WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD PASTER

December 19, 2005
Washington, D.C.

Interviewers
Russell Riley, chair
Paul Martin

Assisting: Jill Abraham
Audiotape: Miller Center
Transcription: Martha W. Healy
Transcript copy edited by Hilary Swinson, Jane Rafal Wilson
Final edit by Jane Rafal Wilson and Gail Hyder Wiley

WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD PASTER

December 19, 2005

Paster: I came in yesterday, went through the material. I accept the terms and I understand how you want to do it.

Riley: Okay.

Paster: There were questions in the back that laid out where you might want to go, but I'll let you control it and if you want to ask me open-ended questions at some point, I'll answer them as well.

Riley: Absolutely. This is very conversational. We don't come in guided strictly by this template of questions. That's just representative, as you suggested, of the kinds of things.

Paster: Paul's got seven yellow sheets of questions.

Riley: Chuck Jones sent me a couple of pages, and I've got my own list here.

This is the Howard Paster Oral History as a part of the Clinton Presidential History Project and again, I'm very grateful for your taking the time to do this. I felt like I sort of bushwhacked you in New York.

Paster: I wasn't trying to be difficult the last months, it's just that I travel an enormous amount.

Riley: But we're delighted to have the chance.

Paster: I only had one year in the White House, so it shouldn't take more than an hour.

Riley: Well, I beg to differ on that point, but in any event thanks for doing this. There are a couple of things we do on the record to begin with. The first is to repeat the fundamental ground rule that the interview is being conducted under a veil of confidentiality. We talked before the tape came on about an elaboration of these ground rules and what will happen from this point. Again, your audience is not the people seated at the table, but people 10, 20, or 30 years down the road who really want to understand the Clinton Presidency as it actually was, not as the press accounts may have had it. So that's the purpose of the project.

The second thing we do to begin, as an aid to the transcriber—Jill will be keeping a record of the sequence of interventions—but we also like to get a voice ID at the beginning. So I'll ask everybody to identify himself or herself and say a word or two just for those purposes. I'm

Russell Riley, I've been heading up the Clinton Presidential History Project, I'm an associate professor at the Miller Center.

Martin: I'm Paul Martin. I'm an assistant professor at the Miller Center and I'll be helping to ask questions.

Abraham: I'm Jill Abraham. I'm a graduate student researcher at the Miller Center and I'm going to be taking notes and writing down the speaking order to aid the transcribers.

Paster: And I'm Howard Paster. In 1993 I was Chief Congressional Relations Officer for President Clinton.

Riley: Splendid. We always like to begin by getting a little bit of biography on the record. So I understand that one of your parents at least was involved in Democratic Party politics when you were growing up. Is that correct?

Paster: Yes, my mother was a precinct committeewoman, so I had some early Democratic experience handing out leaflets. I actually have a wonderful large pin, 4 or 5 inches in diameter, that says, "If I were 21, I'd vote for Kennedy" from the 1960 campaign. I actually saw John Kennedy at a rally in New York. When I talk to students I say, "You don't understand this pin. Eighteen year olds didn't vote in 1960." I wasn't 18 then anyhow, I was 15, but the point was, that's one of my great keepsakes.

Riley: I'd think it would be very valuable on the market.

Paster: I wouldn't think so.

Riley: Were you active once you got to a political age, 18 or 21, or when you went to college?

Paster: Aside from helping out, walking and handing out leaflets or something, the real activity began when I finished college in 1966. I'd taken a cross-country motor trip that summer. I came back to New York sometime before I was starting graduate school, and my mother suggested that the incumbent Democratic Congressman who'd been elected in the [Lyndon B.] Johnson landslide in '64, in a Republican district, was in a tough election. If I could spend six weeks before I started graduate school volunteering, it would be a good thing to do. I did that, and subsequently went to work for that Congressman. That's how I came to Washington.

Riley: Okay. You were in Washington as a paid staffer at that point?

Paster: No, this was volunteer work in New York, in the campaign in the fall of '66. When I finished at Columbia [School of] Journalism, I came to Washington as a paid staffer, went to work up on the House side July 1, 1967, and worked on the House side for some years. In the fall of '71, I went to work for Senator Birch Bayh. To demonstrate to people how old I am, I say that when Senator Evan Bayh was in high school, I worked for his old man. I worked there until 1977 when I left to become the chief lobbyist for the [United] Auto Workers Union [UAW]. I was hired by Leonard Woodcock before he retired. I worked for him and then for Doug Fraser. In

1979 we went through the Chrysler loan guarantee battle, which was a great experience and I got to know the lobbyists who had been hired by Chrysler. We worked hand in glove.

In those days, most lobbying firms were Republican or Democratic. They weren't bipartisan the way they are today. The Republican firm working for Chrysler offered me a job, so in 1980 I accepted that and went to work at Timmons & Company—they made a bold foray of hiring on the left. It's kind of funny. I said to Bill Timmons, "Do you know my politics?" He said, "We can handle *one* of you." So I stayed there for 12 years at Timmons & Company, but staying quite firmly planted in the Democratic camp in all respects. We sold that firm to WPP [originally Wire and Plastic Products], my present employer, in 1989, the same week that George Bush was sworn in. In 1992 my boss asked me to go to Hill and Knowlton. I told him I didn't want to do that, that I had planned to go to work for the new President when he was elected.

My boss made two bad calls. He said, "One, your guy won't win, and two, those great jobs are hard to get." So I went to work for Hill and Knowlton in October of 1992 and left 60 days later to go to the Clinton-[Al] Gore transition and went to the White House.

Riley: Let me ask you. Had there ever been a possibility or contemplation of your going to work for Jimmy Carter in the '70s?

Paster: Not really. Birch Bayh, as you know, ran for President in '76 and got blown out early, and Carter was not my next choice. In 1980, I suddenly was associating myself with Neil Goldschmidt, who was then Secretary of Transportation and a neighbor down the street. But Carter lost the election and things were mooted. In '84, I was very much involved with [Walter] Mondale and you would find somewhere deep in the fall of '84 in the *Wall Street Journal* a reference to who would end up in the White House if Mondale won, and my name appears as a potential staffer in a Mondale White House in '84.

Riley: We must have missed that one.

Paster: It's somewhere deep in the '84 records. In '88 I did some work for [Michael] Dukakis but it wasn't significant. In '92, my first choice was Tom Harkin. I'm a labor guy. One of the dirty little secrets is my only Presidential campaign contribution in '92 was to Tom Harkin. I got to know Clinton later. I know you're going to ask me how I got to the White House, so why I don't I just carry that forward.

Riley: Go ahead.

Paster: When it was clear that Clinton was going to be the nominee, one of the important things was the management of superdelegates. When the Democrats decided they were going to let all Democratic Congressmen and Senators have a vote, all of a sudden winning on the Hill became the big primary. That's what I knew, Democrats on the Hill. So I volunteered to help as a liaison between the campaign and the Democrats on the Hill in 1992.

Riley: Who would have been your contact in the campaign?

Paster: Susan Brophy, who was at the DNC [Democratic National Committee] at the time, interestingly enough. We went to New York for the convention. We all had delegations to watch and individuals to watch and stay in touch with. I got involved, because of my old UAW connections, with the Michigan delegation. They were upset about Al Gore because of his attitude on corporate fuel economy for automobiles. I remember in '92 in New York trying to convince John Dingell, who is a dear friend, to calm down, not to worry about it, it's going to be okay.

Riley: They're not easily calmed, are they?

Paster: No.

When it became somewhat hopeful that Clinton would win, it was the same time I was agreeing to go to work at Hill and Knowlton. I went to call on my friends on the Hill and particularly the leaders, that is [George] Mitchell, [Thomas] Foley, and [Richard] Gephardt, to tell them I was changing jobs. But I told each of the three of them that my real aspiration was to work for Bill Clinton if he won. They all said that if he won, they would support me. I used the opportunity of going from Timmons & Company to Hill and Knowlton to see each of them separately, individually, and put my oar in for support for a Clinton job. But I also had friends, Michael Berman, who was in Little Rock at the time, is close to Susan Thomases. Mike is a dear, dear friend of mine, who was an advocate and supporter and had a lot to do with my success.

I guess David Pryor mattered. Because of the Arkansas connection, Clinton would turn to Pryor for advice. I had a relationship with David Pryor. I remember calling his top guy, Don Harrell, and saying it was just possible Clinton might ask his point of view and could he put in a nice word.

Riley: Where did your connection with Pryor originate?

Paster: Just lobbying. There was a time when I knew almost every Democrat up there.

Riley: Sure.

Paster: I used to be able to recite the descending order in seniority on the committees.

Riley: Can I interrupt one more time and ask, when you went to see the leaders and briefed them about your change in jobs, did you let them know specifically that you'd like to do Congressional Relations?

Paster: Absolutely.

Riley: So that was always—

Paster: Oh, yes, it was the job I always wanted, about the only job I was qualified for, or arguably, the job I was most qualified for and then arguably the best qualified. That was the case I was making.

Riley: Sure.

Paster: Soon after the election, I got a call from Warren Christopher, from Little Rock, saying he was going to be in Washington and could I get together for lunch the next day. He said, "I hope that's not too short notice." I said to him, "Mr. Christopher, if I had a plan, I wouldn't admit to it." So I went to lunch with Warren Christopher, and we had a good lunch. I'd not met the man before—that's not true. I would have met him in Little Rock. I had lunch with him when I went down—maybe that's not the right sequence. No, I'm sure I'd not met him before, because the interview with Clinton came later.

So I had lunch with Christopher and whatever I did was sufficiently good. He then called and invited me to come down and meet the President-elect on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving in '92.

Riley: Had you met Clinton before?

Paster: Only to say hello, how do you do. I had never had a conversation with him before. My interview was that Wednesday before Thanksgiving. It was quite specific, about 70 minutes, in the Governor's mansion, alone, nobody else was in the room. We talked about a lot of things, campaign finance reform—as I said up in the Hofstra [University] meeting, he talked to me about how he liked to go lobby the Arkansas State Legislature, wander down the hall. I said, "Well, you can't wander down the hall in Washington, they're not there, it's more complicated."

Riley: That was in response—you told a bit more elaborate story at Hofstra, it was in response to—

Paster: We talked about style and how he liked to lobby personally and how when he had problems with the Arkansas State Legislature, he said, "I go out of my office, I walk over to their office, I go in there, sit down, close the door, and work it out." I told him it was much more difficult, it didn't work quite so simply in Washington.

Riley: Right.

Paster: That was the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. I remember getting home very late that night. You couldn't fly directly from Little Rock to Washington at that time. Early that Friday morning, Warren Christopher called. He was already in California for the holiday weekend. I remember it was very early for him. He called and said they'd like me to handle the confirmation of the Cabinet during the transition and could I start that week.

I said I needed him to talk to my boss at the time, the head of Hill and Knowlton. I said, "I'm sure they'll agree," but he did make the phone call. "Here's the guy you need to call, here's his number. I know he'll say yes." He said, "I'll call Monday morning." I said, "Great." He said to me, "This is not an offer for a White House position." I said, "I'll consider it an audition." Warren Christopher has since become a very good friend, we stay in touch a good deal. I have the greatest respect for him.

Riley: He's one of the first people we talked with.

Paster: Well, if you consider he was Deputy Attorney General in the Johnson administration and Deputy Secretary of State in the Carter administration, it's like one of the wise men in that wonderful book, the old guys, the [George] Kennans and the [Averell] Harrimans. So I said it was an audition. A little while later Vernon Jordan called, and in his booming, profane way, said to me, "You got it." I said, "No, no, no, it's just an audition." He said, "Relax."

Riley: That doesn't sound terribly profane the way you put it.

Paster: Well, he said a lot of other things. We got into the transition and we worked on the Cabinet confirmations, which went very well, Zoë Baird notwithstanding. Every Cabinet member except the Attorney General was sworn in in less than 48 hours of the President's swearing-in. You can't find a precedent for that. That's not all me, a whole lot of people did it.

But we got into January. Here we are in January and nobody has said anything specifically about going to the White House. All I have is Christopher saying it's not an offer of a White House job and Vernon teasing me about it. And I knew Vernon from Washington days.

So I said to Mack McLarty in a conversation one day, "I've been asked to assemble a staff for the White House but nobody has offered me a job in the White House." "Oh, no, you've got it, you know that." I said, "No, that's not really good enough. The President-elect is going to have to ask me." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "When I go up to the Capitol, I want to be able to say, 'The President asked me to do this.' And I'm not going to take the job unless he asks me to take it." And Mack said, "You're serious, aren't you?" I said, "Absolutely dead serious." I wouldn't do it. If you get hired by the Chief of Staff and not hired by the President, your effectiveness on the Hill is diminished.

Clinton called. He offered. I accepted. We went about our business.

Riley: This was before inauguration?

Paster: Yes, it had to be. It was within a week of the inauguration.

Riley: That opens up a very interesting line of questions.

Paster: It was just before that press conference when they introduced it in Little Rock. You probably know the date of the press conference.

Riley: It was three or four days, because it was the trip—they came to Charlottesville.

Paster: But it was like two days before that press conference, we were all introduced in Little Rock.

Riley: You said that the transition had been handled brilliantly with respect to the Cabinet. But the conventional wisdom on this is that, notwithstanding that with the Cabinet, the bigger, long-term problem was created by not focusing on the staff at that time and you're basically confirming that in your case.

Paster: Yes, and there's also a problem created by the requirement that we really assemble the most diverse staff we could find, and finding people who met diversity standards who were world class took extra time.

Riley: When you say staff there, are you making a distinction between White House staff and Cabinet or staffing across—

Paster: I was talking in this case about the staff I had to hire, but I think it's a case across the board. Anybody who tries to tell you with a straight face that Hazel O'Leary was the most qualified person in the world to be Secretary of Energy in 1993 would be hard-pressed to do that. A nice lady, but most qualified person in America to be Secretary of Energy? It's like saying Clarence Thomas was the most qualified man for the Supreme Court. Neither one is close.

Riley: Can you tell us a little about what you were doing during the transition on managing the confirmation process for the Cabinet? You're not responsible—you're receiving decisions that the President has already made with respect to nominees or are you being consulted about who's sellable?

Paster: Mostly receiving. There was one interesting consultation. Clinton asked me about Lloyd Bentsen for Treasury. I said, "The problem with Bentsen for Treasury is [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan is Chairman of the Finance Committee. You can deal with Bentsen. Dealing with Moynihan is a whole other piece of work."

The President said to me, "Ah, but if we don't pick Bentsen, he'll be hard to deal with as Chairman of the Finance Committee," which was, of course, a wholly valid point. So you end up with this funny dilemma where you have this fellow who would be a good Treasury Secretary, who would be a really good chairman of the Finance Committee, but who if he didn't get to go to the Treasury Department might not be eager to be so helpful. But with the knowledge that the guy below him was going to be difficult.

So, in fact, I remember having that conversation with Clinton in the course of the transition. It was obviously a difficult one for him. But mostly I was given the announcements. Normally Christopher or one of his people would call me a few hours ahead of time, very little advance notice about the people. In some cases I learned about it on television.

Riley: Most of those decisions were made by Christmas, right? That was a pledge the President made.

Paster: Well, Christmas Eve was the last round, and Zoë Baird was in the last round. I assume you want to talk about Zoë Baird as a story. She was in that Christmas Eve list when they completed the Cabinet appointments. I remember vividly because she called me at my home

Christmas Eve night. My wife, for whom Christmas Eve is very important, looked at it as rather inappropriate.

Martin: Can I backtrack just a little? I'm really curious about your impressions of what Clinton knew or understood about Congress and how it worked. Starting from this first meeting you have with him, the 70-minute meeting.

Paster: I think Clinton's unfaltering belief in his ability to persuade anybody of anything gave him enormous confidence that he could work with the Congress. There is no better retail politician anywhere, ever. He is still the best lobbyist we ever had. The guy is remarkable. I'm a huge fan. So I think his confidence—"If I could just talk to them, they'll understand." His belief. "Let me talk to them." I think he sometimes wasn't seeing all the other political obstacles to getting the things he wanted done.

For example, fast-forward to right after the inauguration, the first bipartisan congressional leadership meeting in the White House. [Robert] Dole told him then, told us then, I'm sitting at the back of the room, you know how it works, next to the windows and the doors. They said, "If the economic plan has any revenue in it, there will be no Republican votes for it." Remember, these were the guys who felt George Bush had lost the election because he'd raised taxes. They told us, within a week of the inaugural, and you can check the date. You must have a chronology of every day in the administration, whatever the day of the first bipartisan leadership meeting was. They told us then that any revenue, any tax increases in the economic plan, there never would be a Republican vote for it. And they kept their word all through '93.

Clinton repeatedly tried to break that down and he never could. There was never a chance—it wasn't going to happen. But he just couldn't imagine that they would be so pigheaded that that would be the case. I think the President came in with more optimism about the ability to reason with Congress than probably was justified by the way Congress behaves.

Martin: Do you think he had a good sense of the personalities—

Paster: No.

Martin: —or turf protection of different members?

Paster: No, he didn't know a lot of the people. There's the famous dinner in Little Rock with Mitchell, Foley, and Gephardt, which was not a great success.

Riley: This was during the transition?

Paster: Yes, during the transition.

Riley: Were you invited?

Paster: No, no, I think it was before my appointment.

Riley: But you knew it was taking place.

Paster: I think it was the time around the economic summit, just the week before the summit if my chronology is right. No, I wasn't invited. I don't know that I took much umbrage at the time. The question is, could I have helped if I had been invited, because I knew all three of them well and got on with them all well. I don't know, but that was not successful.

Martin: How did you know that it wasn't successful?

Paster: Because I heard from the guys.

Martin: From the Congress side or from the—

Paster: From the Congress side. "He doesn't get it" was generally the theme. Mitchell was always the most open to Clinton and the best relationship certainly developed there. Gephardt was never unpleasant, but it was always a tad more awkward, and Foley in the middle.

Riley: Of those three, who would you have had the closest relationship with? Gephardt?

Paster: I supported Gephardt in '88 so that may well be the case, yes. Although I supported Mitchell, I actually encouraged Mitchell to run for leader back when—he was running the campaign committee and he had the successful '86 election. I went to see him and said, "You've got to run for leader." So I would say the two of them. I got along with all of them.

I mentioned that Christopher interviewed me and then I was invited down to meet Clinton. In the course of getting to know Christopher I asked him if all three had made me their first choice for the Congressional Relations job. He said, "You had two and a half votes." Two and maybe one had made me a tie for first. So they were my friends. These guys were wonderful. I worked with them all. But I think the fact that that dinner didn't go well, the fact that the President really overloaded the Congress with legislative agenda—which I think he himself in hindsight acknowledges, we talked about that once—reflected the tension between his optimism and energy and the way the place works.

Martin: You said earlier your impression is that he thought he could persuade anybody to follow policy or to go along with him. Did that reflect a sense of their own political base or individual Members of Congress's electoral calculus?

Paster: No, when I said that Clinton believed he could do this, I think it had to do with Clinton's belief in the power of reason and his ability to persuade people.

Martin: Did he have a sense of who was vulnerable, who was not, who could really—

Paster: I don't think he knew the districts as well in '92 as he did eight years later. No, clearly he didn't understand some of that. He knew some folks, but he didn't know most Members of Congress. I remember introducing him to many Democrats for the first time.

Martin: Did he seem interested in getting to know them?

Paster: Yes, enormously so. And if you went through the material you sent me, you'll see me talking about how many times he went to the Hill. Clinton was never a problem in terms of dealing with the Congress. I had trouble getting things on the schedule because of the other people who blocked it. But when I really had a hard time, I would just go around him. I said to Clinton one day, "Do you know Bill Natcher?" He said no. I said, "Chair of the Appropriations Committee." He said, "Get him down here." I went to see him. He was very formal. How you deal with Natcher is a very interesting thing. You go to his office: "Mr. Natcher." "Yes, Mr. Paster." "Mr. Chairman, the President asked me to extend an invitation." He had a wonderful meeting with Natcher, I remember.

I set up the initial key lunch with [Daniel] Rostenkowski, who after all is going to control so much of Clinton's fate through the economic plan and other pieces of it, the agenda including NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]. The three of us had lunch on the patio behind the Oval Office. And Lloyd Bentsen was livid when he found out about it because he hadn't been invited. I did it the way I did it deliberately because Clinton needed a personal relationship with Rostenkowski. I'm bouncing around trying to respond to your question with anecdotes.

Riley: Sure.

Paster: I got called into the Oval Office one day and the President and the Vice President and Bentsen were there. The President said, "The Secretary was terribly upset that we had the chairman down here to lunch." Bentsen said, "This really diminishes my ability to be the lead economic voice in the administration, to go around me like this." He's screaming and carrying on. I'm sitting there being humble. He leaves. The President said, "What do you have to say for yourself?" I said, "Dan Rostenkowski thinks that Lloyd Bentsen will always be the Chairman of the Finance Committee. If he'd been at the luncheon it would not have been as successful as it was." And Al Gore, thank you very much, said, "Howard's right, Mr. President." And the case was over.

I had to do end runs periodically. One thing I tried to get that I never got in the year I was there: I asked for a moderate Republican cocktail hour in the solarium. I don't know what access you have to all the memos down at Little Rock—none at all?

Riley: Not yet.

Paster: But someday you'll find a memo down there, one, two, three, four from me to McLarty and others, asking for that. We never did that outreach to moderate Republicans the way we should have done it. It was a clear weakness. It was fighting with the scheduling people and with McLarty. That's a long answer.

Riley: No, it was very illustrative and it's fine for us. I want to go back to that first meeting also and pose a couple of follow-ups.

Paster: My interview in Little Rock?

Riley: Yes. You mentioned that one of the issue areas was campaign finance reform.

Paster: Yes, absolutely.

Riley: That's something he raised?

Paster: Absolutely.

Riley: And your response to that was?

Paster: I agreed with him on the need for it. It was something that obviously had been a key issue in the '92 campaign, the President-elect had it on his mind. I said to him, "The truth is I'm in the middle of this. I'm a maximum giver to Democrats. My wife and I give as much as the law allows every year, and we have huge problems with the system. We need public financing. But if you do a half breed without full public financing, the Republicans will beat us." But it was an issue he focused on. He raised it at the first Democratic-only leadership meeting. When we got into the White House I'd asked and they agreed to put on a full bipartisan issue meeting as early as possible, and then the following week we had a Democratic leadership-only meeting and we alternated them as best we could through the year.

At the first Democratic meeting he brought up the issue, and Tom Foley was emphatic in his opposition to campaign finance reform and made it clear that if we pushed it, it was going to be a problem. It became a source of controversy over the year. In his book Mike Waldman was very critical of me on this issue. We needed Foley and it's absolutely true that at different times I tried to discourage those in the White House who were pushing campaign finances reform from doing so lest we anger the Speaker. It was absolutely true that I felt upsetting the Speaker on this was a mistake in light of the whole legislative agenda.

Riley: Sure.

Paster: NAFTA was a good example, because we were losing Gephardt and [David] Bonior, we really needed the Speaker. Whether I was right is a very difficult question. With hindsight, I'm not sure I was right in trying to push campaign reform away. I don't know. I don't know how Foley would have reacted if we really tested him on it, or how we could have tested him on it. It's an interesting question. If we tested him on the campaign finance instead of guns, there might have been a different reaction.

Riley: Were there other issues that you recall you discussed with the President at that time? Is he sort of vetting with you at that point a provisional legislative program?

Paster: No, no, no, I think he was testing me. I think one reason he brought up campaign finance reform was because I was one of the lobbyists he wasn't necessarily embracing. There's an article in the package you sent me about how he hired the guy he inveighed against in the campaign, not by name but by profession. So he may have brought that up simply to test me, I don't know. No, I think it was more personal conversation. We talked a little about some of the

personalities on the Hill. He had lunch during the interview, I remember that vividly. Big lunch. I thought it was lunch for two of us, although I'd already had lunch. He ate it all. I think it was from Doe's.

Riley: This is a consistent theme through your time there?

Paster: His eating?

Riley: Yes.

Paster: It's wonderful. I had this wonderful office, which became the congressional office when Frank Moore came to the White House and Mondale got the West Wing office. That is the one the Vice President now occupies. Now Congressional Relations has a wonderful office on the second floor, it's huge. Susan Brophy was my deputy and Tim Keating was my principal assistant and the first week we had trays from the mess. We were sitting at the table in my office going over stuff and all of a sudden Clinton and Gore walked in. They had taken a tour of the West Wing. They hadn't been through all the offices. So they just wandered in the office and started chatting. Son of a gun if he didn't reach down and start eating the french fries off the tray, just like on *Saturday Night Live*. I thought it was life imitating art.

Riley: The question posed about Clinton's relationship with the Hill, again we're going to bounce all over the place today coming back and forth. One of the things you occasionally hear from people who studied Clinton is that after all, here was a guy who did have some Hill experience.

Paster: Very limited.

Riley: You're turning your nose up at the suggestion.

Paster: He spent a little time there with [William] Fulbright years ago. With all respect, that's not the kind of Hill experience that makes a difference. I think he was wonderful. You're not going to get me criticizing Clinton. I remain a huge fan to this day. But he didn't have the intimate knowledge of where the pressure points were, nor did he understand the intimacy of the Congress. Frankly, one of the issues we had was that there were so few people around who did. The only really senior soul mate I had was Leon Panetta.

If you want to go back and look at who was in the Cabinet and where they were, I had the most Washington experience of anybody in the West Wing. If you made a list of all the people, assistants to the President and deputy assistant to the President level, I had the most years in Washington. Certainly had the most years on Capitol Hill, I'd been there my whole life. But go through the Cabinet. Chris obviously had been in Washington in the Carter and the Clinton years and was very sophisticated, but that was a step away. Les Aspin came off the Hill and yet was curiously insensitive. One reason gays in the military got screwed up was because, I believe, Les Aspin told the President-elect before the inaugural, "They can't get to us on this." He was totally insensitive to the fact that nongermane amendments were in order in the Senate. He was thinking about the House.

Martin: It seems unbelievable almost.

Paster: But the failure to anticipate a nongermane amendment on the first Senate bill that moved, I'm convinced, based on—there was a Sunday-night meeting before the inaugural at Blair House that Aspin had with Clinton. I think if you check the record, you'll find that that's the case. I think Les simply miscalculated.

If you fast-forward after the problem in Somalia, there's a time when I take Aspin and Chris to the Hill to meet with the unhappy Democrats and Les didn't have anything to say. He excoriated me later and I said, "I assumed you'd have come with something to say." No, Leon understood. Leon had it. He was my soul mate, but there weren't a lot of folks there who understood that place.

Martin: What about George Stephanopoulos? He had some Hill experience.

Paster: Yes, and very helpful, fairly specific to the House, to Democrats. He was in touch with Gephardt and Gephardt's staff all the time and other House Democrats. George was certainly an ally and a friend. Fairly specific, I'd have to say in that respect, but yes, George was good.

Riley: Let's come back if we can, and we'll probably go through the roster and pick up on this line, but I want to go back into the transition period and make sure we cover everything thoroughly there. Again, going back to this question about Clinton's own innate confidence. My assumption is that some of this just relates to his own confidence in his ability to sell himself as a retail politician.

Paster: Correct.

Riley: Some of it also relates to his success in Arkansas?

Paster: Yes, I think it relates to his success in Arkansas, it relates to his success in getting elected. He'd proven, in the process of getting elected, that he knew how to sell.

Riley: Do you recall any other issue areas that came up during your discussions with him in this first meeting?

Paster: I don't.

Riley: Health care?

Paster: I don't.

Riley: More generally, did it strike you or anybody as unusual—you said you were a labor guy—that Clinton, who had marketed himself as a New Democrat, was looking to a labor guy to take a key position in the administration?

Paster: Well, I don't think that's how they thought of me. I think they thought of me as a Democratic business lobbyist. I think the biggest problem they had with me was my business ties. So they didn't think of me the other way. It came to be an issue later. [John] Breaux and [David] Boren clearly did not like me and felt I was pulling the President left. My background became relevant.

During the campaign, Clinton promised the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] that he would reinstate the PATCO [Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization] workers who were fired more than a decade earlier by Ronald Reagan.

Riley: Yes.

Paster: So one time, I don't remember when it was, you can check the calendar, there ends up being this meeting in the Roosevelt Room with a cast of thousands, to discuss how they're going to meet the President's pledge. Now, it's all symbolic. These people were going about their lives, it's been more than a decade since they had been fired. Maybe if somebody had other federal employment workers reinstated, it might matter for pension maybe, but it was a much more symbolic, pro-labor statement. And a bunch of these bureaucrats were finding all the problems with doing this.

I said, "No, no, he made this commitment, we've got to honor the commitment." Back and forth, back and forth. And someone said, "What do you want us to do?" I said, "I think you ought to fire the scabs and give the people their jobs back." They went, "Ohhh." Terrible.

Jimmy Carter had a guy named Landon Butler in the White House whose job was liaison with labor. I was working at the UAW at the time. I'd see Landon maybe every other week. Frank Moore would have me and Ken Young and Andy Biemiller come into the White House once a week over the legislative agenda. There was a much more active labor liaison in the Carter White House than there was in the Clinton White House. So I carried a lot of that and the guys used me. They would call me. They would send a message.

Riley: Was it your perception that experience in the Carter administration was a prohibiting factor in hiring people or in people being hired into the Clinton White House?

Paster: Warren Christopher would seem to belie that, wouldn't he?

Riley: That's true, and Tom Donilon with him and I guess Madeleine Albright.

Paster: She was in the Carter White House.

Riley: But if you set the foreign policy establishment aside—

Paster: Tony Lake. I never thought about it. If it was policy, it never became apparent to me.

Riley: I think that's important.

Paster: It may have been. One thing I remember, maybe I'll back up. I was never an insider. I hadn't been in the campaign. I wasn't part of the war room in Little Rock. [Paul] Begala and [James] Carville and [Mandy] Grunwald, [Stanley] Greenberg looked at me askance. I was a newcomer. There was inside stuff going on all the time I wasn't part of.

Riley: Those are the people who looked on you as a corporate person?

Paster: Yes, there's some stuff in the public record about that. I also thought it was inappropriate for them to have White House passes and have private sector jobs. I was outspoken about that on the record.

Riley: Right.

Paster: So there were conversations, and whether or not the Carter folks were somehow excluded, I mean, there were conversations I wasn't a part of.

Riley: During the period of time in the transition when you were managing the confirmation process, were you also actively talking with the people who were putting together the White House staff?

Paster: Very little of that was going on. I was asked to assemble a White House staff and then George Mitchell called up and said, "Your Senate liaison will be…" and that was [Steven] Ricchetti and I said, "Yes, it will. If you say so, it's good enough for me." So I was assembling the Congressional Relations staff.

Riley: But that would have been later or—?

Paster: I started December first; I was working on staff by Christmastime certainly.

Riley: So a core part of your responsibility was putting together the Congressional Liaison [CL] staff as well as managing the confirmation of Cabinet people.

Paster: Yes, presumably it was going to be my staff although it wasn't confirmed until late that it was going to be my staff.

Riley: So the deputies were all in place by the time you were appointed. Am I understanding that correctly?

Paster: Not by the time of the Little Rock press conference. By the time we got to the White House it was pretty much finished. I think there were one or two slots we filled later. But the Ricchetti spot was filled, the Brophy spot was filled, the Tim Keating spot was filled. Lorraine Miller had House liaison. I'm not sure the second we picked on Lorraine. I had trouble getting that one sorted through. Then we took a bunch of young staff people left from the campaign as staff assistants.

Riley: Okay.

Paster: And Paul Carey, who was on the Senate liaison staff, was the only person I hired who didn't have Hill experience as a lobbyist because a number of people, including Ken Brody, said you must do this, and Harold Ickes said I must do this.

Riley: I guess what I'm trying to make sure I understand clearly for the record is that the Congressional Liaison title was something that people were presuming you were going to be responsible for. It was with that understanding that you were proceeding to put together a staff for that operation. That's correct?

Paster: I expected I'd get the job and I was told to start putting together a staff. I'd been told by Christopher, Jordan, McLarty, some combination of them, to do that. I was doing that on the assumption that I would get the job. But I insisted on formalizing how I got the job.

Riley: So at the same time you're doing that you're also beginning the business of managing the confirmation process.

Paster: Yes.

Riley: Were those responsibilities to end on Inauguration Day or again, was part of the assumption that you're going to get rolling on this now and—

Paster: One of the delicacies was that Susan had done Congressional Relations in the campaign, and she was head of Congressional Relations in the transition. So theoretically I was working for her in the transition. At some point, the issue of how we would shift responsibilities came up. It worked and we've been friends to this day.

The Cabinet confirmation thing was organized in a fairly straightforward manner. We were able to take volunteers, you know how that works. For each person selected we had a personal handler, a substance person, a Congressional Relations person, and a media person. As soon as we had a nominee or more properly a designee, we'd get him or her into the conference room at the transition. We'd have the lawyers who did the vet there, then we'd have the team assembled. Tim was always with me.

We'd talk about what issues might arise. Then we'd talk about process. I'd talk to them about what they could and couldn't do and how you had to respect the Senate. We'd talk about courtesy calls. We'd set up a system of courtesy calls. We were doing 30, 40 calls on the Hill a day. Different people seeing multiple people. We had a great bit of work, it worked. We got it done.

Riley: Did you invent this from scratch or did you go back and ask people who had done—

Paster: It's just common sense. If you understand that the whole nature of the process is to respect the Senate, the easiest way to get through the process is to respect the Senate, follow the Senate process. It's really not complicated at all, it's very straightforward. Trent Lott later on

would say, “I don’t know how you got Ron Brown past me so easily.” It really wasn’t complicated.

Then you’d talk about how they’d have to behave at hearings. Remember now, we have Democrats controlling the Congress, a different time and place. So we had all these hearings done before the inaugural. They can’t vote until they have nomination papers. They can’t have nomination papers until you have an inaugural. The practice was the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Treasury get confirmed as soon as possible after the inaugural, and they did those the afternoon of the 20th. They did all the others on the 21st. Voice voted, unanimously, and everybody was sworn in on the 22nd with the exception of the Attorney General. But it was a cooperative crowd, great help from the Senate and Senate leadership.

I remember talking to them about how you’re supposed to behave at a hearing. I said to Bob Reich, “The best hearing is a dull hearing.” Bob Reich said to me, “I have spent my entire life trying not to be dull.” I said, “Give me two hours of dull. Just give me two hours of dull and I’ll make you Secretary.” He said, “It’s against my nature.” I said, “Please, two hours.” I had coffee with him the morning of his hearing because I was just afraid he might not be so dull, but he was good, he was good.

Riley: So he cooperated with you?

Paster: He cooperated.

Riley: Were there any wrinkles in the others? Were there particular instances where red flags popped up?

Paster: The Henry Cisneros case was talked about many years ago. After we had these large meetings, I would ask the designee to come into my office and I’d say, “Is there anything else you want to tell me without everybody else in the room?” Henry told me he paid this woman. I didn’t ask him how much, but he told me he paid the woman. He said, “What do you suggest?” I said, “Okay, we’re cool, as long as you’re not withholding anything.” He got in trouble later on the amount, but he told me about it.

Riley: Did you get a sense that that was—

Paster: A big deal? No. I think the most difficult thing I had in the transition with the individuals in the Cabinet was Mike Espy, wasn’t paying close attention. He screwed around with the disclosure rules, his staff was not helpful. I’m glad he was acquitted but not surprised he was indicted. He was difficult, he really was.

Riley: And in the Cisneros case, was it your sense that he was just being careless or that he was calculating?

Paster: I don’t know. I assumed it had to do with his wife finding out how much money he’d given the woman, so that was the issue. Henry’s my friend these days. Why the sum wasn’t right I don’t know.

Riley: It's a curious omission. You would think that the fundamental—

Paster: Having admitted to the payment, why not reveal the correct amount. I don't know, I have no idea why. What I do know is that Al D'Amato said later—this is part of the defense when they came after him—that if he'd known the amount, he would not have changed his support. So in some sense it was unnecessary.

Martin: What are you hearing back from the Senate during this period?

Paster: The only thing the Senate cared about was patronage. Everybody was cooperative on the confirmation process. Every committee chairman was being enormously helpful, we're getting all the courtesy calls done. If you think about it, [Sam] Nunn might have preferred to be Secretary of Defense, but he wasn't going to screw with Aspin, it wasn't going to happen. Everybody loved Warren Christopher, there was no controversy with Christopher. We had elaborate disclosure on potential conflicts and things they'd done in their private lives. This was the Ross Perot time and we were just transparent about stuff.

I had one funny incident. Ron Brown was going to get paid out over time from his equity position in the Patton Boggs law firm. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "They're going to be sending money each year." I said, "No, no. We can't have you getting money each year from the Patton Boggs law firm when you're Secretary of Commerce." He said, "Well, it's a fixed sum, it's not—" I said, "I don't care. You can't take checks from them." He said, "They don't keep cash around to pay off partners. That's how it's always done." I went to see Tom Boggs and Tim May and I said, "Guys, I need you to give Ron his full payout." I don't know where I got the nerve to do this. But I had known Tom for many years. He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "It's not going to be good for you or him if he's Secretary of Commerce and he's getting checks annually for his equity position in the firm." "That's how we always do this."

"Guys, pay him." "We don't keep cash." "Borrow. Pay him, please." And they did. Because I didn't want to go to a hearing and the issue is, "Mr. Brown, do you have any lingering interest in the law firm?" The answer is, "I won't on the 20th of January." Otherwise it's terrible. What was the question?

Martin: The feedback you're getting from the Senate during this period.

Paster: I was going to go to patronage. In term of the confirmation of the Cabinet there were no significant issues. What they really cared about was U.S. attorneys, U.S. marshals, district court judges, appellate court judges, this is what they cared about. The Democrats with long memories felt that Jimmy Carter had gone a little too far on the side of merit. So Mitchell called me and said, "The Caucus wants to get policy. What's the deal?" So I got hold of Warren Christopher and I said, "What's the story?" He said, "Give me a proposal." I sent a note down to Little Rock, and they didn't fiddle with it. He said, "Thank you, you're good to go." So I told Mitchell I would be happy to come up to the caucus. So that's what they really care about. I went up and met with the caucus and, you've got to remember, I'm still a private sector lobbyist on loan. Now

I've got 55 Senate Democrats listening to me in their private caucus. It's a heady experience. I'm not so callous that I don't think that's a big deal.

I took them through the whole process, how I was going to work it and so on. The incident of that occasion that I remember vividly, and I've told the story many times since, is that I said in the case of marshals, district court judges, and U.S. attorneys, if there was one Democratic Senator, there was a good chance that his or her wishes would be respected. Two Democratic Senators, if they could agree, would help enormously. I said, "If you're willing to give us more than one name it would be very helpful. Two or three names we'd be satisfied with. But if you give us only white men, we can't honor all your requests. The President-elect during the campaign spoke repeatedly of a government that reflects the population." I forget the words he used, "representative of the country." I said, "So please keep that in mind. If all of you only send us white men, we're not going to be able to accommodate all your wishes."

Appellate court judge is a whole other thing, multistate jurisdiction. Do states own different seats or not, that's a tough issue—and we had back-and-forth exchanges, how it's going to work, who they give it to, and so forth. Moynihan stood up and said, "Mr. Paster." I said, "Yes, Senator." He said, "You're Jewish, aren't you?" I said, "Yes, Senator." He said, "Do you know that in the 1930s there were quotas on the number of Jews in universities in Germany?" "Yes, Senator." He said, "What you've just described about this appointment process sounds very much like a quota system. You can't be for quotas, can you, Mr. Paster?" I said, "Senator, there are no quotas." Then I gave him the answer: representative of America, but no quotas. It was a really weird experience. All the other Senators were silent.

That afternoon I was back in my office at the transition office up on Vermont Avenue and Mitchell called. He said he was rather embarrassed by Senator Moynihan and he was the host of it. I said, "Senator, don't worry about it." And then [Edward] Kennedy called too to apologize. A very funny experience.

But patronage, now that's important.

Riley: But the issues in terms of what was going to be—

Paster: Policy issues? The legislative agenda? Sure, but it was secondary to, "Can my guy get this regional HUD [Housing and Urban Development] job? Can you get this guy a job?" Employment took precedence over substance at that time. At least it did for me. Now there were the transition teams working on substance for each of the departments, and maybe they were getting more stuff in the committees. But for me, the transition was much more about jobs than about substance.

Riley: There was a lot of pent-up demand.

Paster: Twelve years.

Martin: With the exception of Moynihan, were the Senators happy with what Clinton was doing?

Paster: Yes, Clinton's plan was actually giving them greater authority than Carter had. We were bowing a little bit more to the Senate prerogatives.

Martin: So from your impression—

Paster: Let me just say this before we go on. Remember, I'm going to be the guy who advocates for the Hill to the administration. I got in trouble for doing that, people were complaining from time to time, but I would have argued, "Let's try and respect Senate prerogatives as much as we possibly can. It makes more sense." I think they were my constituents, frankly.

Martin: At this period of time, do you think you have started off right with the Senate?

Paster: Yes, I think we were in very good shape with the Senate going in. Democratic Senators, Republican Senators were fine on confirmations. I was getting along well with Bob Dole at the time. Trent Lott was ranking on Commerce and he let Ron Brown through. I think we were on a good roll.

I'm looking at the clock. We've got to leave the transition behind at some point.

Riley: Yes, of course.

Paster: I've got to talk about Zoë Baird.

Riley: Okay.

Paster: It really is an important story.

Riley: Absolutely, go ahead.

Paster: I never heard her name until Christmas Eve, '92. She gets designated. She called me that night. I said, "I have my family here." I'm Jewish, my wife is not. So I said, "It's Christmas, I'll call you tomorrow." We spoke Christmas Day. That day or the next day Lanny Davis called. Lanny had chaired the vetting for Zoë Baird. He said, "You've got a problem with Baird." I said, "What's the problem?" He said, "She employs illegal aliens and hasn't paid their household employee taxes." I said, "Oh, shit."

Riley: She 'fesses this up to him or he's discovered it?

Paster: It came out during the vetting, and it was acknowledged during the vetting. I don't know whether it was because they found it or asked. It was one of the questions, I think.

Riley: Sure.

Paster: Her husband, remember, is a professor at Yale Law School. She's general counsel of a large insurance company. Two pretty smart, big-shot lawyers. I think to myself, *Oh, I don't like*

this, I don't like this. So I caused there to be a conference call to involve Zoë and Paul and Mack McLarty, maybe Christopher and Jordan, I forget, because they were co-chairmen of the transition. I said on the call that I was very concerned this might be a problem in confirmation. I needed to understand the issues better. It was causing concern.

We talked about it on this conference call. This would have been around the 26th, 27th. When it finished, I got McLarty separately on the phone. I said, "I think this is a huge problem. I may be wrong but I'm really anxious about this."

Riley: Based on—

Paster: Purely on instinct.

Riley: Your knowledge but not because anybody's—

Paster: It just struck me that sending up an Attorney General with those kinds of flaws, it was obvious to me. So he said to me, "Look, there's a lawyer in Little Rock the President-elect has enormous faith in. I'll tell him to expect a call. You call him and let's see what he says." He gave me the name and number for Vince Foster. It's the first time I ever spoke to Vince.

I called Vince after waiting an hour. McLarty wanted to call him first. I said, "Here's the story." Vince researched the case history on employing illegals for household help and not paying household employee taxes. He reported back that it's not a problem. In these cases people simply have to pay a civil penalty. Sometimes back taxes with interest, some penalty, they just write the check and it goes away.

I said, "How many of these people were nominated to be Attorney General?" But what happened was, Zoë went down to Renaissance Weekend and the President-elect went to Renaissance Weekend and he said he would stay with her and we were off to the races. It was an interesting thing for me. I got to know Vince, obviously, before his suicide. We spent six months together anyhow. Fine lawyer, good mind, nice person, sad tragedy, but he asked the wrong questions. This is what always happens. If you ask the strict legal definition and not the political question, you get in trouble. I'm not critical of Vince because there's no way he would have known to ask the other question or how to evaluate it. But it was the failure to see beyond the narrow case history to the politics of that.

Riley: The presumptive Chief of Staff had channeled it to him.

Paster: But Mack had an inadequate political background. That's one reason we didn't get on. We'll get to that eventually I assume. You have to have been an old man, what was I then, I was going to be 48, I was an old guy. I'm not smarter than anybody else. I'd just lived in Washington longer than other people. That's all. No claim to have brilliant insight, just lived here longer. Lanny understood for the same reason. Lanny gave me the heads up because he was a lawyer lobbyist in Washington. He had the same antenna twitching that I did. That's why he called me at home to give me a heads up. That's something I think insiders would have naturally that outsiders wouldn't initially pick up.

Riley: So you're then asked to sell damaged goods.

Paster: Yes. Why did this happen? Because she was very busy and she trusted her husband to handle these matters. Oh, the law professor at Yale didn't know the law either? I mean, if her husband were a supermarket manager and she entrusted him to handle it, maybe. He was a law professor, a famous law professor. So it was flawed. I don't know how we could have saved that.

Riley: So that gets scuttled a couple of days after the inauguration, if I recall?

Paster: Was it the next day or the day after? It was within two or three days. Yes, and then what happened, she was on the Hill, she was getting the hell beat out of her. Biden and Mitchell were telling us it's a no-go. The President sent Bernie Nussbaum meanwhile up to the hearing. On a recess at the hearing I went up and spoke to the members of the committee and they were very negative, very unhappy. Ultimately Biden and Mitchell called the President and said, "You have to—"

Riley: There was an account in the briefing materials that indicated that she was over at Wilmer Cutler [Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale & Dorr] and—

Paster: At night. We go up there, the hearing, it gets later in the day. She goes back to Wilmer Cutler and it goes into the night. I'm thinking it was the 21st but you've got to check. Before we finish this, I want to tell you a wonderful Bill Clinton story in the process. We go into the night and she's going to withdraw, but if there's an exchange of letters it helps ease the pain. So we're working into the night now on letters back and forth. Letters she writes to him asking that her name be withdrawn voluntarily, which he accepts and he praises her. We're exchanging draft texts, working out of George's office, as I recall. We're going back and forth. It's getting later and later at night.

Eventually Clinton wanders back from the Residence, and we closed it off 10:30, 11, 12 o'clock. It was late. We cut the deal.

I don't know if you know this, but every night a bunch of people come in and clean the White House, the way you wish your house was cleaned sometimes. The cleaning crew is in there and they roll up the rug in the Oval Office every night, vacuuming. I mean it's *clean*. The cleaning crew comes in to work and he goes in there in his running suit, it's 12 or 1 o'clock at night. They're all startled and he goes around to say hello to each of them, introduces himself, "Hi, I'm the President." I don't think these people ever met a President in their life. He worked the crowd, it was beautiful. These folks were so thrilled to meet him, it was just wonderful.

Think what he's been through the last three or four days of his life, President of the United States, all of these things going around, just went in and treated them so nicely. It's just the way he was. He was always that way.

Riley: Anything else on Baird?

Paster: The windup on Zoë Baird is okay, she withdraws. Bernie finds Kimba Wood, which was really wonderful, then he finds Janet Reno, which was worse yet, except she got confirmed.

Riley: You want to elaborate on that?

Paster: Bernie could pick them, I'll tell you. Some months later, Rosa DeLauro called me from the Hill. You know Rosa. Her and Stan's house in New Haven is right next to Paul [Gewirtz] and Zoë's, they're good friends. She said, "You've got to give something to Zoë." I said yes. She said, "You realize the Presidential Foreign Intelligence Advisor Board doesn't require confirmation?" So I said, "I'll take care of it." I told Zoë, "The President wanted to give you the nonconfirmable thing as a gesture of appreciation and respect."

Riley: Consolation prize.

Paster: I don't know who gave Rosa the idea, whether it was Zoë herself or one of her advocates. I thought it was Warren Christopher. I thought he might have taken initiative on it.

Martin: Is there any follow-up in the Senate on the Zoë Baird withdrawal?

Paster: I think a bunch of Senators were surprised that she'd been sent up, because while she was qualified it's the same problem. Am I going to convince anybody that she's the most qualified person in America to be Attorney General? She had some key advocates, Lloyd Cutler, which is why she spent her night at Wilmer Cutler Pickering with the late Lloyd Cutler. Warren Christopher was an advocate for her. But the conviction on the Hill, fairly or not, that she was chosen because she was a woman and that this problem had been glossed over, not taken seriously enough, I think made them wary.

Riley: And she's a young woman too at the time. Was she younger than you?

Paster: Everybody was, Clinton and Gore. They still are.

Martin: It made them wary about her or about dealing with Clinton?

Paster: I wouldn't say about dealing with Clinton, that's too strong. I'd say made them wary about the decision process that had gotten them into this mess.

Riley: Now you're also having responsibility for Cabinet nominees that's going to carry over. You'll be doing sub-Cabinets as well throughout, although I guess that work is farmed out to your—

Paster: The way it worked once we got there was it was farmed out except for the troubled or difficult nominations. There were some that came to me.

Riley: Let's go back and pick up on the line on putting together your operation, which we started on. You were telling us about appointing the deputies for CR [Congressional Relations] staff.

You said on a couple of occasions you were told from the Hill, you were given strong encouragement—

Paster: It was my decision, my decision entirely. My decision was that if George Mitchell thought Steve Ricchetti was the right person, then I thought he was the right person and you know what? He was the right person. It was absolutely dead right.

Riley: Did you have pretty much a free hand from other people in the White House or—

Paster: The White House was interested in making sure that a bunch of the really bright kids who had been on the campaign got picked up in staff assistant jobs. And we did pick up several of them and they were superb and I was delighted to have them. I think that was the only sort of pressure. The intention was to get people with Hill experience, Paul Carey being the sole exception.

The structure is you have a Senate guy, you have a House person, turns out she's a woman, they each have three under them. Then you have staff assistants, then you have a correspondence unit over there.

Riley: You basically inherited this structure and maintained it.

Paster: I inherited a basic structure. There's flexibility, you can set it up a little bit more by House or Senate, a little bit more by subject area. For example, we had a guy named Al Maldon who was a former liaison officer from the military to the Hill. So he'd done Hill work, but he was a retired officer, a colonel. I used him on national security stuff on House and Senate so he could cross over, he had a specialization. The woman who did budget also crossed over—this is the Congressional Relations staff—

Riley: We're looking at the picture on the wall.

Paster: Barbara Chow was a budget specialist so she walked back and forth over to the House and Senate. But what I did inherit was a commitment to cut the White House staff, which was made during the campaign, and I had too little staff. It was always an issue. We had too few people. It was always a fight. The head count was inadequate.

Riley: At what level were you losing?

Paster: The lobbyist level, not the Deputy Assistant, but the Special Assistant level.

Riley: But there weren't any great innovations in your shop internally in terms of—

Paster: No, I didn't do anything radical.

Riley: There were some shared assistants in your shop with the NSC [National Security Council] or—

Paster: No, no, we worked with their folks, but they hired their own people and the Vice President's staff was part of our— This picture was a going-away picture. I'm looking at the wall here, a picture of me with the President in the Oval Office with the people who worked for me in '93. You'll see the Vice President's staff was in there, Thurgood Marshall and the people who worked with him, because they were an extension of our operation.

Riley: So, you're—

Paster: Why don't we take a break?

[**BREAK**]

Paster: I can tell stories all day long, but history?

Riley: History is stories.

Paster: Is it?

Riley: It's oral history, it's a mix of both.

Paster: I'll waste all our time telling these anecdotes.

Riley: Believe me, it's not a waste of time.

Martin: It gets pieced together and there's a pattern or something interesting.

Riley: Absolutely. In fact, if you look—

Paster: I'll answer any question you want, but if you want to cut me short, I will not be offended. I want this to be productive for you.

Riley: It has already been productive. Before I left Charlottesville, Chuck Jones sent me a list of things that he said he had contemplated asking you, and the first line was, "The stories on these major events of the first year are as important as anything else."

Paster: I've got a lot of stories.

Riley: Splendid. You had a follow-up about the transition, something we'd missed. Then I promise we'll leave it behind.

Martin: This isn't necessarily the transition, but in the early period, we talked a little bit about Clinton's understanding of Congress to start with. I was hoping to get your take on the flip side of the congressional leaders' understanding of how to work with a Democratic President.

Paster: The changeover in 12 years, in terms of the number of Democrats who had been in Congress with a Democratic President, was remarkable. I forget the statistics. They're

somewhere in these documents. But most of the guys on the Hill had not had a Democratic President to work with. There was the need to relinquish some of the independence they had when they were challenging a Republican President, Reagan, then Bush. The notion that one needs to get in line and cooperate with and support a Democrat when he was in the White House was something a little alien to them, and it took some getting used to.

It was somewhat complicated. I think everybody thought he was charming. He didn't make some of the same gaffes that Carter had made that showed a sort of arrogance toward the Hill, which was really so profound in '77. You didn't see that in '92. There were gaffes for sure, gays in the military being the most obvious one in my mind. But he didn't stumble the same way Carter did on the way in.

Yet they were all just a little wary. "I'm going to be less important as a chairman because I have to take something from a Democratic President, whereas if it were a Republican President, I could just go head to head with him and negotiate." So they actually lost some power. I was thinking about this last night and I was going through this desk to look for a memo I wrote to Mack McLarty. I don't know where this memo is, maybe in this file here—

Riley: If you've got it, and you don't mind parting with a copy of it, we'd love to have it.

Paster: Yours is an oral history and I have here a memo I wrote to Mack McLarty on January 15, 1993. It's too long to read, I think.

Riley: Could we append a copy to the transcript?

Paster: I've never given this to anybody so let me look at it. Let's see, in response to the point we were just making, "Less than 30 percent of congressional Democrats have ever served with a Democratic President." Okay, I think it's important to bear in mind. "The congressional leadership has many difficulties, but perhaps the most difficult is working with the party leader in the White House after 12 years of leading the party from Capitol Hill. Powerful chairs with names like Rostenkowski, [Jack] Brooks, and Dingell, Biden, [John] Johnston, and [Robert] Byrd are being asked to give back a portion of their power and to follow the lead of a youthful former Governor of a small state."

Riley: I'm telling you, Howard, for our purposes, as well as for your purposes and the position that you hold in the administration, it is very important that that information be available to people so that they understand you knew that and were trying to communicate that to the President.

Paster: I bet Mack never showed this to the President. That's part of my problem. I don't think a lot of the stuff got through to the man.

Riley: Look at it.

Paster: We're going to have lunch in a little while. Let me look at it and I think I'll give it to you.

Martin: Of those leaders you just mentioned, were some of them more willing to give up a little power and work with a Democratic President than others? At least behind the scenes, things that we wouldn't have heard through the press.

Paster: One of the things that happened, when Clinton had a chance to woo them, some really lined up. I talked about Rostenkowski. The lunch that Bentsen didn't come to was profound, it really was. I mentioned Natcher. I went to see Natcher. He's very formal. Great dignity about him. "Mr. Chairman, the President has asked me to extend an invitation for you to come and visit with him, at a time, of course, when the House is not voting." Natcher had this unbroken voting record. "Mr. Paster, I'd be delighted to meet with the President." I said, "Simply tell us what day is convenient for you. We'll accommodate your schedule and the House schedule."

So he comes in and I was in the West Lobby to greet him and the guard called me when he came in the gate and I was there. I took him into the reception. We go in and the President is brilliant. He asks all the right questions. I give him a two-paragraph note and he's superb. At some point in the conversation Natcher leaned over and said, "You're my ninth President, and I will make sure you succeed."

I said to Clinton one time that there were few guys left on the Hill who commanded more votes than just their own. One of them was Jack Murtha. "Bring him down." I got Jack down there one day and the two of them are sitting on the yellow chairs and I'm sitting on the sofa minding my own business. The President said, "You hungry?" Hits the button for the steward, there's apple pie. The two of them are sitting there with apple pie on their knees. Jack went on to love Bill Clinton. If Bill Clinton had a chance to talk to people and do that kind of stuff, the answer is yes, there were people who were willing to take their power and trade some of it in to help him succeed. Absolutely yes. Some more than others, some less than others. But yes. It required some wooing. This is January '93, this note I just read. He wasn't in office yet. They weren't going to just lie down for him. Could he earn their favor? Sure.

Martin: One of my next questions was just that one about key members of the House or the Senate you thought were important in terms of persuading, who would carry other votes, Murtha you mentioned being one of them.

Paster: The problem was by 1993 we had too much democracy in the Congress. There weren't a lot of folks who could deliver votes other than their own. Murtha was one, Dingell and Rostenkowski were others. But it was a relatively short list of people, as a practical matter, which is why there was so much retail trading. If you go through the history of the year, you'll see there were deals cut individually with people for NAFTA votes or for economic votes, and it's because there weren't a whole lot of folks who could go get groups of votes. It was really tough stuff to do and even more so in the Senate obviously.

Riley: Did you have a strategy then? If you're having to retail with 535 members, did you come in with some kind of plan for the first year about how you were going to get him access to these members or were you going to do it on an ad hoc basis?

Paster: It was more ad hoc because it was issue driven. Some folks, including Clinton and McLarty, had lingering hopes that they might get Republican votes for the economic plan. I never believed it. I took them at their word. So we had the entire Democratic caucus of the House through the White House around the economic plan, in different-sized groups for briefings. We had all the Democrats on the Senate Armed Services Committee down to the White House for a separate meeting on gays in the military. Somebody I consulted with before I went there, I had the advantage of talking to—Bill Timmons, my former partner, had been a White House Congressional Liaison; Ken Duberstein, my former partner, had been a White House Congressional Liaison. I got on well with Nick Calio, so I was getting counsel from Republicans. I should say, I also had a former partner, Bill Cable, who had been a Congressional Liaison in the Carter years.

Along the way, somebody said to me, "Whenever you invite Members of Congress to the White House, have a defined group. Don't ever pick names randomly. It's all the Democrats on this committee, it's a bipartisan group of that committee, it's the class of '92, it's the freshmen, it's the sophomores, but don't ever have a group to see the President that you can't say to somebody who says, 'Why wasn't I invited?' Well, that was only the group of '92." It was very good advice. I tried to follow that rule as closely as I could. Nobody could be slighted because they weren't in a particular category or group. But no, there wasn't a general one.

Now Clinton did, and it's in the material you've given me here for the meeting, he did go to the Hill more in the first year, according to the records, than any President in modern history. At the Hofstra meeting I mentioned the gym dinner, which was a great example. I think it was Natcher in that meeting, who asked me to come to the gym dinner. I think Natcher was head of the House gym. The President said he wanted to meet some Congressmen. Natcher said, "Perhaps you'd come to the gym dinner we have." The President said sure. So he and I went up some weeks later to the Longworth Cafeteria for a dinner for the House gym that they have every year. It's just a good times dinner.

I remember vividly going up with him to a Republican caucus that [Robert] Michel invited him to around the time of Michel's birthday. We had arranged for a birthday cake to be rolled into the caucus, and I sent somebody over to a sporting goods store to get a Cubs hat for the President to give to Bob Michel. So he went up to see the Republicans. He did. And he liked it. He enjoyed doing it. We went up a lot.

Riley: There was a critical meeting sometime in early to mid-January on economic policy where the deficit numbers had come in. My assumption is that you were not at the Little Rock economic summit.

Paster: Correct, and Bob Rubin started the economic planning meetings in the transition. I never got to those. I was totally absorbed in this Cabinet confirmation process. So I didn't join any of the economic plan meetings until we got to the White House.

Riley: Was that a problem for you in terms of—

Paster: I had this job to do. It was a full-time job. No, one of the things I have to say, with very limited exception, I never felt excluded from anything. They were very good to me. I think that with all due respect to Pat Griffin and John Hilley and the others, I had more access than any successor of mine in terms of participation in meetings. Once we got to the White House and the economic plan meetings continued and the Roosevelt Room meetings, the ongoing sagas, these long, long sessions, as much as I wanted to be in, I was in the room.

That's where my most famous comment came out. This is the one about the bond, how many votes does the bond market have. They were talking about cutting spending, how they would convince people of the seriousness of the economic plan by cutting spending. Somebody said we ought to cut highway demonstration grants. I got a little upset and I said, "Those are very important to the folks on the Hill." This is kind of like Jimmy Carter's water projects, right? If you'd been here in '77, you knew Jimmy Carter screwed the water projects, you would know that. I was the only guy in the room who knew it, nobody else even knew it. Knew what happened in '77 with the water projects. That's where history and being the old guy in the room helps. I said, "One of those demonstration grants is a road in Portland, Maine, that I know George Mitchell really wants to get built." It would go back and forth, somebody said, "If we get rid of these grants, we'll demonstrate to the bond market that we're sincere about cutting deficits." And I said, "How many fucking votes does the bond market have?"

In some of the articles they have the "F-word" in, in some they don't, but I blew up. It was the dumbest thing in the world.

Martin: Who was making the counterarguments? It definitely reflects a lack of understanding of Congress.

Paster: I don't remember who I was fighting with. That was a big meeting. There were people who should have known better. Ron Brown was in the meeting. Lloyd Bentsen was in the meeting. They should have known better. Bob Reich was in the meeting. He might not have known better. Of course you have Bob Rubin and Rubin's deputies, [Gene] Sperling and [W. Bowman] Cutter, Laura Tyson. The President and the Vice President were in and out all the time, of course, and a bunch of other people.

Riley: I guess the broad question we're interested in is the one about—the economic policy is the first place where it comes to bear. The overall question about whether the Congressional Liaison people are in at the launch, in at the shaping of the policies that ultimately the administration is going to sell on the Hill.

Paster: I felt I was adequately involved, yes. There were meetings that were held before the inaugural, I think in Bo Cutter's office in fact. You may know more specifics than I do, but there were some meetings I was not involved in. But I did not have a complaint about my inclusion from the 20th of January until the time the President went to the Hill with the plan. I didn't win every fight, but I felt very included. I have to tell you, the only issues I had about access and inclusion were time limitations, frankly.

Riley: Your own time.

Paster: Yes. There were things done around me that drove me crazy. McLarty going to negotiate with Gephardt on NAFTA near the end and it leaking out, and Newt Gingrich calling me up and saying, "For every vote he gets from Gephardt, he'll lose two on my side." I said, "Don't worry, Mr. Gingrich, we're not going to do it. Don't worry, we're not going to do it, don't worry."

So I was not excluded from meetings, group meetings on issues. I had access to anything I wanted to go to pretty much. Where I felt the Congressional Liaison was not treated correctly was this independent operation, which was essentially being driven by more conservative members of the Hill, the Boren/Breaux faction. We were trying to get them to do stuff that made no sense at all.

Dick Gephardt is my friend to this day. Dick and I have a call scheduled on Wednesday. He was my friend long before McLarty ever met him. Dick and I agreed to disagree on NAFTA. My deal was to get the votes without Dick Gephardt. I could do that. But it was illogical. It made no sense. I was a UAW lobbyist. These guys were my dear friends. We can agree to disagree. Let me go get the votes where the votes are. Leave me alone, I'll get the votes. So that was the stuff that drove me crazy, but no exclusion from meetings.

Riley: What you're suggesting then is that—and this is consistent with what we hear from other places, but it's a different manifestation of it—in an ideal world you've got channels in a White House. There are respected channels to the Hill, maybe respected channels to the press. That's in an ideal world. We know it doesn't exist that way. You are able to take advantage of a sort of porousness in these channels in the policy meetings, but it becomes a problem for you because the same porousness that allows multiple people in these policy-making meetings is adversely affecting your work on the Hill.

Paster: Although other people go to the Hill all the time. George Stephanopoulos had a steady stream of Hill communications. Guess what, he'd tell me what he was doing. We'd talk about it. I'd say yes or no.

I couldn't do everything myself. I had good staff. But frankly, George was better qualified than some of my House liaison people, doing some difficult lifting in the House side for sure. So I didn't mind taking help. God knows, Leon Panetta and I worked intimately for the whole year with great success. There's a picture in the *Washington Post* of Leon and me in a totally spontaneous embrace when we passed the damn budget. But it's the failure to consult that hurt.

This White House had an interesting problem. It overconsulted. There were too many meetings with too many people and then meetings to reconsider the decision taken at the last meeting. It drove you crazy. On the other hand, where there should have been consultations, where somebody had particular expertise or knowledge, there was not an adequate communication because people were running separate agendas. On one hand there's too much time spent in meetings that didn't need to happen, and the worst thing was you stayed there until 8:30, 9 o'clock at night and you get to the end of the meeting and somebody calls a meeting at 7 o'clock in the morning to reconsider the decision, which happened all too often.

But was I going to negotiate with the Senate on chain of command amendments after Mogadishu without talking to Tony Lake? No. I could have but I wouldn't. But people would go into my territory all the time without talking to me. Everybody's an expert. Everybody has a friend on the Hill. It doesn't work that way, it doesn't work that way.

Riley: Whose job is it to police those channels?

Paster: The Chief of Staff.

Riley: And Mack was incapable of policing those channels or he elected—

Paster: He violated them himself. It's the truth. Fast-forward for a second to why I left the White House. I told some lies. I read the transcript in the book you sent me of the press briefing when Mark Gearan had me talk to the press. I said I was leaving because of my family, my family was more important. That was half the story. I left the White House in part because of my family situation but also in part because I was intensely frustrated. Mack and I were not getting along. I found myself raising my voice more than is my nature, because I was sleep deprived and irritable. He went to kindergarten with Bill Clinton. If one of us had to get out of the way it was going to be me. At the end of the day McLarty orchestrated it to make sure that I left.

I was thinking of leaving. I discussed it with him. I had not made up my mind. Wolf Blitzer goes on the air one day with a leaked story that I was resigning. I was on the Hill. I hadn't told anybody. I know it came from Mack because I hadn't talked to anybody. I get a call from my staff saying, "Blitzer is saying you're quitting." I said, "Bullshit." I come running down to the White House and I guess I decided I was going to quit. I went in to see the President and Mack was there. He said, "Do you mind if I stay?" He was afraid that if he left, maybe the President would talk me out of leaving or maybe I'd waffle. So he wanted to stay there to make sure it happened. I said, "I don't care, Mack, stay right where you are." I sat down and told the President I was going to leave at the end of the year. Mack was happy I was going to go, whatever protestation he makes to the contrary. I hope he was as honest about it. He was delighted to see me go, and I'm sure that Breaux and Boren were delighted to see me go.

Riley: Ultimately the Chief of Staff serves at the pleasure of the President. The natural question is, was the President satisfied with the job you were doing?

Paster: You'll have to ask the President that. The President was enormously gracious. He is very nice to me every time I see him. In his speeches after big successes on the Hill he shared credit widely. Behind you there's a picture of the President handing me a pen. That's the NAFTA bill-signing ceremony. That's the first of the pens, that's the "W" in the William Clinton on NAFTA. My resignation had been announced at that point, it was public. We had a signing ceremony in some big auditorium, I think the Commerce Department. I had invited all the key Hill folks who helped us get this done to come and sit in the nice seats. I was sitting with them in this auditorium.

Clinton is up on the stage and he makes a little speech and goes to sit down at the table to sign. He takes the first pen and goes back to the microphone. He said, "Before I sign this, I want to say

that I'm going to use this first pen, and I'm going to save it and give it to the fellow without whom we couldn't have done NAFTA." He paid me a lovely tribute. Then he sat down and signed, and he put that pen in his pocket. I was touched. I'm an emotional person, it was very touching. He finished, he said, "Howard." He called me up to the stage to give me the pen. That's the first of a series of sequences, the last one was a big embrace.

So my view of Bill Clinton is absolutely clear, I still think the guy walks on water. He made a stupid, stupid error in 1997, he lied when he shouldn't have lied. That's sad, but I think the world of the guy. Did he want me to stay? You'd have to ask him, I don't know. I was a political problem for him. People like Breaux and Boren I know actively complained. I sure Tim Penny was actively complaining. I don't know if Charlie Stenholm did or not, I have a lot of respect for Charlie. We didn't agree a lot but I think he's a classy guy. Certainly Tim Penny and those guys, some of them were unhappy with me. But I don't know whether he wanted me to leave or not, whether he was glad I left or not. I have no idea.

Riley: I'm equally curious about your recognition of part of the reason for his problems with Congress, which was a process problem that you've defined. That is, you've got a lack of respect for the proper channels to Capitol Hill. That doesn't mean that all communications go through you but it does mean there is a—

Paster: Lack of respect seems a strong term. I think there was a failure to understand how the Hill works. It wasn't disrespecting the Hill, and it was less a Clinton problem than a people-around-him problem. The Natcher quote about, "You're my ninth President, I'll make sure you'll succeed"—the whole point is that Presidents come and Presidents go and the Hill rolls on. It changes how it does business very slowly. More radically since '94, but even now, in this painful end to the 2005 session, you see a lot of the old, traditional behaviors coming out. I think that Presidents arrive—I think actually Carter was the worst example of this—with the idea that they're going to change how it gets done. You know what? You're not going to change how it gets done. You're going to change it on the margins. But you're not going to fundamentally change how the field is shaped. You can do a little bit on the edges, that's all.

I think Clinton came to understand it. Clinton's a pretty smart guy. He figured it out. He may have been frustrated by the inability to change how things get done, but he figured it out. I think that's why he won the key budget fight in '95.

Riley: Howard, my question, or the point that I was making about respect for the process, wasn't the congressional process, it was more the process in his own White House.

Paster: There was no process the first year. I misunderstood you.

Riley: And that clearly is not your fault alone. There may have been some—

Paster: I don't think the process was my fault at all. The place was a madhouse. That was the name of Jeff Birnbaum's book if you recall.

The number of people who could invite themselves to meetings was extraordinary. We were going to have to get tiered seating for the senior staff meeting. It was so silly. The number of chairs for staff and Cabinet meetings was out of sight. There was no discipline on Oval Office access, meeting access, messing around with issues access. It was somewhat loose. The story that was told in those days, which you've come across repeatedly, was about the six year olds playing soccer. Everybody goes for the ball, nobody stays in position. It was true.

The President knew this in the summer of '93. He knew there was a problem in the summer of '93 with the way the White House was run. He didn't like difficult personnel decisions. He proved that in his years as President, but he knew we had a problem. He didn't deal with it until the middle of '94, but he dealt with it at that time.

Riley: Somebody deals with it. To an extent. Your departure that you've described as being orchestrated is a partial response to this problem, right?

Paster: My decision to leave was a partial response to the problem. Mack made sure that I left, which means he was a good manager in that sense, but was my leaving a solution to the problem or simply getting one of the irritants away? My point is that I'm immodest enough to believe my leaving actually complicated the problem, didn't make it easier.

Riley: Oh, yes.

Paster: I think Pat Griffin suffered as a result of my departure in that I don't think the Congressional Liaison had the same access after I left.

Martin: I'd like to start with that picture of the White House with open meetings and not having a clear sense of discrete channels—who is responsible for what. How do you make decisions about, say, the strategy of what sequence of policies to pursue on the Hill, what issues are worth pursuing versus not? It strikes me as a very interesting mix of policies that gets pushed through in 1993.

Paster: The Hill had an agenda. The reason Family and Medical Leave was the first one out of the box was that it was a Hill issue as much as our issue, and that was fine. Clinton was delighted. That mattered to them enormously.

The question is totally appropriate. The question of what to pursue was the subject of a big meeting in the solarium one night in August 1993. The subject was the collision we were going to have after Labor Day. We've got health care, we've got to reinvent government, and we've got NAFTA. This is after the economic plan is passed. Everybody is charged up. We have this late meeting. I guess the people have to leave on their August vacations or whatever.

Riley: Welfare reform is still—

Paster: That was pushed off. This is where Moynihan, whom I had no particular brief for, was absolutely right. It should have come before health care. But we didn't know that at the time. So welfare was behind health at that juncture. This is August '93. There's a big meeting about how

we're going to manage these three things that are colliding in the post–Labor Day period. There were some who wanted to abandon NAFTA, which would have been a terrible, terrible thing to do. One of the things that made Clinton successful in '92 was that he took the issue on. I'm a labor guy but labor is wrong on trade, and I thought he was right on trade and I was very comfortable with NAFTA.

We couldn't abandon NAFTA without convincing people he caved in to labor and that would have really limited his ability to do other stuff on the Hill. I'm for a pro-labor agenda, but I don't think the trade issue is a way to serve labor.

They weren't going to abandon health care. That belonged to the First Lady. They weren't going to abandon reinventing government because that belonged to the Vice President. So we had this long, long meeting, well into the night in the solarium. Lots of people up there. To me it was all a waste of time because the answer was you had to do all three. The only other question was how to sequence them.

NAFTA had some greater imperative around it in terms of the schedule. Reinventing government was more an external thing than it was a legislative thing, and health care was going to have to come along. How do you sequence and how do you decide the priorities? It was not done in a very orderly fashion any time in '93. When the President went up to lay out the economic plan, whatever February date that was, he then appended to the end of the speech a list of legislation he'd like to get done that year. That was just mind-boggling. After the speech we went back to the solarium. This was now February, and in the solarium there was a little party.

I should have brought my pictures with me, that would have been really good to illustrate—you can't see pictures on the tape, but I saved all the White House photos, in sequence, with little notes on what they were. But there's a picture of us talking that night, he's in shirtsleeves and he's kind of rumpled and he's just come from this big event. The conversation was something like, "How'd I do?" I said, "Excellent, Mr. President, phenomenal, but that laundry list at the end, it's a little bit tough." He said, "Wait till you see what I want to do next year." Oh, man. So there was not a logical process for sequencing the various issues we did. Brady [Brady bill] got done around Thanksgiving because he wanted Brady to be done the first year. It didn't have to be first year, but the President kind of pushed hard to get Brady done. I don't think that's the gun bill that got Jack Brooks and the other guys in 1994, I think it was the next one, frankly.

Martin: Assault ban?

Paster: Yes. Whoever yelled the loudest, had the strongest advocate or the best-placed advocate had a lot to do with sequencing the overall legislation.

Riley: The economic package was going to be the first thing out of the block.

Paster: It was the big one, but it had to go to reconciliation because we couldn't have gotten it done except through reconciliation.

Riley: Could we get your take on that story? Just sort of march us through from start to finish.

Paster: The big problem with the economic plan was the decision, a correct decision, when the President got the revised deficit numbers, to abandon the middle-class tax cut. Now that was sort of a seminal moment.

Riley: That was during the transition.

Paster: Yes, that was early in the transition, before I was involved. It came relatively early.

Riley: So when you come on—

Paster: Wait, let's back up. In the transition, the first set of appointments announced was the economic team.

Riley: Okay.

Paster: So we had in December the Bentsen, Panetta, [Alice] Rivlin, Rubin, [Roger] Altman announcement. Tyson was there too.

Riley: Probably.

Paster: I went down to Little Rock for that announcement. And that team went to work right away.

Riley: So you went down for that announcement.

Paster: Yes, I did. I'm not sure exactly why, but I did. That group went to work right away.

Riley: And did you meet with them in Little Rock, other than casually?

Paster: Not in a substantive meeting, no. They were just getting organized at that point. They met during the transition. Also there was a substantive meeting the afternoon of the inaugural. I remember going to Bentsen's office, his old Senate office. He was moving out of the Senate office that afternoon, I remember. There was a substantive meeting that afternoon. Probably down at the White House.

So they went to work right away. Then the middle-class tax cut had to be abandoned when they got the revised deficit numbers. As I said earlier, I was not involved in any substantial way during the transition but joined the meetings in the Roosevelt Room immediately after the inaugural. It went on for several weeks thereafter.

Riley: But you just mentioned there was a meeting in Bentsen's office—

Paster: On the 20th, because I remember, they were cleaning, moving the office out. I don't what it was about but I went to see him.

Riley: It was not about—

Paster: It was about the economic stuff, it wasn't a large meeting. I forget what it was.

Riley: Okay. But basically the die is cast by the time you come.

Paster: Which die is cast?

Riley: On the content of the economic package.

Paster: No. We spent weeks—

Riley: Forgive me, on the middle-class tax cut.

Paster: The middle-class tax cut had been abandoned. That was off the table.

Riley: But everything else was still fairly—

Paster: Oh, it went on for weeks.

Riley: Continue, I'm sorry.

Paster: There was this ongoing process. The economic team would meet in the Roosevelt Room frequently, long days, short days, weekends, and go through item by item. The President was intimately involved with that stuff, really personally. One of the things that always impressed me, which I cared about enormously, was that he always wanted to know the impact of each decision by the next morning. So he asked Treasury to run the data on the distribution charts. If we do this and do that. Where is the benefit going, where are the taxes coming, what's the net benefit for the middle class?

Separately Bob Greenstein, the best liberal guru on budget stuff, was running the same numbers for us by a separate track, not just for me but others as well. But talking with Bob, we were sharing with Bob what we were doing the whole time, having him analyze it, making sure it was coming out right for the good guys. And it did. The Earned Income Tax Credit was a huge amount of progress. In terms of positive decision, the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, Gene Sperling probably told you that's the thing he's most proud of from that time and rightly so. Absolutely rightly so. That helped ensure that we had good distribution charts going forward. It was a very big deal. But there was a lot of other stuff in there, it was good stuff that we did.

The fact is that we were cutting the budget, but we did have a lot of investments. The stimulus plan went down and that's unfortunate. We didn't like to lose. Not sure it was material to the outcome. The economy seemed to be fine without it. But within the broader plan there was a lot of investment. For a budget, deficit-cutting package, there was a lot of spending in there.

Riley: Can you tell us a bit about losing the economic stimulus package? There may not have been much of an economic impact, but the political impact.

Paster: The political impact was tough. I put in my resignation after it went down, which I think people should do when they have big defeats in life. The boss should have a chance to change the people if he wants. The real mistake on the stimulus package was the presumption that the Senate Republicans would come to the table. I believe to this day that Dole thought he would too, but I think a bunch of the more conservative activist Republicans decided to press Dole, to say, "We can stop this." We didn't compromise early, when we might have. By then it was too late.

I think my error in handling the stimulus package was thinking it was like the good old days when you always cut the deal at the end. And by the time we got to the end, they didn't want to cut a deal. I knew we had to compromise. Unless you've got 60 votes you've got to compromise. But what I didn't anticipate was the move to take the whole thing down. So we should have taken a compromise earlier. The trouble was the other compromise came from Democrats as I recall, and to compromise with Democrats is the wrong way to do it. It's very frustrating.

It was clearly an erroneous assumption that we had this opportunity to strike a bargain. I remember going up on the Hill at night and going between Dole's office and Mitchell's office. Dole gave me reason for some time to think we had a chance, but then it simply wasn't there. Psychologically it was much more serious than it was ultimately for the economy. I think, in fact, it was the only significant legislative defeat that we had in 1993.

Martin: What were the negotiations like with the House? The Senate gave you a lot of trouble, but what was the—

Paster: On the stimulus? For whatever reason, it became a grab bag for all kinds of stuff. So there were swimming pools being built, there was midnight basketball—thank you, Janet Reno. There was stuff that it's easy to make fun of. Economic stimulus for my guys is you build some roads, you put up some buildings, you get some bridges, and you put people to work. That's economic stimulus. Everybody got a chance to jump in. A lot of the stuff didn't look like major job creation. Midnight basketball is an anti-crime program, it's not an economic stimulus program. So there was a lot to make fun of.

One of the problems with the defeated stimulus, in terms of understanding the psychology of the Hill, is when you subsequently had the House pass the economic plan with the BTU [British thermal unit] tax and then abandon it in the Senate. It was the second time the House felt it had been screwed over by the Senate, where the House was asked to take tough votes and then the Senate gets its way. That really was an unfortunate problem. It didn't go away so easily. Why should we take tough votes for these guys if you're going to turn around and cave in the Senate? That was the issue.

Martin: On that BTU issue, was there no warning that Boren was going to back out on BTU before he did?

Paster: When they switched the BTU for the gas tax the first time around, or are you talking about when he opposed the bill the second time it came through? There were two different—

Martin: My knowledge is not that great. My understanding is that Boren was important—

Paster: Boren was important to a lot of things. The thing I think is crucial—we're a little out of sequence here—but when the economic plan passed the Senate the first time, there were five no votes on the Democratic side. I'm not sure I can remember who they all were right now, but I think it was Bennett Johnston, Dennis DeConcini.

Riley: [Richard] Shelby?

Paster: Shelby, Sam Nunn, wasn't it [Frank] Lautenberg? I think it might have been Lautenberg, don't hold me to that.

Riley: That's easy enough to check.

Paster: So it's 50-50, and Gore votes. We come back from the conference and we've got to get all the same votes. We lose any of these, they have 50, we have to pick up one. Boren then switched and went no, even though he'd been intimately involved in negotiations on the compromise. He's a treacherous guy. All of a sudden, unless we can switch one of the five, we're going down. McLarty targeted Johnston and Nunn. I targeted DeConcini. Shelby was hopeless. DeConcini's chief of staff was a guy named Gene Karp whom I'd known for many years. I got talking to the Senator, took a lot of time with him. We've got to turn a vote, otherwise we're losing. Eventually Gene said he thought the Senator might switch. McLarty was working on Johnston and Nunn, I was not going to succeed with them. That was fine. If he could pull it off, God bless him. I didn't trust those guys.

But I got DeConcini down to see the President in the dining room over by the Oval Office. DeConcini was facing election in '94 and he said he needed some stuff to help his election, something for his brother, whatever it was. It was all reasonable stuff, easy stuff, and we cut the deal and DeConcini switched. If [Robert] Kerrey held, which was a separate saga—we can get to that if you want.

Riley: I would like to.

Paster: I think DeConcini was the hero. DeConcini ultimately didn't run for reelection. I'm not sure it was because of that, but it made it that much harder for him to win reelection.

Riley: Sure.

Paster: Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky is famous for having cast a vote that cost her her election. God bless her, I even contributed to her Governor's campaign last time, even though it was hopeless, because she did it. She said she would. She told me from the first day. "I'll always vote if it's essential." The other guy was DeConcini, and they both were out of Congress in the next year. I think it's interesting.

Riley: Is it true that they were taunting her on the floor when she was casting this vote?

Paster: Yes. It wasn't the first time, it was the second time around. She switched on the second time. The galling thing about it is there were people like Ray Thornton from Arkansas who could have voted for us with no political risk at all, and he wouldn't do it for the President so she had to walk the plank. This is terrible, terrible. But we switched DeConcini.

On the Boren question you asked me, I think it may relate to his switching from a yes vote to a no vote, from the first time to the second time around and having to get one of the other Democrats to switch back. Separately, Boren was one of those, along with a bunch of others who, when the BTU came over from the House, objected to it in principle and then objected to it in size. Ultimately it turned into a gasoline tax. Then we had a big fight over tenths of a cent. We were fighting over tenths of a cent on the gasoline tax. It was just remarkable.

The Vice President brought this whole thing forward. It was part of his environmental crusade as well as economic initiative and by the time we finished it was a shadow of what it was supposed to be.

Riley: You mentioned Bob Kerrey in this too and I would like to hear your—

Paster: Now we're jumping ahead to August.

Riley: Does it make sense to hold it and let you continue—

Paster: No, no, it connects. The DeConcini story is an August story as well, the one I just told you. We were working all the votes. We had the 50 that had stayed with us, we take off Boren, we add DeConcini, we're looking for the other soft ones on there. There were a whole bunch of them. Carol Moseley Braun called me to come see her. She threatened that she was going to vote against the plan unless the President did something for her campaign or campaign debt. Terrible behavior. But the one guy we couldn't really rely on was Bob Kerrey of Nebraska. I can't give you the precise sequence, but in the course of a three-day period, he said he was going to vote against it, he said maybe he wouldn't vote against it. Then David Gergen, Mack, and I went down to have lunch with him. I guess he called George to say, "I'm thinking of voting no." George tipped me off and I invited myself to have lunch with him, he and Gergen and McLarty invited themselves to lunch and I said fine.

Riley: A message like that is an invitation.

Paster: To do something, yes. Gergen, whom I liked and got along well with, and McLarty wanted to go with me. In cases like that you say yes, because if you don't take them and lose the vote, then it's your fault. So the three of us went up and had lunch with Kerrey in a restaurant over on the Senate side. We talked to him about it, why it was the right thing to do, and did the best we could. So he said he would think about it. Then he said, "I'm going to go see the Tina Turner movie this afternoon. Do you think the President would like to go with me?" You ask Gergen and McLarty. God's honest truth. Ask David. We allowed as how the President really

couldn't go to the movies with him that afternoon. That happened, it also happened that we brought him to see the President. I didn't want anybody to see him, so I had him come up West Executive Drive, I took him to the basement. I took him into the Residence through the basement, then upstairs so we wouldn't go past any of the reporters.

Riley: The reason being?

Paster: The reason being that we didn't want to advertise that we were in the kind of situation we were in, that he was getting this attention. I left them alone. I didn't stay for that meeting. If I did, I don't remember it. I don't have any memory of it so I assume I left them alone. I would have waited outside and escorted him out in any case. Anyway, I was in touch with Mitchell constantly. Finally, the vote was coming that night. That afternoon, close to the vote, Kerrey calls the President to say, "I'm going to do this for you. It's a free vote. I'm giving you this vote." There's a big sigh of relief. Mitchell called me to his office for the vote. He said, "I have Kerrey's demands." I said, "He just told the President it was for free." He said, "You believed that?" The key demand was that he create a bipartisan commission on Social Security that he and Jack Danforth would chair. That was part of the price of getting his vote.

Riley: Their chemistry was a little odd, wasn't it?

Paster: Remember, Bob Kerrey ran for President against Bill Clinton in 1992. Several guys did. Tom Harkin did, and Tom Harkin and Bill Clinton developed a wonderful relationship. Tom Harkin could not have been more constructive and helpful. But Kerrey clearly believed that he should have won, that he was the better qualified of the two to be President. I think history will prove that he was wrong, but I think he believed otherwise.

Riley: Were there other members, especially on the Democratic side, let's start with the Senate, but we can go through the House too, where, for whatever reason, they just couldn't get on the same wavelength or—

Paster: There were guys who would work their own agendas and not care about the President, okay? Sam Nunn was the principal problem in leaking around gays in the military. He was doing it all the time. I remember a front-page *New York Times* story on the subject. I said to Mack, "This is your friend Nunn. The only person who could have done this is Sam Nunn." "No, Sam wouldn't do it." "Yes, Sam would do that." In a second he'd do it.

I think there was a group of Senators, maybe some House but more likely Senators, who probably thought they should have been President or were better qualified to be President than this Governor from Arkansas. They wanted to show Clinton who was the boss. That was certainly the case with Nunn. Shelby was a different kind of behavior. Shelby was just—he finally became what he was. He was a Republican all along, he finally became one.

Riley: I'm from Alabama so I've known of Shelby for a long time.

Paster: We got into a huge hassle with Shelby. It was on the economic plan, first time around. I said, "We're not getting this guy." The Vice President agreed to go see him. I make an

appointment for the Vice President to go see him. Shelby tips off all the press that the Vice President is coming to his Senate office. So the Vice President is ambushed by the reporters. And Shelby was really, really—nasty is too strong a word—really, really negative.

The Vice President called me at home that night, he'd been seething all day. He was furious. He said, "We've got to do something about this." So we didn't invite him to the White House for some kind of ceremonial stuff, and we said right out he was *persona non grata*, which helped ensure we didn't get his vote. Kind of the way the Republicans dealt with [James] Jeffords, the same sort of thing. Drive him out of the party if you treat him nastily enough. In Shelby's case maybe it was just as well, because trying to chase Shelby's vote forever was probably useless in the end.

Riley: You moved some jobs, too.

Paster: Yes, we took some from Huntsville, Alabama, and gave them to the Johnson Space Center. Gore was really angry at him.

Riley: It showed him up, right? They were standing next to one another in the cameras.

Paster: Yes, that's exactly right. The Vice President was very unhappy. I don't know whether we would have gotten Shelby at other times. But here's a great story about Clinton's optimism and the notion that everybody could be saved. The night that Vince Foster killed himself, the President left the White House to go over to the Foster residence. Somewhere during the course of the night, it turned out that Shelby was a next-door neighbor of the Fosters. The President ended up spending time with Shelby in Shelby's house talking to him. The President was always trying—just give him a little more time with somebody and he'll convince him, he'll convince him. Shelby was hopeless.

And then there was Moynihan, who hindsight will say was probably right about the welfare/health sequencing. If we'd done it, we might have had a better shot at health. You don't know if it would have made a difference, but clearly it didn't work so the other way might have worked. But he was a difficult guy. We had this famous story that you have in your records of this *Newsweek* or *Time* article inaugural week in which somebody associated with Clinton said, "We're not worried about Moynihan, we'll roll right over him."

Riley: Right.

Paster: This is often attributed to Rahm Emanuel, but Rahm insists it wasn't him. Doesn't matter who it was.

Riley: I don't remember. I remember hearing the story but I don't remember.

Paster: So I go in to the President and I show him this. I say, "This is killing us. You have to call Moynihan. Tell him we'll find out who this is, we'll discipline them." There was all that kind of stuff. Many more problems with the Senate. At different times, it was Moynihan or it was

Kerrey, or Shelby. I'm hard-pressed to think of House Democrats who were equally difficult. Really, there were individuals who from time to time would hold us up for something.

Riley: What about the flip side of the equation, people you felt were—were there Clinton guys on the Hill?

Paster: There certainly were. You start out with [Dale] Bumpers and Pryor for sure. They both really tried. They were helpful as they could be. I think they'd been political rivals at different times in their careers, but they got on the program, couldn't have been more helpful.

Mitchell became an absolute, reliable Clinton guy. If he couldn't help the President, he would tell him early. It was very rare. He carried a lot of water. Lani Guinier was probably the case where Mitchell just said, "I can't do it, I can't carry that one." We can come back to that if you want.

Riley: Yes. Go ahead.

Paster: But Mitchell was clearly such a person. Rostenkowski, Dingell, and Foley were pretty faithful, and I would say with the exception of NAFTA we could count on the House leadership generally. Witness the fact that the economic plan passed the House twice without a Republican vote, NAFTA passed the House with Foley's help. We got it done. What we haven't talked about is that Clinton had enormous success the first year. All the data prove it. I would say the House leadership generally, putting NAFTA and Gephardt on the side for a moment, committee chairs, Dingell, Rostenkowski, Natcher, first rate, really, very supportive.

Martin: Along the way, the House had somewhat of a rocky road in terms of taking pretty close votes. You mentioned Mezvinsky, her having to take a tough vote. How did you respond when the House would put themselves out, like on the BTU tax, and then it didn't happen in the Senate? Was there anything in your powers or within the President's power to try to patch relationships?

Paster: The only thing you could do was the kind of congressional attentiveness that you should have all the time anyhow. I mean, how many pairs of cufflinks did we give out? How many invitations to different events did we give out? How many personal thank-you letters got done? Those from the President are a lot more important than those from me, but I can't tell you how many thousands of notes I'd written in the course of a year. But I had Presidential notes going up all the time, constantly. Phone calls he was great about. He was wonderful. So the best you can do is try to persuade them you love them.

Riley: Expand on that. Tell us a little bit about what is available to a Congressional Affairs person for winning friends and influencing people. You mentioned—

Paster: Invitations to the White House of any sort are still very welcome. If it's a state dinner it's worth more than if it's just a luncheon. If it's a briefing, it's not as good as a meal. There are Presidential visits to people's districts. There's sending people out to raise money, Cabinet members, raising money with substantive visits. We kept track of all the travel by Cabinet and

sub-Cabinet people to members' districts. You do have Presidential cufflinks. Other little gifts and recognition. How you deal with people's constituents—somebody's favorite constituent is in town, they get the special White House tour at the right time. Who's on the Christmas party list? There is a host of perquisites available to a President. Flights on Air Force One. Golf with the President. Jogging with the President. People would call up and say, "I want to run with the President." I'd say, "He runs very fast." Really, I'm serious. His jogging is a serious thing. He doesn't jog slowly. But jogging with the President. Golf games. These things matter to people. I hope we're never so jaded they don't still matter to us, as a practical matter. So you used all of those devices.

Riley: You routinely had seats on Air Force One to—

Paster: Where he was going, obviously, but yes, we had people on Air Force One.

Martin: How much influence could you have over resources going to districts, pork barrel projects or those sorts of things?

Paster: Most of the members of the Cabinet were very helpful. The only problem was that the amount of retail horse-trading that went on, on one bill after another bill, after another bill, made you kind of tired. I think sometimes they dreaded my phone calls. How many times can you go to the well? But for the most part this was a very practical group that understood the circumstances.

Martin: One of the press accounts, I forget who it was, made an argument that Clinton had perhaps overextended himself or overspent.

Paster: It's an interesting argument, that he made it too easy for people to get stuff because he was too accessible and too quick to deal and that he should have pushed some of the stuff out—I think it's an interesting question about when the President is demeaned by virtue of the kind of pork barrel dealing that goes into securing a vote. Is it a failure of Congressional Liaison or the White House staff or the Cabinet, if you need to use a President as much as you do? It's a fair question.

Under the circumstances, if I could have everything back again, I might have been a little more discreet about where we used him, but I'm not sure he would have agreed. Remember, this guy was asking for the vote counts. He wanted to see the tally sheets, he wanted the lists. I think the possibility that we used him too much early has to be considered a serious question. The currency depreciated by excess use. There's a risk.

Let's take a break.

Riley: Then lunch is coming.

[**BREAK**]

Riley: French fries.

Paster: No, I'd have big jars of pretzels and candies and cookies and stuff. It worked. Every time Henry Cisneros or Bob Reich came in, they came to my office, and others. It works. It's a good device.

Riley: Paul had raised the area of the President's currency or using the President too much in the early period. I wanted to ask you a related question and that was about your sense of the President as a bargainer. We were just talking about Dennis Ross. One of the things Dennis Ross says in his book is that the problem with Clinton in his negotiations was that he was always ready to make a deal early and that he would take his best card and lay it out on the table well in advance, at least in the Middle East relationship, of when he should have. That was his one big deficiency as a negotiator. Does that resonate with you?

Paster: Yes. He's not a patient man. The notion of getting it done and getting to where it gets done—psychologists talk about Clinton wanting to be liked. I'm not a psychologist, but wanting to get the deal done is part of wanting to be liked and finding the way out. The other part of it is, if the compromise is so obvious, "Why are we wasting all this time?" Clinton would say. "Let's just get to it." So yes, I think he probably wasn't the toughest bargainer you ever met.

Riley: Did you have occasion to try to get him to back off of that or to give him backbone on occasions when you may have felt he was going to give in too early?

Paster: I can't think of a specific instance where we had to do that. Compromising is connected to wanting to see both sides of every question. One of Bill Clinton's interesting qualities is a desire to have every issue debated. This isn't precisely on the line of your question, but my mind followed me in this direction.

Riley: Sure, go ahead.

Paster: There's an interesting story about the proposed constitutional amendment to balance the budget. Fairly early in his administration this was being pushed by people like the late Senator Paul Simon, a good Democrat, and others, and Clinton had to take a position. We staffed it. Everybody was against it. David Gergen, who had written in favor of it as a journalist, was against it for Clinton. Gore was against it. Everybody was against it. There was nobody anywhere in the administration who thought it was a good idea.

So we went to Clinton before he was going to meet with Simon to say, "Look, he's going to ask you to support a balanced budget amendment. There's a unanimous recommendation. The Vice President, the Chief of Staff, everybody, we touched every base, unanimous. You can't support that, that's craziness." He said, "That so? Any of those people ever teach constitutional law, because I did. Let me tell you—" And he insisted on having a debate about the subject. He ultimately opposed it, but he wanted the debate. If you didn't bring up both sides of an issue, he wasn't satisfied, which is a wonderful thing.

One of my good friends on the Hill has said of the current President that he's the most intellectually uncurious President he's ever heard of. Well, Clinton was just the opposite. I prefer Clinton.

Martin: In terms of Senators or members of the House you dealt with, who did you think were good bargainers or very good tacticians in getting what they wanted?

Paster: From him?

Martin: From Clinton.

Paster: The best guys in the House were always Dingell and Rostenkowski, but they weren't trying to extract a lot. But if they needed something, they knew how to get it and they knew when to get it. I learned many years ago patience of the process. I learned a lot of it from John Dingell when I was working for the UAW, and we used to work together a lot back in the '70s. These guys know making a deal too early is a big mistake. You've also got to be willing to take the consequences. The '95 budget impasse was an important moment in the Clinton Presidency. It was a willingness to take the heat and manage it. I think Leon deserves an enormous amount of credit for helping the President through that. It would not have been Clinton's natural instinct to let them shut down the government. He would have wanted the deal before then. But there's a certain point at which you don't take the deal, and I think that's relevant.

Martin: Is part of that the different institutions themselves? The Presidency, it strikes me, has a stronger obligation to move legislation than do individual members of the House or Senate. As long as they vote correctly based on their state or their district, they'll probably be okay. So is it Clinton's personality or is it institutional?

Paster: I don't know. I've not thought about that. Thinking now about [Harry S.] Truman's do-nothing Congress. If Congress doesn't act, can they get in trouble? I guess Truman proved that Congress can get in trouble if it doesn't act and that voting right isn't enough, you have to legislate. I think Clinton had a restlessness and an activist nature that ran faster than did the Congress and the wheels of Congress. So some of it is personality. I'm not sure how much of it is institutional.

Riley: Let's go back. Did we finish everything you wanted to say about the economic plan? There are some policy things we probably ought to track through and get any comments that you have or any stories you may have. We got into the question about the economic plan and then jumped around a bit, but I don't know whether there were any important parts of that story that you—

Paster: I was satisfied with the amount of Congressional Relations input into the process. There may not have been as much consulting of the Hill directly in those early days as we would have done if it had been later and therefore more sophisticated. This was getting driven really fast out of the box in January. Worked on before the inaugural, as we talked about, and then afterward. But I think if one were to go back and relive moments, and I don't spend a lot of time doing that,

probably I would say a little more Hill consultation along the way. The BTU thing, that whole episode might have been avoided if we had understood what we were doing.

Riley: We touched on gays in the military, but I don't know whether you want to go back and revisit that.

Paster: I think the key thing on gays in the military was that the issue didn't have to come up when it did in January. I think it was a miscalculation. If you don't say anything you've got a promise out there, and the worst problem you have is the gay activists saying you're not honoring your promise. So you're working on it, and you do some behind-the-scenes thing. You send somebody over to the Joint Chiefs for confidential conversations. I think the late Les Aspin totally miscalculated. He was trying to do the right thing for the military, whereas the right thing would have been, let the sucker sit. Do some behind-the-scenes diplomacy and find out what you can get away with. It's unfortunate.

When we talked about having different delegations to see the President, I mentioned that we had the Senate Armed Services Committee Democrats in for a session. With respect to gays in the military there's a wonderful story in one of the books about the administration, about Robert C. Byrd giving us a history lesson. You know the story? About how an ancient Greek or Roman leader was lost because he was having sex with the young men in his brigade. It was the weirdest thing. But in that session, the only sort of war hero in the room, Chuck Robb, stood up and supported the President. I thought it was interesting.

Riley: His relations with Robb were pretty good?

Paster: Yes, they got along fine. That he's the son-in-law of a former President is probably relevant. I think the cadre of Presidents, former Presidents, even crossing party lines, tends to get along pretty well.

Riley: You mentioned the Brady bill once before. Anything special about moving on that? You said that was another one of the things the President had decided he wanted to do.

Paster: He really wanted that.

Riley: Did you get a lot of pushback on that?

Paster: No more than the normal anxiety that rural Democrats have over any gun legislation. As we said earlier, it wasn't as charged as assault weapons was after I left the White House.

Riley: Right.

Paster: The Bradys were up on the Hill a lot. They made a very big difference. But if you look, you'll find that the Brady bill was signed in the Oval Office. Sarah and Jim Brady were there without much fanfare. So the fact that it was carrying political baggage was not lost on anybody.

Riley: Right.

Martin: How did that affect Clinton's relationship with John Dingell?

Paster: John understood. Before it was over, he was there fighting alongside Clinton. He ultimately chose, and he chose to go against the NRA [National Rifle Association]. Had it been a Republican President, he might not have done that.

Riley: Some of the briefing materials indicated that you had done some work for the NRA at one time. Is that—?

Paster: The firm I worked at, Timmons & Company, had the NRA as a client. In fact it's an anecdote about my appointment. Warren Christopher had discussed all of my clients with me. I told him about the NRA being a client of the firm, and I explained to him that I had declined the job at the firm when it was offered to me in 1980 because I wouldn't work for the NRA. They had said to me, "Come here and you won't do their work," which is true. Then when my name was speculated in the press about getting the White House job, I guess Sarah Brady got quite upset and she called Warren Christopher. He called me up and he said, "Sarah Brady is just livid at the thought you might go to the White House." I said, "I told you I don't do the NRA." He said, "Do you have a suggestion?" I said, "Yes. I'll ask Chuck Schumer to call her."

Chuck was in the House then and a leading gun control advocate. I rang him up and said, "Chuck, have I ever done any of that work?" He said, "No, not really, you're good." I said, "Would you please call Sarah Brady and tell her that?" And he did. And she accepted Chuck's word it was okay.

Riley: Was that a case—there was a paper delivered on a panel we sat on that I thought had some flaws in it.

Paster: A couple of those papers had flaws in them.

Riley: Some of them more than others. But there was a sense, again, going back to Clinton as a New Democrat, that this was a guy the gun owners felt comfortable with. He makes a reference, I think, in his announcement speech, to the guys driving the pickup trucks and so forth. Was there, in your experience, any sense of betrayal among some of the Members of Congress about this guy taking this on as an issue?

Paster: I think the waiting period for handgun purchase wasn't—

Riley: Wasn't?

Paster: It just wasn't that big a deal. It didn't have that kind of drama attached.

Riley: Other than the hard cores and you weren't going to get those anyway. Very good.

Paster: I think you're in an important area though, which is the extent to which that was part of the compromising of the moderate Democratic image over time. Whatever was accomplished in

gun control was worth the lost position. Do Democrats have to decide that economic justice is a bigger issue than abortion and guns?

Riley: Right, exactly.

Paster: I sent a contribution to Bob Casey's Senate campaign this year. I don't think I've given to a right-to-life candidate in 25 years. But beating Rick Santorum was too important.

Riley: Well, the argument that the paper writer had made, I think he said that the gun issue had been overblown as a blow to Clinton based on the study he made. I thought that it was—

Paster: I took that on if you recall, and I said, "What you fail to understand is that the polls say most people favor gun control. The majority doesn't vote on gun control."

Riley: That's correct.

Paster: The minority does vote on gun control, with vehemence and with anger. So the absolute numbers on popularity don't measure the issue. Much the same issue on abortion.

Riley: And the distribution. In the interest of full disclosure, my wife worked for Jim Sasser in '93 and '94 and there was a sense, especially among southern Democrats, that guns had been a real problem for them. When we interviewed Tom Foley it was the same.

Paster: I liked Jim Sasser a lot. I got my ass in trouble because when Mitchell announced he was stepping down, I said something about Sasser being a good leader, and then he lost the damn election. Left me hanging out there.

Riley: I know, she went from thinking she might be working for the majority leader to being unemployed in the span of about two weeks. For those people again, it was a sense that guns and the social issues were as powerful as anything else he had to deal with.

Paster: Jim didn't work very hard.

Riley: No.

Paster: Let's be candid.

Riley: He had a number of other problems. History would be very much different had he won that race given what has transpired since then.

Paster: That business with him in Beijing.

Riley: Family Leave we talked about. You said there was a demand—

Paster: Yes, they wanted it. It was the classic low-hanging fruit but symbolically very important.

Riley: Motor Voter same thing?

Paster: Much the same. It was mostly congressional initiative. When you look at the stuff that was leftover legislation, vetoed Bush stuff and favorite Democratic stuff, and it's just easy to push through.

Riley: In that same regard, was there much discussion about the use of executive orders and the reversal of Republican policy at this time, because there's some—

Paster: There was a commitment during the campaign, which he executed on the 20th of January, on what was the forerunner of the stem cell issue, which was fetal tissue research. That was Erskine Bowles's issue, to go back to his son's illness. That was an Executive order, the President signed them in January. So there was some of that. There was no appreciation then, I don't think, of the scope of Executive order, which we saw at the end of the eight years.

Riley: Part of my question related to whether there was any blowback from Capitol Hill or, in fact, was it the kind of thing that was winning him plaudits on Capitol Hill because he was using—

Paster: Certainly when I was there, he wasn't using it that extensively. We didn't do recess appointments, there were no vetoes. It was a fine time.

Riley: National service gets done the first year.

Paster: Hell of a year, wasn't it? What's his name?

Riley: Eli Segal?

Paster: Eli Segal. Eli had that assignment and a passion about it. The guy he worked with named Rick Allen, the two of them would consult me all the time. This is the point about not minding that people do stuff, because they were constantly in touch with me about their visits on the Hill and who they were seeing, what they were doing. They were laser-like in their focus on getting that sucker done. The Congressional Liaison staff helped them when we could. Let me say generally, the head of Congressional Relations in any White House, Candy Wolf today and anybody else on the job, needs to know to the extent it is possible all the ways the administration is acting on the Hill at any given moment.

Now, you can't possibly know them all. You try to know them all. So what I would do is, every Saturday I would have my own staff meeting and once a week have all the Congressional Liaison people from all the Cabinet-level departments and agencies come into the White House to do a little show-and-tell of what they're working on. Just run through the list, say what's going on.

Riley: This was on Saturday?

Paster: No, I did my staff on Saturday. I did the departments during the week. I also had written reports from them. It was an attempt to try to know, because if Congressman Jane Doe calls up

and says, “Howard, I need the President to help me on this,” I need to know what’s going on with Jane, who’s got something in to her, whether she helped in committee last week or didn’t. Now, obviously we can’t know everything, but I tried to know as much as I possibly could. Anybody who is smart is going to do that.

So when people like Eli and Rick were working hard on that issue, I had no problem with it and I could help them. But I’ve got to know what’s going on, I’ve got to know what’s going on. People said, “Control freak, obsessive.” It’s the way you do your job. You can’t do the job correctly without the knowledge, that’s the point. You don’t know where to put the priorities or when to trade off, when to tell somebody they can’t have the vote. No, you can’t ask them because we’re asking for something that much more important than that, so I don’t want you up there getting that done, and he’ll say he did one for us and it’s a cheap one.

Riley: Do you have any specific recollections of crossing with anybody who was freelancing?

Paster: Other than McLarty?

Riley: Other than that.

Paster: Yes, Bentsen. Bentsen in the Treasury Department. He was doing stuff I felt was front running the White House on issues and all. We had some cross words at different times.

Riley: Was this on stuff related to the economic package or were these things that were kind of Treasury Department, things in their portfolio that might not have been of Presidential importance?

Paster: I don’t really remember, I just remember having words and unpleasantness. I couldn’t even tell you what it was.

Riley: I would guess that’s difficult being a 48-year-old White House staffer and having to approach the former chairman of the—

Paster: Well, I knew Bentsen. I’d supported him in his elections. I was on his friends list.

Riley: We’re into Watergate by the way.

Paster: It reminds me of a Bentsen story. One time he had this big committee come together to do a fundraiser. If the committee is 50 people, how big is the fundraiser going to be? We’re all sitting around a huge table in one of the hotels. He said, “I just want to tell you folks, President Nixon got in trouble years ago for having an enemies list, so I don’t have an enemies list. I have a friends list. It’s in the top right-hand drawer of my desk. When people call up, I’ve got to make sure whether they’re my friends or not.” So I’d done business with Bentsen. Joe O’Neill was his chief of staff, we got along fine. My first run-in with Bentsen in the context of the Clinton administration was I was the one who was called and told to call him and tell him he couldn’t pick all the Assistant Secretaries himself. The White House wanted to have some say on it. In fact, he ended up picking almost all of them himself.

Riley: Why are you tasked to do that? Because you're doing the transition?

Paster: Why? Because somebody figured, "Let him go impale himself." We had some words over that because he wanted to staff it all himself and I told him he couldn't. He did most of it himself anyhow. I think it's fair to say that Treasury was the least cooperative department we dealt with on a regular basis. I'm trying to think through the different departments. No, Justice. She was impossible.

Riley: She being Reno.

Paster: Yes.

Riley: You mentioned earlier that you felt that was not a good appointment.

Paster: Her view of the independence of Justice meant that she didn't cooperate. We had some issue that the White House and Justice were really at odds on. Don't ask me the issue, I will not remember, but I remember the incident. We were sitting at the conference table in McLarty's office and she said something about, "*We* think and *you* think." I said, "That is the problem! We're the *same* administration. We have the *same* boss down the hall. And it's not us and you, that's not how it works." She was a big pain in the neck, very unhelpful. Jamie Gorelick was sent in to try and manage that, but it was impossible.

Riley: Did you have much influence over the staffing of the Congressional Relations people out in the department?

Paster: Yes.

Riley: Can you tell us about that?

Paster: The policy was that if people wanted to pick somebody, they knew who I didn't know, they should please check with me. In other cases they were interested in getting my recommendations. I can't tell you quite how it came about that Wendy Sherman went with Warren Christopher, but I think I may have suggested it. Jerry Klepner with Donna Shalala and others. The answer is yes. Most of them were very open to that kind of cooperation.

Riley: Then you had them in weekly to—

Paster: Yes, just to make sure we knew what was going on. We'd talk a lot during the week and stay in touch. What happens in White House Congressional Liaison is that the departments and agencies work the issues until they become the number one issue and then the White House comes in on top of that. So it's the inevitable process. I got involved in the fall of '93 for weeks at a time on the defense appropriations bill in the Senate after the Mogadishu incident that I referred to earlier because there was a whole series of amendments affecting the chain of command, U.S. troops under UN [United Nations] auspices and so forth. All of a sudden, in an area where I was not personally very expert, which I had to learn a lot about as I went along, I

essentially stepped in front on that issue. Sandy Stuart was the head of Congressional Liaison for Defense, she came out of Vic Fazio's office. But I sort of took over that issue, as you did for whatever the big issue was.

Riley: Was there a separate CL for the NSC?

Paster: There was somebody there. The answer is I don't think it was full time, but yes, they had somebody and we worked with that person.

Riley: I'm trying to remember if the NEC [National Economic Council] at this point—

Paster: No, I don't think so. I don't recall. NEC was a new creation, of course.

Martin: At some point I think we should talk in more detail about both NAFTA and health care, but I have a broader question that stems from a David Broder article, a piece he wrote in late 1993. He makes this argument that your job was hampered by Clinton being only a 43 percent President.

Paster: That's the column on the wall over there.

Martin: You're right.

Riley: He knows that column.

Martin: I was wondering what your take—

Paster: You want to read the part about where I was obsessed about returning the congressional phone calls?

Martin: Yes, there was that aspect of it.

Paster: It was a lovely column. It was very nice of David.

Martin: He points out a couple of interesting things in this article and I wanted to get your take on it, one of which is that you had a tough job because Clinton was a minority President. The other is that the set of issues you were asked to lobby on, for example, the—what did he say NAFTA? There are two different pieces here that he mentions, NAFTA and then something else that was very important where only 78 of 435 House members were with Clinton both times.

Riley: This is a staple of these articles if you look through, that on a number of occasions the *CQ* [*Congressional Quarterly*] reports are also referring to wildly varying alliances.

Paster: I think NAFTA skews that so terribly. You have this one-off, this absolute renegade issue, which we had to win with Republican votes, and then you run these numbers and they all look kind of weird. So I think it's a little difficult. The reason you have such a low number there is because a lot of the Democrats we had on NAFTA were the conservative Democrats and blue

dogs who were also against the economic plan. So the number for both NAFTA and for the economic thing gets to be a very low number.

I don't think the 43 percent popular vote was a big issue because each district's vote—every Member of Congress can tell you precisely how the President ran in his or her district or state. And if they ran ahead of the President by 5, 7, 8, 9, points, they're going to be more independent than if they ran behind the President or even with the President. So I think that's the issue, not the absolute popular vote. It's how you go by districts.

Riley: There weren't too many in that category.

Paster: No, and there were too many in which he ran behind. But three or four points behind isn't a big issue. We did an analysis for the purpose of trying to manage the job, of trying to look at every district and how he ran. We had that work done. We knew what the deal was and that's relevant to when you go see people. If you're a lot weaker—"red state Democrats" is now the jargon. What happens to Byron Dorgan and Kent Conrad? Or is that why Tom Daschle loses in a red state? I think that's relevant. But the absolute popular vote wasn't the issue, it's really personal and local.

NAFTA was an important fight to complete. As I said earlier, it had been a huge differentiator for him in '92 with the other Democrats in primary season. If he had abandoned it, he would have really been discredited. It was a very difficult fight because the majority had already announced against, we had to switch votes in NAFTA. The economic plan we had to get the number—not to get switch votes. So there was a lot of wholesale trading. Mickey [Kantor] was giving away stuff, tomatoes for Florida or citrus, whatever the hell it was. We did the deals, we did the required deals. We did the Southwest Development Bank, that was Bentsen. One of the problems we had was everybody was cutting deals and we had to keep track of how many of these were being cut by whom because everybody was trying to get votes. Somebody could bargain three times and get three different deals. I know one guy got a buddy appointed ambassador out of NAFTA.

The key on NAFTA was holding the Republicans and having the Republicans trust him. We needed as many Democrats as we could get. We tried to pick off as many here and there as we could. We got a few unusual. We got a few pro-labor Democrats, but mostly it was pretty tough. But Michel and Gingrich needed to believe Clinton wasn't going to cut and run on them, that this was going to be a shared victory and so forth. That was a very important part of the process. We got down to the end, we were within a couple of days of the vote. We had a meeting in the Oval Office with Michel and Gingrich going over the undecided Republicans figuring out what we could do to try and pick off some of them. Then there was a meeting two hours later with Foley doing the same thing with the Democrats, without Gephardt and Bonior obviously not involved.

I remember one anecdote from that. We were talking about a Pennsylvania Republican and Gingrich says, "His big issue is that Boeing V/STOL"—a very short takeoff and landing thing, the airplane that goes up like a helicopter. Boeing wants to build it in eastern Pennsylvania, that's his issue. Clinton said, "I know all about that. I'm for that plane." He started talking about why it

was a good idea. Gingrich said, "No, no. I know you understand it. I'm just telling you that's his issue." Clinton was about to go into a good policy speech on the plane. He's very smart.

My wife said when I resigned that if NAFTA had lost, I couldn't have resigned. She said, "But you got that win that nobody expected you to get, so now you go out with your head held up." It's an interesting question. We had the economic plan, we had NAFTA, we had Brady. We had a hell of a year at the end there after an early stumble on the economic stimulus. She said, "You couldn't have quit if you hadn't gotten NAFTA."

Riley: You touched on this earlier but I want to try to pin you down a little bit more on it, and that is the question about, was it, as a political matter, a wise thing to go with NAFTA at that point? You may have been forced into it by the calendar.

Paster: I think so. What is the negative? The negative is that a bunch of Democrats were unhappy. They knew we were right. Labor was unhappy. Labor didn't break with Clinton. The people we were upsetting didn't rupture their relationship with Clinton over it. After all, he had told them all along he was for it. Maybe they thought he was just kidding in '92, but why would he have said it in '92 if he wasn't going to do it? No, I think it was absolutely the right thing to do. You can't undo history and see how things might otherwise have been, but going into '94 if the Whitewater stories don't break in the *Post* the beginning of '94, he's got a huge momentum. He's got this great bipartisan victory in his hands. He's got his economic plan in place. The momentum turning the corner to '94 is phenomenal. Cut back, and all of a sudden Whitewater was in the headlines.

Riley: You've got scandals in the first year. The travel office, you've got something that's blown up over Vince Foster where there was not really anything there. Are you getting a lot of blowback from the Hill on the scandal business? Is that something people are paying attention to?

Paster: Travel office, I would submit, was the only scandal. Vince Foster's suicide was not a scandal, it was a tragedy. The haircut was ridiculous. Gays in the military was mishandled. But scandal? Travel office was obviously not done right. Hindsight being what it is. I'll give you another. I don't know if it's a scandal, that stupid moment when David Watkins took the helicopter to go look for golf sites. Goddamn it, how stupid can some people be? I don't think there was a lot of scandal the first year, I'm not sure I'm going to buy that.

We had negative press. Negative press on different stuff. That's just routine. No President goes through a year without a bunch of negative stories. I can't imagine that you're going to find a year in the last 25 in which there weren't a whole bunch of different negative things going on. Remember Karl Rove's Enron stock in 2001? Stuff goes on all the time. No, I think the President was in a strong position at the end of '93. It's self-serving, but I think I'm right.

Riley: Let me clarify one thing. The only reason I raised Vince Foster in this relation is that it gets manufactured into a scandal at some point because people don't believe, mostly because of the aftermath of handling the documents coming out. That raises an air of suspicion—

Paster: Bernie Nussbaum was politically tone-deaf. He may be a smart lawyer, but he didn't understand any of this stuff.

Riley: Okay—

Paster: If you're going to have Bernie as White House counsel, then you need to have somebody who is a real Washington hand as deputy White House counsel, not Vince who's a great Little Rock lawyer.

Martin: Okay, a question on timing. When NAFTA comes up and you have the vote on NAFTA, to what degree are Clinton and you able to influence the House calendar? One of the key powers of being in the majority is being able to schedule, dealing with the Rules Committee as well. How much interaction do you have with Foley's office and the Speaker's office in general on scheduling legislation and trying to—?

Paster: Constant, constant. Every day we worked on one thing or another.

Martin: What were your day-to-day tactics like?

Paster: I'm not sure I have a specific answer for you. The general answer is always deferential, trying to get what we wanted with great respect and humility. Anybody who is lobbying is a supplicant, whether you're lobbying for the Farm Bureau or the White House you're a supplicant. The question is, do you know when and how to act as a supplicant? Do you know when and how to do favors in exchange for legislative support? I'd be on the phone to the guys every day, several times a day. I was up there constantly.

Martin: My sense is that this is an important relationship, but I'm not exactly sure what the right question is for you to go into the relationship.

Paster: The Foley relationship or the Gephardt relationship?

Martin: Really, it's the—

Paster: The schedule is controlled by Gephardt more than Foley, but the relationship with Gephardt was such that we would talk about schedules. NAFTA didn't destroy the relationship. His key staff guys were friends.

I think what may have been missing in the House was that Clinton, as I said this morning, never achieved the same set of relationships with Foley and Gephardt he had with Mitchell. They'd talk frequently for sure, they'd be in the White House a lot. But I think there was much more relaxed back-and-forth with Mitchell about strategy and timing and stuff. It was always a little more awkward when dealing with Foley and Gephardt. Not unpleasant, but they just didn't have the same rapport.

Is that consistent with what you heard from others?

Riley: Your impressions would be more definitive and more authoritative than most of the other people we could talk with about this. But I think the general sense is that Mitchell in particular was somebody who was very accessible—

Paster: He was relaxed in his dealings.

Riley: But I wanted to press you—don't lose the train of thought—about why you thought the rapport with Foley and Gephardt was not as good as it was with Mitchell. Foley I could sort of understand, there might even be something generational there. But I don't want to pre-program you if you've got another idea.

Paster: I don't know. I don't know. Tom Foley is about as cerebral as you're going to get of a Speaker. He and Clinton intellectually should have linked. They both read lots of books, they both think big stuff. It should have seemed to be a natural match. It wasn't ever quite right. It wasn't unpleasant. I want to stress this. There was never any animosity. But it wasn't quite as comfortable a rapport as he had with some others.

Gephardt, I don't know.

Riley: Competition? This is a guy who has thought he ought to be President for a good long while, right?

Paster: If Gephardt had competition, it was with Al Gore. That was competition. The fact that Gore was Vice President could have, by itself, been enough to make it a problem.

Riley: Interesting.

Paster: That was always a strained relationship, going back to when Gore was in the House.

Riley: Can I follow up on this for a while?

Paster: Sure.

Riley: Let's talk about Al Gore for a few minutes, because he's somebody we touched on once or twice—

Paster: He was Vice President then, I remember that.

Riley: How does having Al Gore as Vice President complicate your life?

Paster: On a personal level, he knew damn well I was a Gephardt guy in '88 and reminded me of it periodically. Threw it in my face more than once.

Riley: With a smile on his face or—?

Paster: No, no. Just like, *I know you're not that close to me*. Once again, things weren't said, but—I was not on side with Gore because he knew that given the choice, I made a different choice in '88. So that was always a bit of a gulf between us. The Vice President, for somebody with all of his Hill experience, was remarkably ready to put forth ideas that were going to be trouble on the Hill and argue for principles and beliefs that were going to get us in trouble up there—like the BTU tax.

I had a huge battle, had to do with the use of chlorine-free paper, which was one of his environmental issues. You know where the center of non-chlorine-free paper is? It's in Maine. I got caught between Mitchell and Gore on government procurement of paper. I actually prevailed. I'd go around. I'd go to the President and say, "Do this with the Vice President, you're going to piss off George Mitchell." I actually won that fight. Gore was, for a great Hill veteran, many years on the Hill, not as Hill sensitive as I would have wanted the Vice President—he could have been an enormous ally if he were Hill sensitive.

Riley: That was an interesting self-paraphrasing you just made. You went from great Hill veteran—

Paster: Lots of years.

Riley: To a Hill veteran of lots of years. That's sort of a different implication from those two—

Paster: I guess somebody who has been on the Hill as long as he was, I would have thought would have figured out how to work well with the Hill.

Riley: And Gore's reputation as a Senator, can you comment on that before he—you're a guy who spent a lot of time around—

Paster: Gore was always a little bit piloting his own ship, flying his own plane. He tended not to be a terribly gregarious, engaged, cooperative member of either the House or the Senate. He also took contrary positions, as he did on missile defense when he was in the House. So he had a history of being somewhat of an independent sort. I guess that's part of the point you're making. But he's very smart, and I just assumed that if you're on the Hill that long you figure out how the deal works. And he either didn't or didn't care, and it was interesting. He also, I thought, overvalued this reinvention of government stuff and whatever political value it had. I thought it was exaggerated, frankly.

Riley: Can you comment on his rapport with the President?

Paster: Began brilliantly as they left New York on the bus in '92 after the convention. That was the high point. That was absolutely the peak, and then it just got worse and worse and worse. He cost himself the Presidency over it. I believe to this day that if he had respected Bill Clinton more, he'd be President and we wouldn't have eight years of George [W.] Bush.

[**BREAK**]

Paster: —honored fully his commitments to Gore about inclusion in everything, and I think Gore wasn't equally respectful of letting Clinton be Clinton sometimes, or he injected himself in places he wasn't needed. So whatever bargain they struck I think Clinton honored fully, but I think Gore kept wanting to make sure of that and protect it, assert it in ways that weren't necessary. It got to be a bother. There's no question. I don't know what others have told you. I think it got to a point where having to have Gore in every meeting was a real burden for the President.

Riley: We've heard that the Vice President enjoyed making presentations on white boards during their weekly luncheons, which evidently the President sometimes found a little taxing.

Paster: I told you the anecdote before about how he defended me in the Bentsen episode, so I want to acknowledge that. I was distressed when he agreed to debate Ross Perot on Larry King on NAFTA. I felt we had turned the corner, we were going to win, and I thought it was such a high stakes gamble. Now, he did a great job, it actually helped us. He called me. He knew I tried to argue against it. I think he went out of town. He called me early the next morning, I think he was in Denver, and said, "I didn't hurt you too bad, did I?" Just stuck the knife in, twisted it, turned it. Called me *again*. When he got back, *again*, just couldn't resist sticking it to me. I still think I was right. We didn't need it and it was a risk we shouldn't have taken. The fact that he did a great job, I acknowledge he did a superb job. That picture of [Willis] Hawley and [Reed] Smoot was just brilliant. So credit to him, but we didn't need it.

Riley: I'm trying to get a sense of whether the President felt that Gore had a well-defined sense of what was going on in the Hill. Did the President overrely on Gore early for advice about how the Hill was going to react to things?

Paster: I think if he wanted an independent view, he'd probably call David Pryor or somebody like that. No, I don't think he would rely on Gore.

Riley: Did he have those chances? That raises an interesting question. If he needed a back channel to the Hill to take the temperature among members, it would be Pryor?

Paster: Well, Pryor would probably be the first call he'd make, but I think he had others. Over time he developed relationships where he would have called lots of different people with whom he had a prior relationship. I'm sure that by well into the year—first of all, he called the Hill frequently at night. Just back up for a second. I'd get the call slips the next day. He would have called seven members in the course of the evening, some of whom I never even would have thought he was calling. I couldn't tell him not to. I did ask him to let me know what he was up to. He was pretty good, not perfect.

But he would have been willing to pick up the phone and call Rostenkowski and say, "What do you think? What's going on?" He had lots of people at that point. He got to know a lot of folks on the Hill. He was very much at ease running his own traps.

Riley: Was there a preference between working the phones and seeing people in person?

Paster: He saw people a lot but the phones were when he had the time at night when he could do stuff. Seeing people tended to be in more formal situations. He'd take somebody aside, ask them some questions. So if he got 20 members in for some reception, and he might pull somebody, drape his arm over his shoulder, pull them in the corner, ask some questions, what's going on and stuff. But it's not easy to do that with lots of individuals. That goes back to the very place we started, which is you can't walk down the hall and go to the legislator's office and sit down.

Riley: Exactly.

Paster: So the phone is a substitute for that.

Riley: Was there much socializing with the members? Bringing them into the theater to watch movies at night. You mentioned golfing.

Paster: Golfing was the big one. He'd play golf with members. There was less of the nonpurposeful relationship building than there should have been in my view. There was no problem getting appointments when we needed to lobby folks on NAFTA or the economy or whatever, get whatever groups in. When we had issues, "Get them down here." But what I was after, which I never got enough of, was time for relationship development. We did one-on-ones, as we talked about—Rostenkowski and Murtha, that's fine. But I also mentioned my frustration about not getting the moderate Republicans down. I think we missed opportunities.

Every time there was a dinner I was asked, "How many people do you want to invite, who do you want to invite?" They always gave me my fair shot, but that's different from the kind of social interchange I would have preferred more of.

Riley: Do you think some of that was related to family obligations? This is a President who evidently took seriously his relationship with his daughter and—

Paster: No, my trade-off isn't against the family, my trade-off is against what else he's doing with his time that's of an official nature. And guess what? The head of Congressional Relations thought Congressional Relations was the most important thing he was doing. I plead guilty to that.

I remember one time I was in the office on a Friday afternoon. He rushed me out because he was going up to Sidwell [Sidwell Friends School] to watch the football game, which I had no problem with at all, but he didn't invite me to the football game. My son went to that school too.

We talked about that in my interview in Little Rock in '92 in this context. I said, "Before I go, I need to ask you a question about family values." Remember that was a hot button term in the '92 campaign. "Family values?" he said. I said, "Yes. The main value in my family is when my son pitches, I go to the games. I don't want a job that makes me miss the games." He said, "Oh, I'm on your side. I get out of the mansion and go to the school for Chelsea's [Clinton] plays and all that. Absolutely." He said all the right things. He meant it, but it didn't happen.

Then after Vince's suicide, we had this meeting in the old Executive Office Building in which we were all admonished to live our lives and not let the work consume us. Nothing changed. He'd still call meetings at 5 o'clock on a Sunday to get ready for the next week. He was obsessive.

Riley: Five o'clock?

Paster: At night. You work all week, you work all day Saturday. You work part of the day Sunday and then you come back 5 o'clock Sunday night to get ready for the next week.

Riley: Five o'clock in the morning didn't sound like the right time with Clinton.

Paster: Not Bill Clinton.

Riley: Three o'clock in the morning maybe.

Paster: The whole notion was that by Sunday night your week is over and you've got this meeting to get ready for the next week.

Riley: You said earlier, before we got on tape, that you made only the one trip to Camp David and that was for—

Paster: It was that introductory event they had. We were brand-new in the White House, it was the second or third week, I guess. The Cabinet and some of the most senior folks went up the night before. Remember, I told you I was not an insider. I did not get invited on the overnight. I was part of a group that was asked to be at the White House for a bus trip up early one morning, back the same day. It was just this weird session. I didn't know a lot of the people. It was all so new.

Riley: It was weird while you were there?

Paster: I have no recollection of what we did. All I remember is that they let us go to the commissary and buy souvenirs. What I did in summer camp. I don't remember a damn thing about it.

One thing that never happened in the Clinton White House was that people were not given a chance to come to know each other. If we had spent that time doing that it might have been real useful. After I left the White House, I got to be a good friend of Bo Cutter, who was one of Bob Rubin's deputies. I scarcely knew Bo in the White House. We got thrown in together, we were in lots of meetings together. We never saw each other outside of those meetings, and you know, he's a wonderful, interesting guy, and we're friends now.

If ever I have a chance to influence any other administration, one thing I would say is, "Look, you're getting a whole lot of people together who don't know each other. Take the time, make the time for them to get some rapport before you cast them adrift."

Martin: Do you think that that's different from, say, when you worked for Senator Bayh?

Paster: I think the difference is, you don't all come in at the same time. I joined an existing staff, I was introduced around, got to know people and relationships. One of my dearest friends to this day is from those days. What happens in the White House is that if you don't know somebody on the way in, it's really hard to get to know them well while you're there. Maybe after the first year it was a little less frenetic and maybe there was more opportunity for that. And there's an issue about my personality, which is I am obsessive. I never went on a single trip on Air Force One because I didn't take the time. I guess if you went on the plane you had schmooze time. I never had schmooze time. I sent Susan or Tim on the trips. If I'd known I was going to leave in one year I would have taken one of the trips just to have been there.

My wife says I'm a little manic and maybe it's me. It's work, work, work. Never played tennis on the White House courts. I know some guys did that, but I just didn't have time. Could be my problem.

Riley: Your sense is that this could have been done during the transition period if there had been a greater emphasis on getting the White House staff designated by the end of November, as opposed to waiting until two or three days before people were leaving Little Rock to get everybody positioned.

Paster: I think it might have been useful to get them not only appointed, but then to get them into some kind of setting where they could spend time together. Nobody ever asked me the questions you've asked me about strategy for dealing with the Hill. If Mack ever acknowledged that, and I'll give you the memo—I want to scan it—if he ever acknowledged it, I don't recall him acknowledging it. Did anybody else ever see it? I doubt it. I saved it. I saved it because it's a little self-vindication. All of us are jealous about our own records. I deserve some responsibility for the defeat of the economic stimulus package, or what was interpreted as the package. But still, I accept some responsibility. But I got blamed for a whole lot of other stuff.

Ira Magaziner blames me because I didn't help him with health care enough. Mike Waldman said I didn't help on campaign finance reform enough. Bullshit. I reject that—I accept accountability and responsibility where I messed up, but those weren't my messes.

Riley: Let's talk about health care because that's—the outside perception is that health care is a big matter, a big undercurrent throughout the course of the first year. While there is all of this activity going on, health care is impossible to ignore because it's always there in some fashion. Were you feeling that or is that an overstatement of what's going on at the time?

Paster: I can't answer your question because I essentially, early on, said to Ricchetti, "Look, Steve, there are all these meetings on health care and there's no way I can do my job and go to all these meetings. You're the health care guy."

Riley: Okay.

Paster: I said to the First Lady and to Ira, "Steve's your guy. If you need me, let me know." I couldn't have gone to those meetings and done my job. So I was not off the hook, but I was a distance from it. It was always a big deal issue because it was, after all, so central to the campaign. The decision to have the First Lady champion it was a way of stating its importance.

Riley: Did you think at the time that was an overly risky move or a wise move?

Paster: I wasn't consulted on that matter. [*laughs*]

Riley: Not surprising.

Paster: I'm trying to recall how I felt when I heard that news. One recollection I have is that I thought, *That's a way to tell everybody how important it is*. So it's an affirmative response. He's telling the whole world this is a big deal. I don't remember if I was smart enough to understand the risk that it carried with it, or if I did at the time. I can't claim now that I understood that.

Let me say this about the First Lady and it's very important. My dealings with her were somewhat limited, but they were all very good and constructive. I didn't meet her until we got to the White House. I never met her before the 20th of January. I wasn't interviewed by her. I wasn't queried by her. I didn't come to know her staff well enough until later, Maggie Williams and the others, became good friends. But when I had reason to do business with her, I never ran into the stuff that folks complained about. I heard complaints. My dealings were really very good.

I remember I got word in the office one day that Jake [James] Pickle announced his retirement. He was on Ways and Means, Health Care. Her office was down the hall on the second floor. I ran over to the office, she was there. She said, "Come in, come in." I said, "I just got a call from the Hill and Jake Pickle announced his retirement. So if you call immediately, wish him well and stuff, it could help later." In a second, didn't hesitate. I liked the lady. I'm a big fan of hers.

Martin: I was imagining that in 1993, there's really nothing happening legislatively on health care.

Paster: A lot of Hill visits, a lot of Hill visits.

Martin: I was going to guess that you're visiting regularly with Rostenkowski and Dingell on other business. To what degree are they chafing under the fact that they're not exactly included in the task force on health care?

Paster: But they were being talked to a lot so I don't think that was the issue. I think Mrs. Clinton did a pretty good job of being in touch with them and talking to them. She did private meetings in their offices. I don't think they were chafing. I think the fundamental error on health care—and I blame Ira for this—is that in 1992, while controlling the Hill but not the White House, Dick Gephardt had taken the House Democrats through a whole exercise on a common health care position and gotten Dingell and Rostenkowski and [Henry] Waxman and [Fortney] Stark aligned. So you've got the subcommittee and four committee chairmen, Ways and Means,

Energy, and Commerce, Stark, Rostenkowski, Waxman, and Dingell. He had a consensus sort of position.

At the same time, Mitchell had done a similar thing over in the Senate and among the key players there were [Jay] Rockefeller and Bentsen and Kennedy of course. They had a pretty clear-cut position. Now, different positions, but there was a House Democratic point of view and there was a Senate Democratic point of view. Ira never bothered to try to understand them to find out whether there was a place there to go forward from. He had this mechanism of going through this labyrinth with all these trapdoors you go through. It's the weirdest thing in the world.

Riley: Tollgates. Trapdoor sounds better.

Paster: Trapdoor is what you fall through. Trapdoors are what he had. Ira just wouldn't listen to all the work that had gone on for years by guys who wanted to get to the same place he wanted to get to.

Martin: Dingell had introduced comprehensive health care every year for 50 years.

Paster: I'll tell you an anecdote, it has nothing to do with your report. Last Tuesday, I went to lunch at the White House, 30 people in the family dining room, the President and Mrs. Bush, honoring John Dingell on his 50th anniversary in Congress. He was elected December 13, 1955, in a special election to succeed his father, who died in office. Bush is hosting the lunch and he said to the Dingells, "Give us a guest list." His wife, his mother-in-law, his sister and brother-in-law, his brother and sister-in-law, his son, daughter-in-law, granddaughter, daughter, couple of cousins, and a few friends. Nobody else except the list he gave them, plus President and Mrs. Bush. The President gave an hour and a half. It was a lovely affair. I said to the President, "Those of us who are John's friends are enormously grateful for this act. Doesn't change my politics, but it's a really nice thing you did." The question? It made me forget the question. It was about Dingell and health care.

Martin: Initially yes.

Riley: About their having a position.

Martin: Their response to—

Paster: You were talking about Dingell introducing it every year. That was his father's legacy. That's how I got off on that, I got sidetracked. They had a great history and experience. Stark and Waxman from California didn't like each other. They'd come to some common ground. There was all this stuff going on. Ira just wasn't going to listen to it.

Riley: There's a bit of curiosity though about how this has gotten passed down in the received wisdom because the conventional criticism of it is that it was a closed-off process. Yet if you talk to people who were involved, including yourself, you're saying that there were efforts to reach out to the Hill and—

Paster: Let's say efforts to talk, but were there efforts to listen?

Martin: So it was more that she was briefing them on what she was doing.

Paster: I wasn't in the meeting so I won't answer. But Clinton is the one—I'm not trying to absolve her, but I think the practical fact is staff takes the hit. It's not Clinton's fault economic stimulus failed. That's my fault, I accept responsibility. I acknowledge it. I think it's a little unfair to blame Hillary Clinton for the fact that Ira ran a flawed process.

Martin: I'm more raising a question about the process itself. Who's to blame is not really the question for me, but more—

Paster: For some of us it's very important.

Martin: I understand that. The interesting question is, I think, in the received wisdom it's that Congress, scholars, and other people write about this as Congress was cut out and that's why the policy failed.

Paster: The premise is valid. Congress was inadequately part of the process. The substantive debate was, do you start at the left and go center or do you start at the center and go left? You understand that argument.

Riley: Were you involved in that discussion?

Paster: A little bit, and I was more left of the center, which maybe was bad advice. But what I do know is that if I begin where they leave off, they have to give me a different level of respect. If I'm the new guy in town, with tollgates and trapdoors, I'm going to be a lot less successful in garnering their support. So there's a place in some of the history, some of the literature, one of the books, where Ira complains that I failed to keep an appointment with Rostenkowski and that's why health care failed, right?

Martin: One meeting?

Paster: Right, it could have been Mogadishu, it could have been NAFTA. I don't know what it was. But it isn't the problem. That isn't why health care failed. health care failed because the Hill was not properly listened to even as it was being talked to.

Riley: So you get the sense that if they had started out differently, if the design had been more heavily influenced with Hill input that this was a doable proposition. They could have gotten something very close to—

Paster: You can't prove the unprovable but clearly, by virtue of my natural disposition to how one deals with the Hill, that was how I would have done it. I also think it makes more sense.

Riley: And I think it's also the case that there was a bit of arrogance in there. It wasn't just inattentiveness, there were decisions made that "we don't have to deal with what those people

have done because we just won a national election in part on this issue, and it's our responsibility to make the important judgment calls on what the package looks like."

Paster: Nobody would have said that to me because I would have gone berserk. I never heard that. That may have been what people were saying but they wouldn't say that to me. I would have been violent.

Riley: Maybe I overstated it.

Paster: But I think there's something else. Ira's problem was that he thought because he was as smart as he was, he could intellectualize this thing into being. He was competing with Bernie for political ineptitude.

Riley: There was a point where health care intersects with your portfolio. There was an effort made sometime in mid '93 to get this into the reconciliation bill, right?

Paster: There was discussion about it. The theory was, how do you avoid filibusters? You get into reconciliation. There was a conversation about it. It didn't last but for a day or two, it was an absolute nonstarter. It would have so destroyed the system. We had enough trouble with Robert C. Byrd using third-degree amendments on budget bills to help us out. It got us a lot of difficulty.

Riley: We haven't talked about Byrd much. I guess his name has come up once or twice.

Paster: Well, he was a little like Natcher, a lot of respect and formality in the relationships. I knew him well enough to be able to do that. I think Pat Griffin, who succeeded me, who used to work for Byrd, had a better relationship with Byrd than I did. But I had a good relationship with Byrd. He was always accessible. We had him in to see the President more than once on stuff. That funny conversation that I remember as the "gays conversation." It was really generational.

Riley: There's a lot of federal government presence in West Virginia now. Did some of that come through on your time?

Paster: It happened every year for the last 30 years. Nobody can take all the blame or credit for what he's done.

Riley: The rumor is that eventually the entire federal government will be located not in the District of Columbia but in West Virginia.

Paster: I think the issues with Byrd and Clinton were generational. The men are so different. I think even though Natcher was older and also formal and courtly, I think that his manner was one Clinton could recognize and warm up to. I think Byrd is really just a different personality. You had to remind Clinton it wasn't Bob, it was Robert.

Riley: How about you with members, first-name basis?

Paster: Very rarely. It was always Mr. Chairman or Senator. John Dingell and I were close personal friends. But some of the younger members were first name. In meetings, always formal. In a meeting never use a first name. If others were in the room. Same thing with Cabinet members.

Riley: There were, I think, two so-called war rooms created during the first year. One would have been on the budget.

Paster: I'll take credit for that. Put Roger Altman in charge of it, my idea.

Riley: How did that work? As a student of politics from the outside, you see an ad hoc organization created in a set of existing systems, it looks like a recipe for problems.

Paster: It depends who the people are. I remember the conversations in McLarty's office. The idea was we needed to get people who were just focused on this. The data by district on what the economic plan meant—Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky was one of two people in the country whose district was disadvantaged by the plan. The other was Bill Archer in Houston. Everybody else we could show a net gain because of the earned income credit and other provisions. You need a place where all the information is going in and coming out coordinated. You need somebody to run it who commands sufficient authority that he or she can get stuff done. I had this conversation with Mack, I don't remember who else was there. I suggested Roger was the right guy to run it, which was absolutely right, it was perfect.

That person who runs such an enterprise needs to work with Intergovernmental Relations, Public Liaison, Congressional Relations, and share, share, share, share. One way to do that is you take somebody from each of those places and put them into the war room. So you have your person there and you make sure—you don't rely on good faith for stuff to come out. I was fully supportive of it. I didn't consider it a problem, I considered it an asset.

The other occasion, of course, was NAFTA with Bill Daley and [William] Frenzel. Bill is one of my dear friends to this day. Both of those were very successful.

Riley: You basically took that part of your portfolio and turned it over to—

Paster: No! Let them do the lobbying? No, no, no, no, no. You said that just to get me excited.

Riley: Yes.

Paster: The lobbying requires good data. It requires political intelligence from the field. It requires a sense of what support you get from Governors and mayors. It requires knowing which businessman would care about stuff, information we couldn't generate. We didn't have the people or the time or anything. The war room provides the information, the substantive arguments, the linkage, and we control the lobbying. Now, in both those cases, everybody in the administration lobbied. The President lobbied, the Vice President lobbied, every Cabinet member lobbied. We ran it out of our shop, exchange of information. The rule on NAFTA was we needed two or three separate confirmations of a commitment to make it count, otherwise we couldn't

count it. We kept the tallies. But I would talk to Mickey, and I would talk to Daley, and I would talk to Frenzel and they would talk to each other. What happened was that people cooperated. There was a sense of common purpose so that the information flowed broadly enough that in both cases it worked.

Riley: Okay.

Martin: No question on that, but some questions about events and to what degree they affected Congressional Relations.

Riley: I've got a couple broader thematic things. You mentioned earlier that you had objected to the political consultants keeping White House passes. I don't know whether it was an inference that there may have been too much interaction with the consultants at some stage when you were serving. I wanted to pose a general question in that light about the role of polling and decision-making in White House operations during the time that you were there. This is a President who gets a reputation later on of being very much a poll-driven figure. I'm wondering the extent to which, especially in light of what you just said about the war rooms, polling was being done on this multiplicity of issues and how you were relying on it.

Paster: Let me first put a disclaimer into the record. After 1994, the polling was all [Mark] Penn. I acquired Penn's business in 2000 and he works for me, so I have a sympathetic disposition.

I think if polling is done to get numbers that dictate decisions, that's really shortsighted. If polling is done to understand what will drive people and enable you to persuade people, the purpose of intelligent polling—this is where I think Penn really does a good job. It's not the numbers that say most people favor this or don't favor this. It's the messages and the words that will enable them to accept what you want them to believe in. It's a qualitative task, message development that comes out of the research, that I think is a totally appropriate form of management. The President did it with Mark later, with Stan Greenberg at the beginning. I'm not bothered by that principle. I think if all you do with the numbers is let them make you decide what to do, you can get into trouble.

For example, on Easter Monday in 1993, the day of the Easter egg roll, I think if you check your chronologies, you'll find that Bill Clinton went out on the South Lawn during the Easter egg roll and excoriated the pharmaceutical companies for overcharging people for drugs. This was a direct result of a Greenberg poll and some Carville/Begala stimulus that said people hate pharmaceutical companies because drugs cost too much. So the President went out and took some shots. It served no useful purpose. Made some enemies.

In 1992, if you remember, he announced the health plan on the steps of Merck with Ray Gilmartin standing next to him. In the spring he starts kicking the hell out of the pharmaceutical companies. Now, if they had done something specific—you've got to check me on the date, but I think I'm right about that sequence. That strikes me as a misuse of the process. More generally, I think that having good political advice, having good current research on public mood, having smart people help you develop the right messages to convey a point of view is wholly appropriate. I have no problem with it. It's the purpose for it and how it is used that's the issue.

My concern with Begala, Carville, Grunwald, and Greenberg—and later of course Paul Begala became staff—was not that they were enormously influential, which is fine. But if they're going to have that kind of White House access and White House role, they should be under the same ethical rules that regular staff have. I think it is inconsistent to portray oneself as sitting at the highest ethical standards of government and having people at the center of the government who have these businesses they're running on the side. That was my concern. I didn't start the problem. The problem came from the Hill. There was unhappiness on the Hill. I reflected that.

Riley: Unhappiness on the Hill generated by—

Paster: Some House Democrats were resenting the role they were playing. I guess Republicans were making an issue of it because they weren't subject to White House disclosure, ethics rules. Some of the Democrats on the Hill felt it was an area of vulnerability and I agreed with them.

Riley: You're speaking specifically here about the—

Paster: The four of them early in the administration.

Riley: Not adhering to the regular staff—

Paster: They weren't regular staff. This was the glory of it. But they had staff passes.

Riley: I just wanted to be clear that the complaints from the Hill weren't about decisions that were being taken as a result of—

Paster: Political risk.

Martin: Let me follow up on the polling question.

Paster: Stan, don't forget, is the husband of Rosa DeLauro.

Riley: We were talking about that just before we came in.

Martin: In terms of the polling, do you remember any discussions where perhaps the ethics of the polling were discussed? Let me give you a little background. Several academics have begun criticizing Clinton, not for following polls, as the popular press would have it seem, but rather that polls were used to manipulate the public, to craft a message that was slightly underhanded. Because they were using the polling to try to figure out how to phrase something or how to write a speech.

Paster: Why is that underhanded?

Martin: I think that the general sense is that it's—maybe underhanded is too strong, but it's a sense that the public is being manipulated.

Paster: If Procter and Gamble uses market research to find out what tag line will best sell the soap, if they're honest about what the soap does, that doesn't bother me. In fact, that's how I make my living. Not personally, but that's what WPP does for a living, okay? So I can't find too much fault with it.

If a politician uses market research to find out which aspects of a policy will be most appealing to the public, not whether that person changes the policy or misrepresents the policy, but simply articulates it on the basis of intelligent research, I'm not sure I have a problem with that. You get into an area like crime. Is "personal security" the right expression or is some other expression the one that will get people supporting crime legislation? I'm not sure there's any harm, if I want to push a piece of legislation, in finding out which words attached to it resonate better with the public. I'm not sure that's a problem.

Martin: Just to flip it around. One could also just call that leadership as well. You can make it sound better or worse but you don't recall any discussions when the polling came up about how it was being used and whether that was—

Paster: No, not in my tenure. But I would not routinely have been in meetings those four were in. That was rare. That solarium meeting in the summer of '93 to decide the fall agenda they were in, a couple of them were trying to get him off of NAFTA. But mostly—this is where my earlier point about me outside of the inner circle—I wasn't in a lot of the political conversations.

Riley: I think part of what of what we're trying to do is what surely happens in retrospect. This becomes such a prominent issue for the President after Dick Morris comes back in, and it's sometimes difficult for us to peer back behind what was going on in '95 to an earlier period. What we're trying to track is the extent to which the pollsters were being used during the first year and indeed get an accurate picture of what they were being used for.

Paster: The pollsters, one pollster was taking polls. The others weren't pollsters, they were political consultants.

Riley: The consultants.

Paster: The four of them. I wouldn't know enough. George would know the answer.

Riley: We have not talked with him.

Paster: George would know for sure. George, I think, would tell you he spoke to Stan every day. I think it's fair to say that George spoke to Stan more than once a day. Once again, the folks who were in Little Rock in '92 were different from those of us who came later.

Riley: Exactly. But you don't have any specific recollections of legislative initiatives or steering of legislation based on poll numbers.

Paster: No, the legislative agenda we talked about was pretty straightforward.

Riley: Exactly.

Paster: We weren't doing the school uniforms, stuff like that.

Riley: We'll get to something else after this question. In the use of the war rooms you said there was an awful lot—part of the purpose of the war rooms was a mechanism for gathering political intelligence. Polling would be a part of that enterprise.

Paster: Yes. I don't know how they did that because polling was paid for by the DNC, and we would have had to have some kind of legal methodology for getting information in. I'm sure it was done. I hope it was done. It would be silly if it wasn't.

Riley: I wonder if you could talk with us a little about press relations during your time there. Did you spend a lot of time talking to the press?

Paster: No. Didn't you read in here how little I talked to the press?

Riley: I did, but I don't believe everything I read in the papers.

Paster: I talked to the press all the time. But I didn't need to be quoted. Ruth Marcus and Ann Devroy shared the beat for the *Post* when I was there. I would talk to one or the other of them almost every day about something.

Riley: What were the ground rules?

Paster: Background only.

Riley: Meaning?

Paster: Meaning no attribution and no use, so much as guiding them to where the story was, in that direction. There were others. Ann Devroy is dead now, I had a terrible blowup with Ann Devroy. There's an article in here about my job at Hill and Knowlton, about ethics violations and stuff. She didn't call me before she wrote that article. I had the nastiest screaming match with the late Ann Devroy about that. I said, "How can you write this article and not give me a chance to comment?" She said, "I couldn't reach you." I said, "That is the most horrible piece of shit. You've reached me every day for the last 300 days and then you say you couldn't reach me. Did I ever not return your phone calls?" Ruth told me later that they could hear me screaming through the other end of the phone in the newsroom.

What was missing was somebody—Stephanopoulos, Gergen, Gearan, Dee Dee [Myers] —who would gather senior staff together and say, "This is how we're going to deal with the press. Here's the strategy for the press." I tried to do that in the Congress as much as I could.

At the beginning of the administration, and this was terrible, in the early senior staff meetings each day the question was, "What's the message of the day?" I'd say, "We're not running for office anymore. We don't need a message of the day." Getting these people from campaign

mode to governing mode, getting that transition, was enormously difficult, and they weren't doing a good job of making the transition. Really, they absolutely asked the wrong question. But what wasn't dealt with was who should take press calls, why you should take press calls. People acted in their own perceived best interest.

So if I thought talking to the press would support getting the legislation passed or send the right message to the Hill, I was going to do it. Nobody told me not to. We were told affirmatively to cooperate with Elizabeth Drew.

Riley: You were told that.

Paster: Absolutely. We were affirmatively told to cooperate with Elizabeth Drew and later with Bob Woodward. So Drew would come by once every couple of weeks for a half hour, 45 minutes for the *On the Edge* book. Everybody was seeing her. She was walking around the West Wing with impunity. We were supposed to cooperate. That was the word that was out.

Riley: That came from Mack or from the President?

Paster: No, from Mack. The judgment was to cooperate and to provide access.

Riley: Is the book a good book from your perspective?

Paster: It's pretty accurate. It's a better book than Bob Woodward's book. Nice big book. If I could remake the world, you get the senior White House staff together and you'd have an hour in which the people in charge of the press say, "Here's what I'd like you to think about doing. Give me a heads up if you hear from So-and-So." And I would have a chance with congressional—mayors and Governors, they would do their thing. So they'd have cooperation.

What happened was they evolved natural alliances. So I get a phone call from somebody and I'd call up George or Mark and say, "So-and-So is calling me. What do you think I ought to be doing here?" or vice versa. Someone would get a call from the Hill and they'd call me and say, "[Charles] Rangel is calling, what should I do about it?" So where you developed good personal rapport, you then fell into the kind of behavior that you wanted to have happen. But where that rapport didn't exist, there was a lot of that ad hoc stuff going on all the time.

Riley: Were there particular reporters who gave you guys fits that you want to talk about? You mentioned the one occasion—

Paster: The only one I know who was constantly hitting the President's buttons was not a reporter, it was Howell Raines.

Riley: How do you explain that?

Paster: Why is the *New York Times* editorial policy so anti-Clinton? I don't know, but I was thrilled when Raines got fired. I don't know. I'm a Clinton partisan, I thought it was terribly unfair. The President complained to [Arthur Ochs] Sulzberger. It was constant vitriolic stuff. He

was unhappy because a southern guy got to be President? I don't know. It's the darnedest thing. But that's the only one I remember really persistent, miserable unhappiness with.

Riley: Another Alabaman, by the way.

Paster: I'm on the board at Tuskegee so I go to Alabama several times a year and I get in and out of the state without any problem.

Riley: You probably fly into Atlanta, you drive 85, you're in Alabama for 35 miles, you get to Tuskegee, then turn around and go back.

Paster: But I spend the night at Tuskegee. I don't leave the campus, it's safe that way.

Riley: I'm from Auburn so it's only—

Paster: The bad thing is when we have our October board meeting on the weekend of an Auburn football game. Getting back to Atlanta is really hard.

Riley: I'm sure it is. My apologies, although the last couple of years it's been worth it. How about cooperative reporters? If I'm a historian 50 years from now and I've got access to everything on the Internet and I want to figure out what the best reporting is on the Clinton Presidency, who are the real professionals who don't have axes to grind and are doing a good job of it all?

Paster: Interesting question.

Martin: Even connected to that—

Paster: Mara Liasson.

Martin: There might be other folks—

Paster: I thought Ruth did a good job, I think Ruth Marcus was first rate.

Riley: Ruth Marcus.

Martin: The fluff reporters will provide more positive than is due.

Paster: I didn't deal with that stuff. I had a couple of personality pieces written, Lloyd Grove did one. There was one in the *Times* that was pretty nice too, but mostly I didn't do that stuff. I only did it if somebody downstairs asked me to. I would never agree to a profile piece without the right person—Mark or Dee Dee or George or somebody—saying yes, do it.

Riley: That's a good idea. It's noticeable. I was going to comment earlier that when you see as many briefing books as we do, it's notable when you find what for us is a relatively thin group of

profile articles. In your case it's borne out by the factual evidence here that you made it a practice not to do that kind of stuff.

Paster: It didn't further the job.

Martin: It strikes me that you only surface really when you quit, in terms of press recognition.

Paster: Pretty much. There was a nice article in the *Times* during the course of the year and the Grove piece. It's not part of your history but I think it's useful to bear in mind that I didn't need the White House job to get my career into high gear, and I wasn't worried about my next job when I was in the White House, which gave me an enormous advantage. So the amount of publicity I got wasn't important. I got the job I'd wanted my whole life and I loved it. Doing it well was its own ultimate satisfaction. If I were ten years younger at that time, I might have had a whole different view of what I was about. And I also have said repeatedly that if I were ten years younger, I probably couldn't have quit when I did. Because it's intoxicating. All of the work you've done, in all of your histories of the Presidency—if there's anybody who doesn't acknowledge that it's intoxicating and thrilling to go to work there every day, you know they're bullshitting.

There's a guy I'll protect here with anonymity. He came to see me a couple years after I left the White House. He was thinking of getting out and wanted to talk about his career. He came to see me every two years, and he served eight, but he never got out. Giving that up is tough. Being older than Clinton was an enormous advantage in that respect because of where I was in my life. Despite what any article says, I will give you a sworn affidavit that my compensation the first year I left the White House was precisely the same as it would have been if I hadn't gone to the White House. It's contractual, exactly what it would have been. I make a lot of money anyhow. So I think my attitude was different. George is 15 years younger than I am; it changes your attitude a lot.

Riley: The fact of your own professional success before gives you—your professional identity is not wholly wrapped up in this. I had an interesting conversation over dinner when we interviewed Harold Ickes. If it were in an interview, I couldn't divulge the contents, but because it was a dinner conversation it's a different matter. But we got on a discussion about why there aren't wise men anymore. I don't think we ever reached a conclusion over dinner, but one of the things that occurred to me was that there are very few people who have that level of independent success in business or the law that affords them the ability to come in and at a moment's notice say, "Thank you very much, I've had enough, I'm going to go back to my job" and not have it adversely affect their career.

Paster: There are lots of issues. It's something I'm concerned about a lot because I reference that earlier case of Warren Christopher. I think it's a wonderful book, the wise men issue is a good one. Of course the joke about Clinton saying, "Get me somebody like Lloyd Cutler" is it's going to be Lloyd Cutler. The ethics rules really make it hard for people to go in and out of government with any kind of alacrity.

When I went to work in the White House, I'd been in business for 12 years and I had saved up a fair amount of money and I had my kids' college money saved and so forth. I was required to sell every share of stock I had and put them into mutual funds and stuff like that, with the exception of the stock in WPP, my employer then and now, because I couldn't sell them off. Then I had to recuse myself when the issue of advertising deductibility came up in the economic plan. The forced stock sales cost me a fortune. Not just by the pay cut I took in going to the White House, but by what happened to the stock market in '93 that I had no benefit from.

Martin: So Clinton's success you just sort of missed?

Paster: I missed a lot. You check the record, '93 was a huge run-up in the stock market. I was left out of it.

Martin: It seems ironic at times.

Paster: I once spoke to a friend of mine, Al Hunt, and I said, "Al, are you going to write a story about the people who gave up a lot to work in the government? You write about everybody trying to exploit their government experience." Of course, it never got written. We set up ethical rules that really make it hard to get people into government and to get out of government—because we presume guilt and unethical behavior. It's a big issue, it's a big problem. It will be interesting to see where we recruit the next Democratic administration from.

Riley: That raises an interesting question and I think I posed this to you earlier about whether Carter experience was a positive disqualifier for being brought in—where was the memory bank of people?

Paster: I don't think working for Bill Clinton is a positive disqualifier. I think it is essential that a President be able to establish his or her own identity and it would be a particular issue for Mrs. Clinton if she becomes President, that she not bring back all of Bill Clinton's people, because then it's even harder for her to establish herself. If Evan Bayh populated himself with a whole bunch of Clintonites around him. Bruce Reed goes in as head of domestic policy, Sandy Berger goes in as National Security Advisor. Yes, you've got the positive history and the experience, and you should certainly call on some of that talent. I hope they do. It would be a shame not to. But you also need to get fresh faces. And the process by which we are training those fresh faces and where we're training them and how they're being taught is an issue. At least I worry about it.

Riley: Yes.

Paster: We've got to do Lani Guinier at some point. That's a person who is really kicking me around. I don't want to let that go.

Riley: Absolutely, I've got the name mentioned right here. I just thought I would go back to Paul. We're scheduled to go until four, you're all right.

Paster: I'm okay to go to four. If we finish early, don't be apologetic.

Martin: We can either talk about Lani Guinier now—

Riley: Let's deal with that now and then we can go back. There are some bits and pieces we want to cover.

Paster: So I get this nomination. I didn't understand what it was until after it was out and then we started hearing about some of her more controversial writings. Several things occurred in the process. At first it was one I wasn't doing. All of a sudden, I had to do it myself because it was a really troubled nomination. I got deep into it. I said, "Let me take you up to Mitchell and see what he can do to help us."

Riley: Before you even get into it, the vetting, before—

Paster: I'm going to come back to the vetting. So I take her up to see Mitchell. On the way I give my speech. "You're a supplicant, you're asking for support. You need his help." All nominees, under any circumstances, are putting themselves in this position—somebody with a troubled nomination is particularly doing that. She refused to ask him for his help. She went into the Mitchell meeting in a defiant mode. She mishandled him 100 percent. When it was done, he called me up and said, "I don't know if I can help that woman." And he was prepared to want to help. But she was either too proud or too dumb. I don't think she's dumb so I'll assume too proud to acknowledge that she needed his help. She thought that the fact that she was in trouble was unfair and it was the Senate's problem, not her problem. We might have saved that nomination if she had adopted a different persona, a different attitude, as one who needed confirmation. Everybody who needs confirmation should behave that way anyhow, particularly when you're a troubled nomination.

So we end up back in the Oval Office and we're having a conversation. The sequence may be wrong here, maybe the conversation was before I took her up. But I knew Ron Klain had done the vetting. I knew Ron Klain had found the articles. I knew Ron Klain had told Bernie Nussbaum about the articles. And I knew Bernie Nussbaum had said, "Oh, don't worry about it." Those are facts. I got them from somebody else I trust.

So we're in the Oval Office. I don't know who was there except me and Bernie, the President, Ron, and maybe Mack. George was probably there. Clinton is all pissed off. He says, "I don't understand, what the hell is the process here where we can't find stuff like this in the vetting?" Nobody said anything. I said, "Mr. President, the articles were found. The risk was identified. So it wasn't a failure of the vetting process." Then he really exploded. But Bernie didn't have the balls to say, "I didn't tell you about it, Mr. President, because I decided it wasn't important."

Ron was getting excoriated. They're cutting the poor guy up. It wasn't Klain's fault. Klain did his job correctly. Bernie had no idea the significance of what Ron told him, and I didn't know about it until after the shit hit the fan. But I'm a big one in believing in accountability. You know, I've told you six times today and I'll say it again. They could have fired me after the economic stimulus went down, it would have been a legitimate firing and I did offer to resign. You have responsibility, you screw it up, it's your fault. He just let it go on. Poor Ron, Ron was a young guy in those days. He's shrinking in the corner. Terrible, terrible behavior.

So finally, we come to the point. This meeting is now in Mack's office, maybe the next day, whatever, where we've got to get her out. The word from the Hill is this just ain't going to happen. So Ricki Seidman was there. You talk to Ricki?

Riley: Not yet.

Paster: She's second tier but she's very smart, very good, you ought to talk to Ricki.

Riley: She had a second portfolio early on—

Paster: I forget what she was doing then, but she was helping on this stuff. I think she was the White House liaison to Justice Department, maybe that was part of her job, I don't know. She worked for Kennedy years before. I don't know once again who's in the meeting, but it's in Mack's office and the answer is we've got to try and convince her to withdraw. Who's going to go tell her? Bernie is sitting on his hands. I said, "I'll go." Ricki said, "I'll go with you." Bernie is silent, he's got to go to the men's room.

So we call over there and we get them assembled in the Attorney General's conference room. Paul Stern was there, he was head of Public Affairs. Lani and—I don't remember who else was there. We go in and we sit down. I said, "I spoke with Senator Mitchell, I spoke with Senator Biden. We had these conversations. I reported back to the White House. This isn't going to work, it isn't going to happen."

"I'm going on Larry King tonight to fix it." Or was it Ted Koppel. She was going on one of the shows that night.

Riley: This is Guinier saying it.

Paster: I said, "We weren't aware at the White House that you were planning to do that." She hadn't told us she agreed to go live on one of the shows that night. She said, "I'm doing it. I want my hearing, I want my day in court." I said, "It's only going to cause the President more difficulty." Finally I get around to saying, "We'd like you to withdraw the nomination." She said, "Won't do it. Won't do it." She refused. She said no.

She went on television that night. Eventually the President asked her. The next day he called her in, asked her. It was a totally avoidable error. It was, in many respects, I think, worse than Zoë Baird because Zoë Baird was missing the political nuances by Vince Foster in the transition. This is now months later. We've been in the White House. It's less forgiving of that kind of political failure at that juncture. The President got a huge black eye. Hurt him with his natural allies in the Black Caucus and others in the civil rights movement. He didn't need that shit. And it was absolutely avoidable, inexcusable.

Lani had very harsh words for me in her book. I make mistakes, God knows, but that doesn't destroy her nomination.

Riley: You're the messenger at this point.

Paster: Yes.

Martin: How did she first get on the radar for the administration?

Paster: The Clintons knew her.

Riley: At Yale? I think they were in law school together.

Paster: She's younger than they are, I think. I think it's a Yale Law connection.

Riley: It may be through Children's Defense Fund. I think they had been at her wedding or she'd been at theirs?

Paster: There was a relationship.

Riley: Was Clinton's relationship with the Congressional Black Caucus very positive when you were there?

Paster: Pretty good. He had a lot of friends in the caucus. We did stuff. We put enterprise zones into the economic package for Charlie Rangel. I ran into Gene Sperling the other day, he got talking about it. He said, "You know, you said it was going to be a problem getting that done. You told me I had to sell Charlie Rangel." I said yes. He said, "I did, didn't I?" I said, "I guess so." I think generally the caucus relationship was pretty darn good. Ended up in the second term where you've got John Conyers as the ranking Democratic in Judiciary going through impeachment. He's not the guy you would have picked to be your principal defender, kind of a weird duck he is. But I think in general he did well with the Black Caucus.

Riley: You had other—

Paster: Why don't we take ten minutes?

[**BREAK**]

Riley: One thing I forgot to mention in the beginning was about the standard release arrangements, which means nothing is produced out of us until the conclusion of the project, which is still two or three years off.

Paster: That's the earliest release date for anything?

Riley: The default setting on this is that the entirety of the archive becomes available at the conclusion of the project, which is scheduled to be 2008 probably, maybe 2009. Cleared transcripts. Anything with any special provisions made for it, which could include the entirety of the transcript, if you get to it and decide two or three years' time—

Paster: I think there's a lot I'm going to put off limits only because if Clinton does run and a lot of these people are going to be running—it would be giving the Republicans a gift.

Riley: That's understandable. Our preference is, let's get the stuff recorded, and if we need to hold on to it for a considerable length of time before release, we're happy to do that and obligated to do that.

Paster: Are you going to come back to me at that time or should I put the restrictions—

Riley: What we will do is when the transcript comes back to you, at that point you have the opportunity to place any stipulations concerning release of the materials. I would treat this as I would the main core of the transcript unless some special provision is made for this in the way that certain special provisions would be made for pieces of the transcript. So, to simplify, if the general release date is 2008 or 2009, my assumption would be that this would come out with the cleared part of the transcript in 2008 or 2009 unless a special stipulation is made.

Paster: I can tell you now I'm going to put it on.

Riley: Okay.

Paster: I'm going to be very conservative because of her potential candidacy.

Riley: I understand, and I think in fact, that will affect most of the interviews we do from here on out. It became an issue for us when we were interviewing Bush people, when W [George W. Bush] decided to make noises about running. I think it affected the willingness of people from that administration to feel comfortable releasing stuff for some time too.

Martin: I think you mentioned this earlier, but when you get the transcript you can add if you want to go into more detail on things, if we missed something or if something jogs your memory.

Riley: If there's an elaboration or documents too. If you happen to have other documents you'd like to attach so that people who are reading the transcript could have those available, you can do that.

Paster: I haven't read this in a long time. The last paragraph, "We prepared an analysis of how the Clinton–Gore ticket did in comparison with each member of the House and his or her district." It's the most obvious thing in the world, right?

Riley: Exactly.

Paster: It says here, "Where the Congressman ran five or more points ahead, we need to be especially sensitive." It's really interesting to read this now.

Riley: Based on what you've told us about this already, I think this would be very helpful for your reputation. So I hope you allow us to go ahead and make that available sometime soon.

Paster: As I said, as long as she's a candidate, I think I'm going to be really conservative.

Riley: Understand. Shall we go?

Martin: Mainly a series of questions about different political events and world events that happened during your time, 1993. What I'm interested in is whether these events had any effect on Congressional Relations. Did it make Congress more cooperative, more conflictual, affect who was leading in terms of Congress versus the Clinton administration? The first one is on February 26 you have the first terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. I was wondering if you have any sense how that affected—

Paster: I have no recollection of it affecting Congressional Relations. We had a fairly standard policy that any Congressional Relations Office would have, which is calls to the Hill on important events to leadership, bipartisan leadership, and key committees to share information. But I don't think that had any effect on lobbying or the relationship between the Clinton White House and the Hill.

Martin: But you would have been called into service to brief them perhaps?

Paster: I'm not even sure we had information sufficient for a briefing. I don't know what we were doing, it would have been a touching the base.

Martin: Moving right along. April 19 you have Waco.

Paster: Well, the problem with Waco was it was happening on television for the whole world to see and there was a lot of communication. It was informational: this is what we know, this is what we were told, this is what we understand. There was a congressional hearing subsequently on Waco as I recall. Out of Justice. Once again, did it materially affect our relationship going forward in a certain way? No.

Riley: You're not getting beaten up by some of the members over this?

Paster: Yes, they're unhappy, but it wasn't like a huge event. We didn't lose votes on subsequent issues because they were unhappy.

Martin: So even if they might have been publicly beating you up a little bit they—

Paster: Yes, you call, tell them what you know, and give them the best information you can.

Martin: Zero for two. Later in June, the United States bombs Baghdad after Iraq, in retaliation for an attempted assassination on President Bush.

Paster: Yes, it was on a Saturday as I recall. Tony Lake called me. Got me on my cell phone, suggested that I call him back on a land line, which I did. Said we have a bunch of notifications we need to make.

Riley: Howard, do you want to give me a date on this right now, or should we just hold off and it's off limits?

Paster: Yes, please, off limits.

I was at my son's baseball game and I said, "What do we have to do?" He said, "We have to notify the leadership of the key committees." I said, "You guys telling me I can do it?" He said, "Yes. Do it." I think it was just a notification exercise only.

Martin: The next one is similar in nature, it's Somalia in October.

Paster: The Mogadishu?

Martin: Yes.

Paster: *Black Hawk Down*?

Martin: Yes.

Paster: Huge issue. Huge, huge issue. I think the House had probably passed the defense appropriations bill at that point, and it was in the Senate. There was enormous anger that U.S. troops were under UN command, which is always controversial. There was a question about whether we should be in peacekeeping forces or not, highly controversial. There was bipartisan upset with the fact that this could happen to American Marines. It resulted in lots of congressional activity and amendments on the legislation, and we were in a response mode.

I mentioned earlier that I have a picture file I've kept. There's a picture of Tony Lake, the President, and me looking at proposed compromise language on an amendment that Robert Byrd had on the issue of command and control as I recall. This went on for I think it was three weeks of fairly intense activity in the Senate. Trying to prevent the passage of legislation that would seriously restrict the President's flexibility, War Powers Act questions and stuff. The answer was yes, it was a big deal for Congressional Relations. I learned a lot more than I ever had known before about such subjects.

Riley: That was going to be my next question, whether there was something materially different for you about dealing with foreign policy questions as opposed to domestic questions.

Paster: Throughout my career, I'd not been a specialist in national security or foreign policy issues, even back when I was Birch Bayh's chief legislative assistant 30 years ago. I had other people who did mostly that. I just tended to go to the domestic policy. We didn't have a lot of issues in the White House early on that were foreign policy. So on the theory you do whatever is the most pressing issue, I was on other stuff. This became the most pressing issue and yes, I got more deeply involved than I normally was in such matters.

Riley: You said earlier that you had a defense or national security specialist—

Paster: A former Army colonel named Al Maldon who was on the Congressional Relations staff, but he couldn't do this. This was Senate politics as much as it was—

Riley: Right.

Paster: I'd rely on Tony and his people for the substance or the Defense Department, but the politics of getting through this—because the Democrats were unhappy with my job. If it was just the Republicans it's one thing, but the Democrats were unhappy. We had this meeting on the Hill, which was a very difficult meeting.

Riley: This is the one with Aspin?

Paster: Yes.

Martin: The negative effects after Mogadishu—

Paster: This was a negative effect in terms of relationships with the Hill, in terms of time and energy invested in repairing it and avoiding bad legislation. We came out of that okay, it was a successful outcome. None of the amendments passed were deemed by either Tony Lake or the Defense Department to be really dreadful.

Martin: Outside of those last two, which were more foreign affairs, I don't have any major events that happened that year internationally. I don't know if there are any other outside events that might have affected your relationship in Congress.

Paster: Yes, there was one. In 1993, the new Russia was coming into being and had significant economic stress. In the spring of 1993, a bipartisan congressional delegation went to Russia, Gingrich and Gephardt and others. Around the same time, the President was going to meet [Boris] Yeltsin up in Vancouver and we worked with them on their trip. They reported to the President as he was flying out to meet Yeltsin on what they'd learned. From that the President made some commitments to Yeltsin and the Congress passed a foreign aid package for Russia. It was a pretty nice, good story about bipartisanship in foreign policy, aid for Russia. It was little noticed but very nice.

Martin: How did those foreign policy, like the aid to Russia, and those interactions affect when you go back to work on domestic policy?

Paster: I think we established with Gingrich—Michel was still the minority leader, Gingrich was clearly the emerging force on the Republican side. I think we established a good relationship with Gingrich. We did that issue with him and we did NAFTA with him. When we disagreed, we disagreed honorably. I think that, at least through '93, when he was still Minority Whip, we had a pretty good relationship with Gingrich. Michel was easy to have a good relationship with. He was a gentleman. He came from a time of bipartisan cooperation. The reason he wasn't liked by enough Republicans was he wasn't nasty enough. He was too nice. So that was easy for us. But even with Gingrich, I'd say we got along pretty well with those two.

Martin: Shifting from these external events, I'm interested to know if there were moments, or events, policy legislation or whatnot, where you thought the White House was starting to learn about Congress, almost like a teachable moment, where something would happen.

Paster: The problem with the question is I think there were folks in the White House who didn't need teachable moments and others who were unteachable. I really believe that.

Riley: I do hope you'll let that quote stay in this.

Martin: It's a nice quote.

Paster: Did the White House get better in Congressional Relations? Sure. If it hadn't, we all should have been shot. I don't think the White House got as good at Congressional Relations as we could be until later. I was gone by the time it hit its best numbers. It's not because I'm being modest about my stuff, but I couldn't do it by myself with my staff.

Riley: How would it have been to work with Leon Panetta as Chief of Staff?

Paster: It would have wonderful. I probably would not have quit if Leon had been Chief of Staff. Leon and I had a superb relationship, I think. I'll say something now, which I'm obviously going to put very far off the record, but I'm taking all your promises—

Riley: Absolutely.

Paster: I told the President in August that I probably would leave at the end of the year and I told him both reasons. I told him the problem we had in the Chief of Staff's office, and he asked me who should be Chief of Staff and I told him Leon. I would give you an affidavit that I had that conversation in August. I had it after that famous solarium meeting, late at night, in the Residence. If I had just been patient enough, maybe I would have survived.

Martin: It may be obvious to you and me, but why Leon?

Paster: Because of the most senior people around the President, he had the combination of substantive knowledge, political acuity, and good Hill sense. And for all those reasons the President picked him. It was a brilliant pick.

Riley: But the President at that stage was also willing to accept somebody in that role who was more of a disciplinarian of these processes, right?

Paster: Well, what kind of a disciplinarian? He was told he could get rid of Dee Dee Myers and yet he couldn't get rid of Dee Dee Myers, remember? Leon, as I understand it, had a series of conversations with the President and the Vice President, I think it was at Camp David in fact that they had the conversations, about what his authority would be, and they weren't all honored. It's very hard to honor those requests.

Martin: Last question in this range of things: by the time you left, you were with Clinton for approximately a year including the transition period. I was wondering if you could talk at all about—

Paster: Counting the transition, I've got 13 months.

Martin: Thirteen months. Your sense of the evolution of his image of Congress or his view of Congress in the policy-making process.

Paster: He certainly was dealing with personalities. It's Clinton's nature that he would have thought about how to manage a Bob Kerrey or how to manage a Newt Gingrich. He would like to try to figure out how to deal with this guy or that guy or this guy. It would have been his nature to try to do that. Was he more or less respectful of the Hill's prerogatives? I think he was still figuring it out. I think it was later. The real turning point was '95. It wasn't until the budget stalemate in '95 that he set himself up for the next three, five years. I never doubted he'd survive impeachment, because by then he'd clearly gotten himself in a strong position. The fact that it was a partisan impeachment didn't matter. But he still was sorting it out.

The debate that began when I was there and continued after I left, about how to deal with the *Washington Post* on Whitewater, is indicative of not having yet established a definitive decision-making process, this ongoing debate about Gearan and Gergen and Stephanopoulos, [Bruce] Lindsey—what do you tell the *Post*, what don't you tell the *Post*? That began when I was there and continued into '94. It reflected and emphasized the decision-making process.

Riley: There was something else that may have carried over. Was the reupping of the independent counsel statute being talked about when you were there?

Paster: Yes, it was being talked about a little bit.

Riley: Were you weighing in on this?

Paster: If I did, I don't recall. I saw Bernie somewhere not long ago, he continues to go on about how he was right on that issue. Clearly he was. Was I on his side or the other side? The chance of my being on Bernie's side was pretty slim. I sent the President notes on different issues from time to time as I left the White House. Let me see if any of them were on that issue. Trade legislation, budget, constitutional amendment to balance the budget. I don't, not trying to be defensive, I just don't remember.

Riley: It wasn't something that would have naturally occurred to me to ask you but for the remark you just made.

Paster: Here's a memo to Mack on Whitewater hearings in '94. [Robert] Fiske had been appointed by then.

Riley: So this was after you were gone?

Paster: Yes, they asked my advice from time to time, believe it or not. No, it doesn't answer the question.

Riley: Okay. You said they asked your advice from time to time after you left, do you remember any other instances where—

Paster: Sometimes people asked my advice, sometimes people asked me to weigh in on their side of the argument. I did weigh in unsuccessfully. Some point after I left, the Ambassadorship to Italy came open and I sent a note through Betty [Currie] imploring him to name DeConcini Ambassador to Italy, reminded him about DeConcini saving our bacon in '93. But he didn't take my advice. He sent the job to [Thomas] Foglietta. I still think DeConcini deserved it.

Riley: Any other times you recall being asked for advice?

Paster: I've got trade legislation covered there, I've got balanced budget, should he offer a balanced budget. Remember the question, that big fight about whether he should go with a balanced budget or not. Imagine Whitewater. I don't have any memos there on those subjects.

Riley: This is in the realm of the hypothetical, but would you have liked to have been there after the changeover, after the '94 midterms? What is your perception—?

Paster: [*laughter*] Would I have liked to have lobbied for the White House in a Republican Congress? The answer is I think I was there for too short a time, and I always felt cheated by virtue of having been there for too short a time. I don't spend a lot of time doing look-backs. My wife and I joke about it. I wish I'd bought Microsoft stock when it was issued and I wish I'd done a few other things differently in my life. No, I don't worry about it. Life moves on.

Riley: It was more a question—Leon becomes Chief of Staff.

Paster: That was June, July of '94.

Riley: Exactly. So you said, "Well, if I'd managed to stick it out then I would have been able to serve with Leon as Chief of Staff." But fairly soon thereafter the environment—

Martin: You get two months.

Riley: The environment that you inherit changes dramatically.

Paster: I said I left the White House for two reasons. One was family, one was my inability to get along with Mack. The family stuff would have caught up with me by the end of '94 anyhow.

Riley: Fair enough.

Paster: My wife's comment was, "You had one more year."

Riley: As a father of a seven-year-old, I understand how these pressing family matters can bear on you. Go back to a couple of things that arose as a result of Paul's questions. One was that Haiti became an issue in '93, right?

Paster: Right.

Riley: Was that something you had—

Paster: I didn't do much about it. Sandy was running that one for Tony. I remember some hurried hallway conversations with Sandy about it, but the Black Caucus was very concerned about how we dealt with [Jean-Bertrand] Aristide. This is a case in which I trusted them to do it, saying, "Look, make sure you touch this base, make sure you talk to that person."

Riley: Florida delegation weighing in on this?

Paster: Maybe, but the folks I entrusted it to took care—

Riley: So that was taken care of.

Paster: I go back to my earlier comment, which is that in the top congressional job you get to do whatever the biggest thing of the moment is and you trust other people to do the other things.

Riley: Haiti becomes big for a brief period of time.

Paster: But you have to tell me when it was happening, what else was going on.

Riley: Exactly.

Paster: I think it was happening during the economic fight.

Riley: Probably so. Congressional delegations [codels], you mentioned one. How big a piece of your job is dealing with that or managing that?

Paster: Not very much at all. The request for aircraft went to the Defense Department, which owns the airplanes. The support for the trip went to the State Department. We kept a list of codels that were going out. We occasionally sent congressional staff people on the codels if enough of the leadership people were involved. Susan would go on a codel, Tim or somebody if the right people were there. It didn't require a lot of time. We just made sure everything was happening.

Riley: You didn't have much downtime during your time there either?

Paster: I had one week in August.

Riley: The congressional calendar had almost no downtime.

Paster: No, we went right up until December. August recess I went to California with my family for a week. One of the problems with the congressional job, and it's in the articles, is you have the schedule of both the House and the Senate and then the White House administration schedule on top of it. For me there was this enormous realization during the Lincoln Day recess, in February of '93, that I didn't feel the recess because the work was coming, coming, coming, coming. On the Hill you have recesses. In the White House you have the Hill schedule but you don't have recesses. It was enormously intense, without any kind of relief or break. It was quite remarkable.

Riley: Did you spend, can you say, a percentage of your time on the Hill as opposed to in the White House?

Paster: I went to the Hill most every day, and I think when things were intense, I'd go up to the Hill a lot. I spent a lot of time on the Hill certain days.

Riley: But there's always this question with CR, whether—

Paster: You've got to go to the Hill. If you do the job in the White House, you'll get your ass fired. That's one reason I didn't take any flights on Air Force One, you've got to be there. It's essential.

I'll tell you a true story. The phone rang, the House was in—I never went home until both the House and Senate adjourned. They often worked alternative late nights just to make me miserable, but I wouldn't go home until both of them had adjourned for the night and my work was done in the office.

I'm in the office, swear to God, it's after midnight, and my phone rings. I pick it up, say, "Howard Paster." It was a Congresswoman from California, she said, "You're there?" I said, "You just called the office, I guess you thought I might be here." "Well," she said, "we're in session." I said, "I know you're in session." She said, "I have a question for you." Who calls somebody after midnight to ask them a question? But that was the stuff that got me through my job. That's where I got my reputation, and it was worth a lot.

Riley: Did you have a deputy who was responsible for taking care of White House stuff while you were away?

Paster: Susan was the deputy, and Tim Keating. Tim, who was my assistant, I had his desk in my office. I don't know if you've been in the West Wing in those offices—

Riley: Not upstairs.

Paster: That's a huge office. I had my desk with a big credenza behind it, a sofa, a couple of wing chairs, a table and chairs. It was a huge office. And a desk for him in the office. Susan was in a small office just outside. I had the receptionist, the secretary out there. I had Tim physically in my office so I could turn to him when I was on the phone and say, "We've got to do something about that." But Susan and Tim were the ones who covered.

Riley: Did you consider yourself principally a House person or a Senate person, or by the time you take this job are you—

Paster: I hope I was both then. I worked six years in the Senate. From June of ’67 to November of ’71, I worked in the House, about four years, and just less than six years in the Senate and I certainly had lobbied both at the union and at Timmons & Company, so I don’t think I was identified as one or the other.

Riley: That’s kind of unusual, isn’t it? Most of the other people in that job were—

Paster: Pat and John were certainly Senate people. Chuck Brain was certainly a House person.

Riley: Right.

Paster: [Larry] Simon was a Senate person, yes, the answer is yes. That’s unusual, it just happened to be that way.

Riley: Susan’s experience was?

Paster: House, then—unless she worked for the Senator. Maybe she worked from the Senate, I don’t know.

Riley: Most of the cases, when we talk with people like Chuck Brain, for example, he was a House guy, he’s looking for his principal deputy to be a Senate person.

Paster: It wasn’t an issue.

Riley: In your case it wasn’t an issue.

Paster: Number one, I wasn’t less comfortable on one side or the other, and number two, Susan was going to be my deputy. That was not a discussible item, which was fine with me.

Riley: I want to ask you a series of questions—

Paster: Multiple choice?

Riley: Exactly. True/false questions. I hook you up to a polygraph on this one. This is about the other offices in the White House. We talked about individuals, but there are a lot of organizational structures there and I’m wondering whether it prompts any recollections to ask you about, say, Intergovernmental Relations. Did you have much—

Paster: Intergovernmental Relations physically shares a reception area with Congressional Liaison, at least it did in those days. Marcia Hale’s office was connected to the same entryway that my office was so I’d see her more and talk to her more. Didn’t pay a lot of attention to what she was doing, to be honest with you.

Riley: Public Liaison?

Paster: Alexis Herman. We had more dealings because of the kind of broad support issues around NAFTA, business groups, and stuff like that. So we would talk briefly.

Riley: Who am I missing?

Paster: Intergovernmental, Public Liaison, you've got the Cabinet Secretary, it's an important job. We have lots of dealings.

Riley: [John] Podesta?

Paster: No, no, he was Staff Secretary. He was paper control. The Cabinet Secretary was Christine Varney originally.

Riley: Of course.

Paster: The management of the Cabinet around lobbying, around traveling to congressional districts, around getting programs and stuff done with support, there was a lot of interchange with the Cabinet office, a fair amount going on there I would say.

Riley: We talked about the press office.

Paster: The press office, you've got domestic policy, you've got the National Economic Council.

Riley: What about those guys?

Paster: Domestic policy was interesting. Carol Rasco came from Arkansas with the President, and Carol was trying to find her way around a little bit. It was a difficult spot for her. Bruce Reed was really the strong deputy in that case. Bruce was much more visible and engaged. Bruce came from a different Democratic Party than I came from. He came from Al From's party.

Riley: NEC? Bob Rubin?

Paster: Bob had been a client of mine when I was in private lobbying back in the '80s. I knew Bob, and Roger Altman was part of that group. There's a coalition of investment bankers in New York that we represented here in Washington, we lobbied for them.

Riley: So you worked for him and he worked for Lloyd Bentsen.

Paster: So I knew Rubin and Altman. When we met down in Little Rock in transition, I said I was down there for the announcement of the economic team. I hadn't seen them in a couple of years, but I knew both so I had a head start with both of them.

Riley: What was your perception of Rubin?

Paster: I think the world of Bob. All that has been written about how he is the honest broker and the calming force is true. Honest broker, willing to take a point of view but everybody gets a say and everybody gets to participate and weigh in with his own point of view. I think he did a superb job.

I'll tell you about Bob Rubin. He wrote a book. Everybody writes books. I haven't written a book. I got a call one day a couple of years ago. Bob Rubin's on the line. I pick it up, he said, "How are you? Great to talk to you. You know I'm doing a book?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, I quote you in the book. I'd like to send the quote to you and make sure it's okay to use it." I said, "You're the first guy who's written a book who actually did that." He said, "Well, that's the way I am."

Riley: Lani Guinier did not do that.

Paster: But that's the kind of classy guy Bob is.

Riley: Is there anybody else on the roster that we didn't—

Paster: Talked about the White House counsel's office—

Riley: The press secretary's office we talked about. The Chief of Staff. There were deputies in the Chief of Staff's office, I guess Gearan.

Paster: Mark at one time, Phil Lader at one time. Phil is now the chairman of WPP, so he's my boss. Small world. He was Ambassador to the Court of St. James, we're a British company. So after he left his ambassadorship, we had an opening for chairmanship. In the British system your chairman is different from your chief executive. So my boss, Martin Sorrell, called me up one day and said, "You know Phil Lader?" I said yes. Martin had met him when he was ambassador. He said, "What do you think about him as chairman?" He's been a good chairman for us. Small world.

Riley: Anybody else?

Martin: I have a different question, totally unrelated. I don't know why I forgot to ask you this earlier, but what role, if any, did you play in the State of the Union? That's the one formal President-comes-to-Congress event.

Riley: Which goes to speechwriting, which is something else.

Paster: The first year, there was no State of the Union. It was the economic address, that *was* the State of the Union. I was involved with that. In the second year I was gone, but there'd been a memo around for contributions and ideas. When I told the President I was leaving, which was Thanksgiving week, I said, "Why don't I stay until the middle of December and then take a couple of weeks' paid vacation at the back end?" He said he'd like me to stay through the budget

meetings, because—you know how the budget process works. Each agency works with the OMB [Office of Management and Budget], takes it as far as they can. Then they take their differences to the President for adjudication. He thought it would be logical for me to finish those meetings because Congressional Relations should have a say in those meetings. He wanted to make sure he had congressional input into some of those budget decisions.

That gave me a chance to have a point of view on some stuff that went into the ’94 State of the Union. The health care speech on the Hill—I was given drafts and asked to comment. It was a speech that wasn’t finished until the last minute. That’s why we had the wrong text in the TelePrompTer, as the story goes. Anything George had a large piece of I got consulted on. When Gergen came in he consulted with me, we got on. I did not have a complaint about being excluded. I had issues, but it wasn’t about exclusion except for the one issue I described.

Riley: You mentioned Gergen a couple of times. Of the personnel changes the first year, other than your departure, and there’s a bit of a shakeup in the Chief of Staff’s operation very near the end of the year, about the same time I guess Roy Neel—

Paster: Roy and I left the same time.

Riley: I guess Roy came in, didn’t he—

Paster: Roy came into that job, but he also left when I did.

Riley: Gergen, you’ve had some very nice things to say about him.

Paster: Yes, I liked David Gergen. To his credit, Mack McLarty asked me about that before he did it. I think he’d already decided to do it, but nonetheless I had advance word. I wasn’t surprised by that decision. I was supportive. I thought all the adult help we could get would make sense. I didn’t share the resentment of my colleagues that this former Republican staffer was in the White House. I thought David was a constructive player.

Riley: You’d had a relationship with him before?

Paster: I’d met him. I’d lived in the city long enough to know a lot of people, but not a real relationship. How many people do you say, “How do you do?” and you’ve met but you don’t really know.

Riley: I thought in Washington that constituted a good friend.

Paster: I didn’t fall into that trap.

Riley: Just a couple of general questions about your time there. What out of that first year ought historians to pay much attention to from your perspective?

Paster: We talked on our short break before about the degree to which the economic progress has been undone because of deficits, policy changes beginning in 2001. Nonetheless, I think

some of what Clinton did the beginning of ’93 has helped mitigate some of the poverty and some of the working poor issues in this country. I think it is remarkably easy how much you could do to help people who have little. It doesn’t cost as much. I think there are some important legacy issues there that count. Whether or not welfare reform undid them would be an interesting question. Is this country more or less concerned about poor people? Folks suggest that what happened in New Orleans demonstrated that they really have forgotten about poor people in this country. You’ve got Lyndon Johnson back to Franklin Roosevelt and it was my hope that maybe Clinton would pick that up—Roosevelt, Johnson, Clinton. Maybe it never really worked. It’s an interesting question. Was an opportunity wasted to materially affect some economic justice or not? It’s an important issue. It will be interesting to see how it plays out. But the chance to follow in Roosevelt’s and Johnson’s footsteps may have been lost. That’s one issue.

Riley: Please don’t lose your train of thought here, but did you feel that in this administration those kinds of equality issues got the fair hearing you hoped they would when you joined the administration?

Paster: Among some people, among some people. I think for Bob Rubin and Gene Sperling, it’s what they were all about. We exulted over what we did in some of that stuff. So the answer is yes. The President certainly cared. I think the other folks did. I think historians might determine that Clinton established an international Democratic Party in a way that could have been lost, say, since the Second World War, particularly in the aftermath of Vietnam when people were withdrawing. His international activity, everything from breaking open the free trade policy in the Democratic Party to his travels to places Presidents had not gone before, to sort of capturing globalization and deciding to ride with it and not let go of it. I think it’s a big deal.

I think one of the things that most saddens me—I travel internationally a great deal in my present job—is the number of people around the world who say, “What’s wrong with the United States?” I think the retreat in internationalism and globalization in this administration, the inward-looking stuff, ignoring the world, is such a huge setback. I think we have to recapture that. I think it’s a very big deal in the scope of history.

A good enough job wasn’t done in understanding that the next important superpower relationship was China. We didn’t complete that transition adequately in the Clinton years. I’m talking about ’93 particularly. That is the most important bilateral relationship we have right now. We might have made more progress, I think, with China. We had FTN [Most Favored Nation], which they renamed, what do they call it now? Home and trade practices or whatever it is. Big deal. In the scope of history.

Riley: How about the party itself, the Democratic Party?

Paster: The party is still just terribly torn up. We haven’t made any progress in that respect. If being a moderate was necessary to get elected, embracing all of the crap coming from Al From wasn’t. I think there was too much credit for Clinton’s success given to the conservative wing of the party. I think it’s a dangerous place for us to go.

I'm not arguing that we go all the way left. You can't win elections on the left. I'm practical, but my colleague and friend Mark Penn, according to yesterday's newspapers, sent this article out with From to all the Democrats on the Hill saying, "Be wary of sounding too liberal." I think I would like to see the party work on how to be liberal in a politically successful manner rather than running away from being liberal.

Clinton, I think, might have done that, but he was beaten into retreat after they lost the Congress. He wasn't able to break through.

Riley: Was that a sign that the country may not have been prepared to have a President that way or was it more rejection of incompetence?

Paster: I think '94 you've got health care, you've got the gun issues, you've got the failure to articulate any kind of clear message. You go from the hope of '92, this is the 21st century, to '96 and you have this terrible annoying gap in the middle. You can analyze the '94 election until hell freezes over, but I think the progressive goals of the Democratic Party should not be at risk because the Clinton Presidency got torn up. I guess that's my point.

Riley: You have already testified that it may not have had Al Gore run—

Paster: My view in that's very simple, so I will not put any embargo on— If it wasn't for Al Gore's hubris, his unwillingness to ask Bill Clinton for help, his unwillingness to ask Robert Byrd and Jay Rockefeller what he needed to do to win West Virginia, the Florida recount would never have had to happen and we wouldn't have had George Bush. That's a pretty big deal, it's a pretty big deal.

Riley: Would you go back in?

Paster: Isn't there an age limit? Seriously, would I consider public service again? In a minute. I waited 12 long years for a chance to do public service and that was followed by eight more, but would I do it again? Absolutely, without hesitation.

Riley: Notwithstanding the cost?

Paster: The economic cost is no longer an issue for me. Now I'm an older man, I've had eight years, probably ten years to make money. So economics is not an issue for me anymore. But I'm not sure the White House is where I should do my public service, that's a different question.

Riley: We're very grateful, thank you, it's been for us—

Martin: Very enlightening.

Riley: Very educational experience and a lot of fun at the same time. I think we've got some of the greatest jobs in the world to be able to circulate around and talk with people about this period of time.

Paster: There were some wonderful people in the Clinton administration. I don't know how well you've done with the chiefs of staff and the deputy chiefs of staff. I assume you're doing the assistant to the President level as much as you can?

Riley: Mostly.

Paster: There were a lot of wonderful, wonderful people there. Did you get to see Mark Gearan at all?

Riley: Yes, he came.

Paster: A wonderful man, delightful guy. You talk about reporters who had a special deal going, Mary McGrory. You see Susan Brophy and Mark Gearan had this special relationship with Mary McGrory. I wouldn't say she was a pushover, the late Mary McGrory, but she was about as easy as a—.

Riley: So if you want the favorable spin, go to read Mary McGrory. Is there anything you've read that you think, boy, that pretty much got it right. You mentioned Birnbaum's book, Madhouse.

Paster: I did not like that.

Riley: You did not like—

Paster: Jeff's a friend of mine and what happened is, he spoke to me about what that life was like and then his editors just screwed the book up terribly. I was very unhappy with the portrayal in that book. I think Elizabeth Drew's book was the best book about '93. Bob Woodward succeeded in getting me to spill my guts more than I had intended. He's very good at that.

Riley: We're still rolling so let's—how does he do that?

Paster: He is so good. First of all, I know Bob Woodward, our kids went to the same school. He called me up, he's doing this book, he'd love to come by. I'd left the White House at this point. Finally I agreed to let him come to the house one night. He got me to say more than I wanted to say, enough so that I had to write the President a letter of apology and also McLarty. McLarty thinks my comments in Woodward's book helped force him out of his job. It may or may not be true. But the timing of the book, Clinton was over for the D-day ceremony in June '94, he comes back and McLarty loses his job. It's about the same time that Woodward's book is excerpted in the *Post.* Maybe I helped.

Bob asked me a series of questions, knowing probably what I thought and then let on that others had given him stuff. The way he got me to say more than I intended to say was by essentially having me confirm that which he claimed to have, but of course, I then became the source of it. He's very, very adroit. I won't make the same mistake again. But McLarty was terribly upset about Woodward's book. I wrote him a letter of apology and I wrote the President a letter of

apology. But I said in my letter to the President that I had never spoken ill of him and never would, and that's still true.

Riley: It is true.

Paster: So whatever criticism I had did not relate to the President.

Riley: Other books? Rubin's book you mentioned.

Paster: Yes, I don't think Rubin's book is too—

Riley: It's a very different kind of memoir, an awful lot of it not related to White House service.

Paster: Yes. I'll tell you, if you want to understand foreign policy aspects, the material that Warren Christopher put between his speeches in the book of his speeches is really intelligent stuff.

Riley: In the Stream [of History, Shaping Foreign Policy for a New Era]?

Paster: There are two books, In the Stream of History, what's the other one called?

Riley: I know the one you're talking about.

Paster: One is much more autobiographical and one is an excerpt of the speeches. He explains the context and the issues that were going on and it's very, very intelligent, to understand, to get the whole text, original text, but the comments in between are really useful, I think.

Riley: You didn't keep a diary.

Paster: No.

Riley: Did you consider—

Paster: No. I will also never write a book and I also refused to keep phone messages. So this note comes out from Bernie Nussbaum saying everyone is to keep a phone log of all phone calls. I went to his office and said, "No." "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm not going to keep a phone log. I will have 200 phone calls some days. If I have to stop taking calls from Congressmen to write down the last phone call, it ain't going to work. No." Okay. I have no phone log, I have no diary. All I have are the pictures with little notes on them for my grandchildren and a couple of memos I sent like the ones I just—

Riley: And you're going to have about six hours of tape, and we'll get you a copy of this at the conclusion of everything, regardless of what we do with our copy, under your stipulations, your copy is yours to keep so your grandchildren will have something.

Paster: We'll file it away. If anybody ever tells you it's not special, don't talk to them.

Riley: We don't hear that very often. It's been a real privilege.
[continuation]

Riley: This is with respect to the Supreme Court nomination of Ruth Ginsburg.

Paster: [Byron] White's resignation letter, he called Ron Klain, his former clerk, one day and gave him a letter of resignation. I have a picture of the President opening it. I was with him at a Congressional reception and reading it. So you go down and pick a Supreme Court nominee. I wasn't involved in the early stuff, but in the course of developing names, [Stephen] Breyer was a serious contender. Vince Foster came to the office like at 3:00 in the morning one morning to check some records and confirm that in fact Breyer had paid up a bunch of old nanny taxes. And the next day in a meeting with the President we took a view, I think collectively, that it was too soon after Zoë Baird to have a Supreme Court Justice who had been negligent. A year later it didn't matter. He got over that problem so that took Breyer out of play.

Bruce Babbitt was a serious contender and I actually went over to the Interior Department on a Sunday afternoon to work on the vetting of Babbitt. There were some issues about controversies in politics in Arizona we'd discovered. But the real issue was that the jockeying to replace him and Bill Richardson's desire to get in the Cabinet was creating a huge political problem if he vacated the Interior job. I think Babbitt might have gone to the Supreme Court if there wasn't a looming huge political problem right behind it—what to do with the Interior job and stuff.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a late entry and in fact was flown in from vacation to see the President at the last minute. He really liked her a lot, and he also liked the fact that she had argued these really important cases with the Supreme Court on women's issues. The [Harry] Blackmun biographer, Linda Greenhouse, wrote a good book, she talks about that a little bit. He was really taken with her. He made the decision on a Sunday night late. We were in the Residence in the family kitchen on the third floor. It was Gergen and George and me. He finally decides, okay. He asks the White House operator to get him Judge Ginsburg. They screwed it up, right? He was furious. He also had to call Kennedy and tell him he wasn't going to take Breyer at that point. But it was an exciting thing to be caught up in. I think it took a little longer than people expected it to take. I think these things can be judged by outcomes. She had two no votes. She has been distinguished on the Court for nearly a decade. I think, if you measure the outcome, it was really a superb process.

There were other names bandied about too. He would have given the job to [Mario] Cuomo. George had that task and Cuomo said no, he didn't want it. I think if he had known that Mitchell was going to retire the next year, he might have given it to Mitchell. In fact, he offered Mitchell the seat that Breyer got. I know that for a fact even though I wasn't in the White House.

Riley: Mitchell didn't want it.

Paster: Mitchell only would have taken the Chief; he told me that. Actually, I know that because when I was out of the White House, I saw Mitchell, and he told me I could send a message to the President not to offer it.

Riley: Only Chief.

Paster: He didn't say that, but that was the implication. And Chief wasn't open. So Cuomo could have had it if he wanted it and he declined it. Never got down the road with Mitchell. Babbitt had a huge political problem attached to it. Breyer had this nanny hangover and there were one or two others, but the process was a little bit long. But I give the President a lot of credit, he sorted through that stuff very well. Both of his appointments turned out to be really superb appointments.

Riley: Babbitt would have accepted the appointment if it had been made? I seem to recall some place that he had actually said—it rang a little odd that he didn't feel like he could leave.

Paster: I think he meant that because he knew there was a huge problem—I think he would have taken had it been offered, but that's the right position to have been taken. I thought it was a really good process and I got to play in that process, which is kind of exciting, and then I handled, of course, the whole confirmation.

Riley: The confirmation was relatively easy?

Paster: Yes, it was.

Riley: How was that different from—is it the same, are you going up and you're—

Paster: It's much the same. The substantive conversations are narrower. Justice Ginsburg hoped that the confirmation could go back to what I'll call the pre-[Robert] Bork days, where it was a little less difficult and you didn't have to answer substantive questions. They were going to ask the questions, you can't roll the clock back, unfortunately. But the support she had from people like Orrin Hatch and others of course is relative today when you come up with people, like the Bush nominees, both of them. The question is, do you vote for somebody you disagree with if they're otherwise qualified. I actually think it's okay to vote no. Maybe not to filibuster, maybe it's a compromise.

Riley: I've sort of wondered from a precedent perspective. The Democrats now are acting as though the nuclear option has already been enacted in some respects, and I'm wondering if they wouldn't be well advised to go ahead and force the Republicans' hands on this because if they don't—

Paster: I think they may. Right now, I think there's so much baggage on this guy, but some of those memos are just horrible. The Chief Justice was fine, but I don't know about this guy. The issue is whether there are a handful of Republicans who can oppose him. If the main Senators and [Lincoln] Chafee can get excited then they can't lose. Then it changes the debate substantially.

Riley: Stuff for another oral history. Thanks, Howard.

Paster: All right.