WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH TOGO D. WEST JR.

July 18, 2006
Washington, D.C.

Participants

University of Virginia
Jeff Chidester
Paul Martin, chair

Also present

Janice Joyner

WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH TOGO D. WEST JR.

July 18, 2006

Martin: One of the things we like to do when we start is to do a voice check. This helps the transcriptionist to identify who is speaking. Let me just start off by saying I'm Paul Martin of the University of Virginia and I'm happy to be here to interview Togo West.

West: I'm Togo West, the interviewee, and I'm pleased to be in that position.

Chidester: I'm Jeff Chidester and I'm the research director for the Clinton oral history project.

Steiner: I'm Jessica Steiner, I'm one of the researchers for the Clinton oral history project.

Joyner: I'm Janice Joyner, I worked for Secretary West in the Department of the Army and Department of Veterans Affairs.

Martin: Why don't we go ahead and start with your introduction to not just the Clinton administration, but you also served the [Gerald] Ford and [Jimmy] Carter administrations? I was hoping to get that story of how you came to work for the Ford administration first and then the Carter administration.

West: You have a suggested question somewhere in the list in the back of the book that says, "Did you find that your previous positions in the Department of Defense—" presumably referring to my time in the Carter administration— "helped you when later you were Secretary of the Army?" The answer is, probably. But the one that helped the most was that after graduating from law school and clerking for a year in New York, I went on active duty. It was the time of the Vietnam War. I was an ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] graduate from Howard University, as had been my father before me, Army, and was commissioned as a combat arms officer, field artillery, upon graduation from engineering school.

But then under the program you became a JAG [Judge Advocate General] officer if you went to law school, took the bar, and came on active duty. You went from a two-year commitment to a four-year commitment. In the process, all the time you spent between commissioning counted against your then eight-year military service requirement. So by the time I finished the JAG Corps, I was through with my military service requirement. All four of those years were spent in the Pentagon. *Those* helped me more than anything. For one thing, I knew my way around the Pentagon way better than any of the countless number of aides-de-camp and others who were assigned to guide me around as Secretary. I knew all the shortcuts.

But anyway, when I finished undergraduate school—While I was in law school at Howard, there came a time when I was a summer associate at Covington & Burling. All those early things

played a role in what happened later. I think it's true of all of our careers: the things you do early end up having influences later. I'll just make this very quick because you don't want to spend a lot of time on this.

After clerking as a summer associate at Covington, I went up to New York to clerk for a federal judge in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. The judge's name was Harold R. Tyler Jr., "Ace" Tyler, himself a World War II veteran, a Republican, appointed during the administration of John F. Kennedy during the days when Presidents nominated, but they made deals with the Senators from the various states, whatever the party was. Tyler himself had a record that would have attracted Kennedy. He was one of the first three lawyers to serve as head of the Office of Civil Rights in the Justice Department. He was in the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower—He was the second one, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. He headed that office at the time of Little Rock [Arkansas] and some other things. And he had obvious commitment to providing opportunities. There weren't that many judges taking young African Americans into clerkships in those days.

I mention that because some years later Judge Tyler—not a lot of years later—but why don't I take it in order? I clerked for him for a year, returned to start on active duty. The first eight weeks of Army JAG is, of course, of some significance to you from the University of Virginia because you have housed the Army JAG School for a long time. I can remember that you've housed it in three different locations, all of them corresponding to the location of the law school, which has moved about from time to time. When I was there, the law school and the JAG school were more central on the campus. So I was there for eight weeks.

During those eight weeks, there came a time when we received our assignments. My first assignment—My family was still in New York, where I'd been clerking—was to go to Fort Ord, California. Now, for the JAGs in those days that meant, since that's West Coast, you're going to do a year there to prepare you to jump off to Southeast Asia. You do a year there, short tour, and then return for a two-year assignment basically as much to your liking as the JAG Corps could make it, and then you'd be at the point to get out or decide to stay in. That didn't happen with me.

Just before I was due to meet my wife and leave for the new assignment, I got a call from career development at JAG, and they switched me to an assignment in the Military Justice Division, in the Office of the Judge Advocate General at the Pentagon. I went there and six months later I was assigned to work for a young Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Office of Manpower and Reserve Affairs. So, essentially, I spent that final three and a half years of a four-year commitment as a young assistant working in the office of one of the Assistant Secretaries of the Army and getting to see a lot of the policy interplay, particularly in the personnel field.

My areas were drugs—There was suffering from that—race relations, and all the sort of special issues that an army that is both garrisoned and deployed is facing. Remember, we're talking '69 to '73, and the Army is in Germany in a much larger configuration than now. It has a four-star commander just for the Army in Heidelberg and several three-star commanders. Eventually Colin Powell would get one of those three-star commands years later as a corps commander. It had its deployment of corps things, career, and even greater strength there. And it was deployed around the world. Well, a garrisoned army gets into a lot of trouble, and the issues that were

affecting us here in the United States—race and drugs—were big ones. So I worked those projects for four years. That had a big and useful impact.

I went back to Covington for the two years after I left the Army. During those two years, a bunch of things were happening in American society. We're talking about 1972 to '74, or was it '73 to '75? The big thing was the implosion of the [Richard] Nixon Presidency. There came a time when the Saturday Night Massacre occurred. Richard Nixon's then Chief of Staff, an Army four-star, not on active duty, but between assignments, by the name of Al [Alexander] Haig, calls up the Attorney General, who at that point is Elliot Richardson, who has already had two other Cabinet posts in that administration, and says—He was briefly Secretary of Defense about six months, and then before that he was at HHS [Health and Human Services], HEW [Health, Education and Welfare] in those days. He says to him, "The President wants you to fire Archibald Cox," then the Special Prosecutor, but without Special Prosecutor legislation. That hadn't occurred yet, so he was an appointee. The President had the power and the authority to do it. Richardson had the authority to do it, and as you recall, he declined and said, "I quit."

Al Haig calls up the Deputy Attorney General, Bill Ruckelshaus—he of environmental fame before and after—and says, "You're now the Attorney General. Your Commander in Chief wants you to fire—" and it repeats itself. Ruckelshaus says, "I won't do it and I quit." And then, in an action that had an effect on a later Supreme Court nomination, Al Haig calls up the Solicitor General, who is Bob Bork, and says, "Hey, the President wants you to fire Archibald Cox. You are now the Attorney General." The other two have gone away. It's still Saturday. Bork explained later that his view was the President was entitled to do that, and all that the Attorney General was supposed to do was carry out the instructions. He did. People later on didn't see it that way, and he never became a Supreme Court justice.

Nevertheless, Cox is fired. That leads to Nixon's eventual resignation. There is the first President, and only President, to serve who was never elected in a nationwide election, either as Vice President or President, Gerald Ford. Gerald Ford wants to reconstitute the Justice Department. He appoints William Bart Saxbe first, the Senator from Ohio, who had been Ohio attorney general at one point. Saxbe didn't stay long. Then he does something that warms the cockles of every law student's heart in America: he picks Edward Hirsch Levi to be Attorney General: at that time president of the University of Chicago; former dean of the law school; former, for five years, senior careerist in the antitrust division at Justice; learned in the law; above political partisanship. He was last a Democrat. He'd been a Democrat; hadn't registered in years; respected by everyone; as smart as could be; nonpolitical, and yet not a babe in the woods either; wonderful administration.

He decided that, as part of resurrecting the Justice Department's morale, he'd find himself a federal judge who would be willing to give up his career, tenure, and become the number two at the Justice Department. He picked a little-known, but not completely untalented, United States District Judge in the Southern District of New York by the name of Harold R. Tyler Jr. who eventually, after he had been sworn in, called me up and said, "I have a big office; it's right next to me; you can come and sit in it. We'll have great fun; we'll run the department." I said, "Judge, I'm a Democrat." He said, "That's OK. I can work it with the White House." And in those years you could; those days you could. Each successive administration, whatever its orientation, has become harder and harder about that. But the Ford White House did allow me to be appointed

Associate Deputy Attorney General, so I ended up in the Gerald Ford administration in a pattern that would repeat itself: didn't know him, had never been part of his inner circle, nor of any President that I've ever served.

Martin: You had said that it wasn't a problem for the Ford administration to bring you in as a Democrat. Can you talk a little bit about that interaction, just to give us some historical basis for it?

West: It was a problem, but it just wasn't as big a problem as it would have been in successive administrations. That is, yes, you had to be cleared by the White House. It was not a PAS [Presidential Appointment with Senate Confirmation] appointment, but it was a PA [Presidential Appointment]. It required approval in the White House personnel office, and it was essentially an appointment by the President. It's the one on top there. [*referring to a document*]

It did require going through the process. There were fewer papers, but there were papers. There was a clearance process, and it didn't happen overnight. It took six to eight weeks. I think I was over there shortly after Tyler started, and yet this is not signed until July. Well, I was over there in April, and this is signed the 20th of July. So it took that long to get it cleared. But somewhere there is a plaque or something, or a picture that says my time was April to April, because I only stayed a year.

So the answer is yes. There was a process, and it did require Judge Tyler to go talk to the White House counsel, the deputy counsel, who at that time was Carla Hills's husband, Rod Hills. He had to say, "This is someone important to me. Get the Attorney General to support him." But it got done. Didn't require a bunch of Senators to call up; I didn't have any Senators to call up anyway. I was here in the District. So there was a process, but it simply was not as difficult.

And to say that these spots weren't normally reserved for Republicans would be to give the wrong impression. There were two Associate Deputy Attorney General slots working for the Deputy Attorney General. The other one was filled later on by a Republican. I don't think that I know of any other Democrats serving in the Attorney General's office. He had a bunch of assistants or special counsel. Well, a fellow who ended up the owner of the *Chicago Tribune*, Jack [Fuller], wrote a book—I'll think of his name. But anyway, I think he was a Democrat. So to say that it was not a problem is a misstatement by me. It took some doing, but it wasn't nearly as painful as it would be now. It would be quite difficult, I'd assume.

Martin: Before I interrupted, you were getting onto the Carter administration.

West: The one thing I would say about that is, in that year, I mentioned that what happened is that under the Deputy Attorney General—who had essentially responsibility for running the department while the Attorney General oversaw it and did lots of other things—the guy who had my job basically kept an eye on the civil part. The Civil Rights Division, the Civil Division, Lands and Natural Resources it was called then, which was environmental and also ownership of U.S. properties and parts and the like, Interior Department stuff, tax division. But the criminal division would have been under the other associate deputy. Also liaison with the organizations, the other departments—FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], DEA [Drug Enforcement

Agency] was there then, INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] was still there, Office of the U.S. Attorneys, and the like.

So we needed to get the other one filled and we did, and we took a young prosecutor from the Southern District of New York. He had gotten himself quite a name. He had clerked the same year I did in the Southern District, but I had never met him. He had convicted a Congressman in the Abscam trial, got big notoriety. His name was Rudy Giuliani. So there are all these Republicans around me, and we worked closely, because of drug interdiction, with a guy who was on [Nelson] Rockefeller's staff, who was then the Vice President at the White House, and who came over to see us quite a bit. He was a very sharp guy, also a Republican—big, tall guy—and his name was Richard D. Parsons. Parsons is now the CEO [chief executive officer] of Time Warner. Both those guys ended up at Patterson Belknap, which was Tyler's partners years later, as did I. So those things have a lot of effect on you, on your later life.

I went back to Covington & Burling after one year. I had told the judge I would need to. He had said, "Hang around. We're a year away from an election. See who wins. Maybe we'll stay in. Make your decision then." But I had been very late in getting started on my career in the law, and it was important to get back. As soon as I'm back, this guy, a Democrat, comes out of the woodwork. He runs around; he tells people, "My name is Jimmy Carter. I'm running for President." I was not involved in his campaign. He gets elected.

Cliff Alexander was becoming Secretary of the Army and knew my wife's family. He asked me if I'd have any interest in coming into the administration. At the time, I told him I'd think about it. He wanted me to be Assistant Secretary in charge of the very office in which I had worked as an officer, Army Manpower and Reserve Affairs. I called a fellow who had just been a partner at Williams & Connolly, just taken a job—Williams & Connolly used to be right over there—had just taken a job as the chief of staff to Harold Brown, the Secretary of Defense. The title in those days was called The Special Assistant to the Secretary—capital "T" on the "The," which the military do in the Pentagon quite often. It's not Judge Advocate General; it's The Judge Advocate General. The Special Assistant—and it's actually The Special Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, both those options together, very powerful. It was first created when Mel Laird was Secretary of Defense, so it had a little history.

Anyway, this fellow had just taken it on. His name was John Kester, back over at Williams & Connolly now. John was the young Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army that I had worked for as an officer. Once again, what happens to you earlier in life tends to come back, and sometimes it doesn't take long to come back. I called him up and said, "John, this is what I've been asked to do. What do you think?" He said, "Well, I didn't know you were willing to come back into the government. Come on over." So the long and short of it is that he introduced me to [William] Graham Claytor, who was about to become Secretary of the Navy and who had been a partner at Covington. I had known him and had worked on some cases for him. He had been president of Southern Railway before that. And I was introduced to young guy who was going to be the Under Secretary and with whom I would have lots to do in later years by the name of R. James Woolsey. So Claytor, Woolsey brought me in as the general counsel of the Navy. That's how I got into the Carter administration. I did that for two years.

There was a job I held that's not mentioned in the stuff you have there, and that is the next one I'm going to mention. My third year there—It would have been '77, '78, part of '78, part '79—John Kester left to go back to the practice of law. The Deputy Secretary, who was Charlie Duncan then, who later went over to be Secretary of Energy after James Schlesinger, and Harold Brown, Secretary, interviewed me and asked me to take that job. So I had a third job, or a middle job there, as the Special Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary. That's the next job that I had that, as much as anything, had a hand in preparing me for later, because in that job I saw everything that went to Harold Brown, which, incidentally, was a real chore because Harold Brown was a genius. His mind worked lots faster than anybody else's, *especially* a lot faster than mine. He's a nuclear physicist, a PhD—and he'd gotten his PhD at a very early age—very young director of the Livermore Lab in his early 30s; very young Secretary of the Air Force in the Kennedy-[Lyndon] Johnson years; and a very young DDR&E, Director of Defense Research and Engineering, in those days, when that was the third-most-senior job in the OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense].

So that's how I got there. I did that for a year. I ended up then as DoD [Department of Defense] general counsel for the last year. It is during that period that I met a young member of Congress who was very liberal, out of place, on the House Armed Services Committee, by the name of Les Aspin.

Martin: It struck me, your story about how you got involved in both the Carter administration and the Ford administration could be unique for that time, or it could be common—the fact that you're a political appointee but not really connected to either administration in terms of campaigns or old friends or contributors. Did you get a sense that this was a normal thing at that time?

West: What I thought was that my presence in the Ford administration did not strike me at the time as any more unusual than Dick Parsons' presence or Rudy's presence, because neither of them had been really involved in the Ford—Look, Ford didn't have a campaign.

Martin: Sure.

West: He didn't have a campaign to be Vice President either. He came over. So what was unique was the time. We all thought that what happened with Richard Nixon, and the President leaving under those circumstances, was extraordinary. But the many different ripples throughout not only American society but American government occurred and had effects in different ways, not all as profound as we tend to think about. But even the little ones such as, how do people end up in positions? At that point, there may even have been a kind of—He was ramping up, in the middle of a Presidential term, basically to complete a term and hopefully to prepare for the next one.

What he needed more than anything was—We use this phrase so often, but I think it's—kind of "pulling people together." So it would have been natural for Judge Tyler to turn to his old law clerks. In fact he didn't just bring me in as one of his two associate deputies. He brought both his law clerks who were with him at the time, plus the two he had hired. That's understandable. In fact, one of my duties was to keep an eye on those folks. They were on my staff.

So it didn't feel unusual for me. If you ask me to look at it in hindsight, I'd say it was an unusual time, but in more ways than people normally think about it. Not just in the fact that we're going through the trauma of a President gone, a new one is in. Is he going to be pursued? He's got to be pardoned by Gerald Ford. Remember, that cost him, people thought, votes? Actually you don't remember, but you've read.

Martin: I was alive.

Steiner: We weren't.

West: It was unusual in lots of different ways. In my case it was unusual in little ways. But I think it all was a function of the times more than anything else, so I ended up showing up in other administrations.

I grew up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in a very real way. It's not just that I was born there and left. I mean I grew up there. I went to elementary school there. I spent eight years in a Catholic elementary school, four years in the public high school, segregated, where my dad was vice principal—became principal, but happily after I had graduated. An only child of teachers—What that meant was that every summer we packed up and left town. We tended to come here because the teachers then were paid then, as they often are now, on longevity and academic credentials. So they go off every summer and work on their master's degree. Dad would go to Penn State; Mom would go to the Teachers College at Columbia; and they'd stow me right here with grandmother over in southeast Washington, so I spent most of my summers here.

In many ways you can never be a true Washingtonian unless you're native. I'm not. I'm the only generation of my family that's not. Our girls are from here. But when I graduated from Howard Law School in '68, I was already married. I had married my law school classmate at the end of our first year of law school. She had come from Cincinnati. Her dad was in the Johnson administration, so she was living here. Her father worked for Sarg [Sargent] Shriver at the poverty program.

Now, he's an interesting story. He had started, as a member of the council in Cincinnati, a little operation in which poor people actually took control of some of the issues that were being decided. They called it a "community action program." Sarg wanted to include that, so he brought him to Washington. He became one of the three assistant directors in charge of CAP, Community Action Program, which had the community action programs in LSP [Land Stewardship Project], the stuff on the Indian reservations, Head Start. It had a bunch of other things, including legal services.

They were here, and she came here to go to Howard and be with her parents. We got married, so from '68 on, we were essentially residents of Washington, D.C. We were part of the permanent culture here, not because we came here for an appointment but because I came here to go to school in a city where my dad's family already was. She came here because of her dad. So we formed associations. I mean, John Kester, when he left the administration while I was on active duty, didn't leave town. He stayed and practiced law. I didn't leave. In fact my whole life has been—We live in the same house, since 1984. I just get up and go to work in a different office.

So, to some extent, there probably is around a body of people—Let me give you an example: Jim Woolsey never went anywhere. He's from Tulsa, Oklahoma. He had been working on the Hill at one point. He's Under Secretary of the Navy in the Carter administration. He goes back to practice law at Shea & Gardner. Then one day you're talking to him and he disappears. And you can't find him until you see him on a TV broadcast from Arkansas and the President is just naming him CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] Director, and then he disappears again, because that's what the CIA does with their Director. So I don't find that so unusual. There are folks, like Madeleine Albright over at Georgetown when she's not in government—Now I think it's a little unusual, at least as I matured in my profession, to not be involved in some of the campaigns.

There's even a funny story that when my nomination finally showed up on Bill Clinton's and Hillary [Clinton]'s joint desk—They tended to be reviewing those nominations jointly at the time—It is claimed by one of the guys who says he advised the President on stuff like this, that he said, "Who is Togo West, and what has he ever done for Bill Clinton?" Of course, the answer to the first, by those gathered there, was, "Don't know." And to the second is, "As far as we can tell, nothing."

Of course that was all Les Aspin. It's not what most people think of in terms of how you end up in an administration. I believe it happens more often than not. I would love to tell you that it has something to do with making selections by merit. I'm not so foolish as to claim that. I am willing to say that at least part of the explanation has to do with the fact that when you come and you put together an administration, at some point you talk to people, you have some advisors around. You notice all candidates do it. They always wind up with some group that actually used to be here, whether they're in Arkansas or in Texas or down at the Pond House in Georgia or wherever—Kennebunkport, I guess, California—and who tend to know folks. And you do say, "Who have you got who actually would know this area?"

Now, Secretary of the Army is unusual, because that tends to be every car dealer in America who used to serve or went to the Academy or anything and put big money in and who say, "Hey, my time, President, and that's the job I want." So a lot of times—

Martin: It does tend to be more ceremonial sometimes.

West: Not so much ceremonial as it, like ambassadorships, are what people outside the government who have made contributions think should be used to pay them back.

Martin: Let's jump for a second because, Jeff, you had some questions about your time when you were the lead government-affairs official for, was it Northrop?

Chidester: If we go back, you joined—

West: I can get you there. I'm done there. I don't go back to Covington.

Chidester: You go to Patterson.

West: Where Judge Tyler, Rudy Giuliani, and Dick Parsons are all partners and where they say, "We want you to open up the Washington office." I open up the Washington office and do it for

nine years. Then I'm asked to join Northrop, and that happens because of people who affected my life earlier.

My second year in private practice—The office was right there on Pennsylvania Avenue, just two blocks down and over—Jim Woolsey called me up—He used to be at the Navy—and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, you know." He said, "Would you like to be on the board of something called the Aerospace Corporation?" The Aerospace Corporation is one of the big nonprofits that is attached, FFRDC, Federally Funded Research and Development Center. Its big contract is with the Air Force. They're in El Segundo. Great place. I wish I were still on the board.

This is this crowd that I joined [*showing more pictures*]. Incidentally, one of the board members is Gerald Ford. That was a very young-looking Woolsey; this is Cornelius Roosevelt; this is Hedley Donovan; this is one of the last CINCSACs [Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command]; this guy right here is the four-star General Russ Dougherty. The thing about Russ is, he is the father-in-law of—I'm trying to think of his name, who was SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander Europe], also an Air Force general. So anyway, Herb York, formerly of the *Times*.

So I went on this board, which got me into the aerospace community. Part of the reason, of course, is defense, my undergraduate engineering degree, so they all thought it was related. Reminds me of a funny story I'll tell you when we're not on about a conversation I had with Harold Bromley, who asked me to come to the Pentagon.

But in the course of that, I got to know a bunch of the, obviously, senior people at Aerospace, one of whom ended up leaving and going to Northrop. At some point he called me up and said, "When is the next time you're going to be out for a meeting? I'd like you to come meet some of the senior people at Northrop." Kent Kresa had just taken over as the CEO. Tom Jones, the former CEO who really built it into a big thing, was getting a lot of criticism over some sales to South Korea. The then head of the Washington office, who is still in the business, Stanley [Ebner]—Anyway, he now does work for Boeing—was leaving after ten years, so they offered the job to me.

Chidester: You were in private practice for about ten years.

West: It's actually nine. Ten is just the round number.

Chidester: But you're still plugged into this network—

West: Still have a security clearance, which in the defense business, the national security business, is the indication that you're still doing something.

Chidester: Did you have intentions to go back into public service, or were you satisfied with—

West: I think, at that time when I first left, having been general counsel of DoD, I'd only had a chance to be general counsel of DoD one year, and that, for a lawyer, was a really great job. As I look back, I don't think of it as necessarily the most important, certainly the most senior. I wished I had time to do it longer.

So I thought, *Ah, well*. Remember, we in the Carter administration maybe should have been able to read the writing on the wall, but I think most of us thought, *Aw, come on*. The guy, sure, he was Governor, but he's an actor. He's not going to beat Jimmy Carter, graduate of Annapolis and all sorts of great stuff. So we found ourselves unceremoniously dumped out on the economy with a feeling that there's some things left to do. So I think most of us from the Carter years thought we might go back. But what happened, of course, is that Ronald Reagan gets reelected. So now it's four years gone and another four to go.

Then I remember my wife and I left and took our two daughters to Europe—We thought it was time for them to see Europe—for two weeks. At the time, the then Governor of Massachusetts was leading George [H. W.] Bush, the incumbent Vice President, handily. When we came back, the race had flipped in just two weeks. I think it was the grainy photos of the guy. So now it's 12 years. By the time we got into the Bush years, I'd pretty much abandoned the notion that I'd be back in government.

Chidester: But you're part of this network that is almost a network-in-exile that is ready to go back into government. A lot of these people are thinking that with the next Democratic President, they'll likely take positions in Defense.

West: When I went to Northrop, my wife and I thought that I had made not just a career change but a final career change. She had been in the corporate world all along. She had never been a vice president. I went in as a senior vice president. To my shock, it was much better compensation than I had even as a partner in a law firm. Modest size; Patterson Belknap was pretty good size then; it's bigger now. Our daughters were, by then—Tiffany [West Smink], when I started Northrop, was finishing Harvard and was going to start law school at Yale. Hilary [West] was just starting college at Connecticut College. It was still useful to have the income. Actually, at that point, when we started at Northrop, I thought, *Government is over and out*. Not just a decision that I don't want to; it just didn't seem that it was practical to think it would happen anymore. It just was done.

I remember the first time somebody ever said, "I want you to meet the next President, Bill Clinton from Arkansas." I thought, *Oh, well, sure.*

Chidester: This is what I was getting to. I'm interested to hear not only your perspective but what you sensed from this network. Around '90, '91, you start getting the Presidential campaign in its early stages, and you've got guys like Bill Clinton coming up. What did you hear about him? What were your impressions? What did the network think of this guy?

West: I wasn't as plugged into the network as you might think. The reason is that it has never been that interesting to me to get involved in the organizing and back-and-forth of the political process. I'm happy to do some things, but I didn't want to go to meetings. I didn't want to even get together and chew the fat. It's not that I got invited and said, "I won't do it." I just never made the effort.

So, for example, when everybody was gathering—Let's go back to Jimmy Carter—and going down and advising him and Jim Woolsey and all those guys—The benefit for me was that I knew people who were doing it, but I wasn't one of those doing it. Same thing with Bill Clinton:

I knew people who were doing stuff with him, who were getting more and more excited about his candidacy, but I was sort of watching from afar saying, "Well, if he can do it."

Remember, my job in those days was to advise my CEO back in Century City as to what was happening around Washington, the same question you asked me. What are you hearing? What's the scuttlebutt? What's going on? But I wasn't really plugged into the network that much. I had friends who were. I talked to them on the phone. They'd say, "This is what we're hearing, and this is what we're doing."

Chidester: Your friends in the defense community—

West: One of my friends was the chairman of the DNC [Democratic National Committee] at the time, Ron Brown. Right here in Washington, sitting over at his law firm doing all sorts of stuff. But I never saw that much of him. He just was someone we'd known for years. It was as if we watched more than participated.

Martin: As the campaign progresses, you have the issue of the draft with President Clinton. You have other figures who are potentially going to enter the race. Was there a favorite among the defense community? Was the defense, or military, community put off by Governor Clinton at the time?

West: Well, if you mean the defense Democrats—and I did consider myself part of that group—frankly, by then—Remember, it's been 11 long years; we're in the 12th year. I think all elements of the Democratic community were saying, "Can he win? If so, we're for him." Remember, some 22 former generals and flag officers wrote that letter for him saying, "We think he's perfectly capable. We're not at all put off by all this stuff about his so-called 'unclear draft'" and that curious letter he writes. Back and forth and all that stuff. "We think he would be fine." Frankly, I just think that the feeling in the Democratic defense community at the time was, if he can win, they're inclined to support him. The theory being—I think this is true of every specialized community within political circles—we'll get him in; we'll train him. It never turns out that way. But you can see us all sitting around saying, "Sure, we know what he thinks he thinks. We'll tell him what he thinks when he gets here."

Martin: You're some hick from Arkansas—

West: He did some very interesting things. It was clear very early on that he wasn't just a hick from anywhere, I remember. That's where the [J. William] Fulbright fellowships come from, Arkansas. So they're not all that hicky out there.

Martin: You don't actually become Secretary of the Army until '93—

West: And late in '93, November.

Martin: What are you doing between the time that Clinton is elected and—?

West: Thought you'd never ask. There I am on the board of the Shakespeare Theater. That means that they have four productions a year, and there's always a premiere. Listen, not all business gets transacted in business circumstances. So there I am and the practice still is—

because I was at Northrop and I could sponsor a lot of these things—The practice is that the various contributors have a big dinner just before the production. Then you go in. That's the premiere night, and then you come and stand around. So there are always people invited, the dons of the Hill, the barons and baronesses.

One of them was the then chairman, and it happened—surprising thing—For decades it was chaired by these southern conservatives, and this liberal from Wisconsin becomes chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. At the same time, Sam Nunn is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Les Aspin used to make every one of those premieres. He liked coming to the Shakespeare; he liked the Shakespeare plays. He'd always bring one of his dates; he had a bunch of dates. I'd see him there and I'd say, "Mr. Chairman." I'd shine him up and rush back to my office in Century City and fire off a fax to Kent Kresa that said, "I just talked to the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, and this is what he said—" The message was always the same. He'd say, "Togo, we're going to kill the B-2." That was the big thing. He was killing the B-2, and I was trying to get the B-2 through.

There came a time after the election—What was I doing after the election?—when I went there, and Aspin was there. I had some guests there, dear friends for a long time from Covington. We came out for the intermission; we're standing there; I'm talking to them. I see Aspin; I think, I need to try to talk to him at some point, but I'm talking away. As I turn, he's there. He's come over with his date, so we're chatting. I think, *OK, speculation out there is who's going to be Secretary of Defense?* We know the President is going to name that package early. He always does the national security cluster early because the world wants to know who it's going to be. They get them in right on Inauguration Day.

So I think, I'm going to be clever. Now, I know this is not going to sound clever to you, because it didn't sound favorable to me when I said it, but you do what you have to do. So I turned to him and I said, "Mr. Chairman, what are you going to be doing come spring?" Isn't that clever? Oh man, that's so subtle. And he says, "I don't know, Togo." I think, Eh, wrong answer. He's supposed to say, "You jerk, I'm the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. I'm going to be kicking you and your B-2 around just like I've been doing." He didn't say it, so I'm composing my answer on this.

He said, "I have a question for you. Is Northrop paying you so much money that you wouldn't go back into public service?" Remember the question you asked me earlier? I had completely stopped thinking about serving in the government. After a while you don't think about it. Eleven years is a long time. As far as for me at the time, I had no answer. I found myself on one of my rare occasions, I was speechless. I looked to my wife and my friends; they're not there anymore. You know how you can sometimes find yourself in situations, and it seems as though suddenly there's a spotlight on you and you're standing there and out there is black. Well, there it was, just Aspin and me here in the spotlight. I'm trying to think.

So I fumbled something like—I can make it sound much smoother now, but it wasn't smooth at all then—"Mr. Chairman, Les, I'm like you: I consider there's nothing more noble a person can do with his or her life than public service." Something like that comes out. He says, "OK." That's the end of that conversation. Eventually Aspin is picked.

On Inauguration Day I'm out along the parade route at one of the parties that they give in the banks so you can watch them go by. I call the Northrop switchboard here and talk to my receptionist because, though businesses in town here are closed, Northrop is out there in Rosslyn. So we were open. I asked her, "Do you have any messages for me?" She said, "Oh, Mr. West—" She's all atwitter— "Secretary Aspin just called." "What 'Secretary Aspin?'" Then I remembered, of course, they got the package through. And she said, "He wants you to call him."

So eventually I got back to an office. I called him. That was before there were a lot of cell phones. I go over; I see him; I see his chief of staff; and they've decided that they want to send— He's got to get his "big seven" over: that's the Deputy Secretary, two of his key Under Secretaries—or three, I forget what—and the three service Secretaries or something like that. So he's sending me over, Secretary of the Army. That's the way he did it.

Now, there's another little piece in between that I forgot: that is, around that time, also, I started getting calls from a woman who was part of the Presidential transition team, the part that was doing personnel. Her name was Pat Irvin. She ended up as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, but in those days she was part of the senior effort to find talented people for DoD. But she wasn't calling me about me; she was calling me to get my input on various people. Eventually she began to ask me about women—and minorities too. But just people in general. She cleared names with me. She'd say, "What about this person?" I remember she used to call me every Sunday afternoon at home. I guess that's because during the week it's hard to find me. So, over time, I had lots of conversations with her, the only contact I had with the Presidential transition team.

The last time she talked to me she said, "OK, let's talk about you. What should you do?" I said, "I don't have any aspirations this time around," because I hadn't thought about it. She said, "Yes, but what should you do?" I said, "Well, I don't know. Probably a service Secretary, but I couldn't be Air Force because of all the work Northrop does." That was as much of an early conversation as I ever heard. I didn't think much of it, but it went from there to the—The timing is, the Aspin conversation is way earlier. Then Clinton comes to town. He starts talking to Patricia. You'll see her listed as a DoD Deputy Assistant Secretary. Then suddenly there's—This is all in December. Then there's the inauguration in late January.

Now, after that I heard nothing. I received no papers to fill out. This is always the signal that you're actually seriously being considered. From time to time I'd see stuff in the press. It wasn't even moving enough for me to talk to Kent Kresa about it. You're always going to tell your CEO, but there just wasn't anything. Maybe in February or so there might have been a mention or two of it, a couple of weeks later. Then it went away. Started hearing other names. Nothing happened until late July. Late July is interesting around Washington. It's the last period before the really serious vacationers go off to Martha's Vineyard or wherever, and Vernon Jordan called me up.

Now, Vernon is someone I've known for a long time, off and on. Even then we considered ourselves friends. He knew Gail [West]'s father. That's Ted Berry. Those were old-line civil rights guys. I used to go out to Century City several times a month for meetings. I had gotten on the plane to go out there, and when I landed at LAX [Los Angeles International Airport], there was a message to call my office, and I did and she had two messages for me. Vernon Jordan had

called and wanted to know if he could see me the next day. She said she had already told him that I had just gone to LA [Los Angeles]. He said, "Well, maybe if I called him."

And Ron Dellums, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, had called. He said he wanted to see me, and she told him the same thing. He said, "Well, maybe—" I forget what his message was, but my message to her was, "Call him back. Tell him I'll be there," because I'm the Northrop guy. At the time, Vernon Jordan was very close to the President of the United States. I don't know what he's calling about because I'm not in the mix anymore, I didn't think. No, I'm sorry. I had gotten a couple of calls from personnel asking, "Would I consider being Under Secretary?" I said, "No, I wouldn't do that," because they'd begun to fix on somebody else.

Martin: There's still no Army Secretary, right?

West: Right, and it's taking a long time. They finally got a Navy Secretary in June but because they had to. What was it? Tailhook had reached out and claimed another victim, and it was the holdover Secretary, I think, or something like that. They had to get a Secretary in. That was John Dalton. Then they had wanted to get a woman in, so they closed on Sheila [Widnall] sometime in the summer too. They had John Shannon, a holdover from the Republican times, who had been Under Secretary. He got himself in trouble over at Fort Myer, in the commissary shop. I still don't understand that. So they finally were forced to move on that. But up until then they were just dawdling. It was because they were going back and forth. They had some guy they wanted to put in one of the three jobs. The military didn't like him because he'd been associated with the President's gay initiatives, and they were real uneasy about what the President had in mind there.

I wasn't hearing a lot about it, and it wasn't clear what I was coming back to Washington for. I just knew I was coming back. So I went by Northrop. I told Kent Kresa's secretary to tell him that I'd gotten a call from these two guys and, if nothing else, any time I can go in and see the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, I'm going to do it. He understood. I took the redeye back. I went to see Vernon, who said, "The President is going to go with you for Secretary of the Army." I said, "Are you serious? I had heard it was going to be So-and-So." He said, "The guy doesn't know his way to the—It's going to be you."

Part of this, I think, is that Aspin had gotten tired of waiting. I'm trying to recall if I had a call from someone who said, "We're going to make a press." But they were always real careful about committing themselves, the people around Aspin. And I never called them. I was experienced enough to know that would have been a waste of time. You don't call people up and ask them. You never get through, and you just embarrass yourself. What I learned after is that Aspin had decided to put on a full-court press. He had called Vernon or had someone call Vernon. He had called Ron, because Ron, the House Armed Services, had nothing to do with it. This is Sam Nunn's stuff as chairman of the Senate Armed Services. They're the ones who confirm. But Sam wouldn't have interfered, and Aspin and Ron Dellums had a special connection, the only two liberals on the House Armed Services Committee. And Ron's an African American.

Vernon said, "These are the people I want you to get letters from." I said, "Vernon, letters?" He said, "Yes. Just do it. I know you think letters don't do any good, but we're at the point now where he's ready to make a decision, so get some letters in." So Howard and some military guys

to say the military like me and stuff like that. That was easy enough to do. He said, "But you need to get them in by—" I don't know, the next three days. Why? Because he's about to leave for Martha's Vineyard. He wasn't going to be around the next month to shepherd it. He wanted him to do it.

My meeting with Ron Dellums, the same thing. Ron said, "We're concerned about this thing. We think there needs to be—" "We"? I don't know, the caucus or whatever— "We think there needs to be a minority in this, an African American. You're the best person." I don't know whether he said there were some others being considered or not. He said, "So we're going to support you." What I'm trying to remember is whether he asked me to do anything. No. Just we had a meeting and that's what he said. He said, "I'm going to write a letter" or something. I guess that would have had an effect to a newly elected President and his wife, both of whom were very sensitive to those kinds of considerations, wanted their administration to be representative of America, dah, dah, dah. So by the time that Vernon was ready to leave for Martha's Vineyard—not in August—the President ended up up there. Maybe not that year, but he certainly ended up later during his administration.

He was able to call me one Friday night, just a few days later and say, "Well, got all the stuff in, and I've talked to the President. I have to tell you, Togo— " This is an answer to another question—He said, "The President turned to me when I was talking to him about you and said—When this comes back in the papers, I'm probably going to take it out, but it's useful background— "and said, 'Now, I know Togo; I've met him; I know him; I know exactly who he is; I met him over at St. John's Church.'" The "Church of the Presidents" is over there on St. John's at Lafayette Square. "Is he a member there? I know he's the senior warden. Is he a member there, or does he work there?" In other words, is the warden actually one of the little porters who cleans up there, or was I actually a member of this all-white, largely Republican church? In fact, it's often been spoken of as either the Republican Party or the Metropolitan Club at prayer. So I thought that was funny. Vernon thought it was hilarious.

So let me for a minute go to the question of when did I meet the President? On Inauguration Day he came and had a prayer service there. Many Presidents do. When he had his second inauguration, other Protestant churches had gotten their oars in the water. He went somewhere else, but he still came and had an early prayer service there also. It's a tradition. I met him then, but that wasn't really the significant time. We had also just brought in a new rector after our old rector of some 30 years had left, and I had been the chairman of that committee and was the senior warden.

He, before George [Herbert] Walker Bush—although George Bush has a family tradition at St. John's—But Clinton also took to coming to the early service. I guess it's the eight o'clock. My cynical view is that's what Presidents do when they want to go play golf: they get church out of the way early. Bill Clinton was not Episcopal, neither is his wife. One is Baptist and I think she's Methodist. Foundry Methodist is her church, so she's a Methodist. But it's close by. Presidents go there. The Secret Service is comfortable with it. They used to walk across Lafayette Park. In fact Bill Clinton walked across it; you won't see that happen anymore, I don't think.

He came one Sunday. I got a call from the rector at about 7:00 in the morning saying only two words, "He's coming." I knew that meant, "The President is coming. Get down there and be part

of the little—" So I was there along with—Well, Luis [Leon] couldn't do it; Luis had to get ready for the service. I met the Presidential delegation, showed him to his—There's a pew that we reserve called the President's Pew. It's way down; it's not the pew in the front; it's midway down, on the left side, left of the center aisle. I got him seated and the Secret Service guy assigned, and then I took a seat a few pews back.

Once he was seated, he looked around. He looked back around and sent his guy to get me and say, "The President wants you to sit with him." So I sat with him during the service. We talked afterward on the way. He talked with Luis. That was sort of the first—I saw him on a number of occasions like that afterward, so over time he could truly say, "I know who Togo West is." He couldn't be quite clear whether I was a member there or whether I was just a guy who welcomed him there.

Funny thing about that, Luis Leon, who is still directing, who you see often in the press, the current President's rector, the President had him give the invocation at his second inauguration, President Bush did. Luis also was reasonably close to President Clinton. In fact, he told President Clinton that he was distantly related to him by marriage. And the President acknowledged that; they found they had some common cousin. So, a very bipartisan city even in its most partisan time.

But that's how I ended up there. I had no involvement in the campaign at all. I never offered advice; I never traveled anywhere; I never raised money. In fact, I almost waited too late to contribute to his campaign. Who do I mean by that? Well, Howard Paster at that time was with, I forget which—he had been with—

Martin: Hill & Knowlton?

West: That's where he was then, and before that he'd been at the one that the Republicans out of the Ford administration all established together.

But Howard, specifically, had been one of my consultant when I was at Northrop, so when all of this is going on—Howard is about as knowledgeable about Democratic politics as anybody I knew, so I kept saying, "Howard, is it time for me to send my contribution to the Democratic Party?" He said, "Wait, you have to pick the right event." When I looked up, all the times had passed. As it was, I remember they said, "Oh, it's too late. They've got all their money, and it's going to go to the DNC." So I never even really got credit for contributing to Bill Clinton's first campaign. Long answer to some short questions.

Martin: Absolutely not. I want to go back to this first year of the administration, but I want to ask really quickly. You might have already exhausted it.

West: I may have exhausted you, but I haven't exhausted what I can say.

Chidester: You haven't exhausted me.

Martin: We can go for days.

Chidester: A lot of people have commented about their first meeting with President Clinton and his personality, and the way that he embraces people has become almost legendary. Do you have anything else to add about that first meeting at the church?

West: No, I don't. I have some things to add to the general lore. Here's the thing: later on you'll want to know, well, when I was in the Cabinet and all this, how often did I meet with the President? The fact is, I rarely met with the President, either as Secretary of the Army or as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. But I was places with the President; I did things with the President. Any time the President moved that did something with the Army, I was there to greet him, to welcome him [*shows interviewers a picture*]. There we are, two fat guys in Haiti. See there, that blue thing right by you? So, he went to Haiti? So did I. I was there before he was so I could greet him and walk him around. See the two fat guys strolling around in Haiti?

He went to Germany to get ready to go into Bosnia. I was there. I don't have a picture of us together, but that's me on the ground waiting for him, or something like that. I forget which. I have some others somewhere that are better than that. He went to Atlanta for the Olympics, and the Army was doing a lot to support it—That picture's at home. Here I am with him going down on Air Force One, and out there is "Flo-Jo" [Florence Griffith Joyner]—God rest her soul—sitting with me in the stands. And you should take a good look at that picture; it's right by the door. Look at the little plaque that says who took it, because the photographer was James Lee Witt, Director of FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency], who was along on every trip and who I think took the picture. And I didn't think about it at the time until I looked at it afterward. Obviously the thing for me to do then was to say, "OK, give me the camera and I'll take you with her." It never occurred to me to say it.

So, no, the first time I ever met the President, we're in church. As we're coming out, I chatted a little bit with him, but he's got other people, and he's got Luis waiting—So, not there and not on the subsequent ones. Whenever I would meet him and take him on these things, I could barely shake his hand and get him going, but I've got to introduce him to all the generals and all the generals' wives. Then he's got to go talk to the servicemen, because if he doesn't, there's going to be rumbling about it the next day. He's got to talk to the NCOs [Noncommissioned Officers]. So never really until I started turning up at White House dinners later. But my impression of him and his interaction with people comes less from his interaction with me and more of my observation of his interaction with the people I introduced him to.

I never took him to a single enlisted, or the wife of an enlisted, or the husband of a deployed enlisted woman, and had the impression that he was listening just long enough to be courteous so he could move on to the next person. I always said of Bill Clinton, he never met a person he didn't want to talk to, that he didn't *like* to talk to. And more importantly—or worse for that person, in some respects, because they could never break loose—he would like to hear all their ideas. He wanted to hear what they thought. What did they believe? What did they think about this? That's very interesting but what about this?

In my view, it's why his ratings remained consistently high and why he got elected easily and why the Newt Gingrich-led House of Representatives took such a hit there. Right after, in the midterm election, between Monica [Lewinsky]—That's his reelection—they took a big hit because too many people didn't like them going after him because they thought him a person

who had genuinely taken an interest in them as individuals. Here's the thing: you can meet anybody. No matter what your notion about him, your preconception about him or her is, if he takes an interest in you—"You know, he must genuinely like talking to me. Maybe he even likes me. I think he does—" it's hard not to like him back. I think that the heart of the Clinton phenomenon is that everybody likes him back. That is, he likes them first, individually, and they like him back. That's my take.

But for me? He never really had a chance to do that until I'd known him a long time and by then—My view about Clinton as President was, it was such a relief. This is not a knock on any previous President; it is just not. Every President that I've ever served, whose term I'd been in in Washington, has had strengths and weaknesses. But it was, in many ways, a relief to me personally to have a President about whom Europeans could not make snotty comments in terms of intellectual capability, grasp of the issues. He may have been a wonk, but he was a genuine wonk. He was a wonk because he was really interested in this stuff. He cared about what the wonkish stuff produced in terms of effects on people.

Chidester: I'm glad I asked that because that was very valuable. I want to go back to a couple of questions in this first year. I don't think we've talked to someone who was in your position, being with the contractors the first year. I think it would be really valuable to get your thoughts on military policy this first year. You have a relationship with Les Aspin, Secretary Aspin—

West: I was really disappointed to see him go. When you think about it, he brought me in. My commission there on the wall is dated November 22nd. That means not long after I am aboard—I have a whole bunch of photos of his welcoming ceremony for me and all that stuff—he announced his resignation. I remember everything leading up to it. I remember all the blame that was parceled out to him in various written commentaries that the reason for Mogadishu was that he had personally refused to respond to the request for additional equipment there. This could have saved the lives of those soldiers. But I felt, by the end of the year, he had essentially turned that corner, that people understood, and that in fact his stock was getting better.

It was a personal disappointment to see him leave, and I wasn't pleased at the sense that the White House either pushed him to leave or didn't sound encouraging enough to keep him when he said he was going to leave. That was in spite of the fact that I knew Bill Perry well. We had served together during the entire four years of the Carter Presidency, and in the last two years we'd served together closely. But what was your question?

Chidester: According to the media at least, which is what the story is out there during the time, the two big perceptions about military policy is, one, you get the big huff about gays in the military, and then you get this other notion that President Clinton is almost ignoring military policy in favor of—especially in economic policy—deficit reduction package and a stimulus package. What was your perception from within the defense community? Was this accurate? Was his administration ignoring this policy for the first year? Were they doing a lot behind the scenes in this area?

West: I think the latter part of the perception is not far off the target. They weren't ignoring it. It's just that, for a President it's never a matter of whether you're ignoring and what you're paying attention to. It's all a matter of priorities.

The constant battle among Cabinet and Sub Cabinet, but especially in the Cabinet in those days—and probably still is—much is made of the shift of power over policy and the like to White House staff and special staff. But it's still a fact that the Cabinet Secretaries are the ones who go to battle over the budget. Frankly, the priorities of a President and the priorities of an administration are always reflected in the budget. That's where the fights get hammered out. That's where Presidential direction is most clearly given. Yes, I know that Presidents and their advisors make compromises here and there, and so pretty soon it's hard to figure out what the priorities are in the budget, but they're there.

The fact is, it's not that the President was ignoring the demands of national security; it's not possible for a President to do that. They seize him by the throat the minute he arrives, and they don't let go until the very last minute. But it is true that his priority was to get the economy in order, and the other priority, which foundered, was health care.

So that part, yes. But there's something else. You know, especially new Presidents, Presidents who step into it for the first time whether they're—I remember when I was growing up—I was in elementary school—we had a discussion at one point—It must have been sixth or seventh grade if it had an impression on me—and my teacher, the nun, Sister Mary Virginia, said, "The best candidates for President, the most successful ones, are Senators, not Governors, because Senators have had a chance to plan all the national issues, and Governors—" and of course now, these days, the common wisdom is just the reverse. The most successful candidates are, and the best candidates may be—Well, the answer to both those is, yes, but it's Vice Presidents who you see the most. They may have gotten, in the old days, the real responsibilities, but they're the ones who probably come into office best equipped to be President, if they get to make that step, because there's just nothing like what you get to face in the White House. Most Governors and Senators do not show up understanding the point that we just made, which is national security—the relations among nations, whether diplomatic issues or the raw power base, if its military issues—will grab a President no matter what. So he wasn't able to do that.

But his first year was hijacked. His first military year was hijacked because of gays in the military. I mean, for reasons that were not clear to me—I wasn't there; I didn't arrive until November—but suddenly he finds himself, I think, in response to—They learned this later, responding to a reporter's question or what have you—that the big issue that drives everybody is, "Oh well, you said you thought that the service should be open for gays to serve in the military. Well, here you are. What are you going to do about it?" "Well, I'm going to see it through." "Oh, OK." This is a big issue.

So, suddenly the perception is—and sometimes the perception really can surpass reality—The perception is that Bill Clinton is focused on social issues in the military, not the tough issues: North Korea and the Middle East, which, by the end of his eight years, were a big part of his focus. I mean, there was his visit—the first President to visit Vietnam. His abortive—and he came close—visit to Korea, all sorts of things. A real effort to hammer out a North Korea strategy that was pretty much dashed the minute a new administration came in. So big change there from beginning to end, it would seem. But in fact I think the attention had to be pretty serious all along. But the first six months to a year got hijacked over an issue that never should have been so much of a front-burner, high-octane, high-profile issue.

The military and its lawyers—and I would say that having been one—have always known that the United States of America had to deal with the issue of the service of gay Americans in the military, just as they have always known how to deal with the issue of the service of women in combat and combat-related assignments, which I know you're going to get to. It is not a complicated issue. It may be delicate, but not complicated. The outlines of the solutions and how you should deal with them are very clear.

But once you start hashing these things out in the—I was about to say "overheated." I don't know if it's overheated, but just the heated atmosphere of public statements and press stories and then people saying, "Oh, my God, the foxhole. What's going to happen in the foxhole?" Well, nobody's been in a foxhole in decades, so it just got hijacked. So the perception of the first year, his attentiveness to national security matters, is probably somewhat off center. But the notion that his priorities may have been first and second among some other things is probably correct.

There's one other point I wanted to make about that. Remember, he was an inexperienced President and an unsure President in terms of dealing with the military. So he was also—and this, I think, has been said, and it's true—very tentative in the way he approached some of these things until he got a sense of how officers were going to deal with him.

Now, nice things happen for Presidents if they get the right kind of advice. There is always a change in the chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff within months after a new President—well, within months after a new administration, not just a new President, a new administration. The President is sworn in on the 20th of January. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs leaves at the end of September of a new administration, always, just because that's the way the two-year statutory terms are set up. And it has rarely been the case that a Chairman has been reappointed more than two years. There's actually a prohibition against it, two back-to-back terms. That means four years. So every time there's a new administration, you can count on it.

Colin Powell was leaving at the end of September anyway. But he was there for the first six months. Colin was a good guy to have there. Colin is going to try to help a new President get a feel for things—and he did. But he's still not your guy; you didn't put him there. In fact, he's a guy who has, or soon will, turn down your offer to be in your administration. So if you get a chance to meet folks, you do get to put your own person in. By "own person," I mean someone whom you've gotten—You know Presidents can get to know their senior leaders.

In those days—and I bet they still do something like it—all the so-called CINCs [commanders in chief of the branches] around the world, the four-stars who command major regional commands—They're not CINCs anymore because Rummy [Donald Rumsfeld] decided he didn't want to be that—but the major commanders come to Washington for meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense. There's always a dinner at the White House. They invite the service Secretaries, or at least they used to. They meet with the President, and they eat with him.

And as hot spots develop, he ends up talking to them—It's not possible not to. Yes, a lot is filtered through the SecDef [Secretary of Defense] and the Chairman, but he gets to know them. So over time a President gets more and more comfortable with them. But the first six months to

the first year, he's not that comfortable if he's not been there before. Bill Clinton had not been there before in any form.

Chidester: When you first agreed to be Secretary of the Army, do you get any conveyance from Bill Clinton or the White House what they expect you to do, what your charge is to be Secretary?

West: No, what you get is a sort of funny—Everything leading up to your swearing-in is consumed by the complicated dance of conflicts of interest, disclosures of anything possible in your background, vetting, meeting people who interview you. And if you ever get through the phase that leads to a determination that they may want to go forward with you—and the process has changed. When I was vetted and nominated to be the general counsel of the Department of Defense, the President's decision eventually was conveyed by sending a notice over to the Senate. Now they send over a notice of intent to nominate, which is before they send over the nomination. Apparently this serves to sort of—It's the starting gun. "OK, everybody on the Hill now who has anything to say about it can say stuff about it." Well, you go through that process. You spend all your time getting through the process, none of your time talking about what you're going to do when you get there.

Now, I had some back-and-forth with Rudy de Leon in Les Aspin's office. He had some problems. I remember he once commented to me, "Boy, I know exactly what I'm sending you the first day you get here. I've got something on my desk for the Secretary of Defense that we're going to get off and put on the Secretary of the Army's desk." Fine, but no one calls you in and says, "These are the things you do as Secretary of the Army." Presumably, if you're going to do the job, you find that out yourself or you already know it. I mean, I knew what I was going to do. I knew the duties of the Secretary. I'd read every single thing there was about it. That's what lawyers do. I had been the general counsel to DoD. I spent a lot of time telling the Secretaries what they were supposed to do and fighting with their general counsel.

The Secretary of the Navy, I fought with the general counsel of the Navy. Navy general counsels always do that. You notice they were fighting recently between Alberto Mora, the general counsel of the Navy and Bill Haynes, who was nominated for court over the rules governing the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and a whole bunch of other things. So I knew what the duties were. I knew what the responsibilities were and what the authorities were.

As I was going through the process, I tended to think of the Secretary of the Army as like an ambassador. The thing to remember is that even ambassadors have things they have to do over there. But for the service Secretaries, they have extraordinary powers. Now they get a lot of help in how to use it and a lot of advice, and everybody that works in OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] or in the White House thinks they know what to tell the Secretaries they should do. But the only person in Washington in the Department of the Army that has command authority is the Secretary of the Army. Chief of staff has no command authority, nor do any of those generals who work in the Pentagon. They don't have command authority.

The only person in OSD who has command authority is the Secretary of Defense and his deputy. The various Under Secretaries get to boss their own officers around. They can issue memoranda setting out policy, but the command, for example, of our forces in any part of the world runs from the—Well, the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Deputy Secretary of Defense

form something known as the NCA, the National Command Authority. The line of authority, the ability to command troops to move, planes to fly, ships to sail, goes directly from that triangle to the regional commander who controls the forces at issue. It used to be CINCUCOM, the Commander in Chief of UCOM [Unified Command], the commander of U.S. forces in Europe, which is one of the hats of the SACEUR, Supreme Allied Command in Europe. He has two hats: he's the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] guy, but he also plans U.S. forces in Europe. Most of his work is done by his deputy in Stuttgart. That's where the actual—But that's a direct command line.

The only role of the Joint Chiefs is that they are, through the Chairman, advisors, and they're also the mailroom. That is, they actually transmit the order. You know it comes from the Secretary or the President because it is coming from the Chairman, who says, "This is what the Secretary ordered." Well, by the same token, only the Secretary of the Army issues instructions to various forts and the like and divisions who are here. The chief of staff issues them by order of the Secretary. All that is probably more detail than you want. But also in those days there were lots of other hats.

Historically it is the Army that has been the link between the military and the people of the United States. When there is going to be martial law—We don't have it anymore; we never use it; we'll never invoke it; it's still on the books—it is the Secretary of the Army who is the martial law administrator. Now, that can change over time.

Anyway, there are a lot of roles that come from that. That meant that in the emergencies that require FEMA, which always needs military support—principally the big planes to transport stuff, but also we use those big planes to help the fire people dump chemicals on forest fires—we use both planes and Army transport to get stuff like sand and salt to places where there are blizzards in the winter. If it's the Northridge earthquake out in California, James Lee was out there because FEMA comes in. But he gets most of his support from the Department of Defense, so I'm there because I'm the lead person, and I have the authority—the Secretary has the authority—to issue orders, to execute orders, which is the big deal in the department because normally that's only the Secretary can issue, execute orders to any of the services to provide assistance in those circumstances.

Now, there has been a long-running battle over that. Colin Powell really didn't like it, and he got Bill Perry's ear in the six months that—No, Colin was gone, so it was Les—no, Bill was the Deputy Secretary. I'd always get inquiries from Bill Perry saying, "Should we switch this over? Should maybe the Joint Chiefs have more of a role in this?" I had heard that during Rummy's time they've actually moved all that authority up and taken it out of the AOC [Area of Command]. We used to have a Major General, Director of Military Support, called DOMS. It's changed, but then it hadn't.

The Secretary still has a lot of those roles, though. He is the chief domestic-support person for the U.S. military, still, and the Secretary's advisor. All the base closings, all the budget stuff, it's all the Secretary's. The Secretary is the person who forwards promotions to either the Secretary of Defense for the Hill, or on some of those have to go to the White House. So when the question is who is going to be the next four-star commander of an Army operation somewhere, or three-star, then that's more the Secretary's and the chief of staff's call. If it is one of the joint, or

unified, commands where everybody sends up a name, then that's more the SecDef's call. Then all of them have to go to the President for approval before they go over.

So the Secretary plays a big role in those things. The many roles of the Secretary—but the biggest ones are in the tussle within the establishment over things like budget, and that process goes on all the time. In the Pentagon and all the agencies, there are at least three budgets that you're fighting over: the one that is about to end, where you're still trying to squeeze some more out of it or get some additional authorities; there is the one that is about to start, which has already been through the approval process; and the new one that you're ginning up to start the process again.

It's all about what we discussed earlier. It's all about the real question as to where the President's heart ought to be. Is it with *this* way of structuring the Army around *these* kinds—? When you make decisions of the sort they talk about—leaner, meaner, or a different structure—you go from the triad, get rid of divisions, just add brigade task forces and the like, brigade combat teams—you're also making hugely expensive decisions about the hardware that goes with it. So that's all civilian decision making, heavily influenced—maybe even overwhelmingly influenced—by the experience of the generals you've got to work with.

And while you're doing that, you're balancing that kind of stuff against the fact that all the services are made up of people; that people have to have somewhere to live; they have to have bases; they have to have fair pay; there's retirement; there's health care for them. And those are all at war in the same budgets. So you also are tugging at the President's heart over, "OK, are we going to take care of our people? Is it so important for us to have *this* force be able to do *this* thing because of what we're seeing over here?" Then, when you're deployed—And we've always been deployed in the last several decades. We're more than deployed now: we're fighting a war. When you're fighting a war, that's just doubly difficult, because the war tends to drain everything. There's always a draining from accounts that were originally funded in the budget to do one thing, in order to take care of the exigencies where the theater is. All of that is the service Secretary.

Whenever the showdown occurs, whenever the slinging of the guns at the OK Corral occurs, it is the Secretary who's got to march up and sit down in front of the Secretary of Defense and fight it out. By the persistence, by the polite—courteous, admittedly, but nonetheless strong—sometimes maybe vociferous presentation by the Secretary and chief of staff, those two, the Secretary of Defense either gets a sense that this is important to the service or it's not; it's more important than this or that.

When John Deutch was the Deputy Secretary, and then he went from there to head of the CIA, we had huge internal fights over, you guessed it, intelligence assets. It's a big deal; it continues to be a big deal. For the guys on the ground over there in Iraq or Afghanistan, they want to look over the next mountain. They want the intelligence to do that for them, combat intelligence. But they also want some more strategic intelligence. For the CIA and the President and all those guys, they want to know, "What are they doing in North Korea?" So they want the assets in different kinds of stuff: satellites. And they want the satellites to do certain things and be in control of certain things. Those are big fights.

HUMINT, Human Intelligence, used to be totally controlled by the services. Then they finally started getting the defense intelligence agency into it, not NSA [National Security Agency], DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency]. DIA used to just control attaches. Then, well, now we have the national—all of those are things. So the service Secretaries, though you will hear people say from time to time, "Well, do they really have a function? What about all the—?" They'll never go away.

The Secretary of Defense needs them. No matter what he says, he needs them. This Secretary has often tried to act as if he doesn't. The President needs them because often—Bill Clinton didn't have to worry because Bill Perry was very loyal, very straight-up guy. So is Bill Cohen, the Republican. Bill Cohen, of course, was someone who had served on the Senate Armed Services Committee with Al Gore, so they knew each other well. Not Bill Clinton's guy, but Clinton felt he could rely on him. They also thought a lot alike. Two tall guys who thought about governing a lot but also other things. They liked to read. Cohen's an author, a poet, played basketball in high school, scored 40 points one night—more than just his Senatorial persona. So those are good guys.

But still, the service Secretaries are the President's guys. That's always the case. They are the President's guys. So they'll never go away. There's too much for them to do. The U.S. military is just too huge and complicated to function well without them. The senior Army leaders, the senior military leadership, need them. They provide them cover and they provide them support in a series of fora for the Secretary of Defense, for the White House, over on the Hill where they otherwise don't have coverage, because the Secretary of Defense is too busy covering something else.

So you got me answering a question you didn't ask.

Chidester: It's useful; it's good background.

Martin: Can we hit some of those early social issues we talked about and then maybe take a break after that and come back to get into the actual operational, not problems, but Iraq, Bosnia, those types of issues?

West: Sure.

Martin: I counted three that you had to deal with right off the bat, or at least had to deal with remnants of, and that was gays in the military, women in the military, and then you dealt with rooting out hate groups.

West: Gays in the military, of course, was already an issue and already headed down the path toward what was touted eventually as the temporary Clinton compromise and ended up being virtually a permanent policy, which I don't think they've yet really thrown off.

Martin: Were you in a position where you could weigh in on that?

West: Oh, sure. Not only that but it was a big deal for me when I got there still. It was still going on. It hadn't been finally nailed down. Jamie Gorelick, the DoD general counsel, had seized control of it before she went over to be Deputy Attorney General. I had known Jamie a long

time. She had been a very valuable consultant. She was a young associate at Covington when I was the Special Assistant to the Secretary and then the general counsel at DoD. So Jamie knew some stuff about DoD. I wrestled with it along with my Assistant Secretary, Sara Lister, Assistant Secretary for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. If I had brought anyone to this meeting, it would have been Sara, but she's down in Key West. But that's the office that every one of those things you mentioned, I would have had any oversight of it.

An interesting thing about Sara is that—Remember, I told you this before: we get to know people—Sara had been my deputy general counsel of the Navy, and we dealt with how the military will deal with gays back in the period between 1977, '78, '79. In that context, I took her with me to be my deputy—Special Assistant Secretary and Deputy Secretary—and when I became DoD general counsel, she became—Cliff Alexander, then Secretary of the Army—his general counsel of the Army.

So we had seen all these issues and worked on them in collaboration before. Our view as lawyers, the policy we got written in at the Navy, subsequently changed, was that you treat issues involving gays in the military as follows: They're there. Forget all the rules about whether they should be there or not. They're there. They've been there forever. They're part of who we are in the military. For all the efforts to screen them out, weed them out, they're there. Second, they should be treated on the same basis as all others. That is, if we have concerns about the relationships, the rules—What we dealt with in the Navy was the practice of, as soon as you found someone whom you would say was homosexual—They used this phrase of "demonstrating homosexual tendencies"—they would remove them from service with either a dishonorable discharge or a general discharge under less-than-honorable conditions, either of which would stigmatize them forever. Actually, they couldn't do it dishonorable, because that requires a court martial; dishonorable discharge always requires judicial action. So it would be the general discharge under less-than-honorable circumstances.

We took the view in the Navy general counsel's office after we reviewed this for a long time, with Woolsey and Claytor, and we were fortunate to have them—good, fine lawyers themselves. We took the view that you can't penalize somebody—and a general other-than-honorable circumstances, may be administrative, but it was still a penalty—for anything other than actions. That's the first thing. So you get rid of all these homosexual-tendencies issues—not good enough.

Second, the actions have to be the same kind of actions for which you penalize the rest of the population, the so-called "straight" population, heterosexuals. That is, if the activity complained of took place off base in private quarters, it's not the business of the military, just not. Actions judged on the same basis—so, forcible acts, wherever, of course—we can punish that. Actions on post, in full public view, if we would in any way, either administratively or judicially, punish a heterosexual for kissing on post in broad daylight, fine, then we can do it to homosexuals. If we wouldn't, we couldn't. That was our view.

So we didn't come to the debate—Sara arrived when I did, because once I was confirmed I could get her confirmed too. Obviously the "Don't ask, don't tell" was on its way. But one of the things we found was that Deanne [Siemer] had seized it, and I was OK with Deanne—That's the previous general counsel—that's fine. DoD general counsel's office—And Jamie has a nice

political touch. She understood how to do the decision making and policy making. But she relied heavily on the uniformed-military senior lawyers—the JAGs, as it were. The Army JAG, in particular, had a tendency to be more hard-line on some of these issues than others. So we didn't have the chance to bring some factors to bear that we would have liked to, but we were certainly part of the process. We certainly worked through it with them.

As you know, my own view is that it suffered from the high profile it got. You then end up with members of Congress making speeches in all parts of the country—and, of course, on the floor—inflaming, appealing to the worst instincts and the like. So it made it complicated, but under all those circumstances, the policy they emerged with was about as good as they could have hoped. What it did, of course, was to engender a lot of dissatisfaction and concern that, nonetheless, now that we've stirred it all up, the commanders were going out and doing witch hunts and the like. But that's easy enough. That you can track; that you can exert uniform control over. Things that commanders do like that where they initiate a process, you can track that and you can stop that.

I think the process continues. At best it continues to be a compromise. At some point someone is going to have to take the final step and say, "Look, we're just not going to have this be an issue. We're not going to have even the restrictions we now have." I don't agree with Colin, who I've heard say on more than one occasion when he was speaking publicly that there should be real concerns there. I just don't. Even if there are, it's very hard for me to sort out how we, in this nation particularly, can ever deny a citizen the right to participate fully in his or her own self-defense or national defense—and their fellows and families and the like—without good reason. It's just hard for me to see that. So we'll get there.

Martin: You had mentioned Jamie Gorelick as one of the key voices in this policy debate.

West: Yes.

Martin: Who else would have been involved in that kind of a policy decision, or how would that be made?

West: It was basically done by Jamie leading a task force that had really depended, as I said, on the senior military lawyers. They would have worked it. Now, under normal circumstances, you would actually have expected the Under Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Forces, I think is the term, Ed [Edwin] Dorn—who just recently finished up his stint as dean of the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Government at the University of Texas, and he's still on the faculty down there, who held that position the first four years—would have been the person who actually ended up writing the policies, but it's Jamie who led it. But Ed and Jamie and those folks would have worked it.

Martin: Was there opposition in the administration?

West: Within the administration? No. The only people who were really working it—Well, yes, I think that's right. There may have been some folks on the White House staff left over from the campaign who wanted to hold the President to his original pledge. But by then it was pretty clear to everybody that—Remember asking me if he was really paying attention to national security and the military? Sure. It was all inflamed. He was inflamed over this.

Though I could say to you, "It has nothing to do with national security," you could say, "You've got to be kidding. Of course it does. It has to do with the cohesion of our units. It's the very heart of national security." All right, fine. Was I aware of it? No. I wasn't over in the White House listening to it all. That was Jamie's job. I was sitting at the Army sort of periodically calling up Jamie saying, "We're not going to do that; we are going to do this," or the like. Or sending Sara to meetings or having my own JAG, Judge Advocate General of the Army, come up and talk to me or my general counsel, whose dad, interestingly, was a Republican Secretary of Transportation, Bill Coleman. But they would have played in it. But this was done pretty much—in terms of the thinking, the writing, the negotiating—through the legal channels at DoD, in many ways like they hammered out the prisoner policy in this administration.

Martin: You said that this issue had highjacked media coverage of military policy for a lot of the first year. What was the effect of Clinton's ability to challenge the military for the rest of his administration? Did this specific issue have a lasting effect, speaking of issues like potential downsizing or the Commission on Roles and Missions? Did he get hesitant after this?

West: It's very interesting. You don't really, as President, have to confront or challenge the military establishment. You can put the pressure on your Secretary of Defense to do that. It's one of the easiest things in the world to do. You've got a National Security Advisor who is watching how all this integrates in national security policy, who is trying to integrate the diplomatic concerns and the military concerns. And he had two very good National Security Advisors doing that.

He had a Vice President who had extensive military experience and DoD experience, because Al Gore had been one of the senior Democrats on the Senate Armed Services Committee, so he knew that whole environment inside and out, and he had no fear and was able to provide good support. Remember, Clinton and Gore were, in some ways, during much of the administration, the poster boys of what a President and Vice President team is supposed to be. I still remember, before the administration started, when they flew in at the end of the campaign, they flew in to where? Someplace in Virginia. I forget. Anyway, they flew in, the four of them, Bill and Hillary and Al and Tipper [Gore]. They got on the bus and took the bus in. It was a great moment.

Steiner: They did go to the University of Virginia.

West: They came to Charlottesville?

Steiner: Yes.

West: It was a great moment in campaign lore. The four of them were just—It really put the finishing touches on any possibility that George Herbert Walker Bush was going to get reelected. But he and Gore were quite close, and Gore was his military expert. Gore was not at all hesitant about dealing with the military. As far as he was concerned, he saw generals and admirals all the time. They came up before the committee and testified in front of him, and he asked them searching questions in those days. So it wasn't that so much. It just wasn't Clinton's preoccupation in that first year. And the issue that kept cropping up to get his attention was this gays-in-the-military thing. And of course he had Aspin that whole first year.

Les, who as you can tell, was then and was before, remains a favorite of mine. The criticism of him probably is accurate, that though he had chaired the House Armed Services Committee, and you'd think he too had no fear, he hadn't really wrapped his hands around operating in the Pentagon and directing it, which is quite different from sitting on the Hill and reviewing it. So he wasn't as much the strong reed that the President needed there as he could have been.

Bill Perry emerged as a very strong leader indeed and could have been very helpful, except that as a deputy, he was never one to try to overshadow his boss. So it was that combination of things. Clinton had no reason to confront him just yet, although, you know, he confronted him in the ways that mattered to them. He continued the base-closure process that had been begun under George Herbert Walker Bush, and he continued the budget squeeze. I mean, he squeezed us down from—Well, by the time I left, we were at 10 divisions heading to nine. We never got to nine. I'm trying to remember where we were when I arrived. But I can remember the time we had a 20-division Army. We really wrestled with that. The Air Force wrestled with the push on wings, on reducing its wings. The Navy got down to its—So the record is that the Clinton administration did confront them in the way that mattered most to them. But no, he didn't go out of his way to pick fights. He just made the decisions he had to make.

Martin: Let me just start with going back to some of the social issues.

West: I think of three of them: gays, women—Actually, skinheads came next. So skinheads and the racial stuff, and then women was the last one, in terms of the order in which they erupted.

Martin: Let's go ahead and deal with the skinheads.

West: I'm trying to remember whether I was on a plane. I had another very traumatic thing that happened. It wasn't a crisis in terms of running the Army, but it was huge. I remember I arrived right after Mogadishu. So the Army is reeling a bit from that—Black Hawk Down, all that stuff. The chief of staff talked to me about that every day. That was a big hit internally to the Army because it went to the heart of the things that men and women who go into battle think about: leaving comrades behind; what you do when they're in trouble; whether you supported them enough; whether you sent them into something they should have been in. Remember, the issue wasn't just whether Les Aspin had agreed to send over more helicopters. Actually it was more tanks, I think, was the issue. There was a very good analytical reason why he didn't, which is, in the little crowded areas of Mogadishu, could they get in and do the things they wanted? That's a different matter. There was that issue raised.

But the big one was, how did we get in the business of chasing after a warlord anyway? We weren't there to engage in battle. We were supposed to be part of UNPROFOR [United Nations Protection Force]. I think I'm not mixing it up with Bosnia. But anyway, we were there as part of the UN [United Nations] mission. We had a U.S. guy who had been made the overlord, and he kept pressing the U.S. military to take on more and more of the action. They finally said, "OK, we've got to hunt down [Mohamed Farah] Aidid." Now, that had not been what we went in for. So there was a lot of that going on too.

How did we make these decisions? In other times we call it "mission creep," to expand the mission way beyond what we had gone in there to do. So there was that discussion. They're

reeling, as I said, from that. Gordon Sullivan, chief of staff, who to this day remains one of my good friends—I still do a lot of things with him; we're on the board of the AUSA, Association of the U.S. Army—very much caught up with that, with the ethos, and with the effect on morale. So you know that's going on.

We learn that there has been a midair collision at Pope Air Force Base. This is since I've become Secretary, but I think before the end of the year, so some time real early. I may be wrong; maybe it's a little later; maybe it's the spring; maybe it's early '94. But I have some reason in my mind, late '93, early '94. If Janice [Joyner] were here, she could tell. There's a midair collision. It results from the fact that a couple of years before the then Air Force chief of staff, who did not last long—I don't remember his name—had decided to take the Air Force from its configuration of wings that were—I call them "transports," the wings in the air transport command or whatever it is, for C-5As and the like, those big guys. Then there would be wings of bombers, strategic and tactical—well, tactical are all those fighters. Then there would be fighter wings, basically with command down at Langley Air Force Base down there, Hampton Roads. Said he wanted to have composite wings, where you have a little of each.

Now, the wing at Pope Air Force Base—Pope Air Force Base is contiguous to Fort Bragg right there in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Its sole purpose for decades had been to transport the 82nd Airborne Division when they went out on one of those early missions as part of the 18th Airborne Corps, also headquartered there. That's all they were supposed to do. So, big, lumbering planes. He puts in this composite wing. So he's got some little snappy trainers flying around too. So one day there's a collision between one of the transports in a landing pattern and one of the little fighter jets.

The transport—I'm trying to remember if it's a C-5, C-130, I forget—is OK. It's able to continue and land. Actually it flies on around, gets out of the air pattern to come back around. The fighter trainer is not so lucky. It loses its control surfaces, so it stays on its glide. It's out of control and as it nears the deck, both the pilot and the copilot bail. I tell the Army, "I'm outraged. How could they do that?" meaning, they leave the plane—Well, why should they stay there and die? They didn't have any choice. But anyway, I'm outraged. They're fortunate that they walked away because they bail out so close to the deck, but they make it. The plane continues, hits the runway, streams down there, turns into a fireball. That's a runway where paratroopers line up every day to get on these planes to go up and do their jumps. That's what the 82nd Airborne does: it goes up and practices jumps.

There were a bunch of them waiting to board at the end on the green ramp. The fireball goes right into them. There's burning; there's crushing; there's everything. So that day and the next, the hospital there at Fort Bragg is full of, essentially, charred young kids. I forget the number of dead, but it was over 100—lots of injuries. Of course I went down the next day. Sheila, Secretary of the Air Force, wanted to make a joint visit. I said, "Tell Sheila—" I didn't talk to her— "I need to make this visit to my people on my own." In retrospect, it would have been better if we had gone down together. She wanted to show her concern. She went down later.

Parents are waiting downstairs for news of their kids, some of whose kids had just died upstairs. You go up. It was the worst thing I'd seen. I used to tell the story of two kids, two young paratroopers, lying in cots next to each other, the heaviest bandages on their hands, both of them.

I said, “What happened here?” “Well, this was a married couple who were trying to put the flames out on each other.” Really hard for the Army, right, after Mogadishu? Things like that that don’t get a lot of attention. For months this went on trying to figure out who is going to go to the burn unit down in San Antonio, the big medical center down there, worrying about what happens to each of these people.

It was very tough on Sullivan, of course, chief of staff, and on all those who live with this. But it was a very difficult time for the Army. I always remember that, when you ask me about challenges there, because there there’s not much you can do. You just try to help pull through. You do difficult stuff. You go see families. You go back to the hospital. I don’t think any of us found hospital visiting easy, but those are particularly difficult because you’re not sure what you’re supposed to say. And you shouldn’t even be thinking about it that way. You only say what you feel like saying. So there was that.

The next item is Fayetteville again. It is in many ways incongruous with the visit where you go and you see everybody pulling together, the whole community worrying about people, to learn that two soldiers go off post on, I guess, a Saturday night, a weekend, and they start shooting at civilians. You have to wonder, what is going on? Are they drinking alcohol? Have they been somewhere in a little caucus with each other drinking and stirring things up: “This is awful; let’s just go out and get some of them—” whatever. It ends up as a black-white thing, a town-fort thing.

I made the decisions in that case because I knew what I didn’t want to see happen and what I did want to see happen. Two things can happen: One is you feel at that point as if you’re part of a community that is under attack. Now, here it’s your guys that went and did the attacking, but you still feel you’re under attack. People say, “I always knew it. The military brings them in and trains them to be killers, so they go out and kill. It’s not surprising that they might forget they’re not supposed to be shooting citizens. They’ve been trained.” Some of that came through.

There’s also the outrage in the city, “What the hell is going on?” But actually, frankly, Fayetteville was OK. They’ve been living side-by-side with Fort Bragg and with Pope Air Force Base for a long time. They’ve seen lots of stuff, hopefully not many of these. But they’re sort of OK. But the national community is sort of, “What’s going on here? What does this all mean?” Of course we’re the Clinton administration. So we’ve got all these military that are expecting us to maybe savage the military a little bit just to make ourselves look good.

There are only a couple of things you can do when something like that happens: One is, you’ve got to get the information out very fast. It’s going to get out anyway, but you need to say what you know about it. But by the same token, you’ve got to be really careful that the information you put out is only what you know, because if there’s stuff you don’t know, you’d better make sure you say, “I don’t know.” You can’t ignore it, but you can truly say, “I don’t know.” That’s the other thing. Once you say, “I don’t know,” and once you say, “Here are the facts,” the question is, “Well, when are you going to know, and what are you going to do about the facts?” All that is something you have to consider the first time as it happens. You can’t say, “We’re going to go change this, change that, change the other,” because you don’t know anything yet. But you can certainly say, “We're going to look.” You’ve got to say how you’re going to look.

So I asked Sara Lister to head up the effort, but I told her what I thought we needed to do: we needed to put together a task force drawn from the Army, and we needed to do it soon, before the Congress or OSD or anybody else could put it together. Why? Not just because we wanted to keep others from interfering in our business, but because it's always the place where it happens that people can get the information the fastest and can figure out what makes sense. It didn't make any sense that this was a manifestation of cells of skinheads looking to do stuff. It would have been a bigger thing if it had been. It would have been more than just two guys going and shooting two citizens. They killed them, so it's not a little thing, but essentially it would have been a lot bigger than that.

So we pretty much thought we knew what we were looking for, but we had to put together an investigation, and you couldn't confine it just to that because you just knew people were going to say, "If it happened at Fort Bragg, how can we be sure it's not going to happen in Fort Benning; or down at Fort Polk, Louisiana, where people shoot people all the time; or at Fort Bliss, where shooting is a statewide pastime?"

The only answer is, as much as you don't want to make it bigger than it is, you have to make it bigger than it is, so we did. I always keep copies of the report somewhere in the office. The thing we did fastest was to collect as much information and put the statement out, put together at least the bones of a task force so we could announce the members right away—maybe not that day but the next day or two. Then if we needed to expand it, we could.

But there are some other things you have to do if you're the Secretary of the Army. You need to keep the tendency within the Army family to control it so much that it really doesn't get the job done. So as much as we all have confidence in the uniform military, you had to keep it as part of an effort directed by the Secretary of the Army. That's very difficult in the military service because that's not the way it's set up to work. The civilians give the policy and the direction, but the execution is always in the military because that's where the numbers are; that's where the expertise is; that's where the challenge of communication—Well, we couldn't do it that way.

As it was, it's tough to get credibility for a review that is conducted by the highest level within the department. Everybody wants it to be some OSD, maybe Congressional, some outsiders. But it certainly won't have any credibility if it is not at least controlled there, if it goes down there. Frankly I wanted to be able to see what the results were. We followed the same approach with respect to sexual harassment, which as shocking as killing two citizens in their own home town by two soldiers—As shocking as that is, the sexual harassment stuff was more shocking.

See, there was never much doubt, and yet be careful, because if you start with a predisposition, then you end up—But there was never much doubt that we'd probably find out that these guys who went off and did this didn't represent a large segment of the Army. So we say, "Fine, we'll look everywhere. We're not afraid of what we'll find." So there wasn't much doubt that this was an aberration. But the sexual harassment thing, it came out at Aberdeen Proving Ground where we had a training—It's usually called "advanced individual training." It's the training after basic training. It's when you get your specialty. And MOSs, military occupational specialties, are trained out there. And the harassers were the trainers, drill sergeants, and NCOs responsible for training these people, the very people they're supposed to protect.

Let me tell you, as much as we said that we were pretty sure there was nothing systemic involved with respect to the skinheads and the like, drill sergeants are systemic. They're the system; they're our training system. We train people with drill sergeants and training NCOs, so there's no chance it's not systemic and the question is very straightforward: How far does it extend? Is this isolated? You don't even have to envision conspiracies in which the cell here of drill sergeants is connected with a cell over there and they send pictures back and forth. It doesn't have to be that bad. It's just, if it can develop here, did it develop because of the absolute power we give them? It develops because of a lack of any supervision by the officers over that post, and it also develops because there's no place for them to go with their complaints.

Incidentally Denny Reimer was chief of staff by then. Gordon Sullivan had retired. Denny came to me and said, "You know, I'm getting a feeling here that we made a mistake some years ago when we were downsizing the Army." I remember thinking, Oh, please don't tell me that because we made the Army smaller, women are getting assaulted. You're going to tie everything to the lack of funds? But that wasn't what he said. He said, "Where do you take out personnel? You don't take them from combat. You go find the little things around the fringes that you do. So we reduced the chaplains' force."

Now, he was not suggesting the chaplains would somehow have intervened and stopped these guys or gone to the sergeants and said, "Gentlemen, drop to your knees and pray." No. It's that it is a means of communication outside all the lines of command that cuts across, that had been available historically to people who don't have to explain to their bosses, their commanders, to their NCOs, where they're going. So that was always a means. Even respecting the confidentiality, it was always a means that if there was something going on, the chaplain could make the chain of command aware. But no chaplains there—took them out. Maybe there was one for the whole post.

One of the little things that the Army did, and it's mentioned in the report, but it's not something that I got up there at the various press conferences and said, "We're going to fix this." But one of the things we did that I've always thought was far reaching in its ability to make sure these things are detected again—That's detection as opposed to prevention; prevention is obviously the first thing—was to restore the size of the Chaplain Corps. I'd be very interested whether, with the emergencies past once again, their numbers have dwindled. But that was one thing.

With respect to the actual occurrence, it's hard to draw any messages other than—I don't know, "bad apple" is just not enough. A system that had not yet accepted that the place of women there in that force being trained was to be trained as professionals and over whom they had a responsibility, as opposed to being sort of a group of sheep available to be preyed upon.

So we had to take criminal action against all those NCOs, obviously. We had to take criminal action against the officers who were supposed to be overseeing it. A real serious question we had was, Since that's part of a command called the Army Training and Doctrine Command, with a four-star general and a headquarters down at Hampton Roads, down at Fort Monroe, just how far did the negligent oversight extend? Now, we didn't take the four-star commanding general down, but we did discipline and end the careers of officers above colonel—that is, of a general or two—as I recall.

We put in a hotline that we hadn't had before, worldwide, for complaints of sexual harassment—not just the specific thing, but any complaint. We kept a running tally. It was in the press. Press was always inquiring. Big numbers at first. We ran several different things, not just the task force that we did. We had a big task force again, but the Inspector General ran the hotline. We had criminal investigation going on with the Army criminal—We had to do that.

But the key, again, was find out as much as you can as fast as you can; tell it; make sure you tell what you don't know that you're looking at and tell the initial stages of what you're going to do; and then follow up with what you do. I spent a lot of time on the Hill with the women's caucus there that wanted to hear every word I had to say. When I testified before the Armed Services Committee, I got some interesting reactions from the House Armed Services side. A couple of members came out and said, "Well, doesn't this mean—?" You see, the reactions always run in two directions. Yes, you're right. Sure, there will be the reaction of outrage, but there's also the reaction that says, "Doesn't this make our point? If you didn't have women in there, you wouldn't have the problem." It gets said every time.

I might as well use the opportunity to answer one of your other questions. Yes, Sara Lister and I did, and Bill Perry—Bill Perry was still the Secretary—send a proposal up to Bill Perry. It was in response to a tasking down on utilization of women in the military, on expansion of their opportunities to serve. The other two services had gone a long way, but the Army, because it's in ground combat and flying under cover, the Army was flying cover for the Marines too. The Marines just don't do it. But it's the Army that sets the ground policy.

The big fight was over a handful of assignments. There was lots of other stuff. There was a handful of slots. I'm thinking, was it related to the multiple rocket launchers? I'm trying to remember. Well, you've got it in your research there. When you look back, if you go look at it, it's a handful of slots that a number of women within the military were pointing out could be open, and some on the outside too. Sara Lister, my Assistant Secretary, was pointing out—You guys should talk to her sometime; she's very good—was pointing out they should be open. Now we're back to Gordon. Gordon was saying—because Gordon was the chief—"I can't get this to work with my people," because big chief of staff, you do a lot of talking to your senior military, your other four-stars. You get a sense of what will work and what they think is going to cause them all these problems.

You do take on these jobs with the notion that you will give your superiors your best advice, and I believe the best advice then would have been, and the best advice today would have been, to open those spaces up without regard to sex. Remember, I told you that most of these problems have easy solutions, or at least very clear solutions. The difficulty is not in envisioning the solutions; it is getting past the psychological and emotional burdens and hurdles that attach themselves. The solution is straightforward: Everybody is entitled to participate in the defense of the United States. Everybody who wants to make it a career is entitled to take a shot at advancing up the career ladder. That means in serving in those capacities where they can get the promotions and get the training. That means that all slots should be open to everybody, regardless of gender—and, incidentally, if I need to throw it in, regardless of sexual orientation; but that's not an issue here. But what is the constraint? The inability to do the specific job in a specific slot.

If there is a true strength requirement, the Army knows, the military knows, how to quantify that. We've been doing it—I was about to say "centuries"—probably centuries, two and a quarter. We know how to do that; we are good at this stuff. That's what I'd say, "You've got to be able to bench press this much or lift this much" or whatever. "You've got to have this kind of visual acuity. You've got to have this kind of tactical ability." We can test for it; we're the best testers in the world. We are. So it's easy to say. Everybody has a chance to be in that MOS, to have that assignment. If there's a requirement for it to be filled, they get a chance to compete. They just have to be able to meet the requirements.

Sure, you can say, "Women are weaker than men, and they can't do the heavy lifting," but if that's true, then they won't meet the strength requirements. It's just that easy. But if one does, you have to deal with it. And let's face it, a lot of men don't meet them. Most men don't meet them in some cases. In terms of the acuity and the ability to operate helicopters and fly them, you better be really careful there. Women helicopter pilots may be even better than our men. They just have got some dexterity there. So the Navy found the same thing and the Air Force with their fliers, the pilots. Although you get the crackups; you get things that go wrong and it goes down, and they say, "Hey, we should not have had a woman flying that plane trying to land on that carrier," or what have you. But in the long run, the right way to run that is the way you run any operation: Set out your requirements; set them out *objectively*. Take the subjective stuff out, to the extent you can, and let them measure up against individual things. We'll do that eventually; we'll get there; it goes in stages, but we get closer and closer. I always thought it was a good effort to advance the ball.

Now, I won't answer any questions about did you actually send it, and did they make you take it back, or how did that all work? Eh! Not worth talking about. That's just the way things—You have to work things out.

Steiner: In terms of the actual outcome of the policy, what pressure did you receive from the administration?

West: I didn't get any pressure from the White House, the President. I got no pressure from anybody who works for the President. This was all a matter that we resolved internally within the Department of Defense. Now, the exact play between the Secretary of Defense and me or Gordon and me, I'll say only this: I have never worked with two better partners than Bill Perry and Gordon Sullivan. If you look at Gordon's record, he actually should get credit for a lot of advances that others got.

You read Claudia Kennedy's book. Do you know Claudia Kennedy? She's the woman three-star, the first one, probably the only one, but certainly the first one the Army ever had who was general officer, who was not either a nurse or some kind of personnel specialist. She was an intelligence specialist. And Claudia Kennedy was the three-star DCSINT—that means Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence. She was the Army's chief spy master. I will not say "spy mistress." That was, in my view, one of the hugest things in the history of the United States military. It got a certain amount of attention because she was the Army's first female three-star. She's not the first military three-star. The Marines had done it with a personnel specialist, and bless her soul, I think she's good and deserving and I'm glad to see it. But I thought Claudia

Kennedy was a much better indication of the ability of the Army actually to find, to spot, talent and reward it.

But she gives credit in her book to the chief of staff at the time she became the DCSINT, General Denny Reimer, who I mentioned was the second of the two Chiefs of Staff I had report to me. That's fine; that's appropriate in the tradition, although remember it is the Secretary who picks the name that will go forward, not the chief of staff, although the Secretary always relies heavily on the chief of staff. And generally when it goes forward, they both are in agreement. But that's not the point. The point is that it would have been a disgrace if Claudia had not been the nominee because the time she was nominated, she was the DCSINT; she was the number two. You don't fail to move the number two up under those circumstances, although it could have been done. There was the head of the intelligence activity at Fort Wachuka, big job; it's a command; it's two-stars. And indeed, at one point, that was considered a real contender for this job, as the competition. But it would have been a most unfortunate circumstance if she had not gotten it.

Now, how did she come to be the two-star? Because that was not necessarily something; somebody else could have been appointed the deputy at the time she was two years before. Gordon Sullivan was the chief of staff. He was the one who moved her into that spot—that is, who recommended her to my predecessor to be—and so I always thought he should have been given the credit for putting her in that spot, because he also did that with a black officer who eventually became one of the handful of black Army generals who made it to four-star.

Joyner: Johnnie Wilson.

West: Johnnie Wilson, who was a logistics officer. Once again, it was Gordon Sullivan who recommended to my predecessor that he make him, first, the deputy chief of staff of logistics on the Army staff, three-star post. But that immediately puts him in contention to be the four-star commander of the AMC, Army Materiel Command, which was located somewhere. It's now down with the engineers.

So Gordon Sullivan had the foresight to realize that the way you put people in position to compete for the highest spots, the spots where the biggest stars are, to move them through the positions where they get a chance to get both the experience and the credibility, and he did it in several instances. Another one was a guy who eventually ended up being my Inspector General, another three-star spot, African American officer, Larry Jordan. And it was Gordon who had put him in as command of the armored center as a two-star.

Martin: You said you don't really want to talk too much about that interaction, who set up the list—

West: I set it up; I did. This was a long-term project that all the services were supposed to do. So I'd been working it with the chief of staff and all. But it was my piece. I thought it was a good idea. I thought that we came out of it all right. I saw that piece, and I remember that piece, from the press in which Eric Schmitt, who is always writing about the Army and doesn't always have his facts right, wrote that people were outraged and—Let me just say this: For that system over there to work, there has to be room for back-and-forth. There has to be room for Gordon to have input, but also for some of Gordon's other senior advisors, from my people, from the SecDef.

You saw no reference in that article, I noticed, to a person you would have thought would have been discussed if you were going to write an article, and that would have been the Under Secretary for Manpower and Forces. This is his area. So lots of people had a role in that. This was the key remaining issue; it still is. I think everybody has to take a whack at that.

You should also think about this: nothing happens in the Pentagon without—and this was also true at VA [Veterans Affairs]—without much back-and-forth to the members and staffs of the House and Senate. So there's a great deal of Senate and House interest in this little project too. All had their influence.

Martin: Thinking about people who maybe study civilian-military interaction, especially control of the Pentagon or control of the military decision making, I'm wondering what these three instances of gays in the military, sexual harassment, and then also opening slots for women in combat positions, do they provide unique lessons for those folks who study civilian control of the military, or what would people take from those instances?

West: I guess what they would take is that even in this day when so many roles in government seem to be pretty much laid out, and the process is pretty much laid out, and the way that you get from point A to point B to point C is pretty laid out, there is still room for innovation. And that's all I'm going to say about that.

Martin: Why don't we take a break?

[BREAK]

West: First of all, I didn't want to go. Historically the Army has owned the Panama Canal for the U.S. There's two different concepts: One is owning the operations of the Canal and the place where the Canal employees live and where the business is, on one hand. And the other, of course, is that we had several military installations. There was an Air Force base at one end and an Army installation where the four-star commander of what was then SOUTHCOM [Southern Command] had his quarters and everything.

The way the Army owned it was after we had the Corps of Engineers put it in, the Panama Canal Company was established with only one shareholder, the Secretary of the Army. So, literally, the Army owned the Panama Canal. When Jimmy Carter was President, and while I was general counsel of DoD, he, of course, negotiated this agreement with [Omar] Torrijos, and that reminds me, you should get me to tell you the story of the Shah of Iran and my lowly Special Assistant to the Secretary. We'll come back to that.

But anyway, the treaty that he negotiated and that we signed, partially in gratitude for his assistance with the Shah of Iran, was one that had a staged turnover of the command, a staged pullout of U.S. forces from there, leaving only a security responsibility, and the establishment of a new governing entity then, and then to work through a transition. A Panama Canal Commission was established with a board appointed by the President, majority of whom were

U.S. But a minority, one short of equal, were Panamanians nominated by the Panama President for him to then nominate to the Senate for confirmation.

The structure was that there was one member of the commission who was permanent, who was a member by virtue of his office, and that was the Secretary of the Army. Moreover, the Secretary of the Army had the authority to declare any matter being considered by the commission to be of importance to the security of the United States, of importance to the United States. I think I've got that term. If he did, all the U.S. members had to vote the way the Secretary voted. Otherwise they were free to vote. So it meant that the Secretary always got to name the chairman of the commission.

Now, it worked in lots of different ways. If you wanted to keep everybody happy, then you sort of go talk to the United States and say, "This is what I'm thinking of doing." Most of the time they would assume the Secretary would be chairman, but the Secretary was almost always too busy and would name one of the Assistant Secretaries or the Under Secretary and often it was the Under Secretary, so much so that the Under Secretary became accepted. Sure enough, one of the first things I did when I came was to—Well, we had a holdover who didn't want to leave office, and he kept trying to get agreement that he could continue to represent the U.S. But because we had had a vacancy in the Secretary's office for so long, that didn't fly.

Eventually I named the Under Secretary the Chairman of the Panama Canal Commission. When Bill Cohen became Secretary of Defense, one of the things that happened was that that Under Secretary was told, "OK, you've done your time." So it was necessary to name a new chairman. The Secretary of Defense gave me to understand that he would prefer that I retain the chairmanship myself, which I did.

I was in New York at a meeting of the Panama Canal Commission when my public affairs officer came in and said, "Mr. Secretary, there are reports in the press in Philadelphia that you're going to be the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. We've got to tell the PA [public affairs] people back in Army what to say." I said, "Say the obvious: I don't know anything about it. To our knowledge it's not true." The Secretary is the Secretary. Then I also told the members of the commission who were there, in case they cared, "To my knowledge there's nothing to that. No one has discussed it with me. It would be most unusual if something were going on I didn't know about." Why would I say something like that? It would be most unusual if there were *not* something going on I didn't know about.

Eventually, either before or after that, I forget, I had a call at home from Bob Tyrer, Bill Cohen's chief of staff, who still functions as his chief of staff—He's President of the Cohen Group now—who said, "The Secretary wants you know there's some talk going on in the West Wing of the White House. We had nothing to do with it. The Secretary's preference, if you wish, is that you would stay as Secretary of the Army until this administration is done—" which is not quite what I wanted to do. I wanted to serve for a few more months, maybe end of the year, into the next year or something. I didn't want to stay the whole time. I didn't want to be closed and turning off the lights at the end of the administration. I had done that with Carter and didn't like it at all.

So when I got back to Washington I called up Bob Nash, who was head of the Presidential Personnel office, and said, "Bob, I've been hearing this. I know it's not true because I would

have heard something by now. But you need to know, and I would appreciate it if you pass it along to Erskine [Bowles] and the President, I'm not so presumptuous to assume that I'm being considered, and I'm not disappointed. Or, to put it more specifically, I really am not interested." Now why would that be?

Well, the Secretary of a military service is an all-encompassing job. You're part of a huge family—The Army is the largest of the families, but I think it is true of the Navy and the Air Force too—a huge family in which everyone who wears that uniform, and every civilian who works with them, and every family member, consider you part of their family. I don't just mean their big family, their little-bitty family. You feel a sense that that's a better job to do than any other government job. I will tell you to this day that I still think, even with the changes that go on and the back-and-forth, that the service Secretaries have the most rewarding jobs in government, short of the President, who takes a whole lot more grief than they do, and has, of course, a whole lot more responsibility. There are some other things: because of the demands of national security, the service Secretaries, unlike ordinary Cabinet officers, have U.S. government planes dedicated to their support and their travel. They can go anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

I would say that one of the ways I got to be good friends with Madeleine Albright was that we were great Cabinet colleagues. Wrong. When she was Ambassador to the UN in the first Clinton administration, she used to grab rides with me on my plane if we'd be going to similar parts of the world, and sometimes even if we wouldn't. But I could get her transportation when the Air Force just didn't have a plane to put her on, and they rarely did have a plane to put her on.

That is a big difference in terms of being able to make a commitment that says, "Yes, I'll be in such-and-such a place at such-and-such a time. Even though it's inconvenient as hell and we've got things arranged one way, I'll do it." In fact, when I first arrived, I could walk right out and get on the helipad and go to Andrews and be gone. I lost the ability to do that because there came a time when I signed an order—because that was one of the duties of the Secretary—that said no one will fly in helicopters from the Pentagon helipad to Andrews except the Secretary of Defense. That meant I couldn't do it either. That's because it had been for a long time such a spectacle. Helicopters were taking off, all these fat generals and Secretaries and assistant this and deputy that. It wasn't a good thing. You could get in a car and be there in half an hour anyway if you don't mind going out that GW Parkway, and even if you do mind.

And then the Army and the Department of Defense was something I knew. Let's remember, when I arrived there in November of '93 to be Secretary of the Army, I was coming back to a place that I had known for eight years before and over a longer period of time. There were still people on active duty who knew me from other times. There were people over in the Navy who came to see me and said—In fact a CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] came and said, "I hoped you were going to be over with us." There were folks in the Air Force—I mean, this was as close to a kind of a home. Let's think, I had summer associateship; I clerked for Judge Tyler; Pentagon was the first job I ever had after that. So for me, I'm trading one thing for an environment I had no knowledge of, VA, the Department of Veterans Affairs. Running hospitals was not new to me, because we had huge medical establishment in the military, the Surgeon General and everything, so I knew all those issues.

The claims process, cemetery, but most of all, that most "peculiar"—and I use it in the way it used to be used, as a virtual synonym for "unique"—relationship between veterans today and the veterans' organizations and their department—very different from any relationships—And the veterans' organizations themselves had said—They sent a letter to the President saying, "Fill the job quickly—" because it had been vacant a while— "but whatever you do, fill it with someone who has been in the business of advocating for veterans." I never had. I was a veteran, like the vast majority of veterans in the United States, never took advantage of the status of veterans except for one thing: we all used the GI Bill for our initial loans on our homes. Other than that, I'd never gone to ask for anything. Never been a member of any veterans' organization. So it seemed to me I was the least likely person to be chosen to do that, so I didn't want to go.

Martin: Did they tell you why they chose you?

West: It was pretty obvious. The President had lost his Secretary. Jesse Brown had been Secretary for four years, and after doing four years he did like Bill Perry: he said, "OK, I've had my four years. I'm going to go." That's a good time to go, especially after an administration gets reelected. You've got four years of people you know in the administration, and so you're in some ways still a part of it, but you're out and you're having your life before you're at a point where everybody is out of office. It's just a good time. I had only planned to do one more year because I'd been so late going in. I thought I'd go in, maybe, November.

He then nominated the Deputy Secretary at VA, a guy by the name of Herschel Goldberg. Well, Goldberg had, in the early transition when Clinton first came in, probably anticipation of being the Secretary. Remember, in those days we're in transition; deputies and Secretaries sometimes changed. He had been Clinton's veterans' guy in Arkansas. He had been the Director of Veterans Affairs or whatever it is in Arkansas. He had been the coordinator of veteran support for the Clinton campaign, and that had been vital in that come-from-behind—What did he call himself, "The Comeback Kid"?—second-place finish in New Hampshire. Veterans' votes in New Hampshire had been vital. So this was Goldberg's chance. He was Clinton's nominee to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs in the second administration. Then he ran into trouble on the Hill and withdrew his nomination, withdrew his name, with the President's assurance that he would remain as deputy. Never a good thing for the incoming boss, somebody else picked your deputy in before you have a say in it.

When I told Bob Nash to pass that message, he called me back and said, "You'd better come see your pal from your home state, Erskine Bowles," who was then the Chief of Staff.

I said, "Why should I see Erskine Bowles?" He said, "You've got to see Erskine Bowles before you see the President." I thought, *Well, OK*. So I saw Erskine Bowles, who said, "I guess you need to know that you're not on the short list. You're not even on the long list. The President doesn't have a list. You're his only choice," which, in retrospect, is pretty smart. But at the time I thought, *Oh, no. OK, that's it*. So my wife, my chief of staff, both of whom I had promised I was going to say, "Not going to do it," heard me come back and give this explanation.

It boiled down to the fact that, as reported in one of those pieces I saw in there, which is absolutely correct, the President and the Office of Personnel were looking for somebody they thought was likely to be easily confirmable. Remember that the Whitewater stuff was going on,

everything over the election. That's a fair-enough explanation. Oh, and I had a connection: I was a veteran. I had been in the Army. They thought that perhaps I had faced some things that they would be pleased to see dealt with over there too. It turned out that those were not nearly the issues I had to struggle with.

My view then was, *OK, now that he said this to me, I've either got to go or leave, and I think it would be rude to leave, so I'm going to go do it.* I told myself then that I'd only go for a while. By then there were only three years left in the administration; the first year had gone. Looking back on it, that's an interesting, but probably not a well-thought-out, justification to myself. But that was my thought. I'd go for a while. I was still determined not to spend the last year in office, but I almost did. And I went over to do it. It was a very interesting place and quite different from any government agency I'd ever been in. Remember, Defense was not the only place I'd ever been; I'd been at Justice. But it was a completely different environment and a completely different experience.

Martin: One of your biggest jobs would be putting together and defending the budget on Capitol Hill?

West: Oh, yes, it's more than that. Traditionally the VA budget is probably the most suspect of all the budgets in the eyes of the OMB [Office of Management and Budget] regulars, the ones who have been there administration after administration, seen it come and go. In their view, it's probably worse than the Defense budget, which they already regard as a sacred cow, but at least they can see what's happening with it and how the demands change and fluctuate and go here and there. But the demand at VA, in their view, is probably just more money to do the same three things: health care, claims, build cemeteries. In their view, probably any one of those can be sharply reduced, if not dispensed with. Why? Because no other country in the world does for their veterans what we do, or does it for such a small segment of our veterans' community.

Now, you have to say, no other country in the world demands of its veterans what we do. Our people are deployed all the time. And what with advances in medical care and advances in the ability to do triage and to move wounded, it means that we're getting veterans back who actually need more than they used to need. I mean, you either died or came back with some disability. Now you come back with lots of nasty things having happened, but medically we've been able to intervene and keep you going. Now it's time for you to have the best quality of life your nation can give you. The military doesn't do that. They give you a disability discharge; you're out. The military doesn't have you anymore; the VA does.

Martin: So you've got some suspicion from OMB. You have pressure from a Republican Congress, and you have outside groups: VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], American Legion, and so forth. Now that the VA is a Cabinet-level agency, they have certain desires too. Can you flesh out the whole budget process a little bit more?

West: They had those desires even before it was a Cabinet agency, because even as an independent agency, as an administration, the VA still reported in to the President. So making it a Cabinet agency did not change the chain of authority or even the process that much. It just, at least theoretically, put the head of the agency in the Cabinet room. Some things happen in the

Cabinet room. Even if people decry the demise of Cabinet government, it's not gone. There are some things that happen in the Cabinet room that it is useful to have your person in there for.

Again, the budget process is the same. There's always a budget process. There is never a moment when you're not in the middle of some budget process. You start roughly with the end of the fiscal year and you're working up—What's that, the end of September?—you're working up the new budget. You've got to get it to OMB by the deadline. So you've got to work your process internally.

Remember, that is not that you have outside groups. The five, maybe now six, VSOs as they're called, the Veterans Service Organizations, are very much a part of the inner family, not the outside—American Legion, VFW, the two disabled: the DVA, Disabled Veterans of America and the PVA, Paralyzed Veterans of America. DVA is much larger; PVA is the richest of all the organizations. Of course the American Legion is the biggest because it has fewer requirements for membership; any veteran can join. There is, in addition, the Vietnam Veterans. There are some others. They're not necessarily part of the—But there are lots of other organizations. There are Gold Star Wives, Gold Star Mothers, the Military Order of the Purple Heart; there are the ex-POWs [prisoners of war]—That's what they call themselves, not former POWs, but ex-POWs. And they all have an interest.

A well-advised Secretary of Veterans Affairs will meet regularly—that is to say, on a regularly scheduled basis: once a month, certainly not less than once every two months—with the Washington-office heads of the big five, because they can't bring in everybody. You will talk about everything that is an issue because they can be very helpful to you on the Hill. They have major clout with the two veterans'—well, the four committees: the two authorizing and the two appropriation committees. They have major connections with the staff, and they have experts on their staff who can be useful to you at times.

DVA has taken on itself the training for all the people who represent veterans in the claims process if they don't have lawyers, so they have an academy, and they train them and all that. As I said, PVA has a lot of money, so it can deal with Ford or G.M. to provide free vans to the medical centers around the country to transport veterans back and forth. So it's a very close relationship. They don't regard themselves as outside groups, and it's important that the Secretary realize that.

Now, remember, just as I'm saying that Clinton is new to national government and to the military, when he first becomes President, this Secretary of the Army is new to VA and all this stuff that is lore and wisdom to me now is new, and I'm in the process of learning there, because I'm still the Secretary of the Army. I'm filling in. I'm only Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I also have access to military transport. That's why you saw the VA Inspector General get involved in whether I'm supposed to be using it, because in fact, as far as the Department of Defense was concerned, I had call on their planes at any time for any purpose, as long as it was official.

One of the things for which the VA Inspector General wrote his critique involved a trip in which I went to Alaska and then to Wyoming or Montana, wherever it was, where the funeral of the gay guy was. It was possible that I could have gotten there. In fact I was asked to go because the

White House knew that I had a way to get there quickly because I was only asked the day before. But anyway, all those things, in terms of the single most important factor in a VA Secretary's ability to get his or her job done is the relationship between the Secretary and the staff of VA, not with the Hill staff, not in the members of those committees, but the veterans' service organizations and their leadership.

You go to speak to them annually at their meetings—well, twice. They have legislative weekends in town in the spring, late winter. Then they have their big annual meetings every summer in some of the hottest places in America. You go for both of them. Your appearance is *de rigueur*. It is assumed and accepted. I went to speak to them as Secretary of the Army once. And that was a big deal to them. When I went to speak to them as Secretary of Veterans Affairs, it was, "OK, it's that guy. Let's see what he's got to say this time. Son of a gun."

So the process is you put together your budget—

Martin: I think there's an important point that you're bringing up here. You're placing these veterans' service organizations as more important than folks on the Hill, more important than any of these other ones, and I'm hoping that you can tell us a little bit more why those folks are that important. What do they actually do for you? Why not cross them?

West: They're not more important than the Hill. The Hill passes the laws and the budgets. The *relationship* with them can be more important than your relationship with the Hill. The relationship with the Hill is important, but frankly you can have all the great relationships in the world, but if you're crosswise or are not paying attention to the veterans' service organizations—one, because they're so loud.

Jesse Brown became Secretary of Veterans Affairs because he's a very talented guy who served his country well and lost a hand and had serious injuries in Vietnam as a Marine. He was also the head of the Washington office of DAV [Disabled American Veterans] for several decades. He was one of the most strenuous of their advocates. That's the kind of thing they would like to see in the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. They would like to see a willingness to break with the White House when OMB won't recommend the right kind of budget and to be even a little bit open. You can't break with your President, but you can do some things that Cabinet officers are not supposed to do. You can talk about the number that you've sent over to the White House. You're never supposed to do that as a Cabinet officer.

The number you send to the White House is just what you're asking. You've got to protect the President—and thus you end up protecting OMB—by not saying what you sent and whether what you got back is what you asked for. You're not supposed to do that. And yet, they would love to see the Secretary of Veterans Affairs at least leak to them what that number is, because that's your way of saying to the veterans' service organizations, "I'm putting my all in it for our veterans. This is what I asked for." It's an easy thing to do because then you can say, "And those jerks over at OMB cut me back." Shouldn't do that. And it's not that you shouldn't do it just because those are the rules; it's not a fair thing to do. It leads to your inflating your budget to look good even if you know it's not going to work. OMB is bad enough as it is; you don't need to make them look even worse. And you certainly don't want to do it to the President who is most likely to come down somewhere between you and OMB.

Now, Jesse, before me, had some success in getting significant increases in his budget. So it is to be expected that OMB would try to get with the new guy to pull that back. That is, you don't cut the budget; you just don't get as much of an increase because no President ever cuts the VA budget. The fight is over how much of an increase. So the first year, laugh the new Secretary right off the block. "He didn't get much."

Now, there came a time, a year later—Let me give you the process—The process is like you've heard for others: you have a budget; it goes over; OMB gets it. Actually I think we even get some guidance beforehand, or maybe that was only at the DoD, but anyway, it goes over. You lose at a lower level, you gain, then it goes to the next level. Pretty soon your CFO [Chief Financial Officer] goes over and does all this. It goes back and forth, and pretty soon you're at an upper level and you're still not happy. Then you do something with the Director himself. Once the Director decided, appeals to the President.

In his first administration, and the first year or two of his second administration, the President was having hearings himself, because I can remember going over to him when I was Secretary of the Army. One of the little-known facts about the Pentagon is that there is the big Pentagon budget that the SecDef works with OMB or Congress, but the civil-works budget of the Army Corps of Engineers is entirely separate. It's under the control of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Works, who is under the control of the Secretary of the Army, who reports to the SecDef. But the civil-works budget, which is one part of the Corps of Engineers whole budget, goes directly to OMB.

Generally, we would send the Assistant Secretary of Civil Works over for those hearings, but one year it was vacant, so I went over and did it myself, and I had an appeal with the President. So I knew how he did it. By the time I was in the Cabinet, I think maybe he was trying to handle as much as possible by having the Cabinet officer meet with Frank [Franklin] Raines, then the OMB Director and later his deputy who became the Director. If it was particularly contentious, they'd have—Leon Panetta was gone then—John Podesta would sit in. In fact he sat in on a very contentious one that I had, because I brought up some other issues. I was more successful in budget increases in the second and third year but not in the first.

Martin: What were the tensions in that meeting?

West: One person even reported that the President said at one point, "We're not going to do this to Togo again." That is, the first year was so bad and I took so much flak that he told his people, "We're not going to make him do that again." So it was a lot easier the second and third years.

There was the budget, but the budget wasn't so bad. I got a lot more cooperation, as I just told you. But I was trying to get the head of the Veterans Health Administration, which is an Under Secretary—In a statute he's called the "Chief Medical Officer of the VA," but he's also an Under Secretary. And he is appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate but for a four-year period. He can be reappointed without having to go through the whole process. The President just informs the Senate he's doing so. I think that's the way it works, or something like that.

In any event, I needed to get him reappointed. His name was Ken Kizer. He's absolutely brilliant. He's a brilliant doctor, brilliant public health doctor, brilliant public servant, and he had done an incredible job at the VA. In fact, in my view any of the advances that the VA still takes credit for in health care are directly attributable to Ken Kizer's four years, almost five years, as Under Secretary. He's still around town. I think he's involved in a new organization that sets standards for health care or something like that.

I was trying to get him reappointed. Everybody was inclined to do it, but OMB was really annoyed at him because they believed that he had gotten me, against what they thought was clear guidance from them to me—I remember telling them at the meeting, "OMB doesn't give guidance to me on policy matters." But anyway, he had persuaded me to expand the universe of veterans who could receive certain kinds of health care, because there have always been, both by statute but more importantly by rulemaking within VA, limits on who gets to have priority at medical centers. Because even the small percentage of veterans who do take advantage of it still overwhelm the facilities. So I expanded them, which OMB—"Well, that may sound like all you're doing is making policy decisions, Mr. Secretary, but you've just driven up the costs. You'll need more money." So they were very annoyed not at me, but at Ken Kizer, and they were trying to block the President's approval of his reappointment.

I remember saying in that meeting, in the presence of Podesta—It wasn't Frank anymore; it was his successor, Jack Lew, who had been his deputy—I said, "I really want you to stay out of the business of the reappointment of Ken Kizer. He's an officer of the department. That's not my business. That's a different part of the White House, and it's just not appropriate for your involvement." That sounds good. That's probably theoretically correct, but there are a couple of points in his favor: One is, he's a senior advisor to the President; if the President wants to take his advice, then by golly, he can. Two, he had as his deputy director a very talented woman who had just been one of the deputy chiefs of staff. She was a protégée of Jay Rockefeller's.

Joyner: Sylvia Mathews.

West: You do have her name. This is incredible. Very talented, very capable. She really followed the health issues. She was pretty convinced that Ken had done this and what not. She had a line to Jay Rockefeller, the ranking minority on the Veterans' Committee, so she sort of had me locked either way. The fact that she was now Jack's deputy didn't really change the fact of having been—so they had a reason to be in it, but I still wanted to take the opportunity to say it in front of Podesta. John is a very talented guy, but he also knows when to just leave things alone. He never said a word. I remember saying—Some of these meetings need to be confidential; this is not so bad—I remember saying to him at the end, "Are we done here?" He said yes, and then I walked out.

So you can see that no matter what you're discussing about the budget, the budget is not about numbers. It is not about the dollars. It is about administration policy, and it is about priorities. To some extent—You could say it's a more simplistic approach—that's really what the VSOs are complaining about. It's not about the dollars; it's not whether the President will make another commitment to veterans, will show that they're a priority. Even that is simplistic. Because yes, it is about the dollars too. It is about, is there enough over here to pay for this health care? Is there enough in the claims budget?

And the claims budget is less about the money to pay claims, because money to pay claims is handled differently. Once claims are adjudicated, it's got to be paid, and if it has to be appropriated it has to be appropriated. The claims budget is about hiring enough claims examiners to process the cases. The constant cases are never processed fast enough to suit veterans, and frankly they're not processed fast enough to suit anybody connected to veterans, including folks at the VA. It's just a huge, cumbersome process, several levels of appeals, so it's always questions. Increase the claims budget; get more people in there; come up with better and more cost-effective ways of dealing with it. Health affairs got helped by the success in coming up with, essentially, a paperless process. But they're used the technology, so they don't have to lug things around. But there are still some complications.

Martin: Could you talk a little bit about when you have to go up to Capitol Hill and defend that budget? Especially since you had a long history being Secretary of the Army dealing with Congress, dealing with budgets. How did your task change, your relationships change, when you became Secretary of the VA?

West: Very easily. The military communities were always happy to have me come and very supportive. Even if they thought that the President hadn't given quite enough, they were supportive because there was always more in the defense budget than anywhere else. Does that mean there weren't always touchy questions about, "Are you really going to come up here and defend the President's policy of taking two more divisions out? We are undermanned and—" Jack Murtha would say, "I want to talk to you—" so there's no doubt about that.

You go up to either the veterans' committees, the authorizing committees, or the appropriations committees, and the line was pretty much not nearly as receptive because the veterans' service organizations were sitting right there in the room listening to the testimony and expecting somebody to stand up on that committee and say, "Mr. Secretary, this isn't enough. Your coming up here and trying to defend this is the most craven, spineless thing we've ever seen. This is a travesty for service members; this is a travesty for the nation, and I, for one, won't stand for it. You need to consider whether you're doing the best for our veterans and whether you should be staying." That's the difference.

That was par for the course and often was deserved. If there were holes, especially the first year, there wasn't enough being done there. There was cooperation. Some of my strongest supporters, though, were from the Republican side. On the other hand, some of my severest critics were from the Republican side and from Republicans with whom I had worked well in the past. I had had a fairly good relationship with several of them. One who is not even on the committee—I think I need to say this because I think it's fair to say this—I thought the most supportive—no, there were several supportive—I'll just say, one of the most supportive members in the entire Congress was the then Senate majority leader.

Martin: Switch gears for a second. You said earlier that the Cabinet government was not dead. I want to just get your general thoughts on being a member of the Clinton Cabinet.

West: That's sort of like the President saying, "I'm not irrelevant," isn't it? If you raise the issue, then the question is, are you sure? Why are you so defensive?

Martin: Just your thoughts, your perception, at being a member of the Cabinet, Clinton's role in it, his use of it as a policymaking body.

West: Because of my tendency to wander into other things, I don't always answer your questions thoroughly. You asked me about the budget process. One of the most important parts is the first Cabinet meeting of the new year, roughly the middle of January, end of January. It's the Cabinet meeting that always occurs just before—or maybe a meeting or two before—the State of the Union, which is always followed by the delivery of the budget to the Congress. So it's the Cabinet meeting at which elbows are sharpened and people are jostling and pushing to get the President to put something in the State of the Union about their favorite programs.

Why is that important? Well, just a mention sends a signal to OMB, whose Director sits right there in the Cabinet Room. But it also sends a signal to constituencies nationally and around the world about this little piece or that little piece and that piece. The Secretary of State, Defense, they may care about something that they want to communicate abroad. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs wants to communicate something to the veterans of the country, send a little signal to the Congress. The Secretary of Transportation wants to make sure that the President says something about roads; HUD [Housing and Urban Development], cities, whatever it is, they've got something they want mentioned. So it's an interesting meeting in which the President has his Chief of Staff, Podesta or whoever.

So going down the agenda the President addresses this and people report on that. But you're looking for the opportunity, not for when they get to your topic—Right now you don't even have a topic—but for anything the President says or somebody else says, you say, "That reminds me, Mr. President, veterans have not—" dah, dah, and, "You need to be—" Somebody once wrote a little piece in the *Wall Street Journal* about that meeting. There was a quote in there from someone—I forget who it was—who commented that I used that time to get in a little piece for the VA that was as adroit as any they'd ever seen. Well, that's what you have to do.

So the Cabinet meetings are important, depending on the time of the year and what's looming for the President. And he had them; I went to them. I think, even today—and I don't know how this Cabinet operates—they're still useful. They will come and go, and they're important depending on what the nation is facing. They don't at all get in the way, nor are they influenced by other meetings in which the President will meet with certain groups of Cabinet officers.

On health care or federal health-policy issues, which I never thought I was going to become a big player in, the fact is that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is in there as much as the Secretary of HHS, because the biggest health care system in the world is the VA, second only to whatever the old Soviet Union had, maybe still second to that. Because it is the largest in the country, and it's larger than most national health care systems elsewhere. And it is the primary backup to both DoD in times of war and to the public health system in time of public emergency.

So those clusters of meetings occur anyway, and they'll occur with the President. They will occur with other parts of senior White House staff. There are deputies' meetings. National security is not the only place where there are deputies' meetings. They may not be called the same thing, but there are always clusters of deputies and Under Secretaries and Assistant

Secretaries, either in the White House or in one of the agencies, and they come there meeting on things, so there's a lot of that Cabinet interplay.

President Clinton used his Cabinet meetings in the traditional way. He had Cabinet meetings. He would start off with discussion of ongoing initiatives. He might give some direction. He might call on someone to report. We often got a State Department report and a Defense report, just because that's sort of the state of play in the world. And Cabinet officers would bring up their issues. At that point it would be like any other meeting; it's sort of who finds the right moment to make the right statement to either prod the President in a direction on something that the whole Cabinet is interested in or perhaps on a program of interest or importance to them.

Martin: I think we have time for maybe one last question.

West: Oh, if you slide past the five after, ten after, that's OK. What is it?

Martin: One of the key things it seems like you would have had to do policy-wise is define things as being service-connected or not. That seems to be a perennial issue with the VA. I was wondering how some of those decisions were made. Especially there was a significant one on smoking and tobacco-related injuries or illnesses. Then there were a couple of things that also came down the pike while you were Secretary. One of which, Gulf War syndrome, had been increasingly in the press. Also there was a court case, decided against the VA, about Agent Orange. I was wondering how you dealt with that basic problem of trying to figure out something being service-connected or not.

West: The way any other organization does: the VA is a place where there are a number of Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Assistant Secretaries. There are three Under Secretaries, a bunch of Deputy Under Secretaries, and what's called "the VA central office." There will be Assistant Secretaries who will have within their offices either areas of responsibility or expertise that need to be linked, say, with some part of the Office of the Under Secretary for Health Affairs, which is the VA medical system, where they have considerable expertise.

You bring together a task force. You make them talk to each other. You get the service organizations in at some point who have considerable experts. You have a representative or two from there to talk about it. It is amazing that we often don't realize that the executive branch and the legislative branch have never operated as separate branches. They have always had a huge interplay. We talk about how the White House didn't go over and talk to them about this. Someone is always talking about it. So you may have a couple of staffers in from an appropriate part of one of the committees.

Generally both the veterans' committees and the appropriations committees have an informal—They won't all look at the same thing at the same time. They'll let somebody take the lead. And you work through it that way until it's in the position where it can be a recommendation that comes from an Assistant Secretary or an Under Secretary. Then it comes into me in a big paper. We, a lot of times, put it out for comment. The VA is way better—to make things as transparent to the public, let everybody know about it. Let them just jump up and down and scream.

Then there's something called the Omar Bradley Conference Room. It's right there on the 10th floor; it's part of the Secretary's suite; it's a big, huge conference room that is the Secretary's

conference room. You get them all in there around the big table, and you work it back and forth until you think you know where it is. If it is going to have the kind of policy impact you're talking about, they almost always will have also done some meetings over at the White House staff, where there's often considerable expertise in an area. It was very rare, even then, that we would put out at VA a decision that we had not worked through within that kind of a thing. But also with considerable consultation.

We'd get some folks over from HHS if they've been doing anything with this, or sometimes over from DoD. So that's the way we do it. And it's a standard way of doing things, I would think. I take it back. In Army we'd be a lot more insular. We just work the problem within the Army family. Here's our solution. Here you had to cast a wider net. If there was a chance that we were making a decision on something that was going to affect local jurisdictions in some way—county, cities, states—you'd get some of them in, maybe from one of the associations or something. But that's the process you use. You build on the responsibilities within the structure. But you try to do as much as possible with task forces that cut across lines. Then yes, the Secretary has to decide. But the best way to decide is, "OK, fine, put it all on a big decision paper; get it up." Instead of sitting in your office and doing it, you say, "OK, we're going to have another meeting," and you go in there and sift through it.

Martin: How much did political considerations come into play when you're making what could be seen as a technical decision, right? Is smoking service-connected or not? Do you worry about budgets? Do you worry about how are the veterans groups going to respond to this? Do you worry about all those sorts of political fallout, or is it just a technical, scientific decision-making process?

West: I don't know that you worry about them, but you never do anything in ignorance of factors that have a bearing. I hear your question, and I hear the question under it. I even hear the echoes of the comments over the years that get made, which is, "They really made this decision because they're trying to cut off the exposure of the Treasury to having to pay all this stuff." That is an understandable concern to voice, but in voicing it they make the point that they're not sure that if they were in the same situation they wouldn't take that into account too. It's such a big consideration, how much can we afford to pay?

The standard answer from every Secretary of Veterans Affairs and every administrator of the VA before that is, "We can afford to pay whatever it takes because they paid with everything they've got." That's the standard answer. It is a good and sound and right policy, and it is policy. But to say that in reviewing everything you don't also look and say, "OK, what is this likely to come to?" Of course you do. You try to make your judgments in such a way that you can accommodate all considerations. No one ever can. But all of these decisions are ultimately some kind of a compromise.

Martin: Were there any cases where, say, the veterans' groups won versus lost in some of those considerations? Was there anything that would tip it in their favor versus opposed?

West: Well, I'm not sure about the won-lost thing. Frankly the effort by both the VA and the Congress is to try to keep them from losing. You don't want veterans' organizations going out thinking that somehow, in their best efforts to represent veterans, they didn't get what was

needed. But you also know that the reality is that every year the veterans' organizations are going to have to look for the next thing to ask for, or to go back to things to see if they could ask for this. It's a fact of life. It happens to be a good fact of life because it keeps everybody focused on the means. It is also the kind of fact of life that lets you know you're going to be addressing these as far out as you can, so you try to organize your governmental decision making in a way that you do today what you can. Tomorrow you'll try to take the next step. Those are kinds of political decisions. They're certainly governmental decisions, and they're the kinds of decisions government should make.

Even the United States does not have unlimited resources. The fact is, the money that you're dealing with—I want to say this carefully—is not the veterans' money. It is the money of every taxpayer in the United States. So, even the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, who is supposed to be a cheerleader for doing as much as we can for veterans, has an obligation not unlike that of every other Secretary, the President, and everybody else: we have to use the resources that are provided in the best way possible. This means recognizing the limits on today's budget even as we hope maybe we can do some more with tomorrow's budget.

Chidester: Any closing reflections on your time with President Clinton, your time in his administration? How off are we? Are we as historians getting it right?

West: Don't you want to ask me how the President's personal life can affect the way he's able to do his job and work with his Cabinet?

Chidester: It's exactly what I wanted to ask.

West: It undoubtedly takes a toll. But this President was as good as his word. He always told people, way back when he was Governor, I guess, but certainly early on, that he was able to compartmentalize, that he was able to keep his eye on doing his job, whatever was going on around him. I always thought Harold Brown was, perhaps, the most remarkable government official I'd ever met. You heard me say a little of that in the beginning—Dr. Harold Brown.

But in many ways Bill Clinton is far more remarkable than that. Extraordinary intellect, unbelievable empathy for people and interest in not just them, not just because he liked their personality, but in what they're thinking about and how they react if he says this and how he reacts if they say that. Not just that. But also a remarkable ability to focus on what has to be done no matter what is swirling around him.

My first Cabinet office meeting occurred something like three days after the Monica Lewinsky thing broke, maybe later. So there we were. The President said, "I want you to keep on doing your job. I will support you. But you leave this for me to deal with." And he was as good as his word. I never saw him not discharge the functions I needed him to discharge for veterans or that I thought he needed to discharge for defense purposes.

Frankly I never lost my interest in defense. I was always running back and forth to the Pentagon and talking to my old buddies and second guessing poor old [Louis] Caldera, who went and gave up the "Be All That You Can Be" for "Army of One." Oh God, man, what are you doing? Anyway, I never lost my interest in that stuff. At every Cabinet meeting, the President was

focused on what he had to do and did it well. I would say there were some other things that occurred to me as we were going along, but I can't think of them.

Martin: On that same line of questioning, though, it seems like you're arguing that history has gotten it somewhat wrong by placing too much emphasis on Monica Lewinsky.

West: I'm the one who brought it up. I'm placing emphasis on it.

Martin: One thing I'm curious about is your sense of looking at other people around Clinton and including the military, the Pentagon. Did they put that much emphasis on Lewinsky when they dealt with Clinton?

West: I have to tell you, in an environment that prides itself on being family-friendly, family-centered, with a kind of family ethos, I did not find that the military, or even over in VA, was nearly as interested in that as they were in how successful had been my negotiations on the budget or what in the hell we were going to do about some emergencies that occurred around the world, if you recall, right about that time. I think that's a factual observation. I'm not trying to gloss it over or see it in its most favorable light. Just, no, I thought the military went on with its business.

Martin: They didn't see Clinton as weakened by Lewinsky?

West: I didn't see reflections of that. That's not to say that you didn't hear the occasional—Well, it's hard to say. I don't know if I can say that, as I say, you didn't see the occasional judgmental attitude. But I have to admit I didn't. What I think was by the time that began—Look, I think that in many ways they looked at it as one more stage in what had been a process of issues raised, almost as a kind of—I'm trying to avoid sounding like a defendant—yet another stage in the pursuit of Bill Clinton.

They had heard Whitewater since he ran for President. It went on for four years. It looked as if, frankly, Whitewater had been finally dealt with despite the fact—This just goes to show you how uninfluential the Secretary of the Army can be. After my time at Justice years ago, I was very suspicious of special counsel legislation. I had seen special counsel used in New York, when I was up there, as almost a political tool, so when the time came to consider renewing the Special Prosecutor statute—and I was right there—I was screaming, "Do not sign it. You don't have to. A lot of people are opposed to it." But he did. I have diverted.

But the point I was going to make is, my impression was that the military looked at it as yet another in the unfortunate episode of distractions that had dogged the President from the moment he became, not President, but a candidate, or at least would-be distractions: Whitewater and Gennifer Flowers and all that stuff. Now, impeachment is serious. That's not just a distraction; that's serious and that did occur. I actually don't think it weakened him with the military, but remember, though I was very interested, I wasn't over there as much. I was over at VA.

Martin: This brings us back to your time as Secretary of the Army. Clinton is the first Democratic President, probably since the military in general has gone to an all-volunteer Army. Carter was there but the officer corps would have been younger. This is the first time you have mostly volunteers. And if you look at the voting records, most folks who are in the military who

vote, about 90% vote Republican. How do you think that they would respond to Clinton and all these other things if he had been Republican? Would that have mattered?

West: Let me work my way to that answer. I was on active duty when the Army went from the draft to what General William C. Westmoreland insisted on calling "the modern volunteer Army." He just could not bring himself to concede it was going to be the all-volunteer Army, which, of course, is what it was then, what it was meant to be. It was one of the issues that John Kester ran in the office that I worked in as a captain. And you're right. Carter was the Democratic President and the all-volunteer Army was in full swing by then, because that's a couple of administrations—well, by the end of Nixon, then Gerald Ford.

In terms of the way Clinton would have been treated if he were a Republican, I'm not sure. Here's the problem: there is always a party out of power that is going to criticize the President. George Washington took his hits and all the early so-called "founders" who ended up as President did. Criticizing Presidents is what we do most, and accusing them of lack of moral judgment, of lack of courage, of being ugly and having bad teeth, it's sort of a habit with the American populace. I'm not so sure that a Republican Bill Clinton would not have been savaged by Democrats of every stripe. I can't believe that they also wouldn't have made an effort.

Now, hard to say, because whatever we feel as individuals about the particular conduct, it is quite likely that as a political lesson, the crime that Bill Clinton committed was for it to become public, to become known, to become an object, a thing that made the President—and for that reason the Presidency—an object of scorn within the United States, and perhaps the country a little bit of a snicker victim around the world. Certainly all the French ever did was snicker. Not sure the Germans paid any attention. The Italians thought, *Hey, one of us*. So I'm not sure he would have escaped had it become a public thing.

Martin: Would the military have treated him differently, you think?

West: The military has always had an ethos that said, "As important as family is, we judge our officers on the job they do," and they've always been accused of not moving swiftly and strongly enough against those who are accused of having violated the provisions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which actually says that you can be court-martialed and booted out.

It is only in recent decades that there has been this move to say, "We will throw generals out." We didn't use to; I'll tell you that. We tell them, "OK, my friend, you cut it out." If they don't and it becomes—This is almost a catch phrase; I may not get it right—It becomes a "matter that undermines morale," the esprit of the unit at which that officer is located, or where he commands, then they will be inclined to refer it to formal action. That was always the way the military handled it. It was only in recent years that they had felt that they had to act, because of the accusations that they go after the junior people and not the senior people.

So, for the military, those, many of them—most of them, I think, serving in office—were able to separate the Commander in Chief, the guy doing the job of running the country, from these things. The other side of that coin, though, is I'm sure that someone would say, "Well, I hear you, but what about the example for officers and the like?" Everybody talked about it, but nobody said, "I won't follow the son-of-a-bitch's orders, no matter what."

Remember, the military is not like everybody else. They take seriously the notion that whoever is in charge they have to serve. They have to salute, say, "Yes, sir," march off, and do it. It turns up at the funniest of times. Not for them. They're not funny for them. But as far as they were concerned, he was the President. They'll do what the President's orders are. How would they vote? Different matter. But they will do the President's orders.

Martin: You've been very generous with your time, and we appreciate you giving us this time.

West: Nonsense, I've stolen 20 minutes from you.