EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH CAREY PARKER

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TRANSCRIPT

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Young: This is a December first interview with Carey Parker. We've come to the closing chapter, and it is marked by the [George W.] Bush 43 Presidency and other major events. We can start off by talking about Senator Kennedy's expectations and your expectations for the [Albert Jr.] Gore-Bush contest for the Presidency.

Parker: We were very optimistic that Gore would prevail. Senator Kennedy campaigned hard for the Gore team around the country, and I think he sensed that the reception was always very positive. Gore was a mainstream Democrat, and with [Joseph] Lieberman on the ticket, they seemed to have enough balance and appeal to different groups around the country to make us feel optimistic. The closeness of the election was a shock, needless to say. The rancor and the furor that developed over the recount sent a very divisive message to Congress and to the country at the beginning of the new administration. The bitter words and debate over the ballots in Florida poisoned the atmosphere.

We've often thought that there might well have been a different approach if the election had gone cleanly for Bush instead of it appearing almost to have been seized and delivered to Bush by the Supreme Court. It certainly taught Democrats that we'd probably face serious partisan opposition to anything we wanted to do that might bring the two parties together. Things were off to a difficult start.

Young: After Gore was nominated, was the feeling that if he were elected, his administration would be a departure from [William J.] Clinton's or that it would be more of the same?

Parker: We felt it would have been a continuation of Clinton's policies. Despite of all the personal turmoil over Clinton, it seemed that his Third Way approach was a reasonable way of making some progress on most of the issues that Democrats cared about. We wouldn't get the whole loaf, but we often would get more than half a loaf on major issues. Our feeling was that Gore would continue this approach, and that he wouldn't have a very partisan administration, because Gore himself was not basically partisan in his philosophy. He was a very intellectual and very thoughtful person.

Senator Kennedy had a good relationship with Gore, and he was obviously looking forward to a Gore administration, but it didn't work out that way. There was a feeling that the Bush administration could have gotten off on a much better foot and that the relations between

Congress and the White House could have been better. But with a narrowly divided Senate and with the furor over the election and the recount, the stage was set for a continuation of partisan battles. Senator Kennedy was disappointed in that, but he felt that in spite of the atmosphere, he might be able to work with President Bush on some things.

He'd had a good personal relationship with Bush's father, and he felt that he could have a good personal relationship with the son too. He liked Bush personally, and President Bush seemed to reciprocate that. They got off to a pretty good start together the first year on education reform. That was the biggest single thing that Senator Kennedy worked on with President Bush. There was concern on the Democratic side that Kennedy was too quick to reach a compromise on how the legislation would work. But we certainly felt—and I think you'd get this from Kennedy's education staff, and from the Senator himself—that a great deal needed to be done to improve the quality of the nation's public schools.

The Clinton administration had made progress on this issue with their Goals 2000 proposal, which Kennedy supported, but much more needed to be done. We were receptive to the argument that accountability was missing in public schools. The idea began to be developed with education leaders with whom the Democrats had worked, and with the Department of Education in the Bush administration, that we could work well on this issue with President Bush. We spent a good deal of time during that first year working, ironing out the details, trying to reassure Democratic colleagues who were skeptical of anything the Bush administration was attempting to do. One reason why it passed was because Bush was anxious to work with Senator Kennedy.

Young: And he was already committed to furthering education and to accountability and to other things.

Parker: To enact some sort of fundamental reform. It was difficult to come up with a specific way to achieve the goal, and that caused a lot of controversy. But we certainly felt it was a worthwhile effort. Senator Kennedy, by being willing to step out front and say, "Let's find a way to work this out with the Bush administration," made relatively steady progress during that first year, and the No Child Left Behind Act was all but completed by the end of the year. It went to the White House and was signed into law at the beginning of the next year, 2002. But it was all put together in 2001, with a lot of effort by a team of Democrats who were led primarily by Senator Kennedy and other members of our Education Committee—and also by George Miller in the House. He was willing to work with the administration and with Senator Kennedy.

In spite of all that was happening elsewhere, and with 9/11 suddenly changing the dimension of the debates in Congress on lots of issues, the Act survived and came through. I think Kennedy considers it one of the most significant bipartisan achievements of his Senate career. It was a landmark school reform bill. A lot of people were dissatisfied with it, and we had to work hard with the teachers' unions and with other school groups to make sure that they were in agreement. Some compromises were put together, but there was a general feeling that the legislation was a major step forward to improve the nation's schools.

There were fringe efforts to take a drastically different approach to school reform—such as setting up independent schools and charter schools, for example—by people who were looking for ways to pull the plug on public schools. "Let's dump the public schools and offer financial

incentives to low-income families to move their children into private schools or religious schools. Let's not worry so much about the fate of public schools—they're beyond repair." Kennedy was very concerned that this was the wrong approach. There were far better alternatives.

He's not opposed to religious schools or to charter schools, but the notion that we would spend billions of dollars funding students to leave their public schools and to go to a new form of profit-making schools was alien to his philosophy completely. He realized that the Bush administration, although they supported charter schools and other more conservative approaches to education, was genuinely interested in improving public schools. We thought it had a lot to do with Laura Bush and her interest in education.

Senator Kennedy felt he had established a worthwhile relationship with the President, and also with Mrs. Bush; it continued for the whole eight years. It didn't work out very well in terms of other substantive achievements, but there were no personal problems. Although he could give a strong speech criticizing some of Bush's policies, he was careful not to make it too personal. He went out of his way with both President and Mrs. Bush to try to build a friendship they could use to encourage the work they were doing.

One incident. On 9/11, Mrs. Bush was on Capitol Hill for a meeting. She came up to the Senate to meet with Senator Kennedy and some other Senators in a room near Kennedy's office, when all of a sudden the news came about the attacks on the Pentagon and New York City. Suddenly her Secret Service agents came into the room and whisked Mrs. Bush away. They brought her briefly into Senator Kennedy's office. It was a difficult moment for both of them, but it helped in some ways to solidify their personal relationship. He did what he could to help Mrs. Bush get where she needed to go in the crisis atmosphere that was developing. It worked out smoothly, and Mrs. Bush was grateful for that. It was just a brief moment, but it made a long-time impression on all of us who were part of it, and certainly on Senator Kennedy.

Young: Maybe you ought to, as a sidebar, talk about that day, September 11, when people were at work in the Capitol.

Parker: Yes, everyone was here. It was a routine workday morning. We got a phone call from the press office saying, "Turn on the TV. A plane just flew into a tall building in New York City." We didn't think it was more than just a terrible accident, but when the second plane hit the second tower, everyone said, "Wait a minute. What's happening?" Right after that, we heard of the attack on the Pentagon. From the balcony beside our office, we could see the smoke rising up from the Pentagon. Everyone was alarmed. They took all of the Senators to a special safety place, and the staff was taken outside, for fear that there might be an attack on the Capitol as well. We were in the small park across the street from the Russell Senate Office Building for two hours or so, while officials tried to figure out what was happening and whether it was safe to go back into the buildings. By about 4:00 they came out and said, "You should go home. Don't plan on coming back into the building today." It wasn't until later that afternoon that we heard about the amazing passengers who had attacked the terrorists on the fourth plane and had caused it to crash in Pennsylvania.

Young: It was targeting the Capitol.

Parker: It was apparently targeting either the White House or the Capitol. It wasn't clear where they would have attacked, but it easily could have been the Capitol or one of the Senate office buildings. Some felt that since the terrorists had attacked the Pentagon, they probably intended to attack the White House too. Who knows what the plan was, but it seemed as though we were right on the edge of the attack and easily could have been part of it.

Young: Was Vicki [Reggie Kennedy] here with the Senator at the time?

Parker: No.

Young: Did he go home right away?

Parker: Quite soon. But first he was taken by Senate security officers to a secure place. When the danger of a further attack subsided, he was taken home. There was a lot of turmoil, a lot of chaos. Most of us didn't go back to the office that day, so we didn't find out until the next morning what had gone on. We certainly knew that a lot had changed. We were immediately concerned. It was tragic that while we were in the midst of the No Child Left Behind legislation, all of a sudden something happened that would drastically change children's futures.

Congress, after some hesitant moments, came together very quickly across the aisle, and that helped, in some ways, to produce more of a bipartisan spirit. There was certainly a consensus in Congress on what needed to be done. Basically the Pentagon and the White House had a blank check for whatever the military and the Secret Service and others felt was necessary to protect the Capitol and the country and to track down the terrorists. All of that was developing at a fairly rapid pace, and we had little to do with it. There was a sense that the members of the Armed Services Committee and other committees were at the administration's service to do whatever was needed. That attitude, I think, continued for most of 2002, until the run up to the Iraq War, and then things began to fall apart again.

There was virtually no dissent in Congress over the invasion of Afghanistan, because it certainly seemed as though that was where the terrorists were based. The Afghan Government was friendly toward us, although it didn't have much power over some parts of its territory. Tracking down al Qaeda seemed like the least we should be able to do. National security immediately became the dominant issue, and much of the rest of the Congressional agenda was delayed, with the exception of the No Child Left Behind legislation.

At the time of September 11, that legislation was pretty much on a track that all sides were comfortable with as it went forward and was brought to the floors of the Senate and House. It wasn't affected by 9/11, but a lot of other bills that were on the drawing board and that we were beginning to lay out plans for took a backseat. All of the committees pooled their efforts to develop what they could contribute to the new need for greater national security.

Young: Some people have argued that when it came to funding, Bush retreated from his commitment to No Child Left Behind.

Parker: That came much later. It started off in pretty good shape, in the sense that we felt that for a broad new program, there was no disagreement over the funding level at the start. The disagreements began as budget priorities began to clash and as the administration became more

unwilling to put in the resources that we felt were necessary. There had been an understanding but not a specific agreement on actual amounts.

Young: Was there still a core of Republicans who were opposed to this?

Parker: Yes, and they were obviously reluctant to funnel a lot of money into it.

Young: Even at the beginning, in the first year?

Parker: Yes, but that didn't upset the initial funding. The need for greater national security financing changed everything in terms of what was available for domestic discretionary spending. No Child Left Behind began to be shortchanged more and more, particularly in Bush's second term, and we didn't have the votes to add additional funds. The administration claimed that it had never specifically committed to what we called full funding. It was hard to figure out what the numbers should be, but it quickly became clear that schools were having a great deal of difficulty implementing some of the reforms required by the Act. It was difficult to make more resources available, particularly to schools that needed funds to hire more teachers or upgrade their classrooms by rehabilitating decrepit physical facilities.

Young: So from their point of view, it was something of an unfunded mandate, analogous to that.

Parker: Yes, right. By the middle of Bush's second term, we felt the Act was being funded with only about two-thirds of what was needed to carry out its reforms. Unfortunately, the schools that needed funds the most were being shortchanged the most. That became the dominant issue,. There was not nearly so much a pressure to change the substance of the act as there was to fund it adequately.

We found that we didn't have enough votes to pass true full funding in either the Senate or the House, but a compromise was reached. The funding approved by Congress wasn't as low as the administration had proposed in its budget. It was hard to tell, though, whether the Administration was gaming the system, proposing very low funds that would then be raised by Congress to a moderate level. Most of us think the Administration felt that Congress would always add substantially to what the administration proposed. Between their proposal and what the Democrats wanted, they usually split the difference at about 50/50.

If you were to give the Act a grade, you might give the mandates an A or A-minus but give the funding only a C, and that left a lot of schools shortchanged. Schools and children weren't able to obtain the full benefit of the act that they could have received with full funding. The issue is continuing year after year, but we're optimistic that the mindset is different with the [Barack] Obama administration and that a stronger commitment of funds is more likely. But it's far from certain—just as the Bush Administration had to balance the funding needs of national security in the early 2000s, the Obama Administration has to balance the demands of the weak economy.

Young: Over the years, not just with Republicans, but even during the Clinton years, was there an increasing starvation of the more liberal programs?

Parker: That was certainly the [Newton] Gingrich plan.

Young: But it was going on even in the Clinton years, was it not?

Parker: The problem that erupted with the Gingrich revolution was basically the starve-the-beast mentality. They wanted to reduce the role of government, and they felt that the most effective way to do it was to reduce the discretionary spending in a range of social programs, whether it was health care or—

Young: Instead of a frontal attack on the program itself.

Parker: They wouldn't try to repeal the program, but they could cut the budget, and sometimes severely cut it in a number of programs. It had about the same effect. It became very difficult to maintain a credible program in many cases. Clinton's team basically agreed—as did most Democrats—with the argument that you had to pay for new programs either by cutting existing programs or raising taxes, or relying on economic growth to generate new funds. Raising taxes was a nonstarter for most of that period during the Clinton years, and certainly during the Bush years. With rising expenses for national security and with the demands of Social Security and Medicare and other entitlement programs that had automatic spending increases every year, there was less funding available for so-called discretionary spending programs. Most of the liberal initiatives over the years had not been entitlement programs. The great exceptions were Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security.

Inevitably, in discretionary spending, the needs of the Pentagon were met first. Even in the Clinton years it was difficult to persuade Congress to add to the deficit in order to support liberal spending programs, and the Clinton administration wasn't particularly eager to do that either. The Clinton team, however, was very perceptive and effective at avoiding serious economic downturns. The strong economy generated additional funds that could be used to add to spending on vital programs without creating a deficit.

That all went down the drain in the Bush years. His huge tax cut enacted in 2001 put vast sums out of reach for increased spending on federal programs, and the problem was compounded by 9/11. Everybody understood that national security spending came first. Engaged in two wars, in Afghanistan and Iraq, there were few places to turn to for increased funding for programs like No Child Left Behind. So we grumbled, but we basically had to make do. We felt that schools were getting only about two-thirds of what they needed each year in order for the act to do what it was intended to do. It was a big problem for public education.

Young: You talked earlier about expectations for Gore if he had won. Could you talk a little more about the expectations for Bush early on? Was his candidacy seen as, or expected to be, a middle-way Republican one, or was it thought to be a return to his father's type?

Parker: It wasn't so clear that he would return to his father's type of foreign policy, because he basically had no experience in foreign policy. We felt that the way he had campaigned, as a compassionate conservative, was intended, no question, to reach out to moderates in his own party and to as many Democrats as he could. He would be conservative, but he also would recognize that there were needs that had to be met. That philosophy didn't last very long. The typical refrain among Democrats was, "It's all conservative and no compassionate." It quickly

became clear. It would have been very different, I suspect, without the huge drain of the war on terror.

Young: You think so?

Parker: Yes, I think so. I think they were primarily interested in keeping some restraint on deficit spending. Their economic philosophy was basically conservative, and that meant that we shouldn't, in order to be compassionate, run up large deficits. That was basically their guiding philosophy. There was no chance that they would retract some of the huge 2001 tax cut. But if they hadn't had to spend so much on national security after 9/11—especially on the war in Iraq, the costs of which grew larger by the year—I think it would have been a different Bush administration at home. But they had to give up something, and they chose to give up the compassion rather than their tax cut or their balanced-budget philosophy. "We have to pay for what we spend."

We had endless trouble prying out funds for urgent liberal programs. It wasn't just schools that needed it; poverty programs had also taken a big hit. These programs deserved more than just the back of the hand or the argument that, "We need to keep the deficits under control." We had hoped they would recognize that there had to be some leeway to accommodate these urgent social needs that Democrats had been committed to basically since Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society programs.

The only thing that was able to keep the social philosophy of Democrats reasonably sane, in spite of the opposition of the Bush administration, was that they'd had the foresight in the [Franklin D.] Roosevelt years to make Social Security—and later, Medicare in the Johnson years—a pay-as-you-go program through the payroll tax. Today, as the baby boom generation begins to retire, the costs of those two programs will begin to soar, and the payroll tax won't able to fund them adequately. So that's a major additional problem.

We often heard the argument from some Republicans, "We're seeking more funds for discretionary programs in education and health care—just not enough to please you. But look how much you're bleeding the deficit in Social Security and Medicare. We won't raise taxes to pay for that, and we won't force you to accept cuts in spending for those two programs. Seniors will get what they're entitled to." So there was an impasse over spending.

It could have been worse, but as I say, it got to the point where we felt we were paying a high price for the administration's budget philosophy. The burden fell heavily on low-income and lower-middle-class Americans who needed and deserve better schools and better health care. But we didn't have a majority in Congress to solve the problem.

We felt that nobody knew how long this fiscal crisis would continue, but we took some satisfaction that at least we had programs in place, and that when and if they were adequately funded, they would do the better job that we expected them to do, rather than the less effective job they were being forced to do because of their shoestring budget. That was the challenge. A much bigger gulf was developing between the haves and have-nots in our society. A lot of people were pointing that out, and economic inequality became a much bigger issue.

Young: And it is right now.

Parker: Yes, it hasn't improved. The problems are longstanding and difficult to correct, but there's an opportunity now with the Obama administration to deal with the trickle-down-economics theory that ran wild over the past eight years. "Let the free-enterprise system work and let capitalism work, and government will try to take care of those down at the bottom." That was basically the Lyndon Johnson philosophy, and we launched some worthwhile programs to carry it out. Over the past four decades, Senator Kennedy has consistently devoted a substantial amount of time trying to achieve greater support for those at the bottom level of the income ladder, because they were being hurt the most.

Young: So again it was defensive.

Parker: Yes, and it led to some significant achievements. One of his continuing achievements during those years was periodically raising the minimum wage. That became one of his favorite issues. If you look at the charts of the minimum wage and compare its purchasing power over the years, you see that its purchasing power peaked in 1968. The minimum wage would have to be significantly higher today to match its purchasing power then.

The minimum wage was created in the 1930s, and became one of FDR's [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] enduring achievements. It kept pace with inflation all the way through 1968, but its purchasing power has been allowed to decline since then. Democrats were never able to mandate by statute that the minimum get annual cost-of-living increases, so that its purchasing power at least wouldn't decline as the years passed. So Senator Kennedy adopted a strategy over the years of periodically introducing legislation to increase the minimum by modest amounts to try to maintain its purchasing power as much as possible.

Typically, he'd propose a substantial increase that would be phased in over a three-year period, and he'd do it once or twice in each decade. Usually, it would be a major battle in Congress, but he almost always prevailed—he'd work out a reasonable compromise with Republicans, and a modest increase would be enacted. Then the Republicans would sigh in relief, saying, "We won't have to do that again for four or five more years." It was a continuing battle against the Republican right, who just didn't care about things like that.

Kennedy loves to take his charts to the Senate floor, showing what has happened to the minimum wage since 1968. He'd ask Republicans, "How could you vote against something that will reduce the decline?"

That was typical of many battles in Congress in those years for any kind of social program. Democrats wanted X, Republicans wanted X divided by three or something, and then they compromised. Hopefully you'd get no less than X divided by two. You'd get half of what you were working for. That meant that you usually had to start by asking for more than it was possible to get. It was a game. You had to guess what the end result of the fighting and negotiating would be. Where do we start? Where you start almost always determines where you finish.

Young: Moving on, maybe it's useful to think of the pre–9/11 Bush administration and then the post–9/11 Bush administration. I'm trying to get the vantage point from the Hill and from Senator Kennedy about what was going on after 9/11 and how he navigated through it. Nine-

eleven seems like, in a sense, the worst setback of what he would call "the march of progress," and the worst setback to the principle of the separation of powers—that is, the Senator checking and balancing the executive for almost his entire career, except possibly for Vietnam.

Parker: Yes, those were the two. We started out with a strong consensus on Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11, and it wasn't until the very divisive battle developed over authorizing the war in Iraq in the fall of 2002 that the Senate was deeply spilt. We didn't think that the case for war had been made. People felt passionately about it, but there were only about 25 or 30 Senators who were willing to vote against the authorization. At the time, there were intense accusations against Democrats, and many of them argued when Republicans challenged their patriotism for refusing to give the administration what it said was necessary to avoid whatever Saddam [Hussein] might do. The argument, I think, basically lost all rationality.

When we saw the impressive evidence that Saddam was developing nuclear weapons, and when we heard the doubts from all of the experts we talked to, it seemed that the case for invading Iraq was a sham, and it poisoned the atmosphere in Congress between the liberal left of the Democratic Party and the administration, on the all-important issue of our national security. We were beginning to see that there were key people advising Bush who felt very strongly that, "We ought to flex our power and go it alone. The United States is the dominant power on Earth. We can invade any country and do what we like."

Young: The preemptive-war doctrine was associated with this too.

Parker: Right. The Administration's supporters were making the argument, and sometimes even using television ads, to say, "The last thing you want to see is a mushroom cloud over an American city, because we didn't act in time." They used that fear, "What if the Democrats are wrong? We think we have enough evidence to make a strong case that we need to go to war." Democrats felt the case was nowhere near that strong. There were many steps short of going to war that we should have tried before we simply rolled up our sleeves and invaded Iraq. Kennedy, in the first Bush administration, had voted against the Gulf War on the grounds that it was premature to send in our troops to drive Saddam out of Kuwait. That was a mild disagreement compared to what was going on a decade later about Iraq.

Young: My note on the Gulf War says that the vote was 52 to 47 in January of 1991. On the Iraq resolution in October of 2002, it was 77 to 23.

Parker: Yes. That's what 9/11 did. People were scared of Iraq becoming a nuclear power. But the international inspection agency raised what we thought were major doubts about the capability of Saddam to do so. Even if he wanted to do it, he was still years away from being able to do it. It seemed to us that with a war in Afghanistan already draining our resources, it made no sense to embark on a new war in Iraq. The evidence wasn't there to justify it.

Young: What was Kennedy's alternative to a resolution authorizing war? What was the alternative that he preferred?

Parker: They were talking about some sort of UN [United Nations] action, for example.

Young: So it was delayed.

Parker: Yes. It wasn't as though we'd say never, but there was a feeling that we needed to find out a lot more. To go to war at this stage was grossly premature, and we felt that it couldn't be justified. There were real doubts that the administration even had a plausible case for it. There was skepticism among a lot of liberals in Congress who looked at the evidence and said, "This is absurd. We're acting like a tyrant if we go in there."

Young: But you couldn't be sure you were seeing all the evidence, could you?

Parker: No, you couldn't be sure, but there was enough. The idea that somehow this was all taking place, that nobody from the outside world had any idea that Saddam was successfully doing something that was imminent, that it was a serious danger to the United States—they hadn't made that case at all, we felt. The argument that the administration was using was, "Look, we can't take a chance. We think there's some credibility to some of this evidence. There are signs that he may well be building, or at least preparing to build, a nuclear weapon. He might turn it over to terrorists. We don't know what he might do with it. We have to go in and stop him."

Young: Prevent him from doing anything, yes.

Parker: They said, "Look, you saw how we handled it a decade ago. It will be a cakewalk again. We'll just send in our troops. Iraqis will greet us with hugs and kisses."

Young: Like the liberation of Paris.

Parker: "Throwing flowers in the streets." I think that argument weighed a lot. If they had to vote again on the Iraq War, I don't think it would pass. When they got in there and found out what Saddam had done, there certainly was no evidence that he was preparing nuclear weapons.

Young: Well, with the 9/11 attack on Bush's watch, was the risk of a second disaster on his watch, from Iraq or wherever, to be tolerated by them? Was that part of the thinking, do you think? You saw unpersuasive intelligence that there was a danger, but from a purely political point, was it expected that Bush, from here on out, would do everything in his power to prevent another attack from any source from happening on his watch?

Parker: There was a feeling that that was his goal. We had a lot of doubts about his ability to deliver on it or that he was doing the right thing. The big misstep early in his administration was that a small group of advisors—[Richard] Cheney and company—were basically calling the shots. Cheney was a former Secretary of Defense, and therefore had some credibility. But there was a strong feeling that Bush was simply rubber-stamping a very one-sided analysis of the issue.

There was broad agreement at the time that we needed to do a great deal to protect the country. They created the Department of Homeland Security, for example, to try to bring all of the agencies together under one roof. Kennedy was particularly concerned about another aspect of the issue during those years: the so-called "loose" nuclear weapons in nations that clearly had them—for example, Russia or maybe Pakistan or China—all of the countries where terrorist organizations, particularly al Qaeda, apparently had already gained a lot of support from people

who disliked the United States and would be happy to see the United States brought down. How easy would it be for them to get a nuclear device and use it against our country?

That was a real fear during those times. Kennedy worked very well with Richard Lugar, for example, and other Republicans—and through the UN as well—to try to beef up the State Department's programs for making sure that countries with a nuclear capability had their nuclear weapons and nuclear materials under strict security safeguards, so that it wouldn't be possible either for a government to make nuclear materials available to terrorists or for terrorists to seize the material. It's not clear how well-trained the terrorists were, and that added to the concern. A lot of people felt that Washington would be a likely target of a nuclear attack if the terrorists could pull it off.

Young: After the anthrax.

Parker: Yes. In some ways Bush probably deserves credit that no major terrorist disaster has happened in the U.S. since 9/11. You pick up the papers these days and read about what's happening in India, where you don't need a nuclear weapon to cause panic and mass hysteria and major casualties. A small group of terrorists landed in a posh resort, and suddenly it became a major terrorist battleground. It's hard to say what lessons we'll draw from that, but I think Democrats would certainly give Bush credit. 9/11 happened less than a year into the Bush administration. What happened through the next eight years? Nothing, no other major terrorist attacks in the U.S.

I don't have a good sense of how they arranged their national security priorities to try to keep track of everything—for example, tracking who might be able to smuggle something dangerous across the border. Issues such as immigration reform took on a national security cast that made them even more difficult to deal with in recent years. The War in Iraq may be Bush's worst mistake, but the fact that there have been no major terrorist attacks since then may be, in the end, his best achievement, though it certainly didn't justify the war in Iraq.

Young: Hoping there's no December surprise.

Parker: That's right, or an inauguration surprise.

Young: The face of the Bush administration post–9/11 and pre–9/11, politically, looks very different, at least from the outside. Maybe it wasn't different from the inside. Paul O'Neill left fairly early. In almost every way after 9/11, Kennedy's "march of progress" was just nothing. It went away. Is that correct? It must have been very dispiriting.

Parker: It didn't go away in the way the Voting Rights Act and several other big domestic issues.

Young: That is true.

Parker: We continued the march of progress, but at a lesser pace. It was more of a budget problem and finding the resources to fund the programs that we felt were needed to continue the progress we'd been making. But civil rights continued to be a priority issue on Kennedy's agenda, such as reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act.

Young: That was fine with Bush too.

Parker: The effort over several years to reform the immigration laws to deal, for example, with the obviously huge problem of illegal immigration ran into a firestorm of criticism, and we weren't able to pass anything.

Young: I'd like to hear more about immigration reform: how it came to be and where it is now in terms of the policy.

Parker: On each of these issues, the first priority was to guarantee the continuation of funding for existing programs that we'd fought hard for in prior years, and not allow them to expire. There was resistance, especially from right-wing Republicans, who wanted to say, "Let's claim victory with the Voting Rights Act and say that we don't need it anymore." But the 2000 election convinced even moderate Republicans, that there is a lot of fraud going on in elections around the country, and we simply can't lift the federal oversight that the Voting Rights Act has provided, defective as it has sometimes been. It's essential to have that oversight.

We almost always succeeded. When Kennedy wages a civil rights battle, there is something about the way the Senate responds. He has been a leader on a lot of issues, but when he decides to use his passion and ability to make sure that some civil rights legislation passes—even gay rights legislation, for example—more often than not, he's successful. It is part of a long tradition, going all the way back to the Civil War days or Reconstruction, certainly since the 1960s, that the march of progress continues. The Senator feels that it's his responsibility to make sure that the march continues moving forward, that we don't stop or stand still, let alone move backward. As I say, in both Republican and Democratic administrations, sometimes it has been a major battle, but we usually get it through.

Young: What would be called civil liberties have taken a big hit, it seems to me, in the Bush administration's Department of Justice—torture, military tribunals. That's not an old civil rights issue, but it is a human rights issue at least, the Geneva Convention.

Parker: Yes, no question about it, and to redress that trend since 9/11, Senator Kennedy has put a great deal of his time and energy into civil rights and civil liberties issues. He saw the Abu Ghraib prison situation in Iraq, for example, not as just a civil liberties issue, but also as a huge foreign policy issue. It was bad enough that we had invaded Iraq without adequate justification, but then to go forward with all of the abuses that were involved in that made it worse.

The films of Abu Ghraib prison deeply undermined the respect for America around the world. Intense new opposition was developing to our country, and it made all of our other foreign policy challenges more difficult. Part of Kennedy's mantra was, "We have to end the war and restore America's respect in the world." This is basically what Barack Obama has assigned to Hillary Clinton. He practically said so in so many words today. Maybe you've talked to Sharon Waxman about this.

Young: I haven't interviewed her yet. I think it's scheduled for soon.

Parker: She can take you step by step from 2001, going into Afghanistan, right up through the last election and the funding for the Status of Force Agreement that is being debated in the Iraqi

Parliament right now. Kennedy has had a significant influence on each step of the way, we feel. Not that he has always gotten his way, but he has raised these issues intensely, and he has spent a lot of time on them. He probably has given more speeches on Iraq than on any other subject over the last eight years.

Young: Major speeches too.

Parker: Yes. He has given numerous major speeches on Iraq. There's always something to talk about, always an agenda to lay out. His role has been interesting as it has evolved. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, he's been active in working with leaders at the Defense Department on issues such as guaranteeing the best protective equipment for our troops and the best treatment for those who are wounded. He's also focused intensely on Iraq as a foreign policy challenge and on how we can maintain our leadership role in the world and avoid undermining our reputation.

He feels that the war has been a large counterweight to the progress we'd hoped to make in the war on terrorism. He feels that more and more people are trying to figure out how to attack us, which makes it an even greater challenge for the Department of Homeland Security and the Defense Department to protect the country, and even local police departments to protect their neighborhoods. It's sort of neighborhood security as well as foreign policy. I think he feels that rather deeply.

He has tried to figure out how we can be a leader in the world without being a bully to the world, how we can do something for deprived peoples and disadvantaged nations and refugees, and how we can work with the UN to deal with other countries more effectively. He has an agenda that he feels has been set back significantly by what has happened in Iraq. He'd go to the mat on any Iraq issue that comes up, and he'll always be ready to give a speech about it.

It certainly has joined his three or four domestic priorities. Usually we think of Senator Kennedy as jobs, health care, education, and civil rights. He doesn't have committee responsibilities on environmental issues, but on many of those issues, he works with his state. He gets very involved. We haven't spent a lot of time on what he does on Massachusetts issues, and I'm probably not the best person to talk with about that. I think that your talking with either Barbara Souliotis in the Boston office or with people who have worked with her would be worth it.

Young: I had an unrecorded conversation with her, and then there was a recorded interview that Steve Knott did. I got a powerful sense of the Senator's attentiveness to and responsiveness to Massachusetts' problems. Have you had much to do with the Massachusetts part of his responsibilities, the constituencies part?

Parker: Not much, no. Typically I work on speeches he gives in the state, and I've worked with whoever was working on the issues. With the Big Dig, many of us in the D.C. office were more involved, because Congress was very involved. The support he achieved was remarkable. That was probably his single biggest effort for the state. There are lots of stories involved in that.

Young: I haven't heard any of them.

Parker: I could put together a little list. He worked closely with John McCain, who was threatening to withdraw federal funds for the project. McCain and Kennedy reached an agreement that Congress wouldn't keep funding the Big Dig endlessly, but there would be one last major installment, and it was a large amount. There had been intense pressure on the Appropriations Committee to cut off funding for the project, because its major cost-overruns and mismanagement had erupted into a scandal. Kennedy was concerned that the project might crash if the federal assistance that had been going through at a substantial level were suddenly cut off. McCain and others were threatening to do that. Kennedy and John Kerry were able to work with McCain over a period of several weeks to get a large—

Young: This was in '99 and 2000?

Parker: —yes—appropriation that Kennedy and McCain had basically agreed would be the final installment. If the project still needed more funds after that, and if it were still coming in over budget, then there would have to be other ways to pay for it. It came down to some difficult moments a few years ago, when the federal funding had reached its end, and there was still more that had to be done.

A major accident occurred in the tunnel, which was very costly to repair. Some of the tiles in the ceiling fell, and a passenger in a car was killed while driving through. The state hoped that because this additional expense was so unexpected, Kennedy would be able to prevail again in Congress, but there was no way he could go back to McCain. He basically had given his word. "You have done this for us, John, and that's far more than we were expecting. In return, we accept your view that this is the last of the federal funds we'll get." The state couldn't count on his help anymore.

Young: Did that come out of the so-called ISTEA [Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act] program from the first Bush administration?

Parker: It started out that way, yes. It kept going for quite a while. In the '90s, during the Clinton administration, the focus in Congress on wasteful spending became more intense because of budget pressures. Clinton was somewhat open to the argument that we could save money instead of raising taxes if we made our programs more efficient. "Waste, fraud, and abuse" were the watchwords that everybody used. Eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse from federal spending and you'd save billions.

Young: I remember Reagan saying the same thing, Justin Dart.

Parker: Both sides used the phrase as a way to reduce spending. No one's for fraud or abuse, but it's harder to reach agreement on what constitutes waste. A "bridge to nowhere" sounds like an abuse, but I'm sure it wasn't to the people of Alaska. They loved Senator [Ted] Stevens for it.

Young: Was the Big Dig contemplated when the ISTEA program went in? Was Kennedy there at the beginning, at the creation of that legislation?

Parker: Yes, he was there when ISTEA passed. But the Big Dig project wasn't an issue then. It was no different from many other transportation projects across the country. It didn't become an issue until it got underway and began to have serious cost overruns.

The issue helped dramatize the broader problem of earmarks. Senators and House members give members of the Appropriations Committees their priorities for their state or district, within reason. We're talking about small amounts of money. Only a small number of members has that privilege, usually based on seniority. Typically appropriators expect you to submit requests of a few hundred thousand dollars or, at most, a few million dollars. In recent years, they've been disparaged as pork, and there's a growing movement in Congress to abolish them.

Young: McCain was saying in the campaign that he would eliminate all of this.

Parker: Yes, he talks that way. Earmarks are difficult to justify, but in theory they have a legitimate function, since Senators and Representatives know their states and districts and should be able to make better decisions on priorities than large federal agencies trying to weigh grant applications. So Congress has acquiesced for years in allowing some members to obtain special funds, or earmarks, for projects they feel have merit in their states or districts. But in practice it doesn't always work out that way. Communities and local organizations hire lobbyists to press their case for an earmark.

Kennedy tries to have a fair process. We look through all the requests, and try to weigh them objectively. "Here are 25 possible projects. Which five should we go to the Appropriations Committee for?" We have a process in the office to figure that out, and it usually works well.

Sometimes, when enough requests for a certain type of project come in from across the country, Congress enacts a specific program to support them. For example, the Historic Treasures program was created in recent years, which Hillary Clinton made one of her special causes as First lady. Senator Kennedy championed it as a way to save some of the many famous historical sites that were in desperate need of repair in Massachusetts.

Kennedy loves doing those sorts of things for the state, because he feels it does some good. He thinks the dollars are well spent, and most Senators probably feel the same way. Occasionally, an earmark turns out to be scandalous, but fortunately none that we've been involved in have, with the possible exception of the Big Dig in some Republicans' eyes.

Young: That says a lot about Massachusetts. During this period, the Senator was pretty hard on the Bush administration on a number of fronts. It was not intended, I guess, personally on Bush himself, but it's hard to think that it wouldn't have been taken that way by some of Bush's people.

Parker: I don't think it was taken that way by President Bush himself. He's been too courteous and genuinely friendly and warm toward the Senator, apart from the give and take on certain issues. It's not that he changes his mind on things or that he does special favors for Senator Kennedy or that his advisors say, "You can't do that, Mr. President." The Senator has had a good relationship with Laura Bush too, not that they spend that much time together. But when something comes up and he can do something for her, he tries to. In particular, they formed something of a bond on 9/11, and she appreciated his concern for her at such a traumatic moment.

The President, after hours, is always very congenial. He likes to joke with Senator Kennedy. There's a side of Bush that probably accounts for why he's President. I don't think he would

have won the election in 2000 without his slap-on-the-back, friendly attitude that comes out in most things he does. When you're dealing with President Bush, you don't think you're dealing with an ideologue. He seems to be willing to listen to what you're talking about. He, I think, will go the extra mile to try to find a way to accommodate your views.

When we've worked on education issues, for example, we've found it fairly easy to work with President Bush, because education usually doesn't light a raging bonfire of partisanship—not on most aspects of the issue anyway. Kennedy loves to go to the White House for a meeting with the senior education officials and the education leaders from the House and Senate in both parties. Bush's Cabinet and his approach to education issues have usually been very accommodating—I wouldn't use the word "compassionate," because of the funding problems, but intellectually he's supportive of what Senator Kennedy is trying to do. There's no real disagreement on that. The Senator loves the charm that President Bush can turn on in a meeting. He likes to reciprocate.

He also loves the story that Ann Richards used to tell when she was Governor of Texas and Bush came out of nowhere to challenge her re-election. Ann Richards thought she'd clobber him, but she was defeated. People asked her afterward, "What went wrong? How could you lose to somebody like that, someone who didn't seem to be very good on any of the issues?" She said, "Well, if I could have figured that out, I would have won the race. I don't know how he did it."

She said there was something about him that appealed to voters. I think he capitalized on that in his White House campaign. There definitely is something about him. Kennedy calls it his Irish personality [*laughs*], but there is a genuine warmth to him. You can have a good time with President Bush when you're not fighting over an issue. He dismisses partisan attacks as part of politics as a contact sport. He thinks that Kennedy feels the same way too.

Young: But there are deep divides between them on certain issues.

Parker: Right.

Young: And I think it's hard for people on the outside to imagine that people in Washington who have deep disagreements and responsible positions don't necessarily hate each other. They can maintain at least a civil and sometimes very friendly relationship. Kennedy can engage in a blistering attack on a position on an issue, but he remains friends with the person who is associated with it. You're saying that Bush has somewhat the same—

Parker: Yes. It's not as though they have been close friends, because they don't see each other that much. It's that when they do, a light bulb goes on, and there's a warmth that seems to be generated. He also found it very easy to deal with Bush 41, who was much more moderate.

There is a family association too—fathers, sons, brothers. Prescott Bush was in the Senate when the Senator was first elected, so the Senator has known three generations of Bushes, and that also counts for something in their relationship. I've never heard Bush talk personally about Senator Kennedy, nor have I read anything. He certainly could give tough speeches defending what he was doing. Perhaps some of that familial friendship is in their genes somewhere, and it reminds them that their families go way back together.

Young: Kennedy and Bush more or less agreed on immigration reform.

Parker: Yes, very much so.

Young: The appearance is that Bush didn't do very much to put it across at the eleventh hour the last time around. Is that a correct impression?

Parker: I don't think that would be fair. We didn't get it done in time to avoid it being caught up in the election campaign, and I think both sides recognized that the bashing of illegal immigrants would be fatal to the bill if they tried to push it through. It was clear that we didn't have the votes at that sensitive time. We couldn't turn some Democrats around, and we had no expectation that Bush, even if he had had some of his limited power to expend, would be able to turn some Republicans around. John McCain, during the campaign, backed off from the bill too.

The problem has existed practically ever since the immigration laws were enacted. Immigrants were welcomed into this country for hundreds of years, because we needed them. There certainly was no such thing as illegal Irish immigrants coming into Boston when the Senator's ancestors arrived here in the 19th century. In fact, Kennedy was a leader in the enactment of one of the first immigration reform bills in modern times, the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. It had a different rationale: to end what was called the Asian-Pacific triangle, which was very discriminatory against immigrants from Asia. Interestingly, I've seen comments in recent years that not enough credit has been given to the 1965 Act as a milestone of civil rights.

Young: It abolished national quotas.

Parker: Yes. The feeling has long been that the Civil Rights Act of '64, the Voting Rights Act of '65, and the Fair Housing Act of '68 were the big three civil rights bills in the '60s, obviously because they all had so much to do with segregation. But historians are now are saying that the Immigration Act of '65 deserves to be one of the big four civil rights bill of that decade. It's interesting that it passed in the same year as the original Voting Rights Act, which was a huge achievement by President Johnson.

Young: The problem now seems to be intractable, that people see immigration—

Parker: It's turned out to be.

Young: First it was [Alan] Simpson.

Parker: Simpson and Kennedy, yes. That was the Immigration Reform Bill, I think, of '86.

Young: Yes, I think so.

Parker: They worked very closely together on that, and they had a very good friendship too. If you're interviewing Al Simpson, he probably has some interesting stories to tell.

Young: Yes. He has lots of them.

Parker: In some ways ’86 laid the groundwork for the flare-up that took place the next time we tried to enact an amnesty provision. The ’86 Act basically said, “The system is broken. We have to repair it. There are all sorts of illegal immigrants in this country whom we haven’t been able to prevent from coming in. The reason we can’t prevent them is because employers want to hire them. They need them to work, whether it’s in their factories, their hospitals, and in all sorts of jobs they say Americans won’t do and immigrants will do. We can’t afford to stay in business and maintain our services unless we can hire them.”

The Immigration Department had looked the other way all those years. Congress had looked the other way too, basically saying, “We don’t want to throw down the gauntlet against business.” By the middle of the Reagan administration, with its conservative bent, there was a strong attitude that it was the right time to act, that we were being overwhelmed with illegal immigrants coming in. We needed to strengthen the border. We needed to require businesses to obtain documentation of the employees they were hiring in order to make sure that the immigrants were in this country legally from a certain day forward. And in order not to be totally disruptive of the existing discredited system, we’ll allow an amnesty for anyone who is now in this country illegally.” The amnesty that was granted was remarkable, and it passed with broad Republican and Democratic support.

President Reagan signed it, agreeing that amnesty was the price for curing the ills of the system. It turned out that the enforcement mechanisms were inadequate, and illegal immigration continued. Many businesses found it impossible to continue if they no longer had access to illegal immigrants. They said, “It will be a nightmare if you try to shut off the only avenue we have to the workforce we need.”

So the old system began to develop again. Illegal immigrants found ways to come in. There were efforts to build walls along the border with Mexico, and t some progress made but nowhere near enough. It was still far too easy to avoid the law. A lot of immigrants arrived with visitor visas, overstayed their visas, and disappeared into the country. That part of the problem began to mushroom. Finally, under Bush 43, it appeared that the conservatives wanted to take another run at the issue, but this time they were much more reluctant to provide anything that seemed like amnesty.

Young: Deportation instead, wasn’t it?

Parker: Yes, but with an option to return. You were required to report to immigration authorities and you’d be deported, but with a path to future citizenship laid out so that you could, in two or three years, learn English and take other steps in order to become a citizen. It wasn’t a blanket amnesty. But many Republicans thought that this pathway to citizenship was just a thin veneer over amnesty, and they opposed it. Still, it looked as though we might be able to overcome a filibuster and get it through Congress. But as Senate floor debate approached, it became abundantly clear that we didn’t have the votes to overcome a filibuster, and the Senate leadership felt that there was no point in having a bloody debate that would prevent the bill from passing.

Young: Majority Leader [Harry] Reid pulled it, didn’t he, the last time around?

Parker: Yes. They didn't even have a vote. They said, "We're not ready. We haven't reached a consensus." They kept delaying it, but the delay was caused by the amnesty provision. The longer they delayed, the closer it came to the election, and you could see that it would be a huge issue. The Latin-American community was desperately trying to bring it to the floor, and they urged us to do so. But even they were convinced in the end that a negative vote wasn't worth it. A lot of compromises were made in the details to try to pick up some of the Republican votes we would need, but it couldn't be done. The handwriting was already on the wall.

They probably made the right political judgment that it would have gone down in defeat and that it would have done more harm than good to have had a passionate debate and then have the bill blocked in the Senate. The consensus was to kick it down the road to the new administration and try again. It was disappointing that the anti-amnesty crowd could flex so much muscle. It exposed the polarization that was emerging in the campaign. It was obvious pretty early that many Senators, Republicans in particular, didn't want to vote on something that could be labeled amnesty.

Young: It has gotten pretty ugly on the local scenes, with police raids driving people out of town.

Parker: That's become a growing issue as well.

Young: There was a raid on a factory in Massachusetts.

Parker: Yes, that's right. That happened after it looked like this bill was going nowhere. Our concern was that the immigration agency was just flexing its political muscle, that they were going to mop up all the illegal workers and say, "We're going to send a signal."

Young: After decades and decades of—

Parker: Yes, of inaction. Maybe the ideologues felt that that sent a worthwhile signal. But a lot of people—from what our immigration staff said and from what the Homeland Security Department said—felt that they'd gone too far and that it was appalling that so much human misery was created by arresting the undocumented workers—families, mothers with children abandoned, things like that. The press played both sides of the issue to the hilt. The officials certainly had a sense that they'd gone too far, because they backed off. The agency seemed to be conducting tests in certain areas to see what they could do, but I don't know why they would have picked Massachusetts to do it. Kennedy was annoyed by that.

Young: They've done the same thing in Georgia, Long Island, and New Jersey. Local councils, city councils, and commissions are now stepping in, most famously in Arizona, driving people out or harassing them.

Parker: It has gotten ugly. It's hard to tell whether to some extent the driving force was to try to inflame passions heading into the final stage of the election campaign. They certainly cranked it up. We certainly hope, though, that it passes next year under the Obama administration. We hope we'll be able to put something together like we had before with McCain. He took some heat for backing off in his campaign. Now he will, I'm sure, take some heat from his side for climbing back on the horse again.

Young: Or maybe it's just the virtues of redemption. To a lot of people I know, from the outside it seemed, with every report, with every passing month of the Bush administration—the recent part of it, at least—that we were in a virtually hopeless morass everywhere. The pride in country had reduced. People would say, "I'm ashamed to go abroad because of what my government is doing, because of what Bush is doing." I don't think there was much hope—a point made by one of these people—that this could ever be turned around, even after the Democratic victory in 2000 in the midterm elections. Now only cynics are saying that. With Obama's election, suddenly it turns out—

Parker: A transformation is possible, yes.

Young: A transformation of feeling or spirit or attitude—I don't know what you'd call it—that the dark days won't necessarily get darker, but they may get harder. Would Kennedy have expected this at some point, that there would be an Obama or a rebirth of hope or spirit, of national spirit and national pride?

Parker: I think he always felt that the next election could produce it. He's an eternal optimist in the sense that he loves to go out and tell people what he thinks needs to be done, and he's always inspired by the reception he gets. Obviously, he's mostly talking to the faithful, who usually share his views. He doesn't look at the current situation as an incurable disease. There's always a path out. There's a way forward, and his challenge is to find it. It's almost the same as the way he's treating his illness right now. Even during the Reagan years, there were people who said it couldn't get any worse. Yet Reagan now seems like a relatively modest conservative.

The Senator likes to talk about Arthur Schlesinger's theory of 30-year cycles. Most of his years in power have been during a cycle of the rise and fall of conservatism, through the Reagan and Bush years. It's rather surprising that in all this time since LBJ, there has been only one Democratic President, Jimmy Carter. Yet I think he feels that if he had to choose, he would rather have a Democratic President than a Democratic Congress, because it's much harder to accomplish something with a President who has a veto pen, unless you have a surprisingly large majority that can override a veto, and we haven't had that sort of majority since the '60s.

The peak Democratic representation in the Senate was in '68, when Democrats had a 68 to 32 margin in the Senate. In those years, though, the 68 weren't all liberals by any means, especially on civil rights. But many of them were quite liberal on health care and education and other issues, so it was easy to work with them.

In some ways the biggest change in the Senate has been the change in party lines. We used to feel that Republican leaders like Everett Dirksen and Hugh Scott were moderates that he could easily work with, and we often did. Kennedy and Hugh Scott collaborated famously one time on election reform in 1974. But since Gingrich, basically—and in some ways even since the Reagan revolution—the ideological divide has been greater than it was in the first half of Kennedy's tenure in the Senate. Republican leaders tend to be less sympathetic to Kennedy's progressive agenda than they were in the first half of his career.

He got along very well with Bob Dole, for example, but at the same time, Dole was quite conservative compared to the Dirksens and the Scotts. More recently it has been like pulling

teeth to work with the conservative leadership in the Senate. Fortunately we've been able to round up a number of moderate Republican votes for certain priorities. It's not as though the party lines are now absolutely rigid in the Senate. It will be interesting to see whether this election will change things. I think that Mitch McConnell's return makes it less likely that they will. But at the same time, I think there is a sense from some Republicans that they backed themselves into a corner and they aren't happy about it.

There's one more election result coming up, the recount in Minnesota, and we'll see what happens there, but we're close to 60 votes. We have 58 now. It doesn't mean that we always get every Democrat, but usually there are four or five Republicans who are with us. If we had a 60-vote Senate, it would be unusual that we wouldn't be able to break a filibuster on most things. It's not an ideologically ultraleft Democratic majority in the Senate by any means. But it's more of a center-left Democratic Senate now than center-right. There's a good chance that we can get through a lot of Kennedy's agenda. Number one, obviously, will be national health reform. We'll see how that goes. We have high hopes for it.

Young: I'm trying to see where it is on the list of problems and priorities he has to deal with.

Parker: It's first by far, I would say. He sees this as the time.

Young: I'm wondering about Obama.

Parker: Obama, yes. Kennedy will do his best to keep it high on Obama's list. A lot depends on the degree to which the preparation we've been laying in the last two or three months and in the next month or so will produce a consensus plan. We hope it won't produce more antagonism than support. Obama certainly has been involved in that, and I think he sees the advantages of it. It may be that it has to take a backseat to the right-off-the-bat issue, but I would think that by April or May, it may be working its way through committee, at least if all goes well. There are some optimistic signs that we have at least the Democrats onboard with a consensus.

Young: The Finance Committee—

Parker: Will have the primary jurisdiction. It hasn't been settled completely whether there might be two separate bills, one where Finance clearly has jurisdiction and one where Health has its own jurisdiction, and then the two pieces would be blended together. There's talk, though, about working it out so that even if it goes through Finance, the Labor Committee would have a say in the bill and might even hold some hearings on it. It might even be referred to the Labor Committee after it goes through the Finance Committee. We're trying to do it in a way that won't create any friction among Democrats over it, at least that can be avoided. [Max] Baucus certainly seems to be willing, with his Finance Committee. He'll clearly have a major role.

Young: I noticed that his picture was in the paper several times about that.

Parker: It is interesting that Senator Clinton was willing to be involved now. I thought she'd be preparing to become Secretary of State. Senator Kennedy made her one of the three Senators he chose to head teams to prepare the bill for introduction in the new Congress, and her responsibility was the insurance aspects. Hopefully, she'll be able to get it done before she takes the oath as Secretary of State.

Young: I suppose this winds up our historical survey.

Parker: It seems like it. I think I've maybe talked about more than I know. [*laughs*] But at the same time, I think you've covered all of it.

Young: That's not my impression, but thank you for the extraordinary amount of time you've given us. You've been very generous in doing this.

Parker: Well, you certainly impressed me.

Young: I tend to do too much talking in these interviews and not enough listening. But being able to envision the whole of the oral history at this point, your chapter in it, your interviews are vital, and it would not be the same kind of oral history without them. So it's not only that I personally appreciate your giving this time to me, but it's a contribution to the unspoken.

Parker: Well, it's certainly a fascinating project.

Young: It is. It's a very good project.

Parker: I look forward to the results of it.

Young: It'll be hard to live without it. I've gotten so used to it.

[BREAK]

Young: This is a postscript to the December first interview with Carey Parker. There is an anecdote about the recent personal relations between President Bush and Senator Kennedy, which were commented on in the body of the interview. Go ahead, Carey.

Parker: We talked about their personal relationship, but I think we also talked a bit, though not in much detail, about the mental health parity legislation, which Senator Kennedy worked on for about 10 years in the Senate. The goal was to pass legislation that would require insurance companies, if they offered insurance coverage for physical illnesses, to provide the same coverage for mental illnesses. It has been a longstanding concern of Senator Kennedy's that there's unfair discrimination against people with mental illness, particularly in terms of the current medical revolution, in that insurance companies are discriminating against people with mental illness, even though they're getting care that's very similar to the traditional physical-illness care that patients have long received.

Over the years, Senator Kennedy formed an alliance with Senator Pete Domenici of New Mexico, and they introduced the legislation some time ago in the Senate. Paul Wellstone, who was a Senator from Minnesota, had championed the legislation as well, because both of them were very interested in mental health, and both had family members who were affected by

mental illness. In Senator Kennedy's case, there's also a family connection—his oldest sister Rosemary [Kennedy], who had a serious mental disability when they were growing up.

So he has long supported efforts to help people with mental disabilities or mental illnesses. Kennedy's two highest priorities on health care have long been ending discrimination against mental illness and providing comprehensive coverage for everybody with physical illnesses. It turned out that in this Congress, he had the best chance ever of enacting them.

To make a long story short, Senator Kennedy and Senator Domenici worked together on the mental health legislation with Congressman Patrick Kennedy and Congressman [James] Ramstad on the House side to resolve the concerns of the insurance industry. They were relatively minor issues. The industry, it turned out, understood the need to accept the importance of the principle of parity, and the only question was how to achieve it.

During the course of several weeks of intensive negotiations with the industry during the fall, the staffs of Domenici and Kennedy, and of Ramstad and Patrick Kennedy in the House, were able to work out an agreement that everyone was comfortable with, and the decision was made that when Congress came back into session after the election, they would try to include it in one of the bills that had been passed.

It turned out that there was not much opportunity. Congress wouldn't be in session for very long—only for a few days after the election. So the decision was made to include the mental health provisions in the omnibus stimulus legislation that was being rushed through Congress as part of the financial rescue program for the economy. So the relatively few pages of the Mental Health Parity Bill became part of the much larger bill that was signed by President Bush the day after it passed, a bill that was intended to get the stimulus money flowing.

President Bush had been aware, apparently, of the longstanding effort that had been put into mental health parity legislation by Senator Kennedy and his son, Patrick, and by Senator Domenici as well. In particular, the involvement of Senator Domenici helped secure its passage through the Senate. Senator Domenici was well liked by his Republican colleagues and was retiring this year, so it was an appropriate time to pass this legislation. The omnibus bill was signed by President Bush, who said, "I signed that mental health parity portion as part of that large bill, but I wanted to do something for the Senators and the Congressmen who got this mental health parity legislation through."

So, rather unexpectedly, he called the office about a week after the omnibus bill was signed and said, "I'd like to arrange a special reception at the White House to thank you and the others for what you did on the mental health parity legislation." The Senator was going to be in Washington on the date the President suggested, and so was Domenici, so they both went. Patrick Kennedy and Congressman Ramstad came as well, and they all went into the Oval Office together. President Bush had arranged to have it appear as though it were a genuine signing ceremony. The legislation that he signed was only the mental health parity portion of the omnibus legislation. It was as though the bill had been passed as a separate bill and he was signing it especially for them. Pictures were taken with President Bush. Then they conversed for several minutes. It was all very convivial, according to Senator Kennedy.

To finish it off, Bush put his arm around Senator Kennedy, who was walking with a cane because of his illness, and said, "Let me help you out to your car, Senator." President Bush took Senator Kennedy's arm and walked him slowly down the hallway, out through the Rose Garden, and around to where the Senator's car was waiting. It must have been a trip of about 75 yards, something like that. He put Kennedy in the car, shook hands, said goodbye, and that was the farewell. It was very touching, and Senator Kennedy was extremely touched by President Bush's thoughtfulness. I think it was one of the most remarkable moments he'd had with President Bush. It was a very happy ending to a long legislative effort.

Young: Thank you, Carey.