INTERVIEW WITH HARRIS WOFFORD

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Martin: This is Paul Martin from the University of Virginia. We’re here with Senator Harris Wofford to do an oral history of his time both with the Clinton administration and his Senatorial career as well. Let’s identify ourselves to the transcriptionist so she can figure out who is speaking.

Chidester: I’m Jeff Chidester, research director for the Clinton project.

Wofford: I’m Harris Wofford, at my apartment in Foggy Bottom in Washington, D.C.

Steiner: I’m Jessica Steiner, a research assistant for the project.

Martin: Let’s start with your very first interactions with Bill Clinton. You mentioned that it was probably when he was head of the National Governors Association.

Wofford: Memory is very tricky. I could well have encountered Clinton before the Governors Association session in Cleveland in ’87 or ’88, but it was while I was Secretary of Labor and Industry in Pennsylvania, which began when [Robert] Casey won the Governorship in 1986. I’d been full time party chairman for his campaign, and I thought I was going to be the head of the Governor’s Office of Citizen Service, which Casey had promised we would set up after the election, to make Pennsylvania a model state of national service.

In the late ’70s I had initiated and then co-chaired with Jacqueline Wexler the Committee for the Study of National Service. We had produced a report that was generally, in the service world, considered a landmark proposal for large-scale national service. That’s the “green” book we produced with an interesting group of people, including the revered Father Ted Hesburgh, long-time president of Notre Dame and Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of Labor [Willard] Bill Wirtz. Our report, “Youth and the Needs of the Nation” had gotten a lot of attention, and it helped inspire the Democratic Leadership Council to come up with their own proposal, Citizenship and National Service, which they did in the late ’80s. Again, I’m not sure of the date, let’s say ’88. It was published when Senator [Samuel] Nunn was head of the Democratic Leadership Council, then Governor Clinton had been involved in it, and as head of the DLC he carried the torch for it.

So when Governor Casey persuaded me to be Secretary of Labor and Industry and formed the Governor’s Office of Citizen Service—which became known as PennServe, based in the
Department of Labor with its substantial resources—and Casey was about to go to his first Governors Association meeting, we got the idea that we should get the Governors Association to do a taskforce or a working group on national youth service.

We got Governor [Richard] Celeste of Ohio and Clinton of Arkansas—again, he may have been the Chairman of NGA that year—and Casey to propose this, and it was approved. So I was there to help staff him for the national service part of the Governors meeting. A half dozen or more Governors came to our session and a dozen or so joined it. A number came and gave little speeches. Casey did and then left. Clinton was late, but he came, with gusto. He gave a not short opening talk about his own experience with youth and national service. He had been on the Carnegie Commission’s “A Nation at Risk” report, I believe it was. It may have been a more focused one on middle school students or secondary school students. It was a very significant study, and he had been on the study group and one of the signers of the report, which called for all secondary school or middle school students, as a key part of their curriculum, to engage in service learning, to serve in the community and learn citizenship by doing it.

He became convinced that it ought to be required in the school system—not by the federal government, because it doesn’t have the power to do—but to be encouraged by the federal government. He thought every Governor should move to see that every student—in some form, not in any one prescribed form—should be required to have substantial experience in service in the community, working on problems and thinking about them, and talking about what they learned in their classes. He was very eloquent about that.

He had received our report “Youth and the Needs of the Nation.” From that very first meeting, he talked about how he had read our report and liked it. That was his speech. And he didn’t leave. Every other Governor, including the convener, Casey, stayed briefly after their speech to hear another Governor, and then left and went to their other business. Clinton had to be dragged away about two hours later. He was probing everybody. He was giving his own experiences, his own ideas. It was an extraordinary experience.

He listened very well. I think he probably does that when he goes around the world now. Whether it was the Presidency or other things, I don’t think in his later Presidential years he demonstrated this magical ability to listen—to convey that he was more interested in what you had to say or what you thought than in what he was saying. I find now he monologues more than he did then. He was full of enthusiasm and therefore talked a lot, but he really listened.

I can’t believe he has this tremendous hold on and appeal to people around the world, of all ranks, if he doesn’t now have the energy for that kind of listening when he continues his extraordinary role as the best ex-President we’ve ever had.

**Martin:** When he gave the speech, was your only interaction with him as an audience member?

**Wofford:** No. It was just around a table, and he knew I was one of the ringleaders. When the Governors left, their staff people stayed. Each of them had a staff person designated for this working group. It’s the way they function on many things. The staff always assumes that’s the way it should be. After the principals go, now we figure out what we ought to do here. I think
most of us were expecting that. I’m sure I wanted the Governors to stay. Probably everybody wanted Governors to stay, and he stayed.

Then I would meet him on different occasions on the political rounds. One time was the Democratic Convention in Atlanta in ’88.

Martin: Where he gave his speech.

Wofford: Yes, where he gave the long speech. We arranged for the platform committee (or whatever they did for issue forums), to have an issue forum on the Democratic Leadership Council’s proposal, and our proposal, on national service. We had a panel. I remember Bob Kerrey was on it because, to my amazement, I had thought of him as a sort of national service Democrat, and he came opposed to national service. He was one of the few Democrats who initially voted against Clinton’s national service bill. He changed his mind later. But I saw Clinton there at receptions and conferences, and every time I saw him, he immediately picked up where we were last—gave new ideas, asking what’s up, and is my staff really working and helping you? It wasn’t sporadic; it was as if it was a continuum of a conversation. It was extraordinarily pleasing, seductive, impressive. I’ve had that happen with him on other fronts like race and civil rights. Those we started later, but the first on national services was that kind of encounter.

With the tragedy of John Heinz’s death in the airplane crash in the spring of ’91, I had the opportunity to be appointed Senator for six months until a special election could choose the successor to Heinz for the rest of his term. I ran and I won. I took the gamble of picking [James] Carville and [Paul] Begala as campaign party chair of the Democratic Party. I had been on the selection committee that had selected this relatively unknown James Carville to be Casey’s campaign manager for his ’86 gubernatorial race, and he remained a key advisor of Governor Casey. So he was in the vetting of me for selection for the Senate.

Martin: So you in effect chose one another, or at least had some input.

Wofford: Well, it may have come to that. He was enough of a wild man that it was actually a risky decision from my point of view.

Martin: Can we jump back a little bit? The story you tell about Clinton staying at that Governors Council meeting and asking questions and interacting with different staffers. Most of the Governors came and then left, or did they show up and leave one by one?

Wofford: One by one. They didn’t all come at the beginning, and when they came they made their speeches.

Martin: Did you get any impression from that how other Governors, both Republican and Democratic, saw Clinton?

Wofford: I had the impression that his charm was contagious. I learned later that Casey did not take to him.
**Martin:** Is that right?

**Wofford:** From the very beginning. He thought he was a show horse. Casey was not as at ease with people. He was very stiff and somewhat shy. He was very strong in his opinions when he talked, but he wasn’t a “hail fellow” type. And Clinton was the extreme opposite: touchy, holding, looking you in the eye, trying to get the intimacy—of your mind, at least.

I asked one of Casey’s top people, “Why did Casey take a bad view of Clinton at that very first meeting?” He said, “I think the critical moment was in an elevator. Clinton was either talking to a woman in the elevator or talking about a woman in a way that made Casey think he wasn’t necessarily a very moral man. He didn’t like the way there was a cruising sound to the conversation, and it stuck with him.” Allegedly—this is not first-hand evidence I’m giving you.

I was one of his Cabinet members then and a good friend from Covington & Burling law firm days. We were young associates together. I was somewhat older, but we overlapped for two years back in the mid ’50s here in Washington. He came down from Scranton, sort of idealistic, ambitious, not very at ease talking to people, and very upright, a good Catholic boy. He was a star basketball player at Boston College, and he was a very serious Catholic.

When I was trying to get him to support Clinton for President, he said, “You know, there are rumors about his behavior, sexually—” This is later when I supported Clinton for President. He said, “There may be things in his closet, and I’d be a little worried about that.”

The Casey-Clinton-Carville triangle became a very significant political factor. There was a skit put on for the Pennsylvania press corps. David Stone, the Governor’s chief of communications who later was my chief of communications on the Senate staff, did a wonderful, wonderful skit in which Casey played Casey. He was at his dinner table with his family and said the blessing and was very stiff. They were very respectful to the father, and then someone called and said, “There’s a message you need to take in the other room.” He opened the door to the other room, and Casey—you never saw him without his coat and tie—took off his coat, and people were dancing around like this, and James Carville, dressed up like a devil, was telling him to come in. Then Casey would get back in the video and go back to the dining room table. The video was suggesting a pact with the devil, that Carville was the devil. By then he was already famous with the Pennsylvania press corps. It was a very successful video.

Carville was in on vetting people to be picked for the Senate seat, and I think he was the engineer of the idea of offering it to Lee Iacocca. He supposedly wired it all so that Casey would fly out to Iacocca in Detroit and offer it to him. It was supposedly wired that he would say yes, and it would be a great, shocking thing, because nobody thought that [Richard] Thornburgh—who already was the Republicans’ pick—could be beaten. Thornburgh was almost forced to leave the Attorney Generalship to reclaim this seat. There hadn’t been a Democratic Senator for 29 years, I think—Joe Clark’s reelection in ’62 was the last Democratic Senator until this seat came open. Iacocca, to Casey’s shock—because it had already been leaked to the press that he was doing this—said, “I need 24 hours to think about it.” There were 24 hours when it was the big story all over Pennsylvania that he had offered it. Then Iacocca turned it down.
At that point, Casey put me in the running. A lot of people had been pressing for that, including his wife, Ellen [Casey]. He said no; it had to be a rich, young western Pennsylvanian, because he was dead tired of raising money, and he knew nobody would give money to what they thought would be a losing campaign. It had to be somebody who had his own money or could get it, from his point of view. The person had to be young, because if anyone, by chance, could win the seat, they could keep it. And only a western Pennsylvanian could win, he thought—someone from Thornburgh’s own territory to have any chance. Iacocca wasn’t from the west. He was rich, but he wasn’t young, and had been outside Pennsylvania for a long time. So Ellen in bed allegedly was saying, “Now why not Harris?” She had been lobbying for me. I was vetted by the general counsel, his own great lawyer friend, and James Carville, whom I knew.

Let me give you one vivid little example of this vetting. It relates to Clinton. Carville asked me, “Did you ever smoke marijuana?” I said, “Well, James, I have to tell you honestly, I’ve never smoked cigarettes in my life. I’m embarrassed by my lack of sense of sin about smoking cigarettes, but I never smoked. I did try, but I couldn’t inhale.”

I was literally in the middle of a sentence saying, “but I tried harder.” I did try marijuana a few times in the ’60s and ’70s. James stopped me mid-sentence, cackled, said, “Wonderful, best answer, just the kind of answer a candidate needs to have. You couldn’t inhale—wonderful, wonderful.”

So later when I, along with others, was being vetted for the Vice Presidency in 1992, and I had my session with Clinton—a wonderful session in the hotel here—I said, “You know, I’ve already gotten you in trouble once. I think I’m the source of your answer, ‘I couldn’t inhale.’” He said, “No, I just said that.” I said, “That sounds so much like James when he said, ‘That’s the answer!’ I have my suspicions he put that in your head.” He said, “No, I just never could inhale.”

So I still blame myself for Clinton. He got attacked very hard on that.

**Martin:** He did; that’s a great anecdote. Were you involved or knowledgeable when they were considering Lee Iacocca as a candidate?

**Wofford:** No, I didn’t know they were considering him. I think I knew the one other person he offered it to first. I’m pretty sure I knew that he had offered it—conceivably it came after Iacocca—to Art Rooney, a popular lawyer who has been the head of the family’s Pittsburgh Steelers. He had little kids. Art was just in Nantucket at this year’s Democratic Senate campaign committee’s big donors’ affair. I said, “Art Rooney here is the one I have to thank for the opportunity to be in the Senate, because he turned it down because of his family, and he just wasn’t sure he was right for politics. But he’s only 55 now, so he may still have his chance.”

I liked Clinton a lot, just electrically sort of liked him. Intellectually I found him the most stimulating person with a real vision of the world and domestic politics. We just clicked, and he knew we did. By the time he called to ask me to join his campaign, very early, because of my experience on national service with him, my very close friend Paul Tsongas, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia when I was the director in Ethiopia, had announced. This was my
introduction of Paul to Emperor Haile Selassie [showing a picture]. I was sort of Paul’s mentor on questions like where he should go to law school or whether he should run for the Lowell City Council and House. I was very close to him.

I really didn’t think Paul with his manner had any chance of winning. I think I was wrong about that. You’re too young to remember—

**Martin:** No, I was a Tsongas man in ’92. I supported Tsongas in ’92 before he backed out.

**Wofford:** Well, I went up and did a fundraiser for him, which is in one of your clippings there. I hadn’t forgotten that. It was a big thing. But he knew. When Paul announced, I said, “I’m very tied to Clinton too now. I just don’t think I can simply be for you—but I want to help you.” He said, “Will you come and do a fundraiser?” I said, “Certainly,” and I did. It was a big one.

So when Clinton called, I said the same thing: I’ll try to help, but I can’t join the campaign while Paul is in. I said I didn’t think he was likely to be in very long. The fact is, I think, if Clinton hadn’t—due to Carville’s guidance, I suspect—had a devastatingly negative Florida primary assault on Tsongas, I think Paul could have gone much further and conceivably been the nominee. He was an anti-media type, laconic and underplayed, but interesting. I think I was wrong to think he couldn’t possibly do it. But he didn’t.

The day after he withdrew, Clinton called and said, “All right, now will you join my campaign? I need you now more than I did then.” He just barely got through New Hampshire. He’d done better than people thought he would, but he had Connecticut coming up, and it was looking bad. It was going to be a hard primary. I said, “Yes, I’m on call. I’m with you.”

So I got the call right away: “Could you be at Newark airport”—or wherever it was—“to go to Connecticut?” For probably two days, I was with him—I was more of a living prop than a speaker. But I did speak briefly. Later I did a lot of talks on my own. But on the circuit through Connecticut he had me with him and introduced me, and I said a few things. He used my campaign both on healthcare—whether it was with the Chamber of Commerce or a Democratic rally—and my victory.

Because I was there, probably, he used a lot about national service in his talks. Later national service was a major part of his regular performance. He said he got the biggest applause for his national service proposal: “Serve your way through college.” He made it real middle class: help everybody have an opportunity to go to college by seeing that everyone has an opportunity to serve and accumulate, like the GI Bill, enough money to pay for college.

On the bus ride across Connecticut, in the dark, Bruce Lindsey came up to me and said, “He’d like you to join him for the next hour” or something. Sitting with Clinton up at the front of the bus was an extraordinary hour.

We got to comparing our marriages, but he mainly wanted to get anything I had to say about what Robert and John Kennedy and Martin Luther King were like. He had all sorts of curious questions about them, good questions, good sharing of his own feelings about the three of them.
and about the civil rights issue. That’s what we mostly talked about, not national service. We had talked a lot about national service before I had given him my book, *Of Kennedys and Kings*—it came out in 1980. So somewhere in those early meetings with him, my wife would have been sure I gave him a copy. During the interim after his election in 1992, one after another of the people who went down to Arkansas—like Bill Moyers, when they were talking to him about being Chief of Staff, and other people who were interviewed down in Arkansas—said *Of Kennedys and Kings* was on his desk in his Arkansas office.

He said he had read the book, but the criticism of Clinton on this score is that he wants people to like him, he wants to win them over, and therefore he knows how to say what they want to hear. I’m sure there’s an element of that in any kind of courtship: he has the energy or the reason, or just the instinct, that comes into play. But I certainly felt that the things he was talking about and saying were very deeply rooted in him and very much his convictions.

So my experience with him on two issues that were crucial to me—national service and civil rights and race relations in this country—and King and [Mohandas] Gandhi—plus his feeling about the Kennedys—from the time I first talked to him about them to this day, tells me that they are deeply rooted, important political ideas. I know very few political leaders who I feel have as deeply rooted a feeling, other than the Christian right—[Samuel] Brownback, for example—that I’m sure his positions try to bring Jesus into the public domain as a guiding force for him.

There’s criticism that he doesn’t have any clear ideas he sticks with. My own estimate is that those were two deeply rooted things he did believe in, does believe in, strongly. In the first year after he was elected, he said about national service, “AmeriCorps is the transcendent idea of my administration.” Now, that isn’t the way his priorities went in terms of his time or other things any more than the Peace Corps was a priority with President Kennedy. In fact, I think Clinton believed in the two points more than Kennedy did—more than he did in civil rights, certainly when he began, and more than he maybe ever did on the Peace Corps.

Those are two big things I think he is really deeply rooted in. He undoubtedly has other very strong convictions. So when [Richard] Morris—is that who it is? I couldn’t stand him—came along and was given credit for triangulation and setting him on a centrist course, I’m very skeptical that he came in as a Svengali and moved Clinton to a more centrist position.

If you read Clinton’s three Georgetown speeches again that launched his Presidential campaign and look at his leadership of the Democratic Leadership Council, my sense is throughout his public life that I knew about, “centrist” is too neutral a term, but the vital center, as [Arthur M.] Schlesinger would call it, is where Clinton always was. My instinct is that he went back and re-established touch with Morris because he wanted to get somebody else around him who wanted to go that route, who recognized you had to go that route. He wanted to balance Harold Ickes, or the other gung-ho men of the left.

**Martin:** You talked about this bus ride and Clinton coming up and sitting with you—

**Wofford:** I went to sit with him.
Martin: Sorry, I got that backwards. What kinds of questions did he ask about the Kennedys? What was he interested in?

Wofford: He was very interested in the contradiction between the high ideals of John Kennedy—and even more of Martin Luther King—and any contradiction in their personal life.

Martin: Was this after the Gennifer Flowers incident?

Wofford: Yes, he had to defend Gennifer Flowers in New Hampshire, I believe it was, when he went on television.

Martin: So it was public knowledge that he had had some—

Wofford: He didn’t mention Gennifer Flowers.

Martin: That’s fascinating.

Wofford: To jump from Gennifer to Monica [Lewinsky], we celebrated Martin Luther King day a few days after her testimony went public, I believe it was, and before his own testimony. Your timeline will show when it was. It was the hot national issue on a day when he had pledged to go to—I think it was Martin Luther King High School, one of the main high schools here, to paint a classroom. Hundreds of AmeriCorps members were organizing students to do service that day. Every Martin Luther King Day, Clinton helped make it a day on instead of a day off. That had been one of the bills I was responsible for, that I initiated in the Senate, with John Lewis in the House, to get Congress to go on record as making it a day for service and to get a little money for mini-grants for service, which went to the Corporation for National Service later.

Anyway, Clinton was to paint this classroom, and the White House asked that I come down and paint with him. He was late getting there, and stayed too long talking to all the dignitaries assembled in the holding room, and then we went upstairs. The rule was the press was going to be let in for only about five minutes for a short photo op to take pictures while we were painting some time during the morning. There would be no questions. The White House was determined that this was going to be Clinton painting with students on Martin Luther King Day, not a chance to ask him questions about Monica Lewinsky. So we were painting in the classroom—or scraping or whatever we were doing—and they let them in, a crowd of them, 30 of them or whatever, in this classroom. We just continued painting as we were told we were supposed to do.

Sam Donaldson shouted out, “Mr. President, did you have sex with Monica Lewinsky?” Clinton just continued painting. I continued painting. “I’m afraid you didn’t hear me, Mr. President. Did you have sex with Monica Lewinsky?” My recollection is that he said it three times like that. Clinton never responded. They finally were ushered out. Nobody else did it, but Sam did. This young black student, a very impressive young guy I’d been talking to for half an hour or more as we painted, turned to me and said, “Do they really talk like that to the President of the United States?”

Martin: That’s a good story.
Chidester: There’s a lot I’d like to cover for the ’92 campaign and even before, your ’91 campaign. But I’m interested in this time, shortly before you’re appointed to fill Senator Heinz’s seat and then in the month after. It’s around this time that the Democratic Leadership Council and the Progressive Policy Institute, the think tank, are writing a lot about national service, and Governor Clinton is chairman around this time, the early ’90s. Did you have any interactions with him in his role at the DLC in constructing ideas on national service?

Wofford: Yes, the panel we had at the Democratic convention in Atlanta in 1988 I think was when he was chairman of the DLC or before it. Each time we talked after the DLC proposal was published that was very much related to what we talked about. I was a strong supporter of the DLC proposal. I don’t know if you know, but Ted Kennedy was a great foe of it, and so was a good part of the black leadership. Some of the college and university presidents, such as Sheldon Hackney—a good friend of mine at the University of Pennsylvania—also opposed it. He was on the evening news saying this is a proposal that’s very unfair to poor black students. White students are not under any compulsion to do service but under this plan, Hackney said, the poor students who need federal aid have this condition for getting aid, engaging in service. That was the crucial part of the DLC proposal.

For me, the hypocrisy of university presidents saying that, when the work-study program of nearly a billion dollars—a little less than that then—in student aid, was conditioned on taking work-study jobs on campus. When we looked into work-study, we discovered that 95% of the work-study jobs were on campus, and in the ’60s when it was started as an adjunct to the poverty program, it was assumed that most of them would be serving in the community as part of the “war on poverty.” New York City under [John] Lindsay, had 10,000 work-study students, according to the chief of the IBM Foundation who was in charge of Lindsay’s youth corps.

He says 10,000 work-study students in greater New York were doing their work-study in all kinds of city social programs. College presidents, partly because their students got somewhat radicalized and caused mayors to tremble about homelessness or whatever projects they were working on, and became critical of city politics and city policies. So a lot of mayors didn’t want these work-study students from the colleges engaged in social work in the cities. But mainly the colleges wanted those jobs for their budget. For them to oppose the idea of service-study and the DLC proposal—which was a version of it—to me was very hypocritical.

But Ted Kennedy was very much opposed to the requirement of service in order to get financial aid. After our national service report had come out in 1979, the New York Times had an editorial that I hadn’t read for a long time until yesterday—a friend gave me a pile of documents here. At the end, the editorial on our proposal for national service gives the best case of the people who were opposing the DLC proposal later; since there are only so many dollars that can go to help poor, young minorities, every one of those dollars, every penny of them, should go to help the minorities. Later Kennedy became a big supporter of AmeriCorps, but this as 1979, 1980. I don’t know whether you know, but there was an avalanche of the liberal left attacking the DLC proposal because it would use rare dollars that would go to all students doing national service, and not just to the poor. My own conviction is that serving alongside each other, poor and rich, black and white and Hispanic youth as part of the education of someone who is poor or starts
well behind, is probably a more effective way to really change lives than aid programs targeted just on the poor.

One of my turning-point conversations on a service day was again when I was painting on Martin Luther King Day in a Habitat build with the Philadelphia Youth Service Corps. One young man in the Corps they said had been a gang leader, had dropped out of high school in 10th grade, probably was selling drugs, probably heading to jail. He joined the Philadelphia Youth Service Corps, and he’s now a good leader of that “gang.”

I said to him, “How did you turn the corner and decide to join this Corps?” He first joshed. He said it was a different kind of gang, might be more interesting, less likely to be killed in the end. We went on painting. Then he finally turned to me and said, “I know, there’s a better reason I did it. All my life people were coming to our project to help me—all coming to do good. I got tired of people doing good against me. This is the first time in my life anyone ever asked me to do something good.”

You know, Marian Wright Edelman, the Children’s Defense Fund Mississippi leader, is so incredibly eloquent against the proposition that if you’re poor and in the ghetto, you’re not able to serve the community and try to change it. It’s not only contrary to her whole religious upbringing in her family, but she educationally thinks that service by young people—and especially those who have been left behind by society—is a key part of the prescription they and we need.

This is a long speech. But Clinton was very heavily criticized by the liberal left for supporting that proposal. I got called by Senator Ted Kennedy to come to his home in Virginia for an evening to figure out what we could do because he supported a domestic Peace Corps, he supported national service, and he didn’t like being in the opposition position. He wanted to come up with some kind of compromise, and he wanted an evening to explore a National Service Act that would have a carrot but no stick. It wouldn’t condition money in service; it would add money. That was the easy answer.

That was the evening we started planning. Shirley Sagawa, who was a very significant person in the Clinton administration, and was number two in the Corporation for National Service when I got there in 1995. Then later she was brought over to the White House to be number two on Hillary’s [Clinton] staff. She was very close to both Hillary and the President. Shirley was Ted Kennedy’s staff person who led the drafting group for the first National Service Act under [George H. W.] Bush, which we did all come together on. But the DLC got really hammered hard. I don’t know if I ever formally joined the DLC, but I was very sympathetic to them, in tune with them on many issues, especially this one. When Clinton proposed it in the campaign, he didn’t propose the condition that was the controversial point of the Democratic Leadership Council proposal. He backed away from that.

But on work-study, he was very strong. In ’93 and ’94 I was pushing very hard on the Senate Labor and Education Committee to move to requiring 50% of work-study over five years to engage in service in the community—it was a plan Ted Kennedy and I agreed upon. He was chairman of the committee. Each year for five years, a 10% requirement of work-study jobs
would be added until it reached 50% service-study. We got the 10% through the Senate committee.

Then Congressman [William D.] Ford, the head of the House Education Committee, turned out to be just as much against this as the opponents of the DLC were. He was violently against this. Work-study is to help these kids and not to make them do work in the community. The college and university lobbies campaigned against us. Then in the conference committee, we got through 5%—it has now been increased to 7%. We had Clinton’s strong support for this idea. He came up later with it when we started America’s Promise at the Philadelphia Summit in 1997. It became one of the goals out of the Summit that 50% of work-study should be in service in the community.

Later, when General [Colin] Powell, the chairman of America’s Promise, and I went in to report on the progress—I guess the first year after the Summit, we brought this up to Clinton. He said, “As Harris knows, I think all of work-study ought to be service-study. Why don’t you and I, Colin, send a joint letter to the university presidents asking them to take the lead in doing this?” Colin said, “Wonderful, great idea.” We left very enthusiastically. He gave a little speech on why he had been for this for years, and the next thing we knew, the Education Department said, “We have the Higher Education Authorization Bill, and the educational lobbies are all against this—”

Now the Presidents—like Father [Theodore] Hesburgh of Notre Dame and Tom Ehrlich, who used to be provost at Penn and was formerly president of the University of Indiana and became one of the key board members of the Corporation of National Service—were very much for this. The Washington Monthly had a special major issue in support of this whole approach.

But the Education Department blocked it for basically nine months or a year. Letters were drafted, but we couldn’t get it moving. The next thing they or someone in the White House said, the President of the United States never sends a joint letter with somebody else; that’s against the rules. Then it was agreed there would be two letters. Then word came that Kennedy’s letter couldn’t say 50%; it would call for more service being added to work-study, more jobs in the community, but not any goals set. Then, unknown to me, as the letters were about to go out, the Chief of Staff or somebody from the White House called Powell and said, “We particularly would appreciate your cutting the 50% out of your letter.” So the letters went out to all the presidents.

Now, who worked with [David R.] Obey?

**Martin:** I did.

**Wofford:** You probably know that Obey had a lot of trouble swallowing AmeriCorps and the Clinton proposal.

**Martin:** That was before; I worked for him only in 2003, 2004.

**Wofford:** Okay, well this is 1996 to 2000. I forget when I had my biggest encounter. It must have been the first year, that was when the government had closed down, and one of the things
they hadn’t agreed on was national service. Clinton was standing firm on it. They finally caved and gave him money for national service, but they tried to basically cut it through appropriations. I mean through gradually diminishing money, not gradual but big cuts. I went to Obey to try to get him to help us on this. It was actually rather moving. It was sufficiently painful that I didn’t come away feeling any comradely relations with Obey, but I knew where he was coming from. He said, “Harris, you just have to understand.” I don’t know how many years he had been in Congress—20 then, 15.

**Martin:** Since ’68.

**Wofford:** “—since ’68 I’ve been here trying to help those who are most in need in this country, the poorest and the whole range of things that I’ve spilled blood over and sweated over and I believe in. I’m being squeezed and cut by Clinton. They’re cutting down programs that I believe in. You have to understand why I can’t get any enthusiasm for fighting for some new money being given to something that I’m far less convinced is what people need than my programs that I’ve started.”

He was very eloquent, very strong. As far as I know he never did—in the hard times anyway. I have no idea where he is now on this issue.

**Martin:** When I first got there, AmeriCorps was saved for late 2003, early 2004. There was a point where the budget was going to reduce all the money to zero, and then it got put back in, maybe $500 million.

**Wofford:** Yes. Maybe this year is the first time the House actually put money into AmeriCorps and the corporation in all these years got its money because of the Senate support. An ex-Peace Corps man, Jim Walsh, liked it and supported it, and his dynasty had some good AmeriCorps programs he liked. But each time he said to us—and then he said in a less clear manner to the public: “I’m not going to put any money in for AmeriCorps, because it will be put up against a resolution to transfer the funds to veterans’ health, and nobody wants to vote against veterans’ health. The majority of the people in my caucus don’t like AmeriCorps. If we put money in, it will be voted out on the floor, and it will weaken the position in conference. But I’ll support in conference putting money in”—which he did, every year. But even after Bush called for the increase of AmeriCorps from 50,000 to 75,000, Walsh didn’t think he could put it in. Did you have success on that?

**Martin:** Let’s take a five-minute break.

[BREAK]
Martin: Why don’t we start back with the 1991 campaign? I think it would by useful for us to understand better how you came to choose healthcare as one of the top issues; how you and Carville connected, and how the strategy of the campaign started to develop for you in ’91.

Wofford: I don’t know when Carville coined the phrase “It’s the economy, stupid,” which he used in the Clinton Presidential campaign. I can’t remember whether he was using that very line in mine—maybe he was. That was a central idea. The clippings you put together quoting Begala particularly—and maybe Carville, too—about my campaign, saying it was the economic issues. It didn’t take a genius to know that if you’re a doctor and you have a right to a lawyer, so isn’t it even more fundamental that you have a right to a doctor if you’re sick?—didn’t come from James Carville; it came from the head of the Ophthalmologists of Philadelphia in the very beginning of our campaign. They were giving $5,000 to support me because I was making healthcare an issue.

Robert Reinecke, the head, gave me the $5,000 check, their maximum to give. He said, “But far more important than this would be if I give you the copy of the Constitution I carry in my pocket.” He didn’t know that Justice [Hugo] Black of the Supreme Court also made a habit of carrying his Constitution in his pocket. When he was talking to somebody, he’d fiddle in his pocket and say, “I can’t find my Constitution; can I borrow yours?”

They don’t realize it’s a teaching joke: Justice Black said every American should carry the Constitution in his pocket. Dr. Reinecke said, “Every time I talk in my capacity as head of the ophthalmologists, I say, ‘In this Constitution, if you’re charged with a crime you have a right to a lawyer. Isn’t it even more fundamental that if you’re sick you have a right to a doctor?’ You try it, and I think you’ll find that it helps you more than my $5,000.”

So I did. Business audiences, Labor audiences, families—black churches—they’d say, “Amen!” It really clicked. My wife had an autoimmune disease that required a lot of anti-inflammatory medicine over ten years before she got acute leukemia. She was literally scared that if I lost the Senate election I would have no job at that point, and we would lose our health insurance.

Now, there’s a six-month provision she didn’t know about until somebody corrected her, that you can continue to pay—COBRA [Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act]. We were doing well. With the nomination, I resigned the state government job. We had no backlog of any money. She said, “How could we afford it?” We were obviously upper middle class. You like to think middle class, but I think in those days it was $60,000 and above and you were in the top 5% of the United States. My wife to this day would never imagine that we weren’t middle class. It doesn’t leave the upper class very many seats.
I called Carville and said, “We ought to use this in ads.” He said, “Senator, you’re so academic and theoretical. That’s a theoretical proposition. I don’t think that would go in an election, talking about the Constitution.” I said, “Well, it seems to be working.” I told him once more that I used it and it got the best response of anything I said. Sure enough, to his credit, when we did the ads, one of them said that. We just filmed it in a studio the first time. Then Carville said, “We’re going to do it again; we’re going to do it in a doctor’s office.”

My friend Carl Marcy was a medical student then, about to go back to Harvard Medical School, and on this Saturday, he was going around with us as a volunteer in the campaign. The doctor who was going to pose with me in the ad didn’t show up and we were all ready for the shoot. Carville or Bob Shrum, or whoever was doing the filming, said to Carl, “You’re a medical student; put on those robes.” So he got all dressed up in doctor’s white, and he’s in the background of the ad where I say it.

Carville got all sorts of kudos for that ad. We encountered Dr. Reinecke on various occasions after I was elected, where we honored him for the election. I did it regularly. He became a living prop. He enjoyed it very much; he’s a real good guy. In the Wall Street Journal, Al Hunt did a column that I read one day before going to swim at the YMCA here. He talked about the genius of James Carville, how he had this academic character for a candidate and he finally got a message down that he, Carville, thought up this thing about the Constitution and that was what really enabled Wofford to carry this message, because Carville thought of the idea of connecting it to the Constitution.

He said, “My nightmare was that Harris would start talking about Mahatma Gandhi, get off message, and I finally found a way to explain to him what ‘Stay on the message’ means. I said, ‘Re-read all of [Abraham] Lincoln’s speeches, from his Cooper Union speech to the Second Inaugural, and you’ll see that he stayed on message. It was how to check slavery without losing the union or how to save the union without expanding slavery. He argued and re-argued it, but he stayed on message.’ That finally got through to him.”

Well, I’m the one who said to James Carville one day, “You know, you don’t need to press this point about the message other than to keep reminding me, because I re-read all of Lincoln’s speeches recently from the Cooper Union on, and he’s doing just what you like, James: he stayed right on message.” So I said to Al Hunt, “You had a lively column, but each of the stories is sort of upside down.” I told him what I just told you. Al apparently called James right away, and that night I got a call from Carville. “Senator, I have an abject apology. I got carried away. I know that that doctor gave you those lines, and I know that you told me to read Lincoln, and I just somehow misspoke.”

**Martin:** For those reading the transcript, we should note that Mr. Wofford is giving a good imitation of Carville.

**Wofford:** Did my best imitation.
Chidester: Can you talk a little bit more about the relationship between you and those two consultants, Begala and Carville? They’ve become such larger-than-life personalities now, but back then they were—They had run Casey’s campaign, but they weren’t national figures.

Wofford: The Casey campaign should have gotten more attention because he had lost twice before, and lots of people thought the third time was going to be Casey striking out at bat. But he didn’t get that much attention. Casey had an inner sense of grievance. Once he said to me—and I know he said it to a number of other people—“If I had not been an Irish, Roman Catholic, anti-abortion Governor, the kind of victory we had—which was a big victory in the state we’re in—would have made me a contender for the Presidency in everyone’s mind. The liberal bias against someone like me in the Democratic Party is deep.”

So, now we get to the morning after my victory. I say that morning, but within 24 hours or so Clinton was on the phone to me saying, “Tell me about this fellow Carville. Should I consider him to be campaign manager for me? What do you say?”

I said, “He’s wild and he’s brilliant and he’s tough. It was a good gamble for me, and it would probably be a good gamble for you.” He had a lot of trouble already—no, I guess this is earlier. None of the harder stuff had hit him. He said, “I’m going to see him.”

So for better or worse, I take a little credit for the events around my campaign. We gave Carville to the public scene. They’re a very good team, especially when they’re together. Paul Begala is as sharp, but has a softer edge. No, that isn’t the right word. He’s more collegial. Carville is dominating, and he expects you to be strong enough to push him back if you don’t like it. Paul Begala is easier going, and so they balance each other; they’re a very good team. It’s easier to like Paul almost all the time. James can get carried away with his conviction about something. He’s learned that to get something clear with the public or even talking to anyone, you have to overstate it and dramatize it as much as you can. Not only the way he talks, which I was imitating, but the thrust of his language.

When you’re riding high with him, it’s exciting. When you’re trying to get another thought in edgewise, it’s a little harder. He’s a very passionate person, passionate about a lot of the ideas he supports with his candidate. I think he’s passionately for social justice. The issue that really concerns me the most is his view of the world. I don’t really know James’s thinking—James’s world view. I have a real sense of his idea of America and what he would like it to be. There’s a critical edge to some of what I am saying about James, but I don’t have that feeling about Paul. They’re both very generous and loyal to people in their domain, on their team.

Martin: From the beginning of this campaign, it seems that the campaign goes beyond Pennsylvania. You’re running against a close associate of George Bush, and in many ways—at least according to these articles—this is somewhat of a trial balloon, a referendum for the 1992 election. Can you go more into the themes you developed, how you went about discussing middle-class issues, economic issues, and what role the national party had in joining you in creating these themes?
Wofford: I don’t remember any role of the national party. Do you know the chairman during that time? I haven’t any idea right now.

Martin: It could have been [Ron] Brown.

Wofford: I don’t think so. This is before Clinton. No, it wouldn’t have been Ron Brown.

Martin: It might have been Paul Kirk.

Wofford: Paul Kirk, very possibly. He was, as a young man, by the way, head of the Young College Democrats, which is the group that actually first put out a proposal for a Peace Corps in the 1960 Presidential campaign. They didn’t use the word “Peace Corps,” I think, but it was the same idea, and something like it had been suggested in several books. The College Democrats—perhaps Paul Kirk—drafted a letter over Kennedy’s signature, proposing this. It went out to College Democrats. None of us knew about this letter until after Kennedy had spontaneously proposed the idea in vague terms at the University of Michigan. In any case, what you most want from the national party, at least according to my Senatorial candidate’s view, is money.

Who you want engaged with you is somebody like Carville. You’re plotting the campaign. You just do it directly. But the key unit that we were dealing with was the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee. Chuck Robb was the chair, and this was the year before one-third of the Senators were to be elected every two years. I don’t know how many Senators there were on the Democratic side up for election in 1992, 20 or 15, 19 or whatever. The Senate Campaign Committee was out of money. They were just beginning to try to collect some money for the ’92 campaign. Literally, hardly anyone thought I had a chance. My wife and I did, my sons probably did, and Carville and Begala did. There were some true believers, but not many. I was 47 points behind, I think, in the first poll.

I got extraordinary royal treatment in the Senate after my appointment when I arrived. Half a dozen or more Senators got up and gave little paeans of praise to me. That kind of reception was very flattering. I suppose they were all Democrats, but it’s in the Congressional Record, and I think it made an impression in Pennsylvania that I was treated that way when I arrived.

But Chuck Robb said to the Senators on the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee something like, “I will not approve any money for Harris, however much we may like him, unless every one of the Senators coming up next year agrees that we should go into debt or use the very little we have for him in a probably losing race when there are vital races coming up one year from now.”

George Mitchell, Tom Daschle, and Alan Cranston went to every one of those 19 or so Senators—Daschle, I think, was one of them—and talked to them. So in the committee meeting that I wasn’t privy to (it was a closed meeting of those Senators), Daschle began by saying, “I think we have to support Harris with a generous dose.” I think they gave us $500,000, beginning with a quarter of a million and more to come if we showed any gains in the polls. That was combined with Labor’s almost unanimous enthusiastic support—based in part on the conditions of the country, but also my work for four years as Labor and Industry Secretary.
The absolutely crucial ability to get on television and otherwise get on the air came from my fellow Senators. Just like that story about the doctor giving the line about the Constitution and healthcare, a lot of the things were on the run, spontaneous as is probably the case in most Presidential campaigns. I certainly know how much more spontaneity and less planning was in the 1960 Kennedy campaign than people think about the Kennedy machine.

But in our campaign, that was certainly true. People who tried to find out how to crack the atom, produce the atomic bomb, had to try different ways to get at it. When we began, nobody knew quite what the way to win was. The press treated me as “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington,” a political innocent, an outsider going in. The outsider, the innocent Mr. Smith type, Jimmy Stewart type, was repeatedly in press and other treatments of me. It initially drove my wife crazy. She was a great campaigner, and she thought, *You can’t be that dishonest. You’re a fish back in water.*

When she knew me at 17, I had organized the Student Federalists nationally and had spent a good part of the summer of ’43, my seventeenth summer, in Washington, D.C., lobbying the Senate for the B2H2 bill—the Ball-Burton-Hatch-Hill Bill—two Democrats, two Republicans—to pledge that the United States Senate would support American entry into a world organization with power to keep the peace after the war.

In 1937, at age 11, I was convinced that packing the Supreme Court was a bad thing, and I have a scrapbook with messages from Senators who wrote me, *“Master Harris Wofford, thank you for your support of my effort to keep [Franklin D.] Roosevelt from packing the Supreme Court.”* In ’36, at age 10, in a Republican family, I had decided I was for Franklin Roosevelt. It was not a Roosevelt-hating family. We always listened to the fireside chats, and I remember listening to his Inaugural Address: “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” I was in politics at age seven. From 1948 on, Clare [Wofford] and I had been at every Democratic convention. In 1944, when I was in the Army Air Corps in World War II, I couldn’t go, but Clare was there. We were always on the floor in some capacity.

So she thought this was a complete bamboozle of the public. I was a fish back in water and people should know that I am an experienced political type, etc. James said, “Clare, the best thing we have going is that they think he’s Mr. Smith going to Washington. Don’t you spoil that image.” Then Thornburgh made the great mistake when he left Washington, as Attorney General, to think he was coming back to Pennsylvania for a coronation—that’s the way Republicans treated it. The Cabinet met on the White House lawn and sent him off. I think they had a band, but that may be an exaggeration. They gave him this royal send-off. I think there was a helicopter. But in any case, the press covered this. He landed in Philadelphia, coming back to take the crown.

They didn’t actually nominate him until September. This was early summer, I think, or mid-summer. He let them raise money for the pre-primary and during the primary, and then we got into a little trouble because we did the same thing, even though we’d had the convention earlier. But Thornburgh went out in front of the cameras, and almost his opening words—very shortly into his announcement—were something like, “I have walked the corridors of power in
Washington, I know the corridors of power in Washington. I can be your representative because I know those corridors of power.”

James Carville immediately got me on the phone. He said, “We’ve got him, we’ve got him. You have to go on the air and take him on, right now. In the next ten minutes you have to go out and say, ‘Well, there’s the issue. He wants to go back and walk the corridors of power that he knows so well, and I want to go down and sweep them clean.’” So we hooked him to Washington that first day.

On the other hand, after the Gulf War, Bush the First, was what? 70% popular? Carville’s number-one rule, from beginning to end of our campaign, was never criticize President Bush because he’s too popular. You don’t get anywhere doing it. Deal with the Republican administration and the Republicans and their policies and Congress’ policies, particularly in the Senate and Thornburgh’s policies on S&L [savings and loan], but don’t you touch George Bush.

I got carried away about a week before the election in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, I think. It was a labor rally, and I was beginning to feel this incredible surge everywhere I went, an electrical enthusiasm. There were 500—a lot of ex-coal miners and others—cheering. It made me feel like football stars must feel when they win a game in high school.

When I went down the aisle, and one coal miner, I think it was, said to me, “Harris, when you win next Tuesday, it’s going to mark the first day of the end of the Bush administration.” I got up, and the first words I said were, “What’s your name?” He gave me his name—Joe Smith, we’ll just say. I said, “Joe Smith, right there as we came in said to me and I say to you now that our victory next Tuesday is going to mark the first day of the end of the Bush administration.” They went wild. And the AP [Associated Press] was covering it. It was on the wire within ten minutes: “Wofford makes his election a test of the Bush administration.”

Within minutes, I had both sons, my wife, James Carville, probably Bob Shrum, all calling to our car saying, “You’ve done it; you’ve blown it; you can’t ever do it; you may have lost the election by saying that when it was just going our way. Don’t ever do anything like that again.” So I didn’t do it again until victory night when I said, “As I said last Tuesday in Uniontown, this victory marks the first day of the end of the Bush administration.” By then Carville was happy to claim that we had brought about the first day of the end of the Bush administration.

**Martin:** You mentioned something that struck me as indicative of that campaign: a pioneering of this rapid response to the opposition. It corresponds, I think, to a certain degree, with changes in technology. Email was very new at this point, and fax machines were becoming more and more useful. How did your campaign embrace these technologies? Was that a Carville intention? How did that work?

**Wofford:** Over my 80 years now, that trend has been so dramatic when you think of it, but I can’t say I was thinking of a technological revolution then. The example of getting on the air right away: as you know, I was in the thick of the Kennedy campaign, and we had a lot of that going on then right away, on radio, less on television. AP was getting its wires out right away.
As for the rapid response, in that sense, Carville—and Begala—were probably far ahead, and I give a lot of credit to Bob Shrum in our campaign. He’s had a lot of defeats, but he ought to get credit for playing a very significant role in our messaging on that campaign. All of them were probably more in tune to the value of the rapid response than I was. It may be that we were more of a sharp example of it than the public knew about before. I suspect Carville’s other earlier campaigns had done it and usually the Republicans have been ahead on things like this—on the negative side, anyway.

But certainly, trying to get on the offensive right away rather than stay on the defensive was our rule, and “corridors of power” was taking the offensive. It was Thornburgh’s offensive, but bang, we were on the offensive once we hit the line, “He’s from the corridors of power, and that’s what’s wrong with Washington, too many people like that.”

The negative of that was that three years later, we didn’t succeed in the first big debate with [Rick] Santorum. We were each asked to say what our campaign was about. He had the opening gambit. My wife and I had argued with the campaign planning groups, with Carville and Mandy Grunwald, that I ought to be turned loose on national service because I played a major role in getting the national service bill through in 1993—and helped shape the earlier one in 1990 before I was a Senator, the Martin Luther King Day of Service bill. And we had failed on national healthcare. She said, “He’s been championing this for 30 years, and he’s more red-hot on this than anything else. You don’t have anything else that’s a big achievement you can talk about and go all-out for.”

James said, “Clare, you just don’t understand. National service is nice, and—unless they’re just against it—most people think it sounds fine. But it’s out on the periphery, and no one can bring it from the periphery into the center of a political campaign. It’s not going to affect anybody’s vote.” He just demolished Clare. She didn’t change her mind, but we didn’t do it. She was particularly arguing for a strong ad on this, an offensive ad.

So we go onto the first debate a little later, and Santorum’s lot is to go first. He begins by saying something like, “The issue of this campaign is what has Harris achieved there. He certainly didn’t get what he promised to go down and do, which was universal healthcare, national health insurance. What he did get is AmeriCorps and national service, and that’s a 1960s idea for hippie kids to hold hands around the campfire singing ‘Kumbaya’ at taxpayers’ expense.” I noticed the E.J. Dionne article you gave me quotes Santorum saying, “I don’t think I used the word ‘hippie.’” He made an issue of national service, ridiculing it. He was on the offensive. We hadn’t staked our ground and identified with it. He nailed me on it.

You might be brighter than I was as to how you answer that and how you get on the offensive again when you face a good strong opening offense. I’ve heard both Carville and Begala say, “We just couldn’t figure out at the time how to go against the strong current.” On that or other issues.

We did have a technological breakthrough that almost worked. We were neck and neck the last couple of weeks of October. Teresa Heinz had said that if she thought there was a chance that Santorum could win, she would publicly support me and break with the party, but it was very
painful for her to do at that time. But she decided she would. Independently, she got the University of Pittsburgh to call a convocation, invite people from the community and give this speech on what’s wrong with American politics and what’s right with it—her husband, what he stood for, bringing people together in the common good. Not demonizing, not an extremist. Then she ended by saying something like, “That’s why it’s so heartbreaking to find my party nominating a candidate to take John Heinz’s place who represents so much of what is wrong in our politics and is the direct antithesis of John Heinz.”

By then it was so late that it was very hard to buy enough time—she didn’t let us put an ad on for another week, until she was sure that we were really in trouble. Then we put the ad on, but we couldn’t get the mass audience we wanted. I don’t know how much effect it would have had, but it was too late. But we had a victory because the campaign had assigned a wonderful young woman who gave us a breakthrough—and the night before the election, when we thought we had turned the corner and we thought the signs were good, we gave her credit for what looked like victory.

She had followed Santorum around with a tape recorder—maybe videotape, I don’t know—and had been taping him. At Temple University she slipped into a class where he was asked, “What’s the problem with Social Security, and what would you do?” He said—more or less, I’m remembering—“The problem with Social Security is that people are living too long. When the Act was passed, it was assumed that by 65 most people would be dead. But now they’re living to 70 and 80 and 90 years old. The Social Security system has to reflect the change, so we have to raise the age to 70—and I’d go further if I could—before they could draw on it.”

We got that on an ad right away—“I’d go further if I could.” That was about two weeks before the election. We put that out everywhere, and we did pull ahead. So by election weekend, we thought that ad had really saved the day. That weekend there was a surge, all over New Jersey, New York—perhaps a national surge. There was nothing we could attribute it to in Pennsylvania. But if you believed the polls, if they were right before, they said that there was this surge of three, four, five points, and we lost by two points, 80-some thousand out of 3.8 million, something like that. But that was technological. I don’t know how long those tapes have been going, probably back at least to Kennedy’s time.

Martin: The ability to turn things around that quickly was probably novel. You book-ended very nicely your two campaigns. So much of your Senate service is tracking parallel to Clinton’s initial run, his victory, the debate on healthcare, and your fate and Clinton’s fate seemed intimately tied together. We were hoping to capture quite a bit of those two stories running parallel.

Wofford: I read a number of the articles you gave me—I think I read them all at the time. It’s making me remember how some astute people in my own ranks, chief of communications David Stone and my older son (or both sons), wanted me to break much more sharply with Hillary’s plan when it was clear that it was going down, to break away much sooner and more clear-cut than I did. They were critical of my loyalty to Bill and Hillary during the Senate period, before the reelection campaign. It was not something I could readily do. I couldn’t do it.
We made one effort to come up with a constructive initiative that might help turn the corner. My wife suggested that we get Pat Moynihan—who had done a lot of damage to Hillary’s plan despite all the good things he did and said in his life—great, good things—by more or less saying that Hillary’s healthcare plan was dead on arrival. The White House in its arrogance—somebody there—dismissed Moynihan in contemptuous form. They said, “What he said doesn’t make any difference,” or something like that. It was very offensive to him.

Martin: The quote was that they were “going to roll him.”

Wofford: Yes, something like that. Is that what they said?

Martin: Something like that.

Wofford: She thought Pat would probably like to have a constructive opportunity on healthcare, and we got Bob Kerrey, who pegged his Presidential campaign on healthcare, to have a dinner with us. We had a good friend, Tom Hughes, who was an Oxford friend of Pat Moynihan and head of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace then, one of my closest friends of over 50 years, at the dinner too. It was a very merry dinner in Moynihan fashion: Kerrey and Hughes were very witty. And then we got serious on healthcare.

Pat Moynihan said, “Harris, you have to understand that Clinton’s first administration is going to be a catastrophe, but we will teach him how to govern. In his second administration, he may get it right.”

Martin: Is this ’92, ’93?

Wofford: This was the winter of ’93-’94.

Martin: That’s very early.

Wofford: Remember that the healthcare plan was introduced by Hillary to the Congress in extraordinary all-day (maybe day-and-a-half) sessions of the Senate and the House. She and Ira Magaziner (and maybe somebody else), presented it and then for hours answered questions. I was sitting in the midst of Republican Senators, who were dazzled by it. They said, “She’s really got it.” The plan was supported by 70% of the people in the first months of polling, and Clinton’s popularity was way up.

I don’t know when the “Harry and Louise” ads started, and I don’t know when Arlen Specter started with his Rube Goldberg chart of how complicated this healthcare plan was. For the Democratic answer, we had a far more complicated chart of the present healthcare system. That was on the defensive. But day after day Arlen would go out there with his chart. I have a copy of it, and afterwards I asked him to inscribe one for me. I had it framed. It did huge damage to the plan. It was brilliant, and Arlen just kept going back to the floor with it.

And those “Harry and Louise” ads. The state troopers came into the picture, with the story of the woman who complained she went up to the hotel room. The state troopers were giving these
remarks, testimony or allegations to the press, and it hit the front pages of papers. Maybe the Paula Jones case was still bubbling along, and Whitewater. By May—six months after the Hillary plan was presented—the Lexis count of newspaper articles showed something like 28,000 articles on sex and Whitewater, or maybe they separated them. One was sex, one was Whitewater, and one was healthcare. Healthcare was down about 17,000. The other two were way up.

Clinton’s popularity in the six months had gone from 70% down to 38% or something like that, and the healthcare plan had gone down to 40-some percent. It was kind of the perfect storm of alleged misbehavior by Bill Clinton or the Clintons on Whitewater, which turned out to be nothing, in my opinion—and more her portrait than what I thought that in the end was the opinion of the investigator. It was in that context that the healthcare plan began to look very touch-and-go. We were beginning to be pessimistic about what could emerge—not that we were committed to her plan getting through as it was, but even getting any good, significant leap forward or big first step.

So we had that dinner to consider how to help get that first step. Then Pat Moynihan said, “Harris, this isn’t the time for us to try to come up with a joint plan.” Now, looking back I don’t think he would want to be in a joint plan; he wanted to save the day in a different way or a bigger way than with me and Bob Kerrey. But Pat said, “Come spring, there will come a time for a compromise, and you can count on me and we can count on Bob Dole. Bob is a patriot and he wants to make progress on healthcare for everybody. We will come up with a plan, and the sailing will be good.” That was the end of that effort.

Come spring, several times I said to Pat, “Don’t you think the time has come?” Finally, rather bleakly, he said, “Harris, the time has passed. Bob tells me that they’ve tasted blood in the Republican caucus, and they’re going to drive a stake into this plan. He said he couldn’t get his caucus even to support his healthcare bill if we agreed that the Dole bill should pass.”

Our counterpoint, mine and some other Senators’—was to start pressing for a children’s healthcare proposal, to try to get universal coverage for children. They passed the children’s health insurance program [CHIP] in the next Congress. Carville and others think that if that program had been passed that spring, I would probably readily have had those extra votes to win in Pennsylvania in 1994. It would have been a kind of victory, a very significant step.

**Martin:** You and Tom Daschle had introduced a bill for national healthcare. Was that plan, or that bill, embraced or ignored by Hillary Clinton’s group?

**Wofford:** Can you date when that plan was? It was before Clinton became President, wasn’t it?

**Martin:** April of ’92.

**Wofford:** The Clintons developed their own, somewhat different, approach in the Presidential campaign. They didn’t pick it up as the Daschle-Wofford plan; that wasn’t their business. Their business was what does Clinton want to do? So I don’t think our plan had any impact. I don’t know who was around Clinton on healthcare at that point. I was increasingly focused on our new
pitch that we used while I was a Senator and leading up to the 1994 election. What we want is healthcare for all Americans that’s the equivalent of the healthcare that Congress has arranged for itself. This points to an employer-based plan. The government for its employees puts in 75 or 80%, and you then can choose from the whole range of private health insurance. If it’s more expensive, you pay a little more. If it’s less expensive, the government covers a higher proportion of it.

I also had a little victory in the Senate, on the issue of free medical care for Senators. For some reason I had some medical moment that I needed to go to the attending physician, and I learned that the attending physician attends members of Congress and their families and the staff and tourists who are there and get sick in Congress. Senators get free medicine. Admiral whatever his name was, who went up to the multibillion-dollar man—a fascinating admiral, who had been Haile Selassie’s doctor in Ethiopia before we went over there in ’62, a wonderful guy. I had had this good treatment down there. Then I said, “This is wrong. We have this wonderful healthcare plan, and now we also get everything free. Why shouldn’t we pay for this extra service?” It was demagogic in a sense. So I put this bill in, but I made the mistake of not talking to this admiral in charge. It think he’s called the Capitol Attending Physician, but it’s always an admiral.

So I went down and said, “I should have talked to you before I put this bill in.” And he said, “I understand exactly your principle, Senator, but you have to understand, if yours should pass, I’m going to ask for relief from this job. The reason I like this job is I don’t have to deal with paperwork. I’m not trying to save or to cut costs; I’m just trying to give the best medical treatment. It’s the ideal medical practice, and you’re destroying it for me if it gets passed.”

I said, “Would it be that hard to have a little HMO [health maintenance organization]—” which I’d been learning more about—“just for these services and get an independent appraisal of what the average value is and charge that? You wouldn’t have any paperwork; somebody else charges the annual fee. Couldn’t we have a very simple one?”

He said, “That’s a brilliant idea. I’d love it. That would be fine.” So that’s what we worked out. The bill passed. It was adopted. They estimated, I think, $600 a year, something like that. The House did the same thing soon afterwards. They weren’t very pleased that I had done this, but they figured they had to do the same thing. They had a study as to what the value was, and I think it came out $300 or something like that. It was the same service, but they—

**Martin:** They’re working men over there.

**Wofford:** They’re working people. So he stayed. But that became my model: “the state employees healthcare plan”—I had that in Pennsylvania in Governor Casey’s cabinet. So this was my own public pitch to people. We did a variety of town meetings and circuits on healthcare. Hillary came to one of the big conferences we arranged. We had a little slogan, a bumper sticker, something like “the same healthcare for you that Congress has for itself.” The Daschle–Wofford plan was a version—not single-payer, but a single-system—that was not employer-based. It was public premiums. I’d forgotten about it until I read the clipping, because it didn’t go anywhere after that.
The next thing that happened is Clinton is elected, and then he picks Hillary to run his healthcare task force—which I was intrigued with, and in favor of when he did it. It’s one of those things—she planned a massive set of task forces—that if it had succeeded would be a footnote in history on how you really can get a common problem dealt with by having a lot of outstanding people working on it night and day. I think we had two members of my staff assigned to the Hillary task force, but they were among many other people.

They were off to the races, but under huge pressure. Hillary was always respectful and friendly. If I wanted to volunteer an idea, she was happy, and she was delighted with the staff or persons we had on her taskforce. There were different taskforces where you could have different staff members, and we were very much in the group that was involved.

But I had to fight to get an appointment with the President or Hillary with ideas on the healthcare plan. I’m saying this with an understanding of the pressures she was under from all sides, all the constituencies. She knew I was on her side.

Let me add a parenthesis. The former president of Georgetown before the current president, a priest—unlike the first civilian president they have there now—knew Clinton well at Georgetown, I believe as a student. Clinton’s class met for a reunion while he was President, one of their big reunions. The Georgetown president said to me, “I don’t know anybody, anyone I’ve ever known, who has as many friends who think they’re close personal friends as Bill Clinton. And it goes back to his kindergarten with [Thomas] Mack McLarty, and a second person in Clinton’s first grade or second or kindergarten who’d been with him, in high school. And that was true at Georgetown.” And I know it’s true of his class at Yale Law School.

Gregory Craig—you probably will have him for interviews—was Clinton’s private lawyer, brought in to play a major role in the impeachment hearings. He made a big impact on television. Greg for some years was Ted Kennedy’s foreign policy advisor, and he’s a leading partner at Williams and Connolly. He was head of the Harvard student body at the time Clinton was protesting the war in England. Greg was organizing the student body letter to [Lyndon Baines] Johnson against the war—a wonderful guy.

Greg says that most of the people he knew in their law school class considered Bill Clinton the best representative of their generation—although I’m sure there were many people in that class who didn’t. And the same at Oxford. And the same as he went from one place to another.

Jay [John D. IV] Rockefeller came up to me on the floor of the Senate and said, “Harris, I have to tell you—because I know how much you like Bill Clinton, and how close you are to him, and I am, too—I think I love him more than anybody in this Senate. But he never calls me in. I don’t get invited over to the White House. I don’t see him.” I said, “I don’t either, Jay.” Jay is a former organizer of the Peace Corps and went to West Virginia with VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America].

I said, “You have to realize the other side. So many people he likes feel close to him—think of the pressure he must feel. All these people want to hear from him.”
I have two areas of real respect for Clinton in terms of the amazing way he handles the pressures. One is just what the Presidency is like, or what it’s like being a Presidential candidate. Then, once you’re elected, the awe that goes with it—not just of people for the Presidency, but the issues. Of course, from Kennedy on, nuclear war was part of the awe, the power, the burden you have and how much time you have to spend on foreign policy. It’s more than people realize as things blow up here and there, as we know right now.

Then there’s this additional factor of Clinton’s list of close personal “Friends of Bill.” It’s quite unusual to have that on such a scale. In retrospect, I wish I’d had some bull sessions with the President—not just with me, but a few other people beyond Hillary’s taskforce, on healthcare. I have nothing but admiration for my own encounters with Ira Magaziner, but he was in such high gear that I never had any feeling that he thought he needed any advice from me.

**Martin:** That’s one of the criticisms of Clinton’s healthcare program. They didn’t consult the Senate or the House enough; they tried to do a program on their own.

**Wofford:** I agree.

**Martin:** Your comment about not getting invited over, and Senator Rockefeller’s concurrence with that, also seems like it’s one of the recurring patterns of Clinton, especially in the early years: not paying enough attention to the Senate.

**Wofford:** The intoxication of the victory, and for Clinton coming from so far behind, reminded me of that sense of intoxication or over-reaching we had in the first days of the Kennedy administration, exultation with which Dick Goodwin remembers the President turning to him at the inaugural parade and saying, “The Coast Guard marching through doesn’t have any blacks in it. What the hell do they think they’re doing? Call them up and say I don’t want them to march in front of me again until they look more like America.” Goodwin says Kennedy said something like that to him on the inaugural stand, and it demonstrates the sense of power he had: going in the next morning, calling the head of the Coast Guard. It was overreaching.

The Bay of Pigs was a sobering factor for Kennedy, and the Cuban Missile Crisis was another huge one. But there was undoubtedly a kind of arrogance of power that goes with the exultation of being swept in, and by only 100,000 votes in Kennedy’s case. Clinton went in with a lot of people already thinking he was not legitimate; they were trying to de-legitimize him. So I have tremendous respect for how Clinton navigated all of this, including the disappointment that his huge energy went in the wrong direction on occasion.

**Martin:** You mentioned your discussions with Senator Moynihan about eventually getting a healthcare proposal through, and then this last conversation about this lack of consultation between the administration and several members of the Senate. Could you tell us more about the reaction within the Senate, the Senate Democratic caucus, to the administration’s proposal and then any plans to get an alternate proposal in? What did the leadership think? Tell us the inner workings from a Senator’s perspective at this time.
Wofford: I think George Mitchell was dedicated to trying to pilot it through and to work with them. I don’t know that he wasn’t consulted. You’d have to press George on that. One felt he was captain of the ship to get that plan through. As far as I know, he was very loyal to it, right to the end. Knowing him, I would expect he was also candid about prospects as things went along. That’s a good question, but I don’t know the answer.

There were Clinton loyalists. Former Governor David Pryor of Arkansas was a truly devoted friend. He knew Clinton’s shortcomings, presumably, whatever they are, from his experience with him. But David had this wise, supportive role, with Clinton and with other members. I think he was very respected by fellow members. I think his warmth toward Clinton and support of him was not insignificant in the Senate. Clinton and Hillary at first, until the ’94 election hit them so hard, were over-confident. I think a lot of people in Congress didn’t like working with the White House staff.

I think Moynihan and Bob Kerrey, as a former Presidential candidate who thought he should be President, would be in the other wing. The Senate is such a diverse group.

Martin: That’s a valuable insight.

Wofford: To give you the flavor: when Clinton and Al Gore went on their bus trip to St. Louis, they rolled through Pennsylvania, and from the time they were approaching Pennsylvania until they left, I was in the caravan. We spent a night in a hotel in York, and maybe the second night in Pittsburgh. But for a day and a half I was with them at each stop. At York, Clinton said, “Harris, join us for a run in the morning.” It was a sweltering hot day, not quite as bad as today, but awfully hot. I’m not a jogger particularly. I used to do a little bit, but never really very much.

He said, “Join us tomorrow.” I asked the Secret Service what’s it like, how long he goes and how fast. They said, “Oh, it won’t be hard. If it’s hot like this, he won’t keep it up.” So we started chugging around York, Pennsylvania, and I was having increasing trouble keeping up. I was working my hardest. I don’t know when it was—soon after he and Gore had been nominated at the convention.

We finally come towards the hotel, and thank God it was over. Clinton said, “For York and for Pennsylvania, let’s do another round!” So we set off. Al Gore could see that I was really having trouble on the second round. So he said, “You know, we haven’t had a chance to talk for a long time. Why don’t we walk in the last part, and we can have a real chance to talk by ourselves.” I said, “I’d love to do that, Al, but right now, in front of Pennsylvania, I can’t show inadequate fitness.” So I made it.

I got up to my hotel room. We had 20 minutes before the bus would leave, and I turned on a cold shower. It felt so good, and I felt so tired that I sat on the floor of the bathtub with the shower going. Somehow my door was unlocked, and Clinton burst in. He said, “I just wanted to see how you’re doing, Harris!”

Now, I got back to the Senate from that trip. Wendell [Ford] of Kentucky was one of the deputy leaders. He’s not there any more; he left some time ago. He was in the old guard in the
Democratic caucus of the Senate. He said, “Harris, come over here and tell me what it was like. I saw you on CNN or CSPAN getting on and off that bus with Bill and Hillary and Al and Tipper [Mary Elizabeth Gore]. Tell me what it was like riding with the four of them.”

I said, “You know, Wendell, the real delight was how much fun Al Gore was. I’ve never had time with him and I realized what fun he could be.” They joked with each other. Al was going at Clinton about his diet and his hours. They were really quite hilarious about it. It was a wonderful sense of rapport among the four of them. I had a good time with him and I told Wendell it was just such fun being with him. Wendell called out to others in the Democratic cloakroom, “Hey, everybody, come over here. Harris has spent a day and a half on a bus with Al Gore and said it was a lot of fun. Come over and hear Harris tell how Al Gore could be fun.”

**Martin:** We’ve actually heard that from a lot of interviews, which is important because of the perception in the press that he doesn’t have a sense of humor.

**Wofford:** I have to say I haven’t seen too many examples of it since. I know more about what Wendell means. On the other hand, I saw An Inconvenient Truth and was tremendously impressed with it. It’s baldly Presidential prepping. On the one hand, he’s denying that it is, while on the film he’s very obvious about it. It’s very powerful. Have either of you seen it?

**Martin:** It has just shown up in Charlottesville.

**Wofford:** You should see it, absolutely. A right wing, relatively conservative, born again, great young friend of mine from Spartanburg, South Carolina, against all the Gore and Clinton people, has seen it, and it knocked him over. He’s gotten all engaged, taking on his family on global warming. It’s a powerful piece.

**Martin:** I want to keep going with healthcare, but I have to break for a second with this because you prompted me to think about the selection of Gore as Vice President. I don’t know if there’s a better time. I wanted to get your story of being interviewed by Clinton for the Vice Presidency.

**Wofford:** First it began with Warren Christopher coming to my apartment, very privately, with Jim Hamilton—the lawyer who was key in Clinton’s impeachment, his personal lawyer for some years—a very bright, appealing guy. I think the two of them came to say that they had narrowed the Vice Presidential choice down to—my recollection is about four people.

**Martin:** Do you remember who these were?

**Wofford:** Al Gore was one, Jim Hamilton was another. Clinton lists five people in his biography. I’m just trying to remember who the other was. [Robert] Graham, I think, may be the one Clinton added that I wasn’t told about. In the first place, they didn’t tell me then who the others were. Later on it became more or less public. The people who had the interviews became public. One of them didn’t become public, and it was perhaps Graham of Florida.

**Martin:** I’m glad you clarified that.
**Wofford:** Geographically a Pennsylvania nominee was a reasonable thought. I was a wild card. My wife was very dubious, very worried that it would be a wrong thing if he did. She wanted to make sure if we got to the point of talking to Clinton that I revealed the negative research we had done for my own campaign, which we shared. Clinton knew the degree to which—I have wonderful literature about world government—my campaigning for a United States of the world—from age 17 to 24. It had been used in the campaign against me by Thornburgh; he leaked it to the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*—big article, front page: “Wofford youthful crusader for the super-liberal World Federalists.”

Carville and others were very worried and were planning how we would answer it. In the next few days letters to the editor began appearing saying the World Federalists were not super liberal and that the long-time head of the Pittsburgh chapter was Senator Heinz’s father [John Heinz, Jr.]. It was true: Clare Boothe Luce and Henry Luce were supporters. It was not a liberal left thing; it began with people who wanted to form a union of democracies to fight [Adolph] Hitler. Then after the atomic bomb—they got quite a distinguished group of people, including top business leaders of Pittsburgh, saying this. That was the last we heard of it in the campaign. Nevertheless, it would have been really lively language to use against a Vice Presidential candidate.

Second, I was arrested at the Chicago Democratic convention in a peaceful protest, not directly related to the war. I have a chapter on that ’68 arrest in *Of Kennedys and Kings*. Bill Moyers and others of us planned a vigil between the park protesters and the police for what they had done. It was peaceful, but I did spend a night in jail. There’s a mug shot that I don’t have, but anyone could have gotten. At about that same time Clinton was protesting the war over in England in front of the American Embassy, and that would have been a double whammy. These are the things my wife brought up.

Friends in the past had taken me by surprise and printed a tiny photograph from India when I was wearing Gandhi-type garb—with a short beard I had for some months in 1949. Clare could just see that in a Republican ad. My wife would be a good negative researcher.

[BREAK]

**Wofford:** We were on the Vice Presidency. Warren Christopher writes [in *Chances of a Lifetime*], “On Sunday June 7, Mickey Kantor and I called Clinton, and he told us to proceed to the next stage with five candidates: Senator Gore, Congressman Hamilton, Governor [Mario] Cuomo—” (that was the surprise, I hadn’t heard) “—Pennsylvania Senator Harris Wofford, and former Senator Paul Tsongas. That Tsongas was on the list, despite his sharp criticism of Clinton during the primary season, is a good example of Clinton’s willingness to let his superb political instincts, rather than his personal feelings, guide him in such decisions.”
I’m sure his choices for the priority list reflected impressions he had received on the campaign trail as well as my reports on the interviewees. I promised the five candidates that our investigations would be confidential, and the results would be returned to them or destroyed after they had served their purpose.

“Both Wofford and Hamilton promptly promised to cooperate, though Hamilton said he could not commit to accepting the candidacy if it was offered to him.” (I don’t think they asked me that question.) “He was apparently hesitant to give up his chairmanship of the House International Relations Committee and was also concerned about policy differences with Clinton.

“I reached Senator Gore in Rio de Janeiro, where he was attending a U.N. conference on the environment.” (That was a big thing for Gore’s move toward the environment, by the way.)

“He asked for twenty-four hours to reflect, and when we talked the next day, his answer was affirmative but conditional: he wanted an opportunity to reconsider the question after he returned home…. My call to Governor Cuomo about moving to the next stage did not go well. Although he had been amiable in our initial conversation, this call found him in a foul mood. The preceding day, on Meet the Press, he had advocated that Clinton meet with Majority Leader George Mitchell and Speaker Tom Foley to show that Democrats could get something done in Washington. Cuomo was miffed because Clinton, when asked if Cuomo was stealing his thunder, said he ‘didn’t mind.’ Cuomo worried aloud, for reasons he did not explain, that Clinton’s comment would produce a ‘bad story’ the next day in the New York Times. (It did not.)

“When I asked Cuomo if he would cooperate in our more intensive inquiries into his background, he replied that he knew we had already prepared a ‘book’ on him for use if he ran in the primary. (I could find no evidence that we had.) He added that the Republicans had had three gubernatorial campaigns to find something on him without any success. Then he said, ‘The answer is no,’ and abruptly terminated the call. The exchange left no doubt in my mind that if Cuomo was to be chosen as Clinton’s running mate, we would have to take him without much additional information. I promptly reported this to Clinton, and it reinforced concerns in the Clinton camp that despite Cuomo’s charm and formidable political skills, he would not be comfortable in the second chair.

“Paul Tsongas also asked to be dropped from the list of five. He attributed his decision to a combination of factors, including his strained financial condition, other family matters (perhaps referring to the lymphoma that took his life a few years later), and discomfort with a number two role.

“At that point” —this is it, the ones that I heard— “Clinton added two names, Nebraska Senator Bob Kerrey and Florida Senator Bob Graham…. On June 25, I summarized the results of our intensive inquiries and prepared him for his meetings with the five remaining candidates. I urged him to meet one-on-one with them so he could gauge the chemistry between each one and him, and form his own undiluted evaluation…. He agreed.”

That’s basically it.
“We set up the interviews for him at the Washington Hilton. To avoid the press, we arranged for a sports utility vehicle to bring the candidates to the hotel garage, from which they were whisked upstairs to Clinton’s well-guarded suite.

“Clinton was impressed with all the interviewees, but clearly there was something special about Al Gore. Scheduled for an hour on June 30, their encounter began at about 10:00 p.m. and continued until after 1:00 a.m. Clinton told me the next day that he was taken not only with Gore’s knowledge of national defense, the environment, and technology, but with his commitment to the need for change. Clinton also liked Gore’s national campaign experience,” etc. “Clinton obviously felt comfortable with Gore.”

“I told Clinton I was convinced that in Gore, Hamilton, Wofford, Kerrey, and Graham he had an excellent group of thoroughly investigated candidates from which to choose…. I urged him to make his choice without delay.” That’s basically it.

“Ron Brown said that Cuomo was interested in being considered after all. He was still unwilling, however, to submit to any intensive second-stage scrutiny of his background. As the message was delivered only a week before the convention was to open on July 13, I told Clinton that even if Cuomo agreed to a thorough investigation, there was not enough time to do the job. That ended the matter, once and for all.”

Then Clinton asked Christopher to come to Little Rock.

“En route to Little Rock, I stopped by Gore’s farm to tie up a couple of loose ends. We had a good conversation. As I was leaving, I told him that while Clinton had not reached a decision, I wanted to assure myself that if the call came to Gore, neither he nor Clinton would be embarrassed. He said that though he would give a direct commitment only to Clinton, the odds were great that he would not disappoint us.

“We were then joined by Mark Gearan, Bruce Lindsey, and from time to time, Hillary Clinton. Hillary had been a silent observer during our selection discussions, though I was well aware she had the opportunities to make her views known. We gathered around a table in the breakfast room.

“When it comes down to the wire, Clinton likes to keep several names in play. He went through the five names saying something positive about each, then conferring by telephone with trusted advisors such as Mickey Kantor.

“Around 10:30, Clinton said he was ready to invite Al Gore to run with him. Clinton found their similarities in age,” etc. “He felt an obligation to give the bad news to Senator Graham so he could file for another term in the Senate before the midnight deadline. I knew it was a tough decision for Clinton to communicate because of his affection for Graham. At 11:35, Clinton placed the call to Gore.”

The next morning at 6:30 or something like that, my wife called from our Bryn Mawr home to say that Andrea Mitchell had been on the phone saying she had to reach me immediately because
they had gotten word that during the night Clinton had chosen Gore and they wanted a comment from me, the last thing I wanted to give anyway. But my wife said she told her she would try to track me down, so she gave me the word. I didn’t call Andrea Mitchell back either.

My wife said, “I told you he wasn’t really seriously thinking about you; he was leading you on. I’m sure he picked Gore in the beginning, and this was all a mirage to make him feel good about these five people.”

I said, “Clare, if, at the end of our hour, hour and a half—it seemed long to me and a wonderful interview—he could give me the impression I got, that he was very seriously thinking about it—and was really thinking about Gore, putting me on—that’s another reason why I support him for President, because that’s the quality Roosevelt had.”

So when Clinton called—“Oh, it was the hardest decision I ever made, I can’t tell you how many times I went back and forth and up and down.” I told him what Clare had said. “No,” he said. He knew Clare quite well. “You tell her that’s not true, that’s not true. I did not have that intention.”

This is the answer I gave him: If it is true, granted the way we ended our discussion, it was another reason I was for him because it was like Roosevelt. He laughed heartily at that, and that was the end of that.

We were really worried right up to the end. I think we both, in our gut, didn’t think he was going to pick me, but my wife and I kept talking about whether we should tell him—the final thing was that I hadn’t been tested in the big leagues. My victory was kind of a fluke. The Vice Presidential nomination was too big a gamble. She was very cool about that. I had conveyed all those points to him in our interview and a few other things.

**Martin:** Tell us more about this meeting.

**Wofford:** It was on a par with the first meeting I had with Clinton in terms of intimacy.

**Martin:** The bus?

**Wofford:** Yes, the bus. It was very warm and very reflective of what our lives were like and how we would get along. It was very cordial.

**Martin:** Did he show you at all what he expected of a Vice President, not so much policy-wise—?

**Wofford:** I don’t remember him saying much about that. Chris says that he asked Chris to give a memorandum to him, what to expect of a Vice President, but I don’t remember Clinton saying that.

**Martin:** It sounds like Clinton was more trying to see whether he would get along with you as a person, rather than your policy positions.
**Wofford:** I think he knew how he would get along with me as a person. He didn’t need to ask me any questions to know the negatives. I had even mentioned them to him. But the basic negative of not having been in the big leagues—I’m not sure how I would have dealt with *Meet the Press* or others in terms of right, quick answers and a lot of other things like that. I don’t mean to sound too much like a shrinking violet, but I was generally worried that I might be the wrong choice. I genuinely thought he and I would make a great combination. I was obviously flattered and tempted, and I guess I would have said yes. But I don’t know, especially when I knew they had other really good people there.

**Martin:** When he won a few months later, did he try to take you away from the Senate for any other position?

**Wofford:** No, I never imagined that he would. You mean to a Cabinet position?

**Martin:** Anything in the administration.

**Wofford:** No. You know I had just gotten there. To lose the Senate seat would have been—there hadn’t been a Democrat in 32 years.

**Martin:** That’s a nice place to have friends.

**Wofford:** In the 1994 election Tom Ridge was running for Governor. We were on the same track together, and in fact Ridge hadn’t really liked Santorum in Congress. And some of his main backers in Erie were strong backers of mine, business leaders. On the campaign trail, we made it quite clear we liked each other quite a bit. He made it basically clear he hoped I’d win.

**Martin:** Interesting.

**Wofford:** A number of times our paths crossed. He was the Congressman from the city of some of my backers who were close backers of his.

**Martin:** Can we dovetail this back to a conversation about—?

**Wofford:** One more thing on the Vice Presidential search. Under Warren Christopher—and in my case, with this Jim Hamilton, the good attorney Clinton had tremendous confidence in—I was assigned Steve Silverman, who is now in Citigroup with Bob Rubin. Silverman was a wonderful guy. He was in the White House as one of the key members of the staff, and a young woman lawyer, Elizabeth Fine. They were assigned to me to do the “in-depth” interview. They had to have permission to go anywhere my papers were, such as the attic of our home in Bryn Mawr, to go all through the papers and look for anything negative. They worked very hard. I don’t know whether the other teams assigned to the other people became champions for the person they were interviewing, but in my case, Steve told me they were.

This [the report] is the first interview they conducted, Jim Hamilton, Elizabeth Fine, and Steve Silverman, apparently with notes. This is the transcript of an hour or so of interviews, their first one. I have to read this. This is sort of quoting me. They taped it. It just says “notes, prepared and
transcribed by Elizabeth Fine.” Jason [Levine] found this file and gave it to me, I haven’t looked at it. We gave them the negative research we had done on me, which was very strong, a well-done job. So they probably had read that. This may be useful for what I’m writing right now. They worked very hard for three weeks.

They interviewed my wife for several hours. They did tremendous reading of everything they could get their hands on that I’d written. So it was quite a process, to think they had that going on for half a dozen people.

Martin: I thought it would be nice to talk a little bit about your entry into the Senate, and especially your entry with respect to the issue of healthcare, because I would guess that in some ways you were in a mixed position. You had taken the lead in healthcare in your campaign, yet you were coming into the Senate as a junior person and probably running up against people, like Ted Kennedy, for example, who had long thought healthcare was their domain.

Wofford: Absolutely.

Martin: So I’m curious how your entry into the Senate worked.

Wofford: Remember, my entry was simultaneous with, six months later, my election. So my actual entry was while I was running full blast to win the election. For those six months, this wasn’t a question. It was assumed by almost everybody that I wouldn’t win. The only thing the other Democrats, like Ted or Pat Moynihan or Mitchell, were concerned with was whether there was some way they could help me win. They put me on the Foreign Relations Committee, over Carville’s objection. Carville still, I think, might say that if I hadn’t gone on that and spent a fair amount of time doing my homework and being an active member of the committee, but had spent that time at home in Pennsylvania or on other issues, I could have won.

I had the chance of being on the Finance Committee, it just didn’t interest me. I realize you have a lot of power and that’s where people get a lot of money more easily, but I just couldn’t see myself there. All my life, if I’d been asked, “What would you like to do in the Senate?” I would have said the Foreign Relations Committee. So I accepted that, and the Environment Committee with Max Baucus, and a third committee. Oh, Health, Education and Labor with Ted Kennedy. So I got my three choices. Those were three choice appointments. Everybody really wanted to help me.

You get a little bit of the mood in the Congressional Record in these speeches about me when I was appointed. So then I win the election, and this healthcare torch that I come carrying was the symbol of the Bush administration crumbling in support. Thornburgh was asked, “What happened to you?” He said, “They set me up, had me go down into the mine. I’m the canary that went into the mine and didn’t come back. That’s the signal to my friends on the Republican side—I was the canary that didn’t come back.” This is one year before the Clinton election. So they were very anxious to have me in with Ted or Mitchell or Daschle in shaping whatever we did on healthcare during that period.

Martin: Who was it again?
Wofford: Mitchell, Daschle, Kennedy—those three, very much. One of the reasons I got the Senate appointment was Alan Cranston. He was a World Federalist leader and headed the World Federalists at one point. So I’d known him since I was 17 years old, 18. He wrote a great book on how the Senate killed the peace by not joining the League of Nations. He was a journalist and he translated and published Mein Kampf. There were a lot of colorful things in his past, and he was a great friend.

When Heinz died, Casey said, “I don’t want anybody lobbying for this job to the Cabinet.” I, of course, did lobby for it, but not immediately, because that was his word and I agreed with him: it was time for mourning. But about the third day, Casey said, “How do you know the owner of the Coronado Hotel in San Diego?” He didn’t say it, but this particular person—I’m not remembering his name. But the point is I didn’t remember his name or had never heard of him when Casey said, “How well do you know this guy?”

I said, “I don’t know who he is. I don’t remember ever hearing his name.” My memory was better then than it is now, probably, but I had no recollection of the guy’s name. Casey said, “It’s one of the most beautiful letters to me that you can imagine about why I should appoint you. So he thinks he knows you well. I’m going to send you the letter.”

The next day, he sent about three or four more letters that were somewhat similar but different, from major donors. Casey said, “This guy is one of the biggest, richest, most generous Democrats. He’s giving it out big.”

He later did a fund-raiser for me at the hotel. Later he was appointed Ambassador to Switzerland. He has a bombshell kind of wife, blond and warm and flirting and all when I was out there. She became a good friend of Clinton, apparently, and he got a lot of money from the man, and they went to Switzerland and he died of a heart attack. They buried him up in Arlington as an honorably discharged veteran of World War II or the Korean War or some war.

Then somebody did some research and found out that he had lied; he had never been in the military. They dug him up. I’m telling the truth, it was a big thing in the newspapers. Everybody was sympathetic to his widow. I don’t know what happened to his remains thereafter. But he was very significant. That made a big impact on Clinton.

Then of these other letters, I said, “I haven’t asked anybody to write a letter, and I don’t know these people.” Casey said, “It’s amazing; they’re terrific letters. I’m going to send all the letters I get about you.” About a week later, Alan Cranston called and said, “I didn’t tell you what I was going to do, Harris, because I knew you’d probably be under some strictures and would tell me not to do it. But I asked my major donor friends who would have the most influence with Bob Casey to write the letters.” I said, “Well, I’ve been reading the letters, and they’re beautifully written, Alan. Thank you.”

My wife was livid that I had spent time, uncompensated, at a time when I could have been making money in a law firm between Bryn Mawr and going to Harrisburg by being, in ’84, the co-chairman with Willie Brown, the Mayor of San Francisco, and Marjorie Benton of the Benton
Foundation and Save the Children and other notably good things. The three of us were the three co-chairs of Alan Cranston’s Presidential campaign, which my wife thought was the greatest blunder I made in politics. She just could not imagine Alan clicking enough to work.

He was where I first got the notion of staying on message. He ran on behalf of arms control and the crisis of nuclear war, the danger and the threat. He argued and argued. He had very good showings in both Massachusetts and Wisconsin. He started off well but then petered out.

It’s interesting. I’m sure part of Alan’s loyalty to me came from my doing that. I said to Clare, “Well, I don’t know who gets the last laugh.” She was still bitter about all the money I could have made, once in my life, if I hadn’t spent 90% of my time for six months on his campaign. But that’s one of the reasons Casey wanted somebody who could raise money.

**Martin:** Your entry into the Senate.

**Wofford:** So the next year Clinton is running for President. My victory put healthcare on the agenda, but I don’t think anybody thought, until the election was decided, that it was going to be decided in Congress. We pretended we were hoping and pushing it forward, but I don’t think we had any reasonable prospects of a bill going through before the election. I know we didn’t. We didn’t want to act that way. Daschle offered a bill—our two staffs drafted it—it was partly timed and designed to help me. I don’t know if Daschle was running that year too, the Clinton year. He may have been. So it may have fit his need, too.

**Martin:** Yes, ’92 to ’98, to 2004, and he lost in 2004.

**Wofford:** I think he was running. We were both running and we combined. I was then a good name in Democratic circles. We had different places to run, to be connected with in the aftermath. So I was very well treated that year. Clinton won, and then the issue was before us: what are we going to do on healthcare? It had become a major issue for him. Right away, very rapidly, he chose Hillary to run this taskforce and asked for our staffs to be part of it. Then it got bigger and bigger and bigger. It was really not in our hands. They could have involved me more, but I don’t know that I would have had any bright insights that would have moved them in a different direction.

After the 1994 defeat of the Hillary plan, I was at an evening discussion that the *Washington Times* put on once a month at an elegant dinner at the Watergate. They invited me to be a guest at it, and their editor and publisher chaired it. Several of their top columnists were there. They have a featured guest who’s going to be the one at the center of the discussion. The evening I went, the featured guest was Donna Shalala, and the subject was the aftermath of the healthcare plan and what went wrong. They had the head of the Institute of Health and me and probably another guest and about 12 people. There was elegant wine and cognac afterwards and well-led discussion, very probing. It was a very good evening.

Donna made a good case. She’s very articulate and very strong, as you probably know. It was basically Donna talking. I think I was still a Senator. It could well have been after the election when I was defeated. It was in that period. It was clear we had failed. They said, “Senator
Wofford, do you have any afterthoughts?” I said, “I guess my main afterthought is that as we were moving along, we were making it too complicated. I don’t mean to agree with Arlen Spector’s chart, but we were trying to do so much that it became very hard to explain what it was.” I had an instinct that this was a problem, but the taskforce was rolling with so many different taskforces, each of which was making, let us say, good recommendations to solve critical problems—the financing of medical research hospitals, cost of drugs. It was one thing after another. I just wish we could have found a way to say, “We’re going to expand a system that began with state and federal health insurance programs for their own employees amounting to maybe 20 million altogether.” Quite a large number were already in such programs. Then millions of others were in corporate healthcare plans.

“Couldn’t we find a way to say that we’re going to have the kind of system that federal and state employees have? Find the ways and means to spread it to the remainder, increasing Medicaid and Medicare, but also in between children’s health?”

Donna Shalala turned on me and said, “That would have been the most awful, catastrophic strategy to have adopted. You have an opportunity like this to really deal with the problem, cut the Gordian Knot, to solve the problems of the healthcare system in a way that’s rational and successful. You get that kind of opportunity maybe once in a century, and we had that opportunity, and we had to try to do it.”

I said to myself, I bet one of the problems was that it wasn’t just Donna, but that whole department that was staffing most of these subcommittees—Ira, that whole department, suddenly, was basically told—and every one of their units related to health—“We have the moment to do what you think ought to be done. Put them together; we’re going to combine it all in one grand plan.”

I could just see the dynamic of HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare] (or whatever we called it then) going at this problem the way they did, with imagination. But when you added it all up, it was too much.

**Martin:** Most of the policy-making in America has been incremental and small, little pieces—

**Wofford:** It was exciting to try to do the whole thing, absolutely.

**Martin:** You mentioned earlier that in this series of conversations with Senator Moynihan, at a certain point, maybe April of 1994, word had come from Bob Dole that his caucus would have nothing to do with healthcare and indeed would try to kill it. Was there a turning point with the Democratic caucus where they lost interest or started to be fearful of a program that might cost them the election?

**Wofford:** Yes, sure. I don’t think it would have been worded that way. There was a growing sense that we were not going to be able to have a bill. Not that we want to stop a bill, but it’s not going to be possible. The Republicans won’t go along, and a lot of Democrats had basic disagreements, certainly with Hillary’s plan. By then the pharmaceutical industry had gotten
enough of their Democratic friends to get off the train, and the same with the insurance industries.

There was a tremendous restlessness, yearning, pleading to find a first step. In the last six weeks—I’m just guessing six weeks, before Mitchell and company concluded we couldn’t get a bill—when a children’s healthcare bill was very much in the wind. I don’t think there was ever any enthusiasm or much interest in the White House or with Hillary, in moving to what would have been such a small step. I’m sure, looking back, she would say we should have gotten a children’s healthcare plan through. Looking back, it would have been a great step. In my case, I probably would have won the election.

But it was one of those things where so much was staked on her plan. It had gotten so personalized that that reversal, that turn was never thoroughly tried. I think some of my critics could say—and a few members of my staff did say—that I should have pressed much harder with full force. I thought we did. There’s some stuff in here that shows what we did on the floor. I did ask for a talk with the President somewhere in that itchy time, and we did have a talk. I really can’t remember how it went. It obviously didn’t lead to anything.

He heard me, or appeared to. I got the time, but I had to ask for it. I had to press for it. It’s like Condoleezza Rice when the Chief of Staff to Powell was saying there was a cabal. It wasn’t easy for him to even see the President. Condi said, “That’s just not reality. The reality is that any time Secretary Powell applied, or asked me to arrange for a meeting to see the President, he was certainly able to.” But if you remember the way [George W.] Bush introduced Powell at the convention, and then when he picked him as Secretary of State, you would think he would be talking to him every day or every other day, not that he had to ask for an appointment.

I don’t mean that Clinton should have been talking to me every other day. But with all the pressures he has and the line of command, in that battle, it isn’t easy to—They all know you’re going to see the President if you apply to see him. I did that one time.

We talked on other occasions when we’d meet at public affairs, but that was the only real private time I can remember. I had private time on national service later.

**Martin:** There’s a period, July and August of 1994, where there’s a flurry of different bills. There’s a Mitchell bill for healthcare, then there’s a Kennedy bill. Then there’s a John Chafee—or would it have been Lincoln Chafee at that point?

**Wofford:** It would have been the father, John Chafee.

**Martin:** Anyway, there are lots of different healthcare bills floating in the Senate at this time.

**Wofford:** In that last phase.

**Martin:** In that very last phase. For an outsider, it’s hard to understand what was happening and what the power relationships were like between Kennedy and Mitchell and who was really behind the scenes actually maneuvering these bills. From a Senator’s point of view—
Wofford: I’m trying to remember. I think maybe the sense that the ship was going down may have produced the feeling that one ought to have his own marker to say, “I’m going to be moving this when we come back after Congress.” I frankly don’t remember where I was on what bill. I would guess I was a co-sponsor of some of those, but I just don’t remember.

I know the thing we were most interested in was the children’s healthcare plan. But I don’t know the specific bill. It needed the leadership of Congress and the President to take a different tack. That would mean basically putting up the white flag on Hillary’s plan and very clearly saying, “We’re going to settle for this step.” That’s what we should have done, but we didn’t.

Martin: Healthcare looks like it’s dead. Mitchell pulls the bill. The election is just a few months later. Can you walk us through what that period time was like for you and the Senate leading up to the ’94 election?

Chidester: If I could just add one thing to that. I noticed in one of these articles that President Clinton’s approval rating in Pennsylvania was 30% at this time.

Wofford: Really? It had gotten that low? That’s worth remembering. I knew it went down.

Chidester: Did that factor in—

Wofford: Oh, it was a very complicating factor, because up to that point I’d been very intertwined with Clinton. Something I read last night, I remember doing. It’s related to making clear we had shaped something different and new, and I had gotten some change.

Martin: I think it was a list of differences.

Wofford: Yes, that sort of thing, reflecting the fact that our campaign people were saying, “Your ties to Clinton are not helpful in Pennsylvania. It’s one of the things against you at this point. You have to differentiate yourself, because Clinton is way down.” Hillary was way down, too, by then.

I don’t want to convey that I had a sense of gloom about the election, because we had been ahead until the middle of October when we became neck and neck. Then for a few days he went ahead; then we went ahead. Then he surged again in the last days, if you believe polls. But I don’t think I really thought he might pass us until mid-October. I don’t remember when the time was, but I remember when [Michael] Donilon, the pollster, even said, “This is what I don’t like to tell you, but he’s actually pulled two points ahead of us in the polls.” That was back to the middle of October. So it wasn’t that I had a premonition of defeat.

Then we had the euphoria over the gaffe he made on Social Security that Carville and Begala thought clinched it. We pulled, I think, 5% ahead of him for a week or something like that. He’s a very good campaigner. It’s worth noting—not that my campaign supporters or my sons would like me to put it in the record—but I actually have become a moderately good friend of
Santorum, because after he defeated me (it’s easier for him, you might think, than for me), we both instinctively felt that part of the game of politics was good sportsmanship.

He was very gracious when I conceded to him, and the first time I was on the floor of the Senate and every other time I paid a visit—not to lobby, but just occasionally to go (which ex-members can do)—he would immediately make a bee-line for me. I would meet him in the middle of the Senate. We would stand there chatting and then go back to the back aisle and chat some more. Those were always quite pleasant encounters. He can be very rude to people, I’m told. But he also can be very gracious, warm, with a good sense of humor.

After 1994, I became CEO of the Corporation for National Service and I’ve been to 20 states, let’s say, and seen 50 different AmeriCorps programs, and I’m on the Senate floor. He comes up. I said, “Well, Rick, it’s been six months, and I’ve seen 50 AmeriCorps programs, but I haven’t seen a campfire yet.” He said, “That’s good, that’s good.”

Then the very next week, I’m going to the up-country, California Conservation Corps, High Sierras project. About 50 AmeriCorps members pledged not to go down from this gorgeous Rocky Mountain spot from May until October or some long period of time. They’re rebuilding the trails that the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] had built that are dangerous now and had to be closed. They slept on rock beds in little tents. They had a camp structure of stones where they cooked the meals on a cooking fire, and then after dinner they had a big roaring campfire every night.

I did symbolic labor for part of the day and part of another day (or maybe all of one day), a lot of standing aside and talking to the members and things like that—who were working hard. Then I washed in an ice-cold stream. At the campfire each night, they sit around in a great double ring and reflect on the day. People can say anything they want.

When it came my turn, I told them what Santorum had said. Now I have to go back and tell him I’ve seen a campfire. So the next night before I left, they said, “We’d like everybody to stand and Harris stand. We’d like you to hold hands. Harris, you have to understand that our generation doesn’t know the words of songs very well, because we don’t sing together much; we listen. So we called the library in Sacramento, and we have the words, and we’d like to sing with you, Kumbaya.” There was a rousing Kumbaya.

I made a bee-line the next week to go to the Senate and catch Santorum’s eye and tell him this story. By then he knew that Dan Coats had written an article, “Why I changed my mind on AmeriCorps.” He was one of the leaders of the Effective Compassion conservative coalition, evolved compassionate conservatives. It may still exist. Coats was head of it, and Santorum was a big backer. Coats had been working on Rick to moderate his views on AmeriCorps.

So Rick said, “Let’s go out and talk about AmeriCorps. I want to understand it more.” Dan Coats went with us to the terrace behind the back lounge where people can sleep if they want to. I got into about five minutes of describing how Chris Shays called the AmeriCorps structure a Republican structure because of its double devolution. First it’s a Governor-appointed, bipartisan
state commission, with merit competition for non-profits to put in for applications for AmeriCorps members.

Then, for the ones who win the competition, it’s devolution to them to recruit and select the members and administer it. It’s double devolution. One of the problems is accounting for all this because you have the state structure and then the nonprofits. But it gets down to the nonprofits. And there’s a merit competition for national non-profits—the American Red Cross rapid-response team or Habitat for Humanity—it had about 700 AmeriCorps members who often ran blitz builds. We trapped Gingrich up on a scaffolding with AmeriCorps members because he had a very good idea of getting every member of Congress to sponsor a Habitat build in their community, a new building if there already was one, or a blitz build, preferably.

They decided to have Congress build two houses in the southeast of Washington, D.C., so the day they were going, he was bringing members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats, down to do the big publicity, spending half a day building houses over in this section where about 15 Habitat homes had been built, a nice little community circle. It was a project where for several years AmeriCorps members had been the main organizers of all the volunteers. They run the site. At the morning starting prayer [Millard] Fuller, the founder of Habitat, thanked everybody including AmeriCorps members who were there and had been running this site. Afterwards Newt and the other Congressmen had to get up and do building. The AmeriCorps team was there to tell them where to put the nails and so on.

At the break in the middle of the morning—I didn’t go up to the same house with Newt; I thought that wasn’t fair. He had just given a speech at the Georgia Republican Convention saying, “What’s this AmeriCorps? It’s federal bureaucrats in tee-shirts.” I said, “How do you like your federal bureaucrats in their tee-shirts?” He said, “I love it. I’d like to do some re-thinking about AmeriCorps now that I see what they actually do.”

He asked me to sit next to him at the national prayer breakfast. There was a traffic jam, and Clinton’s car came along and I got stuck. So I got there just as the program came on. I think that’s when Mother Teresa assaulted Clinton for murdering babies—right in front of them, at the national prayer breakfast. That was a low point in my esteem for Mother Teresa, the way she did it that day. I think that was the same prayer breakfast.

In any case, Gingrich was all set. We chatted over the breakfast a little bit. He was really all set to do what John Kasich or Chris had done. As a key conservative, Kasich said, “I flipped. I’m for AmeriCorps now that I know what it’s like.” Gingrich got into his own trouble, and before we could have a meeting, he was out of Congress. When I tried to see him afterwards, he said, “I can’t take on anything new; I have my own problems to work out right now.”

But after less than five minutes of learning the way AmeriCorps worked, Santorum said, “You don’t need to go any further. It’s totally the opposite of what I thought it was. I thought it was a federally run program, like the Marines or the Peace Corps and they parachuted people into communities. I had no idea it was decentralized, local, getting to local nonprofits. I just didn’t do my homework. Congress doesn’t understand it either. We also think it’s a training ground for Democrats.” The first head of it was the chairman of Clinton’s campaign, Eli Segal, a wonderful
man who died a little while ago. By the way, the educational award has now been named the Eli Segal award. In the emergency act, the appropriations act, they got Eli’s name on the education award.

So Santorum came to like City Year in Philadelphia and particularly the project that Jason Levine works on here in Washington. Every City Year group has a Young Heroes program where they organize middle school students to do service for the community. They got Santorum to swear in a new group of young heroes—75 or so middle school kids being sworn in for local service. Santorum administered it and loved the spirit they conveyed. He’s seen a lot of City Year. He actually became a very helpful supporter on AmeriCorps in the Republican caucus.

I disagree with him on most fundamental things, and with his politics on many critical issues—and his divisiveness. He’s the poster boy of the Christian right and all that. But on this particular issue, we have common ground. I also supported Bush’s faith-based initiative. The House Republican leadership and the Democratic civil libertarians in the House, in my opinion, politicized it and ruined it. The thrust of Gore and Bush in the campaign was not how you get more money to churches, but how you get churches to do more for poverty and find the ways and means of seeing that the religious forces that haven’t been engaged get engaged.

If you go back to Clinton’s speeches, it’s what he supported. We organized a working group on faith-based initiatives that Santorum and I partly cooked up and Joe Lieberman blessed, which I chaired, and did it through the Search for Common Ground organization. You might want to read our faith-based initiative report, especially the first one.

Chidester: The 29 points that you have?

Wofford: So on that front, and on national service, Santorum has been good. On the other hand, I think there’s nothing more important than new leadership in Congress—and Democratic leadership. So when we were about to begin the campaign, his office specifically asked that I come along with a national service group that was talking with him about the appropriation that was going on. By the way, yesterday it went very well; we got basically full funding in the subcommittee, including the restoration of the National Civilian Community Corps. Tomorrow is the time the whole committee will take it. But it looks like it’s sailing through.

I chaired these two working groups. The first was the most important one, the 29 recommendations. It’s a process in which you look for common ground. I hadn’t been particularly interested in meeting with Rick now, because I’d already been doing fundraisers for Bob Casey’s Senate campaign against Santorum, and speeches and letters and other things. I knew he’d know pretty soon. So at the end of this session in which he pledged support for appropriations I used the occasion to say, “I know you more than I realize that the political season is starting and hope you won’t be surprised that I’ll be supporting Bob Casey.” He said, “Oh, no, I knew you’d have to do that. You have long ties with the Caseys.” In any case, he said, “I don’t think our friendship is going to be affected by that, will it?” I said, “No, but I notice that what really brought the flowering of friendship between Bush the First and Clinton was when they both were former.” He laughed.
Martin: Let me pick up on that a little bit. One of the things I study is political leaders’ reflections or responses to the mass public. You as a candidate had such a rapid rise and fall. You came from 47 points behind in the 1991 campaign.

Wofford: To win by about 10%.

Martin: So you had a huge switch. Then two or three years later, you lose to Rick Santorum, who’s a very different candidate with a very different set of things that would appeal to people.

Wofford: Though he also campaigned as an outsider.

Martin: After that second election, do you at that point sit back and scratch your head and try to figure out what people really want? How does it make you think about the mass public?

Wofford: I believe the Constitution was set up by people like [Alexander] Hamilton and [James] Madison, and [John] Jay and the rest, recognizing that we’re not talking about a simple process, with the people always ruling wisely, or the majority being right. Passions and lack of knowledge and differing interests, factions—the whole point of the Constitution was to try to make the system reason—not a fast way, usually—but to make the body politic reason.

If you’re talking about a psychological reaction, I’m right now charting in the book I’m writing. The chapter I’m writing is “Cycles of Hope, Up and Down with Fourteen Presidents.” The highest cycle of hope for me, about what we could do—not in our own country but the world—was right after World War II: the whole Roosevelt period, ending with victory in the war, the forming of the United Nations, the [George C.] Marshall Plan, the [Harry S.] Truman Point Four program for assistance to developing nations, the GI Bill—the sense that we could do at home and abroad what needed to be done for the world community and for the United States. It wasn’t going to be easy, but things were open to us.

Then three or four years later, the Cold War had closed in, and those were very gray years in which to get anything done. In so many areas you had to do it in the name of stopping communism. We got investment in education in math and science, substantially, for the first time because Sputnik went up and we had to stop the Russians, or get there first. It was a very corrupting time, in my opinion, the effect of the Cold War.

Then comes Kennedy and very high hopes. And after Kennedy’s assassination, the hopes actually went up again because the transition was so good, almost noble. It was uplifting. What Johnson did reached the country: in John Kennedy’s legacy we’re going to pass the Civil Rights Act; we’re going to launch a war on poverty. Then the Vietnam War closes in, and the other view of the world prevails. Resources are withdrawn. The war on poverty was abandoned and every dollar practically was drawn into Vietnam.

Kennedy said the Peace Corps would be a serious thing when it grew to 100,000 a year: then in one decade there would be a million Americans with first-hand experience. By now it would have been 3.5 million Americans with first-hand experience. So politics has great ups and down.
Now as to the personal “down.” I know some things pretty well. It wasn’t the Republican Contract on America. In Pennsylvania, when I ran the first time, the economy was the issue. People were hurting, and the social issues of abortion, guns, and gays in the military became primary.

In a column, George Will asked Santorum some time ago, when he was running against me, “How do you think you’re going to win?”

He said, “One word: guns.” It’s the largest NRA [National Rifle Association] state membership in the country, I think. Two-thirds of the counties of Pennsylvania close on deer hunting day. Will goes into some of this. The assault weapons ban and the [James] Brady Bill had happened. The Brady Bill one could have gotten away with, but Dianne [Feinstein] pushed the assault weapons ban, which I supported, and the NRA were off to the races. Thornburgh and I didn’t disagree so much on the Brady bill, and in 1991 people weren’t worried about guns when they were so worried about their jobs.

There are people in the labor movement who insist the 200,000-vote shift was related to guns. They couldn’t believe they were going to lose their rank and file on guns. In the first election, the NRA tried to do that, and they had little stickers saying, “Defend your guns! Vote against Wofford.” Rich Trumka, a strong supporter of mine, the mine workers’ chief AFL-CIO leader now, was a regular NRA member. He said, “How can you do this?” NRA people said, “We know that in his heart, Wofford is a gun-control man.”

This time it was a crusade. Santorum went all out, and the gun owners’ clubs, you probably remember, sold targets with Wofford in the bull’s eye. They said, “Get the main enemy.” They sold them for a dollar, and they had shootouts. Editorials all criticized this. Santorum disavowed it, but they got lots and lots of votes on guns.

Secondly, abortion. Governor Casey was a very popular man, in many ways a very good one. He drove down to see me. In the context, it has to be noted that Casey’s not being able to support me for reelection goes back to my support of Clinton. He would have supported Tsongas or several of the others, or representative, long-time House leader, [Richard] Gephardt. He would probably have been for him, almost anyone but Clinton. So he was not pleased with my position on that. When he had his triple transplant, a miraculous operation, I went to see him in the hospital. He said, “Harris, before I went to the cutting table, an aunt of my wife”—Ellen’s aunt, I think it was—“wrote me a letter. It said ‘You’re going to survive, Bob, because I had a vision of Mary last night. She said, “Bob will live to go on and save the lives of millions of babies who are now being murdered through abortion.’”

He said, “When you get a message like that from on high, you have to take it seriously in your limited number of days in the world.” I went out of the hospital room and said, “I don’t think this is going to be an easy trip.” The healthcare bill was coming up. He drove all the way down to see me; we were old friends and good friends. He said, “It’s a very hard thing to do, but I have to ask you to vote for the Coats bill that would prohibit abortion in any federally assisted plan.” I said, “I’ve already said that I’m against it, Bob. I can’t do that. There would be no health bill if we say that.”
Secondly, I’ve already said I’m against the Kennedy amendment that would require abortion in every plan, for the same reason.’’ I don’t think there would be a healthcare plan if you did that. Catholic hospitals and nurses were among the biggest supporters we had. It just was a terrible two hours’ discussion about murdering babies. Anyway, that may have been another 200,000 voters. They overlapped with the gun people. Just look at the precincts and the cities and towns where anti-abortion is so strong. Those two issues were huge changes at the time.

In the 1999 campaign I didn’t have any opposition from the Catholic hierarchy. They were pleased that in mid-life I had become a Roman Catholic. The Cardinal called me in after my first vote in the Foreign Relations Committee on international Planned Parenthood—against the [Ronald] Reagan rule that there couldn’t be aid to any organization that gave information about abortion. It was particularly aimed at Planned Parenthood. It came up in the first meeting of the Foreign Relations Committee. Remember Carville had warned, “Don’t go in there. No one has ever gained anything politically on the Foreign Relations Committee.” I voted against the church’s position.

In the election, Santorum had the hierarchy. The Philadelphia archdiocese has a quite distinguished committee that picks the issues related to church concerns and then probes the candidates’ voting record on those issues. We didn’t know how we were coming out, but we thought we’d probably do all right. A woman who worked for them for years was so shocked by what happened that she went to the press—the Inquirer wouldn’t print it, because they didn’t want to take on the Cardinal again. They’d been in trouble with him. At least that’s the theory why they wouldn’t print it.

But the Daily News did, and that’s when we learned that about three weeks before the election, the voter guides were printed. I came out, on the six or eight, whatever the issues were, 60% for the church’s position—on guns, on welfare, on poverty, on education, and bad on two abortion votes, I think. Santorum came out 60% against the church’s positions.

It got leaked to the Moral Majority, the Christian coalition and the Santorum campaign. And the three groups, we understand, went to the Cardinal and conveyed tremendous anger. In any case, this woman went to the Daily News because she had been ordered to destroy all the voter guides. The committee was ordered to select some additional questions to clean this up. So they added another abortion question and took one thing off. So I came up 60% against the church. I don’t think they could quite clean Santorum up—they had some ambiguous thing saying “different votes in the House,” or something like that. These were all distributed in the archdiocese the Sunday before the election. There was nothing like that before. In 1999 Governor Casey didn’t support Santorum but he said he couldn’t support me because of abortion.

The next thing for me was the battle to save AmeriCorps. Clinton first asked me to be head of the Peace Corps, and I said yes. I was amazed that my wife and I were ready to do it. It was like going back, although I’d never run it. But they were going to South Africa, to China, to Russia, to Eastern Europe, all sorts of places we couldn’t possibly go in other days. And I still believed that the Peace Corps should take off and move to the large scale that Kennedy had wanted. So I said yes.
Then AmeriCorps was zeroed out in the House and in danger of it in the Senate, and Clinton told me that he heard Eli Segal debate with Don Nichols on a TV show. Nichols is a real tough, rough guy, young-looking and dynamic, and mean-spirited in most of the encounters I had.

**Martin:** He was head of the budget committee for the Senate at that point?

**Wofford:** He was very powerful. He was in the leadership in the Senate after the Republicans took over. He was one of my main foes on healthcare and AmeriCorps. But in any case, Clinton by chance heard Eli on either *Crossfire* or [James] Lehrer or somebody. The only way to save AmeriCorps was in the Senate, and he concluded that his great, beloved friend, Eli Segal, couldn’t do that in the Senate even though Eli won over a lot of legislators very well, in many respects. He had other things he wanted to ask Eli to do, which he did in welfare-to-work.

It was a total surprise to me. I got called back from a summer at Aspen while they were doing my FBI clearance for the Peace Corps, and Clinton said, “I have a harder job for you. I need you to save AmeriCorps.” Harold Ickes had warned me that that was what he was going to say. I said, “You really should pick a Republican.” That’s the problem, how we get Republicans. My friends on the Republican side, the caucus, still believe it’s a training ground for Democratic activists. I have good friends on the Republican side, but I’m a Democratic activist in another sense.

I really argued fairly objectively on that. He said, “Who would you recommend?” I had several names, but Tom Kean was my top choice. He’d been on Bush’s commission on national service that led to the first commission on grants to City Year and other prototypes of national service and was really a believer in it. Clinton said, “Yes, he could do it, but I know from something I’ve just been asking him to do that he won’t leave his university post now. So he won’t do it.”

I had [William] Weld on the list. He later nominated him to be Ambassador to Mexico and that brought [Jesse] Helms into action, who blocked him. Helms probably would have let him be head of the Peace Corps. [Mitt] Romney was a huge supporter of national service, so may have been on my list.

Anyway, Clinton said, “You can do it. You have to find a way to make it nonpartisan.” I said, “If I do it, the first thing I’m going to do is make an alliance with former President Bush’s Points of Light Foundation, which is his heart and joy.” Clinton told me what I’d already learned from Bush himself: when Bush came to see Clinton before riding up to Capitol Hill, the only thing he asked Clinton was, “Take care of my Points of Light.” And Clinton said he would.

I said, “You know, I had a real battle on the national service bill because I led the way including the Points of Light in the new bill, and the Democrats by and large didn’t want to.”

He said, “Why? Why wouldn’t they?” I said, “Even I, on the floor of the Senate after the riots in California, had said, ‘The Thousand Points of Light of President Bush have now become the thousand fires of Los Angeles.’ It was viewed as all talk and no action.” He said, “I always thought it was the best thing Bush did. I liked it, and I told him I would.”
I said, “You may not know, but they were very hurt when they asked you to be the honorary co-chair with President Bush of the Points of Light Foundation, but after repeated efforts, they never got an answer from the White House.” He said, “I never heard about that. Believe me, I never heard about it.”

I think Eli told me later that they all assumed Clinton wouldn’t have had the slightest interest and probably didn’t show him the letter. He said, “That really makes me angry.” He was very clear that my mission was to make it nonpartisan. I had a rough going with the White House staff, a number of them, on that very subject.

**Martin:** Let’s take a break, and then we’ll pick up the Philadelphia summit after that.

[BREAK]

**Martin:** Let’s come back to the 1992 convention.

**Wofford:** In the relationship between Clinton, Casey, my election, Clinton’s election, a key factor that’s important to a lot of things that happened—certainly in our Pennsylvania context—was denying Bob Casey the right to speak to the convention on abortion. I believe they would let him speak to the convention if he didn’t speak about abortion. That was a very hard decision to make, I’m sure. Ann Richards was, I think, a powerful voice in that whole picture and in the women’s pro-choice movement. But right to the last minute, I think Carville and I and others thought that the hierarchy of the convention, given the signal from Clinton, would let him speak—not at a great moment, but would let him speak and say what he wanted to say about abortion and show that there was a difference of opinion about it in the Democratic Party.

He was one of the most successful Governors of one of the biggest states, reelected with an avalanche of votes. I think it was a humiliating moment for him. I was sitting up with him in the gallery off and on. From his point of view, he was mistreated by the convention. From the convention’s point of view, he was mistreating the convention, Clinton, and the campaign by raising a divisive issue. From Pennsylvania politics point of view, it set the stage for Casey not to be able to support me in the next round two years later.

Carville was in the middle of that, but I don’t know what he did. In my book, I’m going to try to find out more about what he did at the convention. I went with my older son, Dan, the chairman of my campaign. I sent urgent word to Clinton and to Gore and to contacts I had, including, of course, Carville and Begala. I wanted to make a personal plea to Clinton or Gore—Gore had a good relationship with Casey—that they must change this ruling that he couldn’t speak.

I did break through to get up to see Gore. I didn’t see Clinton. He wasn’t there to be seen, but I’m almost certain it was Gore I talked to. I had the impression he was going to do something
about it. He liked Casey, I think, or at least he had a good relationship with him. I don’t know what Gore did. We kept hoping something was going to happen. They knew it was a very tense situation with the Pennsylvania delegation, with me, and above all with Casey. He was denied the right to speak.

That was a signal to the hierarchy and to the Catholic voters in Pennsylvania and many places around the country that the party was not a big tent. This was one issue where you were going to have to follow the party line. Even if you’re the Governor of one of the greatest states, you’re not going to be able to speak to the convention. It was a terrible mistake. It’s related to where we are now on religion and politics.

[Barack] Obama gave a brilliant speech in his call for renewal. If you don’t have a copy, I just made some extras. It’s different, but on the level of his 2004 keynote address. This was to a thousand or five hundred evangelical ministers, trying to reclaim the social gospel of Jesus in politics. Anyway, that’s what I wanted to say about the convention. A lot of personal emotions were involved in it.

I think Carville felt that Casey was betraying him. This was his new client, Clinton. He had made Casey Governor. He should take the signal from Carville, please be quiet on this. I don’t know what he actually said, but I know people who think that he was angry with Casey for making this an issue. I too was angry, in that sense. I wished he hadn’t made it an issue.

**Martin:** That’s particularly interesting to think with Bob Casey now running against Santorum. The talk within the Democratic Party is that he’s taken one of the key issues from Santorum by being pro-life.

**Wofford:** That’s what George Will says. With Bob Casey, Jr., running now, it’s not the issue of his life. It is not an obsession; it’s not where he has spent his time and energy. As he says in answering this question, you have to look at what a person does. Bob Casey is anti-abortion, but it’s one issue. His father, when he went to the *Inquirer* editorial board in the ’94 election, was asked, “Why in the world aren’t you supporting Harris? Not only did you appoint him, but on almost all the fundamental issues except one you agree with him and you don’t agree with Santorum.” He said, “Well, it’s a transcendent issue. It’s a matter of life and death, literally.”

They said, “Governor, three times you came to this board knowing that we are firmly pro-choice. In three different campaigns you came and said, ‘Please measure me by all the issues and balance that issue with the other issues.’ If you do that with us, why in the world would you not support Harris?”

They said he got very red in the face. They were worried with his heart and the rest—that he might expire, he looked so upset. When my wife died, he came to the funeral, and from the podium I thanked him warmly for being there. Then shortly before he died, one of his sons said, “You know, my father really wants a rapprochement with Harris, but his pride will never let him call him. Is there any chance your father would be interested in calling?” Of course, the moment I got that signal, I called him. He was very weak then, but we had a good talk. I thanked him for our good times together and the opportunity he had given me. He said, “We did a lot of good
things in Harrisburg, and you did in the Senate.” It was very friendly. They said they were very pleased that we had talked at the end.

But you have brilliant political people like Carville and Clinton, and not as brilliant a person and a much more inflexible person in Casey. We all couldn’t get it together. There’s a price when you can’t bring people together.

**Martin:** It’s interesting. Bob Casey, from your story, in a lot of ways pegged Clinton correctly from the start in terms of concerns for morality issues, specifically with women.

**Wofford:** Yes.

**Martin:** Why don’t we shift a little bit back to AmeriCorps?

**Steiner:** Could you talk about your perception of AmeriCorps when you were a Senator and maybe contrast how you found it once you became CEO and the willingness—

**Wofford:** I had an interesting retrospective with Nancy Kassebaum, who was one of the first people to greet me in the Senate when I was appointed. She had heard on CSPAN or CNN the story of me not riding in my family’s car with its Republican sunflower Alf Landon sticker in the 1936 election—her father’s Presidential sticker—on it the last few weeks of school at age ten—not riding in it to school. She said, “Is that really true?” I said yes. She said “My father would have loved it.”

So now we were dealing with Nancy on the floor of the Senate, and she was in a pivotal position. I forget her position—probably ranking—on the Kennedy labor committee. She was a good sport about it, but not a believer. She was willing to go a long way, but we were starting too big, from her point of view.

Clinton wanted to reach 100,000 fairly soon, maybe in three years, or five years. Last night I read a reminder of what the different stages were to be. I know the aim was 100,000 members, whether it took four years or three years to reach, it got up to a billion dollars or something like that over three years. We were dealing with proposed stages, for example 20 thousand, 50 thousand, 70 thousand, 100 thousand for this bill.

There were negotiations. The White House taskforce agreed to lower the numbers. They wanted, as I did, the largest numbers possible that were practical to do. In his campaign Clinton was talking about large-scale national service where people could have an option of serving a year and getting, in Clinton’s original thinking, $10,000 a year to go to college. But it got reduced to $5,000. The military said, “We, the military veterans, will block you if you offer more money than the GI Bill now gives—” whatever they called it, the Mississippi GI Bill. It’s more varied, so it’s hard to prove exactly. But $4,750 was a little bit under the $5,000 they estimated. So we settled on that as the award.

So you start at 20 thousand. Is it 20, 40, 80—what is it? She finally got to her bottom line. They didn’t know it was her bottom line necessarily. She said, “I, and a dozen others at least, would be
able to support the bill if you’ll start at 20, 30, 50, something like that, not getting to 100.” We had an hour or so, and in the final critical moments before the vote, there were back-and-forth proposals to and from the White House. Kennedy and I were on the floor talking to Jack Lew—or maybe Eli Segal. I don’t really remember dealing with Eli that much, but Jack Lew I do. He’s wonderful, he’s now on the board of the Corporation.

Of her last offer, she said, “Believe me, this is the best we can do. You may get a few Republicans, but you have a sizable number if you’ll accept these lower numbers.” My memory is that I was saying, “Let’s accept,” and Ted was saying, “Let’s not.” But I’m not sure of that. It was very hard. We were standing there. It isn’t that my opinion would decide it. It was going to be decided in the White House. The word from the White House finally was, go for the bigger steps.

And we did, and she didn’t vote for it. We got, I think, six Republicans when we would have had closer to 15 or 20.

I was with her for dinner at the Embassy in Tokyo with my 14-year-old grandson on a trip around the world three years ago. We went back over this. I said, “You know, clearly we should have accepted your offer. It might have defused all the partisanship if it had been adopted by that larger number of Republicans”—by her and others.

Of course, with the ’94 election when we lost the majority in Congress, after we got out of the crisis with the government closing down until there was a compromise, AmeriCorps was funded. But a rescission passed that brought it down to her numbers. It has moved up since then. It’s now at 75,000 members a year and soon will reach a total of 500,000 members since 1993. But it’s one of those cases where I think we were wrong. We got pushed back to it anyway, so you have to say we were wrong. It isn’t something you blame anybody for, but it’s part of the history.

The overwhelming Democratic support and the selection of the President’s campaign chair, Eli, made it a target for the ideologues in the Republican Party in both Houses to pass rumors around. The people who switched like Coats, Santorum, and [John R.] Kasich, and others would say, “You just don’t know the way our caucus talks about AmeriCorps as a training ground for Democrats.”

**Martin:** Do you know what the substance of that is or why they think of it that way?

**Wofford:** Why do both sides, I suppose, but more recently the Republicans, like wedge issues? They decided it was a wedge issue. Yes, they have an ideological position that lets very serious conservatives say, “We really don’t like big government. We really do think that poverty and things like this—especially things related to person-to-person and mentoring—should not be done through the government. They should be done by churches and small nonprofits and big nonprofits, not by a federal agency calling signals and whose tune they have to dance to.” I did a piece in *Heritage* magazine which they entitled, “AmeriCorps the Beautiful,” and [Douglas] Bandow did the attack on AmeriCorps some years ago along these lines.
Secondly—and this is the really big point of substance: AmeriCorps comes under most people’s concept of volunteering as unpaid service—or of the term people tend to use, volunteerism. You don’t increase volunteerism. It’s an “ism.” You increase volunteering. That’s a good verb. Most “isms” aren’t appealing anyway. But the conservative argument was stipended service corrupted volunteerism.

They misread [Alexis] deTocqueville in saying that he was promoting volunteerism. I don’t think he ever used the word “volunteer.” What he said was, if an American finds a problem—say it’s a stuck cart that the horses can’t pull out of the mud—before long they’ll form a committee with an executive, and they’ll figure out how together they can get the cart out of the mud. When they’re a community with no schools, they build a one-room schoolhouse or they hire a teacher and get together and form a school. In other words, social invention: people acting, taking initiative, yes, but not what most people think of as volunteerism, doing some kind of charity. That’s not institution building.

AmeriCorps was very much in the business of institution-building—for quantum leaps in getting things done. Habitat for Humanity offices were some of our best witness over the years, in Congress, telling how a full-time AmeriCorps team can multiply the number of houses built. It was not unpaid, part-time volunteers that Habitat must make. They were limited by the number of dollars they can get or lands they can be given so they have the capital. And they’re limited in the leadership that can mobilize, instruct, and lead the unpaid volunteers. That’s where AmeriCorps team brought crucial help.

Republican ideologues say we don’t believe in paid volunteering, but Bush the First, in signing the National Service Act of 1990, set up the Commission on National Service to test the idea of paid volunteering, full-time volunteering in which you’d be paid a living allowance. They experimented with an education award, but it was paid service along the liens of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Armed Forces. Any kind of full-time service, unless you’re rich or a saint, is paid. Yet flanked by full-time service men and women, all of whom are paid—and most of whom, in the military, are paid more than the AmeriCorps full-time people, President Bush read a paragraph warning against paid volunteering.

Somebody put that paragraph in Bush’s otherwise fine little speech for the bill that said something like, “But I must warn against paid volunteering; we must never corrupt pure volunteering with paid volunteering.” The case for full-time service and its impact to get things done, beyond just individuals saying, “I’m going to help mentor somebody,” is very hard to get through because it has been put in this category of volunteerism.

Our Philadelphia summit in 1997 is related to that. At about the same time as our summit, Clinton started the “America Reads” campaign. Oddly enough, six months before—which I use with Republicans—the Governor of Texas, George Bush, in his State of the State address, said something like, “The prime purpose of my administration is to see that every child learns to read by the end of grade three and then reads to learn.” That became exactly Clinton’s motto. He tells me that he didn’t know that Bush had done that. At least two mayors had already started Baltimore Reads and Boston Reads.
Clinton picked it up—rightly, it’s one of the best things he did of many good things—and wanted to launch it on a big scale. That’s where we got the next extra money from Congress for AmeriCorps. Literacy programs around the country would get to use AmeriCorps people to help organize literacy projects. Barbara Bush used them in her Houston literacy efforts. They became a major part of the structure of organizing the after-school literacy programs and evening literacy programs around the country.

So, the summit came along with what turned out to be five goals. The focus was not on increasing volunteering; it was on turning around the lives of children and youths by delivering five promises to every young person who was lacking them: every young person should have a caring adult in their life, a mentor, a tutor, a coach; institutions like Boys and Girls Clubs and Big Brothers/Big Sisters should be expanded to reach 15 million people—then it was 17 million people—in organized mentoring programs. They now believe that they have reached 2,500,000 organized mentors. There were then at about, say, 200,000 organized Big Brothers/Big Sisters and other mentoring programs. Now there’s a strategic plan to assume that the estimated 17 million kids who need a mentor or caring adult got one. They estimate they have 2.5 million. So there are 15 million to go.

If you want to reach numbers like that, you have to build institutions and you have to have either full-time paid staff or paid volunteers at lower cost—people who can really give all-out service for a substantial period of time, but not as a lifelong career.

So the five promises of the summit are focused on getting really important things done and using the manpower, woman power, people power of organized service. Of course, in schools or classes that require service-learning it isn’t volunteering—it’s part of the curriculum. In many cases the service-learning is such a requirement. Maryland requires a certain number of hours or the equivalent. That’s the first state to do it. Many cities and school districts now have it as a requirement. It isn’t volunteering, but it is service.

George Romney came to me right after I was appointed CEO of the Corporation and said he had been convinced by a thesis he had heard me put forth, that full-time service and traditional unpaid volunteer service were the twin engines of citizen action to get things done. You needed a corps of full-time service—preferably as mobilizers and leverages and organizers—and the unpaid part-time volunteers. He said he was prepared to come every week to Washington to work on the Republican caucus until he could win over enough people to see that we needed both national service of the AmeriCorps kind and volunteering as in Points of Light volunteer centers.

He had founded the Volunteer Action Centers, 300 volunteer centers now affiliated with the Points of Light Foundation. He was an extraordinary man. I don’t know if you know much about him, but he was a wonderful Governor of Michigan, head of an automobile company, very successful, Republican, Mormon, father of Mitt Romney. He ran for President and became a Republican who opposed the Vietnam War.

People said, “You were for it up when you came back from Vietnam two years ago.” He said, “I was brainwashed then by the military. They were wrong, and I was wrong.” Saying “I was
“brainwashed” was one of those mistakes you make. He was ahead of [Richard] Nixon at that point, and he was much different. He was more like Teddy Roosevelt, a man with gusto and boldness and generosity.

So he came to see me and he called in Bob Goodwin, president of the Points of Light Foundation. We spent hours hearing how he had tried to get three Presidents to take a quantum leap in service by convening all living Presidents, Republicans and Democrats, as a joint Summit of the Presidents. He wanted to get Governors, mayors, heads of nonprofit organizations, and leaders of Congress, corporations, and faith-based institutions to agree on some major goals and problems of terrible urgency that need us to respond the way we respond when we’re attacked: with all-out mobilization.

He showed us the memorandum he had written. The last one was to Ted Kennedy asking him to intervene and get his memo over to Clinton. He hadn’t gotten anywhere with any of the White Houses. He got the idea out with Bob Goodwin at the Points of Light Foundation (and now me at the Corporation), if we could together deliver Clinton and Bush. Then you get the other Presidents and go to town. He listed, high atop his list, children and youth. I just saw this piece Mitt Romney wrote a few years ago on his father, how his father went back. And he said he met this new fellow, Wofford, and Bob Godwin, and they are taking up his plan of the summit.

I hadn’t even been confirmed when I signed on to George Romney and his plan. Mitt says every Sunday his father has a monologue with all the kids in the family, a conference call. Usually he does other work, but this Sunday night his father was electrified, and he hadn’t seen that life and enthusiasm for a long time. The next day George got on his exercise machine, Monday morning, I think it was, and dropped dead. When I went to the funeral, his great wife, Lenore [Romney], said, “George told me he gave a memorandum to you telling exactly how to organize the summit.” Mitt doesn’t quote it that way, but that’s what she said to me.

“Do you have it?” she asked. I said, “Oh, yes, it was a joint memorandum; we had all agreed. But it was predominantly his idea.” She said, “Are you going to do it?” I said yes.

So then we had to plan, shape it, sell it. We agreed early that if we went to Clinton first and it was Clinton’s plan, at that point he was so polarizing that it would not be what Romney dreamed of, bringing together people beyond politics. So we agreed we should get Bush the First to clearly say he liked it.

There was a Points of Light conference at the Bush Library, and I went out and met Ray Chambers, who was the first chair of the Points of Light Foundation. He’s a Republican, more or less. Because of national service, he had given me all the money he could give. He said, “You know, I’m close to the President, and he appointed me Chair of the Points of Light Foundation. Would it hurt your feelings if I give money to Thornburgh too?” I said, “Ray, Thornburgh’s going to have all the money he needs. I’m the one no one thinks has a chance. So you can balance it out, any time you want.” It became a joke that my son, who was raising money, would call and say, “My father wanted to say that we think it’s time for another contribution to Governor Thornburgh.”
In any case, Ray was put on one side of Bush, and I was put on the other side, at this “corporate award for service” affair, and we outlined the plan to him. He just came to life. He said, “I love it. First, I’m so bothered by the fact that Bar”—whatever he calls her—“is out there, all over the country points-of-lighting, and all I do is go around and have people honor me. I’m tired of just having people honor me. Now Barbara tries to make me feel better by saying, ‘George, what do the people most need in the causes you believe in? Money! What can you most do to get the money? Let them honor you.’”

He said, “That makes me feel better, but this is something I can really do, and I’m for it. Where should it be held?” Later, when it went to Philadelphia, the Philadelphia press had a flurry shortly before the summit saying, “Was the choice of Philadelphia made because of Harris Wofford’s personal closeness with Clinton or Mayor Rendell’s powerful leverage with Clinton? Which one of them persuaded Clinton to pick Philadelphia?”

Well, Philadelphia was picked because Bush said, “Where should we hold it?” Somebody said—maybe he said—“not in Washington.” I said, “Independence is the spirit we want to promote, so maybe Independence, Missouri.” I didn’t have any thought about it, I just said “Independence”—or somebody said that. Then I said, “Well, if we’re really talking about independence, it started in Philadelphia. You’ll think I’m being parochial, but that’s where independence started.” Bush said, “Of course, it should be Philadelphia, absolutely. Philadelphia, here we come.” That’s how Philadelphia was picked.

Then we said, “Who’s going to lead it?” There was this guy, the first Assistant to the President on National Service on Bush’s staff, a wonderful man named Gregg Petersmeyer, and he had come out with Ray Chambers across the room. I said, “Well, what about Gregg, your former assistant?” He said, “Oh my goodness, could you get him?” We talked on Ray’s phone back to New Jersey, and then on to Washington in the middle of the night. By the time we got here around four in the morning, Gregg had about agreed to be the full-time first organizer.

Then we had to get a planning group, and we had to get Clinton clued in at the right time, and win his enthusiasm, we hoped. We knew we had to have it well shaped. When we felt ready I did a memorandum and wondered how to get it to him directly. I had an instinct that if I processed it through normal White House channels, it would be shot down. It was like the call that Mrs. [Coretta Scott] King—if [Sargent] Shriver had presented the idea with all the other staff people present, it wouldn’t have happened.

Fortuitously I was asked to go on the President’s plane to a commencement speech at Penn State, and I took the memorandum with me. I outlined the story to him. Clinton loved it. He said, “That’s wonderful. I can just see it.” I gave him the memorandum and said, “I’ll keep you informed. I’ll send it to you and your staff.” He said, “Oh, I’ll send it to them too, that’s just fine.” Then I said, “We have an idea. We might get Colin Powell to be the chair of it.” Clinton said, “That’s a good idea, a really good idea, a wonderful idea. I tried to get him to come into the administration in several spots, but he told me the only thing that would really interest him would be dealing with my youth program of national service. He really wanted to write his book and do other things first, but that’s what he said he was most interested in.”
That’s in Colin’s book, too. Powell, through Ray Chambers’ persuasion, said yes. But his caveat was that for him to be chair we had to focus like laser beams on children and youth.

So we go buzzing along. We keep reporting to the White House on the process. We got the National Governors Association to support it.

I kept sending the reports over, and I mentioned it to Clinton once or twice in passing that we’d gotten Powell. I think I told him the story about getting Carter. We got [Gerald] Ford easily, and Nancy Reagan agreed to come. Her great friend, Michael Deaver, the communications chief with Reagan who’s here in Washington, a really fine guy. He’s the one who most often speaks for the family now, the one who guides Nancy around when she does anything. He got involved in the process.

Carter wrote back saying no, he’s so sorry, busy, couldn’t come to the President’s summit. He had some Central American people there on peace or something like that, couldn’t come. Then Powell wrote him, and he still got a no. Then Ray Chambers—who had given some money to the library down there—flew down and said, “You know, we really need you; you’re now Mr. Volunteer. It just won’t make sense if you’re not there.” Carter said, “Well, I’d certainly like to help President Clinton with his summit, but I’m busy and I just can’t do it.” Ray said, “It isn’t President Clinton’s summit, it’s the Presidents’, plural, summit, the Presidents’ Summit for America’s Future, with “s” apostrophe. It’s a joint summit, and you’re crucial to it.”

Carter said, “You mean the apostrophe’s after the ‘s’? Presidents’ summit?” Yes. Carter said, “Well, I guess I’ll have to change my schedule and come. That’s the power of an apostrophe.

We got up to the launching of the summit, and Bush agreed to come and jointly announce it from the White House East Room. A lot of leaders of nonprofit organizations were invited. It was coming up, and Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles called me up and said, “Harris, I’ve just been reading this file, the reports on the summit. This is the most astounding thing, both wonderful and disturbing. There’s never been anything like it. There’s a Presidents’ Summit, but we’re not running it. Who’s running it?”

I said, “The Points of Light Foundation and Corporation of National Service jointly, as the file says,” and I probably added that the United Way of America had become our main convening partner. “Yes, I see that here.” I said, “Ray Chambers is the head of the planning committee for the summit.” He said, “I don’t know if I can let this go on like this. We’re not in control of this; we’ve never done anything like this.”

I said, “Maybe it would be good if we got Ray Chambers on the phone so he can answer some of your questions and we can talk together.” “Yes, get him on the phone right away.” So I got Ray on the phone. Ray says, “Oh, Mr. Bowles, you should be so pleased. I was just at the Johnson Foundation in Princeton, and I spent the evening with their president and their top officers, and they indicated that they would put up a billion dollars and help us get one billion dollars from ten other major foundations or donors so we’d have $10 billion applied to what we’re going to do for children and youth.”
He said, “I really believe we’re going to be able to do it, Mr. Bowles. And just yesterday I was with Bill Bradley, and I realized what a wonderful person he would be to be vice chairman of the summit.” When he said “Bill Bradley,” I could feel the cooling by Erskine Bowles. I knew nothing about it. It was the sort of thing Ray did—which I liked and have been accused of doing things like that myself.

So we hang up. The phone rings, and Erskine’s on the phone: “Harris, I just don’t know what to say. Ten billion dollars, the two people we’re most worried about running for President—General Powell and Bill Bradley—you’ve involved in this in a big way. Of course, it makes sense. But don’t you think it makes sense if a President is going to be there, even though it’s sponsored by all the Presidents (and I still can’t get my mind around what a Presidents’—plural—Summit is), if we can at least have our say on the vice chair?”

He said, “I have to really think about whether I can pull the plug on this because it’s like a runaway jury: we don’t know where it’s heading.” I said, “I’m your agent, and I know where it’s heading. A lot of people you trust are part of the planning of this.” He said, “Let me think about it.” He called back and said, “It’s too late to cancel it, and I don’t want to cancel it because it sounds like it could be a wonderful thing for this country. But I do insist that you dis-invite Bill Bradley. We want Henry Cisneros to be our man.”

We reluctantly agreed. We didn’t want to do that, but we did it. Bradley was asked to be head of the “effective education for marketable skills” goal, and he agreed, but someone leaked that he had been dis-invited, and The New York Times had a story. They blamed it on Gore, but of course Gore didn’t have anything to do with it. It was just Erskine Bowles trying to protect the President.

Before long we had all the major networks coming; we had 1500 press there. They built huge stands for the coverage in front of Independence Hall. When it was actually held, every morning news show and evening news, all the morning shows had Powell or others, in some cases one or more of the Presidents. It was a media bonanza, wonderful publicity. It was on the cover, I think, of Newsweek. Newsweek has “I Want You. Volunteer!” with Powell with the finger pointing out.

The night before Bush and Clinton were to announce all this, a couple of months before the summit, Bush’s Chief of Staff reads the press release we had drafted. He’s about to fly to join Clinton in announcing it in the East Room with Powell. He gets told by his Chief of Staff that Hillary Clinton seems to have hijacked this summit. This volunteer summit is now reading like a chapter from Hillary Clinton’s book. As far as I know, Hillary hadn’t then even heard of it.

Bush was almost getting off the plane at that point. Ray got on and said, “It’s General Powell who said, ‘I’ll do this if it’s a laser-sharp focus on children and youth.’ We spent a lot of time developing five promises that don’t have anything to do with Hillary. It’s a real test for what volunteer action can do.” So Bush came along.

Meanwhile, for his sake we added some more words about volunteering. When he read it, Powell said something like, “Where did all this ‘Points of Light’ volunteering get in? I want action for
children and youth.” Then the Clinton people said, “We thought this was a summit to promote AmeriCorps. I want more AmeriCorps in the amount.”

Finally, around dawn, we had a press release that Erskine Bowles signed off on. They went into the East Room, and when we got there it was packed with all the people we needed. We were in the holding room, and Erskine said, “Harris, you probably know that Hillary always presides and opens when the East Room is used. She welcomes everybody. So Hillary will come on first. And the Vice President is willing to come and also join in launching it.”

So we had Hillary and Gore. Then Clinton came on and said this was a summit to move national service to a higher level and bring everyone together for AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps, he kept saying it.

Then George Bush got up and said, “I’m so glad to be part of this volunteer summit to promote volunteering in the United States.” And then Powell got up and said, “This is a summit to accomplish five specific goals for children and youth.” Each had his summit in mind.

It was a fantastic success in many ways. Thirty-some Governors came. Almost every Governor in the country sent a delegation of five or ten, and a hundred or so chosen cities sent delegations. Many leaders of business, education, and non-governmental service organizations came. Thus America’s Promise was launched. It became a real combination of the volunteering and national service with the focus on actually getting vital things done for and with children and youth.

It has great new leadership right now. Colin Powell did very well taking it around the country. There were a lot of state summits that were extraordinary and state structures formed. Powell delivered a lot of Republicans for it. I attribute a lot of our success to that. But one of Clinton’s key staff persons said to me, “Oh, Harris, I’m happy you helped save AmeriCorps, and I can’t tell you how much we all appreciate what you’ve done. But I still can’t understand how you turned over Clinton’s idea to Colin Powell, a Republican like that.”

There’s no question that there was a lot of inner White House consternation about the summit. I don’t think it is even mentioned among the achievements in the Library at Little Rock. I think it’s one of the places where staff misled the President, and I didn’t do a good enough job of convincing him to make it his. Every year Powell came in and reported the progress of the summit to the President. Once they jointly launched a work-study effort to persuade colleges and universities to get most of the nearly one million work-study students to do their work with the community, especially in the America Reads campaign. And Clinton did a number of things one asked him to do for America’s Promise.

In 2001 Bush 43 had a White House Rose Garden signing of the summit declaration and became a co-sponsor. The Bushes gave a White House dinner for its major leaders. It was an important turn in national service becoming much more bipartisan.

Martin: That’s the way that programs last; they take on a life of their own.
Wofford: When you get the right numbers. I think what’s happened on the National Civilian Community Corps is a sign that those numbers are pretty big now. Senator [Michael] DeWine was in AmeriCorps, and a number of members of Congress have people who have been in it and are for it.

But the current administration budget bureau counts bodies in terms of how many volunteers, not what you really get done. They decided that one of the ways they can keep the money down and get the numbers up is to force it toward more part-time AmeriCorps positions. This year less than half of AmeriCorps is full time. So the battle of the service movement that people are engaging in right now is to not let it fall any more in the proportion of full time, and to try to notch that back up to two-thirds.

That’s more expensive, obviously. Your least expensive way to get 100,000 AmeriCorps members would be to have them work three months and get a thousand dollar-education award, and have the organizations pay for their expenses, compared to the costs of full-time service, but the impact and contribution of AmeriCorps would be far less.

Martin: I think there’s some evidence that getting a commitment for a longer period of time actually helps cement the experience. This seems like a good place to close, if that’s okay with you. I appreciate your help with putting together this piece of history, and your candor. I look forward to seeing your book when it comes out.

Wofford: About Clinton, let me just say a couple of things in retrospect. Fortunately, it’s not retrospect; it’s related to how good he is in the world right now and the things he’s doing. I haven’t been intimately involved in most of them, but I’ve been around the world a lot in the last few years. In a way, he’s the first citizen of the world. He’s a kind of world citizen, but he’s a kind of first citizen in popularity and respect. He’s earning that capital as he goes.

The hope that I have for history’s treatment of his administration is that people looking at the record will see that this is a man who believed in a lot of things. You might say he believed in too many things, my wife’s assessment: too many balls in the air. My biggest disappointment is that I still want a President who will take national citizen service from the periphery to the center and really mean that it’s the transcending idea.

No one has more eloquently said that on occasion and repeatedly than Clinton. But he was very embattled in his whole Presidency, and the courage and resilience, the comeback-kid side of him in adversity is extraordinary. That all goes, I’m sure, into my disappointment that there wasn’t more priority to taking this idea—the way he had followed it, shaped it over time—across the finish line, or much further down the field.

Having said that, there wouldn’t be this program if he hadn’t stuck with it, if he hadn’t said, among other things, “The government will shut down rather than your stopping this.” He now is giving support to it. He started City Year National Service in South Africa, as you probably know. He’s been there several times for that. He wants to spread it to other countries.
I think he rates high on the list of good Presidents. For me, the real disappointment is not related so much to whatever mistakes he made—however you count them—but that we didn’t get the opportunity during two terms of Clinton to get his full capacity for change and for creative social invention and for moving people and bringing them together in this country.

I’m not saying it’s all the other side’s fault, but if you read the record of what happened, he was constantly dealing with extraordinary obstacles. It’s amazing that through all that he was able to do so much and to articulate so well. What a strong spirit inside to keep such a happy warrior spirit going! So if he continues on the course he’s on now with health, I think that will throw more light and warmth on his administration in the past.

The thing about Clinton is that there’s so much that people can say; it’s going to be a very rich story. Dark in some areas—and those are the areas that will increase your readership.

Martin: Many, many shelves in libraries will be devoted to figuring out Bill Clinton and these years.

Wofford: He also joins in the tradition of at least Thomas Jefferson and Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy, in the puzzlement we have about the relation of eros and sex and love to politics and political leaders. About Lincoln we don’t have much knowledge in that area—but if you take my other favorite Presidents of this century, Roosevelt and Kennedy, they and Clinton—all three share that same factor. I don’t draw any clear lessons from it, but I think Clinton is truly a lover of many friends and of the common good.

Martin: Thank you, Senator.