebody from the back of the room said, "I think I understand this. Basically, what you're telling us is that Margaret needs to stop telling those dirty jokes." [*laughter*] She's a very good friend of mine.

Riley: Margaret, for the record, has been terrific to us as well, both before she became head of the foundation, and particularly afterward.

Johnson: I think she's really stirring it up down there too.

Riley: Well, as you know, I'm sure she's very accomplished at doing that.

Johnson: Let me say one more thing, one little story that's apropos of nothing, except me. There was one editorial, an op-ed, after the legislature adjourned the first year. It was a reflection by the op-ed guy for the *Austin American Statesman*. How did the legislative session go? It went fine but, he said, "There was only one weak spot in the Governor's office. It's the appointments director, Clay Johnson." I hadn't seen this and somebody said, "Clay, did you see the editorial about you?" I said, "No. Is it glowing?" It said there's one weak spot, Clay Johnson, who is known to be "condescending to members of the senate." I was reading that in the senior staff meeting. *Condescending?* "Yes, that's about right. Guilty as charged." Anyway, the end was better than the beginning.

Perry: I have a follow-up from this morning. You talked about Governor Bush working with Democrats in Austin. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Johnson: They found common interests, and that's the state of Texas. [James E.] Pete Laney, and I'm sure you've heard comments on this from other people who were involved in Texas, but Pete Laney, a cotton farmer from the panhandle, was speaker, a really smart, nice guy. Bob Bullock, five times married to four different women, a recovering alcoholic, a lifetime, career politician, a very powerful Lieutenant Governor, Democrat. They all loved Texas. They were there not to aggrandize themselves. Maybe early in their careers, particularly Bob Bullock was out to get ahead, but they were there to do great things in the state of Texas. Neither one of them liked Ann Richards, because Ann Richards didn't want to work well with them, and so they saw Bush as an opportunity to do some good stuff and work with somebody. They just loved working with each other. They had differences of opinion and they disagreed, but they did it somewhat jovially.

Did anybody tell you the story about when Bullock told Bush one day that he was going to have to do something he wouldn't like that day?

Riley: I think I've heard this. Is this the one with the kiss?

Johnson: The kiss, yes.

Riley: Go ahead and tell it.

Johnson: No, not if you've heard it. One time we were sitting around the Governor's office, maybe a year and a half or two years into it. There was a woman named Vickers Meadows, who had worked with Bush 41's administration in Washington, so she had been in the federal government. She's in Texas and she's the head of administration for the Governor's office. We were talking about what makes George Bush such a good Governor. We were talking about this and she said, "The reason is—and this is kind of hard to clarify—he gets it. He gets what this is about. We're trying to make decisions here."

There was a piece of legislation about hate crimes and there were some people trying to pass this hate crime legislation that if you kill somebody because of hate for a different ethnicity, then you're really going to be hung. You're going to be hung from a 20-foot tall tree, not 10, or something. We already had the death penalty. He did this when I was chief of staff: He had two African American senators come in, one from Houston, one from Dallas, who were the proponents of hate crime legislation, and he said, "What are you trying to accomplish?" They said, well, blacks feel this and that and so forth.

The Governor said, "You know, if I was a senator from your district, I'd be doing the same thing you're doing. I really empathize with your position. You're trying to represent the voice of your constituents really well, and you're doing a great job. And I bet you, that if you all were Governor and your constituency was not this part of Houston and that part of Dallas that you probably would be taking the position I'm taking." The idea was, let's understand what this is. This is the way the system is supposed to work. We're supposed to be handing you disagreements. If we all said, "Yes, hate crimes, bad idea," then you're not doing a good job of listening to your people. So we don't have a solution here but let's not hate each other, let's understand. He just gets it. He understands that it's supposed to be hard to get things done; that's what the constitution called for.

I used to lament, "Gosh, dang, these people, what are they thinking? This is such an obviously good idea; how come they don't see it?" Because they themselves don't get anything out of it. You think it's a wonderful idea, but you've got to explain what's in it for them. He gets it. He understands that it's supposed to be hard, there are supposed to be different opinions, but you talk it out. You've got to try to work it out so that they get something and you get something. You can't get a hundred percent and they get nothing.

He gets the process. These aren't bad people. These are people who are in various ways, maybe with a few exceptions, trying to represent their people. He's really good at that. He doesn't have to hate people to oppose them. He can debate and he can respect them, whereas [James Richard] Perry and Governors before Bush and after Bush, particularly after Bush—They don't get it. It's all political. Kill the other side. Bush was never that way.

Riley: Did you have significant occasions where appointments went bad, not that they were rejected, but that you put somebody in a position and they under-performed or mis-performed in any way?

Johnson: Not really. We had some, and I'd be hard pressed to identify anybody, but I remember in the past trying to think through and answer that question, and it was less than a handful.

Riley: Did it create any tension between you and the Governor?

Johnson: There's no such thing as a perfect—

Perry: You've given such a clear picture of the Governor's really superb vision of politics and how politics works. Were you getting a sense of his view of government? We know, as you've described it, as he gets to the White House, it's this theme of leave things better than when you came and be results oriented, but were you getting a holistic sense of his view of government in the Governorship? Pro- or anti-small government or big government, libertarian?

Johnson: I've never heard him talk about small or large government. I have talked with him about effective government or ineffective government. On a daily basis, there was an emphasis on government that works, and in some cases it's less; in some case it's more. Less government would be called for if we can't afford the government we have now, or for things that are really not the government's purpose, or maybe it's because we're doing it really inefficiently and we could do them public-private or state-local or something, and we could do it for less.

One of the things I always say, and the longer I say it the more convinced I am it's true, is that you never, ever want to talk about efficiency in government, to say, "We want the government to be more efficient." Just never mention the word, *ever*. There's never anything to be gained by talking about how you want more efficient government, because more efficient government can only mean work—It's cost divided by the amount of work done, so if you're going to reduce, you have to either do more work for the same cost or you have to do less cost for the same work, so that ratio changes. The only way you're going to do that is people are going to have to work harder, and they think they're already working pretty hard. Or you're going to have to lay some people off. Not a good message. Nobody in the federal government is going to rally around that.

Contrarily, if you talk about more effective government, no one can be against you. Who is for ineffective government? Nobody. State employees, federal employees, want to be more effective. Your worst nightmare opponents want to be more effective. And more effective can mean I get more for the money I'm spending, which is greater efficiency. I drop this, it's not working, and we'd spent a lot of money on that. You can cover all the bases with effectiveness and create no opposition; whereas, if you talk about efficiency, you're only talking about the cost per unit of work. People tend to focus on the cost thing, and if I can save money, that tends to tell people who are interested in government's doing things for people, that you don't care about the government being effective, you just want to spend less money. Bad idea.

You're always safe to comment on effectiveness, always safe and correct to comment on effectiveness, and you're always going to have trouble talking about efficiency. Therefore, Your Honor, I rest my case. It's not small government versus large government; it's just government that works. There are some things the President expanded in the federal government when he went up there, and somebody was saying he's a big spender. Maybe he was a Nelson Rockefeller Republican or something.

Perry: How about government and business, the relationship?

Johnson: I've never heard him talk about that, either. We were talking earlier that you never want the government to try to run like a business, because a lot of businesses stink, and you want the government to be effective.

Perry: No, I mean government vis-à-vis business, the business world, the private sector. Regulation, the regulatory system.

Johnson: We never talked about that. He's a big believer in the way OIRA [White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs] is set up, particularly the way John Graham ran it, which is the way it's supposed to be run, which is to look at cost-benefits, real costs and benefits, and whether there is real value to be derived from these regulations, or if you're doing more harm than good.

Perry: Not being effective.

Johnson: Yes, if the costs are greater than the benefits, you're not being effective. You're not leaving it better than you found it. I mentioned this maybe in the first five minutes this morning. The thing that's missing in the government is there's no clear definition of what they're trying to accomplish. What's NASA's [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] role? To search the heavens for where we came from and where we might—What? We're going to spend $8 billion searching the heavens? Every major expedition—[Ferdinand] Magellan, [Christopher] Columbus, [Hernán] Cortés—was public-private. A significant portion of all those expeditions was paid for by venture capitalists, basically. They shared in the costs and they shared in the profits.

How about let's get the private sector in here and pay for half of our searching the heavens? They get all this technology and stuff, fine, but I want them not to get it for free. They're going to put up the money and we'll do the work. What's the goal? What are we trying to accomplish here? And the more that is asked and paid attention to and attended to, the greater the opportunity for the government to work. Bush was saying, "What are we trying to do here?" Arguing about people in Louisiana is not going to help get things done. What are we going to *do*? He gets that. We're going to have a difference of opinion. It's going to be hard to get things done, so he's not surprised when it happens and it's messy.

Riley: When did the idea of a potential Presidential run first present itself to you?

Johnson: The first time I heard about it was when there was speculation in the newspaper. It was something other people were talking about. I was in the Governor's office one time and Karen Hughes walked in and said, "You're leading the polls." He said, "What?" She said, "They took a poll and you're the person who's most favored to be the next Republican candidate for President." Now I had heard this speculated, and of course this must be the case. It would surprise me if it had been otherwise, because of the name recognition advantage. But that was the first time I ever heard it discussed within the Governor's office.

Perry: What was his demeanor when she said that, his reaction?

Johnson: He was in the middle of a meeting, so he commented about it, and he said—I don't know, he didn't say, "Oh, my God, *me*?" It wasn't matter of fact, like "Well, of course." It was

just, OK, there's going to be speculation like that. I don't know when he announced for President. Do you all know?

Riley: It was some time in '99.

Perry: Yes, it was.

Riley: You've got a reelection coming up before the announcement.

Johnson: The election was in '98.

Riley: Did you have a piece of that?

Johnson: No, they don't let me near politics.

Riley: You moved to chief of staff.

Johnson: In June of '99. That's when Joe went over to run the campaign.

Perry: And that's when he announced, on June 12th, in Iowa.

Johnson: But they had already started moving the boxes around. The President asked me—

Riley: Do you recall anything about the process of mounting the campaign? Was this something that you thought was sort of a pipe dream?

Johnson: His running for President?

Riley: Yes.

Johnson: No. Once I saw—I didn't know how campaigns worked. I'd been involved in a campaign in the ninth grade once.

Riley: How did that go?

Johnson: We won. I'm one for one. I wasn't the candidate. Anyway, his being Governor and serving well as Governor, and being a very effective Governor of the second largest state—That person ought to be well thought of to be President. I wasn't amazed by that.

Riley: What can you tell us about the development of the Presidential campaign at the time, when he was still serving as Governor? It seems as though that process went relatively smoothly. One can imagine a set of circumstances in which this isn't handled well and there are resentments that boil up and competitions that emerge. Maybe those things did exist and were dealt with, if they were, and we'd sure like to hear from you about that.

Johnson: I think they were handled well. I hadn't thought of it in these terms, but you've got to keep campaign and governance separate, really separate, because campaign mode is not a good mindset for governance, or vice versa. Campaign is *Get them, kill them, kill for the 51 percent*. And governance is *Kumbaya*, *we love everybody*.

To make sure there was no conflict or wrong signals to me, he said, "I want you to be chief of staff. Joe's going to go run the campaign. I want you to do two things: I want you to keep the Governor's office involved in all the things he'd be involved in and make sure we are instrumental in causing the government to do good things. I'll be out on the road a lot. Secondly, separate from the Governor's office, I want you to put together a plan for what we do when I win the Presidency." That was literally it. "When I win, I need a transition plan, and I've got all kinds of people you can talk to. I want you to read everything you can find on it." OK, if he wins the Presidency, I'm a part of that. And between now and the Presidency, I'm running the Governor's office.

Riley: Was it a hard thing to do both of them at the same time?

Johnson: No, because the legislature was not in session. One issue is the potential for bad feelings. There's all this activity here and the Governor's time is over there with the campaign, so the people in the trenches at the Governor's office might feel like second-class citizens. I just made sure that didn't happen. There was a lot of involvement. We had things we were trying to work on, things we had to get done. There were some big issues that had to be managed. We got the Governor involved when he needed to be, such as on capital punishment.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: I'm a good manager, so I kept everybody organized and involved, and we got a lot done. It was important that the Governor's office continued to be vital and important, and that the issues be dealt with in the fashion they'd been dealt with before.

Riley: Were there efforts on the part of the President's detractors in the state to create firestorms or dust storms for him to deal with in Texas, to undermine the campaign?

Johnson: Maybe there were, but I'm not aware of them. Maybe there were some small things. There were a couple of controversial death sentences being carried out and in one of them, the Pope [John Paul II], Bianca Jagger, and people of that ilk, weighed in. The reason they weighed in was not to cast aspersions on the Governor or his background, but that's the effect that it had. The communications people just approached that as they would anything of significance like that and we dealt with it, but I don't think the only motivation was to hurt him politically.

Riley: Were you in attendance at any of these group—like the Vulcan Group gatherings, or these issue—I can't remember what you call them—They weren't issue conferences, but they were events that—

Johnson: To develop policy?

Riley: Yes.

Johnson: No, I wasn't. I'd met Josh, I told you.

Riley: You mentioned the one about the Defense, George Shultz.

Johnson: I think Vulcan was when they got different—Was it just advisors or did they have contributors?

Riley: I don't remember, I think they were mostly Condi's group.

Perry: I think those were the advisors, the defense and foreign policy people.

Johnson: No, I didn't. Maybe this was on purpose, because Vance McMahan, a wonderful guy who's still in Austin, who was the head of the Governor's policy shop, was in those meetings, so he felt involved and had things to contribute. Plus he's really smart and probably would have had something to contribute in every way, on every one of the subjects.

But you get into that kind of dynamic with people feeling lost or given second-class status, when all of a sudden there's a campaign, they're successful, and the guy is President. Now, there is this group over here transitioning. Everybody's working on the transition. Meanwhile, a few of these people involved in the transition said, "Whoa, I used to be Mr. Inside; now I'm Mr. Outside." There are ways of managing around that, but we'll talk about that later.

Riley: Is there anything else about the Governor's years that is relevant to your story or to our understanding? Is there something that we're missing about Bush's Governorship that we ought to be paying attention to?

Johnson: He did things politically that no Governor had ever done before. I've forgotten what percent of Hispanics voted for him, but he had like 40 percent of the vote in El Paso, which is unheard of, because he really related to them. It's not like he bamboozled them, you know? He is really serious about them, about Hispanics. There's a little Hispanic element to his personality. He's just got a zest for things. Anyway, the people liked him, and so he got a lot of confidence that his appeal is broad. In his time as the Governor, he started understanding that, hey, I can be really good at this. You don't ever know. You think *I'm going to run and I'm running to get elected*, but the marketplace will tell you how you're doing. It took a while, but as the polls went up, he started getting more confidence.

Perry: So he felt really good at the politics, as you described it, and really good at the people skills and really good at the campaigning.

Johnson: He was good at running the Governor's office. He had good people around him. Joe Allbaugh was a good operational guy and we had Margaret and Karen. As Dan Henninger said, "He's good at surrounding—" I remember him talking about the President, but the thing was also true in Austin. He surrounds himself with people who are good at getting things done. Their charge from the Governor is to get things done, and so stuff tends to get done.

Perry: It was interesting at the beginning this morning, when you mentioned that the communication of his persona in the Presidency did not translate to the people. What about in the Governorship? Was that better? Was it because it's just a whole different ballgame?

Johnson: I think it was better.

Perry: How come? What were his relations with the media in Texas?

Johnson: Very strong, because he was doing good stuff. They used to complain about—Maybe it points out the difference between the media's perspective on politics versus an effective Governor's perspective on politics. He'd say, "I have five priorities," or whatever it was, for his first term. Every year they asked, "What are your priorities now?" And he said, "I have five priorities," and it was the same five. At the beginning of the second term, he said, "I have a sixth priority," and his sixth priority was to work even harder to achieve the five priorities.

They want something new to cover. Who are you going to piss off? Are you trying to take something away from somebody? Try to take something away from somebody to give to somebody else, because that's a prize fight that we like to cover. He just didn't have that. He told the press—One time they said, "What's your economic development plan? You don't have any economic plan." It might have been when he was running for Governor. He said, "Tort reform is my economic development plan," and they all laughed, like, "What? Is he an idiot or what?" Well, it turns out they're idiots, because the cost of tort, the litigious state of affairs down there, is huge, and to create an environment where things are decided on the merits of the case and you can get rid of this venue-shopping makes a huge difference. You have a real rule of law. If people are making more money out of legal suits than they are out of the businesses being sued, than something is really wrong. It made a huge difference. This is a place where people can come and expect to have a fair marketplace, a lot of checks and balances, and no one part of the population is favored over another. Merit is rewarded.

They didn't all agree with him. He was espousing things that they weren't used to hearing from the Governor. Someone would say, "I'm going to do job training. We're going to spend $3 billion on job training," or whatever they spend in the federal government, $17 billion or $117 billion, and they get nothing for it, but it sure sounds like it ought to be helping economic development. It doesn't. It's not what it appears to be. He's into what really is going to make a difference, not what the appearance of it is. You're going to get nontraditional kinds of solutions proposed and you're going to get tension on what really might make a difference. It's that bottom-line thing. My disagreement with him on it, which I talked a little bit about and we'll talk about later today or tomorrow, is he wasn't consistent enough about that. He just wasn't consistent enough about it.

Riley: So your task was setting up a transition operation at a very early stage. This also is June of '99, when he tells you this?

Johnson: Well, he said to develop a plan for setting it up. I worked alone, talking to Jim Baker and George Shultz, kind of fun to do. Martha Kumar—I don't know if she came down then. [Edwin III] Ed Meese came down with somebody. People you've heard of. I started developing a plan about what the priorities ought to be: Here's what we know from these people, the big picture, and here are the kinds of things we ought to be doing. I can elaborate on that if you want. I talked to the Governor about that in probably the first of 2000. I've forgotten what editing there might have been; it wasn't a whole lot. Then, he encouraged me to go visit Josh to get his input on it, and Karl, people who had been around national things. Later on I went and talked with the Vice President about it. I flew out to Jackson Hole in August of 2000.

Perry: The future Vice President. You went to speak with Dick Cheney?

Johnson: Yes, Cheney. We spent three hours talking about it. I went out and talked to him, maybe in August, about idea starters for key positions. The idea was to develop a plan based on the input of really high-profile outsiders, and then get the Governor's reaction, and then get the perspective of his key people who have some knowledge, and then get the candidate for Vice President's reaction, before implementing anything.

Perry: Before Dick Cheney became the running mate? I'm just thinking back to your thoughts about the Bush brothers not playing on the family business or not playing on the name, but it seems to me that this is where it really helped so much. Presumably, the future President, Governor Bush, said, "Go see Dick Cheney, go see George Shultz, go see Jim Baker," and presumably, you would just call up their secretaries and say, "I'm coming to see you about transitions." I suppose others in the race could have done that as well, but did you get a sense that all these people were very supportive of his candidacy?

Johnson: Yes.

Perry: And the sense that he was the frontrunner at that point?

Johnson: Yes, because it was the family tie. They wanted him. I forgot the other candidates. There was [Alan] Keyes, and there were a couple of people.

Riley: McCain.

Johnson: McCain was a candidate then?

Perry: Yes, in 2000, sure. He won New Hampshire.

Johnson: Maybe people who had worked on Bush's—A lot of times, the Governor might have called them directly and said, "Clay is working this thing." One thing about the phrase, "the family business being politics," and maybe I'm overly sensitive about this because I don't think of myself as being political—I'm not a political person, and some people say, "Well, you've had 14 years in politics." I say, "No, I've had no years in politics; I've had 14 years in governance." Maybe I'm wrong about this, but I think of politics as running for office. You're getting elected. Now, you have to appeal to 50-plus percent of the people, or 60, 70 percent of the people or something, if you want to get a bill passed, because you've got to get their elected representatives to like it. Maybe that's kind of like running a campaign to get a bill passed, but is that a fair—Is politics generally the mark of getting elected?

Riley: Politics at large, in a democratic society, encompasses governance. The distinction may be an important one. Maybe if you were to ask Bush, he might well say that public service was the family business, to make a distinction.

Johnson: That's what I'm wondering.

Riley: OK, it's a fair claim that politics is a necessary instrument for putting oneself in a position of public service. This certainly rings true with Bush 41.

Johnson: He was a better President than he was a candidate for President, and I think George Bush is a better President than he was candidate for President, and a better Governor than he was a candidate for Governor; whereas Gore and [John] Kerry were probably better candidates for those positions than they would have been as President.

Riley: Although they weren't very successful.

Perry: Given that they lost, they weren't very good candidates.

Johnson: Well, they were successful enough.

Riley: To get the nomination, fair enough.

Johnson: It got down to two votes in Florida, and until about eight o'clock at night, Kerry was dusting off his tuxedo. He was ready to get—You know, he was getting after it there.

Perry: Practicing.

Riley: We stand corrected. You actually addressed this in some of the stuff that you've written about the transition, but I want you to expand a little bit on how you avoid the internal problems of a sense of marginalization and competition between the people who are actively involved in the campaigning and the people who are off establishing a transition operation. You seem to have threaded the needle on this, and you acknowledged that Bill Clinton didn't thread the needle on this and that Jimmy Carter didn't thread the needle on this.

Johnson: Well, I don't know how Clinton or Carter did—I didn't comment about them. One thing I remember hearing was that Al Gore, when he was running for President, had designated three different people to be Clay Johnson to put together transition plans. And none of the three knew about the other two.

Riley: You have an incredulous look on your face.

Johnson: Yes, I did. I talked to Mike Leavitt, who was the head of transition planning and development for [Willard Mitt] Romney. Mike is a friend of mine, and I spent a good bit of time counseling with him and his people about this. He took it very seriously. He was wherever they were located at the campaign in Boston. They developed policy there for the government. They went up and compared notes, and they both had to sign off—It was something like that—and he was up there once or twice a week talking about things, and he was reviewing. He was very sensitive about that, keeping people in the loop. I had people like Joe Allbaugh, and some of the people in the campaign who knew me. I was not an end-runner or an empire builder.

Riley: Sure.

Johnson: Maybe there was a comfort level there. But also, all the key people in charge of the key pieces of the campaign—We kept them involved. "Here's the plan, here's what we're going to do. Here's who's going to head this part of the transition—a guy named Gary Edson. "Josh, you ought to be policy—the policy teams and stuff—so who's that going to be?" "I don't want to do it." "I do want to do it but Gary Edson is going to do it." "And this person is going to be in

charge of that." So everybody knew how it was going to be done, and they knew how we were going to approach appointments. We weren't going to interview anybody. All the people we had for conversation starters about different Cabinet positions—Nobody in the campaign would have been a candidate for that, except Don Evans, who was chair of the campaign.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: I reviewed the key people. We were just going to have the names to begin the conversation with the President, so Joe and everybody knew, and Josh knew, who the names were and had some input. It was being done with them, not to them. Plus, they were working. They didn't have time to think.

Riley: Of course.

Johnson: Now the election is over—It was never over, but it was finally over on December 13th.

Riley: Election Day had happened.

Johnson: They start wondering, *what's in this for me?* Then they start coming to Washington, and that was a different dynamic, hanging around the transition. "Can I be helpful?" That's a different deal. It's never going to be perfect, but you have to go 75 days and you just keep them informed. If there's ignorance out there, they're going to imagine the worst, so just make sure that they're somewhat knowledgeable about what's going on.

Riley: So your solution to the problem of tension between the two is to make sure that they're informed.

Johnson: Seeking their input, from the senior people.

Riley: You also stated that there was a comfort level with you because you were not known to make end runs on people. You weren't a political animal as such. I would guess that another component of this that you don't address is the fact that you have the President-elect's utmost confidence as a person. In other words, you have very deep roots with him and that confidence, I would guess, transcends things. I don't think that this is true of some of the cases where things have gone off the rails.

Johnson: Yes.

Riley: Were there any crucial decisions that you had to make in advance of the election?

Johnson: About the transition?

Riley: Yes, about the general transition. I'm guessing that there's no role for you in the convention that year. Was it 2000?

Johnson: No, none. We went. I had no formal role, no.

Riley: But the integration with the Vice President's operation in this sense must have been crucial, particularly given who the Vice President-elect was.

Johnson: There were some integration problems with the President's office. First of all, the Vice President was the first person—I hope this came out—that Bush asked to be his running mate, and the Vice President said, "I don't want to do it." I don't know whether he then volunteered to head up the search committee or Bush asked him. You're all aware that he was the first person he asked?

Riley: I probably told you beforehand, my memory is terrible, so I often don't know what I picked up from where. It doesn't sound shocking to me, which indicates to me that I probably have heard it, but I don't know.

Johnson: I didn't have any dealings with the Vice President then. He came back to report to the Governor, you know, the results of the search, and we talked about a couple of people, but nobody was obvious. The Governor noticed something different about Dick's body language that suggested, "Dick, maybe you've changed your mind. Are you interested in doing it?" He said, "Well, I need to ask Lynne [Cheney]," or some words to that effect. I don't know when that was, in the spring, May or something.

Once he signed on, I talked to him once—I think it was in the campaign office—about the plans we were doing for the transition. We had a couple-hour talk. We got along fine. Then at Jackson Hole we talked about the appointees, I think. Right before the election or right after the election that wasn't really settled. He was in Washington and we were using what we had used as campaign space for transition things. I got into a run-in with his chief of staff, [Kathleen] Shanahan, a redheaded woman—Be careful of redheaded women.

Riley: This is Cheney's?

Johnson: Cheney's during the campaign. She said, "We're developing a database system here to collect names." I said, "You need to stop doing that right now, because we've already been working on that for four months. In fact, we have this system and it's what we used in the Governor's office, and we've got the new technology." She said, "Well, I'm going to continue." I said, "No, you're not going to work on that, because this is what we're using, and so you just need to stop." She wouldn't let it alone and I just ordered her, and she was not happy. About two weeks later, we were working, first in the transition offices, and she was saying, "I'm going to do this, that," and I said, "No, this is not the Vice President's stuff." You're down in here and you don't understand the work chart, who's responsible for what. It was not my most politic, because I proved once again why I could never have been an ambassador.

Cheney came down at the end of the day, which was about eight o'clock at night. He came into my office, closed the door, and he said, "I've got some Dutch uncle advice for you." "What?" He said, "My chief of staff is up crying in her office. You've hurt her feelings." I started to say, "So what's your point?" But I said, "Well, I'm sorry, Dick. She wanted to do these three things, or four things, and they've already been completed, already been done elsewhere, and there's absolutely no point. There needs to be better coordination." [redacted]

Riley: I don't remember hearing her name before.

Johnson: So he was supportive of his staff, but his staff was not working well. In the meantime, I could do stuff like that, that maybe other people couldn't do, because what are they going to do, go tell the President? Oooh. [*laughter*] Now, if I deserve to be told to stop it, then he'll tell me stop it, and I'll take it like a man and stop it.

Riley: Your point is spot-on. How many people are out there who have that kind of relationship with the President, where they could look at somebody like Dick Cheney and just say—You know?

Johnson: We joked around about when it came time to tell the President and Vice President about their buddy who wouldn't be able to succeed as an environmental guy over here. There was a guy, Jodey Arrington, who worked on that position. I said, "Jodey, I'm going to let you be the one to tell the President and the Vice President that this guy is not qualified," and all the blood just—

But it worked well. Cheney's people—I'm jumping around here, so if you don't want to get on to this, stop me.

Riley: No, go ahead.

Johnson: One of your questions is, what the successes are—That was my favorite part to fill out, to really think through about. I think they were substantial. The transition was maybe the best transition in modern times, particularly given that we had half the time that anybody else did. We had clear goals and we had people accountable for doing the work. OK, I'm sorry you only have half the amount of time but these are still the goals. We did a good job.

It was my idea to make Cheney the chairman of the transition. Bush said, "We need to make a notable someone chairman of the transition." I said, "Why not make Dick the chairman?" This was right before the election. I said, "He knows Washington. He knows everybody, and there's nobody with more stature in Washington who can deliver the message that adults are in charge here." So he asked him. Andy Card told me six months later, "It was a very unusual decision to make the Vice President-elect the chairman of the transition." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because that takes the spotlight away from the President and usually the President wants the spotlight on him." What? OK, I get it, but meanwhile, there are extenuating circumstances and Cheney is not trying to take the spotlight away.

Andy was right in general, but the Vice President was fantastic. First of all, he knew it was easier to say, "I'm sorry" than "May I?" I'm sorry we spent some money two or three weeks unnecessarily early, to set up an office for the transition. He was willing to do that to get a two- or three-week head start, to set up an office before the election was called, and that made all the difference in the world. He was a guy who could meet with all the key Republicans in both Houses of Congress. He could talk to the think tanks and get them all excited about what was going on. That, nobody could have done. It was just home run after home run.

The Andy Card selection—I didn't know Andy from anything, but I did know, based on Shultz and Baker and so forth, that we needed to get the Chief of Staff to get everyone up on the White

House staff. Andy turned out to be a great selection for that. The President called him a couple of weeks in advance, which was the advice we got. He came down, accepted, and started hanging around, and got a White House staff set up. Card's presence in there early, Card being who he is, and Card being who he was as Chief of Staff, was great in terms of getting the White House staff set up.

The messaging was fantastic in the relationships we established all around us, and in my little organization, where I could make sure that all the little groups did their thing. And Cheney's guy to be the Legislative Affairs guy for the transition is an old-time friend of his who had worked with him. He was really fun to work with and really knew the Congress and did great. Then he brought in [redacted], Dave Addington, who is really conservative, but he was good at clearing stuff. Then Cheney made the decision to bring in Fred Fielding as White House Counsel—brilliant. We had little time to do it. It turned out to be just brilliant.

We didn't have much time to do normal background checks, and so anybody who was going to be selected and introduced to the public, before the election to maybe March, was not going to be able to have a full background check. We were going to have to take some risks, which meant it was all going to depend on Fred's one-hour conversation with him. Well, he knows so much about how someone can be unqualified to serve that he—It was what we called the sex, drugs, and rock and roll questions. He could sit down and say: Tell me about this; tell me about that, any of this, any of that, and by the way let me remind you…. He'd do this about three times. Speak now or forever hold your peace, because if you tell us something that you're ashamed of and we proceed anyway, we're going to be behind you all day long; we're not going to ignore or deny knowledge of this. If you don't tell us something and it comes to light, we're going to drop you. You're going to have whiplash we're going to drop you so fast. That's what happened to Linda Chavez. We didn't [knocks on table] have a problem with anybody, and it was because of Fred. Fred was the consummate pro, the most experienced guy who could have done this in the world. And Dick was the guy who could do this, and Andy was—

You know, Bush surrounded himself with good people. I don't know who would be in the—although I did think Cheney would be the best guy to be chairman. Bush knew the best guy to be the Chief of Staff for him and I knew the best time to do it. We put those two things together. It really went well.

Riley: Let's take five minutes and let you catch your breath, and then we'll run through the rest of the afternoon.

Johnson: Great, all right, wonderful.

Perry: All right.

[BREAK]

Riley: Do you have anything on your list you want to deal with right now?

Johnson: No. I don't know where we are in the thing.

Perry: Selection and vetting.

Riley: I'm just trying to think if there are any more generic questions about the transition. Were you under instructions not to speak to the press, generally, about your work?

Johnson: You mean after the transition?

Perry: During.

Johnson: While it's being planned?

Riley: Yes, during the planning phase.

Johnson: Yes, no press.

Riley: No press.

Perry: On the issue of the recount, the literature that we have in the briefing book is very clear, about trying to walk that fine line between being prepared should all go well with the recount, but not being presumptuous, or not appearing to be presumptuous.

Johnson: I think that's all changed, the whole idea of presumption of victory. You have to be presumptuous of victory. You don't deserve to be elected President if you are not going to presume that you were going to kick butt, and you have to be totally prepared. What's the downside? You wasted somebody's money and a lot of people's time.

Perry: I meant the peculiar, and we hope unique, situation of the Florida recount.

Johnson: I know, but still, like Cheney said, I'm presumptuous of victory. Guilty. I'm going to rent some space. We can't wait. The person gets the nod and we think we are, but if it's 50/50, I've got to presume—Gore didn't do anything, because he never thought he had a chance, and he probably didn't really have a transition plan. My understanding is that Clinton didn't think he was going to get elected, so he really didn't have a plan. It was based on a whole lot of naïve assumptions about what the priorities ought to be. There was a commission, an Aspen Institute commission, formed in 2011 or 2010, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, and I was one of the four co-chairs: me, [Thomas F., III] Mack McLarty, Bill Frist, and Chuck Robb, so two Senators and two executive branch people. We came up with some recommendations, we got a bill passed, and there were some things we were going to do that the time to do it will be in 2016.

One of the things that came out of that—It started to really come out this past Presidential election, or 2008—both McCain and Obama—You have to presume victory; you have to begin working. They were very obvious about it, very public about creating a transition plan. McCain didn't do much because he knew he was not going to win, but Obama took it seriously and they did more work prior to the transition, work by more people, than anybody had done before. I don't know how many people he had, 20 or 25 or something. Eight years previously, Bush had

one person, me, and then four years after that, Romney had 80 people working on it before the election. Everybody who's serious about it presumes they're going to win. That that was sort of an old wives' tale, I can't presume.

Perry: Almost a superstition not to presume.

Johnson: Now there's enough understanding about the complexity of standing in for these administrations, that there's no negative associated with presuming away.

Perry: One problem, though, that you had was that you couldn't get the money, the public money.

Johnson: Yes, but that's not a problem because the federal government provided $4 million, or now $6 million. It costs $12 million, in those terms—I remember when the election was over Jack Oliver came to me and said, "How much money do you need?" I said, "We think $8 million." He said, "When do you need it?" I said, "I don't know, pretty soon." So about four days later he came back. "Got it." The donors—It's a separate thing. I don't know how legally they separated it, and what the limitations were, but people have given a lot of money and worked hard to get this guy this close. There was a lot of interest, so money was not an issue ever.

Perry: So, the transition office then, was in McLean? That's where that was set up? Because you weren't able to use public space.

Johnson: Federal money, right.

Riley: Although the Vice President had that shop set up earlier.

Johnson: It opened up about December first. It was open about two weeks before the 13th.

Riley: Did you object to that?

Johnson: To that? No, it was the right thing to do, perfect. As I said, everybody said, "Gosh, should we be doing this?" Cheney was *zzzzzzzzzzzzzzz*. [sound of a revving engine] It was just perfect.

As an aside, a personal comment—I don't know how apropos it is—There were six or eight of us from Austin going up there. We had three or four people from the Governor's appointments office who were going to go work on personnel. They were going to meet some people I'd identified in Washington to be on that. Somebody had arranged a private plane to take us up there, so we met out at a private aviation place in Austin. We were sitting there and our spouses were telling us goodbye. We got in the private plane, about six of us, and we were waiting to take off and I said, "Do you all realize what we're getting ready to do, the six of us bozos? Nobody knows us. We're going to go up to Washington and commence doing something that's never been done before in the history of the United States: try to launch an effective transition in half the time that every other transition has had, to put the President-elect in office." We kind of looked at each other. "Let's go get 'em!" It was like, "Come on, let's go!" It was so much fun.

Riley: We hear different things about the level of cooperation you got from the Clinton folks. What was your sense about that?

Johnson: Andy would have had the primary dealings with them. The Clinton people fired people, or asked for resignations. There was that, and exchanging information about national security threats and the status of things, which is a big deal now, a huge deal now, because of all the threats that exist. I really didn't need to interact with them. Our dealings were with the FBI directly on security stuff. In terms of administrative stuff, the woman who ran all the back-office stuff for President Bush had been in that position for Bush 41 and Ronald Reagan, so we knew what we needed to know. Andy was the one, during the transition—We talked about what the specific problems were, but the stuff I was working on didn't really need him.

Once we got in the offices, were there letters torn? Yes, but—I don't think it was an orchestrated thing; I think it was just a bunch of young interns.

Perry: Did you see anything firsthand?

Johnson: Somebody's initials carved in a drawer. Somebody showed me a key missing on a computer.

Perry: Not vandalism as such, but mischief.

Johnson: Yes, mischief. It was not done by adults. It was done by interns, I'm sure of it. So, there was not much. It didn't debilitate us.

Riley: Do you have a piece of the inauguration? Is that also considered a transition?

Johnson: No. A woman from Dallas, Jeanne Phillips, was in charge of that. They came up with this grand thing. First of all, people of Dallas really know how to put on parties to raise money. It's the fund-raising-est place. That was all done great and they had their own organization. Just little niceties, where they arranged for the heads of each of the major functions of the transition to have a car to use for transition weekend, which was fun. But no, we weren't involved in that at all. Again, it's that whole divide and conquer. Andy Card, White House—He started having meetings every day in the transition offices with people who were going to be on the senior staff. Sometimes it wasn't clear what position everyone would have. Just to have a chemistry—I've seen you on a regular basis. Andy got a great start.

Transition—Jeanne. President's personnel—I was the guy who was going to do it. A wonderful thing Andy said was, back to the people selected to do the work—He said, "Tell everybody who works for you that they can't leave for 12 months." I said, "Why?" He said, "You'll understand at the end of 12 months." You don't want them to develop a learning curve and then they leave and you have to get somebody, so you lose—These people are the nexus of every desirable job in the federal government that they might possibly be qualified for, so all the confirmed things, and all the SES [Senior Executive Service] or Schedule C jobs. Just say, "You can't leave. Drool, but you're not leaving." That hurt Clinton and that hurt Obama, bad, really bad. I wouldn't have known, but Andy did.

The Clinton transition had not gone well at all. That's why there was so much research and study done after Clinton's transition, about transitions, good and bad, and what makes a difference. I was asked to speak a lot, because we were so wonderful, and I would say, "You've got to have plans and you can't have all rookies." If the only person involved had been me, it would have been a disaster. We had Cheney and Card in there making these things happen, so I could spend a lot of energy getting ideas on a daily basis, and they had all this knowledge. Clinton just didn't have that kind of leadership. One time I found out that my friend Mack McLarty was going to be the one sitting at my table. I thought, *I'm going to be making this point in Mack's presence.* I said, "Mack, one of the points I'm going make here is—" He said, "Well, I agree in general. I don't think it was that big an issue, but make whatever points you want to make." More evidence about what a good guy he is. He's a good man.

Riley: Do you have any good inauguration tales?

Johnson: No. One of your questions was: What did you learn from the people you talked to? There are some papers on it that are about as clear as you can be. When Martha submitted that paper I wrote to whatever organization it was, about the 2000 transition, they said, "We can't accept this." She said, "Why can't you accept it?" They said, "It's full of bullet points. Our kind don't write with bullet points." I said, "Well, that's the only way he's going to write this, so you've got to run it like that." I don't know how to write without bullet points, but whatever literary or whatever scholarly—

Perry: We use bullet points.

Riley: But we're sort of quasiacademics here.

Johnson: The importance of the White House focus, the communication challenges, and the thousands of people applying for appointments—In Clinton's case it was 300,000 people in about two weeks. It was unbelievable. It was 70,000 or so with us in a couple of weeks. Job seekers—You've got people who know the answer to the Middle East peace problem, and you have sycophants, people who just want to be hanging around.

You have to have, nowadays, electronic ways of receiving all the applications, and then you have to communicate with all those worlds, to tell them where to go. If you have a piece of advice, go to this number. If you want to apply for a job, go here. So if someone gets hit with 70,000 things, it's 70,000 things that relate to them, not 35,000 that relate to them and 35,000 things that really should have gone over there. I think we did a good job of that, and now the way you can do that is incredible. Everybody has a priority, and then somebody like me is following up with them and making sure they're doing what they need to do to accomplish the goal by January 20th.

Another thing is to focus on your priorities for the first 20, 45, 100 days. Don't develop briefing books like this: *Everything You Want to Know About the Defense Department*. Short-term. It's got to be action-oriented. You're going to have to make some decisions. You're going to have to take some actions. Prepare them to do that work in the first period of time and then they'll get a sense of the place in general and go from there. All that was really good advice and will always hold true in terms of an approach, because that tends not to be the approach taken. It tends to be, "We need to develop an overall briefing book."

Riley: One question about this based on previous—My sense is that in previous instances there was a segregation between the personnel component and the policy component, in earlier transitions, so that you'd have one bunch generating thick briefing books, and somebody else focused on personnel. Was that also true in your situation?

Johnson: We had people working on personnel. You can't contact anybody, you can't do formal research, or investigative background checks, until the election is over and you can actually go talk to them. But you start preparing to be able to do that.

Riley: Sure.

Johnson: In terms of the prior policy work, the decision with us in 2000 with Josh was that our policies are to do what we said we're going to do in the campaign. It wasn't like, what do you really want to do if we get elected? No, we've just been saying that. Nobody was developing new policies.

Riley: So you didn't have these sweatshop operations with 20 people there to generate decisions options.

Johnson: Then it came down to, all right, specifically, in the first 20 days, is there anything I need to do on this, any actions to be taken? So there's a short-term group that's not trying to decide everything to ever be done on this. The focus is on the first 20 or 30 days, let's say, it was: What executive orders need to be torn up? What executive orders need to be created anew? What kinds of decisions need to be made that are consistent with these policies? That just gets you going. Then, on these teams that went into the agencies to collect information to be able to brief the Secretaries-to-be, we wanted briefing books like that. We were very specific about that.

Riley: Personnel. All right, tell us about getting a Cabinet put together. What are the highlights and lowlights of that experience? Or are we missing something?

Johnson: No. There's the Cabinet and then there's everything else. The Cabinet is quite different, particularly if you have 35 days total, not 70. As I was mentioning, Cheney had two or three ideas and they were pushed forward, so it's the President and Vice President who put those up, and then there were some others that all emanated out of President Bush. There were some combo picks. We've got to get to the finish line on these things by a certain date. The Senate is working for you because they want to get those people up and running. They want to be prepared, and sometimes they'll have hearings before the person's background check has been really verified.

How do you then make good selections—from the Cabinet Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries, positions like the head of GSA and OPM [Office of Personnel Management], and heads of these smaller agencies? This work would have really begun after January 20th, so it's back to, what do we want the person to do? I hope it's the way everybody is hired, in academia or the private sector. What do we want this person to do? What kind of person is best qualified to do it, given who else is around? Who do we have to consider? Who is our choice? You get input from the policy people, on what the President would want this person to do, or this person's organization to do. You want the person to have good relations with Congress. Or you don't care if they know

anything about Congress. Maybe you hope they have experience operating in the public arena, or dealing with the press.

Is it an inside job or outside job? A doer or a thinker? And who's going to be the number-two person, and the number-three person? If the number one person is a strategist, then the number two person ought to be a doer, an implementer, or vice versa. You just have all that. Who's this person working with? You want complementary abilities. We did that and had a process, and we got a pretty full battle rhythm going about the latter part of February. There were about five people who had portfolios. Somebody had national resources, somebody had national security, somebody had general government, and then one person had boards and commissions. So there were five people, plus boards and commissions.

We would typically present 25 people to the President at each meeting. Each person is concluding five, plus or minus, searches a week. That leads us to the conclusion, for the future, that if you really want to present 50 a week to the President instead of 25, you've got to have 10 people doing that work, not five. That was one of our recommendations from this commission: the reason PPO, Presidential Personnel, only produces pretty consistently this number of confirmed people by the August recess is because everybody has the same number of people doing the work. If you want twice as much work done, you've got to have twice as many people doing the work. Duh.

Riley: We'd like to apply that logic around here.

Johnson: In these weekly meetings, the Vice President attended every time we met, when he was in town, with rare exception, for the first six months of the time. Every meeting was with the President. If the President wasn't available we didn't meet. Andy Card was there. If there was some controversial issue, which was rare, something we couldn't resolve with Political Affairs, Karl would come and present his case by case by case, and the President would make a decision. We had lots of justification. All our people were very good at doing this. Two or three people had come to the President's office from the Governor's office, so they'd been doing this for this same person for three, four, five years.

In fact, the very first meeting that the President had, on Monday, January 22, 2001, the first full operating day of the George W. Bush White House, was with us. He had a briefing at eight-something, so I think it was at eight-thirty. There were four people presenting, because not everybody had work done to present. I think two of the four had done this with him for several years and the other two were plenty bright, so they learned from the people who were long term. We went in there, and the President doesn't know really how to be President yet, but he knows how to have a conversation about personnel, with me, and these other people, and I know how to have a conversation with him about the subject. This very first meeting he had as President was as good a meeting as he ever had with any group of staff members in his entire eight years. It was as professional. It was so much fun, so exhilarating. We walked out of that office—I'm a little biased. We got out in the hallway outside the Oval Office, and I told my staff, "You all don't know how good that was, because you don't have anything to compare it to. The President and America were really well served by you all just now." Good, crisp decision making, all about leaving it better than we found it. Really good. Really fun.

One of the key things is that the President was involved in everything. We weren't presenting to the Chief of Staff, who then went over there. We were talking to *the* man. We could tell the appointees, "The President personally signed off on you." In general, the way you work with personnel is the President makes all the appointment decisions. We make the disappointment decisions. So the President gets the credit for the appointment and we're the people the disappointees could be upset about.

The thing the disappointee wants to know, "Was I qualified?" We used to practice how to deliver bad news. They want to know, "Am I qualified, and am I so qualified that I could be considered for a future position?" In almost all cases, if we interviewed them, they were qualified. If they act really immaturely about this and throw a hissy fit, invariably the reason we had uncertainty about them was their temperament.

Perry: So then, when a person like that says, "Would I be considered for something else?"

Johnson: We said, "Yes, we'd love to be able to do that."

Perry: I like that wording. "We would love to be able to do that."

Johnson: Yes. "We'd like to keep you and there will be things that will come up. We'll talk about it." And invariably it worked out.

Riley: Now, the President was seeing paperwork on these potential candidates in advance of these meetings?

Johnson: Right.

Riley: Or was he being given only verbal briefs?

Johnson: No. He was given, the night before, a book, and he would go through it. There's a format we used to summarize the information. Here's the position and here are the specifics. He'd scan the thing, and then have some idea about that position. He would look at it and then he's given a verbal brief the next day, about a minute a person.

Riley: That's being done by your staff?

Johnson: Yes, unless it was somebody like Cheney's buddy.

Riley: How often did these discussions actually generate a lot of back-and-forth? If the meeting was scheduled to go, how much time did you typically have with him?

Johnson: Twenty minutes.

Riley: Was it ever the case that you'd get into something where the President felt the need to parry back and forth with somebody?

Johnson: No. If he would bring it up—He might ask a question but the person would have the answer. The two things that were happening that were different with us: One, our presentations

were always with the President himself. Secondly, in all prior administrations that I'm aware of, the only person who talked to either the Chief of Staff or the President was the head of Presidential Personnel. The people below the Director of PPO, the special assistants to the President, did not talk to the President directly. Well, our special assistants talked to the President. They had done the work. If the President had a question, they could answer it; I couldn't.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: So, the reason none of those things dragged on was because we had the people with all the answers there.

Riley: OK, but were there cases where the President would say let's hold onto this one and think about it?

Johnson: Yes. But I bet you in the two years that I was involved in that, that happened 10 times.

Riley: OK. So he was ready to pull the trigger on one of these things.

Johnson: One time he said, "I want you to find out—" *something, something, something*. It was very rare.

Riley: Obviously there's a difference between Cabinet appointees and the kinds of things that we're talking about here. And you've mentioned there were a couple of places where there were maybe not failures, but the process didn't work quite well, Linda Chavez being one.

Johnson: Linda Chavez was out there with the intention to appoint Linda to be the Secretary of Labor. That was out there less than a week when it came to light that she had a nanny, so we withdrew her name.

Riley: Was that a Fred Fielding screen that didn't pick up something?

Johnson: Didn't pick it up. He asked her and she did not bring to light the nannies, and then they started doing the formal background check and very quickly, a nanny came up. Everybody went "Oooh, that is a big problem." That wasn't a problem. Shit happens, you know? We're going fast.

Riley: And then you said Paul O'Neill was just the product of—

Johnson: Paul O'Neill—I think if we had done more review of temperament and going through the key qualities to be looking for—I'm not going to list them here—I think we would have concluded that he's not someone who would be comfortable being George Bush's Secretary of the Treasury. He will want to do this on his own. He still might have been appointed because of Cheney's insistence on it, but the kind of person he was—Somebody who was either also on the General Motors board, or had knowledge of the General Motors board, said he was kind of that way, that he always had to be his own guy.

Riley: Were there other people appointed or nominated by the President, who also sort of slipped the standard procedures on the basis of a Cheney endorsement?

Johnson: No.

Riley: Did Rumsfeld come through the main channels?

Johnson: No. Rumsfeld was an obvious one we had to consider because he's a good friend of Cheney's. He'd been Secretary of Defense. I read something in the paper about how Rumsfeld and Bush 41 weren't close. I don't know what that means.

Riley: I think that went back to [Richard] Nixon's time.

Johnson: Oh, really? I don't know—Who's the Senator from Georgia?

Perry: Sam Nunn.

Johnson: They talked to Nunn, and they talked to two or three, four people, and maybe the President met with them.

Riley: Dan Coats.

Johnson: Maybe Dan Coats.

Riley: The briefing book suggests something that I had heard before, which was that his meeting with the President did not go well at all, but I've never talked to anybody who knew exactly what happened.

Johnson: I was not in any of the meetings regarding the Defense Department. That was all Cheney and Bush. That's just the way he wanted it done. He didn't need anybody, so that's fair. Treasury was O'Neill, and then Colin Powell was a go. By the way, a comment about Colin Powell: We were in the transition office. Bush hadn't been declared yet, so we were in the privately funded offices. I'd gotten a mention that Colin Powell wanted to come visit about potential appointees. Great, I had never met him. He arrived at the designated hour and he had his friend with him, a longtime associate. Maybe he was the head of management, Under Secretary for management, when he was at State. I forget his name, a very nice guy, both of them very nice. They came in the office and it was like Mick Jagger was walking in the offices. All these little junior staffers were like—

Anyway, the subject had come up in the Governor's office, about Colin Powell picking people. "Clay, with all due respect, how are you going to help Colin Powell? Doesn't Colin Powell need to be on his own?" I was suggesting that we'd be working collaboratively. So Powell came in and his buddy was there and I said, "It wouldn't surprise me if 92 percent of the people who end up being on your sub-Cabinet are people you already know and you recommend, but I'd like to make sure that everybody gets a good feeling about their people being considered, and that we really care. We have to protect you and the President, through this process. We understand you have experience and we don't, but let's work with each other." He said, "Sounds good to me." And that's kind of the way it worked. He had designs on new people who were good for all these

other things. So he got it. It was fine. And we knew we weren't just going through the drills to go through drills.

Rumsfeld, conversely—The guy who handled National Security was a guy named Stuart Holliday, who works in Washington still, and was formerly in the Navy, so he'd been around the military. He gets it. Rumsfeld set up his own PPO staff, his own personal selection staff, getting résumés. I don't know how many people they had over there but it was a lot. We deferred to that operation on Defense stuff. Our guy, Stuart was the guy who took stuff in to the President. But Stuart caught a few things and had a couple people to add, so it's OK. You're not going to come up with better ideas than Don Rumsfeld, but the way the process worked there was a consistency of product that went to the President.

Riley: Was that pattern also descriptive of the other departments? In other words, were the sub-cabinets typically generated departmentally with your vetting?

Johnson: Not really. Well, for instance, Christie Todd Whitman said, "OK, we can do it. Fine, fine." She was working and she has her ideas, and Jodey Arrington, the fellow I mentioned before, was working with her. Jodey was about 25 at the time and she was a former Governor. Basically, what Christie wanted to do was to take her former staff from the Governor's office and move it down here to EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]. Being from New Jersey does not necessarily qualify you to be an EPA officer. You have to ask, "What do we want the person to do? What kind of person is best qualified to do that?" well, they have to have knowledge of environmental things or they have to have knowledge of the U.S. Congress. So she had some people and we had some people. We worked it out.

Norm Mineta, was the most wonderful human being. I don't know if you had any dealings with him, but anyway, a fabulous guy. He was picked to be—It was Andy's idea to make him—

Riley: Transportation.

Johnson: Transportation, yes. He wanted to come talk to me, so he came to talk to me at the transition and I explained to him that we work together collaboratively, and we'd both have to agree. He said, "I've had a conversation with Andy and Andy told me that I would get to pick all the people, to have the final say on all the people who are in my sub-Cabinet." I said words to the effect, "Norm, I've talked about all this with Andy too, and I'm pretty darn certain Andy didn't say that, so I'm pretty darn sure you misunderstood what he said. I bet what he said was, maybe they are going to come from you, but there's going to be a process. We have to sign off, and you have to sign off. We'll have ideas. We're going to work on this together. We won't hold you back one bit and we can make sure that all the people know the President signed off on them. "If you want to pursue this further, you and I can go talk to him, but I'm pretty certain that this is what he agreed to, because we've talked about it a number of times." That's the only time we talked about it. We worked fantastic with him. Every Secretary is different. Each department head is different.

Riley: Justice?

Johnson: Justice. John Ashcroft was a bundle of energy. We had a guy, [D.] Kyle Sampson—The only agency he worked on was Justice. He's a lawyer. He worked for—Who's the Senator from Utah?

Perry: [Robert F.] Bennett?

Johnson: No, the other one.

Perry: Orrin Hatch.

Johnson: Yes, he used to work with Orrin Hatch. Kyle knew the Judiciary. The Judiciary searching was led by the General Counsel's Office and Department of Justice, with Presidential Personnel, Kyle participated in that, because they had to do all the screening and the background checks and the tying it together. That was the way it made sense to do that. On the state level, the appointments office did judges, so I did a lot of judges. I've never been in a courtroom, but we picked some pretty darn good judges.

The people in the Justice Department—Kyle knew a lot of people, Ashcroft knew people. It was a partnership, just working together. Kyle was well respected and regarded by Ashcroft, and vice versa.

Riley: But Ashcroft had a number of his people join him at Justice, right?

Johnson: Yes, or people he had certainly worked with before.

Riley: You mentioned Mineta. To what extent were you operating under any kind of directive, formal or informal, from the President, on diversity in the Cabinet? And I mean partisan, as well as other dimensions.

Johnson: No formulas. What he did, which is what we did in Austin, was about every two months or three months we'd say, "Sir, we want to brief you on where we are in terms of diversity and how many people by gender, by ethnicity, by previous Washington experience versus non-Washington, just to see how this thing is and compare it to other administrations." I don't think we looked at it geographically. We might have. We did in Texas, because people in far west sections were bellyaching that they were not represented. He would say, "It looks like we're doing OK," or "We've got to get more Hispanics involved." Not that we were below some magic number, but it was noticeable for some reason or other. He'd say, "Yes, fine," and we just kept him informed about it.

The way Mineta came up was I was talking with Andy about Transportation and he said, "What are you looking for in Transportation?" I said, "The policy people say there's a lot of stuff that has to be done with the Congress. They want somebody who really knows the U.S. Congress and is really well regarded by them—Somebody who has prior Transportation experience, so they don't want just some general problem-solver to come in. That's what we're looking for." He said, "Norm Mineta." I said, "Who's that?" He said, "A Congressman," and he listed other things. I said, "Perfect." And he was really good.

We used to talk about what kind of qualities we were looking for in general. We used to reflect in Austin, and we continued that in Washington, about what kind of person, in general, is going to do well in an appointed position? It takes a certain kind of person. The qualities, we decided, in no particular order: The person has to be a hard worker. This is about judges. If you ask a judge what kinds of people make good judges, the number one thing is work ethic. It's hard work. You can be the most brilliant of all minds, but if you're not going to apply that at any kind of high pace, you can't keep up and you're a bad judge. So you have to work hard.

You have to have the courage and discipline to do the right thing that may not be popular, and they're OK responding to bad news. Our Constitution, both the state and federal Constitution, is designed to present roadblocks. A lot of people can tell you this is a bad idea, so you have to be comfortable with that. I'm not comfortable with it; that's why I wasn't around it very much, firsthand.

You have to have people who are—In some cases you need a thinker, a policy person, somebody who brings a specific ability to sort through the arcane, but it's not often. More often than not, you need problem-solvers and doers, which is Obama's problem. The vast 90 percent of them are thinkers, but somewhere you've got to implement. You don't want somebody coming in with a specific reason why they want to be the deputy secretary or Secretary of something, because that reason might be a hot topic now that needs to be dealt with, and what this person wants to do on that topic makes sense, but two weeks after they get in there, 9/11 will come along and it's irrelevant, because now you've got new priorities. You want people to come in with general interests, interested in doing the right thing. Not necessarily generalists, but they don't come in with a specific agenda in mind.

The last thing is that they're comfortable—the Paul O'Neill thing—being George Bush's Secretary, versus *the* Secretary. You don't want people who are rogue. Nobody elected Paul O'Neill to be Secretary of the Treasury, but they did want Bush to pick somebody who would carry out his agenda, and Paul was sometimes reluctant to do that. So it's those qualities. It's amazing how that really narrows it down, as you do some editing. And if they haven't been successful getting some big issue accomplished, they're probably not going to be successful getting some big issue accomplished in the federal government.

One question we had was pace, how many appointments we had to make. I remember there was press about that. My recollection was that by a couple of key milestones, a hundred by May first, and then August recess. On May first, we were generally below what Clinton and 41 had done, but by the August recess, we were where everybody was, and after that, we were making them at a faster pace. It took us a while to get to full ramming speed, but we did well.

Riley: How fully engaged was the congressional liaison operation in the selection process? Is somebody from the CL [Congressional Liaison]'s office sitting in on your nomination meeting?

Johnson: From the Legislative Affairs Office?

Riley: Yes.

Johnson: No. Once we pick somebody—If Senator Lott, in particular, or somebody who just doesn't like to be told no, and he was really behind some candidate, we would be aware of that.

The person working on that, Jodey, would have been aware of that, let's say, and so he'd be talking about, "Can you work through that? Can we do this? Is this a deal killer?" "Oh, no, it's not a deal killer." He's trying to make sure the guy thinks that he's really batting for him, Lott is, but he really doesn't care, or he does care in this case. We worked through the particulars, so when we went to the President, we knew we were going to have a Legislative Affairs problem. If this was going to ruin the chance of passing this bill, we invariably would not recommend the person.

Riley: Right, but the question is where would you gather that information from if there isn't a routine vetting of these nominations through the congressional liaison process?

Johnson: We would know, because there's a file, there's a letter from So-and-So. Senator Lott or somebody has communicated these things. They would talk, not in any kind of weekly meeting, but we would call, as necessary, the person who worked with that Senator, a Legislative Affairs person staff member, and check that. If this is going to present a confirmation problem, there's no point in signing off on them if this person is never going to get confirmed. We're going to cause more damage.

Riley: Exactly. Now, in this regard, was there any material change in your procedures after, what was it, June or so, when [James] Jeffords jumped ship and shifted control of the Senate to the Democrats?

Johnson: No. There were just more issues to deal with in terms of the process.

Riley: It didn't change it at all, OK. Barbara, what have you got?

Perry: I do have one question: In the aftermath of the Florida recount, do you think there was any more discussion about being more bipartisan? You mentioned that San Nunn was under consideration.

Johnson: Is he a Democrat?

Perry: Yes. I read in the briefing book, [James] Hunt from North Carolina and [John] Breaux from Louisiana, and William Gray from the House. Were you aware of any discussion? Was there discussion in your office or was there discussion outside your office, about making—I'll use the term affirmative action—to do an outreach to more Democrats?

Johnson: No, there wasn't.

Perry: Under normal circumstance there shouldn't have been, but I'm just wondering if there was any deliberate conversation to say, come let us reason together, after this difficulty.

Johnson: I think it's always a good idea. Andy's thing about Norm Mineta was, "Oh, by the way, Clay, you don't know this: he's a Democrat." So the guy had to make it on competency, but it wasn't like I need 12 out of these next 50 people to be Democrats. It wasn't that. I was asked a question like that in 2001, after the transition was over. "Because it was such a narrow victory, the narrowest of margins, did you feel like you could be as bold about making your

appointments?" I said, "The President is the President, the President of the United States, not barely the President." It's either true or false. He is the President.

He should be sensitive. You don't want to be totally partisan. You don't want to be ignorant about the politics. You want to find the best people and if you can find diversity of whatever kind, including politics, great, do it, because it will serve us in good stead. But it wasn't like, "Ooh, we'd better be very careful" because now we're supposed to be treading a narrow line. There was never any thinking along those lines. Breaux would have been a good choice for some things and I heard him discussed. Norm, I know well. There was no discussion about, "Oh, what do we do now that it was such a narrow thing?" He's the President.

Perry: And the last criterion that you mentioned, about the willingness to support the President's program, would have been difficult.

Johnson: Yes. This guy is going to want to be the Democratic Secretary of whatever, so like-minded and comfortable being in a different group. I remember there was a reception for Norm Mineta, with parts of the Asian community, and I was asked to make some remarks congratulating him on being Secretary, a couple of months after he was sworn in. I said, "I had the occasion to meet Norm. I love him, he's great and he's doing wonderful." Nobody was paying any attention so I said, "I was part of the process the whole way, plus I know how he was picked." Everybody with a cocktail looked up, and I told them the story about when I was explaining to Andy Card, *da-da-da*, and he said that Norm Mineta has total respect for the Congress, and knows about transportation. And then Andy had explained to me that he was Asian and a Democrat. They were like, *Yes!* Anyway, Norm is a wonderful guy.

Riley: You mentioned Kyle Sampson a few minutes ago. The judicial appointments process was taking place largely apart from your operation.

Johnson: The paperwork and the background checks, and the consistency of the process: You consider the operations, what kind of person you're looking for, what are the general qualities being adhered to? Is there not undue persuasion from this Senator or something? There was some consistency with the way the nonjudicial were appointed, but the final decisions were being made, with advice from Kyle, by the General Counsel and the Vice Counsel in the Justice Department.

Perry: This is a more general question. I wrote this down from Martha Kumar, quoted in our briefing book. I'm sure she meant this in reference to the appointment process. "It's good to know the President's rhythms," she said. I think you've given us just a brilliant analysis and overview and description of George W. Bush's rhythms, certainly before he became President.

Johnson: I'm not sure if—Therefore, *ipso facto*, here's the conclusion. I know what it is, I can describe what transcends, but how this happened, what the magic was—Was there some magic thing that converted him to this and he became more focused? I don't know.

Perry: I just am intrigued by that concept of Presidential rhythms and what they are, and I think you are—This started my question this morning, about how you're the person, other than his family, and you've admitted to it, who has known him the longest and has served with him in the confines of the White House and nearby.

Johnson: Yes.

Perry: My question is, we have a really good sense of his rhythms up to the White House, and you even started this morning with the adjectives that tell us something about his rhythms, but I'm also leading up to 9/11. In other words, you described so well that first meeting you had the day after the inauguration, which was the first meeting of the President of the United States, who is now George W. Bush. I feel pretty certain you're going to say you didn't see any difference in him or his rhythms, in how he was operating that meeting versus Austin, but if you did, please tell us anything that you're seeing that's different from being Governor, and his rhythms, to being President, and his rhythms.

Johnson: One difference between President and Governor is that Cheney and Card were there. They weren't active participants but the President was—You know, Andy might ask him a question or the Vice President might ask a question. I think Cheney looked at the briefing book, too, if he had a question about somebody. He didn't often, but occasionally he might bring that up or the President would say, "Dick, do you have any questions?" He would invite Dick to jump in. The President was deferential to the other senior people in there, but the interaction with the staff, with Personnel advisory staff, was the same for the President as it was in the Governor's office. We just were talking about bigger jobs and bigger people.

Perry: Should we mention 9/11 at this point? Russell, did you have other things, or did your question come to you?

Riley: One or two preliminaries, and I'm not sure we want to—Maybe the thing to do is to start with that tomorrow, rather than getting to it today. It's getting a little bit late and I sense that people are getting a little tired. I was going to ask you about the White House staff, because you had indicated that that wasn't a piece of your portfolio.

Johnson: Right.

Riley: Could you assess the putting together of a White House staff? Did it work smoothly? Is there a generalizable lesson we should take from your experience: that Personnel chiefs and transition directions should not have a role in the selection of the White House staff? Or is there something idiosyncratic about this administration that makes it sort of a one-off that you couldn't probably replicate?

Johnson: I think it's very important that the Chief of Staff be responsible for picking the senior staff at the White House, because he will be the symphony conductor for the instruments they play. The question is, does he get assistance from Presidential Personnel or not? Now, maybe initially it made sense for Andy not to ask for assistance from Presidential Personnel. Most of the people who came out weren't new to George Bush. They had been in the campaign, they had been in the Governor's office or something; whereas, in the second term—Andy was involved at the beginning of the second term, then Josh came in and changes needed to be made. Josh was fresh thinking, and he sought out fresh ideas from Presidential Personnel. I wasn't involved in it.

But the Chief of Staff needs to head up that operation. The Chief of Staff should seek ideas wherever he can and I would encourage him to use the Presidential Personnel whenever possible.

People they're considering for deputy secretary or something or other and they say, "My goodness, that would be a fantastic person for—"

Riley: Right. One of the points that you make in the written components of the briefing book, and this is something that was probably published as part of Martha's book, is the necessity of getting a Chief of Staff appointed early, December one or something. You had a deadline that you suggested.

Johnson: Yes. Well, I think the Chief of Staff needs to be selected before that. What I suggested to the President was that he be able to announce the Chief of Staff within 24 hours of the election.

Riley: I'm sorry, I didn't recall what the specifics were, but it was much earlier than the other appointments, to get that one settled.

Johnson: Yes, because you need a Chief of Staff to decide on the other members of the senior staff.

Riley: Right. Now here's a question I want to pose to you as somebody who knows George Bush very well, who worked with him in Texas, who has a very organizational management frame of mind. The model of staff operations in the White House is something that's a little bit unusual in the history of Presidential administrations.

Johnson: Bush's model?

Riley: The Bush model. For those of us who teach these things, there are two conventional approaches to how these are organized. One is the so-called "strong Chief of Staff" model, which is very hierarchical; and the other one, which is sort of discredited out of disuse or misuse, was the so-called "spokes-of-a-wheel" model, which puts a President at the hub with multiple voices coming in. On paper, Andy was Chief of Staff and was supposed to be a strong Chief of Staff, and yet on the large body of evidence journalistically that was reported, and that we're gathering, this White House was much more permeable. The Oval Office was much more permeable. You didn't have to go through Andy Card to get to George Bush. How did he reach the decision that he wanted that model? What explains why it seemed to work so well? Or if it didn't work well, what are we missing about it that means that it wasn't working well?

Johnson: That's a very good question. In the Governor's office, Joe Allbaugh's title was not Chief of Staff. It was—

Riley: Executive assistant, I believe.

Johnson: Something like that. The point was, Margaret and Al Gonzales and Legislative Affairs talked directly to the Governor. It's not end run, but you make your pitches to the Governor directly. Joe can caution the person about strengthening the presentation, or say you can do this or you need to do this. You don't have to get Joe's permission to do this, to be able to go see the Governor, but Joe is involved in implementation. The President—I don't know what that exact conversation was, but I know he wanted to have the full, unadulterated input from Condi, from

Margaret Spellings, from me, from Al Gonzales. He didn't want Andy saying, "Al wants to do this."

Riley: Right.

Johnson: Andy's role is to make sure that the quality is there, that he's communicating directly. He's helping Al be a good White House Counsel; he's helping Clay be a good this and that. The second general organizational concept you described is the way it was, and that was on purpose.

Riley: You mean it was more of a spokes-of-the-wheel with the President.

Johnson: Right.

Riley: How many people had direct access to the President?

Johnson: Direct access—There's the scheduling with the White House and I don't know what interaction Andy had with the scheduler about, "I need to be involved in that," or "I might need to talk to the person," or if there's some big issue, "I'd like you to bring that to me." Andy has never said, "I'd like to review who you want to recommend for this particular position before you talk to the President." I don't know if he said, while working with Margaret Spellings, the Domestic Policy Advisor, "I want to review with you and approve." I don't know whether he did that for some particular hot issues but not for others—I don't know what he did, but the President, on purpose, wanted to know what his senior person on this issue had to say. In our case, he was fine with special assistants coming in there.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: My understanding was that grew out of—When he came up here at his dad's request and went around and talked to people in the White House, one of the messages back was that [John] Sununu kept the rest of the staff away from [George H. W.] Bush. He wanted to be the only conduit by which this kind of thinking made its way to Bush. It was not good for the President and it wasn't good for the staff members. George, the Governor/President, was perfectly comfortable dealing directly with staff and it was important that he devoted the necessary additional time to make that happen.

Riley: How does one discipline the process if you've got those kinds of multiple access points to the President? Is it the President himself then, who—

Johnson: What do you mean, multiple access points?

Riley: Well, if you're not going through the Chief of Staff to get access to the President.

Perry: The spokes that are coming to the hub.

Riley: If Personnel and National Security Advisor and the Chief of Staff and the domestic policy person, and Karen and Karl, all have walk-in privileges to the Oval Office, what prevents that from becoming the chaotic problem that was typical of—

Johnson: I would have never just walked in. If I ever walked in to the President to talk about a business matter, I made sure Andy knew about it; not necessarily before, but I made sure that I never talked to the President about anything related to business without Andy's, within an hour, knowing about it. "I just want to make sure you knew about it." Now, was Karen allowed to walk in on a hot communications issue? She wouldn't say, you know, "Some plane has hit a building" and not brief Andy at the same time.

Andy was not kept in the dark at all. What the informal and formal protocols were, I don't know. I know Andy would have seen the President's schedule and if it was Karl talking about something, I don't know whether he would say, "That's fine," or "I wish you'd check with me." I just don't know. They made it work.

Riley: Exactly, they seemed to have made it work.

Perry: Could I come back to something that you mentioned briefly this morning, and that is the lunch that you had with the President in early 2006, about the lines of authority that had become—

Johnson: Related to Katrina, yes.

Perry: Right. I wrote down the word "tangled." They had become tangled, and you were informing him of this or explaining this to him. Was that a result, do you think, of these multiple access points, that that tended to blur the organizational scheme? Or was it driven by events?

Johnson: What I was talking about was when the White House doesn't function. I went and talked to the President about that before I talked to Andy, but I was going to for sure talk about it with Andy. In fact, I left the Oval Office and I'm walking down the hall to talk to Andy. Did Andy feel end-runned because I'd had a conversation that related to the functioning of his world? I don't know. I originally called the President, and he was the one who suggested lunch, because I wanted to talk to him. It wasn't working. The White House was really inept at dealing with Katrina. People kept running into each other. It couldn't go on. It had to end.

Riley: I take it from your presentation, that it wasn't a one-off experience. From your sense, it was a culmination of a decay in organization?

Johnson: No. They had made some changes recently in the White House, at the beginning of his second term, 2005. They put new people in there, and just keeping things going was OK, but after Katrina the rookie White House staffers weren't strong enough to get departments coordinated who generally aren't accustomed to working with each other.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: All of a sudden, this person is trying to get HHS and Labor to work together? "Get out of town! I report to the President; I don't report to Andy." Anyway, did Andy think that that was dysfunctional for me to go to Bush first and tell him? I don't really know. When I was talking to the President, the President said, "Are you saying you think I need to replace Andy?" I said, "I don't know what the solution is, but your White House is not working. It's not doing what it needs to do. You need to charge Andy to fix that, or you need to decide that one of the problems

is that Andy is the second-longest serving Chief of Staff in the history of Chiefs of Staff at this point—If he's another two months he's the longest—and you need to replace him or—I don't know what the answer to that is. I'm just here to tell you, you have a performance problem."

Riley: Maybe one way to phrase the question is: Did you think the performance problems that you saw then were a natural outgrowth of the way the original structure was set up? Did it deteriorate, or you just didn't have the right team in place?

Johnson: One of the things that grew out of this—It actually led to a whole government-wide initiative that I was in charge of—Here comes Katrina and all of a sudden Housing, HHS, and Education have to work in concert with each other to do something in one area. It was not like you can do your work, and then I'll come in and do my work. And the local police and the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and the FBI have to work together. There had to be coordination. Andy's solution to this was: OK, you three agencies—The symphony conductor on things related to Katrina is going to be this guy, Claude Allen. The symphony conductor on these four agencies is going to be Tevi Troy, and so forth. Maybe that made sense on paper, but these agencies are going to balk at the idea of being orchestrated with how they worked with other federal agencies, because they're used to doing HUD things only, not HUD things in concert with HHS.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: We identified that it's a problem. We're not set up to manage agencies working together. So we developed something called NSPD, National Security Professional Development, and it was: there shall be training to identify contact points within every agency, where people will have to work with their counterparts in other agencies to make multiagency things work. And it's not all 30,000 people who worked in HUD. It turns out there are 327 people in the federal government who have to be good working across department lines in special situations like a hurricane—How do you train those people? How do you prepare them for this? How do you make them sensitive to how their priorities have changed now? How do you make it acceptable for them, with their bosses, to now be dual-hatted for this six-month period of time? We got people together and identified what the goals were. It's funny, once we got that thing going, we dialed back the formal meetings and they started meeting on their own. I bet you that today they're really good at it.

When Claude Allen was trying to get three agencies to work together, they bristled at the idea of working in concert with other agencies. Nobody had ever asked them to do that. [redacted] Even though your authority is way less than your responsibility, some people have that ability. They didn't have people in those positions who could do that, so you needed to put different people in there and/or train these people to work more effectively, and/or have a different organizational structure.

The other thing was there was a tendency to put people in these positions who had been deputies in agencies, and to give them a promotion. Maybe it was loyalty to a fault. It was identifying the next most likely person to be qualified for this. Well, let's take the deputy of this and put him in charge of domestic policy. Oh, by the way, he's African American. OK, fine. Is he qualified to do the work? I'm not sure that question was attended to as it should have been.

Riley: We have done yeoman's work today. I often say at this juncture that we never exhaust all possible topics of conversation but we do a pretty good job exhausting the person in the chair. I would bet that we have as many pages of transcript out of this first day as I can remember. We've covered a lot of territory, and you're terrific to come in prepared to deal with so many of the things that we would normally delve into. Why don't we call it a day today?

Johnson: OK.

Riley: We'll start again tomorrow morning at about 9:15. Barbara, do I remember correctly that you have to be away at 11:00?

Perry: I have to meet with the Governor upstairs at 10:30.

Johnson: The Governor of what?

Perry: The former Governor of Virginia.

Johnson: Oh, former Governor. What's his role here? He runs this?

Perry: He's the director.

Riley: Yes, he's the director of the Miller Center now. At some point, we ought to find time for you to step up and say hi to him. I think the schedule has us until—

Johnson: Noon. My priority is this, if we have to go past noon. What I have tentatively scheduled for tomorrow is to meet with somebody in Washington at 3:00, and I'm going to have dinner with somebody tomorrow night and then meetings Wednesday and Thursday.

Riley: Yes. I need to let you go by noon in order to be sure that you'll be at a three o'clock appointment. We've covered ample ground today. We're in easy finishing distance tomorrow.

Johnson: It was fun reflecting back on these things.

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Perry: This was the book that we were telling you about yesterday and we have a copy for you. This is our commemorative book that we did for Bush 41.

Johnson: They're great.

Riley: That's pictures and excerpts from those interviews.

Riley: We have a lengthier book coming out that will include the papers that the scholars gave at the conference when we rolled out the oral history.

Johnson: That's great, thanks.

Riley: That's sort of development and public relations purposes there. Usually, the second day, the first thing I do is stop and ask if when you were shaving this morning something occurred to you that we should have talked about yesterday, or that you wish you had gotten into?

Johnson: I don't think so. As you probably determined, I had reflected on this stuff last week and I made notes of points I wanted to make, and I think I made them all.

Riley: Well, that's terrific. You've done us an enormous favor by coming in that prepared, because we're always concerned that we give you ample opportunity to get on the record the points that you want to make, other than just getting into things. So that's good to know.

Barbara, let me start with one or two, and then to the extent that you've got questions, make sure you get those dealt with before you have to take off. Rather than spring it on you, let me ask a couple to start with. One is, in the appointments process, were there for you any particularly memorable home runs or misses, some cases where you felt like, boy, we nailed this one just right?

Johnson: Presidential appointments?

Riley: Yes, Presidential appointments.

Johnson: Gosh, I was successful so often I don't know where to begin. [*laughs*]

Perry: For the record, that actually is true, because the literature is just uniform praise of the process and you.

Riley: You're making the comment somewhat tongue-in-cheek.

Johnson: I'm referring to the *New Yorker* project.

Perry: It turns out to be true.

Johnson: Let's clarify that for the editor.

Riley: In any event, was there anything memorable?

Johnson: Let me start off with one small-scale thing. I'm reminded of this because I ran into this person's nephew the other day in Austin, in an elevator, and he said, "You're Clay Johnson." I said yes. He said, "My uncle is Bruce James." I said, "I remember him so vividly because we became good friends." This was a fellow from Nevada, and the subject was the Printer for the United States, the United States Printer—What is that? Well, there's a lot of stuff that needs to be printed. The position came open and so who are the printers out there? A young staff person, Jan Williams, who was probably 25 years old, had the assignment. She had done such good

research, very good. She had done research on the U.S. Printer, the current state of affairs of their Printer, and what they needed to do better. They needed a whole lot of modernization and additional technology to bring it into the 21st century. She networked around and inquired of a bunch of regional directors of political affairs, because they have good networks, and she came up with a fellow, Bruce James, who had been a printer in Nevada. This guy was unbelievable, really smart and substantial, very substantial, and very successful in printing.

This young woman, who was not a Special Assistant to the President, but below that, had done such a good job that we brought her into the Oval Office to make the presentation. She made the presentation to the President in the Oval Office. I added, "Mr. President, the only question we have about this person is whether the United States government is ready for this much change." He said, "Let's give him a shot. Let's see how it goes." And he just tore it up a new one. It was a perfect example of how to make great appointments. What are we trying to do? What's the goal? Who out there can really do this? He did a great job.

A story about [Melquíades] Mel Martinez, the first Secretary of Housing. He had been the county judge in whatever county Orlando is in.

Perry: Orange.

Johnson: Orange County. He was recommended and he was just great, and so our role was really to help get him launched. He didn't know anything about Washington. Misery loves company and I didn't either, so he and I became really good buddies. He had been a [CIA Operación] Pedro Pan immigrant from Cuba, and that was when people's families would send their kids over here in the '60s. Actually, a couple of our appointees have been Pedro Pan.

He used to kid me—I told him, "Mel, I'm going to adopt you. It's my responsibility for you to be a success. I'm going to take on this responsibility for the whole time you're here." I didn't say it but it was implied, "Because you need some help." He knew I was kidding. About six months into when he was appointed—He got off to a great start. A good friend of mine, Alphonso Jackson, was the Deputy Secretary. He knew housing. Mel didn't know housing, so it was a good combination. Alphonso became the Secretary, too.

Mel came to me when I was about six months into the administration. I said, "How's it going, Mel?" He said, "I want to ask you about this you-were-going-to-adopt-me thing." He said, "I know about being adopted. I came here as an adoptee before my parents arrived. I'm not feeling the love from the adopted parent. I'm not seeing where you're as engaged as I would like an adopted parent to be." I accepted the point. But he was really good. I didn't make him a good Secretary, but we provided the surroundings.

Riley: Yes, exactly.

Johnson: It was my idea to put Alphonso in there as the deputy because it was a really good complement. There were some people—We talked about it yesterday—whom we wisely advised not to be appointed to something. Cheney's friend.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: I've pointed to several flashes of appointments brilliance. It wasn't me; it was the staff. This young woman two years before had known nothing about appointments work. In fact, none of them had, except the couple of people who worked in the Governor's office. It was just that we were consistent. The approach was the same for everybody, the high and the low. What do we want the person to do? Let's find the kind of person who's best suited to do that. Do they have experience or are they not experienced? Are they from this part of the country or that part of the country? Politically savvy? We do or don't care, depending on the position. Have they worked with Congress before? We do or don't care. You know, whatever it was. What does success look like? What kind of people do we have who fit that bill? Who's best at those, and who also is qualified? Or somebody is a big promoter of them and maybe we need to do a little political work with them. Once you get that clear, this really smart, hardworking woman who succeeded me could do it as well as I could. You get a clear process that's going to produce a good outcome almost every time.

Riley: Do you recall any instances where there were misses?

Johnson: I'm pretty good at blocking those out.

Riley: That's a coping mechanism.

Johnson: Yes, it's a coping mechanism. Cavemen used to do it. I'll tell you about one person we almost appointed. I think he would not have made it through clearance. This was the beginning of the second term. I wasn't involved in Presidential Personnel, but the President had asked me to work with Dina Powell, who was the head of Presidential Personnel then. She succeeded me at age 29. I can't tell you what I was doing at 29, but it wasn't Assistant to the President of the United States. The subject was Homeland Security, and she got enamored with Bernie Kerik.

Riley: Oh, yes.

Johnson: He was a darling. He was successful working the New York scene and he knew how to schmooze. It turned out he was involved in police work. Dina got a little too carried away and I was part of it. I could have advised her to steer clear of it. I think the background work would have caught that, but we were too enamored with him and there was enough smoke around that, that we just didn't pay attention. She was just, *Wow, Bernie Kerik*. The other thing that came up after the fact was that he had been detailed, asked to go over to work with the security folks in Iraq. He'd gone over there and some of the reference checking turned up after the fact that he was a one-man band. The way he operated was not going to work at the federal level. We presumed too much at the beginning and got into it. In fact, I think he actually might have been recommended to the President.

Riley: His name certainly was publicly—

Johnson: Maybe he was actually recommended and the President signed off, it was announced, and then he was withdrawn. Maybe that's what it was.

Riley: It was public enough for it to be known.

Johnson: It wasn't just rumored that he was a candidate. Maybe he really was.

Riley: Let me ask you about that. The question is, did you engage in selective leaking of names to the press?

Johnson: No. Not one time that I'm aware of. We never did that. Now, one of the things you hear about is that they floated a name.

Riley: Yes. I don't know who "they" is.

Johnson: It didn't come from me to float the name to see who raises hands, who stands up and applauds and who gives a thumbs-down.

Riley: But you didn't do that?

Johnson: We didn't do it, and I'm not aware of anybody who did it, because we believed that part of our due diligence was to find out who would applaud and who would boo.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: Not, let's just see what the marketplace thinks. One thing I found out is in these articles where someone said, "people under consideration," that's baloney. They get together, the reporters, and they call somebody who's always currying favor with the press because they get kind treatment from the press, and they say, "Here's the kind of people they were looking at," and they give you the names.

Riley: So if a historian starts looking at press accounts and sees a reference to the White House considering X, Y, or Z, are those credible lists of names?

Johnson: Not for the Bush administration. We never did that. I didn't even know it was fairly common practice. We never did that in Texas. Of course it's less common there.

Riley: Sure.

Perry: Can we go to 9/11? And I don't know if we have physically situated you in your office. Did we talk about that yesterday?

Johnson: In the White House?

Perry: Where were you located?

Johnson: Are you familiar with the layout of the West Wing?

Perry: Generally.

Johnson: OK, you walk up the stairs to the second floor, and the White House Counsel's Office is over here to the right, and then it was the… maybe Domestic Policy or Council on Economics. Anyway, you go up the stairs to the corner offices, and that's the White House Counsel. You go down the hall, and in that office there was Legislative Affairs and their staff, me and my assistant.

Riley: That was fairly standard, to have the Personnel person up there?

Johnson: I don't know what was standard. I haven't answered your question. Because they were doing some remodeling that took forever in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, our staff, the rest of PPO, was at 1300 G Street, which was the first time it had not been in the [Eisenhower Executive Office Building] EEOB. I think it's back at the EEOB now.

When I first got there, to tell you how naïve I was, a common recurring theme in this, two days before the inauguration we were invited to come down and meet my predecessor, a really nice guy from Arkansas. I can't remember his name. I was looking at his offices. It's one of these rejuvenated office spaces in EEOB—OEOB [Old Executive Building] or EEOB. I thought, *This is where we're going to live? You've got to be kidding me*. I got back and I asked the head of administration, who knew my staff, "What other office alternatives are there?" He said, "Well, we've got NEOB, the New Executive Office Building. It's new. The offices aren't great but they're newer than the OEOB." I said, "Is it possible for Presidential Personnel to be over there?"

Perry: You asked that?

Johnson: I'm asking that. Before President Bush is sworn in. I was talking to [Joseph, II] Joe Hagin and he says, "This is the first time this question has ever been asked."

Riley: In the history of the republic.

Johnson: In the history of the United States of America. I said, "Why?" And he said, "You're new here. There's an old adage up here, 'Where you sit is a reflection of where you stand.'" I said, "What?" He said, "The closer your office is to the President, the more important you are." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "The idea is if the President says, "Come see me," the faster you can get to his office, the more important you are. If you can take five minutes to get to his office, you're not very important. If he needs you there in 30 seconds, then you're really important." So I dropped that pursuit.

Riley: I think it was Walter Mondale who once said, "If you're not in the West Wing, you might as well be in Baltimore."

Johnson: Yes, that's probably a good one.

Riley: I don't know whether your predecessors were all in the West Wing. It strikes me as a little unusual, but it may just reflect the limits of my recollection.

Johnson: I don't know. As I said, when I went over to meet my predecessor, he was not in the West Wing; he was over at OEOB.

Riley: I think that's probably more likely.

Johnson: Really?

Riley: I think that real estate—Now, maybe the first year of the first term, because there's so much going on, they would make an exception to that, but I don't know what the protocols are.

Johnson: I remember when I first got in and Andy was getting ready to move into the White House, he said, "Clay, what I want you to do is—" Somehow, I had already presumed I'd be the head of Presidential Personnel, because nobody would be better suited, better qualified and experienced to serve this President. Nobody had ever done that job before somebody became President in real life, and I had. It would be foolish for me not to be head of Presidential Personnel.

Andy came to me and said something like, "I want you to be assistant to the President for Presidential Personnel, and also deputy to the—not Deputy Chief *of* Staff but deputy *to* the Chief of Staff. I said, "What's that? Just head of Presidential Personnel is fine. I don't care. That's all I'm going to do." And he said, "We'll put you in charge of the motorcade," and a couple of small administrative things, with this extra subtitle, "deputy to the Chief of Staff." I'm thinking that maybe the President has said something about "My good friend Clay—Don't put him out in Siberia," or something along these lines. So Andy thinks, *OK, I need to give him a little bit more pizzazz*.

I remember when it came time for Andy to leave and they were going to bring in—The President said, "Clay, I think I'm going to ask Josh. I think Josh will be a good Chief of Staff." Then he sort of explained, "I don't want to take you away—" You know, he was explaining that I was not going to be the Chief of Staff. I said, "Whoa, you don't need to—I would be a terrible Chief of Staff. No, I'm not asking. Don't read—Whoa, no."

Perry: Was that in the course of that lunch in '06?

Johnson: No, it was later. He hadn't really decided who was to be the Chief of Staff.

Perry: But you said yesterday that in that lunch he did raise the possibility that it was time for Andy to go.

Johnson: Yes, he said, "So what you're trying to tell me is that maybe I need to replace Andy?" And I said, "No. I'm trying to tell you that this needs to get fixed, and maybe you charge Andy to fix it. You haven't said, 'Andy, this isn't working. Come back to me in 24 hours with a plan.'"

Perry: If I could stop you there, because we didn't really bear down on the President's overall reaction, other than that specific one about: "Are you saying that Andy should go?" How did the President accept this really bad news about the structure of the organization in the White House? You were saying this to someone who prided himself on good organization.

Johnson: He's not a fretter, and this is maybe a good example of that. He didn't say, "Wow, I've got a problem? Oh, we've made mistakes? Give me about five minutes. I've got to get over that it's not perfect. OK, now I'm over it. Now let's figure out how to fix it." He jumped right into the "OK, what do we need to do?" It was pretty clear. This is not like, gosh, this could be trimmed up around the edges. No. This is Rome is burning. So we jumped immediately to the OK, so what do we need to do? He wasn't upset about it. We were problem solving.

Riley: And did you have an idea about what needed to be done?

Johnson: As I said, somebody needed to be tasked to fix this.

Riley: You didn't say what the structure ought to look like.

Johnson: No.

Riley: You just said, "This isn't working."

Johnson: No, I said, "You've got people doing things that they're not qualified to do. You have a lack of clarity about who's responsible for what." The Cabinet Secretaries had been brought in and partnered up with, directed by, in their minds, lower-level people.

Perry: Did the President say, "I see exactly what you're saying," or "I see what you mean," or "Thanks so much for telling me. I'm so busy doing what I need to do, it hadn't…?"

Johnson: No. That would have been a waste of time. He jumped right into—He didn't have to congratulate me with **"**Good job, Clay." He's jumping into it.

Perry: That's wasted time.

Johnson: That's wasted time. He immediately said, "Are you saying that you think I need to replace Andy?" Maybe he focused on that because he wondered if I was thinking, *I ought to be Chief of Staff*. Maybe it's just his being loyal to a fault. He was concerned about or didn't want, you know—So that was fine and I said, "I want you to know that after I leave here, I'm walking down the hall and I'm going to tell Andy exactly what I told you." Maybe he needed to confer with him about what the solution was. The people they were putting in those positions were—Some people were moving, so they just said, well, who's next in line? OK, promote them. They weren't giving thought to the nature of the work to be done.

Perry: So they weren't following the protocol that you had laid out so clearly, that you followed when you came into the position: What is the job? Who best can do this?

Johnson: Because it was a White House position, Andy Card, the Chief of Staff, was doing it.

Perry: Right.

Johnson: And so the PPO discipline was never a piece of that process. Andy was looking for the usual suspects. Let's get some people who we have some confidence in. Confidence to do what? Oh, OK. The "what" is different now, because of Katrina.

Riley: You said that you told the President you were going to go see Andy. You went to see Andy. Do you recall your conversation with him?

Johnson: Yes, I went down there and I told him exactly what happened. I said, "I called the President. This whole organized response to Katrina is not working. It's not firing on all cylinders. It's really bad out there." I told him it was a CF and that Margaret Spellings,

independently of me, had used the same phrase with some mutual friend of ours yesterday, so I'm not alone. I mentioned this to him and I asked him if he could see me about it. He said, "Come up and have lunch," so that's why we had lunch. I don't know if I said, "Andy, he asked me if he should be replacing you." I don't think I said that. I bet I told Andy, "I don't know what the solution is, but this needs to be fixed."

Riley: Andy, by that time, had already volunteered to resign, not in relation to Katrina, but as a start of the second term.

Johnson: Really? See, I'm not aware of that.

Riley: I don't know when.

Johnson: It would have been like him to change to get fresh faces. "Mr. President, I don't want to presume." He's such a gentleman and such a wise person about things.

Riley: I think this is even detailed in the President's memoir. Was anything done, to your knowledge? Did that have an effect?

Johnson: Yes. He replaced Andy.

Riley: OK, but I don't remember when he replaced Andy. Was it '06? Would it have been that soon?

Johnson: I think it was sooner than that. I think it was the end of '05.

Riley: OK, end of '05.

Johnson: You read something yesterday about Josh coming in, in '06 or something, but I would have talked to the President—

Perry: March of '06, Josh came in as Chief of Staff.

Johnson: Really? I would have bet it was the end of '05.

Riley: Well, I'm sure it was in the works and the transition was there. We're far afield from September 11th, but this is what happened. What changes when Josh comes in? From the outside perspective, there's a sense that this was a White House that was well run.

Johnson: Yes.

Riley: But it was differently run. What is different about Josh Bolten's service as Chief of Staff as opposed to Andy Card's service as Chief of Staff?

Johnson: Well, a couple of things. Not initially, but later on, Ed Gillespie gets involved for Josh, and Josh brings in Fred Fielding. I mean, he's not like, "We're in the last couple of years; the junior varsity will be fine." No. It's "Bring back Fred," you know? So Fred Fielding is back in there. That was so smart because Fred—There's the lawyer and then there's the wise man. Fred the wise man is probably more valuable than Fred the lawyer, those last two years. And Ed's

very smart and hopefully going to be a Senator. I'm trying to get to the situations that Josh addressed initially. Who was in charge of communications? Was Scott McClellan gone then?

Riley: Scott must have gone before then. I can look and see.

Johnson: So maybe those issues have been dealt with.

Riley: Yes, because Dana Perino had been brought in.

Johnson: Dana Perino—America's a great country. Dana Perino came in at the beginning of the Bush administration, from Colorado, and she was a letter-opener, correspondence. There was a young woman, Heidi Marquez Smith, who was an intern with me in Austin, and she's a really good, organized person. She became the number two person in correspondence, this nice, attractive, talented young woman. We put her in as letter-opener. Four years later, she's on TV every day. This doesn't happen in every other country. This only happens in America.

Riley: You're suggesting that one of the things Josh does is he surveys the personnel and he makes some personnel changes.

Johnson: One thing that changed the game was Karl had been promoted—It was sort of standard, let's promote him, let's keep him busy—to be the deputy chief of staff for policy. He's plenty smart enough to do that and invent a cure for cancer at the same time [redacted]

Riley: [redacted]

Johnson: Well, I guess so, yes, but I could sense that that wasn't debilitating. It was aggravating, drove his wife and son nuts. We got that policy stuff straightened out. On the White House stuff, Josh said, "I want Presidential Personnel—" Dina Powell was there. "Dina, I want your help. Help me think it through. Who's the best person to do these things? I want to make a change. Who can do it? Who can we get?" He reached out and looked at things more rigorously, with Dina's help. There were things to address; whereas, there weren't things to address when Andy first started up. So he did some things that maybe Andy would have been less inclined to do, and Josh did them well.

I was thinking whether the formal response to Katrina—Well, when they made Don Powell the Katrina czar, the sort of Mr. Fix-It, down in Louisiana and Mississippi—I don't know if that was a way to fix the CF-ing that was going on in Washington, to try to bring some sense of sanity to it, or not. You know, it started working better.

Riley: Sure.

Perry: Did you notice any difference in access to the President? Russell talked about that model of multiple points of access. Did anything change about your access or anyone else's that you noticed?

Johnson: No. Again, that's the President's design. People would have said, Why are we changing? Looking at Presidential Personnel—Nobody would have brought the deputy assistant to the President in to talk to the President himself, about this person that they were recommending. *They are not worthy. It's a misuse of the President's time*. No. We can talk about it. But he wouldn't have brought the head of Presidential Personnel in. Anyway, it was the way he could get the best job done in terms of personnel selection, in the least amount of time. There was all this, too much attention to rank versus who's qualified.

When I was going through a bunch of old notes and journals and stuff last week, I ran across something from the beginning of the administration, and there's Karen Hughes and Andy and the President. The President said something and Karen jumped in and said, "Mr. President—" She took exception to it. Karen noticed that Andy had this look of horror on his face, not on the President's face but on Andy's face. The point of the observation was Andy has a lot to learn about this President. He wants that interaction. He'd been working with Karen. Karen had been his right hand for six years, but all of a sudden now, she's not going to have the access to him? Where's the logic in that?

Riley: I want to make sure I register this point, because it's unusual for us to hear that somebody kept these kinds of notes or a diary, as you had suggested, and I do hope that you preserve that and find a way, if you're comfortable with it, to make sure that it gets to the library or to the Yale Library, eventually, with your papers. Otherwise, it will be lost and we don't want that to happen. You can close it for however long you want. Just make sure it doesn't get lost and is accessible at some point.

Johnson: Someone said, "You have a million stories," and I said, "Maybe a million and a half." What I like doing is to say, "Here's 20 stories. I'm not going to draw any conclusions. I'm just going to tell you 20 stories and you draw your own conclusions about what life is like."

Riley: We love hearing 20 stories and a million-and-one more.

Johnson: That's a good point. I might ask Margaret, or George, the President, "I've got this journal, which I gave you examples of. Is there any use to be made of this?"

Riley: Absolutely.

Johnson: I mean to ask them what they would do.

Riley: Well, from my perspective, the libraries are situated to accept donations with whatever restrictions. Barbara deals with the Kennedy Library on these kinds of things all the time, and because it's not an official Presidential record, it doesn't fall within the rubric of their usual clearance procedures. If you were to tell them, "I hereby make a donation. It can only be used with my permission, or not until 20 years after my demise," or whatever, then it would be in the possession of a professional staff accomplished at preservation and access. I'm only moved to do this as somebody interested in history, and with an understanding that it is unusual, under current circumstances, for us to hear that somebody has kept a diary, I mean, if this is true.

Johnson: Didn't you tell me that Karl has volumes of written notes?

Riley: I don't know. I'm not sure I would have been aware of that with Karl.

Perry: Yes, I don't think he said that to us.

Riley: I'm not sure he said that to us.

Johnson: It's just things like, **"**Susan came in and did some—He'll respond to that." It's thoughts of mine, and observations. "So-and-So is not working out."

Riley: Sure, which is a goldmine of contemporaneous stuff, even if it's a couple of lines a day. I'm clearly not saying that I want access to it or that we want access to it. I'm saying, for the sake of history, do give some thought, talk with the President, and talk with Margaret, about the best approach for this. And it doesn't have to be accessible in the next 20 years if you're not comfortable with it, but at some point.

Johnson: The thought occurred to me to do this on Election Day, when Bush first ran for Governor. We were down in Austin. The polls had indicated he was going to win big, pretty significantly, and someone said, "I wonder what Ann Richards over at the mansion is thinking right now." I'm in Austin and all I can think about is*, Why is Ann Richards at the Mansion Hotel in Dallas?* This is my naïveté. Somebody came to me and said, "Clay, in Austin the mansion is the Governor's Mansion, not the Mansion Hotel." I realized I've got a long way to go, and I thought, *Clay is a real goober.* I'll bet you I could—I'm going to have a field day. I can do a whole movie: *Goober Comes to the City*.

Riley: Well, the other possibility—If you want to get it into a publishable form, there are presses out there that would bend over backward to try to find ways to help you edit this and get it under cost for the money.

Johnson: I do think there's value, in terms of the government working better, to do that some way. As I said, I thought about doing a 100-page book, but the real opportunity is to get the advice into the hands of an administration that's really interested in it, which is not the Obama administration. I've never even thought about the non–management-related stuff.

Riley: That's all terrific. Your interior observations about people's moods and temperaments and attitudes, and who's working out and isn't—This is what historians, for centuries, have relied on, that kind of written documentation, which has dried up, partly because of the telephone, partly because of subpoenas, partly because of press intrusions and investigations. There will be some of this probably stored in email traffic, but insider accounts of day-to-day observations, even if it's one line: "The President seemed down today. I can imagine why."

Johnson: Yes.

Riley: It makes sense for it to seem valuable if we're thinking about Abraham Lincoln or Theodore Roosevelt or Herbert Hoover, but because you're so close to this President.

Johnson: I didn't have stuff like, "The President seems down." I would say, "This was particularly effective" or "particularly ineffective."

Riley: Exactly, and that's terrific. It would be a goldmine. Anyway, I've planted the seed. We can carry on. Barbara, do you want to go back to 9/11?

Perry: Back to 9/11. Situate yourself on that day and what happens.

Johnson: On 9/11, I'm in a senior staff meeting at 7:30. I go in to my office, and I have a meeting at 9:00 with Tim Flanigan, who was the deputy to Al Gonzales. I walk out of my office at five minutes to nine, and there's a television in the corner showing one of the towers smoking. I said, "What happened?" They said, "Some plane flew into one of the World Trade Center towers." I said, "Wow, man." It was a clear sky. *Wow*. I walk down the hall, go into the office, and we're talking about some appointments, what he thinks. It was Tim, me, and maybe one of his attorneys. That was the beginning.

Then, at about 9:10 or something, his assistant knocks on the door, comes in, hands him a note. Tim looks at the note and says, "A second one?" She said yes. She turned around to leave. "Second *what*?" He said, "A second plane has flown into the World Trade Center towers." A minute later, 30 seconds, 20 seconds later, she opens the door again and says, "We've been told to go to the White House Mess. Don't go back to your office. Right now walk directly to the White House Mess," which was considered to be safest if we got hit by a plane, because it's the lowest floor. So, dutifully, I went by my office and grabbed my briefcase, because it was right up next to it. We go down there and then five minutes later someone comes in and says—Have you heard this before? What happened in the West Wing on 9/11—has somebody reported on it?

Riley: This is the evacuation?

Johnson: Yes. They said, "Leave the White House as fast as you can. Ladies, take off your heels." You usually had to show a card and go through a turnstile. They just opened the gates for people. "Go to the north side of Lafayette Square." So we did. We're standing there and it's just, *Well, now what are we supposed to do?* Oh, as we were walking out of the White House, someone said, "Did you hear something about a plane hitting the Defense Department?" Somebody else said, "No, that was another plane that hit the World Trade Center towers." Well, it's both. The fog of war.

Anita McBride's husband worked for Daimler Chrysler, and their offices were a couple blocks away. She said, "Let's go to my husband's offices. They've got a lot of free space and we can congregate there. Everybody in the White House staff, let's go." We stayed over there watching television, watching the stuff unfold, until about noon. At one point I saw Kristen Silverberg. You talked to her. She came up and said, "Clay, I think you're the senior person here. I think you need to help get us organized to do something." I said, "Do what?" She said, "We could be preparing talking points for our bosses, if they're asked," or something. All I could think about was Alexander Haig saying, "I'm in charge here." I'm thinking, *If you think I'm going to get up and say, "Hello, everybody—" No, I'm not doing that*.

So we stayed there. Meanwhile, somebody had connected with the people who had gone to the PEOC [Presidential Emergency Operations Center], underneath the East Wing. At about 11:30 they said they wanted [Nicholas E. Calio] Nick and me and other Assistants to the President to come back there at 12:15. So Nick and I—I forget if there were one or two others—went

downstairs and we were going to be escorted to the PEOC over there. It was eerie because there were no cars, no people. Downtown was empty, except there were very intimidating looking military persons with heavy equipment at every intersection. You could just see them. And the Secret Service guy was the largest human being, the most muscle-bound human being I've ever seen. Maybe I was hoping that it would be so, but I saw him a couple other times after 9/11, and he was mighty large then, too. I turned to Nick and I said, "I feel really safe next to this guy." He said, "As it should be."

We went over there to the PEOC and got taken down. We were down there and the Vice President was there, Karen Hughes, Condi, and a few other people. We just stayed in the PEOC. Do you want me to keep talking about them?

Riley: Sure.

Johnson: Norm Mineta was there. Here's that conference room, here's the table, here are the TVs, the Vice President's here, Karen was here, maybe Condi was standing here, moving around. I'm standing here most of the time and Norm is here. Norm's on the phone. The Vice President was maybe talking with Andy or the President periodically. I remember vividly that Norm was on the phone and saying, "Yes, OK, OK, good, good." He gets off the phone—It's maybe one o'clock or one-thirty—and he said, "Mr. Vice President, we have it on good authority that the plane that hit the Pentagon was a private plane." As he's saying that, CNN [Cable News Network] on a TV directly behind Norm Mineta reports, "Yes, it's been verified that the plane that hit the Pentagon was American Airlines flight—" Or Delta flight—whatever it was. Here's the head of Transportation, and CNN has better intel than the Secretary of Transportation. The fog of war. It doesn't mean Norm is a bad guy; it was just—

Anyway, there was a lot of standing around, and everybody was saying, "Can I get coffee for anybody?" Anything. "Shoeshine, anybody?" There was really nothing to do. The President was going to come back. He came back at five-ish. He was going to address the nation from the Oval Office at 8:00. We were allowed to go back to our offices at about 5:00. At about four-something, Josh said, "Clay I want you to get with So-and-So here, who works in Political Affairs, and get in touch with all the Governors' offices," to clarify whatever the protocol is. I said, "What is the protocol? What do I need to tell them?" He seemed a little exasperated, like, figure it out. I'm thinking, *This is Clay you're talking to*. *I don't know what I'm supposed to be telling the Governors.* He said, "Give them a number to call with any and all questions they have about this." Just who to talk to in the White House. The political liaison guy, Dave something—He knew. We went back to my office and he got on one phone outside and I got on the other, and we started calling Governors. That took us a couple of hours. It was eight o'clock and I went home. Again, the streets were empty, nobody.

Riley: Where were you living at the time?

Johnson: Near American University, in Spring Valley. One thing I forgot to mention was when early that morning they said, "Leave. Go down to the White House Mess," I went back to my office, grabbed my briefcase, and called my wife. She said, "Hello?" And I said, "Turn on the television, because what they're telling you is what I know." When I got home at eight-something, she and—I think one of my sons lived in Washington then. He was there. There were

a couple of friends sitting at the dining room table just talking when I walked in. They said, "Tell us." What do you say? What a day. What's it all about? Nobody knew what it was all about.

The next day, Karl called me and said, "Let's go in together tomorrow. I've got a car, with one of the military guys." I said, "Perfect." I drove to his house nearby, and we had a personal car take us in. It was just eerie, as it should have been with nobody around.

Perry: When do you see the President after? When is the first time you see him and/or talk to him?

Johnson: 9/11 was a Tuesday?

Perry: Yes.

Johnson: I didn't see him Tuesday. I don't think I talked to him that week. I might have seen him at the other end of the hall.

Riley: Was there a senior staff meeting on Wednesday?

Johnson: There was a senior staff on—Yes, I'm pretty sure there was. I don't recall the particulars.

Riley: This is fairly common. One of the things that we hear is people have a really vivid recollection of what happened on 9/11, until the Cathedral event, and then even beyond.

Perry: It all blurs together.

Riley: It's all blurred. Occasionally something will jump out.

Johnson: Well, there was the Cathedral event. Andy used to give a talk about all that happened on 9/14. They go through that with you, and they have the President redefine the mission of the FBI with his daily briefing in the morning at 8:00, then he went to the National Cathedral and then he did the thing with the 600 or 400 family members. Andy told him on the way back, "Mr. President, you have been a phenomenal President today," or words to that effect. He probably said, "You've been a phenomenal President and human being today."

I'm trying to think of what I know about other Presidents, or pretenders-to-be President, candidates for President—Who could have done in that day, what he did, as well as he did? I can imagine a lot of interest in being Mr. President, a lot of imperiality, made worse out of imperialness or whatever.

Perry: Imperious.

Johnson: Imperious. A lot of all those things. They'd never spend two hours, three hours, with family members. We were real proud of him.

Riley: Do you have a sense about how long it took for things to return to some state of normalcy after that day?

Johnson: Well, first of all, it hasn't. That is now the normal. One of my points to your question is: How will the President be remembered? How will this administration be remembered? What's been misunderstood, or interpreted, or not fully appreciated?

Attention to national security, fear of terrorism—Everybody expects every day to pick up something. There have been some suicide bombers, whom Karen Hughes wanted to call murderers. She wanted from Day One to have all these suicide bombers referred to as murderers. Don't aggrandize them with suicide bombers. Forget what they're doing in committing suicide. Nobody cares. They're *murdering* people. The State Department thought it was terrible. Nobody wanted—Reagan referred to the "Evil Empire," and then Bush referred to them as the "Axis of Evil." Let's call it like it is, you know? We're a little bit too nice by half. Let's call it what it is.

It's changed. It's changed dramatically. America has changed. The world has changed. Because the world has changed, America has changed. There have been major institutional changes, structural changes in the budget, structural changes in our official priorities, unofficial priorities, and our daily priorities, changes in each citizen's perspective of things, in our perspective of what the future means, and how the federal government and America have changed as a result of that, and the role the Bush administration had in doing a pretty good job of making those changes. Creating Homeland Security, and dealing with things in a really substantive fashion, you know, what needed to be done.

An editorial comment: Something really needed to be done about health care. The priorities, in my opinion, were not the priorities that Obama defined, which was that uninsured people should be insured. The quality of our health care is poor, and that's the goal. That's not Obama's goal. He has the wrong goals and he's not interested enough in how to achieve those goals to take ownership for the solutions, so he tells Congress. Congress should never be charged to write a bill. It's a Christmas tree. How many ornaments can we hang on this Christmas tree? He doesn't want to take ownership of a solution. Hey, we need a little leadership here. Step up. Who's got the courage to go to the trouble to lead this country to find a fix to this?

Bush was willing to take the fix and go all in for protecting our country. He took that Commander in Chief role—He took it all seriously, but the most important role that a President has is the Commander in Chief. They all say that, and it's true. He took it really seriously that the Commander in Chief needs to lead that. Well, Obama needs to be the Commander in Chief for all these things that he's not fixing. No, he'd like to give speeches.

Perry: I have a question that I wrote down as the very first one yesterday, and you said we would come back to it. Before I have to leave, I want to come back to it.

Johnson: Sure.

Perry: You said you would speak to what you thought the President or the communications people might have done differently to present the President's persona as you saw it.

Johnson: I don't know how they would have done it, but I just know that they should say here's the perception. Nobody sat down and said, "We're going to fix this. This is a priority, to fix this." Our goal is not to *work at* properly communicating what the President needs

communicated. How you marshal the forces to address this opportunity or problem is different if your goal is to work at it than if your goal is to fix it. The people in charge, not Karen—

Perry: Would it have been better if she had stayed in Washington?

Johnson: Yes, it would have been better, because the people who were in charge were the junior varsity and remained so. She would have brought in more people. If your goal is really to fix it—Again, I'm not a communications person, but I'd say, "All right, what's working and what's not? What's his perception? What's the reality? Oh, my gosh, how do we fix this?" Let's be really clear about what we're trying to do, back to the old thing of what is our goal, a desired outcome? A year from now, we want people thinking this or saying this about the President. What people? These writers? We could never get these writers if we don't get those writers. The more specific you can get about what that picture looks like a year from now or six months from now or whatever, the more specific your targeted solutions can be.

They're not used to—Karen, even, isn't used to taking a problem and digging down. She's probably a whole lot better since she's been at Burson-Marsteller, as global vice chair. She's really talented. She's not a particularly good manager, by her own admission, but she's really talented. Somebody who's a prop organizer and assessor could organize those things and then bring in three or four major communications people. She could have gotten anybody in the United States who was at all positive about President Bush, who would want to help him help our country. They could have gotten the most talented people possible to come in and help figure this out. But no, it was like the functioning of the White House. Nobody said, "This is unacceptable. The White House cannot function like this with regard to Katrina. We have to do something. We can't 'work at' it. We can't promote people because they're the next in line." Bullshit.

You know, it's the same thing with the communications. Someone needs to say this. There's such a tendency in the communication world to say, "Well, the liberal press—" OK, life is hard. Welcome to the NFL [National Football League]. You have 300-pound guys who can run a four-three forty-yard dash. Get used to it and figure out how we're going to neutralize this. Put wire around it or something.

There just was not that sense of we're going to really fix this. This is unacceptable. America deserves better. It's more than just politics; it's about our country not being well served. I don't know how that got fixed. I don't know what the solutions were, but I know that nobody was at all inclined to say this was a priority. Maybe they thought communications is all about getting you elected. "Well, he's not going to run again, so we really don't need to worry about it." No.

Perry: Did you ever, as a close friend of the President, feel that you could have approached him about that issue, as you did about the organizational structure?

Johnson: That's a good question.

Perry: Or did he ever express frustration to you about how he was being perceived?

Johnson: No. On a few occasions after he left office, I commented to him that I thought his communications were weak [redacted], and he never engaged me in

conversation about that, because, as I say, he's loyal to a fault. He was very loyal in the area of communications. If I did, it was once or twice, but I really don't think I did during the Presidency, nor did I bring it up with Josh, but in the meantime, Ed Gillespie was brought in, so Josh upgraded the talent.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Riley: [redacted]

Johnson: [redacted]

Riley: [redacted]

Johnson: [redacted] One thing that's interesting is that the way the President talked about Andy with me—My suggesting that the White House was messed up suggested I was in favor of Andy being replaced, but I didn't care. I can imagine that might be the best solution, but I didn't care. And with Andy and Josh, it's that gadfly thing. I was more apt to speak up. Maybe a lot of the things about which I would say, "The king has no clothes on," would be because of my naïveté about politics. But still, the king is naked.

There's a thing in Texas called the Philosophical Society of Texas. Two hundred people belong. It's been around since the mid-1800s. A friend of mine put me in, and Andy's a member. He and I spoke last year on a panel about 9/11 at this thing. It was at Texas A&M. He and I spent the

whole day sitting next to one another, in the audience listening to all these different panel discussions, and we were on a panel. It was the most fun day, because I felt like I had experienced a different part of Washington. I'd experienced eight years of Washington in a day, through the eyes of Andy Card. He was telling me stories that will never make it to print, hopefully.

Riley: We haven't interviewed Andy yet.

Johnson: You haven't?

Riley: No, we haven't. He's been in transitions pretty much, for the last couple of years, and it's about time for his number to come up.

Johnson: Plan on a couple of sessions.

Riley: We sure will.

Perry: I'm going to have to take my leave. Now it's possible you'll still be here when I get back, but if not, thank you, Clay, so much.

Johnson: Barbara, really, really fun.

Perry: And thank you for your service.

Johnson: Thank you. Very good questions and I really have enjoyed working with you. One thing about this—We're going to finish at noon. I've got to be in Washington. Does it ever work out that an hour follow-up could be done on the phone?

Riley: Well, we haven't done it over the phone but it's worth thinking about. The options are to try to find a time that we could get together for a couple of hours if we need to. The other thing is that you'd asked about documentary appendixes. If you wanted to just sit down and hack out something, two or three pages as a supplement to something that you find particularly interesting.

Johnson: If I have things, and I probably won't, but if you had follow-up questions—

Riley: Follow-ups.

Johnson: Follow-up questions.

Riley: We could treat it that way. Let's take two minutes.

[BREAK]

Riley: Did you ever worry about your friend, the President, with the pressures after 9/11?

Johnson: Do you mean whether he was capable of leading the charge?

Riley: No. My question is less about capabilities than about just his coping with the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Johnson: No, not at all. Why is that? Well, it's certainly nothing from Andover or Yale days. One thing is that it's not on the President's shoulders; it's on the Presidency's shoulders. So who's around? Let's go over them again: Dick Cheney, Don Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Andy Card. These are not rookies. And just knowing that he personally—He's a gamer. He's not going to just dispense with the severity of the issue or the importance of it by belittling it. He's a gamer.

Riley: You were in the Personnel office for a year?

Johnson: Two years.

Riley: Two years, OK. So I'm guessing, do things calm down after the first year?

Johnson: By about the end of the second year, except for a few lower-level things, all the Senate appointed stuff has been done. The major part-time boards and commissions have been done.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: So the question is, how did I get over into the management?

Riley: Yes.

Johnson: In the fall of the second year, 2002, the President one day at the end of a meeting said, "Clay, you're kind of reaching a completion here doing this second wave of people—It's probably quieted down some, but if you're interested at all in taking on a different challenge, you ought to think about one of these independent agencies out here that you would like to run and take to new levels." Then he said, "What about NASA? Why don't you think about running NASA?" That was his suggestion, and I said, "Well, I think that's a bad one to think about, because I disagree with your space policy." He said, "What?" And I said, "Your space policy is you want NASA to go explore the heavens and send men to Mars. We don't need to send men to Mars. Per dollar spent, we can learn more about Mars by sending robots to Mars. We can send more robots to Mars for what it would take to send one man to Mars, and find out probably as much." He said, "Well, OK, then NASA is probably not something that you would be good at running for me." I said, "That's right."

I said, "What I really would like to do is to be the deputy director for management at OMB." He said, "What?" I explained why. I said, "You work across the government on management policy, and you have every agency spend the money more effectively. For someone like me, it's like you're the king. You're the king of management." As you know, I'm not like the king, but he said, "Well, man, if that's what you want to go do." I said, "Mark Everson is going to go over to be head of the IRS [Internal Revenue Service]." He said, "Well, God bless you."

Riley: There weren't a lot of people standing in line for that job, is that right?

Johnson: Yes. It's the best. It's more fun. It's just fantastic.

Riley: So the position came open.

Johnson: The position came open, so I went over there. Then he started immediately about my successor. He said, "I think Dina Powell—I'm very impressed with Dina," and I said, "I am too. I think she's the one you ought to pick to succeed me, even though she's 29." So that was handled. I went over there, and Mark was still there. Mark hadn't been confirmed for the IRS job, so I sort of overlap with him, starting about January. I don't know when Mark went to the White House, maybe in the spring, but I wasn't confirmed until June. I was over there in an acting capacity, but I really started functioning, taking the lead on most everything, in January of 2003.

Riley: Any problems with confirmation?

Johnson: Well, they wouldn't confirm me. They just never brought it up. A general rule is if there's no real important reason to thwart it, they can suggest that their little town or their state ought to be given some stuff. I think the female Senator from Washington was trying to have some money appropriated to do something for the port of Seattle. The President said, "How's your confirmation coming along?" I said, "It's not. It's on hold." And I said, "I don't care. I love this, because I'm still working with everybody across this thing. I can't sit in the real office, but I don't care. I'm getting a lot done and I don't have to mess with Congress."

Riley: You said that?

Johnson: I said that to him. The next day, he was with some Senate leaders, and he said, "By the way, my friend Clay Johnson says don't worry about moving forward on his confirmation. Whenever you all are ready is fine because he's doing fine the way it is now. He's getting stuff done and he hasn't got any of the official trappings with the job." There aren't many. I was confirmed within a week.

Riley: You're shaking your head. It was not an enlightening experience with the American government.

Johnson: I told the Legislative Affairs people, I said, "Do not give up a penny for my confirmation." I'm not worth $400 million, or whatever it is she wanted for Seattle.

Riley: That's Patty Murray?

Johnson: Patty Murray. I'm not worth $400 million for her port, or whatever it was.

Riley: Obviously you've got a lot of experience there that we won't cover, but for this project, the question would be, did the President maintain an interest in what you were doing? And if there were Presidential issues, what were the Presidential issues that you dealt with from OMB? Did he just cut you loose over there and then you're running and you don't see him again for many years?

Johnson: A little bit of that. I would see him friend-wise. Laura and my wife are very close friends and my wife and the President are good friends, so we'd been invited for dinner and that sort of stuff. There had been a lot of conversation between the leaders of OMB and the President, and Andy Card, in the development of the President's management agenda.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: [Mitchell E., Jr.] Mitch Daniels, who was really—He should be President, but unfortunately he's not going to be.

Riley: He is President.

Johnson: Huh?

Riley: He is President.

Johnson: Well, it's going to be really interesting to see, five years from now, what it really looks like. He and Sean O'Keefe, who was the deputy at OMB—There are two deputies, a regular deputy, Sean, and a management deputy, Mark Everson. The three of them, but particularly Sean and Mitch, created the President's management agenda, and it was so smart. There was a focus on how every program needed to have a desired outcome, and needed to have good management. It was Mark's idea to use red, yellow, and green performance ratings.

Anyway, it was just so well-conceived. The way I thought of it is the three of them, but particularly Sean and Mitch, gave birth to this thing, and I raised it. They got it on the ground and it had really good DNA [deoxyribonucleic acid]. This kid could really become something. It blossomed into a fine adult under our tutelage. The primary challenge of the deputy director for management was the management agenda. It was, without being spoken, the DDM's responsibility to raise that thing and maximize its impact.

And so we did that. I knew that the President was all for things working better, leaving it better than we found it. He liked goals and that sort of thing, so I didn't need to ask him for direction or "What do you think about this stuff?" I referred to this yesterday, where I arranged for him to meet with the President's management council, for us to review the status of the President's management agenda annually. I think we met maybe four or five times.

As the DDM, I was also the nonexecutive Chair of the Council of Inspectors General. I loved working with those guys because they were all about getting rid of waste, fraud, and abuse. I went to Andy one time and said, "I'm going to have the President talk to the IGs." It was their 25th anniversary of their founding, and he said, "I don't think we like the IGs." I said, "What do you mean you don't like them? We appoint them." I said, "If you don't like them, you let me know if there's someone you don't like, because we can fire him."

Riley: Right.

Johnson: "We have to tell the Senate and you might upset the Senate, but if we don't like him—Unless you tell me, I'm assuming we like him, and I like them all, I mean some more than others, but they're for the same thing we are." Andy had never thought of them as a positive. As

former Secretary of Transportation, the Inspector General was always coming and telling him bad news. Andy saw that as an intrusion.

Riley: As a threat to the President's leadership.

Johnson: Something, as opposed to, "This needs to be fixed."

Riley: Interesting.

Johnson: That gets back to the President asking me, "Why are we highlighting what doesn't work in the federal government?" I wanted to say, "You're frigging President of the United States. You know better than that." You can't fix it if you don't put a little light on it. You know, this needs to be fixed. Even he got it. So I had him speak to the IGs, and he did a really good job, and they loved it. They loved being connected to the President.

I had a big role in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, with security clearances and those kinds of things. I never asked him for direction. I just knew it's, what's the goal? We just approached it exactly like we did the Personnel stuff. We did more management stuff, as I've suggested to you, than anybody's ever done, and it's sickening that—I was naïve about it, as on a lot of things—I didn't push to have more of it immortalized in legislation. Not immortalized, but made permanent, because remember, I'm being asked in the administration, "Are you worried that some of this going to be dropped?" I said, "No, why? The agencies like this stuff. It makes their agencies better places to work and makes them more effective, which is what the employees want." Well, that's another naïve comment. You know, there are a handful of people like that, but the unions would rather not have the accountability. They might be held accountable or have their people be held accountable.

Riley: You mentioned the DHS. Can you tell us about your role in the emergence of that?

Johnson: They wanted to create a Department of Homeland Security. They wrote a 16-page bill that Congress turned into a 400-page bill.

Riley: This is the inside-the-White-House group that was working very under the radar?

Johnson: Right. Joel Kaplan, maybe Mark Everson—four or five people were writing this bill, and I think it was 16 pages. I don't know when they introduced it, exactly when it was. They introduced the bill and it was floating around and it hadn't been made a law yet, but I think they used the Christmas recess as a stopgap to force its passage. I think a bill got passed just before the Christmas recess. We started in October, to introduce the bill.

Riley: September of '02.

Johnson: It was '02. They said, "We're going to need to figure out, once this bill passes, how we create an agency." There was to be a transition planning effort, and I was picked to lead it.

Riley: The legislation creation was November 25th. The President signed it November 25 of '02.

Johnson: OK. Sometime around late summer I was told to develop a transition plan. I'm still at PPO. I start thinking about who would be the key officers in this. We approached the transition plan exactly like we approached appointments: All right, so what's the goal?

They didn't ask Tom Ridge to put together a transition plan, because he would have been incapable of doing that, but there was a guy, Carl Buchholz, who was a young partner in a major law firm in Philadelphia, a confidant of the Governor's who was down here helping him, and they put the two of us in charge of it. Carl was linked to Ridge, to make sure Ridge's wishes would be reflected, but Carl deferred to me in terms of running it, and we had a ball. We did really well. It was the same kind of process. I'm a one-trick pony and that's the trick. What's the goal? What are we going to do?

We had designated, by the various departments, somebody from the Secret Service, somebody from Immigration Service, somebody from all the different pieces that were being proposed to put in there, and we got them all together and said, All right, what's the goal? What are we trying to do? We decided we needed to define two goals: What capabilities do we want this department to have on Day One, and for the first 90 days in particular, but starting with Day One? That's one challenge. Separately, over on the search side, what people will fill the key positions to make that happen? Secondly, what capability—What needs to happen to make it a real live department? Like, we need to merge this and that and we need to create an Executive order and these other things.

I went through this with all the people and we came up with a list, and it was a book about yea-thick. It was like 643 different acts that had to occur: tangible, physical, legal things that had to happen. After the department was created, I worked with the various people of the department. Jim Loy was the head of Coast Guard. If you want to get a really effective person in government from the military, *per se*, to partner with you, don't go Army, Navy, or Air Force; pull people from the Coast Guard.

Riley: Is that right? Why is that?

Johnson: I asked him—I had several occasions to work with the number one or two or three person at the Coast Guard, and after I had the third straight successful experience this way, I said, "You guys are very easy to work with and you're very results oriented. Is that just by chance or what is it?" He said, "No, we have to be. We're small. If we want to stand out, we have to stand out with our ability to work with other agencies." In the military, they're so big, and they have DoD over them.

Riley: You don't have to worry about anybody else.

Johnson: Loy was great. I don't remember who his successor was, a guy with a mustache. They were all really good people.

So we had these 600 things. On "What sort of capabilities on Day One?" I remember it vividly, because it was really so spot-on. We were sitting around the table and I said, "All right, let's take the Port of New Orleans." They said, "How do we do that?" I said, "In 2000, a ship is coming in. We don't know, maybe there's some bad stuff, I'm not sure, coming into the port. What happens now?" The ship comes on in, gets inside the Port of New Orleans, docks, somebody goes

onboard, checks some things out. What risks are associated with that ship? What could be wrong about that ship? Bombs, terrorists, and so on. In light of those potential risks, what kinds of things should happen? Well, we should board all the ships two miles out. We should get them when they leave the port. We should be monitoring them all with satellite. We're brainstorming. It was a pretty good brainstorm.

What's the picture of success? Start with the goal and work backward, which is goal-setting 101, the trick, which is to focus on the goal. All of a sudden, everybody is saying, "Man, this is really something." And nobody was holding back, saying, "I'm Secret Service. I don't want to be a part of it." " I'm the Coast Guard and I don't want to be—" All of a sudden, "Now I want to be in this because, man, this is—" And it was a great transition plan, if I do say so myself.

We're developing this and at one point it was time to review it directly with Homeland Security Advisor Ridge. We had a meeting in the Roosevelt Room and Andy was there. We'd been keeping Andy briefed on it. Ridge was there. Of course we've been sending it to him. Buchholz had been keeping Ridge informed about it. We're presenting all this stuff and we're telling Ridge what his transition plan is, which is a little awkward. He said, "This is fine. It's nice work." We're in the process of dispensing this. He said, "What I want to do is I want to get a group of people together who are merger and acquisition people, like some Wall Street people, and get them together so that we have some experts on merging and acquiring, and get their response to this and get their ideas about how to create this department." Of course, smoke is coming out of my ears. [redacted]

I said, "Governor, I think it's a fine idea to have people reflect on this, but I want to tell you something. These people—Check the statistics—from Wall Street, are successful 30 percent of the time, with mergers and acquisitions. They get it right, how to do it, 30 percent of the time. Wall Street people, by and large, are about bringing the balance sheets together, and the P&Ls together, and making paper changes. Thirty percent of the time, they're successful. You have to be successful one time out of one. You can't afford to be successful 30 percent of the time. And it has to be based on the reality of the work to be done, the reality of the desired outcomes, which Wall Street doesn't have. So I encourage you to have whatever sessions—I'll be glad to participate in all that, and I look forward to all that stuff, but ultimately, the expertise to create this agency exists in this room and it starts with this plan."

The agency is created, and I recommend to the President that he not be made Secretary. I don't think I had an alternative. I might have suggested Gordon England to be the deputy, who was Secretary of the Navy, who I had gotten to know pretty well and had a high regard for. He said, "No we've got to make Tom Ridge the head of it. In the transition plan, in doing all these things, Andy and the President were talking about how to get this thing done and Bush said, "Clay, he's the Secretary." I said, "There's no way to really mandate that this happens a certain way, because he's the Secretary, but you're the guy who has probably the clearest vision of what this thing ought to be like." He didn't say, but didn't have to say, "Your ability to work effectively with political figures is demonstratively weak," or your patience. "We're going to designate you to be the—something—White House point person on working with the Secretary. That doesn't mean

anything. This thing is going to happen if you are successful partnering with the people you need to partner with over there to get this stuff done."

Riley: So you're doing this as an informal add-on to your—

Johnson: Not informal. It's a formal responsibility but it's unrelated to the President's management agenda.

Riley: Right, OK.

Johnson: As is security clearance stuff and all these other things that come up. I said, "I got it." The first thing I did was I called Tom Ridge and I said, "I'd like to come out and talk to you." I went out there—I've forgotten the exact details. I may have made some notes, but it was sort of, "Let's open the kimono and talk about what's inside here. Look, you have this view; I have this view. Carl is here. The definition of success for the agency is the same. I get it. You're the Secretary, and you can stop all of this whatever, whatever. I'm here to help you. You're not here to help me be—" We went through all that. We didn't hug and kiss at the end but there was a little bit of, you know.

It took hold. We opened it up and we went through it and we got into it. Gordon England was the deputy secretary and supportive. I'd talk to Gordon about it [redacted] It was a little dysfunctional at the top. But we'd done a pretty good job. It wasn't as good a job as could have been done, but we got a lot done. I was honored to have been given the task. It was really fun. We did a good job, and a lot of it did well. That was that. I had a very integral role in the creation of what the successful department looks like. Whether they pursued it the way I did, or with the right priorities, the definition of success was still the definition of success.

Riley: Let me ask you a general question: As somebody who came out of the private sector and then went into government, the way that you've described how you approached this problem reflects a high regard for the professionals you were dealing with in the government and the necessity for getting them onboard with things. And yet, maybe it's a caricature of Republicans and a sort of disdain for bureaucrats that might have been manifested in Ridge's own sense that, rather than listening to the government professionals, he was going to go to the private sector and get its reading on how to do a merger and an acquisition. I just want to throw out the question about whether, in your experience, the Republican aversion to big government gets translated sometimes, into an aversion of government.

Johnson: I don't think Ridge's thing is an aversion to big government. Ridge's thing was wanting cover all the time. It's like Obama: "I was never told that the computer system wasn't ready." F-you. What do you mean you were never told? Of course you were told. What kind of idiots do you have working for you? You know, he wanted cover. [redacted] I don't know about big government, little government. As I said, Bush's thing is effective government.

Riley: Right. You said yesterday that you didn't like the idea of "efficient" government, because there were sort of code words there.

Johnson: Good government is going to be more efficient. Money is going to be spent more wisely. The proper umbrella to do all this under is effectiveness, not efficiency. Delta Airlines, you know, "We want to serve you efficiently." No, you don't. You just contradicted yourself. Don't get too categorical with Republicans. There are idiots like [Rafael E.] Ted Cruz and some people who are just dogmatic.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: Or [Randal Howard] Rand Paul, or some of the libertarians, who are really off base—I mean it's just crazy. But Ridge's thing is he's just too political an individual.

Riley: I see.

Johnson: He didn't want any risk to him personally of—This is a really stupid way of bringing this thing together.

Riley: In your experience, either in the White House or when you were at OMB, did you have occasion to confront other instances where you felt that people were being too dogmatically anti-government in their approach to dealing with management problems in the government? In other words, were there ideological blinders that made it more difficult for you to do your job and manage?

Johnson: I didn't. Maybe it existed. Appointees at GSA would talk about how the big percentage of employees at GSA are liberal Democratic, and they get together and talk about it at lunch. I'm at OMB, which is the most professional, or it used to be the most professional, organization in Washington. I didn't know who was a Republican and who was a Democrat, because it was all about serving that President, the current President.

Riley: You said, "used to be."

Johnson: Because it used to be one of the most admired places to work, the second or third, or fourth most admired place to work. Within the first year under [Peter] Orszag, it became the next to the last.

Riley: I see, OK.

Johnson: He was a terrible manager.

Riley: Politicized also?

Johnson: No, just a terrible manager. His disdain for the—For years at OMB there used to be a Friday morning meeting with all the SESs, career people, and the political leadership, and they would talk about what was going on. Every Friday. He said, "We don't need to do this," and he canceled the meeting summarily. That's like saying, "I don't care what the senior SESs are doing." Finally somebody instituted a meeting to replace the meeting that they had canceled, which was fewer people and the director wasn't there but the deputy was.

Riley: Not good management.

Johnson: My experience was that our people didn't come in with a mindset, and the President didn't come in with a mindset. They embraced the thing. The thing about the PMA [President's Management Agenda], the beauty of the PMA, was it made the agencies work better and there just seemed to be a lot of interest in this. It wasn't for the benefit of some people over here, this Republican Party. This was about the government working better. That's what the federal employees are there for.

I did about 10 to twelve focus groups every spring for about three years, all career management people. Now, they handpicked the people to participate in these focus groups. I moderated them. They just didn't randomly pick people, so I didn't get some flamethrower or rogue in there. I said, "We're going to be more accountable. Is this good or bad for you?" And they said, "We welcome this. We want to do a good job here. We're impugned regularly: 'You work for the government? Oh, you must be inept.'"

Riley: Sure.

Johnson: They all wanted to be ept. This helped them and they liked it. There was celebration when they got to green or celebration when they made something work for the first time. Big celebration. The first time the Department of Agriculture got a clean audit opinion—That doesn't mean there were no material weaknesses; they just got an audit opinion for the first time in its history. It took one year. Nobody even bothered to work on it before because they thought it was impossible. That celebration was like they won the Academy Award. It was fantastic to see this. Those are the career employees, the bureaucrats, so-called. In fact, I saw the political leadership wrap their arms around people. I didn't see them dispense with them.

Riley: I wonder if you could go through the OMB directors that you served with, and give us a thumbnail sketch of what they did well, your assessment or report card of each of the folks.

Johnson: They were all good, in different ways. My relationship with all of them was similar in that their primary knowledge going in was budget-oriented, not management. The budget, every year you start all over, and it's a lot of involvement with Congress. There were big obstacles related to the relationship with Congress.

Riley: And you had no piece of the action?

Johnson: Of the budget stuff. On the management stuff, Sean and Mitch launched it, and we got a head of steam going and were cooking. We were making stuff work and adding new things to it, improper payments and real property. They thought it was fine and sort of stayed out of it. They stayed focused on the budget and I'd keep them informed. The only time I got involved in budget stuff was in the fall, when they had what they called Director's Reviews. The budget examiners would work through all the budget issues. If somebody wanted more money, less money, whatever, they would try to work it out. And if there were major strategic issues or large money issues that couldn't be resolved between the examiners and the counterparts of the agencies, it came to the Director's table. They scheduled meetings where all the leadership would be there, the lawyer, management people and so forth, and here's the issue. Should we spend another million dollars at NASA, for instance, to speed up NASA's ability to put a man on the moon?

Riley: Right.

Johnson: Or should we cancel the X, Y, Z aircraft at DoD? Occasionally, there would be something for us to opine on and interject into the deliberation. On NASA, particularly, they were saying, "Spend more money to put a man on the moon sooner. Speed that up," and I said, "We're trying to put a man on the moon?" They said, "Yes. Right now it's set for 2020, but we're going to move it up to 2016." I said, "Why?" They said, "Because it's important. There's a race to get a man on the moon. China is doing something, India's doing something, and it's important that we maintain our leadership." I said, "When were you born? Before you were born, we put a man on the moon. The race is over. We've already put a man on the moon. We don't need to spend money to beat somebody there. We've already been there. We might want to put another man on the moon, but am I the only one who remembers that we put a man on the moon?"

Riley: You might have been the only one alive in 1969.

Johnson: It was that kind of thinking. Then, on the military thing, it was fascinating. There was a helicopter system that was designed to do surveillance to see what was happening. Well, they designed this helicopter system like 20 years ago. In the meantime, satellites, so we don't need helicopters. As satellites took this over, the military-industrial complex said, "All right, well, it's really not surveillance, it's shooting people." They changed the scope of it. It was just ridiculous. Basically, there was no reason for it, and they killed it. We hadn't killed a weapons system in decades. It was because the facts were—We can do this other ways.

You can say man versus robot. What can a robot find out about Mars, or Venus, and what's that data worth? You can do the same thing with a man, but what it costs to put a man on Mars is unbelievable. The data I can gather over here versus the data here—There's no comparison. We need to send our surrogates out. This is the kind of stuff that comes up and gets an audience at the Director's Review. We were as quick as, probably quicker than anybody, not me in particular, to say the king is naked here. This is not hanging together.

OMB was a fantastic place to work. It's really sad that the Obama administration has let it fall down. It was so bad that there were attempts to unionize. They wanted to have an administrative employee unionization effort and a professional employee unionization effort. They were so fed up they thought they needed a union. Oh, man. In a year's time, they created this thing. They're all thinkers, no doers.

Riley: One of the general questions that I want to ask you is about the President's—You were there when the President was selecting people to staff the executive branch of the government. I'm curious about the follow-up from there. How much attention did the President pay, after people were dispatched?

Johnson: Are they doing a good job?

Riley: Yes. You said we want people who are going to be good—not good Secretaries of Interior, but good—

Johnson: Not *the* Secretary but Bush's Secretary.

Riley: President Bush's Secretary. What was the follow-on to that? I'm assuming that it's more than just checking the headlines to make sure that nobody's gotten into legal trouble. Can you tell us?

Johnson: Not enough. The policy people would be the first ones he'd hear from. The National Security people would say the Defense Department is not doing what they need to be doing, or the State Department. They didn't. Whether the State Department is not—You know, people are hating us and they're supposed to be liking us. Or the Domestic Policy people would say the HUD person is not doing a good job. They would raise that with the President, or there might be an article written and the President might ask the policy person to come explain it.

Riley: Right.

Johnson: And so it was really—If it's bad enough, our own person, their counterparts or the overseer in the White House would tell him about it. I think I mentioned yesterday that we recently asked, in 2006, what are the goals for each of the departments? We challenged each of the department Secretary heads to identify what they want to accomplish in the next two years, to make sure they don't just ease their way into retirement for the next two years, that they stay active. They came up with a list of things, and the initial submissions were pathetic. They weren't results oriented. Then there was no plan at all to follow up, as you said, to ensure that they stay focused on it. It was so disappointing. It was a fire drill that served no purpose. There was no attempt to really have it cause more things to get done. There was never any intent to have it drive behavior.

Riley: I see, OK.

Johnson: And it was just, it was a complete BS [bullshit] exercise.

Riley: Was that fixable?

Johnson: Oh, yes. If they had said we want Clay, or somebody, to be the person who then ensures that there's attention paid to this, I would guess we would have said something like, "All right, Secretary So-and-So, what I'd like to do is to help you stay on track here with a review, maybe three times a year, maybe quarterly, but not every six months. Sit down with these and see what you want to do on each of these things. On these four, what are you doing? Kind of like we did with the President's Management Agenda. What progress are you making, and in the next three months, what do you want to do toward these ends? Then after three months, did you in fact do this? Are you progressing as you planned? Then red, green or yellow—What is the state of affairs when you passed it? If you fully pass it you're green, and if you've partially gotten it done—the same thing as the President's Management Agenda. To drive attention, you use transparency and follow-up as a way to move behavior.

Riley: Why doesn't that happen?

Johnson: Because there was no interest in the White House that it happen.

Riley: The White House being the President or the Chief of Staff?

Johnson: The Chief of Staff's office, yes.

Riley: OK, so everybody's got more than they can say grace over and this doesn't work.

Johnson: Or their interest in really driving behaviors—They only wanted to work with maybe the things that are hot and spicy on the menu.

Riley: Exactly. So this is not sexy enough as an issue. Is that Barbara? Hey, Barbara.

Perry: I'm back.

Johnson: It just shows how all the biases in government are to focus on the easy things. Pass a bill, appropriate some money, give a speech. Making this work better rarely can occur in a month or a couple of months, or a quarter. People would rather do easy things than hard things. And they'd rather be dealing with buildings that are burning down than buildings that can be made to work better, that kind of thing.

Riley: In most White Houses, there is somebody who is designed to head up Cabinet Affairs. I think there was somebody with that title in this White House.

Johnson: Albert Hawkins was the first one. He had been the financial guy, the budget guy, in Bush's Governor's office, a career employee. After he left, three or four years, I've forgotten who had the position then.

Riley: That's not a name that I hear very often. Is this a person who had much pull within the White House or could have taken on the responsibility?

Johnson: Cabinet Affairs is really sort of a communication liaison to keep everybody informed. Again, that's a drive behavior. At the LBJ School, you get a Master's degree in public affairs. What is public affairs? Public affairs, Cabinet Affairs—You're in charge of Cabinet Affairs? What is that? [*laughter*] What I told the LBJ School was, "You ought to rename your degree. Offer a Master's degree in public effectiveness." They said, "I don't know what that means." I said, "Nobody does." Pick that as a name and decide, "Oh, my gosh, for that name to be appropriate, I've got to figure out what that means. You'd be the only one doing it, for starters, and then everybody would be doing it." Cabinet Affairs, what does that mean?

Riley: Right.

Johnson: How are you doing over there?

Riley: And setting up Cabinet meetings once every six months or something. But the question was whether there couldn't be a stick added to the carrot part of the portfolio.

Johnson: Yes, but the only person—Cabinet Affairs isn't going to run behavior, so it could have been somebody from the Chief of Staff's office. Joel Kaplan, who's a wonderful man, a good friend of mine—I mean, the only person who was doing that in the federal government was me.

Riley: The OMB piece, yes.

Johnson: Just sitting down with the Cabinet Secretaries or their deputies periodically, and reviewing this, and just treating it like any kind of management project, which is if we want to be successful at this by a certain date, then we need to manage the process in that light. We don't want to "work at" doing these things; we want to do them with certainty. It suggested a level of seriousness that was not forthcoming. Maybe they had other things to do that were more important, but I never heard anybody offer a good rationale for why we weren't following through.

Riley: You've mentioned a couple of times that you had a portfolio with security clearances.

Johnson: Security clearances were a problem. There are two million granted a year, and they used to take over a year to get, so you couldn't hire people promptly because it took a long time, and there was no excuse for the delays. Security clearance work, most of the background work, used to be done by Defense, so there was a bill passed to move the security clearance work from DoD over to OPM. It was getting lost at DoD. Then they wanted to create a bill to—Congress wanted to really get involved in fixing this, so we said great. Let us help. Let's work together. What we did is we sat down with the people and helped them write a bill that was results oriented.

Basically, the bill said, "there shall be reform," this has to get a lot better, and it said the President will designate somebody—Josh didn't want to do it at OMB because he was afraid homosexuality would be a reason you couldn't get a clearance and he didn't want OMB to be associated with the issue. We said there shall be reform. Within 60 days, or 30 days, or 90 days, the President's designated person will come back to Congress and say, "Here's the goal, here's the date by which the goal will be accomplished, and then there will be update and performance information provided annually, or every six months, to Congress, as to how this is going to progress." So there's a goal. We don't know what it is now, but there's a goal, a plan to get there, a date certain, whatever. Every bill ought to be written that way. They've got its official charter. The President designated OMB, OMB designated me, and we did that. In the meantime, we went on GAO's high-risk list. We didn't come off of the high-risk list in our term, but in the first year of the Obama administration, we did.

You asked about OPM's involvement. Kathy Dillaman, who ran that background investigation process, is going to heaven on the first ballot, because there will be no dissenting votes. A fabulous person. She started as a [General Schedule] GS—the lowest level you can have, from West Virginia, and was really fun to work with, and results oriented. It happened. Again, what's the goal? What's that picture? There's a boat. It's coming into the harbor. What happens now? What should be happening with that boat? It's just magic.

Riley: Did the management portfolio at OMB include the Defense Department?

Johnson: Yes.

Riley: I'm curious about how that worked. I get the sense that the Pentagon doesn't really smile favorably upon people looking into their business.

Johnson: Oh, yes, but for instance here's how it worked: The Defense Department's financial practices are red, clearly bright red. It's the most complex organization, arguably the most

complex organization in the world. We went over and visited with the Under Secretary for Finance.

Riley: Dov Zakheim?

Johnson: Yes. We said, "What are we going to do here? For instance, what's involved in getting a clean audit opinion?" Our controller, a woman named Linda Combs, went over and talked to their people and they concluded, if we wanted to spend about $500 million, they could get an audit opinion in a year. A more sensible approach is not to spend $500 million to do that. It's likely that you could do this piece, that piece, this piece, that piece, and have a clean audit opinion by 2016, I think it was, and it wouldn't be $500 million; it would be some normal expenditures to the department. We agreed that that was the wise thing to do, as the better disciplines put in place would be real.

So you get agreement in terms of programs. For every program in the Defense Department there was required to be a goal, and some designation of the quality of management. They didn't have a choice. There were 1,200 programs across the government by the way we counted it. DoD is big and their biggest problem was not that they didn't want to try to run it better. The biggest problem was they're so big. The Army—Is this program in the Army working? Jesus, it's so big and so complex. It's harder to make sense of than this $300 million job-training program over here in the Labor Department. But we didn't see pushback.

The Army Corps of Engineers, which is part of the Defense Department, sort of, because it's a big civil division, were giving little attention to the management agenda, and I called the head of the Army Corps of Engineers, the political head of it, one day and said, "I understand that you're not paying much attention to it, just going through the motions. I have an opportunity for how you can be a much more effective head of the Army Corps of Engineers, and that's to pay attention to these management issues." It's shown as a separate item on our scorecard. There's the Defense Department and the Army Corps of Engineers. I said, "Right now, you're red across the board. What does that mean? It means the President will be looking at you." It was not because this is important for us. I said, "It should be important for you that you're paying attention. You can run this thing." All of a sudden he became Mr. Go Get 'em. It helped to say that the President sees this.

Riley: Sure. We're getting close to our appointed hour, so it might make sense to deal with some of these broader questions. I'm wondering, were there pieces of unfinished business left as the President departed office? Did you talk with him about things?

Johnson: No. At the end, the dominating thing was the financial meltdown. There was the Middle East, terrorism, which is always at the top of the list, but all of a sudden right up there as number 1A, 1B, was the financial meltdown. He was 24/7 focused on that.

Riley: You were gone by then?

Johnson: No, I stayed to the very end.

Riley: You were still around, OK. For some reason or other, I couldn't remember whether you had been there beyond 2008.

Johnson: I stayed to the very end.

Perry: You flew back to Texas.

Johnson: Yes, I did.

Perry: We wanted to ask about that, too. What was that like?

Riley: The financial meltdown, are you in those discussions at all?

Johnson: I'm not at all. The President—talk about how he likes to operate—This is secondhand information and a little comment from the President along the way. I think I mentioned this yesterday. He told Paulson, "You go fix it. Staying true to our capitalistic, free market principles—Forget all that. You fix this. You go do what you need to do, working with Bernanke, you two people, there's nobody better qualified, and let me know what I can do to help."

One time, I asked the President personally, "When does Paulson sleep?" He said, "It's really funny you ask that. My primary role now with Hank Paulson is to make sure he remains alive on the job through January 20th." He's a fitness guy, and he's tireless, but nobody is completely tireless. He said, "Sometimes I've had to order him to go home, and he probably didn't." He put it in their hands and it's like, you don't need to clear this thing. You and Bernanke have the ability to delegate, and I have confidence in you. The primary issue in management and leadership is you're helping people be successful, and that's what he was doing. Not like, "Help me, the President, to be successful." No. This is America. You're here to serve America. You do the best thing for America.

Riley: Are you getting vibrations from out of the White House in the close perimeter from where you are, about all of these developments?

Johnson: Me, personally?

Riley: Yes.

Johnson: No, just what I read in the paper or hear at OMB. You know, big stuff was happening, larger than life, never been done before, violation of this theory and that theory, consistent with this understanding and that understanding. It was for the heavyweights, and Bernanke and Paulson were the heavyweights.

Riley: Exactly. Since Barbara has mentioned it, what about the ride home?

Johnson: The ride home. We went out early to the—You know, we're supposed to be in the plane, and it was all the usual suspects, people he was close to, some friends, and members of his administration.

Perry: Could we back up, before you got to the airport? How did you leave your office? What was that like, to walk out for the last time?

Johnson: It would have been the afternoon of the 19th. I've forgotten what day of the week that was. You pack up. I would have taken my personal stuff home over the last few days.

Perry: Your picture of Governor [Beaufort H.] Jester?

Johnson: No, that was in Texas.

Perry: You didn't have it in the White House office?

Johnson: No, I didn't.

Riley: Afraid a nosy reporter might wonder who that was.

Johnson: I took the stuff home. You have a going-away celebration, and you take your staff to lunch. They gave me a great gift, which was—I've got it on the desk at home. I haven't hung it yet. It's the first PMA scorecard, and the last one, on our administration. There are 130 scores here. There are five areas of focus so 130 efforts were scored and 26 agencies, and these were judged very objectively and with rigor. At the beginning, five percent of them were green. In 2008, 57 percent of them were green, and that doesn't mean we just ran out of red here and we had to use green. That meant they worked as we wanted them to.

Riley: You're not grading on a curve like college professors.

Johnson: No. It's so startling. And then all the people signed it.

Riley: That's a nice gift.

Johnson: Going through these notes was such a great therapeutic exercise this past week. One of the notes I ran across in my journal was about a guy, Rob Sandoli—I think he worked in the Defense Department branch. He sent me a note and he said, "It's been a pleasure to work with you." This is what we were talking about earlier. He said, "You showed so much confidence in the career employees, interest in, and ability to really make a difference and really take this seriously, that you inspired us to perform at our best." Oh, my gosh. Where's that mirror?

Perry: We took you off your route. You were out to Andrews on the morning of the inauguration?

Johnson: Yes.

Riley: I'm going to interrupt this again. Did you work on the outgoing transition and can you tell us what that was like?

Johnson: I was asked, in the spring, by Josh, to handle working with all the agencies, because I had the PMC relationships, the President's Management Council relationships, so we were buddies, team members—To figure out what the goals were and to accomplish them. We met in the spring, the President's Management Council, and we became increasingly specific about what the goals were. The first thing was to make sure there was continuity of services for America, that there was no disruption in the agencies' ability to serve the American people. The

second goal was that the people exiting from the Bush administration had the support they needed to exit successfully, with all the benefit stuff. Those became the overriding goals. Then the question was what does that mean? The next meeting was—Let me know, for instance, that the homeland was secure. How do we ensure the homeland is secure during this transition period?

All of these things, including briefing the incoming people. What does it mean that there's a continuity of services? Well, that means that the incoming people need to be prepared. You give them cell phones, email addresses. All the little administrative housekeeping things, as well as secure the homeland. From little to large. Again, what's the goal? I'm not kidding you, if we don't have goals, it ain't happening. So we were very specific about the goals, and then we got everybody together and divided the responsibilities. Who's responsible, and who's got the lead on this? There was a person, Gail Lovelace, at GSA, and I had done some work with her over the course of the six years I was at OMB. She was a career employee, a real pistol. She could get in your face if she wanted to, if you needed it. I used to kid her about it. "Whoa!" Anyway, she was great. I said, "Who's the career person who's going to be in charge for each of the agencies, the point person?" Then that person would report to Gail. Pretty soon, as I become meaningless, Gail became the key overall person.

It was just working all that out. We had meetings and we briefed Andy on all this, and he was pleased with it. He said, "What sort of follow-up are you going to have to ensure this happens?" I said, "I'm not going to say anything to them after about November 1st." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because career employees are the most motivated they ever are in their life when there's a new administration coming in." They want the new administration to love them. If they allow the new group coming in to HHS to have a really bad entry experience, they'll never live it down, nor will the new leadership ever forget it. So they want it to be the smoothest thing possible. They are so highly motivated that anything I could tell them is irrelevant. That's the way it worked.

Again, clarity about the purpose and getting everybody organized, and making sure somebody is responsible—it went well.

Riley: The incoming Obama folks, any comments about them?

Johnson: They loved it. Chris Lu, who was the Transition Director, and I, worked well on that. He told me, "Clay, I did what you did. I've read everything that's ever been written about transitions, and one of the shortest but the best thing I read was your paper from 2000." That was our primary document and it really helped. We tried to be as specific as that, and it was really helpful.

Riley: All right, so now we've got you back on the airplane and you're getting ready to go.

Johnson: They said, "You're invited to fly back." I said, "Wow, great." A comment about Air Force One: It was about three years into the administration before I flew on Air Force One.

Riley: Is that right?

Johnson: My wife and my Labrador Retriever flew on Air Force One before I did. Laura invited them to fly back up before we got settled in. "But we have our Lab." She said, "Bring him." The

only reason I flew on it was because somebody was talking about Air Force One, and the President said, "Clay, what do you think?" I said, "I've never been on Air Force One." He said, "What?" I said, "I've never been on Air Force One." He said, "Well, why don't you go with me to the Army-Navy game in two weeks?" I said, "Great." He said, "Normally, I would just helicopter up there, but because you've never been on Air Force One, I'll take Air Force One to make sure you get a ride." I said, "What?" He said, "Just kidding."

Anyway, we showed up at Andrews and got on the plane, and Bush arrives. I don't know how many people there were, but there's sort of a conference area where people were gathered, and people were sitting around back here, breaking up into groups. The President would come back, and Laura. At one point he said, "Let's all gather in this big conference area." It's something that's maybe twice this big, or 50 percent bigger than this. He was thanking everybody and reflecting. It wasn't sad or glad. It was about service and America.

We flew to Waco. Maybe there was something there, and then they flew to Midland. Anne and I got off—We flew back to Washington, or maybe we went to Austin, I forget. I don't know that we went to Midland. I think we got off in Waco. How would we have gotten to Austin? I don't know. It was a great gesture. There were close friends who had nothing to do with the administration, and there were a lot of people, Texans, who were there at the beginning and they were still there.

Riley: Has the President's post-Presidency surprised you in any way? Has he done what you sort of expected that he would do?

Johnson: I didn't have any specific expectation. The only reference I'd ever heard him make to the acceptable behavior of the ex-President's society, which is not really a society, was how terrible Carter was at it, bad-mouthing other Presidents. You just don't do that. I knew Bush would not bad-mouth his successors. And it doesn't surprise me that he's really busy on his Center. He's taking that very seriously and it's very important, because that's the kind of person he is. It doesn't surprise me that he's interested in becoming a better golfer. It really doesn't surprise me, but I didn't have any specific expectations.

He left January 20th, and in April he had a gathering of the usual suspects at Dallas, to first brainstorm what the purpose of the Center ought to be. Then there was another meeting the following summer, to brainstorm part two. They had a director, and they had taken some of these initial thoughts and it was a more fleshed-out review, with comments from the crowd, going about it in an organized way, relying on close confidants to lend their support.

Back to the one trick that I'm good at, Margaret Spellings and I had talked beforehand, before the beginning of the first meeting, and I said, "I'm afraid we're not going to have goals here." She said, "Well, me too." I said, "We're going to force it." They had come up and they were talking about, "We're going to have a policy center, and we're going to do this." The President was sitting in this. I don't think Cheney was there. I said, "No disrespect intended here but quite frankly, 'Bush' and 'policy,' those two words don't normally appear in the same sentence. The essence of the Bush administration is not its policies. The essence of the Bush administration is what it accomplished. I would encourage us not to have this be a policy center or a developer or opiner on great policies, but on things that were implemented well."

So it would all be focused on desired outcomes that you want to work toward, not policy center development. Then Margaret, on cue, jumped in and echoed all that, and it seemed to be the general consensus. She and I congratulated each other that we had made this point and we made an impression on people.

A year later, there's a meeting and [James] Glassman gets up and he's talking about all these things. "Here are our priorities and here's how we measure performance on each of the priorities. Here are my performance measures." I said, "You have performance measures, but there's no reference to any goals here. A performance measure is not a goal. What level of performance do you want to achieve? Why is this important? If you want to fight malaria—We'll use the instance of malaria in Africa—do you want to reduce it to zero continent-wide, in 10 years? Do you want to reduce it 50 percent in these countries and not tackle these others? Until you know that, you don't know what kind of money you need to raise, how many people you need working on it."

Goals, that's the essence of this administration. More often than not, you need desired outcomes. And then Karl or somebody made a comment, "Well, Clay, I know that because of your OMB experience you like your numbers and stuff." No, this is not Clay's penchant for numbers. This is simple. What are we trying to do here?

A little bit later, they redesigned the website and they sent it out, and I noticed there was no reference to outcome goals. So I emailed the President. He's out of office now, and he said, "I didn't notice anything. I'm going to have Mark Langdale call us." Mark emailed me and said, "I'm going to have somebody call you, a new hire, on making it happen." She called and I was out. I called back and she was out. I never talked to her. It just never occurred. There are no goals.

Riley: I've got a goal: we're supposed to do a hundred of these before the end of the next two years. I can quantify that, but that may not be specific enough.

Johnson: By when and what—

Riley: What's the definition?

Johnson: You might find out, for instance on appointment stuff that I was talking about yesterday: How many appointments do you want to make when there was recess? I don't know, the most I can. If you want to make 300, not 150, how many can somebody do? As I said, you need 10 people.

Riley: Right, metrics.

Johnson: You need 10 people at the Deputy Assistant to the President role, not five. It's really simple math. It's not the Senate working faster. You need to start earlier and have more people doing the work, real simple.

Riley: Did you know the President is a painter?

Johnson: I'm shocked. I had no inkling.

Perry: Has he painted anything for you?

Johnson: Yes.

Riley: You need to show us a picture on your phone.

Perry: Your Labrador?

Johnson: My English Springer Spaniel.

Riley: No kidding, good guess! But there was no indication, even when he was a kid?

Johnson: Let me tell you how it came about. I didn't think this was important. There was a website where you could do finger painting and he used to do these little sketches, funny things.

Riley: Oh, yes?

Johnson: Yes. The President showed me—He's really fabulous.

Riley: This is when he was in office?

Johnson: No, after he got out. He would do stuff and he'd send it to his girls, and they would send stuff back, and they were kidding each other. He'd do a little girl with a flower. There is a woman named Pam Nelson, who went to SMU [Southern Methodist University] with Laura, and Pam is an artist. She looked at that and said, "Mr. President, there's something here. There's an eye. There's a little artistic sense here." I don't know what happened the first, second or third, but about that time—He used to like to chew on cigars or occasionally smoke cigars. Laura was cutting out all of his vices—alcohol in 1986—and she got him to agree to give up cigars. He was losing all the things he could do with his hands. He was talking about how he needed a new hobby. He was talking about this with a famous historian at Yale.

Riley: John Lewis Gaddis.

Johnson: Yes. Have you heard this story? Gaddis said, "Read [Winston] Churchill's book about painting, because it's not a book just about painting, it tells you about the world." But it's also about painting and it's really interesting.

Riley: I had forgotten that piece.

Johnson: Bush loved it, and he started thinking about painting. Meanwhile, about the same time, Pam Nelson was saying there's a little something here.

Riley: Interesting.

Johnson: So he started doing it. He hired a woman to come in—Pam found somebody—and she comes in once a week. She doesn't hold his hand, but he'll do something and she'll critique his things or maybe paint there with him for an hour or two. She's working on stuff and he's working on something. She reports that the thing that is really notable about his progression as a painter is the time he spends on it. Unless he's traveling somewhere he spends about two hours a

night doing it. He said, "I want to paint a picture of Charlie," so I sent him that. [shows photo of Charlie]

Perry: Charlie, your Springer Spaniel.

Johnson: And in about a month, he sends back *that.* [shows photo of the painting of Charlie]

Perry: Wow.

Johnson: There's not much depth there.

Riley: Well, it's a photograph that's taken on an iPhone.

Perry: Yes, but the expression in the eyes, and his one of Barney is just great.

Johnson: This was done in August. He started in March. The first time he squeezed paint out of a tube was in March, and in August, he's doing this. Now the stuff he's doing is way past this. You've probably seen, he gave Jay Leno a picture and it's quite good.

He's going to do an exhibit at the library and it opens maybe this month or next month. It will be about the world leaders he worked with, gifts exchanged, that they received from him, correspondence between them, and his paintings of them. The subject is personal diplomacy. Back to the issue about: do friendships matter? They matter big. I suspect the tone of the correspondence will be, this is not one official reporting to another; this is like personal correspondence.

Perry: He's been doing paintings of all of the foreign leaders he knows?

Johnson: Right. I said, "Are they becoming?" He said, "All of them will like them. None of them have seen them." I said, "Don't you think you ought to give them a head's up and show them what it is?" He didn't like that idea. He said, "Putin may not like his." I said "Why?" He showed it to me and he's looking pretty stern. But he is stern.

Perry: That's the way he looks at the Olympics right now.

Johnson: That's the way he looks.

Riley: Has he got a shirt on in this picture?

Johnson: Yes, he does have a shirt on. It's so much more. There's expression and personality, I mean, the man is good.

Riley: That will be interesting.

Johnson: It's so much fun. He has this big space on the second floor of his office that's about 50 percent bigger than this. What else did I say was 50 percent bigger than this?

Perry: The conference room.

Johnson: Air Force One. He used to have his desk here and his little painting area here. Now the desk is here and this whole end is painting.

Riley: It's an amazing development and it's interesting to hear you say it's not something you would have predicted, either.

Johnson: Oh, no, not at all, never.

Riley: Because it certainly caught the rest of us by surprise.

Johnson: At Andover, I got interested in and took a photography course, and they really force you to look and see. It's a fabulous course, and ever since, I've remained interested in photography. I think I have an eye. I like photographs and composition. He didn't take a photography course.

Riley: And you mentioned a Scully course, too.

Johnson: I took the History of Modern Architecture, and it made me look at buildings. Bush never cared about that.

My sister is the executive assistant for the head of the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth. She's worked there since it opened, except for about a four- or five-year period. She called me about six weeks ago and said, "Guess who was here?" And I said, "President Bush." She said, "How did you know?" I said, "I'm just guessing." It was a Friday and George and Laura took their staff and they loaded up in a bus and drove over for a little road trip to see the Kimbell because they've opened a new pavilion there. My sister said it was really fascinating. They were giving them the tour around. There's also a [Pablo] Picasso and maybe [Claude] Monet exhibit up. She said, "Everybody else was looking at the art and the President was up close at the painting, to see how he put the paint down." She said, "We don't have people look at how they put the paint down." The former leader of the free world was studying paint application technique.

Riley: Interesting.

Johnson: It's so neat.

Riley: You have taken us on quite a tour, from A to Z, in a man's life. We never get everything recorded that we'd like to, but this has been an extraordinary portrait of this man.

Johnson: Thank you.

Riley: I think the way to leave it is to take a deep breath and recover from our having grilled you for 10 or 12 hours, and then let's be in touch about whether it makes sense to—You will know better than we will, if there is stuff that needs to be downloaded, that we haven't gotten to, and if it makes sense for us to grab another two or three hours at a convenient moment. It's easy for us to get to D.C. at some point and do that. I'm sure we'll be going down to Texas periodically. We can pick you up down there. You talked about documents. We haven't mentioned any in particular, but if there are some documents that you want to append to this, by all means do so,

things that would help the readers as they come to it. And if you wanted to just hammer out on a typewriter, two or three pages of, "I wish we had talked about—"

Johnson: One thing on that: You had asked questions about his greatest assets, his strengths, his weaknesses, and the Presidency's strengths and weaknesses: what are the real commitments to it? How will it be viewed in history, his most significant achievements? I gave that a good bit of thought last week, but all I could do is just put that in writing and send that to you.

Riley: That will be fine.

Johnson: If we also want to meet—

Riley: One of the things that I've pledged to the foundation supporting the work, is that we're trying to keep the imposition on people's time to a minimum. You've been more than generous in making the trip here and letting us do this. I think we've done extremely fine work, but we're happy to invest our labor in it further if you want to do more.

Johnson: I can't imagine that I would want to, but you all would know the kind of things you've gotten from the 60 or 70 people you've already talked to, and were there holes, and whether I have anything to add.

Riley: The notable holes that I would have detected earlier, we've amply filled. We spent a lot of time talking about your knowledge of this man before he became President, which is important because you have a unique perspective. That's something we can't get from anybody else. The personnel and the transition piece, we can't get from anybody else. The OMB piece becomes less a part of our portfolio, as it leaves the President's portfolio, and we've talked about that.

Johnson: One thing, what kind of President is going to be— I'm wondering, and I'm going to get with Karl and pick his brain on this. I had a discussion about this with the President briefly when we were in Florida, and Judd Gregg, who was also down there. Will there be a political campaign or a run for the Presidency? Here's someone who's going to be a doing President. Everybody else in here is a little short on things that they've done, long on gab. Judd Gregg—Well, he's New Hampshire—is sort of negative on the idea. At some point we have to start focusing on substance, on somebody who's willing to produce substantive change.

One distinguishing characteristic about this President is his focus on substance. As I've pointed out, I believe it was inadequate toward the end, when there was no follow-up or attempt to drive behavior. It's an important point to start making about every Presidency. What was the attention to substance, and actually effecting change? How did they go about trying to organize to make that happen?

Riley: It's certainly timely. Driving in this morning, listening to the problems the current White House is having in executing the health care program, I think people's attention is focused on how does a President fulfill even the goals that he considers to be his principal ones?

Johnson: Have you all talked to Don Evans yet?

Riley: Yes, we did.

Johnson: OK. I didn't know if you had talked to him.

Riley: My colleague Mike Nelson and I spent time with him.

Johnson: We were talking a little bit yesterday about, was there any kind of seminal moment where he became—Don is as close as anybody.

Riley: Exactly, and we did talk with him about those kinds of matters. Often, we have to ask questions because we're not sure whether there are relationships or discussions that you've had. Sometimes it's like oil prospecting. You dig a fair number of dry holes in these interviews and then a casual remark will spur something that will be a gusher.

Johnson: Don's pretty savvy about the political arena and the public arena and so he might be reluctant to psychoanalyze the President.

Riley: I understand.

Johnson: What was that thing about the alcohol, like in '86, before and after, and priority given to religious beliefs?

Riley: Don certainly shared that experience with him.

Johnson: And he's the guy to give it to you.

Riley: I think he was comfortable in that environment. Mike and I both, because of our own personal experience, were sort of empathetic in that direction and maybe it made it easier for him to talk about these things. The President often said, as his father said, "I don't want to be laid out on the sofa and psychoanalyzed." But it helps history to have a sense of who these people are, and sometimes you have to put yourself in a reflective state of mind and think about it.

I've got to get you on the road, because you've got a trip to make, but thank you so much.

Johnson: Really, I enjoyed it. As I said, it was wonderful to prepare for it.

Perry: Thank you again.

Johnson: It was good, really fun.

Riley: You've done us a terrific public service.

Perry: We like to say your service to the country continues through this participation.

Johnson: That's the other thing about being in Washington. It's so different because you're not serving in the military but you're serving the country. You're reminded of it when you're giving somebody tours of the White House or something. You look back at them and their eyes are about this big around, and it reminds you that this is not a job; this is service. Then at the end you're saying goodbye and they say, "Thanks for what you said, and thank you for your serving us, the country." You're reminded that you're serving and it's just—

Perry: It's an honor.

Johnson: A real honor to be given the opportunity. The initiative at the beginning should be you're given this opportunity, and you should think about the ways you can look back and say, "What am I proud of?" One of the things you say is, "What were your greatest accomplishments?" At least six to ten things that you want to be really proud of, what are they? Then maybe a year into the three years of service, you ask yourself, "I'm a third of the way through. Have I got any of those six identified yet? I've got to raise my game a little bit."

Perry: The goals. I've learned.

Riley: I'm working on it. I'm thinking in those terms already.

Johnson: Well, this is great. I've enjoyed it. One thing I noticed is I used the word fun. One connection to the President is he has a good sense of humor and I have a good sense of humor.

Riley: We've noticed.

Johnson: It was a lot of fun. When you met with agencies and you were celebrating an accomplishment, there's joy. Fun doesn't mean like ha-ha fun, but satisfaction, a lot of joy.

Perry: Delight.

Johnson: Delight.

Perry: Delight, I like that word.

Johnson: Good command of the English language.

Riley: The best move I ever had was going to Harvard and then—

Johnson: See? They hire good people.

Perry: And the best decision I made was to come and work with Russell. We love it.

Miller Center Oral History Project:
George W. Bush Administration
Additional Information **from Clay Johnson**

Q: What was the strength of President Bush's presidency?
A: President Bush provided strong, substantive, courageous leadership for all Americans, as the times and challenges called for. He sought substantive solutions to our significant challenges and surrounded himself with substantive, result-oriented people to implement them.

Q: What aspects of the Bush presidency were/are overlooked and misunderstood by the press and public?
A: The American people don't really appreciate how significantly the World changed between 2000 and 2009, and how significantly the people and policies of President Bush's Administration transformed our government to effectively serve all Americans in the face of the new threats, challenges and opportunities.

Q: How should the Bush presidency be viewed in history?
A: History will show that George W. Bush's presidency effectively, most substantively addressed the major national security, economic, and education challenges and opportunities of the day. They left the government and the country way better than they found it: safer/more secure, with effective solutions/safeguards in place, with an increased focus on/accountability for desired outcomes.

Q: What were the Bush presidency's most significant achievements?
A: The Bush presidency:

- Kept America safe;
- Transformed national security institutions and the tools of war to effectively address the threat of terrorism;
- Aggressively/effectively addressed the 2008 economic crisis;
- Infused greater accountability into America's public school systems; and
- Increased economic opportunity with lower taxes and more free trade agreements.