EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL DONOVAN

February 17, 2009
Natick, Massachusetts

Interviewer

University of Virginia

Janet Heininger

To cite an interview, please use the following general format: [name of interviewee] Interview, [date of interview], Edward M. Kennedy Oral History Project, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.

EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL DONOVAN

February 17, 2009

Heininger: This is an interview with Paul Donovan on February 17, 2009. Why don't we start at the beginning? When did you first meet [Edward] Kennedy and what were your first impressions of him?

Donovan: I first met Senator Kennedy when I was in college and he came to speak for the New Hampshire Democrats. This was when I was at Dartmouth, and it must have been 1976, which would have been an election year. He came to an event and I just happened to be at the event. I shook his hand very briefly and he moved on, but I came away from the brief encounter with a feeling of an energetic powerful person with a strong life force, and that opinion was certainly validated many years later. That was the first time I met him. I saw him in the intervening years not very much. I worked for John Kerry for a couple of years prior to working for Senator Kennedy and saw him here and there and said hello. I really didn't get to know him until I went to work for him in—I believe it was February of 1987.

Heininger: How did you get hired?

Donovan: In 1986 the Senate went Democratic again and he was building a staff for his chairmanship of what was then called the Labor and Human Resources Committee, and they were looking for a press secretary. They were probably also looking for someone who, in addition to handling the national press and those issues, could also be helpful with the Massachusetts press in the upcoming reelection, which was only a few years away at that time. I was hired by Tom Rollins, the staff director of the committee. Ranny Cooper was the chief of staff. I interviewed with Carey Parker, too, with whom I hope you're going to spend a lot of time. I was hired pretty quickly through the interview process, and then it was Senator Kennedy who offered me the job.

I remember him telling me how important it was to have good relations with the press and to be friendly with them and things like that. He mentioned that his brother, President [John F.] Kennedy, had always had a good relationship, even when he was first in the House of Representatives, and he had said that was an important part of his career. That was a bit of encouragement that most new hires don't get and was an example probably not too many people can give, about their brother the President. So he and I were always on the same wavelength about relationships with the press and how important they were, and to maintain good, friendly relationships.

Heininger: Had you been doing press for Kerry?

Donovan: I had been doing press for Kerry. I had worked for Kerry in the 1984 campaign, and then I worked in his Senate office in Boston for 1985 and 1986, and then moved over to Senator Kennedy in '87.

Heininger: How did you find out? Did somebody know of you and approach you, or did you find out that Kennedy was looking?

Donovan: I figured out that he was going to be hiring a press secretary for the committee, and obviously there were a lot of ties between Kerry's staff and Kennedy's staff, and that's how it came about.

Heininger: And it didn't create a problem with you leaving Kerry to go to Kennedy?

Donovan: No, not at all. I've stayed on good terms with Senator Kerry and his staff to this day No, there was no problem at all. We were able to work closely between the two offices, in part because I had been there before with Senator Kerry.

Heininger: So you'd been doing the Massachusetts piece for Kerry?

Donovan: Yes.

Heininger: Was this a change, then, to go to the committee and be doing the national piece, or had you done any of the national piece for Kerry?

Donovan: I had done some but not much. It was really a big change. It was a big step up. It was a big step up to go to a committee staff, but it was also a bigger step up to go to a committee staff that Senator Kennedy was chairing, in an area that had huge untapped potential, and I would say unrealized needs for the past six years. It was certainly a baptism by fire.

Heininger: In the six years that the Labor Committee had been in the minority, had the minority had a press secretary?

Donovan: I don't think the minority had one. No, they did not.

Heininger: Tell me about Tom Rollins.

Donovan: Tom: a very smart, very capable guy who had a good sense of how to move an agenda, and also had a very good sense of the give-and-take and the ebb and flow of legislation. He learned it very quickly. He was a very quick study and he came in and picked very good people. The committee really did a tremendous amount during his tenure as staff director.

Heininger: How press savvy was he?

Donovan: Well, Tom was a protégé and friend of Bob Shrum's, so all of us who were friends of Bob Shrum are, by definition, press savvy. [*laughter*] If you're not, you become so very quickly, being around Bob. That was a big advantage, that he was a longtime friend or protégé of Bob's. If you know Bob, you know the press, or you learn it very quickly.

Heininger: In this case you were coming in to be a press secretary on the Labor Committee, with a press-savvy staff director, which gives you a double whammy in terms of dealing with the press. That's probably somewhat unusual.

Donovan: Yes, I would say it was. I would say also that we had a very press-savvy chairman.

Heininger: That's right, a triple whammy.

Donovan: We also had—Ranny Cooper understood the press well, and Carey Parker understood the press well. Carey Parker understands everything.

Heininger: Yes, Carey Parker does.

Donovan: My view of the world is Carey Parker—it all begins and ends with Carey. He understands everything, but he understood the press very well. He was such a terrific writer. A little side story: I think it was in 1990 when President [George H. W.] Bush sent up a budget. The Cold War was over, the Berlin Wall had fallen, and we were in a new world. Basically the Bush administration sent up an old budget; they sent up a Cold War budget that was way too heavy on military spending for the Senator's liking and not enough on domestic spending.

We had just been told by the *Washington Post* beat reporter that they were feeling there were too many Kennedy quotes in the *Washington Post* stories—like it matters—and that we're going to have to keep the Kennedy quotes out of the stories for a while. This was Helen Dewar. So I said, "OK, we all have bosses. Fine." The next press release was after the Bush budget came out and Carey Parker wrote a quote that said, "This is a Rip Van Winkle budget that pretends that 1989 never happened, the Berlin Wall is still standing, and the Cold War is still hot." It was the leading quote in every story on the budget, including the *Washington Post*. So I had a pretty easy job. I had a lot of people propping me up.

Heininger: You give them something that, shall we say, they can't *not* use.

Donovan: Right, it was irresistible as a quote. But also, there was so much substantive action in the committee that it was pretty easy to get press for that. We were breaking ground on everything and there was a lot of pent-up demand, but there were also new things like AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]. That was the first AIDS legislation ever, I think. It came from that committee.

Heininger: I take it you also worked with Michael Iskowitz.

Donovan: Very closely. And Terry Beirn, who is no longer with us, was on the staff as well.

Heininger: How did you do press for all the stuff that was going on in the Labor Committee? It's more than just writing a press release.

Donovan: It was like drinking from a fire hose. Number one, the Senator was very accessible and good with the press, and we came to an understanding of how much to use him. The other thing is that there was a very strong staff on the committee. Reporters oftentimes want to know the facts and the substance of what's happening with the content of the legislation. We had a

very good staff that could explain everything to the press, so a lot of my job was to broker the interaction between the staff and the press.

After a while I was able to learn the legislation pretty well, too, and I think they saw me as someone who understood the legislation and could explain it. Also, when I didn't know the details that they were looking for, I would say, "I don't know, but I'll get someone who does know, who can explain it to you." A lot of it was briefing the press. They just wanted to know the facts and we were able to provide them. Then the Senator was able to give the commentary, or the color, and things like that. We worked out a pretty good arrangement. You had to keep a lot of things in your head because we were always working on five or six major pieces of legislation. Tom Rollins actually did a list at one point, around 1990 or so, that catalogued everything that Kennedy had passed in that Congress. It was pretty impressive. It was a long list.

Heininger: Did things change when Nick Littlefield came in?

Donovan: At that point, Nick came in and I moved over to the main office. I took my second job with the Senator. I became his press secretary and the de facto communications director, so at that point, the Labor Committee press secretary worked under me and under Nick simultaneously. I would say that things changed in style, but I don't think the substance changed. It was still just an enormous volume of legislation that the Senator cranked out and drove through the committee. There was maybe a style change. I think it was Tom Oliphant who said that Nick was like a brass band, you know, he has an exuberant style. Tom certainly had his own style too.

The core interests and the core priorities of the Senator remained the same. I wouldn't say that they changed at all when Nick came in. I don't think that the staff really changes his direction or focus or priorities. And the other thing is that, in the end—again, my theme here is that everything begins and ends with Carey—nothing happened if Carey didn't want it to happen. Everything happened with Carey's input and guidance, and that has given a consistency over more than 30 years, or more than 35. In 1969, I think, Carey came on.

Heininger: In '69, yes.

Donovan: So no one really changed that I saw. It didn't matter whether it was a staff director or the people responsible for the individual pieces of legislation. The Senator knows what he wants to do and he knows who he is, and he has a consistent approach to things, so individual staff directors and staff members, other than maybe bringing some enthusiasm or push—Some bring more subtlety. There are differences in style, but I don't think it really ever manifested itself in anything substantive.

Heininger: When you were press secretary for the committee, who was the communications director that you were working under?

Donovan: Jeff Smith was the person.

Heininger: And did you feel that you were working under him?

Donovan: I felt I was working *with* him. We were kind of left hand–right hand. Actually, another reason I was able to do my job well was that Jeff was a very seasoned, experienced, senior Washington hand, and I learned a lot from him. He was a great partner. He was definitely the older brother and I was the younger brother, no question about it. He was very helpful.

Heininger: How did the two jobs differ?

Donovan: The committee job was all policy and legislation, and the politics of making it happen. And it was defined, too. As broad as those issues were, you still had just those issues to focus on. When you went to the personal office, you had everything to focus on. You had to continue to do all the Labor Committee issues, but then you really had to learn the Judiciary Committee issues, and you had to learn the defense issues on the Armed Services Committee, and there was the Joint Economic Committee, which he also served on. So, there were really four committees and three of them were "A" committees. I think he was one of the few to have three "A" committees and he had to have some type of waiver, formal or informal—

Heininger: He didn't have a press person for each of those?

Donovan: No. It was just the Labor Committee. And then you had to work with the chairman's press secretary on the Judiciary Committee and the Armed Services Committee, which was also—I always had good relationships with those people. There's no question that personal issues came into play when you became press secretary for the Senator himself, in the main office.

Heininger: Which they didn't when you were on the Labor Committee?

Donovan: Correct.

Heininger: How did you and Tom use the press to put pressure on other Senators to move legislation that you wanted to move?

Donovan: There were two ways: We had kind of an overall national, broad-brush omnibus strategy that we did every day in Congress. It was all done through the beat reporters who covered the Senate and who were physically there. It was the [*New York*] *Times*, the [*Washington*] *Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*; it was a couple of the other big regional papers; and then it was the wires. That was about it in those days. We certainly had television and radio as well, but the big papers and the wires really are the workhorses, and they covered us every day. That was pretty easy because they could just watch what the Senator did on the floor and get the press release and get the information from us when we were done. Radio could take the sound from the floor. Television was a little different. They would often want an individual interview, as the radio would, too, so there was some setting up with that.

So there was the national, broad media, and then there was the media as a tool to win votes. I can remember bringing in a map of the United States once when we were doing mine safety legislation. I said, "OK, let's look at where the mines are and let's think about who are the persuadable, or gettable, or undecided votes there, and let's create a strategy to drive local media at those markets." The Senate in those days had a fledgling satellite television service, so if you were trying to reach the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, or you were trying to reach the Iron

Range of Minnesota, you could just look on the map and know that WXYZ-TV, or whatever it was in Duluth, Minnesota—Wouldn't they love a satellite feed of the Senator? Wouldn't the TV or radio love an individual interview? On radio it was easier to do an interview by telephone. But there were newspapers in those cities, so we had a state-by-state, district-by-district strategy that involved the press and reaching out to those people.

Heininger: Who thunk this up?

Donovan: That was actually my idea, and it started with the mine safety legislation, which was one of the first pieces of legislation that we actually pushed that year, and it kind of lent itself well to a strategy, because if you knew where the mines were, which was largely picking five or six minerals—Coal and iron were in Colorado, and a few others—you could figure out where to go.

Heininger: How effective was this?

Donovan: You never really know why you got a vote or why you lost a vote. I'm answering, I hope, the endgame question, in which the effectiveness is, did you get the vote?

Heininger: Right.

Donovan: If we generated coverage, it was very successful. You know, it's something of low-hanging fruit. If Duluth television has a free satellite feed on an issue that's going to affect the local economy and local people and workers and miners and the union and everything like that, that's an easy story for them to take that day and run it at 6:00 that night, and run a follow-up at 11:00, then do something with an interview the next morning on a local talk show or something like that, or TV or radio.

Heininger: Did you get feedback from other Senators about this?

Donovan: I'm not sure that we really told the other Senators we were doing it.

Heininger: But did they not—Well, let's put it this way—

Donovan: Yes, we did hear anecdotally. We heard it from the press secretaries: "We got some coverage on this bill up there," and they just sent along the clips. It was all very friendly. They were just passing along clips of the legislation, and sometimes they were involved in it too. Now, if they were already supporting the bill, they might be creating press for a different reason: to show that their boss was supporting an initiative that's going to benefit the local workers, so they would be showing me the clips from a different perspective.

Heininger: But this is actually a very clever strategy, particularly with the satellite operation, to be able to feed this stuff into places where you needed votes.

Donovan: Right.

Heininger: Nothing works better, I would think, with Members, certainly from what I saw, than generating local press, which creates pressure because it creates attention. All of a sudden

something that may not have been known back in the district or the state, all of a sudden you get a Senator going, "Whoa, what happened here?" Did you hear about reactions like that at all?

Donovan: To tell you the truth, I don't remember. From time to time we'd hear, "They said you were on television, Ted." It was more that type of thing. "Ted, you were on television in Duluth." The thing that really drove people—In those days there was no Internet, so every morning the clips, so to speak, came over the fax machine, and there was the Minnesota or the Duluth *Star*, or whatever it is, and the story below on the debate in the Senate. That was all a part of something we were trying to do, to try to move votes that way.

Heininger: Is this a technique that you have now seen copied by other press secretaries for other committees? Has this become a common thing to do?

Donovan: I don't know. The technology on the satellite TV is still a viable technology. The technology has changed in other ways, but the satellite television system in the Senate was set up so the individual Senators could beam back to their own individual states.

Heininger: Right.

Donovan: I do think we started to see a little copycat on this, and on other legislation as well.

Heininger: How did Kennedy feel about the press?

Donovan: I would say Kennedy likes the press. He has good relationships with the press and he has a lot of friends in the press. He's also realistic about the press and probably follows the adage that you can be friendly but never friends with the press, but he had a lot of good friends in the press. He spoke at David Nyhan's funeral, the former [*Boston*] *Globe* reporter and columnist. Over time, people would become friends for various reasons, and there were a lot of people who—I mean, he and David Nyhan were cut out of the same cloth, so to speak. They were both pretty friendly and warm people.

He also understood that the press is a pretty Balkanized institution. There are a lot of different kinds of press. He certainly had a lot of relationships with senior, serious, substantive reporters at a lot of news organizations, and there are a lot of news organizations. There's the standard news organization, where the reporters are really editors who are serious or substantive. Then there are the gossip columns, there's attack TV, and then there's the right-wing media. He was wary of those people, but I don't think that ever blinded him to how many good people there are in the press who do good work and who are just great people and enjoyable people, smart people, well-rounded, interesting people.

Heininger: Did you get requests from all the way across the spectrum?

Donovan: We got requests from all the way across the spectrum, all the way across the world. We got requests all the time from everywhere.

Heininger: How would you decide who to give information to?

Donovan: Well, we gave information pretty broadly in a fairly free and open disclosure through the press releases we did, and obviously he's on the Senate floor all the time saying what he believes. Then to take it to the next level, we really had a pretty good strategy of who to speak to and why. If it was on legislative matters, it was one thing; if it was on a political strategy, it might be another. If it was getting close to an election year back home, there might be another strategy. If it was a big political issue, he might sit down with a David Broder.

It matters what you're trying to influence. A lot of what he was trying to influence was Washington in general on political matters, so you're probably not going to pick a better person than Broder to get that message across. And then a lot of it was just the beat reporters. He's such a human guy in so many ways. If there was someone that he saw every day, month after month, year after year in the Senate, with a little pad of paper, running around and saying, "Senator, Senator," he would always stop and give a quick quote. That person might ask me for six, twelve, eighteen months, "I'd really like to have a sit-down with the Senator." The biggest constraint to all of this is his time.

Heininger: Right.

Donovan: He just doesn't have enough time to accommodate everybody, but there would be many times when I'd say, "You know So-and-So? He's the guy always in the back of the pack and he's a nice guy but doesn't speak up that much and he's from a small newspaper." And he would probably say, "Oh, sure." I mean, everyone deserves a shot. He'd say, "Well, what does he want?" "He wants an hour sit-down interview." "Let's do a half-hour." You know, that person is going to feel indebted to him for a long time. The other thing is, that person at 26 may be somebody who is entirely different at 36, who may be with the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* at that point.

He didn't look at it that way as much as he looked at it like, "That poor person is there every night until midnight covering our legislation. Just give the kid a break." There were plenty of David Broders, but there were plenty of people you never heard of who got their 15 or 20 minutes, maybe a half-hour.

Heininger: But from a press secretary standpoint, it's a wise thing to think about, that this may be somebody in ten years who is going to be—

Donovan: Yes.

Heininger: Because Kennedy's going to be around.

Donovan: That was it. I had a very long view of his career and how long he was going to be around. There's no question that people who were 26 and obscure now would someday be 36 and less obscure, or even famous.

Heininger: Were there some media venues he did better in than others?

Donovan: The best interview with him was probably a sit-down print interview with someone who knew the legislation well enough to write an insightful, comprehensive story. He would sit down with those people and—The other thing is, they all know the facts and figures and the

substance and content of the legislation, but *how* he did it, what it means, what the next step is—Often the story behind the story is how it came to become law. That's what he's the master of, turning legislation into a law. For reporters to hear that and to be able to give readers a glimpse of how that happened was the ultimate forte for him.

Now, he would never make a story as good as it could be for him, because he would always want to share the credit. He would rarely agree to an interview that was, "Tell us how you passed this legislation." Maybe he'd take that with the *Boston Globe* three months before an election, but he's not going to give that interview to the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times*, other than to say, "Let me tell you how we, the coalition, came together and did it."

For a long time he probably shied away from TV when he really didn't have to, and shied away from the morning shows when he didn't have to, and I was probably complicit in this. That was part of an overprotective staff figuring put him where he's best. Where he's best is the long, thoughtful interview. Sound bites—he was probably protected more than he should have been, and overcoached. In the end, it's better to just let him be himself.

Heininger: He can be kind of inarticulate.

Donovan: Yes, he can; there's no question about that.

Heininger: Would the morning talk shows not have been the ones where he would necessarily do as well, rather than in the thoughtful, sit-down, analytical—?

Donovan: Right, because he could sit down with a reporter from the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and he wouldn't even have to use words.

Heininger: Right.

Donovan: But people would come out of it with a great story. Of course, he's not going to use verbs in 10 percent of his sentences, and if you don't use verbs in 10 percent of your sentences on *Meet the Press*, you don't look so great. But if you don't use them with the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, you're still going to have 90 percent of your material as great quotes, and all those stories need are three sentences and quotes. So I would say that the talking-head television thing was something he probably was not as comfortable with. It just wasn't his style as much as the sit-down, thoughtful, long piece, because the talking head is "Me, me, me," and the Senator is "We, we, we." The whole thing of getting on television and telling everybody either what you did, how wonderful you are, or what you think, is in a way anathema to who he is as a person.

Heininger: What about radio shows? The same problem?

Donovan: Number one, you don't have a lot of talk radio that is the same structure as talk TV. There aren't a lot of radio shows that are like *Meet the Press* or *Face the Nation,* or what in those days was *This Week with David Brinkley*. Actually, he did a lot of radio in Massachusetts, particularly when he did something for a local community. He did an enormous amount, as you know, for the state and for local communities. We would do Leominster radio and it would be on

a grant to build or repair a bridge. We would do New Bedford and Gloucester radio, on fishing. We did a lot of those, lots and lots of them, which never show up, you know.

Heininger: No.

Donovan: But radio wasn't as popular. And the other thing is, there were countless radio reporters who sat in the radio and TV gallery. They were there getting sound from him, day in and day out. People all around the country would turn on their radios and he would be on the radio reaching tens of millions of people, and he never had to go anywhere or do anything. They just got his voice off the Senate floor.

Heininger: I think that the radio, particularly in Massachusetts, could be a much more personal interview, in that it's focused on a community, something that is relevant to that community, rather than these big—I mean, I can see the difference between radio like that, which would make sense, or even somewhat of the national radio, rather than the talking heads on Sunday mornings.

Donovan: Shouting heads. And of course you put your finger on it, because radio is considered the most intimate of media. That was something that he did very well at when he wasn't doing it, so to speak. They were just taking his voice off the Senate floor. Or he would be talking to a local reporter someplace in Massachusetts and we'd tell the reporter, "You've got three minutes." Otherwise we'd do a series of them. So you'd wind up spending five minutes with each reporter, if that. The good one can say after two minutes, "I'm done. I have what I need. Thanks." There wasn't much pressure in doing those things.

Heininger: What about press conferences?

Donovan: We did a lot of press conferences in the radio/TV gallery. We would typically do them after almost every piece of legislation was passed, and that was a lot of legislation. We were up there constantly, all the time.

Heininger: With him or just you?

Donovan: Oh, him.

Heininger: So he liked to do that? He'd go up to the Senate gallery and he liked to do those?

Donovan: You know what? He liked having the gang around. He was like, "OK, here's the team that passed it." If it was a Senate passage, you'd just have the people from the Senate, and sometimes we'd try to get someone from the House over. I remember so many nights it was him and Chris Dodd and a few other people who were on the committee, and it was really like a family room. The room was about the size of this office. As you know, it's not a big room and it might even be smaller than this.

He was so comfortable with the people he was there with. I don't ever remember him being at that podium alone, and that says a lot about him. It was always the people who passed it and the people who voted for it. He would invite anybody—You know him. If you were a warm body

who voted on the floor, "Sure, if you want to come up for the press conference, you're welcome to come to the press conference."

So he did a lot of those, but he also did a lot over on the print side. Oftentimes things would pass so late at night that there wasn't any opportunity for TV. You know TV: once it's past six o'clock, nothing exists.

Heininger: Past deadline, you're over.

Donovan: You're over. But there were plenty of times, at 9:00, 10:00, 11:00 at night, when we would go to the print gallery—They have those big, comfortable leather arm chairs—and he would sit there and talk. He would have a set of core messages he wanted to get across. He knew what he wanted to say and how he wanted it to appear in the newspaper the next day, which you don't always control but you give it your best shot.

It depended on who was there, too. If there were the senior reporters who really understood the legislation, and he liked them, they would kind of engage in a chat. I don't want to call it a fireside chat because that's a one-way conversation. This was really a two-way conversation. They would always say, "Well, what do you think about this?" "What do you think about that?" "What are the next steps—the conference, the House?" "Will the President sign it?" "Could you override a veto?" Those are always the distracting questions, but you have to deal with them.

It was usually a pleasant ten or fifteen minutes, but then he was done after ten or fifteen minutes. He realized that he got what he wanted out of it. They asked what they wanted and then after that they would just start to think up mischievous questions. Not that they're trying to cause trouble, it's just that if you've got the chairman in front of you who just passed this legislation, you want to keep asking him questions even if you don't have any good questions. Then he would sometimes kid.

They would get into a level of detail of the legislation that it's just not his job to know that level, and even though it wasn't necessarily mine, he would say, "Paul will stay and answer those questions," so I learned to take someone with me for those things. You know, you would take the expert legislative assistant or another expert. The reporters do want to get it right and they want to have an accurate representation not only of what happened, but what's in the legislation. We would typically spend another ten or fifteen minutes and there would be maybe five or ten people who would hang around and each person would ask his or her two or three questions and then they'd say thank you and it would be the next person's turn. This was now just me and the LA [legislative assistant] there, and we'd get the last questions answered. Then they'd have what they needed for their story the next day.

Heininger: Did he have a good sense of when to call an end to his participation, or did you usually have to say, "It's time to go"?

Donovan: He would have a pretty good sense of it. He had a good sense of it early on. He'd been doing this for decades before I was there. I can remember one of the first interviews with this reporter, a pretty senior reporter for AP [Associated Press]. The reporter liked him and thought this was like two friends getting together, but the Senator was always aware of his time. So the reporter was kind of chatty and going on. All of a sudden, I feel this sharp kick on my

shin under the table, the Senator kicking me, and I got the hint right away. I looked at my watch and said, "Oh geez, it's later than we thought."

He always had a pretty good sense of when to wrap it up, and he had a good sense of "Keep it short and get your message out. Answer a few questions and then move on." He had a pretty good sense of that dynamic. Your trajectory goes up, up, up, and then it will level off for only a few minutes and then you start to go down. It's just the nature of the questions. It's the nature of the beast. He had a good sense of how to get out what you need to get out and then call it a day.

Heininger: You had had press experience working for Kerry, so it's not as if you were inexperienced in dealing with Senators and how these things work. How long did it take you to adjust to Kennedy's style? There's a learning curve. Any time somebody comes in with a Senator, you learn.

Donovan: You know what? There was a learning curve, but there was also a lot of support. I was able to get a pretty good sense of him and what he wanted from *him*, but also from the people around him. Ranny Cooper and Carey Parker had known him well for a long time and they were pretty good sources of advice. Tom Rollins knew him, not intimately, but he had a pretty good sense of the Senator, and Jeff Smith was very helpful too.

Heininger: So you weren't thrown into deep water to sink or swim. You had a support system around you.

Donovan: Correct.

Heininger: Probably that's somewhat unusual with other members.

Donovan: And that was a function of the size of his staff. In those days—I think I'm correct in saying he had the biggest staff.

Heininger: Yes.

Donovan: Probably by a good margin.

Heininger: Leaps and bounds.

Donovan: At one point the staff was about 100, as I recall. A House office can be six or eight. The individual Senators we worked with would typically have offices a third or half that size. So there was a big supporting cast, there was good feedback, and you learned very quickly.

Heininger: What was your relationship with Ranny?

Donovan: Always very good. It remains very good. We certainly went through a lot together and it made us very close and we're still very close today.

Heininger: You also had to deal with the Willie Smith [William Kennedy Smith] trial.

Donovan: Right.

Heininger: And I understand that it was just you and Ranny who dealt with that, that this was kept insulated from the rest of the staff. What was her role, and what was your role in this?

Donovan: I have to give credit to Greg Craig too.

Heininger: Well, I leave out Greg because—

Donovan: He was outside by then, yes.

Heininger: But he's as much inside as outside.

Donovan: Yes. [*laughs*]

Heininger: I understand that.

Donovan: First of all, Ranny understood immediately the magnitude of this. It was Easter. My parents were visiting from Massachusetts. I think Monday was a holiday, or I had taken the day off to be with my parents. Ranny called me and said, "There's something in Florida that is a sexual harassment situation with William Kennedy Smith. We don't know what it is right now, but I might need you in the next hour or so." We didn't know if it was like an employment discrimination thing or something like that. I'm not even sure harassment was the word, but the way it came out was very veiled. It was a citation of the statute under Florida law, but the word "rape" was the farthest thing from anyone's mind at the time. But Ranny had it figured out pretty quickly. We just put the immediate focus onto it that it needed and that focus lasted about nine months.

Heininger: Was Greg called in immediately? Was he called in that weekend?

Donovan: I don't know. You'd have to ask Greg. There's another guy who's hard to find these days. I don't remember the details, but I do remember that we put together kind of a battle plan very quickly and we understood the gravity of this. It was pretty clear that Willie could be considered a side act to this if the media had its way. So we appropriately focused on it quite intently and quite early.

Heininger: If you divide up the responsibilities, what was it that Ranny was doing versus what you were doing?

Donovan: I don't know everything that Ranny was doing. Ranny had the Senator and I had the press, to put it in probably oversimplified terms, but that's probably not a bad way to break it down. I don't know everything that went on with Ranny and the Senator, and of course Greg was very involved in that as well. I don't know what happened with the other lawyers and things, but she clearly had the Senator, and I had the press. From the beginning, I understood that I shouldn't know everything that was going on with the Senator and Ranny and the lawyers. I told Ranny that very early and we agreed on that. Then it was just kind of fencing with the press for a long, long time. It was as intense as anything I've ever seen.

Heininger: Well, this is a classic case of damage control. In a situation that was as prominent as this, how do you do damage control?

Donovan: The problem is that damage control—the key word there is control. When you're not the most prominent Senator and one of the most prominent political figures in the country, it's easy to control access to you, or limit access, or just shut down, but when you are the most visible Senator, you can't shut down and you have to continue to be a Senator. Everywhere you go, every day, every place, you can be asked about this. I think we did a pretty good job of limiting what he said, and he did a pretty good job of limiting what he said, but anyone can make a headline out of anything you say or don't say, in the way they ask the question. That was a challenge. It was years of damage control afterward, actually, and there wasn't much you could do about it except just try to keep the press at bay and repeat what you had already said a hundred times before.

Heininger: Would he still go up to the Senate gallery to talk about legislation? Did it reduce his accessibility? Did he reduce his accessibility to the press as a result, even on things that should have been limited to what was going on in the Senate?

Donovan: Not with the national press, but with the Massachusetts press, yes. The Massachusetts press was obsessed with it.

Heininger: Would the national press separate it and focus on the Senate stuff, or did they always see this as an opportunity to try to get in a question?

Donovan: I should probably refine my definition of the national press, and say the press that covered the Senate. I think they were embarrassed by any of their colleagues who asked the questions if they had to ask a question, but to tell you the truth, I don't really remember. I'm sure one or two of them asked, but I don't remember any of the Senate beat reporters ever asking him a question about this, at least after the first few weeks or so.

Then when we went to Palm Beach to testify, that was a whole different set of media down there. We would know when someone would be looking to answer this question, because there would be an unfamiliar television crew at an unfamiliar location, someplace in the Russell Building or the Dirksen Building, or over in the Senate. We'd usually get a call from somebody who said, "There's a crew hanging around here. They might be looking for you." And they typically would be. It's just the complete dog-and-pony show disaster, chasing him with a camera, things like that. They would usually be—*Hard Copy* was one of the shows then.

Heininger: They also had another one, *Inside Edition*.

Donovan: *Inside Edition* was another one. But it didn't happen all that often. When it did, it was a big disturbance. They'd be running—We'd be walking along, just the two of us, and we'd just be talking, and they'd be thrusting a camera and a microphone in front of us, shouting the question, and then we'd have a one-sentence answer, and then they continued to follow us.

As a matter of fact I remember one guy almost split his head open. He was walking backward with a television camera. In the Russell Building, the steps come out and they're big, massive, grand affairs. He was just about to walk right into—His head was just about to hit and I grabbed him just in time and he yelled, "Stop!" He was pushing me away, saying, "What are you touching me for?" I said, "You're about to break your head open there." He said, "Oh, thanks."

But it was just stuff like that all the time, the cameramen getting caught in their wires and tripping and stuff like that. All that stuff wasn't something he appreciated having to deal with.

Heininger: How did he react to it when he was faced with that kind of stuff?

Donovan: He actually has a lot of discipline and a lot of dignity on stuff like that. He would usually not say a word, or we'd run the gauntlet and get him to the Senate where reporters couldn't go, and he'd say, "That was a nice ten minutes. That was a nice walk, wasn't it, Paul?"

I'll tell you another story: We were sandbagged by the *Today Show* with Bryant Gumbel. We had an agreement to go on to talk about healthcare legislation. We went on the program from 7:25 to 7:30 and in front of national television, Bryant Gumbel said, "Senator, there's a few more questions I'd like to ask you. Could you stick around until after the break?" What do you say on national television? "Oh sure, I'm glad to stick around." So we come back from the break. "Senator Kennedy, do you have a drinking problem?" He gave a pretty good answer and then Gumbel just went bang, bang, bang, bang. We walked out of the studio and I was just seeing my career evaporate in front of my eyes. We walked out of the studio and he said, "Thanks, nice to see everybody," got in the car and never said a word about it.

Heininger: Really?

Donovan: Yes. He never said a word about it. I was able to find out years later from someone who left NBC [National Broadcasting Company] that that was a whole sandbag. They said, "Tell him whatever you need to tell him to get him on the show. Give him whatever guarantees you need to get him on, and then we're going to jump him."

Heininger: When Kennedy would get sandbagged like that, were there ramifications subsequently? Did he freeze out Bryant Gumbel and the *Today Show* after that?

Donovan: I don't know if *he* did; I certainly did. That was something that needed to be done.

Heininger: How do you enforce—If you say, "These are the ground rules," do you really have any control over them?

Donovan: No. There are really no rules with the media at all.

Heininger: I assume you learned who you can trust, kind of.

Donovan: Yes, but for many years everyone thought you could trust NBC. But NBC is not one person, it's a big organization. You take calculated risks, but that was all part of not going onto the show either. We could have never done an interview and never gone on the *Today Show* and never done any television, but that wouldn't have been effective and it wouldn't have been the right approach. You take a risk.

Heininger: What was the weighing there, of making him available to the press? Was there a discussion about, "Should we make him available to the press to try to continue the work of the Senate and what he needs to get done, recognizing that there is going to be this?" Was there that discussion? Did you and Ranny talk with each other or to him about it?

Donovan: I don't know that we ever had—There was never, that I can recall, a big discussion of, "Should we have a policy on this?" If we had just passed a major piece of legislation or we were heading into a critical vote or a big piece of legislation, we would look at all our options. We never really said, "Oh, we're going to stop doing interviews now." We might have done that for a few crucial weeks here and there, where we wouldn't have gotten any other questions, but if there are other questions and other topics, then we did it. We took a calculated risk. That was the only time we ever really got burned.

Heininger: Nationally.

Donovan: You can probably say that NBC got as burned or more than we did. Do people really want to hear that question when they're watching the *Today Show*? If they want to hear that question asked, they'll watch *Hard Copy* or *Inside Edition*. They won't watch a respected news program like the *Today Show*. I don't think they did themselves any favors there.

Heininger: Now, you said it was a little different with the Massachusetts press. What happened with the Massachusetts press?

Donovan: The Massachusetts press decided that, with the combination of the 1991 Palm Beach situation and the 1994 reelection, they were going to be very tough on the Senator and cover him in a critical way, in the literal sense of the word, and they certainly did.

Heininger: Did they feel that they had not done so up until then, that they had been overly easy on him?

Donovan: Some people felt that some news organizations had been easier on him than they should have been, and some people felt that some individuals in some news organizations had been easier than they should have been. I don't think it was an institution-by-institution thing. It was a reporter-by-reporter, editor-by-editor feeling that they hadn't been as critical in the past as they should have been, and some decided they were going to take it upon themselves to be that way. That showed up in some of the coverage and then spilled over.

There's no question as well that really for the first time in his career there was a race to cover. There was a competitive race with a very strong and wealthy candidate who was willing to, and did, put a great deal of money into the campaign, so that made it a competitive campaign. In the end, the Senator won by 19 points, which by any definition is a landslide, but there were certainly tight moments and there were certainly times when the race looked competitive. In the end it was not competitive, but there were certainly times when it was. There were plenty of public polls that showed it could be a tight race.

Heininger: Let's get to the campaign in a minute, because there's a lot I want to ask you about that. When the Willie Smith trial came up and the Massachusetts press started covering him in a different way than they had before, had there been anything that triggered it? Were there changes in the management of any of the major press organizations in Massachusetts that would cause this? Were his poll numbers dropping? Was there anything that made them say they ought to do this? Or was this like, "OK, this is the last straw. We've given him a relatively free ride up until now"?

Donovan: No, I think that the combination of his being drawn into the Palm Beach situation and a competitive race combined to make the coverage tougher.

Heininger: But at that point they didn't know it was a competitive race, in '91.

Donovan: No, but they started covering the—I'm saying that there were two events that kind of came together by '94. In '91, this was a major news story and they covered it as a major news story. I believe that there was polling done concurrent with that that showed him weakened, so to speak.

Heininger: His numbers were dropping at that point.

Donovan: His numbers were lower. They had a story—and this is about the media in general. There's always an interest on the part of the media to make a race more competitive. You can see it time after time in the Boston media when they lay the crumbs along the trail so when he gets in—it's an old trick. I don't think the poll numbers ever really got back to where they were by the time [Mitt] Romney declared in '94. At that point, you've got '91 as a new story, along with the polls, and then in '92, '93, everyone's looking.

Remember, there was a dearth of other political news in the state at the time. That was the big race. There really wasn't much else in terms of a race in Massachusetts at the time. So '94 comes along and all of a sudden you have a multi-multi-millionaire who's worth literally hundreds of millions of dollars, and has indicated he's going to spend money and he was going to raise money. It was far and away the toughest race he had had in ages.

Heininger: Well, ever, I think.

Donovan: Ever. I guess I was barely alive for his first race.

Heininger: I don't think it was as tough as the '94 one was.

Donovan: No, it probably wasn't. They covered it as a tough race and they probably made it a tougher race.

Heininger: Although you weren't around at the time for it, did you get the sense that Chappaquiddick was factoring into how they were covering the Willie Smith trial?

Donovan: No, it never felt that way.

Heininger: It didn't feel like that?

Donovan: It didn't feel that was linked, no. There was so much time in between those two events. No, I didn't get that sense.

Heininger: Now, did you work on helping him prepare to testify in the trial?

Donovan: No, not at all.

Heininger: Did Greg do basically the trial prep then?

Donovan: I think he did, yes.

Heininger: So then you dealt with the engagement.

Donovan: Oh yes, Ranny and I.

Heininger: In between these two tough things, there comes Vicki [Reggie Kennedy].

Donovan: Right.

Heininger: Tell me about that. Tell me about breaking the news.

Donovan: It's funny, I don't remember—Oh yes, I do remember now. It slipped out through one of Vicki's children's friends at the Maret School, is how I remember it. I really don't remember exact details, although I think Lois Romano of the *Washington Post* called me and said that she knew this was happening and she was going to write it. Did I want to comment on it? I said, "Lois, this isn't going to happen. If it was going to happen, I'd know about it." Of course, famous last words. No press secretary should say that. Of course she was right. I forget exactly what we said at that time. It was kind of a modified "No comment." I just don't remember a lot of how we did the press on the announcement.

Then when we did all the series of press interviews, that was certainly a major thought-out operation that Ranny orchestrated. That was her brainchild. She understood its potential. That was something that we put together. It was a real serious communications plan with a lot of interviews. We did a lot of interviews with that.

Heininger: Did you suspect that he was engaged?

Donovan: I don't know that I really gave it much thought. At the time, I was single and I was a lot younger, and I didn't really think about too much.

Heininger: So it came as a surprise.

Donovan: Yes.

Heininger: Did you like Vicki?

Donovan: Oh, yes.

Heininger: How did the Massachusetts press respond?

Donovan: Number one, they saw it as a big story and they wanted to be a part of it. They didn't want to be left out. They didn't want to play second fiddle to a national news organization, so we had to take that into consideration, too, because they were very sensitive about that. It was one of those things where we really had to balance all the interviews and the timing of the interviews with all these considerations. All the national media wanted to be first and all the Boston media wanted to be at least equal to, if not ahead of, the national media, so it was a balancing act.

Under the circumstances, we did a pretty good job. You're never going to make everyone happy, but we certainly did a lot of interviews and I think everyone came away pretty satisfied.

Heininger: Was the engagement viewed positively?

Donovan: Universally positively—overwhelming universal acceptance and approval. No one ever asked me, "Do you think this is a good idea?" Or, "Why is he doing this?" We virtually didn't get that question at all.

Heininger: Were you seeing a change in the press? "Ah, Ted's settling down."

Donovan: There's no question about that. It was taken as a given that this is Ted settling down.

Heininger: But it didn't change how the press then handled the '94 election.

Donovan: No, it didn't change how the press handled the election, but it certainly changed people's perception of him, significantly. They thought this was a different person in many ways.

Heininger: Were you picking this up just from the media, or what you were also seeing in the state?

Donovan: Everywhere, we saw that people were happy for him and for her. They were pleased, but I think they were also relieved, because when you get married, that's a break from the past and that's something that's real. It's different. It's a change. As I said, it's a break from the past. It's a real gate, if you will. In a way you're closing the gate on what's behind you and you're opening the gate to what's in front of you. I don't think anything else could have done that for him and been so symbolically powerful to everyone, including the electorate, as getting married.

Heininger: Unless he had made the wrong choice of woman.

Donovan: Oh yes, that could have—

Heininger: But I would assume that the response ever since has been, "This is a new man. She's wonderful. All that stuff is in the past."

Donovan: Yes, all of the above. As I said, it's a gate that closed on the past and opened on the future.

Heininger: Then comes the campaign and at this point you're chief of staff. Why did the campaign flounder? First of all, why was Michael Kennedy, who had not had any experience, running the campaign? Why was he named campaign manager?

Donovan: You know, in the end that's a question for the Senator, because he names the campaign manager, but clearly it was a family tradition.

Heininger: I know, right.

Donovan: I don't think that there was anyone who ever—No one ever ran his campaign who wasn't a family member, as far as I know.

Heininger: And he didn't have Steve Smith.

Donovan: Right, at that point he didn't have Steve. All campaigns take some time to find their footing, but also it was something that was totally alien to him, running a serious campaign against a formidable opponent. The other thing that hurt us very badly—and Bob Shrum will tell you this, too, because I'm telling you what Bob Shrum told me—is that because he hadn't had a serious race, he hadn't run a serious campaign, including that he didn't have an opportunity to be sending out a message, communications to people, over the course of 30 years. Principally, there were no ads, but also, he just didn't campaign. He just didn't do anything because he didn't have to, in fairness. There was never a serious opponent.

And the thing that complicates it is in the Senate, as you know, you run every six years, and in the House, you run every two years. Well, just by showing up and being on the ballot in the House, by the virtue of the fact that the House is not in session right before a campaign, you tend to be out and around. You're in a smaller district and they're all the same size districts, so usually you get out there to a relatively manageable number of people every two years and get some kind of message out there, but that is not the case in the Senate. It's a big state and he didn't ever run a campaign. He didn't ever run a serious, traditional campaign and he didn't get his message out there, election after election, so there was nothing to build on. We were starting from zero. Actually we were starting at below zero because we were starting with Palm Beach. And I don't think you can underestimate the political climate in those days, which was—

Heininger: Negative.

Donovan: It was negative and it was also pretty right-wing.

Heininger: This was the [Newton] Gingrich revolution.

Donovan: The Gingrich revolution, and remember, Massachusetts was a state that voted for Ronald Reagan not once but twice. So you were seeing a political tide that had run against him for a long time, and he hadn't done any advertising or campaigning in that climate, so that was tough as well.

Heininger: Did he, or you all who were advising him at this point, not recognize the seriousness of this at the beginning, all of which, if it had been recognized, would have argued for not putting in an inexperienced campaign manager like Michael? Or was it that as the campaign went on it became more and more apparent that this one was different; this wasn't going the way it should have gone? Plus, I know the Senate was in very late that year, too, which didn't help anything.

Donovan: Right, it didn't help at all. No, I just don't think we did many of the things that we should have done in a typical campaign, and that was something that we had to reconcile at the end by bringing Ranny in to run the campaign.

Also, it was interesting because, for all the talk of how much trouble he was in, when we did the typical things that a campaign does, like the early bio advertising and stuff like that, our poll numbers were 65-35, roughly, ahead of Romney. It may have been 60-40 or something like that, maybe 65-35, and then you go off the air for a while and your poll numbers settle down.

Then, to give you an example of how difficult the climate was: Kennedy was one of the principal sponsors of a major piece of crime legislation that year. I think it passed in August. We put up an ad that talked about Kennedy's leadership and his Judiciary Committee spot, and basically the leading role he played in getting this legislation passed. Romney countered with an ad that mocked it and said, "Ted Kennedy a crime fighter? Are you kidding me?" Everyone laughed and thought, *Gee, Romney's right, that's ridiculous. Kennedy's a soft-on-crime liberal. I don't believe Kennedy's ad*. Here you had empirical evidence that he had passed one of the toughest crime measures in the history of the Senate, and been one of the leaders, and no one believed it. That was just an indication of what things were like.

In the end you've got to be judged by what the final numbers are, and we had a strategy of, "Save the money until the end." At the end of the day, we won by almost 20 points. There were times when we husbanded our money and kept it in the bank, weren't on the air, and Romney was on the air and he was going up. But then we came on, on schedule, on plan, and crushed him. At the end of the day, we crushed him. Romney was a different candidate because he had unlimited money. As we saw in later years, this wasn't just about running for the Senate with Romney.

Heininger: That's right.

Donovan: He went on to become Governor and become a serious Presidential candidate, and some say he's still a serious Presidential candidate. This candidate was *sui generis* to say the least, but in the end we crushed him by 20 points. There's no question that wasn't a flawless campaign, but at the end of the end we prevailed, and prevailed strongly.

Heininger: Had Kennedy not really been subject to attack ads in previous campaigns?

Donovan: No.

Heininger: Romney came in with a different strategy.

Donovan: Yes.

Heininger: And it was a strategy that you all just didn't—he hadn't had the experience with dealing with, which is now classic. This is the way campaigns seem to be run.

Donovan: Right.

Heininger: Why was it Ranny that you called to come in?

Donovan: We needed someone to come in and pull the campaign together, and she was clearly the person to do it.

Heininger: Why Ranny though?

Donovan: Ranny had the Senator's faith and confidence. She had the faith and confidence of everyone that mattered. She's also an exceptionally good manager and leader. She knew all the people and where to get them and where to plug them in. She took all the old staff, who are large

parts of the current staff, and plugged them in where they needed to be plugged in. For instance, she plugged me into the press. She plugged the Judiciary Committee people into the legal community, and the environmental people into the environmental community. She matched everybody up with a constituency and created a formula for victory, and she did it pretty quickly and very effectively.

Heininger: Were you surprised at the number of former staffers who came flooding in?

Donovan: No. On any given day or any given night, in the middle of the night, you could ask people to come back and do something for the Senator, and they'd do it without hesitating.

Heininger: Could you see this happening with a different Senator?

Donovan: Some Senators, sure, I could see that type of loyalty.

Heininger: Of this magnitude?

Donovan: Well, most other Senators don't have the kind of magnitude that the Senator had, by virtue of the size of his staff. So no, probably not that kind of magnitude, but there aren't many that would have the magnitude of the challenge too: a big state, and an opponent with unlimited resources.

Heininger: I can think of New Jersey.

Donovan: Yes, there are a few. There are certainly a few.

Heininger: One could argue that he bought the seat, unlimited money. How important do you think the debates were?

Donovan: They were crucial. I drew the short card of being in charge of debate prep.

Heininger: Oh, my.

Donovan: Can you imagine trying to run debate prep when Bob Shrum was one of the people helping us prepare?

Heininger: No.

Donovan: I was potentially in charge of debate prep, but Bob was really the one who prepared him. We had a pretty significant team of people who were part of that debate prep.

Heininger: Now are debates something that Kennedy typically shines in?

Donovan: Yes, he definitely did in this debate, but at that point the media had set the expectations so low. There aren't too many debates that someone comes out the clear winner.

Heininger: Right, that's true.

Donovan: And the Senator was declared the clear winner. That was a lot of preparation and a lot of attention. It was quite a tense night at Faneuil Hall.

Heininger: What about the attack ads? How much effect do you think the attack ads had?

Donovan: They had a lot of effect, actually. In the end, elections with him are swaying a pretty small undecided group, but that group was probably bigger than it had been in the past. I think he brought people back permanently to his side, and also, that was the beginning of the end for his opponents.

That was 1994 and it was really not that much further down the line that [George W.] Bush came in, in 2000 and 2008. If you look at where things are today—I mean, you have to rate this as one of the most dismally failed Presidencies in history—and all the things that the Senator has been talking about for more than 30 years, I think people have come to see he was right. The people who had strayed came back to his side beginning in '94 and they've stayed with him since.

Heininger: Well, he hasn't had a real opponent since.

Donovan: No, he hasn't.

Heininger: He probably won't ever.

Donovan: No, I don't think so.

Heininger: What else did you have to do as chief of staff? How did your job change when you went from press secretary to chief of staff?

Donovan: In some ways it's night and day, because then you're managing a big staff and an outside world as well, but I was also still very involved in the media and his image and stuff like that. But there's a lot to running a staff that has three "A" committees and a lot of very talented people. You've probably heard a hundred people tell you this before, but one of the Senator's strengths is that he hires good people and lets them do their job, and the staff was terrific. They were really impressive and they did a great, great job. It was an easy staff to manage because they were so capable and they were also allowed to do what they wanted to do to some extent. They did their job and did it well.

Heininger: So he knows how to delegate.

Donovan: Yes.

Heininger: And he has chiefs of staff who know how to delegate, but the expectations are high that performance will match the expectations.

Donovan: The understanding is very clear: the expectation is excellence. But I've got to say that time after time people delivered excellence.

Heininger: What happens when they don't?

Donovan: I don't know too many examples. I can't think of too many people who were hired who weren't just excellent from the beginning. That has not traditionally or historically been a problem.

Heininger: Did you have to fire anybody at any point?

Donovan: I don't think I'd probably talk about that.

Heininger: I'm not interested in who—it's just, what is the process when it has to happen? There's always somebody who doesn't live up to what you expect them to do. How does he handle firings? Senators can handle these in many different ways, shall we say?

Donovan: If someone is not a good fit and they're not living up to expectations, then there's a plan put into place that finds a place for them where they're going to fit and do a good job. And that's not in his office; it's someplace else. Usually we would look for someplace that would be a better fit. I don't think we ever—I can't think of anyone who just wasn't capable of doing the work. It's like everything else in life: Is it the right fit? There are lots of other places where people could fit. Maybe it's in a House office, maybe it's another Senate office, maybe it's an advocacy group or something like that, but there are lots of places where you are going to fit. If you don't fit in one place, hopefully you'll fit someplace else.

Heininger: Now see, that's going above and beyond what I think happens in many other Senators' offices. I would say that most people, if they have to fire somebody, don't go out of their way to place them someplace. But you're right; in most jobs it's a question of fit.

Donovan: Right.

Heininger: And you don't always know ahead of time. You make the best estimate as to whether this is someone who can fit, but you're never right 100 percent of the time.

Donovan: Right, right. The other thing is, again showing his view of the long term, I can think of one person who, in my understanding, wasn't the right fit, and was moved out years before I came, who went on to become a very senior person in the [William J.] Clinton administration, and who was completely dedicated and devoted to the Senator long after she had left, you know, not on her own terms. She considered herself a Kennedy person. Her obligations were to the current President at the time, but probably high up on the list was Senator Kennedy as well.

Heininger: Well, that speaks volumes.

Donovan: It really does.

Heininger: That's why I asked the question about how does he handle firing, because I don't think that's common.

Donovan: No, it's not, but it kind of gets back to what kind of a person he is, too. He's a caring, thoughtful person, and he realizes these people are working very hard but it's maybe just not the right fit; it's not the right thing for them. Most of the time they go off and do something similar or a little different in a different organization, and thrive.

Heininger: How does he handle hiring? Where do you get people and how do you vet them?

Donovan: There's kind of an informal network that the individual legislative areas generate. Most of these connections go back many years and started in a school of some type, or law firms or other offices—actually, not too many other offices. He doesn't really take from other Senators' offices that much. There always seems to be someone good. I look at someone like Melody Barnes, in a big job now, and she came to us years ago through someone's network. There's always some connection to someone or something, and it just seems to come together. I don't think there's any formula for it, but it's certainly not headhunters.

Heininger: But I'm assuming it's also not posting that there is a—

Donovan: Oh no, I don't think that ever happened.

Heininger: It's not that there's a posting that there's a job in Senator Kennedy's office and all who are interested may apply.

Donovan: No, no quarter-page ads in the Sunday *Times*.

Heininger: So it's basically that the network is so extensive that if you need somebody for the Judiciary Committee, those who are in the know will funnel people to you.

Donovan: Right.

Heininger: All right. Once you get a group of people to you, how does the process work so that there's a determination made as to who will be hired? Who makes the final decision? Does everybody meet with Kennedy, or do only certain people meet with Kennedy?

Donovan: As I recall, only the recommended candidate meets with Kennedy, and before that, probably two or three people would see the chief of staff, Carey Parker, the staff director on the Labor Committee, the staff director or whoever the top dog is to us on the Judiciary Committee. It's a pretty short loop that you have to go through, actually.

Heininger: So if Michael Myers says, "This is who I want to hire," and the person meets with—right now it's Eric [Mogilnicki]—and Eric says, "Yes, this is fine," and Carey says this is fine, by the time the person gets to Kennedy, Kennedy's likely to think, *Yes, this is likely to be fine*, too.

Donovan: Yes. If it's Michael's hire and Michael goes in and says, "Eric and Carey are fine with this person," and the Senator says, "OK, thanks, I'll see him," it's pretty much done at that point, unless for some reason he doesn't like them, if he doesn't feel it's the right fit or something, but that's pretty rare, actually.

Heininger: Does Kennedy almost always see who is going to be hired?

Donovan: Oh sure, yes. In any substantive job, yes.

Heininger: What about receptionists?

Donovan: No, it wouldn't rise to his level.

Heininger: But after all, you had Melody Miller for years and years and years, who was very important in that outer office.

Donovan: Right.

Heininger: You haven't had a Melody Miller since then.

Donovan: No.

Heininger: So really you're talking about the substantive legislative people. Those are the ones that Kennedy will meet with?

Donovan: Yes, he always meets them.

Heininger: How is fund-raising handled for Kennedy and who does it? What role does the chief of staff play in that process?

Donovan: The chief of staff is one of three political fund designees, and there's usually a political director who works in the office. We have a separate fund-raising operation and it's usually two or three or four people in an office not too far from the Senate. It's a pretty extensive list and it's a pretty extensive network that is cultivated. It just seems to run itself in a way. It gets passed on generation to generation, so to speak.

Heininger: How much does *he* have to do?

Donovan: Much less than most Senators have to do, much less.

Heininger: Most of them are having to do a lot of personal calls.

Donovan: But remember that he's been working this list for many, many years. Somebody he might have called 20 years ago, he doesn't have to call today, although he might. He's built the list over the years, so there's not a lot of cold-calling, compared to other Senators.

Heininger: Is most of the money Massachusetts, or is it national? Is it both?

Donovan: You'd probably get a percentage breakdown for each election, but the majority is national, just because there's 49 more states, but Massachusetts shows up, respectively.

Heininger: It's got to be a much easier job than for most Senators.

Donovan: Oh, much easier, yes, but there's a real—

Heininger: I mean, wouldn't you hate to be from California?

Donovan: Well, you'd hate to be from California because of the size of the budget.

Heininger: Yes, because of the size of the state.

Donovan: But also, there's a lot of easy money in California.

Heininger: Tell me about the network: his brain trust and his network of outside advisors. Who is in what you would call the brain trust?

Donovan: Well, the brain trust changes with need and with topic. Obviously, as various needs pop up and challenges face the country and legislation is proposed to deal with those things, the brain trust has to expand and contract to accommodate those needs. There are some core people that he looks to for advice in certain areas.

Obviously, he has a number of legal scholars that he looks to on a regular basis. I wouldn't want to try to remember or guess exactly who they are. That's probably more of a question for a Judiciary Committee staffer, but there seems to be a core group there.

On health issues, he looks to a variety of experts in a variety of subspecialties. There's the whole question of access to healthcare, there's reimbursement, and there are certain things that fall within the Labor Committee's purview—now the HELP [Health, Education, Labor & Pensions] Committee purview—that are more his area of expertise, access being one of them, whereas reimbursement of payment is more for the Finance Committee and for Medicare. He looks to different people with different areas of expertise. I think he's guided by people who were past staffers who have stayed in touch. The other thing is, whoever is the expert of the day, he can get to them.

Heininger: To put it mildly.

Donovan: I don't know if he still does them, but he used to do these issues dinners at his house, and the roster for those things was really quite impressive. They were the best minds in the country on those issues. Those were very well thought out. They were very well planned, and they were attended by remarkably prestigious people. I think they were a great form of education for him, but they also made people think outside of their own world. To bring those people together was always good.

Heininger: Did he also use them to educate other Senators, or did he use them principally to educate himself?

Donovan: That's a good question and I don't recall. Again, that would probably vary by subject area. I just don't remember if other Senators went.

Heininger: We've heard both. We've heard of some occasions where there had been other Senators who have been there.

Donovan: Of course Dodd and he are such close friends, but I certainly seem to remember Dodd being at some of them.

Heininger: And I think [Orrin] Hatch has been to some.

Donovan: I wouldn't be surprised.

Heininger: Who of past staff would you say he has remained closest to, and who continue to be very close advisors?

Donovan: Certainly Ranny, certainly Bob Shrum, and Greg Craig. Mine is a little dated because I'm probably remembering who he was in touch with when I was there.

Heininger: I think they still are the same people, yes.

Donovan: There's still a lot of continuity there. And then there are guys who worked for him in the '60s that he's still close with. I think he's still close with Jim Flug.

Heininger: What about Dave Burke?

Donovan: Dave Burke—I still see Dave around and I think he's still very close with Dave.

Heininger: And you brought him back in for the campaign in '94 too.

Donovan: Yes, that's true.

Heininger: What about Larry Horowitz?

Donovan: He's still very close with Larry. He always has been close with Larry. He brings in some people—I saw someone's name in the paper the other day that reminded me— This was someone who has been close with the Senator. I think when an issue comes up that rarely comes up, he always says, "Oh, So-and-So knows about that, so I'll call So-and-So." And usually "So-and-So" still knows about it. Others, I just don't recall right now.

Heininger: When you're a chief of staff, particularly a new chief of staff, who do you talk to?

Donovan: Well, you talk to Ranny, you talk to Bob Shrum, you talk to Greg Craig, you talk to Larry Horowitz. All those people were very helpful to me, very helpful. Virtually everyone that we talked to before, I would rely on heavily.

Heininger: Have you performed the same role for subsequent chiefs of staff?

Donovan: Yes, I would say so, more on a case-by-case basis. Everyone who has ever worked there knows the door is always open to me. People do bounce ideas off me from time to time and I'm always glad to help, but I wouldn't say I'm a big sounding board or anything like that.

Heininger: What's your relationship been with Kennedy since you left?

Donovan: I would say it's been ongoing, continuous, uninterrupted, warm, and very respectful from my point of view. I probably see him about once a quarter for one thing or another, so it's three or four times a year that I actually see him in person. Obviously, working for a big Massachusetts company—He calls from time to time to make sure everything is OK, or he's heard something and he's concerned it's not, and can he help? We've had some ups and downs here at Boston Scientific. There have been several times I have just been sitting at home on a Saturday morning feeding my daughter her baby food, or something like that, and the phone

rings and it's the Senator. He says, "How are you doing? Good, good." He says, "Is everything OK up there? I saw you had kind of a tough week," or something like that. And he'd say, "Is there anything I can do? Should I call someone? Should I call Pete [Nicholas] or Jim [Tobin]?" He knows the chairman and he knows the CEO. He says, "Should I give them a ring and just see how they're doing?" Just totally, completely thoughtful. He doesn't want anything, isn't looking for anything, there's no angle. He just is concerned and wants to help. So you still get those calls, which shows you why he's still there and why he gets sent back year after year.

Heininger: What's his relationship been with Chris Dodd?

Donovan: Oh, a great relationship. When I was there it was very close, very friendly. I love Chris Dodd. He's a wonderful, wonderful human being. They're kind of birds of a feather, in that they're both very warm, outgoing, fun-loving, happy, positive people. Those two can light up a room like no one can light up a room. They have a great close personal relationship. They care about one another. He's a terrific guy, Chris Dodd, a terrific, terrific guy.

Heininger: Just a couple of questions back on the press piece: Would you say that the press has generally been kind to, or hard on, Kennedy? And does it make a difference whether it's work or personal life?

Donovan: The press is really a case-by-case, reporter-by-reporter, basis with him. It ebbs and flows. It certainly was ebbing from 1991 to 1994, but it's been a pretty good flow ever since then. Most political experts and people who have been around and have experience will say that you had one tough reelection and one tough fight, and he had his back in '94. In a way it was somewhat cathartic for the press, because I think they viewed their job as to throw everything that they had at him, and they did. He survived it and prevailed handily.

There's some collective action or reaction or lack of action that's almost like lemmings or starlings who do things together, and the press kind of said, "OK, we gave him our best shot, and he took it and kept going. It didn't knock him off his stride." There's a lot of respect there when they give it their best shot and cover things that are tough politically, in the spotlight. They feel they've done their job and don't have to keep doing it just for the sake of doing it. A tough reelection is a tough reelection and it's covered as a tough reelection, but that doesn't mean you have to cover every bill introduction as a tough reelection. So it's ebbed and flowed, but overall, every one of them has a lot of respect for his knowledge and his ability and his work ethic.

Heininger: The latter in particular.

Donovan: Oh, yes. He is one of the hardest working people I've ever known.

Heininger: I don't know how he manages to do as much as he does, and sail too.

Donovan: And sail, yes.

Heininger: What kind of press fallout did you see from the Clarence Thomas–Anita Hill situation?

Donovan: To tell you the truth, the one answer I'd give would be ephemeral, because I don't even remember what it was right now, so it certainly didn't have any long-lasting impact. If you said to me, "Clarence Thomas and the press," my reaction would be that Clarence Thomas really hasn't had a good press in his career. That's what I would think of. I know your question is not getting at that answer. Things come and go, and that was a relatively isolated situation.

Heininger: Well, it was an interesting time period, because he received a lot of criticism for not taking a more active role in the hearings, but it also came at a time where his relationship with Jack Danforth was quite complicated, because he was also working on the Civil Rights Restoration Act with him. So in the wake of all of this—The two things were happening at the same time. Whereas there's this one quite negative event taking place, he's also getting this major, major piece of legislation accomplished.

Donovan: Right.

Heininger: And I don't recall what the press—I recall the press on the Clarence Thomas stuff, but it was just a very unusual time period.

Donovan: It was also a very unusual set of circumstances. To single him out when there were—how many?—eight other Democratic Senators on the committee? Talk about a one-of-a-kind situation, and talk about no precedent in terms of how to deal with it.

Heininger: Who would you say he's been closest to in the Senate, aside from Chris Dodd?

Donovan: I was going to say—the obvious answer is Dodd.

Heininger: Who are his good friends?

Donovan: It's interesting because a lot of them are gone now. He was certainly close with John Culver for many years, and John Tunney. I don't know socially. Politically, everyone writes about the odd couple with Hatch, but they were kind of thrown together and he would work with Hatch and made things happen. He also has a lot of fondness for Barbara Mikulski and has worked well with her. She has been on the committee a long, long time. I wasn't there for this, but by all accounts, he had a soft spot in his heart for Barack Obama early on.

And then I see him working with other people I've never met; they're just a name to me, like [Michael] Enzi or somebody like that. He's more the type—He has a few close friends but then he has a number of people that he feels it's his job to work closely with, and he does. He works effectively with them, and oftentimes they're Republicans.

Heininger: Would you place [Alan] Simpson in the closer-than-just-working-with category?

Donovan: Yes. He genuinely likes Simpson a lot, who is a very likable man.

Heininger: Yes, he is.

Donovan: He's enormously likable. That's another good one. He certainly is very fond of Simpson. You could see there was a real spark between the two.

Heininger: What about Don Riegle?

Donovan: I was thinking about Riegle earlier. Yes, definitely, I would put Riegle on the short list of friends.

Heininger: Well, it's an odd institution to be able to develop real friends in. It's a fraternity, but difficult to be friends, with the kind of demands that are made on these people's time.

Donovan: And also just the level of elevation that you are at when you arrive. It's a funny institution because you have 99 peers, but you also have 99 other people who are—

Heininger: Rivals.

Donovan: —considered to be without peer, in a way, at least by the public. Yes, it's not the most natural, conducive place to make friends. Of course, if you look at it as half-full and half-empty, there isn't a month that goes by that you're not on the opposite side of someone, usually, but there's not a month that goes by that you're not on the same side, too, just by virtue of the diversity of the legislation.

Heininger: Of the three positions that you held with him, which one did you enjoy the most?

Donovan: I'd probably say, as just the day-to-day job to go to, it was the Labor Committee press secretary job, and also the comparative lack of stress.

Heininger: It does rise.

Donovan: As just the day-to-day job, day-in and day-out substantive, interesting, legislative—I think that job.

Heininger: Why did you leave?

Donovan: Why did I leave the Senator's staff all together? Well, number one, I had done what I could do for him, and I wanted to round out my experience in the legislative branch as well. It was a good time to leave, so everything kind of lined up correctly as making sense to me and at the right time to leave.

Heininger: This has been fascinating. Thank you very much.

Donovan: I really enjoyed it.