WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 2 WITH STANLEY GREENBERG

October 11, 2007
Washington, D.C.

Interviewers
Russell Riley, chair
Paul Freedman
Michael Nelson

Audiotape: Miller Center
Transcription: Martha W. Healy
Transcript copy edited by: Claiborne Lange, Jane Rafal Wilson
Final edit by: Jane Rafal Wilson

WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW 2 WITH STANLEY GREENBERG

October 11, 2007

Riley: This is part two of the Stan Greenberg interview. It is the follow-up interview as a part of the Clinton Presidential History Project. Thanks a lot for making time for us. We had a chance to look at the first transcript. We'd gotten through basically the entirety of the campaign and most of the transition. I didn't know whether there may be some follow-up questions from you about the '92 campaign, stuff we didn't pick up. Maybe begin there.

I wanted to ask one global question to begin as a way of helping to structure the interview. There is a kind of general perception that towards the end of '94 your relationship with the White House is not as intensive as before.

Greenberg: Is that your delicate way of saying that we parted ways?

Riley: It's my delicate way of saying that. It's not a good question to start with and I only start there because I'm curious as to—

Greenberg: —when you can stop asking me questions on things that I have anything but first-hand knowledge.

Riley: Exactly. And if there is a lot of the story that we need to be attentive to after '94 then we want to be attentive to it.

Greenberg: There's a parallel research effort, as you know, that starts right before the '94 election. There was a parallel research advisory process that I didn't have knowledge of until December. I continued to poll and advise, and work on State of the Union and work until the spring. Then in the spring we renegotiated the arrangement. My contract was a DNC [Democratic National Committee] contract. There was also a change in the running of the DNC. Chris Dodd came in as co-chair of the DNC.

We structured a research program that was not small. I can't remember the amount; it was over a couple of million dollars a year. So there was ongoing work for DNC, which was also fed into the White House, but I was not physically present in the White House, and the memos off that research would go to Harold [Ickes] and George [Stephanopoulos] so it fed in as a kind of Democratic stream of advice. There were a couple of issues, as during the government shutdown where I came and met with the President, but I was not part of the process in the White House after the spring of '95.

Riley: What we'll try to do then is focus our attention between the inauguration and the '94 period and if there is some room left for that post- '94 period, then we'll deal with that too.

Nelson: One question about '92 and that is, what do you know about the relationship between Clinton and [Albert] Gore before the process that led to that becoming the ticket? Did these two individuals know each other well? Did they regard each other as kindred spirits or as rivals? Was there any kind of personal relationship there that you were aware of?

Greenberg: I may just be reflecting on a decade of conventional wisdom about it. I did press for Gore for the Vice President and I was the only one of the consultants who did. There was a memo in which there is a consultant talking about the criteria and indicating everyone with Gore, that all agreed with him except me. I thought Gore was a reinforcing choice. At the time, no one thought it was—because they didn't get along. They were competitive. I'm sure there were passing comments from the President—or the Governor at the time—that would reinforce that that was true. It was generally believed that it was not a practical suggestion because it didn't appear that he would want Al Gore as his Vice President because he didn't seem to have the relationship that would support that. I think it was one of the main reasons—one reason was that they thought it was not a balancing choice, but the other was that he didn't seem to have a good relationship with him in any case, so why press it?

Nelson: Do you know any of that from personal knowledge?

Greenberg: I can't recall a first-hand conversation with Clinton on that.

Freedman: As I recall, there was little if any research into the Vice President choices, is that right? Were you actually testing alternative names?

Greenberg: We did do some testing. Mickey Kantor asked me to do research. It was not shared with anybody else except Mickey and the Governor. No one else on the team saw it, but Mickey and the Governor saw it. This will be one of those things that we're not going to release in 2009. We did look at Joe Lieberman to see what the effect might be of a Jewish Vice President. I did a poll on that. It was a poll just devoted to that question.

Nelson: What did you find?

Greenberg: We actually found—At the time I remember saying, "I don't know whether to believe any of this." We did the same thing eight years later in dealing with Gore. It was in the general election, not as part of the selection, but afterwards to see whether it was going to impact our ability to win some southern and border states. For that you had to have focus groups. You needed to get much more texture to this and get people talking to each other in a way that they bring out these things. A poll is not a very good vehicle for that but there was no time, so we could only do a poll. We did experimental exercises in the survey to see what the impact was on the vote and we didn't find an impact. That's a new piece of information.

Riley: We talked a good deal about the transition last time, so probably the next thing to do is to talk about your expectations and plans for what happens when Clinton is inaugurated.

Greenberg: I didn't re-read the transcript so I can't remember what we covered in the last piece. My knowledge is more informed now because I've written my book and I've written the Clinton chapter, so I've been through all that material. I probably know things now that I didn't know then because I've been through all my memos and things during that period. But it would probably not be a great use of time since I don't remember what I said last time. I don't know if there's any issue in the transition that you might want to query about to see if I have some recollection of my role.

Nelson: I guess when the fight started, if fight is the right word, between those who wanted to make the "People First" agenda the Clinton agenda at the start, as opposed to those who were more concerned about cutting budget and so on. When did that become apparent as a divide?

Greenberg: It was fairly early in the transition. There was some evidence just simply on who was selected. Particularly Leon Panetta had a long history on the issue. You actually didn't know where [Robert] Rubin was. I didn't really know Rubin very well. He had not been very involved in the campaign. There were a couple of meetings before the economic plan, but not heavy involvement. There were some people who were involved in the policy process and who advised him in the debates and kind of carried through all the way. [Samuel] Berger had a longstanding role.

I wasn't sure on the economic side. None of the big economic people were part of the policy group that dealt with major speeches or debates. They came in during the transition. In early January we had the meeting with Gene Sperling and George in Little Rock in which he laid out the implications of the budget decisions made. That was the first time the scale of it was apparent.

We knew there were issues. I wrote a memo right afterwards, not highlighting the conflict, just noting priorities. I was actually more worried that welfare reform was going to get lost. This was within a few days of the election in which I wrote, "The closest thing we have to 'Read my lips' is on welfare reform and that ought to be part of the thinking." What was animating me afterwards was not the deficit. I didn't think that was where the battle was. I thought the battle would be on the cultural issues that would get pushed back. I didn't actually see where—I should have, based on who was selected for the economic team. But early January is when it became very evident and accelerated over the two weeks right through the transition, through the inauguration week.

I wrote a memo during the inauguration week. My memo is written the next morning that they had come in at the beginning of the inauguration week critical of a whole range of things, the most important being thinking that we were elected to do only deficit reduction. I wrote it with the support of all the political advisors. The opposition to switching off investment was not a left–right—the DLC [Democratic Leadership Council] was completely with us. The DLC were not deficit hawks. Al From was part of the memo I wrote critical of this giving up the investment agenda in favor of deficit reduction.

So we're set up just as he's taking office with a difference of perspective there. At the same time, we didn't know what our roles were. We weren't empowered. They had taken everything back to themselves—Bill and Hillary [Clinton]—after the election. So no one really, other than people

who had positions within the White House—certainly Paul [Begala], Mandy [Grunwald], myself, James [Carville].

I had proposed a research program. My assumption was that I would meet with the President 15 minutes a week as had happened in prior Presidencies. It was not my assumption that I would be there day to day. James was thinking he wouldn't be involved at all, that he'd be a high-level check-in from time to time as he went off to write books and give speeches. He knew where he was going. He was more involved than he wanted to be. But my assumption was that I would be doing this research but not be part of the decision-making process in the White House.

Riley: Was there any part of the staffing element during the transition that gave you cause for concern either in terms of who the personnel were or in terms of a perception that it wasn't—

Greenberg: I was concerned about the focus—you know, a Cabinet reflects America—that it was obsessive and that it suggested priorities that were at odds with the priorities that he had when he ran for office. That was part of the memo. It was pretty strong on that question of losing track of other issues and other kinds of diversity. Begala and I had both strongly communicated, separately, that we were opposed to the Executive Orders in the first week on abortion and also opposed to the other one, gays in the military, at the beginning.

Riley: Are you basing the opposition on your intimate knowledge of what the campaign had been about, or are you basing this on ongoing research during the interval between the election and inauguration?

Greenberg: We did ongoing research, particularly on the question of whether he had a "Read my lips" pledge on middle-class tax cuts. We did that in January before they took office. I didn't have a contract, but somehow I was continuing to do research. But it was not integrated. We didn't have an advisory process. There was no war room. There was nothing to structure it. It was essentially me talking to George and talking to Bruce [Lindsey] and deciding to do research.

Riley: Is it polling or focus groups?

Greenberg: We did polling right after the election and also in December that was oriented toward the agenda going forward. It never occurred to us that gays in the military was going to be first. We didn't poll on it. This issue got blown up. I went back to Little Rock during the transition and tried to address the question there and was told that it was unavoidable, that they had to address the question. I couldn't understand why they couldn't put it off for six months.

It wasn't—just based on the public polls, the public was really evenly split on the issue. They just couldn't understand why that's what you're doing first after the election you had. So I was strongly, strongly opposed. Our poll numbers crashed. We were polling weekly from the time that he was sworn in. Again, I didn't have a contract but I was polling weekly.

Nelson: Would he see the results? Did you show him numbers on this particular issue?

Greenberg: I saw him, but it was not in real time. It wasn't given that this was going to happen. We were strongly lobbying against the Executive Orders in the first week and making gays in the military an issue right upfront, but we didn't know what was going to happen and we weren't in

meetings in which we would know what was going to happen. We threw in our advice and hoped it was going to have an impact.

The biggest issue that we pressed was not losing track of the investment agenda. In January I spoke on the Hill to the leadership, the message group, the various retreats of the House and Senate after Congress came back, in the lead-up to the inauguration. When I look at my presentation notes, it's very much focused on—it's almost as if I'm trying to create pressure myself for my position. I said, "He's absolutely committed to this." Now, I don't know at the time that he is absolutely committed to it. I'm questioning whether he is. But I lay this out that this was in his gut and that if you go back through his entire history, this is what it is rooted in. This is how he wants to govern.

If I look at the amount of time devoted in my notes to various subjects, the main topic was the budget, the priority on investment, the economic plan with investment as a major part of it. There was a real disjunction—I now know things I didn't know at the time, even though we were briefed in early January on the budget and what it would mean. One, we didn't know whether it would stick with him. We'd been through this before where you go through a long process and you don't know where it's actually going to come out. But he actually committed to parameters on the budget, coming out of the early January meetings, which basically precluded the investment agenda. It was no longer possible. One of the problems in the administration in the first months was this disjunction between a decision really made and everybody acting as if it hasn't been made, including the President. I'm not even sure that—

Nelson: —he had worked it through.

Greenberg: I think he did work it through but I don't think he wanted to accept the implications of the fact that it meant minimal investment. Then it got cut back immediately in the Congress, so it was virtually a zero-investment agenda. The only investment agenda there—if you talk to Sperling, he'll say, "Well we have the EITC [Earned Income Tax Credit]." That's not an investment agenda, it's a tax cut. That's not long-term investment that you're doing to make the country more productive and prosperous. It's a good thing, a very good thing, but it's a redistributive tax cut. It's not investment. Investment really was zero. Nobody ever faced up to it.

Even my comments at the Camp David retreat at the end of January had that focus. He asked for it. Before I spoke, he said, "Remind these people what we ran on. I have all these people who came in here, particularly the economic team, who were not part of the campaign. They don't know our mandate. Make sure they understand what we ran on."

Riley: He's not getting any pushback from any sectors—

Greenberg: On this question of investment being still an open issue, that it is still something that could be resolved in a way differently than the economic team had set on it in January with [Alan] Greenspan. I think that's a major problem in communication. We would test all these messages. One of our problems was we were testing our surveys—I'm sure the President would look at these. We would do these experimental exercises and in the survey we would show—A key part of our economic plan is big tax increases. We're in a recession, or people perceive we're in a recession and growing the economy, so tax increases are not exactly popular things to do,

and a broad tax increase at the outset. We were talking about a broad energy tax as well as a tax on the wealthy.

Now, the proposal was popular when it included an investment agenda. If you did this sample and dropped out the investment agenda, we at best had about 40 percent support for the economic plan. We're talking about going to Congress with an economic plan with 40 percent support in the country. How do you get the Congress to move with you if you're going to them—I think part of the reason that the President didn't accept it was that to accept it meant that you had to figure out how to make a case for deficit reduction as the main driver of the economic plan. We never made that case. He never did during the election. He was never focused very much on deficit reduction. We never advertised on deficit reduction. It was not his passion.

And it wasn't even his economic analysis. He didn't have the Rubin–[Lawrence] Summers analysis that this lower long-term rate—It was never part of the economic discussion prior to the election. We only backed into it. Eventually by the end of the economic plan we figured out a message with deficits at the center that had strength and majority support. At the end, it finally jelled, but it should have jelled months earlier.

We never faced up to, and didn't really know, how absolute the decision was. This was absolute. They had said what the level of deficit reduction was going to be. They had said dollars. They took the number from a lower deficit reduction projection and kept that number, which meant that it was a much higher rate of deficit reduction than we had proposed in the campaign. But we didn't know that they had committed to that, or, based on history, we had reason to believe these things can move. He may have said it, but who knows? Amidst all these forces that are competing, eventually maybe this number can move from this to that. In hindsight you can look back and say we should have just recognized that's where the number was, and once that is true, investments aren't going to be central to this, so you'd better figure out a strategy for selling an economic plan that is centered on deficit reduction.

Riley: Just to be clear on this: The microscopic landscape of economics changed during the transition because the numbers that came in were so much worse than they were before, right?

Greenberg: Right.

Riley: So the argument is that there has to be a re-thinking according to those new realities, at least within the economic team.

Greenberg: [Alice] Rivlin and Panetta both said, "Of course we knew those numbers; you just didn't pay any attention to them." But yes, in real time we thought that—and Sperling communicated that this was a shock and a surprise to us, and the President too, and therefore we have to do this."

Nelson: At the point when you realized that deficit reduction is what you need to help him sell, are you thinking of this as a strategy for winning over the [Ross] Perot voters?

Greenberg: Yes. Well, there's a range of things that are there. For sure, my memo right after the election said the "Republican coalition collapsed"— "What happened to the Republicans is fundamental—the unresolved contradictions, or the resolved contradiction became unresolved

and they crashed. But the votes didn't really go to us. For the most part the votes went to Perot. Whether we realigned, whether we really changed the equation, will be determined by whether we win the Perot vote. We have to have an ongoing Perot project at the center of what we're doing." I wrote that in November and every memo I did has a section on the Perot project, on what is happening there, and how they're reacting to all this. It was important because Perot voters wanted investment rather than deficit reduction. Perot voters were younger, blue collar, actually much more concerned about the economy. A job-centered, economic investment agenda was actually more important to them than deficit reduction.

Deficits were much more symbolic as a measure of things out of control. I recognized it was a real economic policy and it was good economic policy to do it. It was the right thing to do, but I'm just trying to factor in our state of thinking at the time. Our consciousness was shaped by the election, in which we did not make the case for deficit reduction. In fact, we ran against [Paul] Tsongas who was making that argument and we attacked him. At no point do I remember us ever making the argument. Deficit reduction was always presented as sort of get the house in order, not as a powerful economic lever for creating long-term growth. That would come later. We had to be educated to that later. Our consciousness in the campaign with him, and with our economic policies—if you look at *Putting People First*, deficit reduction is in there, but it doesn't have that kind of argument around it, that it gets you long-term growth.

Freedman: So while all this is going on, then gays in the military sort of gets lobbed into the mix and really dominates to a great extent with so much public and media attention. Where did it come from? Was it just him?

Greenberg: I talked to Nancy Soderberg in the transition who apparently was handling the issue. She said, "We have to do it. There's no way out of it because there's a decision to be made. The military is going to face decisions on whether they expel people. You can't not have a policy; otherwise, you continue the status quo. It's untenable to continue to enforce the current policy, given what he has said about it."

[Les] Aspin apparently wanted a delay, which would have put off the immediate battle with Sam Nunn, which was disastrous. This was truly disastrous in terms of his standing. He took a big tumble and he obviously witnessed it.

Nelson: Were they thinking that politically it would be easier to do if it was done right at the start when the focus was on the new administration coming in?

Greenberg: No, they felt that they had to do it on policy grounds, that the policy in the military was to expel anybody who was gay, and they would be enforcing this policy and given what he had committed to, people who were expelled would be—we didn't have the compromise in our heads, the compromise of, "Don't ask, don't tell." The issue then was simply if you were open or it was known, then you were out. I'm sure it was purely policy.

Riley: Was this as a profile in courage or was it just—

Greenberg: I think he believed it. I don't think they would have put it first if they didn't think they had to, because the opposite policy was going to be implemented by the military.

Riley: I think there was a court case that came through the pipeline. It seems like at some point in November or December something happened.

Greenberg: I remember I kept going to them and I said, "Do we really have to—?" I didn't know that Aspin wanted a delay. Obviously Aspin thought it could be delayed. But they kept coming back with, "There's no choice."

Riley: And there was no choice, not because the President had firmly made up his mind, but there was no choice just because on policy grounds they had to do it.

Greenberg: Right, because they would have to enforce a regressive policy on this issue.

Riley: Okay.

Nelson: Did you advise them on how to do it?

Greenberg: No, I just was for delaying it.

Riley: And you said that he took a tumble. You were picking this up in your—

Greenberg: It didn't require very subtle— [*laughter*] The first week was not a week—

Riley: I've got to ask; it's my job.

Nelson: Before we move off this issue, were there focus group efforts at this time on this particular issue?

Greenberg: We were polling weekly, but the main focus was the economic plan. It's not complicated. We knew where we were on this issue in terms of him prioritizing it, so we didn't rush out to poll that.

All the polling was oriented toward the economic plan because he was going to present it a month after he came in. There was a lot to sort out. In fact, the weekend after he was sworn in we had a meeting with the economic team, with the polling that we did. There was obviously more polling going on than I remember. We presented a poll on the economic plan in a joint meeting of the political communication staff of the White House and the political advisors and the economic team. We went over the poll on the economic plan, which underscored the fact that if this is about deficit reduction and big tax increases, broad tax increases, then you're going to have a big problem.

Nelson: You said earlier you polled on the middle-class tax cut, whether people regarded that as inviolable. What did you find?

Greenberg: We were surprised. They basically said, "We didn't believe you." That was first. Second, they wanted him to do what was right. I'm serious. They said, "We want an economic plan that you think is right." They trusted him. They thought he was for people, that he was not corrupted by Washington. They thought he was smart. "Go for something that's long term, good for the country. We don't need this. We didn't expect it."

Nelson: They wanted him to lead.

Greenberg: Yes. Not so much as a result specifically of that, but I wrote a memo in which I said, "Go bold." I thought I was siding with the Treasury Secretary. I said, "Do big tax increases, do big deficit reduction, do big investment. He will have much more chance of capturing the imagination of the country if he tries to do each of these things in a big way rather than pieces of things."

Nelson: Would you describe what they ended up doing as big?

Greenberg: Yes, but only deficit reduction. The investment agenda never came back. There were increases in education spending, but nothing on the scale that they proposed in the campaign.

Nelson: So they weren't willing to try to raise taxes enough to fund the investment agenda?

Greenberg: It was brave to raise taxes, a big tax increase, and to do a purely deficit reduction package that involved spending cuts. That was a brave plan. At the time we viewed it as being taken hostage by these people who didn't know the campaign or were indifferent—the elites. But obviously the economy did very well, so I'm much more—I moved before we finished the plan and came to accept that okay, this is what it is. Once you get that whole history out of your head—it's a big turn from where the country was—and accept the long-term argument that it's brave to do it, that you're not going to see the results for—I mean, it's worse than that.

[Laura] Tyson came back with a note saying, "This is front loaded, so there's every chance we're going to have slowdown in growth in the first couple of years." Basically he accepted—they said, "We can keep your overall number but let's change when these things happen." Long-term markets don't care whether it's in the first year or the second year, or if it comes in the third year or fourth year or fifth year, even. It's the overall level of deficit reduction. But, for various reasons, Rubin and [Lloyd] Bentsen wanted to hold it as it was. So the President agreed to a plan that had a very good chance of having the economy slow down before the '94 elections, which it did. It only began to grow in '95, '96. It was good for Presidential re-election but it contributed in a significant way to '94.

Nelson: Was he hoping that the short-term economic stimulus package was going to offset—

Greenberg: Yes, but we lost that pretty early in the process. It also became very small. It was useless. What a mess. But that was defeated early. No, the hope was that Greenspan would offset it. That was the reasoning—that if they were clear on this, including moving at the front end, that Greenspan would balance it by reducing rates.

Riley: Did you have a piece of the inauguration address?

Greenberg: I did not, which was a change. Keep in mind, the political team was disempowered. We were completely unsure of what our roles were. I think Paul was involved. We did not poll. We didn't have discussions to say, "Where are you going? Where's your thinking?" We weren't part of it. It's true of the transition as well. The core political people of the campaign were not really part of the decision-making process in the transition. They were not in the lead-up to the

inauguration. Now, that changed with Camp David when he asked explicitly that we get involved. I saw one draft. I saw him. I made some comments, but not serious, not real. I was never with the Joint Session address.

Riley: Are you feeing kind of exiled at this point?

Greenberg: Here? Now? Or at that point in history? [*laughter*]

Riley: Not here in the room, but during the transition period.

Greenberg: Yes.

Riley: You've invested an enormous amount of energy into making this happen. Your expectations must have been—

Greenberg: I noted it on election night.

Riley: You told us about that.

Greenberg: On election night, the speech that he gave reflected a different set of thinking than what drove the election. I remember James, Mandy, and I were talking at the time, saying that there's some other process here than maybe just him or his family or another set of—Others who were part of that obviously can give you much more.

George asked me to come down to Little Rock. I had no intention of being in Little Rock during the transition. But he asked me to come down, he said, because, "All of this stuff is going by the wayside. You need to come down." So I came and I stayed down until the budget meeting and then I said, "Why am I here?"

We weren't sure about our role. I'm sure it was true of everybody. People didn't have jobs. People who were actually going to work in the administration probably were even more unsettled. But for sure we felt we had an uncertain role. We knew we were involved. Both the President and Hillary had said, "We want you deeply involved. We want a war room in the White House." The assumption was that we were involved but we didn't know what it was.

Also, we saw that the economic team seemed to be completely divorced from the campaign. They were heading toward governing in a way that was different. One of the big things about his campaign, his candidacy, was moving away from the liberal cultural issues that had dragged the Democrats down. The first weeks of the administration were like we had gone completely lost on that and then gone back to all the issues and had taken back the Democrats. So yes, we thought that the Presidency had been hijacked by lots of forces and we had no clear role.

One of the mistakes of the transition was doing the White House staff at the end of the process rather than the beginning. Even George didn't know his role. These things were not announced until right at the end of the transition, so everybody was kind of unsettled. The advisors didn't know what their roles were. We'd be doing something but we weren't sure what. It was an unsettled period.

Nelson: Do you think it was deliberate? Do you think that that approach was taken in order to keep control and authority concentrated during this period?

Greenberg: Yes. People reflect back on the campaign as a brilliant campaign, a well-organized campaign. But it was only true from the convention to the election. Before that, it was all over the place and fragmented. He kept a lot of the campaign to himself and there were a lot of actors who were empowered at various times, so there were different power centers—until the convention. I'm not sure they were that comfortable with having a campaign that was that empowered, that autonomous. I think they were relieved to be done with it after Election Day and I'm sure they enjoyed fashioning an administration in the transition, the one they wanted to create.

Freedman: By "they," you mean?

Greenberg: I mean the President and Hillary and the Vice President.

Riley: You mentioned a moment ago that at one point they had said they wanted to create a war room in the White House. Can you elaborate on that?

Greenberg: All I know is that when I left Little Rock to go to Washington when the election was over, in my last conversation with Hillary she indicated to me that they wanted to have a war room in the White House. I don't know if she meant that literally, but it certainly communicated that, "We want to have an empowered political group that is able to play a day-to-day role in the White House." I'm not sure she meant a war room, but it meant that kind of concentration on communication and political issues.

Riley: When did your role as the consultant to the DNC happen?

Greenberg: The DNC was always the contracting party for our work, even during the campaign, because the DNC had different budget—it was important to do as much of the paid advertising for the campaign—I forget what the laws were that affected it—so our polling was paid for by the DNC. There was a continuous DNC relationship. I sent a proposal on how to do it sometime right after the election. I met with [Richard] Wirthlin to discuss how he had done it before I sent it in. We didn't discuss it until February and it wasn't with him; it was with [Thomas J.] McLarty to discuss going forward.

Riley: So basically the decision was made in consultation with the White House about where you were going to be positioned.

Greenberg: That dealt with the level of research. It didn't deal with what are you doing every day. The meeting at Camp David after Mandy and I spoke—Paul, Mandy, and I met with the President and he said, "I want you in the White House every day." It was mainly focused on the economic plan. "We need a plan for the plan. Paul needs to come on—somebody needs to come on and obviously Paul was the only one who could do that—full time to work on this. We need day-to-day involvement." He explicitly asked for day-to-day involvement.

Freedman: How big is your staff at this point?

Greenberg: I don't remember.

Freedman: Is it huge?

Greenberg: It was cut way back from what it was during the election. During the election we took over the Mews, the back building that was for all the people doing only programming. We probably had about eight to ten people just working on the campaign.

Riley: Polling.

Greenberg: Polling. In most of the states we had dispersed the pollsters. Nearly all that staff left after the election. It wasn't that big. It was a big contract that actually ended up bigger. What we were talking about was polling once a month on tracking the various things and a special poll once a month on the economic plan or healthcare or something. Then I think it was four or six focus groups a month.

Nelson: That was the original.

Greenberg: Right. That was the original scope of it. But it ended up being completely ad hoc. During the economic plan, we were polling almost weekly because we were dealing with some issues that had big consequences in terms of levels of support. We were trying to develop a message. That was the main thing. Once we lost the investment piece, which was the main thing people wanted, how do we make this work?

Freedman: So this is a full-time job for you? There weren't other clients?

Greenberg: Yes, this is full time for me.

Nelson: Who would you call at the White House, or who would you meet with to talk about the polls and so on?

Greenberg: Almost entirely George. The consultants themselves talked among themselves. I would call the President. I met with him about weekly.

Riley: This was after Camp David rather than before?

Greenberg: Yes.

Riley: Do you remember the first time you went in the White House?

Greenberg: You know, it's really funny, I had to write this for my book and I don't have a diary—I kept a diary during the campaign until about a week after the election. So I don't have a diary and I don't have my schedule from then.

Riley: Was that a conscious decision not to keep it for legal reasons?

Greenberg: Yes, which I regret, but I only regret it now that I was never subpoenaed. If I'd kept my diary and I got subpoenaed, it would be probably—

Riley: I interrupted you.

Greenberg: I concluded that I came the day after rather than the actual day of the swearing in when people were finding their offices. But I infer it, especially since there's a meeting after that at Blair House on the weekend. I'm inferring that I must have gone to the White House. I remember my impressions but I have no idea when it was. It really scares me that people speak to a jury and recall these things. You would think, my first time walking into the White House, that I would remember this.

Riley: Well, what were your impressions?

Greenberg: I walked in around the Roosevelt Room. I was very in awe of it. The President wasn't there, so I could peek into the Oval Office. There's that little door that's open. George's office, which had all the communications and press people—everybody was sort of lost. All the phones were ringing and no one knew what to do. Very few people had had any access before. I'm sure there were a lot of people at the security level, but at the political level and scheduling level, I think Marcia Hale was the only one who did a tour.

Nelson: Who in the media are you talking with through this process, from January on?

Greenberg: In the press?

Nelson: Yes.

Greenberg: To be honest, I didn't have inside information and I knew I didn't. Sometimes things are happening and you think you're on the inside at the key meeting and it turns out there are other meetings that are really the key meetings. I was very self conscious of the fact that this stuff is going on, this train is moving without me. I'm not privy.

The main people that I would speak to were E.J. [Dionne, Jr.] and Dan Balz and Ron Brownstein, [inaudible] from the campaign, and Mark Miller, who had just come off doing the *Newsweek* book. I don't remember specific conversations, but I certainly wouldn't have spoken to them with any knowledge of what's going on. I really didn't know. Some people like to inflate their importance, but I wasn't in a position to say—I mean, I don't even know what I'm going to be doing. I was conducting polls. I was conducting research. I'm clearly involved in some way; I just don't know where it's going.

Nelson: Anybody in Congress that you're talking to?

Greenberg: Well, my wife is in Congress and is part of the message group leadership of the House. We were pretty arrogant at the time and we thought we were pretty smart. My notes reflect that. We were very innocent—it wasn't just the budget. My notes, in the presentations to the House and Senate leaders, which are separate meetings—also I had all the reform stuff on cleaning up Congress, campaign finance, and a lot of stuff that I thought would happen, none of which happened. I talked with a real sense that we're coming in here as outsiders. I'm sure they said, "Here come the bumpkins who can't find their way."

But the Perot project had us very focused on the fact that we had to be reformist. That was the key to them, not the deficits. It was really being outsiders cleaning up the place and cutting government waste.

Freedman: I was just wondering if that then is the lead-in to thinking about moving on healthcare. Was it the sense that *we're here to reform, we've got this momentum, this is part of our mandate*? I want to hear about how that ball gets rolling and what that's like in the midst of everything else.

Greenberg: Our assumption throughout this is that the economic plan was number one. Welfare reform has to happen—it's a "Read-my-lips" promise, and healthcare. We all knew the economic plan had to be first. He had a budget that had to be done. It wasn't discussable. So you knew you were doing the economic plan. But there were parallel meetings on healthcare in which there was the question of having the healthcare plan be part of the budget resolution. That was the First Lady's strong preference.

To me it was unimaginable that—besides the economic plan, which was difficult—we could do a complicated healthcare plan in a budget resolution, which meant that we had to do this in the period of the next six months. I couldn't imagine that that could happen. I was very skeptical. She wanted it. I think [George] Mitchell thought that it was possible, but he was probably trying his best to please her. So there were discussions. It wasn't resolved at our meeting. I was skeptical. This is way beyond my expertise. I wasn't skeptical in public opinion terms; I just couldn't see how this one bill could bear the load of reforming the whole healthcare system.

If you were going to just do a fairly small set of things that could be serious in their consequences, but very well-defined—the President's main focus on healthcare was healthcare *costs*. I'm not talking about cost to the individual who is buying healthcare. He was consumed with its impact on the deficit, on the economy, on employers—just the whole effect on the economy of having healthcare rising at this rate of inflation. The reason he was committed to market reforms as a way of trying to do it was that simply having to mandate things that expanded access with no mechanisms for controlling costs might actually increase costs, might increase the amount of spending in the economy on healthcare.

The President wasn't willing to do simple—I imagine, based on public opinion research, or even on policy terms, that I could construct a healthcare plan that would expand the amount of people with coverage. That, I could see within a budget resolution. But if you really wanted to reconstruct the whole healthcare system, the way insurance is delivered—I couldn't see how that could happen in that short a period, as part of an up-or-down vote on a budget resolution.

Nelson: Is the First Lady's preference for this approach because it takes 51 votes to get it through the Senate, as opposed to 60?

Greenberg: Yes. It makes sense if you could get 51 votes. It was hard to get 51 votes on the budget by itself. Maybe the healthcare plan would have helped, but our problem was conservatives. It was the problem with our votes on the budget. So the idea that a large increase in healthcare spending would somehow carry more votes for the budget resolution I think is—the

logic of it—if you talked to Howard Paster, I don't think they believed you could possibly do this.

Riley: [Robert] Byrd was policing it also.

Greenberg: Right. You could only have it if it impacted the budget. There were probably ways you could do that, but I'm not sure. An employer mandate on healthcare might be something that could be in the budget resolution, but not creating new markets for the way healthcare is delivered. That's not a budget issue.

Riley: I have one question and then I think we want to dig into healthcare for a little while. You mentioned a couple of times that you went to the Camp David retreat, and that gets a fair amount of attention in the accounts of the Presidency. Were you there for the whole thing?

Greenberg: No. I was planning on being—no, that's not true, I was never going to be there for the group therapy. I was only supposed to be there that day and night, but after we had this first session where we went through what the mandate was, then we had the separate meeting with the President. He wanted a plan immediately, so I left to go back to D.C. and began working on it. Mandy and Paul began working on it there. They wanted something faxed back the next day to Camp David, so we turned out an initial cut of it within 24 hours. I left in order to deal with that.

Riley: We are on the historical record here. Is there something embarrassing about yourself that you'd like to reveal?

Greenberg: Right. [*laughing*]

Freedman: We started a little bit on healthcare and I guess we want to hear as much as you want to tell us about that process, about the decision to move forward. You've already described it as being one of the center pillars so it was clear that this was going to be on the agenda. But tell us what we need to know in terms of controversy internally around it, especially in terms of research that you were doing leading up to it or during it, and whether or not you had a sense about public perceptions of [Ira] Magaziner and the First Lady and their role and what they were doing as it was unfolding, and if you were having a sense of the direction it was heading.

Greenberg: First of all, the public was supportive of her playing that role. It was only in retrospect when healthcare didn't succeed in getting passed that you end up with the more critical account, the more critical view.

Riley: Did you test that really early?

Greenberg: We had her in the thermometer, in our battery of the Vice President, the President, and range of issues. She was in there. I'm not sure she was in every survey but periodically. We asked once about her role in healthcare and it came back positive. It wasn't during the middle of it, it was after the announcement, after she was announced to head it up. We asked in a poll whether it was a good thing or a bad thing and the majority thought it was good thing. So the public didn't begin critical with her playing that role.

The design of what was in the plan was a separate world, which I was not part of. We polled on what kinds of reform people wanted, but the truth of the matter is we didn't know what the plan was until much later. At the outset we were focused on the scale of the effort. We urged major reform but also said there's lots of risk in this because there are lots of concerns about whether the government gets it right. But they wanted big reform. They wanted big rather than small reforms, given the scale of the problems.

I was on the bold side of the discussions. I made the same argument on the economic plan. You'll actually take more people with you if they can really see you're doing something that matters, if they can see its impact long term. You can make a braver case for it. It was always an analysis of how people were responding to the healthcare crisis at the time, what kind of reforms they want. It was not testing different plans, because we didn't know the plans. The committees were meeting under Ira.

The President had set the overall approach. In New Hampshire, at the outset when [Robert] Kerrey was the person getting most credit for dealing with healthcare, the President was determined to do a plan. He always had kind of a market focus to it. He wrote the plan, I remember, painfully, because we wanted to have it done before the debates and he was writing it late into the night and no doubt calling different policy people. But his imprint—he really owned the approach that we took to healthcare. It was actually always a moderate, market-oriented plan. It was never a single-payer—It was complicated, ironically, because it wasn't a government-run healthcare plan. It was because it was a market-oriented plan that blended all these things that it got complicated. That's what he was committed to. That got incorporated into *Putting People First* as an overall approach to how we'd go ahead with reforms.

I can't remember when it was, but Mandy and I—Ira asked to brief us on the plan so that we could begin to think about communication and think about how to make the case for it. It took two days. It really did—two days. We were in awe because it was really incredibly interesting and fascinating. It was really creative and very innovative. But it took two days to explain it. We should have known at that moment that this was a problem. I remember talking to George right after that and saying how interesting I thought it was. He said, "I think this is a…." George had a different reaction to the complexity of it—that this was going to be a Rube Goldberg type exercise.

Riley: Do you remember about when this was?

Greenberg: I wish I could remember it. It had to be in the late spring. We were debating—
Riley: Ninety-three?

Greenberg: In '93, yes. We were having serious meetings, not so much on the content of the plan. There was a meeting in the Roosevelt Room, in which the economic team was there and they debated big and small on the healthcare plan. When was that?

Nelson: It was May, a three-hour meeting at the White House regarding the scope of the plan.

Greenberg: That was a key meeting on how big the plan should be, which may be further down the line. The big question was what happens right after the economic plan. The economic plan

was going to be voted on in early August, so what comes next? The Vice President was pressing very hard for reinventing government and for NAFTA.

I was probably briefed close to that May meeting, I'm sure before that meeting, because the costs relate to what you do in the plan. So it must be in that period. Our meetings are then on what will be the sequencing of things after the budget. The First Lady was pressing for moving with healthcare first and the Vice President was pressing for reinventing government and NAFTA. We ended up doing reinventing government and NAFTA.

I don't remember my position on this. A lot of this was a legislative discussion. I was for reinventing government because it was an important part of reform and I was polling for Gore separately for the reinventing government. Part of our budget was used for—after they had arrived at the things that they were going to cut—it wasn't at the front end, it was at the back end. They knew what they were going to propose. Given what they're proposing, which things would stand out, and would people see as serious, and would show the scope of the cuts?

Freedman: So it's, "How do we sell what we've already decided to do?"

Greenberg: Right. It was more, "Here's three thousand things we're going to do to cut a hundred thousand people from the workforce and save X amount of dollars. Here's three thousand changes as best we can explain them to you. Now let's look at how people react to these. Which of these things will people get as being real and serious and understandable? And do you have a way of talking about them that we can use?"

Some of these were process changes. Is there a way of explaining these things so that people will understand the nature of the reform? We did that research on that. I viewed that as critical to the Perot project and as more important than the deficit, so I was sympathetic. NAFTA I was indifferent on. I'd been supportive on NAFTA but I didn't think it was—so I didn't press. But there were lots of pressures on the economic team to move on NAFTA.

Nelson: Did people really feel like you had to choose between reinventing government and healthcare? It seems like one is a Vice-Presidential—

Greenberg: It depends on how you look at it. In terms of how much you get heard. In retrospect, if you look at it, we launched reinventing government and NAFTA after Labor Day. Then we did the healthcare speech at the end of September. So it was possible to sequence them. But there were a lot of meetings on this question. I remember the calendar being laid out in the solarium with the key players discussing which things were going to move—the budget had frozen everything, so which things were going to move next.

In retrospect it looked quite successful. Reinventing government got people's imagination. NAFTA was very important in showing his leadership. Passing that, along with the [James] Brady Bill and the healthcare plan, was popular in that period. If you look at the end of 1993—in fact, up to the State of the Union in '94 his standing was very high.

Freedman: The reasons that you describe around reinventing government—to tease out of these three thousand proposals what is going to help sell this; what is going to capture attention—Is

there a point in the process where you're doing similar research around the strands of the healthcare plan?

Greenberg: We did. There was a parallel research project together with Magaziner in trying to look at the healthcare plan. It was difficult. The benefits were always the draw, not the process. It's actually one of the two critiques—outside critiques and academic critiques have come on not trying to explain the process. The other was in not having a tax increase, that the VAT [Value-Added Tax] was speculated during the process as a way of paying for this, and not having a dedicated way of paying for it.

I actually got in trouble in one speech I gave at AEI [American Enterprise Institute]. It was a panel of Presidential pollsters and someone asked a question about this and somewhere in the process I intimated that we had actually polled on the question of the VAT. I said I thought it was a bad idea and then someone asked a question whether I had polled on that question and I said yes. I shouldn't have answered it.

Freedman: This was contemporary? This was at the time?

Greenberg: Yes. Front page *Washington Post* story, "Poll Rejects VAT." I never thought it was seriously on the table. I polled it, actually, only to get it off the table. The problem with the VAT piece was that you couldn't look at it on its own. We had just gone through a budget in which we had an immense tax increase. The idea that we could then come in with a healthcare plan with a tax increase on top of that was not possible. You had to—only if you had merged it into the overall budget and then brought the VAT as part of that. Even then, the VAT would have brought the whole thing down.

But in terms of having a sound healthcare reform financed with VAT—if that becomes a cost that substitutes for premiums that people are paying, if it relieves other costs—I think it makes sense in policy terms but I can't imagine that we could have passed a VAT, given that it took the Vice President to break the tie to pass the budget. To come in with a VAT I think was not practical.

We explored trying to explain the process to the competition. It was not explainable. This needs a deliberative poll and you need to get about 50 percent of Americans to participate in a deliberative process so we could explain the process. It was not explainable. You had to accept. You had to have enough confidence in the— [*phone interruption*]

Freedman: We don't want to leave any healthcare stone unturned. It sounds like then, in terms of the process of putting together this plan, there was relatively little in the way of research that informed it.

Greenberg: There's no research that had formed the creation of the plan.

Freedman: It was only after the plan?

Greenberg: It was after the plan. It was not Hillary, it was President Clinton who committed to a certain approach to healthcare and brought a team together to try to create a plan in that image,

consistent with it. It was clearly too complex. But we never did any polling on what ought to be in the plan.

Freedman: In retrospect, do you wish you had?

Greenberg: No. Reinventing government, this whole plan to reform government, was done without any polling. After it was done we looked at how we were then going to present this to folks in the Congress. It was the same thing on the economic plan. By the time we got to work through what was going to happen with the plan, what cuts were going to take place hadn't been resolved, but the structure of the economic plan was done before we did any polling. So the pattern here was to not poll on big policy things, but after they're done, to try to figure out how to present them.

Riley: Was there any departure from that in the first year that you can recall? This is sort of contrary to what has now become the perceived wisdom over eight years of experience. But in that first year, do you recall things where polling did form either the priorities or the content of the policy as it went along?

Greenberg: I don't think so. First of all, we had a big election. There are different kinds of elections. This was a big election with an agenda that was flushed out during the election. By the time you came to office you knew where you were going in the major areas. We knew we were reforming government; we knew we had to change. Even welfare, I didn't poll on welfare, on the content of it. I did poll on the priority of going ahead with welfare reform, but it was never on what should be in welfare reform.

Freedman: What were the findings there? Was the public more anxious to move forward on welfare?

Greenberg: Yes, higher than almost anything on our list. I think it was the highest. Way back, to the end of the healthcare process, there was a lot of research that took place, from his Joint Session address on healthcare in September to the summer when we pulled it. There were many, many, many polls on trying to figure out the case for healthcare.

Late in the process, like maybe May or so of '94, I proposed that we pull it, that we make the case for it being blocked by the Republican Congress and take that to the country, but that we move quickly to pass the Crime Bill and welfare reform. I was dispatched to [Thomas] Foley to see whether there was any openness to the idea. I have a memo laying out the scenario for how to bring it into this mess. They had no interest.

Welfare reform, at that point, was very unpopular with the Black Caucus. The idea that we would move immediately on welfare reform they felt would blow up the Caucus. They already had problems on the Crime Bill, on the death penalty, and with the Blue Dogs—I'm not sure what they were called then—the Blue Dogs on guns. Introducing welfare reform into this mix they thought would just be—but we should have done it. We should have done it. Unfortunately we let healthcare essentially die without an interpretation.

Nelson: You said that coming out of the campaign people sort of in general trusted Clinton to come up with a good approach to the—

Greenberg: Yes.

Nelson: Did you find that same public disposition toward Clinton at the front end on healthcare?

Greenberg: Yes.

Nelson: And that carried through the President's speech?

Greenberg: Yes, the President got very strong support on the plan that was presented in September. He just presented the outlines of the plan and the benefits of the plan. It got, in our polls, well over 60 percent support. In our polling we never really dropped below 45 percent support for his plan. Now 45 percent is not great, but it's not like President [George W.] Bush and Social Security privatization, which collapsed into the 20s or something. There was a base of support for healthcare reform. Even under attack and at the worst moments, we were around 45 percent support for the plan. There was a pretty big well of trust for them to address this. It's tragic that we were not able to get it done.

Freedman: How did you find it working with Magaziner and Hillary Clinton in this?

Greenberg: Magaziner was very smart. He's very alluring. Did you interview him?

Riley: No.

Greenberg: Did you ask to interview him?

Riley: Yes. We actually had one scheduled that didn't make and he's globetrotting now.

Greenberg: My impression is that he's very smart. This was scrubbed through the practicality—it was not sufficiently—It's more than that. This thing should have been done within Congress, not within the Executive branch. There are bigger issues about how this should have been done. I don't know the decision process for deciding to do it that way. I have no doubt that the First Lady would say that this was not the best way to do it. She has been very clear in her recent statements that the way for this to happen is for Congress to fashion it, which is the way it should have happened, hopefully in a more bipartisan way.

Riley: Did you weigh in on the President's waving the veto pen on healthcare?

Greenberg: I was for it.

Riley: You were for it?

Greenberg: I think it was a mistake. I think it was good advice, looking back, simply because—the fear was that this was going to—that if there wasn't that firmness about the goals that it would quickly get turned to mush in the Congress. It was a way of keeping the goal very strongly up front for universal coverage. You clearly could have been more flexible about what is universal coverage and accepted that, but I think it boxed him in too much. I think it was a mistake.

Nelson: With Clinton starting out with the public trust of how he'll handle healthcare, why can't that be maintained? What goes wrong that didn't go wrong with the economic plan?

Greenberg: First of all, you do have a decline in trust that is not related to healthcare, the decline in trust that is related to a bunch of junk things: Travelgate, Troopergate—you have all this stuff that begins—subpoenas at the White House for people to come testify. So the breakdown on trust comes with things not related to healthcare. It did have an impact. People dredged up the campaign period and the doubts from that period. Those attacks began to erode his support and his poll numbers began to drop pretty sharply.

Really, I think this really hurt us in terms of being able to bring people in the Congress with us on healthcare. I'm not sure it could ever have been passed, to be honest, without a bipartisan sponsorship. There were much more fundamental issues on the healthcare piece. But the Republicans—there are others who have written this history. I'm not sure the Republicans would have given the bipartisan opportunity to do the healthcare reform. But I actually don't think it could have been done on the scale that clearly—in the end it would have been filibustered in the Senate. I don't think you could have gotten there without bipartisan support. It was a very polarized environment.

His numbers were dropping. They saw the opportunities coming in '94. I wrote in the spring about how disastrous the drop is in support for Democrats. They were no doubt seeing the same thing, and seeing the opportunity in that. They have no incentive for him to have a successful close to the Congress. Looking back, I don't think we could have passed it. So you either had to have a game plan for ending it in a way that set the stage for the next battle, or you had to start it differently, in which case you didn't create it in the Executive branch; you had to go to Congress and have more Republican ownership and you had to start that process earlier.

I think they tried. It's my understanding that some people pulled back. I remember discussions of it and Mandy in particular pushing to get Republican sponsorship. But for whatever reason, it didn't happen. It was probably doomed. Once it was doomed then the strategy really should have been how not to win it, how to do it in a way that set the stage for going to the country. It was blocked by the special interests, blocked by the Republican Congress. It was vulnerable because of its design to be attacked that it was big government. But it was complex. It was not a big-government program. It was complex because of maintaining all of the private sector and the fact that you had a standard package that you needed to oversee. But it would have been attacked as a big-government takeover of healthcare, whatever its content. I think it could have withstood that.

After the election, conventional wisdom reports that he lost because of the big-government healthcare program. I think what contributed to it was the defeat of healthcare, that people were desperate for it to happen and it didn't happen. It was less about big government than it was about the failure of the Democrats to be able to succeed, perform, to make change in something that really mattered to people. I think that was the bigger electoral impact.

We could have been more sensitive on the issue of big government, more alert to that critique. I would fault us for that. It's not in the design of the program but more alert to that in message terms, in how to push back against that argument.

Nelson: Would there have been a way to head off or to counteract the "Harry and Louise" style campaign?

Greenberg: I'm not that convinced that the "Harry and Louise" ads moved very much. We looked at where those ads aired and we didn't find differences in opinion in those areas from what we saw in other areas. It was moved by the national debate rather than those ads. I haven't seen any evidence that those ads—

Nelson: That's why I said the "Harry and Louise" *style* campaign because that was part of a—the general critique—

Greenberg: You're right, it was very well-integrated.

Nelson: They indicated that, "The government is going to be making decisions for you."

Greenberg: That was their most effective attack. Perot voters were very skeptical of government. I would fault us for—not on the policy side, because it's complex rather than big government. I would fault us for being less sensitive to its vulnerability on that attack and less effective in responding to that attack.

Riley: I want to go through a couple of events in '93 before we move fully to '94 but I want to preface by asking a more generic question. One of the image problems that the President had during the first year was the sense that he wasn't Presidential, whatever that means. Did you ever try, through polling, to help him figure out how to develop an image of being more Presidential, or were you picking up in your research helpful indicators of places where the people felt that the President wasn't being Presidential, that you could help advise him to correct?

Greenberg: We tracked the question of whether people thought he was in over his head, which was getting at that. We were focused on that question. There was a percentage who thought he was not up to the job. It was substantial, particularly in the first three months of the presidency, which was a very ugly period as the public watched this mess on display. Some of that also focused on whether he was strong enough and also whether he would waver once he faced pressure, which was, I thought, the core element of this issue.

It was not so much Presidential style and whether he wears a suit in the right way and hangs out with the military. Given what they thought was going on in Washington—They thought he was for people; they never doubted his values and his advocacy for people, but they really doubted whether he had the backbone, whether he'd stand firm against these forces to be able to do what he said he wanted to do.

The passage of the economic plan was a very important piece that impacted that perception a lot. There was a very big change in that. We did some research focused on this question in the summer of '93. I think it was called the "Presidential project," or something. We looked at that. We were analyzing it in the context of those times. Perot's vote was a clean-up-Washington vote and Congress was the symbol of things being out of control. The pay raises, the deficits—everything was rooted in Congress. What we found there was that mastery of the Congress was the perception of whether he was strong enough. If you weren't a strong enough President to

master the Congress then you were not going to be successful as a President. You were going to be overwhelmed. Mastery of the Congress was a critical piece to strength as a President.

That was part of our thinking in the fall as we talked about planning ahead. That's also a trap, because the Congress is unmanageable. So you have a standard for strength that is rooted in mastering the Congress but in the end the Congress can't be mastered.

I think one of the things he learned coming out of the '94 experience was to look at the Presidency in much broader terms, which I think was right. There was no escaping the fact that we would have to do an economic plan and the healthcare plan, and you had to master the Congress to act on your agenda. Some of this was specific to the period we were in where strength was defined in relation to the Congress. But in the end he had to escape that.

Riley: And you're reporting to the President that there is a certain percentage of people who think he's not Presidential enough?

Greenberg: Yes.

Riley: Was he happy to hear that?

Greenberg: It was never an issue of him not wanting bad news. I don't remember any reluctance reporting these things to him. I would report those numbers and show him those graphs.

Freedman: I'm just curious, specifically in terms of these more global and general assessments, is the First Lady part of the conversation?

Greenberg: No. She gets the memos, but she was not in that. If we had a general planning meeting—certainly on healthcare—on what we were going to do, or what's the schedule, then she'd be part of that, but she was never at a meeting when I would present the poll results to the President. She was never in those meetings.

Nelson: When he's getting bad news from the results of your polls, is he responding by saying, "Well, I really screwed up," or, "Somehow what we're doing here is being distorted and that's why people feel this way"?

Greenberg: He will sometimes have his explanations and they weren't always right. They weren't always really the explanations. I think I'll avoid that part. I remember some of his explanations. He didn't rush to focus in on some of the things were most immediately related to the drop in his support.

Riley: Can you give an example?

Greenberg: I think I won't try to make news around the President.

Riley: Was he reading the data as carefully here as he was during the campaign?

Greenberg: Yes. But he's also a quick read. You would present it and he would go through it. You wouldn't have to go back through it and say, "Let's go over that again." It just immediately

was in his brain. We'd come back weeks later and he would reference it, or if you mentioned something in a subsequent presentation that was either a contradiction or reflected change but did not say it, he would note it. It clearly went deep into his consciousness somewhere.

Freedman: Did he ever micromanage the research in these settings? Did he ever say, "Why don't you do this, or try it that way?"

Greenberg: No. I had an entirely different relationship with him than Dick Morris or [Mark] Penn did. That goes back to the campaign. We had this exercise in the campaign where I refused to do that. We went back and forth. He pulled a poll out of the field once because I didn't wait for his comments on a survey. The conflict was that he was used to going over surveys and spending time on it. This was a Presidential campaign where polls are moving much faster. You don't have time to wait for—if the comments don't get in on time— [*phone interruption*]

Riley: Did we stop somewhere we want to pick up?

Greenberg: Healthcare would probably—I didn't write about healthcare for the book so therefore I didn't spend much time.

Freedman: The book is on?

Greenberg: The book is on leaders—Clinton, [Anthony] Blair, [Ehud] Barak—it's essentially around their main agendas, so it's around the economic—it's at the publisher. It's a big challenge because they don't want it to come out before the election. It's not about elections. It's about Clinton, but it's not about the election. It's about [Nelson] Mandela and others, so they want it to come out after the election. It's ready to go out before then, but they'll probably hold it.

Riley: Let me run through a couple of things here. One was Waco. Do you have any recollections about that? Were you doing anything around Waco or what was happening?

Greenberg: Obviously we were engaged, but we didn't go out and poll, other than looking at the effects of it, which did not have a significant impact. I wasn't involved in any decision-making or anything like that.

Riley: I didn't expect so. I didn't know if there was something in the aftermath that you might have picked up or if there was anything unusual going on in the research as a result of it. There were some criticisms at the time that the President had not been forward-leaning enough in terms of getting out publicly on this, and that Janet Reno was doing it all.

Greenberg: There were discussions. I don't remember second guessing.

Riley: David Gergen came in in May of '93. Was that good news for you? Bad news for you? Didn't matter?

Greenberg: It was not so much the Gergen piece. George wanted to be where he was but we were against it. We thought George being in the spokesperson role was—that it was undermining for him to play a role in the communication strategy and overall strategy for the White House.

We actually urged that there be a role of Special Advisor that he fill. He didn't agree with this. We thought that he should be where he ultimately ended up.

We didn't think about bringing in someone like Gergen. That was a surprise. I remember Mandy being particularly upset about it. I don't remember being upset; I was intrigued by it. Afterwards Gergen communicated to me—it was very interesting. At one point he said, "You know, when people say things they make their way to me. I know these things. And I appreciate your being this supportive." So it's not just my self-recollection. I remember him noting that I was not undermining his role in the White House.

Riley: There's a Supreme Court nomination in June. Are you asked to do any testing on the Supreme Court?

Greenberg: No. We monitored the news, that is, we would ask in the surveys, first of all, "Is the news more positive or negative about the President?" Then, "What do you recall?" Open-ended, the positive and negative. Obviously, the Attorney General made its way in earlier in the process. Obviously some of the appointments, not just the Supreme Court—you had a number of the appointments that were noteworthy.

Riley: Vince Foster's suicide comes in July. Did you know Vince?

Greenberg: Only casually. I liked him. He was not an inner-circle decision maker. He was in the legal environment. A decent person but I was not close.

Riley: You don't have any observations or recollections in particular about the atmosphere in the White House?

Greenberg: No. The presumption was that it was so much part of the cultural war that was being waged against Clinton. This was all connected to Vince and Hillary and Arkansas and all those stories. It was so vicious. The fact that it took a life seemed to be the outcome of it. Then afterwards proved even more indifferent as they proceeded to try to investigate it further.

Riley: Do those character stories gain any traction before the end of the year when the Troopergate stuff comes out?

Greenberg: Troopergate began the process that began to erode. We were still quite strong in January. I remember noting some recognition of it in January, that our overall numbers were very strong. It's in February and March that they begin to really erode.

Riley: There were a couple of foreign policy events that occurred. We haven't really talked about the foreign policy component.

Greenberg: Back on an earlier observation on the question of whether there was any area where we polled to figure out what to do. At the AEI when I spoke about the role of Presidential pollsters, I wrote that this was a Presidency that had a project that was defined in the election. The President was clear about his priorities so we never polled to find out—In contemporaneous terms, I was saying that we don't do this. It just wasn't the mode.

When Rahm [Emanuel] was working on the Crime Bill, we didn't do any polling on which elements of the Crime Bill would be the most popular. Only after they had developed an approach on dealing with crime did we then poll the elements. It was always at the end of the process, after they had become fairly clear about it. They were not even making policy choices. The polling was really about what do we emphasize on this as we make the case to the country?

Freedman: It's more strategy in terms of selling and moving the thing forward?

Nelson: When you say polling, are you including focus groups under that heading?

Greenberg: Yes.

Riley: On the foreign policy issue, you've got the handshake between [Yitzhak] Rabin and [Yasser] Arafat.

Greenberg: I had a position of not polling on foreign policy issues. I recommended that because the President was being criticized as being poll-driven and being political. Given no military background and experience on foreign policy questions, the perception that he was doing polling on foreign policy issues might subject him to criticism. So we didn't poll on foreign policy issues.

Riley: This was true retrospectively also? After an event, like after Somalia, you wouldn't have polled?

Greenberg: Only to the extent to which it would come up then as a recall of what is happening. And we would sometimes monitor his job approval on handling foreign affairs or a particular issue so he could see how he is doing on it, but it wouldn't be to sort out the policy. I would not meet with the National Security Council people. The only occasion when this happened was on Haiti, when the decision was made to intervene. As you know, it ended up being more complicated in how they proceeded. But I was asked to poll on the rationale for proceeding. It was after they had come to a conclusion; I was not part of that group. George contacted me and asked me whether I would do this.

Freedman: Did he say, "Here are three different messages. We want you to—"?

Greenberg: Yes. I mean, in all these cases he would have his ideas and I would have my ideas on what would be the alternatives. It could be humanitarian, it could be national security, it could be people coming into the country—a large migration into Florida. There was a range of things that one could emphasize as a reason for going.

Freedman: What is your recollection that they went with?

Greenberg: As you recall, it happened eventually. My recollection is that it got incorporated into the argument. I was polling outside for Alan Kay, who had a foundation that was called Americans Talk Issues. They always had a Republican pollster and a Democratic pollster. I would poll for them maybe four or five times a year. They were serious polls on foreign policy, national security questions. I would do those surveys. Those were public. I would incorporate

things that I was finding from those surveys when I would present to the President weekly.
Riley: Interesting.

Nelson: Were you, or anybody else in the President's orbit, paying attention to the public polls?

Greenberg: Yes. We would monitor the public polls, certainly on key tracking questions. I mean, a good part of the job was to contest with the media what was happening. For example, there were two points where the President spoke from the Oval Office: the first time not so effectively, the second time more effectively. The first time was two days before the first Joint Session address on the economy. He gave a pre-address in which he made known that there was not going to be a middle-class tax cut—to get that out of the way before you give the overall plan.

The press reported negative reaction to the Oval Office address. Unfortunately, we had polling the day afterwards and were not able to contest that. We found no evidence that it was having impact. There was a stock market impact and people inferred from the stock market fall that the public had reacted against the speech as too populist. But it was all made up. No one really had—there weren't overnight surveys. In fact, it was uneven what the public polls showed.

Now, it was very important when he did the speech the night before, or maybe two nights before the House voted on the final version of the economic plan, followed by the Senate. For that Oval, because we knew we'd have to contest it, we had an overnight tracker—I don't like overnight polls, they're not as—but we had an overnight poll and then we had a two-night poll. I don't even like that either.

It was all devoted to—because we were developing momentum. Our argument was now growing stronger. We wanted momentum going into the vote, so it was very important to contest with the press. We wanted to show that there was a strong positive reaction to the speech and that he made gains as a result of the speech. Support had grown for the plan and now the polling supported that. If it had not shown that, we wouldn't have released it. But it was done specifically to be able to contest with the media what was happening.

Freedman: Are you doing the same thing around Whitewater charges and accusations?

Greenberg: No. It was picked up on our regular polling but we never did a poll to figure out Whitewater.

Freedman: In the regular polling, did you have questions about believability?

Greenberg: Yes. We tracked trust, integrity—

Freedman: The believability of Whitewater *per se*?

Greenberg: We asked overall questions on how serious an issue it was, as I recall.

Freedman: Did it go up?

Greenberg: It was never high. It was actually the delivering of subpoenas to the White House off of Travelgate that produced more of an effect.

Riley: Anything with the movement from [Robert] Fiske to [Kenneth] Starr?

Greenberg: Nothing in the polling. Obviously it was a big deal but not in polling.

Riley: Let me ask a more generic question going back. This had been on my mind a minute ago and I lost my train of thought. Did the President ever express frustration with you in what he's picking up in the polls? Did he ever express frustration with your performance in what you were doing for him?

Greenberg: It was interesting. He would continually say, "What are we doing to do about—tell me what to do." He was looking for actionable items. There was actually a bit of a tension in the way I define the job. I believed that my role was to make sure that he didn't come out of touch. The purpose of the 15 minutes, I viewed as—I would take the postcards from the focus groups and give him the postcards to read. When we had focus groups, we would always ask people, "Imagine you could write a postcard to the President. Write the postcard." I would give them to the President.

Freedman: He would read them?

Greenberg: He would read them, absolutely. He loved reading them.

Freedman: That's fantastic.

Greenberg: People were incredibly earnest on these things and really wanted him to succeed and were really pulling for him. It was evident in the postcards themselves. So I viewed the 15 minutes as very much a process of keeping him in touch. A lot of it was on evaluation of where we were on the project, the various elements of the project. I didn't view it as us deciding what to do.

This was not a Morris relationship with Clinton, or maybe even Penn. I'm not sure of Penn, but certainly Morris. It was the two of them together deciding things. I knew I was part of a group that was bigger than the two of us and it wasn't for the two of us to decide what we do with this information. There was a political group and a communication group and a strategic group in the White House staff where we would deal with what to do. I didn't think that I should use that time to offer what I thought he should do. But he wondered. I think he certainly was used to getting it with Morris.

Freedman: Interesting.

Riley: How early are you picking up serious signals of problems for the midterms?

Greenberg: Very early. We asked about Congressional votes. We asked the University of Michigan thermometer question on each party and Clinton, and on a range of other things. The Republican thermometer—Clinton would go up and down in this process, but there was a steady decline—Democrats were associated with the Congress, which was the center of what was

wrong in Washington. The thermometer score for the Democratic Party was continually on the decline and the Republican thermometer was higher than the Democratic thermometer, like nine months out. I was noting that this was anomalous. Historically, the mean Democratic thermometer was five or seven degrees higher than the Republicans. For Republicans to be higher was alarming, so much so that I convened a conference of academics to examine this question and offer my data.

Riley: This was when?

Greenberg: This would be in the spring of '94.

Freedman: Who was there?

Greenberg: I made a list of who was there. [Samuel L.] Popkin was there; in fact, Popkin was the principal organizer of who should attend it. They concluded that I was wrong, by the way, that based on the economy, job approval—*blah*, *blah, blah*—that we'd lose seats, but that this wasn't cataclysmic.

Riley: What were the ground rules for participation?

Greenberg: I think all were people who were relatively sympathetic and Democratic-oriented. I had done another conference in which I had broader participation that was not partisan where we were looking at the role of religion and in which I went much broader. This one was people who had a Democratic leaning.

Riley: And the explicit purpose?

Greenberg: To look at the data, to focus on the off-year elections.

Nelson: Did they have models that took your data and put in other data and came up with predictions about the election, about November?

Greenberg: Yes.

Freedman: What were they?

Greenberg: Losses but not loss of control. I wrote a memo in May that said that we faced—I forget what word I used—like catastrophic loses in the off-year elections. I'm not sure which came first, but I believed that we faced—

Nelson: So you weren't persuaded by what they—

Greenberg: No.

Nelson: You weren't reassured?

Greenberg: I was reassured. No one thought we could really lose—the incumbency, all kinds of other things. It took the Crime Bill and some other things to drive us further beyond these

numbers. But these numbers were very scary. We got some reassurance from our academic friends that we would survive this. Yes, we were very worried about it.

But also, we were not making the assumption that we would lose healthcare. We were still assuming that Congress would pass something on healthcare, and that the Crime Bill was going to come through. We had gone up and down at the various points, but there wasn't an assumption that it had to end badly. It ended up much worse—the combination of healthcare not happening and then the failure on the Crime Bill.

Riley: Do you remember whether the President felt that the numbers were accurately reflecting reality?

Greenberg: No, no, he's very attuned. He was very alert to the risk.

Riley: But my question is did he look at this and was his position the same as the academics' position, which was, "This is going to be a tough year but we're not going to lose control"?

Greenberg: I think everybody's assumption was that we wouldn't lose control. It's going to be terrible, but we wouldn't lose control.

Riley: Okay, let me refine this question.

Greenberg: Even at the end when he campaigned he was able to bring up his own numbers. His approval rating went up. He went to the Middle East and saw the troops. He also gained by fighting for the assault weapon ban. But Congress' numbers kept going down. We did have this implicit model that was also important to the academic model. If the President's approval rating went up, it will help. Even if the Congressional numbers are low, the President's rising approval numbers will help. The assumption was that that was offsetting some of that trend.

Freedman: Were you doing any polling on the Contract with America around this time? Were you trying to investigate whether or not that was going to have traction?

Greenberg: A major, major dispute. I didn't realize at the time of Morris' involvement at that point. We found that the Contract was—first of all, no one knew about the Contract. It didn't impact the election. As you look at the elements of the Contract, Republicans had been associated now with term limits over a number of years. So a number of the elements of the Contract were having their impact through much more important things than the actual Contract. They were running against big government and taxes. I do think that what they stood for mattered, but the Contract itself was too late to have much impact on it.

What we found in our research was that if you took the Contract and told people what it was and specifically that it took you back to [Ronald] Reagan policies, all in a range of things, that we could shift the Congressional vote. We had a poll and played out the scenario. In the course of the survey it showed that the Congressional vote shifted. We were very excited. James and I, in particular, were very excited about the fact that for the first time—We had no traction. None of our messages had worked. Everything we tested was a disaster, just nothing. Things were in concrete. We couldn't move anything. It was the first time that we got attention, playing off their Contract with our critique.

We took it to the President and he was very surprised. He listened, but didn't buy it, didn't accept it. Now, it turns out—I didn't know at the time—he was meeting with Morris. Morris says, "That's a crazy idea. The Contract is popular." So the President never accepted the concept that we could use the Contract as an opportunity against the Republicans. Our strategy message was, "They want to go back to the Reagan years." That was enough to budge the election towards us. But it was not implemented.

Freedman: When did you find out that Morris was having these conversations with him during this period?

Greenberg: I took a break after the election for a couple of weeks. When I came back in December, Harold Ickes told me that Morris had been communicating directly with the President.

Nelson: He didn't tell you for how long?

Greenberg: No.

Nelson: Did you sense during the campaign that Clinton was responding to your advice in different ways than he had before? Did it seem that he was basing his response on something—

Greenberg: No. The biggest problem in the campaign was that he wanted to run on the accomplishments that they had achieved. All our research said that the country didn't see them. You could make the argument that you laid the foundation but you couldn't—particularly on the economy. Having passed the economic plan was not—since they're adopting economic growth—there were no income gains yet. There was a little drop in unemployment but you didn't really have a change on economic performance so we could not make the case of progress made. He was very upset. We had contentious discussions, including on Air Force One, on this subject.

We tried to list them, to limit him to talk about only three accomplishments. He would give a speech and have this long list of accomplishments. It just clashed against—the country watched the Congress fail to pass healthcare and have a disaster on the Crime Bill. You had a disastrous close to the Congress. Talking about the successes just didn't work. He was determined to talk about the successes.

Nelson: He was thinking if only people understood—

Greenberg: Right. He is a terribly persuasive human being so he wanted to go out to the country and educate them on what they had—this is not unusual, I've discovered, in the various leaders I've written about. They work very hard. Indeed, what he had accomplished was serious business and good for the country, but not in that time period were you able to convince people.

Nelson: Were you polling individual races as well as overall?

Greenberg: Not for the most part. For example, on the budget, where we had key Senators who were in play, we would poll in their states.

Nelson: This was in '93?

Greenberg: In ’93, to give them—not politically. We didn’t do campaign polls in the races.

Nelson: When you were worried about a swing to the Republicans—

Greenberg: It was all based on the overall trend in the country.

Nelson: How did that translate into advice to him about where he could make a difference in the campaign?

Greenberg: The DCCC [Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee] came over with their chart of polling for each district. I remember reporting that, “I can’t believe this will happen, but there are 50 race seats where the incumbent is below 50 percent.” There were 52, I think. I remember reading the count of how many seats they had with the incumbent below 50. They weren’t necessarily behind, but they were below 50. But the DCCC was there, so we would meet daily at that point in the fall. We knew which races were in jeopardy and where it made sense for him to be. In some places they didn’t want him; he didn’t campaign.

Riley: Was there a more fundamental argument then about whether the President ought to be out at all on this?

Greenberg: There was. And it changed. After he went abroad and came back, his standing was fairly high. So it was the last week and should he go back? I leaned against—I wanted him to give a big speech, not to campaign. If you give a big speech—but there were all these commitments to go. I remember the scheduling meeting and he couldn’t get out of it. There were forces at work, inertia that drove that forward. We had a discussion. I wanted him to give a big speech coming off the foreign policy stuff and then not campaign.

Riley: Be Presidential.

Greenberg: Right. He was willing to go with what the advice was, but the political directors who were working with all the campaigns—we weren’t going south—it wasn’t where we were going. He wasn’t wanted in those places. He was certainly more popular than the Congress in that period. His popularity had gone up with the campaign for the assault weapon ban and for going abroad. There were a lot of commitments made that he would come. It just seemed too hard to unravel.

Nelson: Do you feel that if he had followed your advice in ’94 that the outcome would have been different?

Greenberg: I think you could push back a few seats. I don’t even know what would have happened in the execution of it. We had a message that would work, but there were such big forces at work by that point. Conclusions that people had drawn were pretty strong. No, I don’t think we would have won, maybe held a few more seats, but it still would have been a disaster.

Nelson: Did you find out from Harold Ickes? I’m trying to put myself in your position. That would have been an awful thing to hear that I’d been the President’s trusted pollster since he was a candidate and now to find out that not only had he ignored some of my good advice but that he’d been dating another pollster and keeping this from me.

Greenberg: And Morris, of all people. You sound like my publisher. I wrote about this in the book. I don't like to focus on me, so I actually don't say very much about what I thought, other than the fact that he was probably right to get a different team—not Morris, but a different team.

Nelson: During '94?

Greenberg: No, not during '94. This team was shaped by an election—your mandate was shaped by the election in which you had a majority in the Congress with some chance of doing it. You're now at a new period with Republican control of the Congress. What you can achieve is entirely different. It probably was right that there be a change in the team at that point. You also end up getting caught—there's accountability.

I became desperately worried about the Congressional elections and I was the only one who threw myself into it. Everyone else was saying, "We're busy." I made the mistake of saying, "We have to address this. We have to face potential disaster." I threw myself centrally in to try to figure out a strategy to avoid disaster. It's hard not to be held accountable once these things happen. At the time, yes, I felt betrayed and upset that he hadn't, *himself*, called.

Freedman: Did he eventually, or did you approach him?

Greenberg: He called me, but he didn't actually talk about the subject. [*laughs*] Harold laughed when I told him. Clearly, Harold forced him to call me, so he called. We talked about everything but this.

Riley: What was the message? Was it that your services were no longer needed? Did you ever have a conversation like that?

Greenberg: No. First of all, the conversation with the President was never that. Harold was simply telling me that there is this other thing going on. It was not that this displaced what I'm doing.

Riley: Harold is not happy about this either.

Greenberg: No, and I talked to Panetta, who was one of the few people who knew about this. He was clear with me that there was a parallel polling process. From Harold I knew that another poll had happened, not that there was a parallel structure. With Leon I realized there was a parallel structure. But even with that, we were negotiating what the plan was going to be going forward. It was not the assumption that this was going to end in negotiation. It may not have even been the President's intention, because we were working out what the long-term polling would be. We talked about bringing more people into the polling process. That went on for months and I would continue to poll during this period. That's the reason probably why there is not this epiphany. There was not a moment where someone said, "You're out." There never was such a moment.

Riley: There was an overlay.

Greenberg: An overlay, and you were working out the details and eventually it became that. I stopped having meetings with the President but no one ever said, "You're not meeting with the President any more."

Nelson: You could see it in the rearview but you couldn't see it in the windshield. When you say you could see why he would want to have a new team, but "not Morris," why not Morris?

Greenberg: Why not Morris? Because it's not real polling. It's not about the project, not just the project that brought him into the office; it's not about any project. It's about tactics. It created a tactical element to his Presidency, which I don't think served him well and I don't think served Democrats well.

Riley: When you say, "not real polling," what do you mean by that?

Greenberg: It's on a napkin. You have to have a lot of faith.

Nelson: It sounds like Clinton wanted to have more influence on what questions were asked, in dealing with his pollster. He wanted to have a pollster who would answer him when he would say, "What should we do?" For entirely good reasons, you were not willing to do that. He found somebody who would go to third base with him and you only wanted to go to first base.

Greenberg: I think there's something to that. It was a different role. It was a different personal role and a different political role, and something he had had for a long period as Governor. This was a very difficult period for him, both politically and personally. I could understand wanting a different kind of relationship with someone in my position.

Freedman: Was it your sense that the First Lady had any input into that transition?

Greenberg: Yes, but I only know that from the books. Our relations were good during this period.

Freedman: They were?

Greenberg: Yes, we met during this period. The books indicate, according to Morris, that she was the one who called him.

Freedman: So your 15-minute meetings—

Greenberg: Disappeared. Stopped happening. I was active through the State of the Union. I was involved in the drafting of the State of the Union in '95.

Riley: The '95 one was the long—

Greenberg: I think of all of them as long. I don't remember rating them on the length. This was probably long because there were actually two parallel processes for writing the State of the Union, which probably contributed to the—but I didn't know that there was a parallel process on the State of the Union—that, and probably on research. We had done research. I was in the meetings. I was part of the drafting process right through to the practice sessions before going.

So in terms of your question, I'm still there. I don't have the sense—I know it's a different relationship, but I don't—

Freedman: And you never meet Morris through this period?

Greenberg: No.

Freedman: What happens when Penn shows up? How does that happen?

Greenberg: Penn doesn't show up during the period that I'm there.

Freedman: Okay, so that's not until—

Greenberg: I never see Penn in the process.

Riley: Then, just generally during the balance of the first term, are you called in on an episodic basis?

Greenberg: It's episodic based on when they're looking for input that will influence a decision. During the government shutdown and the budget battle, we were polling nightly. We were tracking nightly through that whole period. That was for the DNC. Our audience was the White House, and it was also the Congress, because we were trying to keep everybody on board in the midst of that crisis. It was clear that it was breaking for us. The longer it was going on, the more it was breaking for us.

Morris was pressing a different point of view. I was asked to come over and present it to the President in the Oval, which I did. He then had to go give a speech and I went with him to the Hay-Adams where he gave a speech. Then I talked further with him in a back corridor there on this question. It was very clear. He said to me that Morris said to him that if he were to make a deal that it would produce a 15-point rise in his support. He was clearly being pressed by Morris to move to a deal.

Riley: And you're not seeing that in your numbers?

Greenberg: No, nothing like it—the opposite—and we were monitoring closely. People wanted him to hold firm on these things. So essentially, the Democrats in the White House would call me in when there was an issue in which they would hope to have further input.

Riley: Is there awkwardness when you're dealing with the President at this time or is it just strictly business?

Greenberg: Strictly business. "All right, let's get this on the table and talk about.…" He's happy to see me and I'm happy to see him and I'm delighted I've been brought in to try and impact it. We do it. I then would deal with him periodically, with other people that I'm working for. When I'm working for Barak and doing Syria and Camp David negotiations, I would have conversations with the President, sharing the polling data from Israel that would impact what's happening in that process.

Riley: Do you remember any other specific instances at this point in dealing with the President?

Greenberg: I was doing Blair's polling as well. I was invited to various social occasions in which there were opportunities to talk. We talked during Blair, about Blair.

Freedman: Does Blair know that you're sharing this data with Clinton?

Greenberg: Yes, in my conversation with Blair, our meetings always began with, "What's happening with Clinton?"

Nelson: Can you talk about that some? What did the relationship between those two looked like from your vantage point as you'd talk to both of them?

Greenberg: I first started to work for Blair—I didn't know at that time but a range of people became involved in the '92 campaign. So in '92 I was worried about the possibility that we would lose ground at the end, the way Labour lost ground at the end in '92. They had lost in '92 after being ahead in the polls and everybody presuming they would win.

I worried there was a possible caution about electing the left that would lead to a pullback. So I had Philip Gould, who was their general consultant, their Carville, come. He did a kind of seminar on their elections. He met with the war room people. Then he stayed for about a month after that. He actually helped us when the Republicans did an ad that was almost identical to a Saatchi & Saatchi ad that had been used by the Tories in their campaign. We did a press conference showing the two ads, showing that they were using identical ads from Britain, to try to expose the ad.

Riley: They had your people in the campaign.

Greenberg: Yes, so therefore we had some delight in—Blair came over, a lot of the Blair people came over toward the inauguration when Clinton first came in. I was communicating back and forth. We actually had a formal agreement that we would share focus groups with the Labour Party in Britain. I could observe their groups, and they could observe our groups. Phil Gould would come over and observe our focus groups in the States. I'd go over there. There was mutual learning. They eventually, in June of '95, almost within a month of my—I was retained by them to take over the polling for the Labour Party.

Nelson: He's now the Party Leader?

Greenberg: He's now the Party Leader. He was elected about nine months earlier.

Nelson: Yes, when John Smith died.

Greenberg: Right. So he's the Party Leader. They had just won the Clause 4 referendum a month after that. So I take over the polling there. The election is not until June of '97, so almost two years before the election I'm doing the Labour Party polling. One of the big issues for Labour is is Clinton going to be successful. It looked pretty grim. If you look at that period, we had lost in '94. It's a mess. If Clinton is seen to be an unsuccessful President, their election, which will come after the '96 Presidential election, might well undermine the confidence that

Labour is real and can succeed. They were very much concerned with the success of Clinton's Presidency. At this point I was doing the DNC polling so I had extensive polling. It wasn't the White House polling, but they also understood that my distant relationship at that point was what made this possible. I could not have done this in Farningham.

The other thing was, simultaneously, I had been asked by friends in South Africa in '92—COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions] is the biggest union federation in South Africa. Someone who was the general secretary wanted to come and observe—Mandela had been released, and there was a negotiating process going on. So they observed also the war room, which I completely forgot about. It was an important part of how I ended up in—before Blair—I did the Mandela campaign during '93 and '94. I was taking trips—I would leave on Thursday night from New York and I'd fly and arrive around 2:00 in the afternoon on Friday in Johannesburg. I would stay until Sunday night and then fly back on Sunday night. I'd leave Sunday night, I'd get in around 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning in New York, and I could be in the White House by work time. I would do that every two weeks.

Freedman: Did anybody from the State Department regularly interview you?

Greenberg: No, and I'd wonder because at the ANC [African National Congress] at that time the Communist Party had just become legal again. Many of the people I was working with were former Communists. I would sometimes think, *I wonder if I'm going to keep my White House pass, given the folks that I'm working with now*. But no one ever raised any questions. No one ever sought any information from me about what was happening in South Africa.

Nelson: I'm still wondering when you became, and the extent to which you were a kind of node of communication between Blair and Clinton. Not in sending messages through you, but learning about each other through you. Now there's Mandela to bring into the same question. Is Blair asking you stuff about Clinton?

Greenberg: Yes. First of all, he believes in him. He has a lot of confidence in Clinton, believes in him. A lot of this would be—because he's getting terrible press in the States but also bad in Britain. So it was against that backdrop, based on the information that I would offer, particularly as we were making—post-the government shutdown—Clinton had achieved a different level and I thought he was going to be successful in getting reelected. He was very focused on that question. But he was looking for confirmation about his judgment, his political judgment but also his judgment about Clinton's ability to succeed.

Blair was a committed reformer, and he wanted to know if Clinton was a real reformer. Given the problems in Congress, the healthcare plan, big government, all that stuff, he was looking for more inside reading on his instincts as a reformer. He was interested in both his effectiveness and his reformer's credentials. He would ask. He would open up the conversation—we always started there. Every meeting began there. He wanted to know about Clinton.

Nelson: In what period of time?

Greenberg: This was from June '95. Every meeting started with first a query about what was going on with Clinton.

Nelson: And vice-versa? Would Clinton talk to you about Blair?

Greenberg: I wasn't talking to Clinton that much. It wasn't the same amount. You didn't have that opportunity. During Barak there was much more conversation with Clinton. He would initiate calls. Then Barak decided that sharing all the information was helpful to him. Barak was in a disastrous political situation. He'd lost his government—I'll focus on Camp David rather than on Syria, but the same thing happened on Syria. He had lost his government, so he left for Camp David with no government. He was going to come out of Camp David with either an agreement that he could then take to—either a referendum or new elections. But he didn't have a government to go back to. He was way out there on a limb.

We explored a whole range of options and particularly things that he needed from the U.S.: security guarantees and other things that would be part of a final settlement. He wanted Clinton to know how central they were for his ability to succeed afterwards, to pass a referendum. I was instructed to give the entire poll to Clinton, so they'd be delivered over to the White House. He would have them and we would talk on the phone about them.

The same thing happened on Syria, which was actually a less-complicated agreement. But the key thing that happened in Syria—you had an initial meeting where Barak, Clinton, and the foreign minister from Syria, Farouk al-Sharaa, met outside the White House and had a press briefing. Disastrous. First of all the Israelis don't want an agreement. They aren't interested in an agreement with Syria; they are interested in an agreement with the Palestinians. The Golan is peaceful—why do this? It was a very insulting press conference. All the old attacks, completely insulting, while Barak had to stand there silently. It was disastrous in Israel. The press was awful. Barak's numbers, which were already low, plummeted. I mean, they dropped 15 points in a week.

After that meeting they went out to have the Shepherdstown meeting. Again, he wanted me to share the results of the polling with Clinton so he knew what he wanted. Now he wanted more pressure to be put on the Syrians, to be more forthcoming publicly so it didn't look like he was being humiliated in this process. I thought he wanted Clinton to pass this on to Damascus so [Hafiz al-] Assad would know how the—above all, the issue was, what happens with the Galilee? Can there be any change in sovereignty on the Sea of Galilee? It was an absolute; it was a red line you couldn't cross.

I actually thought that the purpose was for Clinton to share it with Assad so that he would understand. When I asked Barak about this, he said no. He said his main purpose was Clinton, not Assad. But Clinton is fully capable of sharing it with Assad. I had more conversations with Clinton around that process than anything in the intervening period.

Riley: I assume that in your book you're going to talk comparatively about how you perceive these figures were, politically and otherwise?

Greenberg: I kind of accept that there is a kind of [Abraham] Lincoln-[Woodrow] Wilson-Franklin Roosevelt model used when dealing with public opinion, where public matters, which is the pushback against the notion that leaders who pay attention to the public are weak leaders. In fact, you have leaders with very big agendas who draw their power from people, but also are

very conscious of the constraints. Lincoln in particular was very conscious of the constraints that public opinion provides. I take that model as my start. This is really about how different leaders relate to people and use that as part of their—

Riley: Let me then frame a directly comparative question and see if you can answer it. That is, can you tell us in fundamental ways how you perceive Clinton and Blair to be alike, and in fundamental ways how you perceive them to be different?

Greenberg: There's no doubt that Blair was inspired by the—In the '92 election—I didn't even realize it at the time; it's only in retrospect that I realized it. In 1992 Labour was way ahead in the polls. The economy was in the toilet in Britain. The unpopular government lost. They had made changes under Smith, but lost. Clinton in that same year won. That fact, for both Gordon Brown and Blair, is very formative. It shapes everything. They had a strong desire to learn from Clinton's experience as they went into a '97 election.

This is not a casual—the historical connections here are not just interesting comparisons. This is a real connection. They physically went there. Gordon Brown and Tony Blair came to America during the campaign. Gordon Brown came to my office. Then afterwards, they came during the transition. Actually, one of the more important things for Blair was the cultural piece. It's actually why I think he emerged as leader, and it's why it is so frustrating that the Clinton Presidency began the way it did.

Gordon Brown was the Chancellor in dealing with financial matters, which was actually a position critical to show that Labour could be trusted on the economy and spending, but it also made you unpopular because you were continuously reining in demands for spending. Blair became the Shadow Home Secretary, which deals with crime. This actually put him in a much better position to articulate his values and he was very much inspired by the fact that you had a center-left party in government with Clinton who took up crime and took up middle-class values as central to their project.

Blair actually came back from the U.S. in January. There was a conference in London that I attended in January '93—Mandy went, I went, Elaine Kamarck, a few others—in which we spoke on the Clinton project. We met with Smith, and by the way, there was great hostility to the project from Smith and the unions. They were very hostile to the Clinton project and the threatened "Clinton-ization" of Labour.

Blair gave a major speech on crime when he came back. He drew on the cultural change that Clinton had brought to the Democrats. I saw him in January but the first time I saw him at any length was for dinner at the end of '93 at Sid Blumenthal's house. At this point he was very focused on learning again about the Clinton project. Blair was—first of all, the private side was less complicated. I remember sitting with him and thinking, *This is someone who lives and breathes this view of the world*. He didn't come out of a Labour history, personally. He didn't belong to the Labour party until after college.

Clinton lived and breathed politics from being a little kid. The Democratic Party has a complicated set of interests and all that—He didn't have any of that. He could just be for whatever he was for, and didn't have to compete with all the other parts of history that make the

Democratic Party. It was much less complicated for him and probably more powerful politically as a result.

Blair had a kind of black-and-white view of the world. He had a very strong religious inspiration, which I didn't really know at the time because he seems very secular, but it's very much right and wrong. He would talk about the Conservatives—it was the devil incarnate. He never moved away from that. When he came into office, he never stopped talking about the Conservatives in those kinds of terms. Boom-and-bust economics—there was never a speech in which he didn't talk about the Tories in those terms.

He actually isn't into gripe. Clinton wanted to accommodate the Bushes and Reagans. He didn't want to be very critical of President [George H. W.] Bush afterwards. When we talked about the Reagan years, he talked about the deficits. He didn't want to talk about the greed. He was very uncomfortable with those kinds of attacks.

Freedman: Publicly or—

Greenberg: At all. He was just not personally comfortable. He wanted to embrace—you know, after Sister Souljah he wanted to call Jesse Jackson. He wants to embrace him. Tony Blair is like, "Just kick him again." He did it when he was—I was watching the process in this time period, in reforming the Labour Party. It would change the rules on bloc voting for unions within the party. But instead of saying, "All right, this was hard. Let's pause," he would immediately, before they had a chance to get up, move to the next thing. "Let's repeal the provision on nationalization from the party rules." Blair enjoyed conflict and Clinton didn't enjoy conflict.

Riley: Interesting.

Greenberg: He relished it, which was psychologically totally different from Clinton.

Nelson: Were there things about Blair that Clinton really admired and wished he had more of?

Greenberg: The problem is, I didn't have those kinds of conversations. Blair was not Prime Minister during that period. I didn't have very much of a role, any role, in the second term. I wasn't doing the DNC stuff, so I had no role after the '96 election. Blair was elected in '97, so I don't have those kinds of conversations on the Clinton side after Blair is in office, so I can't fill in that picture.

Freedman: It's sort of funny to hear you say that Clinton didn't like conflict. You get the impression that he sort of relished the fight, the challenge, the pressure. I'm trying to reconcile the sense that—

Greenberg: He liked battling to achieve certain goals, but he does not relish personal conflict. Also he wants to embrace the people that he has vanquished. He wants to bring them along. It's a different philosophy, a different psychology, a different kind of leader. Over the course of his Presidency, that adds to his success and character as a leader. But it's a different style from someone like Blair. And in our system of divided government, you need more of this ability to reach out to other parties in order to create working coalitions. In Britain, in a Parliamentary system, once you have a majority, you can act, so you don't need to bring in the Conservatives.

But also he had a world view in which they represented the forces of evil. They represented greed and individualism run mad against community. He never stopped defining them. They were always the backdrop against which he presented what he was for. Clinton never wanted to describe the project in relationship to what we were fighting against. It's not true during the campaign in '92. But afterwards he immediately pulled back from that mode of communication and thinking.

Riley: Was Hillary more like Blair?

Greenberg: I don't know. She had greater tolerance for conflict and was determined to carry on the fight toward the goal.

Riley: We've got about 15 minutes. You did the Gore campaign in 2000, is that correct?

Greenberg: Well, I did and I didn't. I made a decision after '92 that I wouldn't—obviously I would have done Clinton in '96, but I said, "I'm not doing this again." The Presidential campaigns are like nothing else in terms of how consuming they are. They crowd out everything else in your head, and crowd out everything else in your life. I said I wouldn't do this again. I would have done it in '96 had I been there. I said no, though being asked, to being involved in the Gore campaign. And I said no to being involved in Kerry or any other campaign in 2004 when we were asked by many of them.

In Gore, in July of 2000, a month before the convention, we were asked whether we would come in. I came in and began doing some work to try to develop a strategy. I was involved in the speech to the convention and then formalized the relationship right after the convention. So in mid-August it was on.

Riley: Had you known and worked very closely with Gore before? Was he always in your 15-minute meetings with the President?

Greenberg: Never.

Riley: It was just you and the President?

Greenberg: Right, which was unusual, because the Vice President had a rule that he—I would do separate briefings for him, not necessarily every week, but I would do separate briefings. I would meet, not just one-on-one but I would meet with Gore's team. Beyond re-inventing, I would periodically report on the polling. He would get all the memos. There were a couple of occasions where I sent the memo only to the President, but 99 percent of the time he got all the materials. And periodically, with some frequency, I would meet with him. But I wasn't part of his team. I didn't have a personal relationship with him and I wasn't consulted as part of his process when he started to run and I wasn't part of the initial team.

Riley: I read something in one of the published accounts that indicated that you had provided advice to Gore, encouraging him to distance himself from Clinton. Is that your recollection?

Greenberg: Well, that's not right. It's a narrower question because I became involved in July 2000. He announced a year earlier, and as you recall made a decision on the day of his

announcement to distance and talk about how he reacted to the Monica Lewinsky stuff. Gore made a decision at the outset of his campaign to separate himself from the President. Where the campaign stood on the President was in concrete. But the relationship was not good between the two of them. That was evident in my meetings with Gore. He was angry about more than—I never asked, but there isn't any doubt that he viewed that this was difficult because of the way the Clinton Presidency was ending.

That created a very difficult—not impossible, because he was elected in 2000—But he never resolved how he was going to relate to the history with which he was associated. But that was established before I was there, so I didn't come in and say, "You've got to separate yourself." I took it as a given. But there is the reality. We would ask a question, "Do you want to continue in the direction that President Clinton is going or do you want to go in a different direction?" The country was split 50:50. For the people who wanted to continue, overwhelmingly it was because of the economy. For the people who wanted to go in a different direction, it was overwhelmingly because of values, and wanting to restore moral values.

Our blockages in the states where we needed to make gains were in places where the numbers were decisively that they wanted to go in a different direction, for moral values. The President's standing—if you look at the academic literature, usually job approval is more of a predictor of vote than personal favorability. It was not true in the 2000 election. If you look at the regression modeling of it, personal favorability was much more of a driver of vote than overall approval. That is what our stuff showed.

Freedman: Personal favorability of—

Greenberg: Of President Clinton. It was more of a predictor of the vote than personal favorability of Gore in our models. Whereas California and New York were fine, the states that were in play at the end were Minnesota and Iowa and Missouri and places in which the President was not popular. So the issue was, should the President campaign for—I was for—James was against as well. The data was just overwhelming that, given what was at issue, this would cut against us.

On the other side of that—and it has never been resolved—I went to the White House and presented this. I forget the times that I go to the White House, but I do go back to the White House to present this data to show them that it is just hard to justify this, given this data. So it was done, and I was associated with it. I wasn't hiding on the advice that I was giving. I did write a long note to the President. He was never convinced by this but I did write a long note to him after the election, taking responsibility on the question of the scheduling. Now, there were other people.

To be honest, I promise you, we were trying to win. Whatever prejudices there were between Gore and Clinton, that was not what decided this question. It was a purely pragmatic decision on whether it was going to help or not. I should add that there's another parallel piece to this, which is complicated. Our plan was to run on the economy in the final month and to use the final debate to—because at that time Bush was attacking the performance of the economy. So the decision was that in the final debate, Gore would join us, would push back and defend what they'd done on the economy and talk about the continuing economy and Bush being a threat to the economy.

All of our advertising we produced after the debate and for the rest of the month was on the economy.

We had made a campaign decision to associate ourselves with Clinton and the Clinton economy and to use it in the last month. The only problem is that Gore didn't do it. Now, I have no idea—we still did the advertising but it's different. We wanted a major battle between the two of them on the economy. The last debate took place in a town meeting format. There was no podium. He was focused on crossing into Bush's space. He had his own personal strategy for winning the debate, which was disastrous. I don't rule out that he didn't want to do it. There was some blockage that kept him from doing it. But the plan was for him to do it. He stopped. He didn't do it, so we didn't have the big set-up out of the debate, the big battle on the economy.

Riley: I appreciate your clarifying that. Things get into print. That's largely why we do these interviews anyway.

Greenberg: I wish we could schmooze for days.

Riley: I'd love to continue to do this, but for a grandfather-to-be, you've been remarkably focused and lucid today.

Freedman: Is there anything that we haven't—

Greenberg: The only thing—and we can't deal with it because I haven't allowed myself to go back because it's so painful—is healthcare. Healthcare is a big piece of that. It's the biggest piece. It's the last year of my involvement. I was heavily involved. This sounds like I was on the periphery. I was, at the outset when it was being formulated, but I was very much at the center of trying to develop a strategy for selling the plan and pressing for different strategies with regard to Congress. But I have not revisited it. A lot of the other stuff I have revisited in the course of doing my other work, so these things are more top of mind. I've mainly suppressed healthcare, but two years from now when I'm doing the book on healthcare or someone has forced me to bring out all my files on healthcare and look at the healthcare surveys, there's probably another interview to be done on that subject.

Riley: Let us know, seriously, if you get to the point where it would be beneficial. We have often found that when we're interviewing people who are writing, that it's a little bit cathartic to have somebody there to help draw out some areas that you wouldn't naturally think of. We'll consider done what we've done, but we're going to be doing interviews for at least another two years.

Freedman: It's a sufficiently significant part, not just of your relationship with the President and the White House, but of the story of the administration, that an unprecedented third interview would be—

Riley: It's not unprecedented. I've done it before, especially in cases where we've had to truncate for various reasons.

Nelson: Were you at the opening of the Clinton Library?

Greenberg: No. Were you there for the inclement weather?

Freedman: Are you in touch regularly or irregularly at this point?

Greenberg: Irregularly. He's very focused on Hillary but that's the context in which we communicate.

Riley: I want to thank you for your time. One other thing I wanted to mention to you—I caught your interview that you did as a part of the PBS [Public Broadcasting System].

Greenberg: On Blair?

Riley: Yes, that is another leader who ought to have some oral history work done about him. I'm a missionary for this kind of work. We probably couldn't take it on ourselves, but I'd be delighted to talk with any of his representatives. There's an awful lot of that, I know, that happens by conversation and a lot of that history is going to be lost if they don't do the same thing, so I'll put in a plug for it.

Greenberg: He's writing his own book. He's about to get a lot of money to do that. I interviewed him about two weeks ago for my book. Now I have to get it back into the book. He surprised me because he was much more open. He actually thought about questions and said things that he had not been saying publicly, in defense, for years. I was surprised that he opened up. But you're right, there are a lot of diaries there. Their diaries tend not to be subpoenaed in the same way, so there are a lot of diaries. You had Alistair Campbell's diaries, which were just published, but that's just a small piece. There are four more volumes, at least, of that diary.

Riley: There's an entire universe of people with whom history would benefit from having conversations. Blair himself is on our list of people to see about Clinton. In fact, I just got back from Little Rock a couple of days ago and there is significant interest in making sure we move into the global arena now and start talking to these foreign leaders.

Greenberg: At some point we'll have to talk because you're knowledgeable about this, because I still don't know where my papers go. I haven't thought about that question. I should consult Clinton about what he thinks.

Riley: I'd be delighted to talk with you about that.

Greenberg: We've gone through it because we had to pull all the material together for what I was doing. We ended up with a pretty good archive from that and are in the middle of digitizing it.