May 7, 2008

Riley: This is the Elaine Kamarck interview, a part of the Clinton Presidential History Project. Thank you very much for agreeing to do this. The one important thing for me to communicate to you before we begin is that the interview is completely confidential. A transcript will be prepared and will come to you. The transcript becomes the authoritative record of the interview, so if we get to where you’re a little uncertain about whether you want to speak about something, recognize that the audience is not me, but is the historical record. You have every right to come back in when the transcript comes to you and place stipulations concerning release or to redact something after reflection.

Kamarck: What is your projected release date?

Riley: The anticipated release, contingent on what happens in the Presidential election this year, is probably sometime late 2009 for the cleared materials. The uncleared materials you can hold as long as you see fit.

Kamarck: Why is it contingent on what happens?

Riley: There is a question about whether there might be anything embarrassing to participants. We’ve had experience with this. For example, we started doing oral history work with the [Jimmy] Carter Presidency and we’ve done the project on [George H. W.] Bush 41. There has been an enduring question about at what point the Bush 41 archive should come out, given the fact that his son is still President. It is merely a courtesy to the people who participate to not do anything whatsoever to put them in a bad light with someone.

Kamarck: Okay, that sounds good.

Riley: The way we usually begin this is to talk a little bit about your own biography, how you got involved in politics, and track us through to your experience with the DLC [Democratic Leadership Council] and your initial meetings with Bill Clinton.
Kamarck: I joined the DLC in 1989. We decided in 1989 that we’d gone through two disastrous Presidential elections, and that something very different needed to be done with the Democratic Party, so Al From, Will Marshall, and I decided to start a think tank, which was called the Progressive Policy Institute [PPI].

Riley: You had known them for years?

Kamarck: No, I had known them just for a couple of years—not very long, and not very well—but somehow we got together in 1989. We all had a very similar take on what had happened: that the Democratic Party was, at its elite level, still trying to be a New Deal party and that at the electorate level, the New Deal was dead and gone. People didn’t think like that anymore. It was an out-of-step party.

We formed this think tank in 1989. At that time, Sam Nunn was chairman of the DLC. The question was who should succeed Nunn. We initially thought that maybe Nunn would run for President and a lot of us—There were even some short Sam Nunn for President meetings.

Al From recruited Bill Clinton to be chair of the DLC. Bill Clinton had played with the Presidency in 1988, so we knew that he might play with it again, but we wanted somebody who was on our page and who would be a spokesperson. He was very much on our page because he, after all, was a six-term Governor of a very Republican state as a Democrat. Bill Clinton really got it. He understood the necessity of a new Democratic Party. I had met him a couple of times during the Carter years, but that’s when I really got to know him, in those years.

The most important thing we did in that period was that Bill Galston—who was then at the University of Maryland, and is now at Brookings—and I wrote a piece called “The Politics of Evasion.” That made the political science critique of the current Democratic Party and said that this was a party that was out of touch on economics, out of touch on foreign policy, and out of touch on values. You couldn’t win the Presidency unless you fixed these problems in the minds of the voters. That paper caused quite a stir within Democratic Party circles. There were people who took it as an attack on them, as it was, but Bill Clinton loved it.

Riley: Was this a political reversal for you? The tradition you had come out of earlier, wasn’t it more of a New Deal tradition?

Kamarck: I got into the party because of the New Deal tradition, but I thought it had passed its prime by the time I started working in campaigns. Bill Galston and I saw this firsthand, because we worked for Walter Mondale. Working for Mondale, we saw the best New Deal candidate around, the best New Deal strategy, and it was a disaster. He lost everything. The Mondale campaign for many of us was a big eye opener. The fact that Gary Hart had unexpected success against Mondale indicated that we were on the right track in trying to turn the corner for the party. Clinton understood that in his bones. He understood it really, really well, although Clinton would veer back and forth between the old Democratic Party and the new Democratic Party. He had trouble staying on a straight course.

Riley: Even as Governor?
Kamarck: No, not as Governor, as a matter of necessity, but once he became a candidate, once he became President, as much as he got it intellectually, he—and this is part of who Bill is—had trouble staying on one path.

Riley: Okay.

Kamarck: Anyway, we wrote this paper. Then we wrote many other papers. We wrote papers on welfare reform. We wrote papers on family policy, saying things that at the time were radical: like children need two parents; that having single mothers was actually not good for children. We had people calling us up saying, “Oh, my God, you’re advocating that people stay in abusive relationships.” That was not the case.

It was a quite contentious period. Clinton then used the DLC to campaign for President. He traveled a lot during this period. He tested these themes. He moved around from state to state, opening up state chapters, etc., but doing everything that you would do to lay the foundation for a Presidential race.

Then—I guess it was September of ’91—he really put together a committee. At that point—

Riley: All of this was okay with the people at the DLC?

Kamarck: More than okay. People at the DLC were very excited that he was maybe running for President. During that period the DLC was basically a nascent Presidential campaign. We were writing issues papers—although, our issues papers were much edgier than you’d get in a real campaign, because we were running an ideological kind of war. It was a little bit like the [Barry] Goldwater takeover of the Republican Party in ’64, where the conservatives decided that the party had been on the wrong track and they needed to go—It was a little bit like that, except it was centrists going against liberals. Bill Clinton was delighted; he was happy about this and the DLC was happy about this. We were on very much the same page.

Then he started the Presidential campaign. That created some obvious tensions, because the DLC legally could not run a Presidential campaign. Some people left the DLC and went to the actual campaign, but there was still a DLC up and running. That produced its own set of tensions, plus Clinton then brought in people like Stan Greenberg as his pollster, who we thought didn’t get it. We thought Greenberg didn’t understand what had happened to the party, what needed to happen, etc. That created an ongoing set of tensions that didn’t even go away once we got to the White House, until Clinton fired Greenberg as his pollster, so it was a tricky negotiation.

I had an interview with Bill about running the campaign—

Riley: Do you remember when this happened?

Kamarck: It would have been September or October of 1991. But he wanted to run the campaign in Arkansas. I had three school-age children. It was just impossible. There was just absolutely no way I could do it, so it was very sad. I remember talking to him and Bruce Lindsey in the lobby of the Washington Court Hotel. It would have been a great opportunity, but there was no way I was going to take my three children out of school and move to Little Rock for what
might have been an uncertain thing. Plus, as you know, in campaigns people get fired all the time, so even if you’re ultimately successful, it’s a high-risk activity.

Riley: And it wasn’t clear that this was going to be a Democratic year.

Kamarck: Oh no, it wasn’t at all clear. In fact, earlier that summer—This is very interesting, vis-à-vis that Clinton was campaigning in New Hampshire.

Riley: In ’91?

Kamarck: Yes, in ’91. Al From arranged a meeting for me and Clinton in a conference room at Logan Airport. The purpose of the meeting was for me to walk Clinton through the nomination process, on which I’m an expert, because I wrote my doctoral dissertation on it. This is the book that I’m now under the gun to get in.

Riley: Some things never change.

Kamarck: I never published my dissertation, because it served my purposes, which was that I got jobs in Presidential campaigns and never went into academia, and then it didn’t seem very interesting. Suddenly this year everybody is fascinated by this, so I’m in a mad rush to update it and publish it.

Anyway, I met with Clinton. It was Bill Galston, who just tagged along for the ride because he was down on the Cape visiting; me; Al From; Bruce Lindsey; Clinton; and Ken Brody, who was one of his early money guys from New York. We met in a conference room at Logan Airport. I took him through the nomination process, through the filing deadlines, through New Hampshire, through this and that, the accumulation of delegates. At one point he looked at Bruce and said, “Well, this means we could be home by March,” because it was Illinois at that period that was mid- to late March, I forget exactly when.

It was clear that what I had conveyed to them was that if you’re not rolling by Illinois, you’re not going to be in this thing; you won’t have the money and can’t keep going, especially a candidate like him. The anticipation of everybody in that room then, and this was summer ’91, was that he’d be running against Mario Cuomo. This would be a setup to a future run, a ’96 run, when it would be a better year.

We also believed our own analysis. We believed that, assuming Mario Cuomo got the nomination, he’d be beaten. It followed: it was the kind of candidate he was; it was where he stood. He—along with lots of other people, especially Massachusetts politicians—was very hostile to our analysis, because we were saying, “You guys are history; you have to change and adapt because you can’t keep this up, especially Presidential. You might be able to keep it up in a state.”

That was an interesting little vignette, because he didn’t think he was going all the way. Bruce didn’t think he was going all the way. They were trying to figure out how much damage this would do them in Arkansas, when they could get home, and when he could get back to being Governor and put it all together again.
Riley: Not an inducement for you to want to leave your—

Kamarck: Leave my family? No. Frankly, it was just out of the question. I wasn’t going to do that to the kids.

Riley: Who eventually filled the position that you—

Kamarck: David Wilhelm.

Riley: There were three or four people clustered in there.

Kamarck: Yes, they had George [Stephanopoulos] and strategists and media consultants, etc.

Riley: Eli [Segal] and others.

Kamarck: No, it would have been the day-to-day management, which David Wilhelm eventually filled.

Riley: One of the interesting things about this to me is that Illinois became a linchpin to them, right? They did a lot of preparation and brought a lot of people from Illinois into the campaign later on—

Kamarck: Yes.

Riley: I’m assuming that was based on your analysis.

Kamarck: Well, yes, but part of it was because of where Illinois sat in the political process. Illinois is like Massachusetts. The Democrats love Presidential politics, so you always find a lot of people from Illinois. I wouldn’t go overboard on that.

Riley: Do you recall any discussions about the particulars of any of the states at that time, or was this more or less just a procedural discussion?

Kamarck: This was more or less procedural, but we did discuss the pros and cons of him in each state and particularly running as a centrist in the individual politics of the state.

Riley: Were there any recommendations you were making at the time about strategies for approaching this?

Kamarck: No, he had to win New Hampshire. It was just very clear—for a candidate like him, particularly if he was going to go against Cuomo—that he absolutely had to win the New Hampshire primary. Iowa that year, remember, was out of the running because of Tom Harkin.

Riley: Okay, I thought that was the case, but it’s good to have confirmation.

Kamarck: That was the summer. I had talks with them in the fall. Then by the fall of ’91 they were really off and running a Presidential campaign. I continued to write columns for Newsday and stayed out of it, other than to write things from a New Democrat perspective. I’m told that when he was veering off the track, [James] Carville and those guys would trot in my columns or
Joe Klein’s columns and say, “Look, look, look,” to try to get him strategically back on message. I did a lot of that. It was clear that I was writing as a Democrat.

Riley: Did they ever strike out at you for—

Kamarck: Hillary [Rodham Clinton] did.

Riley: Tell us about that.

Kamarck: I was writing for Newsday fairly regularly, and by the time they got to New York state they were in real trouble. He was losing to [Ross] Perot. It looked just awful. They had spent all of this time with this two-for-one business, which, as they had to discover recently again, just doesn’t work. I wrote a column saying that Hillary was misreading the role of First Lady. What First Ladies did for Presidential candidates was to show America why they’re a nice person and why you love them. The policy expertise of the First Lady was not only irrelevant, it was actually detrimental, because it blurred the accountability of whom you were electing. It was a very prescient column.

She really got mad at me and called me up and yelled at me. We had a fight on the phone. “You are screwing this up,” I told her. I think I was the only one who ever did tell her that. People didn’t take on Hillary. She was mad at me, no doubt about it. She was mad enough at me to not want me to work in the White House eventually. Subsequently they commissioned focus groups on her and Bill. That’s when they discovered that people thought they were really rich. People thought they had no children. They had an image that wasn’t them at all. Part of it was because of the way they had been doing this two-for-one deal. Then, if you remember, by the summer of ’92 she and Tipper [Mary Elizabeth] Gore were the two suburban housewives next door. There was no more policy talk, no more two-for-one talk, etc. I had to suffer Hillary’s wrath, but in the end I was right, and she probably knows I was right. That was awkward and difficult.

Riley: Let me ask you—because we just skipped over the entire primary season—were you concerned from your perch about the personal issues with Clinton?

Kamarck: Yes. Al From and I had long discussions about this. We thought we knew some of the women he had had affairs with, and we knew he had had many affairs. Al talked to Bill and got assurances that all of that was in the past. Our judgment—and I remember talking to Al about this late one night—was that, given who we knew he had had affairs with, it would come to nothing, because these were all women who had a stake in his success. The big surprise to us was the trailer trash. That was the surprise. In other words, we thought we knew who he was; we knew what he’d done. We believed that he had cleaned up his act. All of that we figured we could live with because he was such a great political talent. What we failed to understand, because we had no way of knowing, was that he had the Paula Joneses of the world, and who was the lounge singer?

Riley: Gennifer Flowers.

Kamarck: Yes, first Gennifer Flowers, then Paula Jones, and God knows how many others like them. The minute Gennifer Flowers appeared, we said, “Oh, shit.” We had no doubt that it was
true, but what dawned on us then, too late, was that she had no stake in his Presidency. Gennifer Flowers was not only—She had no desire to be the Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Treaties, right? The other women he had been linked with over the years had every incentive to be part of the team. The trailer trash really threw us. That, I think, had we—No wonder he tried to keep that so much a secret; that was the ultimate lapse in judgment. It was one thing if his affairs were with former White House staffers in the Carter administration, if they were wives of judges, things like this, but people like that had nothing to gain other than the few bucks they could make from the National Enquirer.

**Riley:** You’ve gotten us to the convention. They had gone through something they called the “Manhattan Project,” to reinvent his image to deal with these problems you’ve mentioned. I am assuming you didn’t have any piece of that, that that was all internal.

**Kamarck:** No, that was all internal to the campaign.

**Riley:** Were there any platform fights at the convention?

**Kamarck:** No, Al From was very proud of the fact that he managed to write a centrist New Democratic platform.

**Riley:** “He” being?

**Kamarck:** Al From. Al was Clinton’s representative to the platform committee. Have you talked to Al yet?

**Riley:** Yes.

**Kamarck:** He was Clinton’s representative to the platform committee. I remember he was very proud of himself, that he kept discipline, etc.

**Riley:** Was there any thought of your going into the campaign after the nomination was secured?

**Kamarck:** No, not really. By that time, again, it was the Little Rock problem. Everything was run out of Little Rock or was on the road. Either way, there was no way, with three school-age children, that I could do any of that.

**Riley:** You were in Boston at the time?

**Kamarck:** No, I was in New York City and was affiliated with the DLC. I went to Washington a lot and I wrote a lot. I hung out with the DLC people, but I didn’t do anything in the campaign.

**Riley:** Any surprises in the campaign?

**Kamarck:** Gennifer Flowers was the big surprise.

**Riley:** Yes.

**Kamarck:** She was the big surprise. The other surprise was how Bill wandered on and off message, because he had been such a true-blue DLCer. That was a little disconcerting, frankly.
Riley: Was that a personality issue or was it related to the structure of the Democratic Party, where they were seeing the guys in the jackets, the labor guys, every time they got off the airplane?

Kamarck: It was both. Now, he did do some smart things. He went to gay and lesbian rallies, which in those days were much worse than they would be today, politically, and he got there at 11:30 at night. Filing deadlines had closed. He still had his centrist sense about him, but it would wander.

Riley: Did Perot help you?

Kamarck: Yes, Perot helped a lot. In the end he helped because he took more votes away from Bush, but he also helped because he was defining the issues that a big piece of America was concerned about: the balanced budget, being fiscally conservative, controlling spending, and things like that. It did help us keep Clinton disciplined: don’t promise to spend so much; don’t sound like an old-fashioned Democrat; you’re doomed if you sound like a tax-and-spend Democrat. So yes, it was very helpful, message-wise.

Riley: That brings us to the transition period. Some DLCers were being recruited to go into the administration.

Kamarck: Not many.

Riley: Bruce Reed.

Kamarck: Bruce was recruited. Rob Shapiro was not. Have you interviewed Rob yet?

Riley: No, I have not.

Kamarck: Rob Shapiro had done most of the early economic work for the DLC and then for Clinton. He was the economist; I was the political scientist. We were actually on the DLC staff. Shapiro, in doing the economic work, got into the position where he was constantly having to correct the economics of two lawyers who play at being economists: Gene Sperling and Bob Reich. He was constantly going down there saying, “No, this doesn’t work.” [laughing] He’s not very subtle, so I’m sure he said something like, “How can you be so stupid?”

Riley: But the other two are not very subtle, either.

Kamarck: No, they’re not very subtle either, but the basic problem was that neither of them was trained as an economist. Shapiro is a Harvard-trained Ph.D. in economics, so he was always having to fix what they did. They obviously didn’t like that, so one of the bad things that happened in the transition was that Shapiro did not get a job in the first term. He eventually became Under Secretary of Commerce, but that wasn’t until either late in the first term or maybe even early in the second term.

Riley: And it wasn’t a plum position, either.

Kamarck: No, although he did get to run the census, so that was pretty cool.
Riley: This was creating bad blood?

Kamarck: Let me go back. The first sign that there was some trouble was that there was a—See that picture of Clinton, “Celebrate the New Democrats”?

Riley: Yes.

Kamarck: That was December 1992. It is from a huge fundraiser for the DLC in Union Station in Washington. All of Union Station was taken over. It was the fundraiser where people were dying to buy tickets and there wasn’t another seat. Al From was sitting pretty, I was sitting pretty, we were all feeling very good about ourselves. The Clintons got to town and before they came to the DLC dinner, they went to visit Marion Wright Edelman at the Children’s Defense Fund and did a cocktail party there.

We had teed off on, or sort of careened off, her policies as one of the examples of the failed Great Society mentality that was killing the Democratic Party. When we wrote family policy, we used her family policy as an example of old-fashioned, doomed-to-fail, bad-on-substance, bad politics, so for him to come to town and go to them first took everybody at the DLC aback. We were shocked, thinking, Who is this guy? Is he trying to play both sides against the middle?

It was typical Clinton, right? He was having it both ways. He was going to the old Democratic Party. She had a piece of legislation that would have created 36,000 day care commission centers around the United States funded by the government—the damned stupidest, most old-fashioned piece of legislation, which we had really fought against, so that was quite a shock. Shock number one: Uh-oh, who is this guy?

Shock number two came in the transition itself, as many old-fashioned Democrats got jobs, key jobs. It was very disappointing. I never was hired by Clinton and I think it was because of my run-in with Hillary. I was hired by Al Gore because Gore—Let’s talk about that dynamic. I was hired by Gore in March 1993.

Riley: You had known Gore for a long time, also.

Kamarck: But not as well as I knew Clinton. Gore really admired the New Democratic movement and admired Clinton for understanding the politics of it, for seeing the politics. He was a bit jealous that Clinton got there first. Gore knew that for his own future he wanted to have a piece of the New Democratic agenda. There were three pieces that we ran on that were purely New Democrat. One was reinventing government. One was welfare reform. Health care, interestingly enough, never was. The third was a conservative economic program.

The first thing that happened was that he set up this health care mess and gave it to Hillary. This came on top of the transition period, when Hillary’s people were saying things to the New York Times like, “Al Gore is going to have to get used to the fact that there are two Vice Presidents.”

But Gore knew he wanted one of the pieces. Health care went to Hillary. Then there was welfare reform and reinventing government. Gore thought he’d run welfare reform and started interviewing me because I had the New Democratic credentials to come and run that.
In the course of our getting to know each other, it turned out Clinton realized that Donna Shalala, who was the Secretary of HHS [Health and Human Services] and should have been running health care reform, had her nose out of joint because they gave it to Hillary and there’s this other task force and she’s just one player among many. They realized that they couldn’t do it again. I don’t know if she ever threatened to resign, but she very well might have. If health care and welfare reform are to be run by somebody else and you’re the Secretary of HHS, that’s a big blow, so they couldn’t give that to the Vice President. The fallback was reinventing government and, well, I had also written about that.

The two signature pieces we’d done were reinventing government and welfare reform. I eventually was hired by Gore to run reinventing government, against Hillary’s objections. But Gore assured her I wouldn’t be there for a long time. Ha! I was there for five years. There was definitely bad blood. The fact that I was picked up by Gore added to the bad blood. That was the transition.

Riley: You didn’t have any piece, then, of the formal transition in terms of—

Kamarck: I did. In the formal transition, I did campaign finance reform, which is a ridiculous issue. It should be shot and killed and never visited again.

Riley: That was also a bone of contention within the networks, right? Some people within the administration wanted to pick up and run with that.

Kamarck: Right, really dumb ones. It was dumb. Nobody in Congress cares about this issue. All you do is make yourself enemies. I told them to forget this issue, to not ever mention it again, and they didn’t.

Riley: So you were successful.

Kamarck: I was successful.

Riley: Did you go to Little Rock for the—

Kamarck: I went to Little Rock for the economic conference. I spoke at it, I was on television, it was a big deal.

Riley: What was your subject area there?

Kamarck: I gave the New Democratic shtick on economics and government and government spending.

Riley: Big picture.

Kamarck: It was very big picture, which is why I made all the networks. Yes, I’d forgotten about that, but that was a big deal. I got on all the networks, basically for telling Clinton he had a real mandate, but that it was a difficult mandate.
Riley: In your memory, were there tensions arising at that conference, or was this pretty much a sweetness-and-light event?

Kamarck: I don’t think we knew yet. I don’t think you could tell yet.

Riley: You still had the buzz from the—

Kamarck: Yes, there was still the buzz from the victory. It was a great big party. It was shortly after that, December I think.

Riley: You’re pointing to the picture again.

Kamarck: Right. I think it was shortly after that fundraiser.

Riley: So you got into the administration—

Kamarck: I got into the administration.

Riley: You were working for Gore, and were coming in under not the best of circumstances because you had a powerful—

Kamarck: Right, I had a powerful enemy in the White House, in Hillary. Bill liked me a lot, but Bill liked women a lot, so I didn’t put much faith in that. What I had to do, in a quick period, was make myself indispensable.

Riley: When exactly did you start?

Kamarck: I think it was March 3rd of ’93.

Riley: Do you remember the first day, walking into the building?

Kamarck: Yes, it was fairly terrifying. There was no equipment. The phones were awful. There were no computers.

Riley: Even in March?

Kamarck: Oh yes, it was horrible. The equipment that the Bush administration used was older than we were. They were a good 10 to 20 years—They had push-button phones and secretaries. They just were—Of course in ’93, nobody—Well, you used computers for word processing. They didn’t have any of those, either. The big offices were pencil and paper and these ridiculous telephones and we all made fun of them. It was just unreal.

Riley: You were in the OEOB [Old Executive Office Building]?

Kamarck: I was in the OEOB, right.

Riley: Did you have understandings when you went in about your slot in the Gore staffing arrangement? Who you reported to and—
Kamarck: I reported to the Chief of Staff.

Riley: That’s Roy—

Kamarck: It was Roy Neel.

It was a tricky first year, because I was creating something out of whole cloth. Now, I had advantages over everybody else in the White House, because I had civil servants working for me. Because we were going to reform the government, I had to recruit civil servants. Within six months I had a huge suite of offices, I had telephones, I had money, I had about 70 people, and I eventually built a team of about 400 people. By the end of the first year they were thinking, What? What happened? They had no idea; we surpassed the Health Care Task Force in size. We had an operating budget that the Pentagon gave us out of its petty cash. We had a lot of capacity. But that was what was so hard that year, building the capacity.

Fortunately, many of the people in the White House Communications Office during that time, like George Stephanopoulos and others, thought reinventing government was fine for a campaign, but didn’t think it was anything that should be taken seriously, so they ignored me, which was terrific. I could then figure out what we should do. I could build this huge team without anybody looking over my shoulder. I just kept close to Gore, close to Roy Neel and then to Jack, and tried to stay out of Marla’s way. Other than that, I ran my own show.

Riley: Within the White House at this time, there were a couple of orbits of people. There was one around the Vice President and one around the First Lady. Then there were the President’s own people. Is that an overstatement, to say that there were these separate orbits?

Kamarck: Oh no, no, no. There were very much orbits, especially the first year, because Hillary had built a huge monstrosity for health care. Al Gore then proceeded to build a monstrosity for reinventing government. There was then the normal apparatus of the [National] Economic Council and the Domestic Policy Council and the National Security Council, so yes, there were basically three worlds, all competing for the President’s attention, all competing for what would get introduced into Congress when, etc. There was lots of competition. Where you saw it most clearly was between the Vice President and the First Lady, because the big political decision in ’93 was in what order to put reinventing government, health care, and NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement].

Gore created a miserable summer for me by saying we were going to give our report September 7th, which we did. Then health care, I think, came September 21st, and then we were into the NAFTA debate. The interesting thing about that, which we’ve talked about a lot since then, was that at the time James Q. Wilson, a political scientist—I’m sure you know who he is—wrote a piece in the Wall Street Journal saying, “Mr. Clinton, meet Mr. Gore.” The point he made there was that you really had to do confidence building through reinventing government, but that trying to do health care before you convinced the public that the government could do anything was a disaster. James Q. Wilson is a smart guy, right? He was obviously very prescient, because one of the reasons that health care failed was that nobody believed the government could do it.
In retrospect, what we should have done is done nothing but reinventing government for the first two years, cut deficits, cut employees, tried to reverse those distrust numbers, and then try to do health care, welfare reform, etc.

**Riley:** The theory there is that you build capital by having successes rather than starting with the maximum amount of capital after the election that gets depleted over time, right?

**Kamarck:** It was a misunderstanding. It was your basic Democratic misunderstanding of the populace, which is that they want you to do things, but they don’t trust the government to do it. This is where Democrats run off the rails all the time. By the way, we’ll see this again this time, too.

**Riley:** What can you tell us about what you were seeing in the White House at this time, particularly in the first year? The conventional wisdom is that you had these long chaotic meetings and it was very porous. Is this consistent with your memory?

**Kamarck:** Yes, and the culprit was the communications shop. The communications shop for the first year was run by George Stephanopoulos, who is now a quite distinguished man, but then was young and a bit out of his depth. He had around him a bunch of twenty-somethings, completely undisciplined. They didn’t get it. When you move from campaign to government—

Things would happen like this: Alice Rivlin, who was the Deputy OMB [Office of Management and Budget] Director; myself; so-and-so; and so-and-so would have a long meeting in the Roosevelt Room. We would say, “We ought to do this.” We would send a memo to the President saying, “We think we ought to do this.” George would come in and out of the meeting. He’d slump down in his chair; he’d never quite pay attention; he’d always wander around. Lo and behold, at 6 o’clock he’d brief the *New York Times* about what had gone on in the White House that day, and if he didn’t like the policy, he’d just change it.

Well, that was fine in a campaign. In a government, it’s a really big thing; moving the federal government is like steering an ocean liner. Then we’d see the paper the next day. I remember Alice at one point getting in to see the President and saying, “This is awful.” I would go complain to the Vice President because stuff was always getting turned around. Then Clinton would have to say, “No, no, no, I decided this,” and they’d have to go tell the papers something else. Part of the problem was not quite so much internal chaos, but the chaos of the communications system, which operated in the first year as a freelance operation and drove everybody nuts. That’s why, when Leon Panetta came in, which would have been—

**Riley:** In the spring of ’94.

**Kamarck:** Yes. When Leon came in, the big headline out of there was not that Leon was there; the big headline was that George would have to report to a structure. Leon was supposed to discipline George.

**Riley:** David Gergen was brought in at some point the first spring, to deal partly with these problems?

**Kamarck:** The problem that David had in there, because we befriended David—
Riley: We being?

Kamarck: Bill Galston and me, the only two New Democrats in the place. The problem David had was that David was not “of the family.”

Riley: Of course.

Kamarck: David was a Republican, so people tended to think, What? These were people who didn’t like New Democrats, so don’t expect them to just roll over backward because there was some Republican in there now. David could never really—David couldn’t straighten that out. George eventually got moved over enough and [Michael] McCurry came in. McCurry was a professional and more of a grown-up and McCurry understood a little bit about government and all that stuff. The chaos was not so much the chaos of the meetings, it was the chaos of communicating out of the meetings from a communications shop that was young and inexperienced and had operated without discipline during the campaign.

Riley: Were you seeing the President much during this first year?

Kamarck: I saw him a fair amount. I saw him a lot at the end of August. We released the reinventing government report September 7th. At the end of August 1993 Clinton—We spent maybe three or four days in a row, some over a weekend, with Clinton and his senior staff and literally went through—I’m looking at the report—four hundred and some recommendations. We had to go through every single one of them with Clinton.

Riley: Wow.

Kamarck: Gore did most of the presenting, but I was there too. Clinton took some out, but he was generally very good-natured about the whole thing. He loved it, he thought it was interesting. He loves government. The joy of working with Clinton was that there was nothing too obscure for his attention. He really got it. He is one of the best students of government ever, which is why, for all his faults, he actually did the right thing. Part of the tragedy of his administration is that he screwed up his entire second term by being an adolescent boy instead of being able to be a really great President.

Riley: But working with him, were you impressed by what you saw?

Kamarck: He’s fabulous to work with.

Riley: Tell me about his turn of mind. You’re somebody who has had academic experience as well as political experience.

Kamarck: He just has a terrific mind. It was a combination of a terrific mind for the complexity of policy. He really could understand complex policy completely. When he approached a policy problem, he was completely not ideological. He was wonderful to work with for me as a woman, because he really, as we know, loves women, but he also—I think because of his marriage—had no trouble going head-to-head with a smart woman. For women—Sometimes men don’t listen to you or you’ll say something—I’ve had many experiences—You’ll be at a meeting, say
something, and the boss will ignore you, then the man next to you will say the same thing and the boss will say, “Oh yes, yes.”

**Riley:** My wife tells me that is very common.

**Kamarck:** It’s extremely common. I think it is getting less so, but it certainly used to be. Clinton never did that. As a woman, he was just terrific to work with. I don’t think I ever had an encounter with him on policy that wasn’t just wonderful, where I didn’t walk away saying, “Wow, that was great.” I loved working with him on the substance of things, he was great.

**Riley:** Creative? Disciplined?

**Kamarck:** A combination of both: intuitive and intellectual about things. On domestic policy, he was just brilliant. He really saw that, he got it. He was wonderful. In ways that the government worked—we reinvented the IRS [Internal Revenue Service], we reinvented Social Security—on all of that, he was terrific. On foreign policy, I had a funny—I didn’t see him interacting on foreign policy so much, but I did have an incident where Gore and I were the last ones to leave the Oval Office, and Clinton asked Gore something about Bosnia. Gore went right up into his face and said, “You can’t do this, you can’t do what you’ve been doing.” Gore was wagging his finger at him. “You must say this, this is our policy.” Clinton said, “Yes, yes, yes, I know, I screwed it up.”

What was going on there was that in domestic policy Clinton was so completely grounded and so comfortable that he’d look at his talking points and then go out and riff—and the riffs were always better than his talking points, that’s for sure. On foreign policy, language gets written a certain way for a certain reason; it’s probably not very poetic, but it is all agreed upon and the President has to say the exact words. That’s what Gore was trying to convey to him. You have to say the exact words.

**Riley:** On domestic policy, message discipline didn’t require him to be literal.

**Kamarck:** Exactly, where on foreign policy you do have to be.

**Riley:** I want to ask you one question about this. Occasionally, in some of the interviews that I’ve done, I’ve heard women talk about the “white boys.” Not the President but—

**Kamarck:** Yes, the rest of them. There was a group of white boys around Clinton. I had a way around them. Because I reported right to Gore and Gore went right to the President, I was usually able to simply ignore them and get around them. At one point they started having regular senior staff meetings in the morning and I wasn’t included. After the fifth or sixth time where an issue that I was running came up in it, I just threw a fit and said, “I’m sorry, if my issues are going to come up here,”—because we were starting to get into all sorts of things that nobody even imagined were out there—I said, “I have to be there.” Gore went to bat for me and I just went. There was definitely a problem there, but I had Gore, so I didn’t have to deal with it.

**Riley:** He would run interference for you? Your relationship with Gore was uniformly positive, or were there issues there where the two of you were—
Kamarck: It was uniformly positive. There would be times when I didn’t—What I had to learn was that I had to fight really hard to see Gore on a regular basis, which is hard to do because of all the demands. But I really had to do that, because I had to know what he was thinking about each individual thing so I could then do what I needed to do. As long as I was seeing him, we were fine. We had some fights and some things went wrong, as they do. He put just impossible demands—Every time we had a new initiative, Gore was completely uptight that it not leak so that he could make the announcement, but simultaneously, he wanted to know if all the Senators had been consulted. This happened month after month after month. This was a no-win situation. [gestures]

Riley: You just slapped your forehead, for the written record.

Kamarck: I could talk to people or I could keep it a secret, but somehow doing both never worked. There was a constant tension over that and I never did feel that he understood just how completely impossible that was.

Riley: Sure.

Kamarck: But we had a good relationship.

Riley: Compare the two of them, Gore and Clinton, in terms of their political sensibilities and their intellects. They seem to me to have different kinds of intellects, but you know them a lot—

Kamarck: I saw them together a lot. Gore could always make Bill Clinton laugh, which is not what you would think, but Gore was very funny. Gore was very funny in an East Coast prep school, cynical way. He had this deadpan humor. In Cabinet meetings and such he would just crack him up. Gore was also much more linear in his thought process, much more male, if you will, in his thought process, whereas Clinton was much more female, more intuitive, etc. One of the other tragedies of this White House, of that administration in the second term, is that they were a terrific team.

Clinton essentially picked in Gore his wife. He picked Hillary. In fact, Hillary and Al never liked each other. The rest of us thought, Of course they don’t like each other, because they are each other. They’re exactly the same person: wooden on the stump; come off as cold and phony and preachy; nobody likes them because they’re the smartest kid in the class. But in fact they were also both very organized, linear, conscientious thinkers. In the first term, Clinton and Gore were a brilliant team.

I wrote a piece on the Vice Presidency for the Hofstra study in which I talk a little about the theory of the Vice Presidency and how it changed when Clinton put Gore on the ticket, but they were a wonderful, wonderful team until Monica [Lewinsky] happened. That was a split that has never healed.

Riley: We can deal with that later. Let’s take a break.

[BREAK]
Riley: Let’s get in and talk about the reinventing government portfolio. Tell me how you were approached to do this and walk us through how you started setting the shop up, how you got your marching orders, and with whom you were involved—those kinds of things.

Kamarck: This was a theory of a way of managing developed by David Osborne in his best-selling book. What it actually meant in the federal government no one had the vaguest idea. I really started from a completely blank slate.

Riley: That wouldn’t have been your preeminent field among the various things you might have been involved with, right?

Kamarck: It had been, because at PPI I did quite a lot of writing about this. I did do public administration as one of my fields, although classic political science was completely useless to us in this, which—There are still public administration theorists around who are pissed off at reinventing government, which has more to do with the fact that we never consulted them than—

Riley: I was going to ask you—I have a question here about who was involved.

Kamarck: There were no academics involved. The first thing we did was—I had a friend who had worked in about six government agencies and was in SES [Senior Executive Service]. He brought along two other guys, one of whom had worked at the Defense Department for many years. His name was Bob Stone.

Riley: How did you know these people?

Kamarck: One Bob introduced me to the other Bob.

Riley: This is through PPI or—

Kamarck: Actually, the first guy, I had been in Lamaze class with his wife.

Riley: These are important networking questions. [laughing]

Kamarck: Yes, it’s not hard if you live in Washington. He brought along two people. The one guy, Bob Stone, had been at the Pentagon for about 20 years, and before that he was at NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration]. He had been written about by Tom Peters, so he was kind of famous, and David Osborne knew about him. We were working with Osborne closely, so Osborne started telling us we had to meet this guy. Well, he was terrific; Gore loved him. The first meeting we had was March 14, 1993. The reason I remember it is that there was a snowstorm, but Gore got to work anyway. It was a Saturday. We all got to work.

Gore met with me, Bob Stone, Bob [Knisely], and John Kamensky. As we walked out, Gore looked at me and said, “That’s our team, isn’t it?” I said, “Yes, that’s our team.” They were three very experienced civil servants. Among the three of them, they had 75 years of experience in the federal government and knew where all the bodies were buried. That was our strategic advantage, that we could move very quickly. I proceeded to figure out how to get them detailed
to the White House, which was the first trick. I was figuring this out, by the way, when nobody else in the White House knew how to do any of this stuff. They were all overworked and suddenly I had hundreds of people working for me.

We had it all lawyered out; we had office space; we got the whole thing done. Then we had to figure out how we were going to attack this huge government. We decided to do crosscuts—in other words, budget, personnel, procurement—that affected all the agencies, and then go agency by agency, and we built in a lot of redundancy. We recruited teams for the NPR [National Performance Review] that were ten-person teams, mostly civil servants. We had a little bit of money to pay consultants, although every consultant in the world wanted to be in on this, and we said forget that, because they didn’t know anything, right? To this day people still call me up and say somebody worked with me on NPR, and I have no idea who they are, but there were hundreds of people. We built huge teams.

Then we set up a process that we called tollgates, like passing through a toll, where they would present first to me and then to Bob Stone and then to me and the Vice President.

Riley: This was in preparation for the September release?

Kamarck: Yes, this was all in preparation, so it felt like we were on a forced march. They would present and would say, for example, “At the Federal Aviation Administration, the procurement cycles are 18 months. The computers are obsolete by the time they buy them; we need to fix it.” We would say, “Yes, we need a shorter procurement cycle at FAA.” Recommendation number one. They’re all in this book. I can’t even begin to remember them, but there was this elaborate culling. It was culling for political reasons, for efficacy reasons, etc.

One of the ones that came back after 9/11 was creating essentially a border patrol agency. One of the big things we dealt with was the fact that immigration was in Justice and customs was in Treasury. They both worked at the borders; the borders were a mess. We came this close to creating a border patrol agency, then Secretary [Lloyd] Bentsen, who was Treasury Secretary, went ballistic and Janet Reno, who was in Justice, went ballistic, because they suddenly realized they were going to lose big parts of their empire, so we pulled back from that.

As these things got out, they would create various firestorms in pieces of the federal government, their worlds, and their Congressional committees. Our proposal to privatize air traffic control, which many other countries have done, had all the FAA people in Congress beside themselves. “Oh, that’s a [Ronald] Reagan idea, that’s a Reagan idea,” which is still the right idea, by the way. It was that kind of thing. There were leaks like crazy, because when you have an operation with that many people, things are always leaking.

Inside the White House, we were always getting yelled at. Things would leak from the tollgate papers. There was always somebody who said, “You can’t do that, you can’t do that,” or tell us that Congressman so-and-so was mad. Then there was a whole political operation that was always reacting—We just weathered a lot of storms. We were very unpopular. As a matter of fact, the way I summed that up was that every morning I’d go into a senior policy meeting and Harold Ickes [Jr.] would yell at me about something, just yell at me about something.

Riley: Harold can yell.
Kamarck: Then one day we were at a DNC [Democratic National Committee] meeting and I walked in to hear Harold’s presentation. There was Harold bragging about reinventing government. That was the essence of the problem.

Politically, the White House understood it in the macro. It was very good politics; we were cutting the government. Eventually, after the midterms, we were balancing budgets. It was all great politics, but the micro pieces that went into that always made somebody mad. Closing the Social Security regional office in Boston? Can’t do that, because Ted Kennedy would get mad, even though we had determined long before that the regional office structures were anachronisms and didn’t need to exist anymore, but there’s a lot of patronage in the regional office structures. There was almost nothing we did that didn’t rub up against somebody’s political turf.

On a daily basis, we were a total irritant. I’m sure that people wished we would just go away. But there were moments. In the ’96 campaign, when I took his bus tour with Gore and Clinton, we got off the bus every 50 miles in the Northwest and Clinton said two things: “21 million new jobs” and “the smallest government since John F. Kennedy.” We couldn’t have done that without all these little micro irritations. Within the White House we were not popular—Gore wasn’t popular for doing this, I wasn’t popular for doing this—yet we had a macro importance that people put up with us in the end.

Riley: Are there one or two particular success stories or one or two particular defeats that you experienced that are illustrative of what you were going through at this time?

Kamarck: The Federal Aviation Administration was using vacuum tubes to land planes; that’s how obsolete it was. We really were very critical of the FAA. Its Congressional committees defended it, as tends to happen. In the summer of ’95 there were so many brownouts in airports around the country that air traffic controllers were going to pay phones and landing planes on the pay phones. At that point, I went back to Congress and to the relevant people in the White House and said, “If a plane crash comes, this is your fault. This is on your head, because we have had this whole list of recommendations, which you have told us don’t need to be made.” Congress went into overdrive and completely restructured FAA in about two weeks and exempted it from the personnel rules, from procurement rules, done. That was a big success, but first we had to suffer.

We passed big procurement legislation. We saved so much money for the Pentagon on the C5A transport cargo plane that when we wanted to quantify our savings for one of our reports, the Pentagon said, “You can’t put that in there. We won’t let you put that in there, because if they knew how much money we saved on this, they’d take it away.” [laughing] We had a huge impact in various places.

The thing we didn’t manage to do, that you can say was a failure, although we actually figured a way around it, was civil service reform. Civil service reform, because we were Democrats and insisted on having a close relationship with the unions, was just impossible to do. The only Congressional interest was from either Republicans who wanted to kill the unions through it, or Democrats who wanted to expand union power because they were very close to unions. There
was no middle in that ground, so we finally gave up. Instead, we called it the Samizdat program. In the old Soviet Union, they’d pass around secret paper.

Every time an agency became exempt from Title V through its appropriations act, we would pass it around to other agencies. I knew that we had had some success when, in 1997, a political scientist published an irate paper about how terrible it was that none of the government was under Title V any more. Yes! We set out to kill Title V and we have successfully done it. The Bush administration kept that up because the Pentagon now has its own personnel system. The civil service system is an obsolete—other than the merit principles and freedom from political interference, it is a structure built for another time. We could not kill it frontally. Again, this is why having this large staff and all these experienced senior civil servants on it was a great help to us. We killed it piece by piece. The last time I calculated, which was for my book on this, I think 60 percent of the government was out from under Title V, so it is essentially dying, which was the right thing to do. Substantively that was the right thing, but the politics of that were too hard.

Then there were little funny things. The other agency that needed to be killed was the Government Printing Office. It’s a ridiculous thing, particularly in an Internet age, yet it tried to maintain a monopoly on all government printing. People in the agencies were always complaining about the Government Printing Office because it charged five times as much as regular printers. But every time we got close to killing GPO, Morty Barr, president of the Communications Workers, who organized the 4,000 printers in Washington, D.C.—the only printers in America making $95,000 a year—Morty Barr would call the President of the United States. Bill would say, “You can’t do this to Morty,” so the Government Printing Office existed even though we found a United States Supreme Court case that said that it was actually a violation of the separation of powers for the Government Printing Office to have a monopoly, because it was controlled by Congress. There’s a weird Civil War story.

We did some Samizdat stuff there, too. Every time an agency had a big printing job, we would send them the Supreme Court case and say, “You know, the Defense Department doesn’t use the Government Printing Office.” See, DoD could innovate a lot because it was the 800-pound gorilla and just said forget it to places like this. We did a little of that. All of us got e-mails the first year of the [George W.] Bush administration—The Bush administration put the knife in the heart of the Government Printing Office, for all practical purposes. I think it prints the Congressional Record and that’s it, because they didn’t care about Morty Barr’s 4,000 printers; they’re Republicans. I’m sure that Morty Barr never got a phone call in to President Bush. We ran up against things we couldn’t do because we were Democrats.

Riley: Sure. There are occasional mentions sprinkled throughout, questions raised during the course of the administration, about the extent to which the personnel cuts you experienced were defense related.

Kamarck: There are two ways to look at that. We went over this many times. Both statements are true, that the defense cuts were the biggest amount of cuts in the government and that everybody in the government had cuts. Here’s the reason why both are true. Civilian defense is the 800-pound gorilla of the civilian workforce. While their cuts were about 20 percent, which exceeded—in other words, DoD cuts exceeded those of some agencies and were below other
agencies, as a percentage, but because they’re so huge—there are about 800,000 civilian DoD employees, about half of the civilian workforce—the numbers were always big.

The Republicans would always say that it was all defense. We would say that, yes, it was all defense because—guess what?—the civilian workforce is all defense. We have in our reports—and we had to do this every year because of this critique—elaborate lists of, for instance, the Department of Justice, its cuts, and its percentage of the total. What you see is that there were across-the-board cuts. Some places, like the Office of Personnel Management, had 40 percent cuts. The GSA [General Services Administration] had 40 percent cuts, while other places had 12 percent, 10 percent, etc. While yes, it was mostly defense, that’s because the federal government is mostly defense.

Riley: But there is an underlying premise or bias within the critique that the defense cuts would happen anyway without—

Kamarck: No. That’s not true.

Riley: That’s the point I’m making. The cuts still had to be made, whether they were defense-related cuts or not. There wasn’t a given that the defense sector was absolutely going to shrink unless—

Kamarck: Right, it wasn’t a given. They were downsizing the—

[Interruption]

Riley: Were there any interest groups in particular—You mentioned the case of one being unhelpful. Were there any that were helpful to you in this effort?

Kamarck: Oh, no. Nobody was helpful. The business of government reform has no friends. The reason is that, with every government screw-up, people are either making political hay out of it or people are getting rich off it. All sorts of people out there are financially advantaged because they make a living out of the fact that the government does things dumbly and stupidly. The most dramatic example is disability lawyers.

There is an entire bar of disability lawyers. They specialize in the disability claims process of the Social Security Administration. When we tried to reform that, because we thought that waiting 18 months to get your claim resolved was not good, we had the wrath of the disability bar come down on us, until it was explained to us and to Senator [Thomas] Harkin, who didn’t know it, that the statute read that the lawyers got a certain percentage of every month of overdue payments, back to the time when it was first filed. In other words, the disability bar had a financial interest in a long, convoluted process. This story was repeated all over the place. So no, we had nothing but enemies.
Riley: May I assume that the same was true of the Congressional relations shop [Office of Congressional Relations] in the White House?

Kamarck: Yes, they were always mad at us about something, because we were always tromping on somebody’s turf. Congress is particularly influenced by these small groups. That’s where they get their “in’s”; they couldn’t get in to see me in the White House, but they got in to see Congressman Joe Schmo from someplace.

Riley: Who has been there forever.

Kamarck: Who has been there forever and has an interest in this little piece of this little committee. Congress was a terrible pain in the ass when it came to reinventing government.

Riley: Did you hear from them directly?

Kamarck: All the time. They were furious at us most of the time.

Riley: They weren’t satisfied just to channel through Pat Griffin or—

Kamarck: Oh, no; God, no. I had my own person who worked on Congressional liaison. We were in too many things for the Congressional liaison shop to ever keep up with what we were doing.

Riley: Did your Congressional person routinely meet with her—

Kamarck: Lee Ann Brackett was her name. She had relationships with that whole shop. She was particularly close to Lorraine Miller, who is now Nancy Pelosi’s chief of staff. She would go to their meetings and try to keep up, but we were too big; we were in everything.

Riley: Other than just as an interested casual observer, were you paying much attention to what was going on in the health care reform effort?

Kamarck: We were because—There are two intersections that are quite interesting historically. One was that when we laid out what we were going to cover, what we were going to reform, we specifically left all the health care agencies out, because we had to assume that Hillary was going to be successful and change everything.

Riley: Okay, so that was a given when you came in.

Kamarck: Right. We came in and we were a month behind health care reform in starting.

[Interruption]

Riley: You were telling me about health care.
Kamarck: This is quite interesting. Remember, the Hillary and Al show wasn’t very copacetic to begin with. If we had announced that as part of our review of the federal government we were going to review HCFA, the Health Care Financing Agency, which is Medicare, then all hell would have broken loose.

Riley: But that’s a huge sector of the government.

Kamarck: Unfortunately for the government. Frankly, it was too damned bad, because, of course, nothing ever happened.

Riley: Nothing ever happened meaning because the Hillary effort—

Kamarck: Here’s what happened. Hillary’s effort failed in ’94. Then, because Hillary was so upset about it failing, everybody in the White House was walking on eggshells when it came to anything with health care. Gore and I had a conversation to the effect that we couldn’t do anything in health care because, first, Hillary was going to change it all; then, if we had gone in and tried to reform HCFA, which was badly in need of reform, she would have been furious at us. It would have looked like Al was trying to show up Hillary. There just was no way we could touch health care.

The problem with that was that almost all of the big operating agencies of the federal government changed in some fundamental ways in the ’90s. We were lucky because, remember, the Internet came in, in ’96. What we could do was a quick modernization of the federal government. Stuff that is on the Web site now, all of that was brand new. We were putting things on the Web; we were moving to transactions on the Web; we were getting Internal Revenue tax filing electronically. We were able to do all of this because we were taking advantage of the technological revolution. Guess what? We didn’t do it in health care.

To this day, a lot of the health care mechanisms are old and slow and dumb when compared to, say, U.S. Customs or the Federal Aviation Administration or Social Security or other places where we did have an impact. We jump-started their modernization.

Riley: But a lot of that modernization postdates ’93?

Kamarck: Oh, yes.

Riley: You couldn’t have foreseen, in ’93, the Internet revolution.

Kamarck: Oh, yes, we did. We have a report that is quite prescient that we put out in ’94. The report lays out the vision of the Internet. This is Al Gore, after all. It lays out the vision of what the Internet will do for the federal government. A lot of that is in the report. We were pushing. No doubt we were ahead; we were pushing. By the time Bush came in, electronic government was a real thing and Bush, actually, before he got bogged down in Iraq—One of the initiatives that they spent the most time on was e-government. Then it was really ripe.

Riley: Exactly.
Kamarck: It was really, really ripe to move. But, you see, health care, again—it’s really unfortunate, because a whole big piece of the government had to be—for the individual problems between Bill, Hillary, and Al—ignored and cut out of reinventing government.

Riley: Okay. Were you paying close enough attention to think—Did it look as messy from the close perimeter as it did from outside?

Kamarck: Everybody knew it was a disaster. Everyone in that White House who had any experience knew she was heading for a fall. Very few people told her. Laura Tyson, who was head of the National Economic Council, was famous in the White House for standing up to her in a meeting and saying this isn’t going to work, this isn’t going to work, and this isn’t going to work. All the men were completely chickenshit. Everybody knew it. Gore knew it. Lloyd Bentsen knew it. Bill Galston, who was working on education policy in the White House at the time, and I used to meet; we knew they were misreading the polling data. Everybody knew it was a disaster in the making. It was too big, it was too complex, and they tried to solve every problem within the White House, as opposed to working it out with Congress. That was their real failure.

Riley: Did you have any experience with Ira Magaziner before this?

Kamarck: No, I just met him in the White House.

Riley: Was it a doable proposition and an opportunity missed, or was it just an impossible mission?

Kamarck: No, it was a doable proposition, and there was even a deal to be had, the [John] Chafee deal. There was a deal to be had and Hillary didn’t let it happen. This I might redact, depending on what happens.

Riley: We can bracket it and hold on.

Kamarck: We’ll bracket it. Hillary in the first term was quite dogmatic, quite arrogant, and people were rightly or wrongly terrified to criticize her. She really thought—My explanation was always that she went from Yale to Arkansas, where she thought she was the smartest person in the state, and she probably was. She then went from Arkansas to the White House, where in Washington, D.C., she wasn’t the smartest person in town, but she still acted like she was, because she was First Lady and her husband was President.

Now Bill was quite different. Bill approached the whole enterprise with much more humility. She didn’t, and that was a killer, because it meant that nobody had the courage, almost nobody, had the courage to tell her when she was going wrong, going off the rails.

Riley: Were you of that opinion very early?

Kamarck: Oh, yes. Early.

Riley: You were surprised when she was named to head this task force?
Kamarck: No, I didn’t know it then. I did think it was odd that he would put her in that position—

Riley: Because of exactly the reasons you talked about—

Kamarck: And because it was putting the First Lady at my level. I was running a task force. Why would the First Lady want to do what I was doing when she could have a much bigger and broader look at things? This was real backbreaking day-to-day work. I thought it was a little odd. Then her personality—She has changed over the years. I think she is a much more open person than she was. I think she learned from that experience, but nobody was going to tell her. Then you add in the fact that they had this screwy marriage. Nobody wanted to tell Bill, either, because nobody wanted to put Bill in the position of having to tell his wife something that she didn’t want to hear.

Riley: But that goes back to my fundamental point, in almost any marriage that’s going to be true.

Kamarck: Absolutely right. Then you take this marriage and all the humility and it’s more true. It’s more true because he was always walking on eggshells around her. Of course he wasn’t going to say, “Hillary, you’re really screwing up the health care thing.”

Riley: Not after Gennifer Flowers, which she had exposure to long before then, but that must have been the most humiliating—

Kamarck: So there you go.

Riley: In your experience—Since the topic is on the table, we’ll close off for today with this. You didn’t have any reason to think that any of the shenanigans were carrying over into the White House years?

Kamarck: I’m sure that they were, everybody was sure that they were. We just hoped it was kept home, which obviously then it wasn’t, but everybody was sure it was. We’ll get back on policy tomorrow.

May 8, 2008

Riley: This is the second day of the Elaine Kamarck interview. I didn’t mention yesterday that we’re doing this from her office here at the Kennedy School in Cambridge.
Usually when I’m doing this over two days, the first thing I start with is to ask if anything came to mind last night after we finished, anything where you thought, Oh, I wish I had remembered to mention that?

Kamarck: No, but I do want to get you that Hillary Clinton column while we talk.

Riley: The Hillary Clinton column?

Kamarck: Yes, the column that pissed off Hillary, during the ’92 campaign.

Riley: Great, we can add it to the transcript.

Kamarck: You can put it in the binder. I think the briefing book is more important.

Riley: Was there anything more you wanted to say about that?

Kamarck: No, I suffered for it, but on the other hand, it was the right advice. That’s why it’s an important part of the record.

Riley: Exactly. I wanted to ask you about the intellectual community and the public administration community during the time of the National Performance Review and the whole reinventing government effort. Were you getting a lot of “help”—I’ll put that in quotation marks—from the public interest group community and the academic community, unwanted help maybe? Were you being pushed or dragged in any particular direction by them? Were you having to withstand criticism from them that you weren’t following the proper theories and things of that nature?

Kamarck: We ignored them; they were useless. They had absolutely nothing good to say except to complain about us, that we were breaking down Democratic accountability, that we were against the rule of law. It was just so full of shit and nonsense. They hated David Osborne for having written a best-selling book about government. They didn’t like all this new “stuff” in government.

Their most serious critique was that somehow we were undermining accountability, that we encouraged bureaucrats to ignore the rule of law. That was just erroneous, because of course what had happened in the bureaucracy was that the rule of law had then bred ten feet thick of regulation, some of which were completely contradictory to the original intent of the law, many of which added cost, added bureaucracy, etc. We were not attacking laws, we were attacking the detritus that fell out of laws after a long, long period of time. I don’t think we ever talked to any of them. I remember encountering Malcolm Sparrow, from here, and he has always had some very good insights on regulation, but no, other than Malcolm we did not talk to academics.

Riley: You talked about the substantive areas that cut across various agencies. Were there areas where you felt you were particularly successful in that regard?

Kamarck: In the crosscuts?
**Riley:** Yes, in the crosscuts, and any areas where you felt like you were relatively less successful?

**Kamarck:** We were very successful in procurement reform. That was the big one. We really made a revolution in the way the government bought things. Within that, the big area was buying information technology. We broke a longstanding tradition in the federal government. Here’s what it goes back to: When the U.S. federal government discovered computers—and it was the U.S. federal government; we were the first movers in this area—it was the Defense Department and Social Security Administration that had the need for big computers. Those two contracts gave birth to IBM [International Business Machines] and EDS [Electronic Data Systems], which these Republicans always forget.

They always forget that it was the government that started a lot of these things, then they go back and bitch about the government all the time. In the early days of computing in the federal government—we’re talking the 1960s, really—you had essentially monopoly providers of information technology, because you had only two companies providing gigantic mainframes, etc. Because of that, the procurement law around buying computers, specifically, was very complex and multilayered, because you were essentially buying from a monopoly provider.

Now fast-forward to 1994. You had Radio Shack and Apple stores and a gazillion things. People in government were able to do on their home computers things that they still couldn’t do on their work computers because their work computers were so old, and the price of technology was plummeting. There was the famous data from market research on how with every gigabyte of increase in memory the price goes down. You had this completely different world. The U.S. government was still acting under the old world.

There was one Congressman from Texas, an old, old guy named Jack something.

**Riley:** Brooks? Was it Jack Brooks?

**Kamarck:** Yes, it was Jack Brooks. He had written the original language and was still there, threatening to lie down and die should we ever change this. It was one of Gore’s finer moments. Al Gore, who was an expert at manipulating senior southern gentlemen, because that’s the tradition he came out of; just sweet-talked Jack Brooks and sweet-talked Jack Brooks until finally we got a procurement bill through that really changed this.

I also think we were helped by the fact that—I’m not sure, but—Jack Brooks retired.

**Riley:** I don’t know whether he was defeated in ’94 or may have retired.

**Kamarck:** He may have retired. My *Almanacs of American Politics* are too recent to show that. He may have gotten beat, actually. When Jack Brooks was gone, that helped. Gore’s vision and understanding of information technology helped. Steve Kelman, who is here on the faculty, was a big expert on procurement, and he was at OMB, and that helped. Before we came, there had been a high-level commission, composed of military guys and industry guys, that had looked at this whole business and had said that the way the government bought things was just adding cost and not adding value.
Riley: This was a commission specifically on procurement issues?

Kamarck: Yes. The stars were all aligned properly. That was where our biggest breakthroughs came, in procurement and in the cost of buying goods. A lot of it was military. We took on military specifications.

Mil specs were a very good idea when [Harry] Truman came up with them, when we were buying trucks for the Second World War. The bureaucracy went nuts with mil specs. When we came in, we had mil specs for chocolate cake. We had mil specs for socks. We had mil specs for soldiers’ underwear. We started clearing away a lot of that. You go to Army bases these days and they have McDonald’s there and they have Pizza Hut there. They’ve gotten out of a lot of business that, frankly, the military should never have been in. We did that, the transformation in the way the government bought things. It affected the military most because they buy the most stuff. See, all of these things we did affected the military most because it’s the biggest piece of the U.S. federal government. That was the big success. In crosscuts, that was the big success story.

Yesterday I talked about civil service reform, which was another success story, but in a funny, roundabout way. Essentially we introduced into the federal bureaucracy the notion that there was nothing sacrosanct about Title V, that it was actually obsolete, and that if you wanted to adapt your personnel system to your mission you should do it. We even got things passed like at NIH [National Institutes of Health]; they lifted the caps on civil servant salaries because they had to hire microbiologists—we had a war on cancer for a while before we had a real war—and stuff like that. That is something we’d do if we went back in, try to open the ceilings because the government is suffering from the fact that it can’t buy talent. Civil service was a success, but in a funny, non-visible way; because of the politics, we couldn’t do it visibly.

We didn’t make any success on a biennial budget; we just could not get that through Congress’s head. Same thing with—and this is an interesting opportunity missed—Newt Gingrich as Speaker had a very aggressive plan to restructure the House and the House committees. It would have helped us enormously, because a lot of the problem with government management comes from Congressional reticence, the fact that Congress still lives in a different era and its committee structure doesn’t match the organizational structure of the executive branch. EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], I think, reports to 83 committees and subcommittees. There’s a lot of fractionalization of oversight, etc. Gingrich wanted to do that.

Riley: Did you have that as a piece of your reform agenda?

Kamarck: We talked about it, but we didn’t make it a piece of our reform agenda. We were busy with the executive branch and thought that was inappropriate, but Gingrich did talk about it. I had a couple of meetings with Gingrich when he was Speaker, and Gore went over to the Congress to talk about reinventing government when Gingrich was Speaker. Gingrich never could get it off the ground. He immediately got into so many problems of his own that to do something like this, which required a huge lift, was beyond his political capacity, but we did have—Let me just say with the Gingrich Congress, we were the only part of the White House that the ’94 Republican takeover helped.
Riley: That was going to be one of my questions. I’m glad we’ve gotten there.

Kamarck: Yes, the Republican takeover was enormously helpful to us, and the reason was that we were fighting, essentially, an old Democratic mentality in the executive branch and in the Congress: Hey, what do you mean we have to cut people? What do you mean we have to balance the budget? What do you mean we have to be more efficient? These Republicans have been here for years, now the Democrats are back. It’s time to grow, get fat, hire a lot of people, do stuff. We were always having to fight that mentality. When the Republicans took over Congress, suddenly we looked reasonable. Against the Gingrich revolution, we looked like the voice of reason.

The first place I saw this was with our attempts to reinvent OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. That was great, because the unions had been complaining every step of the way about everything we wanted to do at OSHA, characterizing our plans as wryly handing over the safety of workers to corrupt American industry, that sort of thing, which we did not think was an accurate characterization, but that’s what they were doing. Gingrich came in and OSHA was on the hit list. Suddenly it was faced with death and suddenly we looked very reasonable. Suddenly the streamlining plans and things like that that we wanted to do at OSHA looked much, much better.

We got a lot of movement in the regulatory agencies, especially, once the Gingrich revolution came in, because part of the Contract with America—the Democrats called it the Contract on America—the Gingrich agenda, dealt with the regulatory agencies. We had had a lot of trouble getting anywhere with the regulatory agencies, but suddenly we were making progress at OSHA; we were making progress at the Food and Drug Administration; we were making progress at the Federal Aviation Administration. We were making huge amounts of progress. Among those reports were reports on each of these regulatory agencies. The reason is that suddenly we looked moderate compared to the Gingrich Congress, so Gingrich really helped us.

It’s very interesting that some of these reforms have been extremely long lasting. OSHA, which was the butt of lots of jokes and lots of Republican anger, has disappeared from the political lexicon as a problem. There’s a lot of that. I think FAA still has its problems, as we saw, but again, that’s more the Republicans letting them think that they didn’t have to do inspections than it is anything structural with them. We were able to get many of these agencies in really good form. Knowing it, I can look back and see it.

I will tell you that one of the few times that this was acknowledged was just last year. Matt Wald in the New York Times, who has covered aviation for years, wrote a piece about safety in the skies. In 1996 TWA [Trans World Airlines] 800 crashed and we got the task of creating the Airline Safety and Security Commission. That sort of thing started to happen to reinventing government; whenever there was a crisis, we got to go fix the agency, overhauling it.

We set out a series of things for the FAA to do to reduce airline accidents. The goal was to reduce airline accidents over a period of ten years by some percent. Well, lo and behold, it happened. In fact, airline accidents have decreased on a per capita basis since we wrote that report. We actually got credit, and Al Gore got credit, because Matt Wald had covered the
commission, then kept covering the industry, and remembered that this was one of the things
we’d done and one of the things we had caused them to do.

[INTERUPTION]

The amazing thing about this was that a) he remembered that it was us, and b) the Today show
picked up the story and actually used a clip of Al Gore at the airline commission saying we were
going to reduce accidents, and saying that it had happened. Now that stands out because of two
things. One of the problems with reinventing government is that most Americans didn’t really
understand what it was, because the federal government is fairly complicated.

Riley: But it did sound good.

Kamarck: It did sound good, yes. And it had political impact in two ways: one was the reduced
personnel, and one was as part of balancing the budget. So that was important. But on the
individual things that we did, it often took years. Air traffic and safety reform was unusual
because a) it was good news, not bad news; and b) we actually got the credit for having started
this process at the FAA through a series of regulations that were all about safety improvements.

Riley: I’m assuming that when the results of the ’94 midterms came in, you didn’t dance with
happiness.

Kamarck: No.

Riley: How soon did it occur to you, or did you see immediately, that there were avenues of
opportunity?

Kamarck: We knew that there were going to be avenues of opportunity beforehand. In other
words, we would have very quiet meetings in my office. It was evident for about a month that
this was going to be something unprecedented. I traveled a little bit with Gore during this time in
a political capacity. You could see it out there, that this was no good. But we also knew that we
were the only piece of the White House that was going to be advantaged by this. Immediately we
saw it. Suddenly—Put it this way, we were a part of a bigger post-’94 transformation.

Riley: Right.

Kamarck: What happened was—if you think of the first two years, Bill Clinton was veering
between old Democrats and New Democrats. He was all over the map. He was doing gays in the
military, which New Democrats would have said, “Are you nuts?” He was making a lot of
mistakes. After ’94, the big thing was they switched their political advisors. This was where Dick
Morris entered the scene, via Al Gore.

Gore was in on getting Dick Morris in. Don Baer came in as a speechwriter and Don Baer is very
much a centrist. All of a sudden issues like reinventing government and welfare reform, that the
more liberal parts of the White House didn’t want to ever see the light of day, suddenly were not only seeing the light of day, but we were on the President’s schedule. In ’95 and ’96, we actually got a lot of the President’s time to do reinventing government. When we had things to show off, things to announce, we had the President and the Vice President. That was a very big deal for us. It settled the ideological argument.

We now had a Republican Congress to deal with. Having listened to Congressional Democrats and tried to please Congressional Democrats had led us right off the cliff. I can remember a Cabinet meeting where Bill Clinton finally snapped. He got really mad—I think it was at Gene Sperling—and said, “Goddamn it, I’m not a Prime Minister!” What part of the White House was doing—again this was when Stephanopoulos was very close, because George had come out of the House—seemed to say, “You can’t do this because the House wants this and the Speaker wants this.” Well, hello, the Democratic House of Representatives was living on borrowed time.

Riley: This was in the first two years?

Kamarck: In the first two years, yes. It was living on borrowed time. Clinton’s instincts knew it. He had won the Presidency by staying away from the Democratic House members. In his first two years, when he danced back toward them, he was always in trouble.

There was a nice clean break. Ironically, the ’94 loss allowed Bill Clinton to win in ’96. He got on a balanced budget mode. All the debate about having a balanced budget stopped. He decided he was going for a balanced budget. He was seen doing reinventing government, which, to the extent it penetrated the consciousness, was part of the balanced budget. That was the case both symbolically and literally. One of the reasons we were balancing the budget was that we were taking advantage of new technologies, etc. Everything was much more efficient, so we could keep running the government. People were still getting services even while we were making cuts and holding down spending.

I don’t think welfare reform would have come to fruition—I think the liberals in the White House would have stopped it and complained about it—but we had this Republican Congress. Clinton then was able to, in the second two years, move back squarely into a New Democratic policy and political mode. I think that’s what helped him win reelection.

Riley: I want to ask you to elaborate. You said that Gore had a part in Morris’s return to the White House. The conventional wisdom tends to place the credit or blame for that move on Hillary.

Kamarck: But they both did. When something was very important, it was the three of them. Yes, I first heard about Morris from Gore. Gore interviewed and talked to Morris and Gore brought in Don Baer to meet me and things like that, so Gore was in on the cabal. In those days the two of them—Gore and Clinton were having weekly lunches. They were private lunches. They knew things were running off the rails.

I would have conversations with Gore in which I would help him understand why I thought things were going wrong, because he couldn’t always see it. He had to rely on me and Leon Fuerth and other people on his staff to say, “This is why this doesn’t work in the White House,” or “This is why this doesn’t work.” Gore was just part of the cabal.
**Riley:** I want to ask you a more general question about Gore’s relationship with Capitol Hill, both about the first two years, when there were Democrats there; and that he came from the Hill. The external image is of a person who was on the Hill but not really a member of the club. I want to get you to talk a little bit about that. Did you see that? Is that an overblown characterization?

**Kamarck:** Well, it is and it isn’t. His time on the Hill was always spent in very forward-looking issues, like the Internet. He did invent the fucking Internet, because he took it out of DARPA [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency], and we wouldn’t have it today had he not done that. It was a military phenomenon, and it was Al Gore who took it, plunk, and who understood that he had to legislatively take it out of there and create what we know as the Internet. It’s one of the things that makes me furious.

**Riley:** I can tell. [laughing]

**Kamarck:** It just makes me absolutely furious. He was very forward-looking. He had four children, a lot of kids to go home to. Temperamentally, I don’t think he was part of the boys’ club, although he played basketball with them. He had a better relationship with the Hill than Bill Clinton did.

**Riley:** Okay.

**Kamarck:** Even though he wasn’t a quintessentially Senate person, he had many friends up there. You should look at this picture, right here, because that’s a fun picture. See this, the “Al Gore, why were you born?” look? That’s Gore in the teeny little secretary’s office off his office. See the mean look on his face?

**Riley:** Yes.

**Kamarck:** See this heavy woman over here in the picture? That’s Lee Ann, who did Congressional liaison. Then see the two of us jumping?

**Riley:** Right.

**Kamarck:** In the top picture, we had called Gore out of a meeting with the German chancellor or somebody because we had to pass the buy-out bill in the Congress. It was very important that we pass the buy-out bill, because we needed to be able to offer money to civil servants to leave.

**Riley:** Of course.

**Kamarck:** That was a critical, critical piece. The CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and the Pentagon already had buy-out authority, but we needed it for the rest of the government. He was mad as hell that we didn’t have the votes and that he had been pulled out of this meeting. He called [James] Jeffords and convinced Jeffords to change his vote.

**Riley:** A Republican.

**Kamarck:** A Republican at that time. The bill passed, so that’s why we were jumping up and down. He heard us yelling in his outer office, so then he invited us in and we had to tell the
German chancellor what we just did. It was a whole big deal, so then he was pretty happy about it, but he was very grumpy. That’s why Lee Ann called it the “Al Gore, why were you born?” look. So yes, he was good.

Part of the problem we always had with Gore and the Congress was that he wanted to do more with the Congress on reinventing government. The problem was that, as stand-alone measures, most of the reinventing government measures were not partisan in one way or the other. But if it had Al Gore’s name on it, or if Al Gore was too closely associated with something like, frankly, the extension of the buy-out bill, Republicans would catch on and say, “Oh, we’d better be against that.” Because of that, we worked hard to keep Gore away from Congress on reinventing government stuff. The buy-out bill was the perfect example. That thing was sailing through, sailing through, then all of a sudden at the end, in the Senate, the vote got tight. Why? Because the Senate leadership figured out that maybe it wasn’t such a good idea to allow the Clinton administration to cut the government and give them a tool that would make it easy to reduce the size of the government.

Riley: Sure.

Kamarck: That’s why suddenly at the end the vote tightened up. That’s why we had to rush in, interrupt Gore, and tell him he had to call. It was ultimately the right strategy, though, because I don’t think we would have gotten the vote if he had been lobbying it from the beginning. We needed Republican votes for all of these things.

Riley: What you’re suggesting is that it was not so much because he was unpopular on the Hill as it was the fact that he was the Vice President and—

Kamarck: For reinventing government, it was not the fact that he was unpopular; it was the fact that most of the reinventing government stuff was management and essentially nonpartisan. Therefore, putting him in it made it partisan, which was the wrong thing to do. On environmental issues, he was much more aggressive on the Hill, but often, after the Republicans came in, they just screwed him in totally petty ways, even on those issues where he might have been better off hanging back a little.

Riley: Did you have much of the environmental issues, or were they completely shaved off and put somewhere else?

Kamarck: That was all Katie’s [Kathleen McGinty] world. There were three substantive worlds in the Gore operation: There was Leon Fuerth, who did foreign policy; there was Katie McGinty, who did the environment; and I did reinventing government. Greg Simon did all the other domestic issues, in particular Gore’s telecom and information technology stuff. These were fiefdoms in and of themselves, so we didn’t interfere very much.

Riley: Do you keep up with Greg?

Kamarck: I do.

Riley: Where is he now?
Kamarck: He’s in Washington.

Riley: You talked a little bit about Gingrich. Were there any other people on the Hill who were especially helpful to you, or, conversely, were there people on the Hill who were just nightmares for you to try to navigate around?

Kamarck: John Glenn was head of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, so he was very helpful. He liked what we were doing and generally approved of what we were doing.

Riley: I see there’s a quotation from him in your—

Kamarck: Yes, he was great. The House Democrats weren’t so helpful. A lot of them tended to be very liberal Democrats, tied to the unions. They didn’t like this management stuff. They would have been just as happy with a great big fat government. We were more against the grain in the House than we were in the Senate.

Riley: Let me ask a more global question about the reform effort. That is, other than just as your academic background, did you do any kind of self-conscious survey of previous major reform efforts in the federal government?

Kamarck: Yes.

Riley: Can you talk a little bit about what the survey looked like, the things you found that were helpful to you, and then situate your reform effort in the history of these reform efforts?

Kamarck: Absolutely. We did a very comprehensive reform search. We briefed Gore on it. We took two things away from all the previous efforts. One was that they were composed of outsiders; the most recent one had been the [J. Peter] Grace Commission in the Reagan administration. Because they were composed of outsiders, even when they came up with useful ideas they were dead on arrival in the civil service. Even though some of the substance wasn’t bad, they never had a chance, so we decided that we were going to minimize the use of outsiders and maximize the use of career civil servants, figuring that we would create a cadre of people who would create reform.

There were three. The second one was that we should stay away from major, mammoth, Cabinet-level reorganizations. This came from the Carter administration. They were more trouble than they were worth and they didn’t really solve the underlying problems, which tended to be at the agency level, anyway. That was the second one.

The third one was that most of these reform things just gathered dust. If we wanted to make a difference, we would have to work at implementation. The real big difference was that. Many of the ideas in that report had been around for ages. The difference was that every year we published an update. We had the Vice President of the United States pushing, pushing, pushing. We were constantly there. We went from a staff of 400 that did that to a constant staff of about 70 through the rest of the administration. I had lots of people watching, implementing, serving things up to the President, putting bills into legislation. That was the most different thing. That went on right to the end of the administration. That went on for eight years. That’s why I think
some things really changed. If we had published that and done something else, nothing would have happened.

**Riley:** Is it also fair to say that it succeeded because it was perceived as being, at least very broadly, a Presidential issue?

**Kamarck:** Yes. It succeeded because it was out of the White House, because we had lots of benefits to give people. We gave out “Hammer Awards.” We had people reinventing agencies. We did all this ceremonial stuff.

**Riley:** Did you learn that from previous experience or did you invent that?

**Kamarck:** We learned that from the corporate world.

**Riley:** Okay.

**Kamarck:** Our biggest consultation was with corporate America and with people who were doing “reengineering the corporation” types of things. We really listened to them. They gave us very useful things. Rewards don’t always have to be financial, because we couldn’t give financial awards anyway. Do everything simultaneously. The public administration theorists would have told you to do things in a sequence. The people in the real world who come in and take over failing corporations have to do everything at once. There is no luxury of doing things in some logical sequence. We were always getting papers from academics saying what we should do. It’s bullshit; the world doesn’t work that way.

**Riley:** Nobody in this building would ever say anything like that. [laughing]

**Kamarck:** Oh, no.

**Riley:** For the record, she rolled her eyes as she said that.

**Kamarck:** So yes, the corporate guys gave us a lot of good advice. Gore and I sat down with probably 20 CEOs; they had very useful things. Then we would start telling them our problems and they would roll their eyes, because their problems looked small compared to ours.

**Riley:** Did this have political advantages to the administration? I’m not talking about the policy implications, but you were developing relationships with corporate people that may have been unusual for Democrats. Did that have an advantage in ’96 and beyond?

**Kamarck:** Yes, I think it gave us a lot of credibility as being different, being different Democrats. I think it helped. In the left of the party, there’s still anger out there about us being part of corporate America blah, blah, blah, but it was very useful. What it signaled was that this effort was real, that the Vice President himself was paying attention to this.

Then it helped us balance the budget. The crowning achievement of the Clinton administration was that they actually got to a balanced budget, showing that it is possible to do it. They couldn’t have done it without reinventing government, because what we were doing was constantly pushing efficiencies. We were also lucky, not to toot my own horn too much, but frankly, we had
a lot of luck because we were doing this at the arrival of the Internet. Suddenly the efficiencies that you had begun to see in the financial sector in the ’80s we were bringing into the government.

Riley: But in retrospect, it’s sometimes a little too easy for outside critics to pick up on a claim like that and to say you were just lucky throughout. The same thing happens frequently with people who make claims about Clinton and the balanced budget and say that he was there when the tech bubble hit and so forth. That completely overlooks the political difficulties of ’93 and—

Kamarck: And all the spending cuts. We took a lot of crap for spending cuts. We had to make spending cuts and we were holding down budgets and stuff. You’re probably going to talk to Leon Panetta or somebody.

Riley: We already have, a long time ago. My memory fails me sometimes from interview to interview as to what came up, which is helpful, because it means that I’m never going to repeat what happened in one interview to anybody else.

We’re going to have to move on in the interest of time to get to the rest of this. In the briefing book was an article published within the last three or four years out of a British parliamentary publication, where you had gone over to England. You made the claim in the interview that for all practical purposes, in Gore’s areas—government reform, the environment, and technology—the way the Clinton White House worked was that in those spheres Gore was really the President.

Kamarck: Yes.

Riley: Is that an excessive claim that passes muster in England or is it really true?

Kamarck: It’s true, and I think even Clinton people would say that. What Clinton did—which was smart if you were President and wanted to get many things done—was hand over to Gore whole big policy areas. Gore was the one who ran regular Cabinet-level meetings on the environment. He would have Bruce Babbitt and Katie McGinty and Carol Browner in his office, regularly, figuring out that stuff. Gore was the lead on Kyoto.

Riley: Right.

Kamarck: Gore was the lead on reinventing government. In other words, the way to look at it was that there was no one on the President’s staff who ran reinventing government. My chain of command, frankly, was Al Gore to Bill Clinton. Even though there were chiefs—I had nice relationships with both of Gore’s chiefs of staff and I participated with them, but I didn’t really have to clear any substantive—the only things I had to go to them for were scheduling and things like that, but when it came to substance, I very rarely had to get their sign-off, because I just went straight to Gore on what we were doing.

The same thing—Gore and Greg Simon did the entire telecommunications bill. All the negotiation for the administration was through them. It was terribly complex—you had to learn about Baby Bells and this, that, and the other thing—so Clinton ceded that to Gore. So yes, he was the President. The way you can see it, structurally, was that there wasn’t a person on the
White House staff—there wasn’t a person on the Domestic Policy Council, for instance—who had the telecom responsibility. If Congress wanted to talk to somebody in the White House about telecom, they talked to Greg; there wasn’t anybody on the President’s staff that they talked to. Greg would talk to Gore and Gore would talk to the President, or Greg would talk to somebody on the President’s staff in the Congressional liaison office who needed to know.

This is part of the paper I wrote for Hofstra. This is a new—the Vice Presidency is turning into quite an interesting and valuable job. The reason is, for people who understand the Presidency, that the Presidency itself is so big that to have somebody you trust, to whom you can say, “Al, I know we have to pass the telecom bill. I have no idea what these things are, do it.” Of course, with George [W.] Bush, the suspicion is that he did that to a fare-thee-well with [Richard] Cheney, that Cheney really ran everything. But I think this is why; the job itself has changed. It is not quite as derided as it was. It began to change with Mondale. George [H. W.] Bush, the first Bush, was actually a very substantive Vice President, and you’ve seen that model since.

Riley: Have you been surprised to the extent to which Cheney has been . . . ? This is a bit of an aside; I’m asking this more as an institutional question than anything else.

Kamarck: I have been. I have been surprised at Cheney’s aggressiveness. If you haven’t read it, every political scientist has to read it, the *Washington Post* series [Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency].

Riley: Oh yes, in fact I assigned it to my class on the Presidency.

Kamarck: Yes, we assigned it here.

Riley: It won a Pulitzer.

Kamarck: Yes, Bart [Barton] Gellman worked on the Babbitt campaign with me.

Riley: Is that right?

Kamarck: Yes, and he won a Pulitzer for it. He’s turning it into a book. What surprised me about it was not that Cheney had a lot of responsibility, because I’d seen that. What surprised me was Cheney’s aggressiveness at controlling what went to Bush. That is a little underhanded and sneaky. Gore was always very forthright in his relationships with Clinton. He never wanted to get caught pulling a fast one. He was always very honest and upfront with Clinton, so what was shocking about the Cheney series was the sneakiness of the whole thing.

Riley: Do you recall any instances where Gore and Clinton had at it over something? Where Gore was perceived as being out of line? You had told us about one instance where Gore had to bear down on Clinton.

Kamarck: No, they had—In the first term, which is when I was there, and into half of ’97, Gore was extremely deferential to Clinton and extremely helpful. The sense you got from meetings and things was that the two of them really liked each other. You got the sense that they had become friends. You got the sense that they were fellow southern boys. They both struggled with their weight. We used to laugh. The Cabinet would meet and the staff would sit in the back. The
Filipino Navy stewards would come out and put a dish of doughnuts in the middle. You couldn’t get at the doughnuts for Clinton and Gore stuffing their faces. [laughing] They both were like little porkers who ate too much and then tried to jog to get rid of the pounds. But they were nice together. It was actually very nice. When you watched them together, they liked each other, they had a good time. That really fell apart in the second term for the obvious reason, which is Gore—The Monica thing hit Gore hard. It was a real breach of trust.

**Riley:** Let’s hold on to that. I want to leave enough time for us to deal with your role in 2000. We’re not going to have much time.

With welfare reform, did you have much of a portfolio, not in the execution, but in the runup to how welfare reform was crafted?

**Kamarck:** I did. I was on the Welfare Reform Task Force. I spent a lot of time on it in ’93 and ’94, but then it was placed on the back burner because of health care. When it got to the technical side of it, Mary Jo Bane was doing it, and Bruce Reed. Have you interviewed Bruce?

**Riley:** Yes, Bruce was very generous with his time.

**Kamarck:** I had almost forgotten about welfare reform. Here’s my role in it, which is kind of interesting. I got a call in the summer of ’96, out of the blue, from Gore, saying, “What are you doing? Can you come to the Cabinet Room right away?” I said, “Yes, why?” He said, “We’re having a talk on welfare reform. You’re for it, aren’t you?” I said, “Yes, yes.” He said, “Okay, come.”

I walked in, and everybody was seated, everybody who was a player in that, including Harold Ickes. Harold Ickes looked daggers at me. It was clear that he was furious that I was there, but Gore had specifically asked me there. Oh, and Gore told me that the President wanted me there. Then I figured it out. The President was going around the room asking everybody whether he should sign the bill.

**Riley:** You were in that meeting.

**Kamarck:** Yes, I was in that meeting.

**Riley:** I’ve heard about that meeting. Now I want to get your characterization.

**Kamarck:** No, I was in the meeting. David Ellwood and everybody were saying no and I said yes. Fewer of us said yes than said no, but the minute I saw what was happening, I got it, which was that Bill Clinton intended to sign the bill. He needed, though, to make it look like more of us wanted him to sign the bill, so he said, “Oh yes, Elaine, she was the DLC.” I had written most of the early welfare reform stuff for the DLC. Even though it had been a good year since I had been in a welfare reform meeting, I was called in on the final meeting, because Bill Clinton had every intention of signing that bill and was just looking for allies. [laughing]

**Riley:** Ellwood was there. Do you remember who else?
**Kamarck:** Ellwood was there; Mary Jo Bane was there; Don Baer was there; Harold Ickes was there. I think maybe Maggie Williams was there.

**Riley:** But there were a number of voices—

**Kamarck:** Oh, yes, the room was full. There were probably 20 people there.

**Riley:** Then there was a meeting after the meeting.

**Kamarck:** The meeting after the meeting was just Gore and Clinton, and maybe Bruce Reed.

**Riley:** Did Gore ever talk about what happened?

**Kamarck:** No, he never talked about what happened at that meeting.

**Riley:** Did Gore ever tell you about his Friday meetings with the President?

**Kamarck:** His lunches? His private meetings? Yes, all the time. We would do memos to him. I wrote almost nothing in the time I was in the White House, because there was no time to write, so writing was done by other people. But the one thing I wrote, *myself*, every week, was a memo to Gore for his lunch with the President. That was mostly to take the hottest issues and get guidance, just to say, for instance, “We’re working on this with the FAA.”

**Riley:** But that was within his three or four—the Gore “Presidential areas,” if you will?

**Kamarck:** Right. No, every once in a while I’d go out of those areas and do politics. Sometimes I would do a straight political thing. Substantively it was reinventing government, and then occasionally I would comment on something that was macro, like the budget or the State of the Union. Sometimes I’d do a political piece for him. Gore would take those in and would make notes. I’d get notes back from Gore saying, “Yes, the President says okay,” so I always had a very good sense of where the President was and where Gore was on the top-tier issues.

**Riley:** Excellent. I’m assuming that those were Presidential records and were left.

**Kamarck:** I’m assuming they were. I probably have some, but I think they’re all in the archives.

**Riley:** That would be a gold mine of information.

**Kamarck:** That would be a gold mine because those were the most important things. Those were the things that I wanted to make sure the President knew, as opposed to the ten other things that he never had to know.

**Riley:** You said you didn’t do a lot of writing, meaning thought pieces, I guess.

**Kamarck:** No.

**Riley:** I’m assuming you didn’t keep a diary.

**Kamarck:** I didn’t keep a diary, no.
Riley: Were you discouraged from doing that, or you just didn’t have time?

Kamarck: No time. I had three children at home, so I was completely a maniac.

Riley: Were your recordkeeping practices affected by subpoenas and things of that nature?

Kamarck: This is interesting. When we first got e-mail in the White House, Gore and I started doing e-mails back and forth, like you do with your friends, insulting people and all sorts of things. Suddenly Gore discovered that every night all the e-mails were backed up and sent to the archives. [mock screaming] If you were to track at least our e-mails—and I’m sure everybody else’s—suddenly our e-mails were down to something completely—“I had a meeting with so-and-so today and we’re going to do this. Is that okay with you?” or “Meet me in West Exec Drive,” which is the driveway in between the OEOB and the—A lot of times Gore had something important to tell me. I’d go meet him as he was getting into his car to go somewhere and we’d have a five-minute conference. There’s a real drop-off.

Riley: That cues us to look for all the early e-mails as the best source of information. [laughing]

Kamarck: You want to look for all the early e-mails because people stopped putting things in e-mails that were potentially embarrassing.

Riley: What was Gore’s operating style? He liked to be briefed in person? Did he like paper?

Kamarck: No, he liked to be briefed in person. Very few politicians like paper. They don’t read. They are people who are orally sophisticated, they hear better. There’s not much time for reading. I brought in outside experts to talk to Gore over the years, and boy, I really had to bang it into them to get to the point, two slides or something if you wanted to do graphs, but you really had to keep that sharp.

Riley: That’s interesting, because you have the impression that this is a guy, because he’s so thoughtful, who would be a reader of memoranda.

Kamarck: Sure, but not in the White House. There’s no time. There’s absolutely no time to read things. You just can’t read anything more than two pages, which is why we teach our students here that they have to write 1,000 words. That’s it. Nobody is going to read more than 1,000 words. Academics were the worst at this, because academics presuppose reading. Nobody in important jobs in the rest of the world reads, other than very short things. Yes, Gore is a thoughtful guy. I’m sure now he reads plenty, but not in the White House.

Riley: Was he punctual?

Kamarck: He was certainly more punctual than Clinton, that was for sure. Usually if he was late, it was because Clinton made him late.

Riley: Did “Clinton time” aggravate him?

Kamarck: Yes, Clinton time aggravated everybody. Everything was always thrown off by Clinton time. Everybody was pissed off about it.
Riley: What about the internal staff structure? Did he rely on two or three people or was he very inclusive?

Kamarck: Clinton?

Riley: No, Gore. My assumption is that you were working with Gore on a daily basis.

Kamarck: Right.

Riley: Your exposure to Clinton was episodic.

Kamarck: Yes, episodic.

Riley: I’m curious about your commentary on Gore’s operating style. What can you tell us about it?

Kamarck: He was pretty punctual, he was pretty organized. There would be times when he was playing with the Internet and you had a hard time getting his attention on something less interesting than what Apple was doing that day or something. There were times when he was just tired and didn’t want to hear it, but no, he was pretty easy to work with in terms of being straightforward and getting decisions made, etc.

Riley: To whom did he listen most for political advice? We talked about the issue areas, but where was he getting—

Kamarck: Mostly to his Chiefs of Staff, first Roy and then Jack Quinn.

Riley: How had he known Jack Quinn? Do you remember?

Kamarck: I think Jack was in his ’88 Presidential campaign. I think he had known Jack for a long time.

Riley: I know Roy—

Kamarck: Roy was in the Senate, yes. It was mostly Jack and Roy. I did some of it. After the ’94 debacle, Gore was disgusted with Stephanopoulos’s bullshit. George’s problem was he thought everything was spin, that there was no reality. Gore was really pissed off about this. He asked me if I would do a real analysis of what had happened, look at the exit polls. I did a briefing for Gore and Tipper [Mary Elizabeth Gore] and the staff after the ’94 elections on the exit polls: who we lost, why we lost, and what people said. It was a straight piece of political briefing. Periodically I would do a project like that for him, but on a day-to-day basis and the internal politics, that tended to be dealt with by his Chief of Staff.

Riley: Did you happen to keep a copy of your ’94 memo?

Kamarck: I might have it.

Riley: If you have one, that would be nice to attach to the document.
Kamarck: What I should do is make a list of things to give you guys.

Riley: That would be very helpful, because anybody who comes to do research who is interested in your portfolio, having that readily available—rather than having to wait for the archives, which could be 50 years now—would be very helpful.

Kamarck: Really?

Riley: This is an enduring problem. It came up during the campaign because of the claims that Hillary was keeping material out of public domain. Even the Washington Post repeatedly had to editorialize that this was a ridiculous claim, because there were people on the Op-Ed pages of the Post who were giving credence to it. But the archival staff is just overwhelmed with FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] requests and the law gives preference to consideration of those things.

Kamarck: Yes.

Riley: Anyway, let’s get into ’96. Did you have any campaign-related activity?

Kamarck: In ’96 I traveled with Gore. I traveled almost the whole general election. I was the “issues person” on the plane. We never had much to do. In ’96 it was a lot of fun because we were winning. We were winning and we were incumbents, so we had a lot of fun. My ’96 was in a schizophrenic place because the TWA 800 crash happened that summer, so I was traveling with Gore, politically, but putting together the Commission on Airline Safety and Security, which really kicked into gear as soon as the election was over. That was a very intense—the work dealt with the airlines. By that time, I had a staff and they knew their job in ’96 was to not do anything that was going to show up in the newspapers and get us in trouble. The only thing that blew up during that wasn’t really a blowup, but the Republicans accused Gore and the reinventing government team of rushing through immigration requests for naturalization, to get millions of Hispanics to vote in California in time for the ’96 elections.

The reason that came about was because in the spring, Clinton was having meetings with Hispanics and they started to complain about the fact that there were these huge backlogs. People—maids and gardeners—were spending $96, which is a lot of money to them, to get expedited. The first amnesty law came in ’86, and it ended in ’96, so what happened was that people thought, Oh, my God, oh, my God, and there was a huge upsurge in applications. It became a political problem because it was taking 18 months for people who were entitled to be naturalized to get naturalized. That was exactly the sort of problem, like the airline crashes, that came to us.

Clinton said to Gore, “Fix this.” Gore said to me, “Fix this,” and we entered into a process with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the worst agency in the federal government, far and away, because, partly, there are no citizens in it. The usual feedback mechanism that would make Social Security or OSHA get its act together didn’t exist there. Anyway, it’s a horrible agency.

We started knocking heads at INS. I put my best and most aggressive team on it. There was a guy named Doug [Farbrother] and the civil servants—when they dealt with politics, they were just universally clumsy. It was very interesting how bad they were. This guy named Doug
thought that he could get Gore’s attention to move even faster on this by saying, “If you don’t do this quickly, millions of people won’t be able to vote in the ’96 election.” [laughing]

Somehow the Republicans got the e-mail and started an investigation into it. The funny part about this was that I thought, Oh, God, Gore is going to be mad. Gore was beside himself. He thought this was just great. He said, “I want you to go out there and talk to every reporter you can find about this. I want this story kept alive.” He wanted the Hispanic community to know that he, Al Gore, was going to bat for them against the INS. The politics of this—which the Republicans didn’t get, which is why they are still in trouble with Hispanics—was that the most hated agency was INS. Nobody else even knew the INS existed, except if you’re Hispanic you know it exists and you hate it, because either you or somebody you know has been victimized or felt victimized by it.

So we went to war with the INS. We totally went to war. The bad thing was that eventually I had to pay lawyers’ fees and go be deposed, as Congress had an investigation, which of course came to nothing, because at some point somebody in Congress said, “What are you guys doing? This is insane.” It all turned into absolutely nothing, but it cost me $4,000 in lawyers’ fees.

Riley: That’s not so bad, I’ve heard worse.

Kamarck: I always say I got off easy compared to what people like Bruce and others have paid. But in ’96 we had a good time with this issue, because Gore wanted to be the hero in the Hispanic community.

Riley: Any other tales from the campaign in ’96? The one problem that came up with Gore was the fundraising stuff.

Kamarck: I was arm’s length away from that. I had to be very careful, because I actually dealt with a piece of the government that had real things, so I tried not to talk to fundraisers and to be fairly distant from them.

Riley: Did that knock Gore off his stride?

Kamarck: Yes, it did. I remember being in the meeting where the lawyer said there was no controlling legal authority and watching with horror as Gore went out and repeated that on television. Mike McCurry was in there, too, and we said, “Oh God, this is awful.” It did knock him off his stride. He’s a very proper guy, so to be accused of this was not a very good thing.

Riley: Were you expecting to stay on in the second term? Had you been approached at any point during your service about doing something else in the government?

Kamarck: Not really. The reason was that Gore really wanted me to stay with him. What happened in the second term was that my husband was president of the Export-Import Bank. He—in a long story unrelated to this—got into a pissing match with Mitch [Addison Mitchell] McConnell. My husband got a recess appointment, but in the second term his appointment was up. He had to find another job anyway, because he wasn’t going to be confirmed again, and I was a bit burned out at that point. I talked to Joe Nye and the Harvard opportunity came up. My husband had a job in Boston, so we decided to move. Gore was not happy with that.
What I did do, though, was—I left in the summer of ’97. I started here in September and then was back there for the next two and a half years. I was back there at least twice a month, sometimes once a week, sometimes twice a week. That’s why I’m a chairman’s preferred flyer on US Airways.

**Riley:** I bet you hope they don’t go under.

**Kamarck:** Exactly. I was back there a lot. I was back there for the Monica episode and the [Kenneth] Starr Report coming out and all that.

**Riley:** What was your portfolio? Was it just political advice? Did you have a—

**Kamarck:** I had a small contract so I could give ongoing advice to the NPR. I hired Morley Winograd, who was my successor, so I would meet with Morley every time I went. Then, after hours, I would sit with Gore and it was all politics; it was all 2000 preparation.

**Riley:** One footnote piece of this: The briefing books indicated your portfolio with the welfare reform business on the hiring end. I don’t know whether that was a big piece of your work or it just happened to show up in the press.

**Kamarck:** The welfare?

**Riley:** Eli Segal must have been responsible for—

**Kamarck:** This is getting welfare women hired?

**Riley:** Right.

**Kamarck:** We did that, that was part of our portfolio. Lots of things came under reinventing government. Part of what happened—I think to our credit—because we were composed of all savvy civil servants, was when somebody needed something moved in the government, they came to us, because we had all the people who knew how to move this thing. All my folks knew how to get people transferred from one place to another. We knew how to get planes, buses, airplanes. My folks knew how to do this and the rest of the White House really didn’t know how to make the thing work, so we always ended up with these things.

In welfare reform, we got the job of getting the federal government to hire 10,000 welfare recipients. A woman named Susan [Valaskovic], who now works here at Harvard, did it. We just put the best team, again one of these incredible teams, on it. They went around to every agency. Yes, we had welfare people; that was a big thing, but was actually a rather small piece of what we did. As I say, I had 70 people who knew how to make the federal government move, so when we wanted to do something, we did it. And when the President asked us to do something, we kind of did it overnight.

When my successor came in, he did the Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles with auto companies. We were always being called on to do all sorts of things.
Riley: Has anything been written about your activity, other than your own writings, that you would commend to people who are interested in this subject, that you think is good?

Kamarck: There’s a variety of stuff in the public administration reviews. John Kamensky has been writing some stuff. Bob Stone has written a wonderful book called *Confessions of a Civil Servant*. That has a lot of the NPR stuff in it, so it’s out there. I have a book out that’s a little bit more forward looking, but talks a lot about that.

Riley: Some excerpts of that show up.

Let’s talk the second term, then. That’s an important time. You had the Vice President beginning to look at running for President in an environment that suddenly turned inhospitable.

Kamarck: Very bad.

Riley: I can either ask you or just throw you the general question to tell us the story of how we got from point A to point B.

Kamarck: The most important thing, which probably others have told you too, was that this really wonderful relationship between Clinton and Gore ended rather abruptly around the Monica episode.

Riley: There wasn’t anything in the intervening—the Monica thing broke in January of ’98. Before January of ’98 things were still—

Kamarck: As far as I know. I wasn’t there in the last half of ’97, but in the first half of ’97, when we were bringing out the airline commission report, I was seeing Clinton a fair amount, and seeing Gore a fair amount. The two of them were having a good time together. I didn’t see and didn’t hear any tension between them.

Riley: Was Gore worried about the personal issue before ’98?

Kamarck: About Clinton’s personal issues?

Riley: About Clinton’s personal issues. If I recall correctly, when I raised the issue with you yesterday, you said, “Well, of course we thought there were still problems.”

Kamarck: Yes, we all did. We thought it was in house. The assumption was that Bill was a horn dog, he wasn’t going to change, he hadn’t changed. But the thing that was so brutal about ’98 was that the woman involved was not somebody to be trusted; it was an intern, a kid. Then there were all these other—As I said yesterday, the trailer trash was coming out. That’s where people were just really angry with him. People who liked him were willing to overlook his fondness for women, but it was the lack of judgment.

It’s like the conversations about [John F.] Kennedy. One of the many problems with Kennedy’s womanizing was that in those days there were Soviet spies around. There were a lot of them. Who knew—He did end up having an affair with a mobster’s girlfriend. This was just a terrible, terrible lapse in judgment. [Franklin D.] Roosevelt screwed around too, but he had one; it’s not
really the same. He had one longtime lady friend. The total lapse in judgment really made people angry. The fact that he was fooling around was not really a surprise to anybody; it was the extent of the lapse in judgment that really surprised people, frankly.

Riley: I may redact the question, but I’m going to ask it. Did you ever have any problems with Bill Clinton on this?

Kamarck: Oh, he was totally flirtatious all the time. If I had wanted to, I’m sure I could have, but I didn’t. Clinton was always flirtatious. I was in a Cabinet meeting once with Bob Rubin and Clinton came by and complimented the brooch on my jacket. Bob Rubin looked at me and said, “You know, the President always notices women’s clothes.” I said, “Bob, no he doesn’t; he just does that so he can look at your breasts.” [laughing] Bob Rubin blushed. Bob Rubin is very proper. The women in the White House had absolutely no illusions about Bill.

Riley: So ’98 was a thunderclap. This was out of the blue. Where were you when you first heard this?

Kamarck: I was home in Brookline and Dan [Balz] from the Washington Post tracked me down at home and said, “Have you heard of Clinton having an affair with an intern?” I said, “Oh, you have to be kidding, that’s crazy. He’s so protected,” and so on. Now, as it came out—Let me go back. Clinton’s finest moment as President and a politician was the government shutdown of ’96.

Riley: Yes, we didn’t talk about it. I had a note on it.

Kamarck: The government shutdown was a fabulous bit of political theater. I was deeply in the middle of it, as was Gore, because it was the federal government and that was our bailiwick. We were the ones who found—Gore and Clinton, in one of their private lunches, said that what they wanted for the State of the Union was somebody who was a veteran, a hero, and who had been shut down and out of a job because of the Republican Congress. Again, the brilliant Susan Valaskovic, who did all the welfare stuff, went to Social Security, which was her home agency. See, all my people had home agencies; they knew everything. She went to Social Security and found us a veteran, a Vietnam veteran, who worked at the Social Security Administration in Oklahoma City, who pulled four bodies out of the rubble of Oklahoma City, and who was now shut down by the Republican Congress. We sat him next to Hillary, wrote it into the speech, and it was brilliant.

Riley: I remember the speech.

Kamarck: It was perfect political jujitsu. The Republicans looked like they’d been stabbed when we pulled that out. That was us; reinventing government did that.

Riley: You were essential then? You were still reporting during the shutdown?

Kamarck: Oh, yes, I was essential. I was in the White House.

Riley: Were you involved in the meetings with the members of Congress?
Kamarck: In some of them. What was funny about that period was that the White House staff went from a couple of hundred to about 40 and everything worked really well, because we didn’t have all these people scheduling meetings for us. We just walked down the hall and talked to each other. It was actually quite nice.

The reason I bring up the government shutdown is that we did have a big piece of that State of the Union. We had a big piece in terms of what was happening in the government. I was essential, so I was in there.

In retrospect, when Dan Balz called me to say this, I said I couldn’t conceive of the logistics. That was my problem. How would he meet some 24-year-old kid and start even a flirtation with her with all these people around him all the time? It started in the government shutdown, because she was an intern. She wasn’t on the payroll, so she could come to work and bring people pizzas and everything was very informal. That’s where they met. That’s where she showed him her thong, in Harold’s office. It could happen then because there was this very shrunken staff. All the gatekeepers who were normally around, who made bad behavior difficult, were gone. That’s one of the real ironies. Probably the apex of Bill Clinton’s political skill was during that and that was his downfall too.

Riley: So you got the call from Dan Balz—

Kamarck: I got the call from Dan Balz. I’m here. It’s my second semester—I think it was my first teaching semester at Harvard, because when you come here they give you a semester to get used to things.

Riley: When’s the first time you talked to Gore after this? Soon?

Kamarck: I was probably there the next week. Gore was pretty devastated. He just could not imagine that Clinton had done this. Tipper was so angry that she was spitting nails. Apparently Tipper was just furious; everybody was reporting to me that Tipper was furious. During this period I had private meetings with both Tipper and Gore. They were taking this very personally, because their understanding, even more than mine at the time, was that they were the ones who were going to be hurt by this. The magnitude of this was going to fall right onto them.

Riley: There was at least a time before the annual message that year when there was a real chance Clinton wasn’t going to survive this, right?

Kamarck: Well, yes and no. That might have crossed Gore’s mind, but the fact was that Clinton was hunkering down.

Riley: Okay.

Kamarck: It was pretty clear.

Riley: He wasn’t going to go anywhere?

Kamarck: He wasn’t going easily. There might have been a little bit of time when Gore thought that. We never talked about it. Now I wasn’t there every day, I was going back and forth. I never
talked to Gore about it. I mostly talked to Gore about surviving, getting through this. Other people may have talked to him about it.

**Riley:** But your characterization, or the assumption within the Gore network, was that this—At some point you must have decided that this could have happened.

**Kamarck:** Oh, we knew it happened; nobody doubted it.

**Riley:** But when you talked to Dan Balz to begin with, you thought it was ridiculous because of the logistics.

**Kamarck:** Because I couldn’t figure out how it could have happened. It was only when the report came out that it was during the shutdown, and then I thought, *Oh, okay, then it happened.* Nobody in their right mind—It was very funny that there was a male-female difference on this. The women knew it right away. They said, “Oh, yes, it’s probably true.” The men—there were some men for whom it took a while and then they were completely outraged and surprised.

**Riley:** Did Gore have conversations with the President that he reported to you about this subject?

**Kamarck:** He did, but he didn’t really say what had happened. The way I can characterize it is he talked to the President once or twice and then he was really pissed off. All I can imagine is that he probably wanted the President to ’fess up, and then the President went out and said— [gestures]

**Riley:** She just shook her finger, for the record.

**Kamarck:** Yes. That happened relatively quickly, the shaking of the finger. By the time he shook his finger, you knew that Clinton was in it for the long haul, that he was going to fight this thing.

**Riley:** So the Gores were both now aware that a lot of the burden of this was going to hit them?

**Kamarck:** Yes.

**Riley:** Were you dealing with his networks on damage control, trying to figure out how you were going to deal with this?

**Kamarck:** No, I wasn’t that involved day to day. What I was mostly doing during this period of time was some consulting with NPR [National Performance Review]. Then I was doing these late-afternoon, early-evening briefings with Gore to prep him for the general election run. I was inviting experts down and we were doing that sort of thing.

**Riley:** Tell me a little bit more about how you were approaching those meetings then, looking forward. Who were you bringing in and what was the subject matter?

**Kamarck:** I was bringing in anybody who might be either politically or substantively helpful for Gore, thinking about how he runs. Alan Wolff had written a very interesting book about American public opinion. One of the things he discovered, and this was 2000, was that
Americans are actually very tolerant on many things, except gays. They aren’t there. It’s interesting, because eight years, ten years, have passed and—to give Alan credit, he even says in the book that there is a generational difference. That’s one of those issues on which you see a big generational change. But it was important for him to show Gore what he found in his research on this, because both Gore and Tipper were really big fans of the gay community. Tipper was always doing events, she had a lot of gay men on her staff. Bless their hearts, they were really pro-gay folks.

That was terrific, but it was very bad politics. We kept seeing it in Tennessee. Every time, no matter how obscure the event that Tipper did with some gay group, we would be deluged with letters from Tennessee, because there are a lot of Christian fundamentalists in Tennessee. That’s why I thought it was good for Gore to hear this research from a nice Jewish liberal like Alan, [laughing] just so that Gore had it in his head to be careful in this area.

I brought in a guy here in Cambridge, Chris [Mackin], who does worker ownership of corporations, because that was a good liberal but business thing to talk about, worker democracy and things like that. We had lots of meetings on Social Security.

[INTERUPTION]

Kamarck: I brought in the world’s experts on the Social Security Administration, because we looked at privatization. This is an interesting story, by the way, for the record. We really looked at privatizing Social Security. We thought, Wow, this might be interesting.

Riley: This is campaign related?

Kamarck: Campaign related, to talk about it in the campaign. We really went through it. As the two people who briefed us that day left the room, Gore looked at me and said, “That dog don’t hunt.” I said, “Yes, this is one of the worst ideas ever.” It just didn’t work. It’s one of those transition problems that you run into in public policy, where yes, it might have been brilliant to set it up this way in the first place, but getting from A to B? Impossible.

Riley: Impossible, okay.

Kamarck: That came back during the campaign, when Joe Lieberman was put on the ticket. Joe insisted that he had changed his mind on it too. I was called to validate that. The reason was that right after Gore and I went through this, Gore had the same conversation with Joe. Joe had come to the same conclusion. In other words, anybody who sat down and really looked at this, and we went into it with open minds, said, “Oh, my God, this is a horrible idea.” It was fraught with all sorts of problems.

Anyway, we did a bunch of those briefings. That was what I was mostly doing.

Riley: This was in ’98 and ’99.
Kamarck: Yes, I was coming to the White House, maybe once a week, once every other week, checking in. I was doing this while all this other stuff was going on.

Riley: Do you have any recollections about the impeachment period, say from fall of ’98 into the early part of ’99? Were you down and watching any of this?

Kamarck: All I really remember is at one point sitting in Gore’s outer office, waiting to see him, and reading the Starr Report. Gore said to me, after I told him what I’d been doing while I was waiting, “Is the cigar story really in there?” Then we spent about half the time looking through it to find the cigar story; it was just so unbelievable. By that time, he was laughing at this.

Riley: You were going to weather it. At least—

Kamarck: Yes, we were going to weather it, but it was also so absurd. You couldn’t believe that we’d gotten into this position.

Riley: By the early part of ’99, impeachment had passed. Was there ever any thought that there could be a challenge within the party to Gore?

Kamarck: Yes, the [William W.] Bradley challenge. That was taken fairly seriously.

Riley: Getting closer to 2000, then. You actually had a formal role in the 2000 campaign. When did that begin?

Kamarck: I start working on the campaign in ’99. Then ’99 became very intense. I was the policy director.

Riley: At about what time in ’99, summer?

Kamarck: Maybe spring or summer. It was very intense, and the reason it was intense was that Gore was getting a nonstop beating in the press about inventing the Internet. In other words, the Republicans were doing to him what, frankly, they’re doing to [Barack] Obama right now. They’re creating the story line. His poll numbers were terrible, even though half the people thought he was running against the former Bush. His poll numbers were terrible. He was getting the fallout, just as he had anticipated, from the impeachment. It was a miserable period, except that when he talked about policy he got good headlines. Here’s the good news and the bad news. We did, in ’99, a bunch of serious policy speeches because it was the only respite from the unremitting bad news. That was the good news. The bad news was that when we got to 2000 we’d given all our major policy speeches and George [W.] Bush started giving policy speeches. People thought he was great and that all we had was recycled stuff, so it was really unfortunate.

I spent a lot of time with the campaign, a lot of time in Washington, in ’99. By 2000 I started going to Nashville. Still, this Nashville business was an idiotic logistical choice. Gore did it in one of those desperate moves. It looked desperate, it was desperate. The problem was that he lived in Washington, D.C. He didn’t have a house in Nashville. He didn’t have a house. He had an old farmhouse in Carthage, which was an hour away from Nashville, so he never went to Nashville. He never went to the campaign.
Everybody who went to work in Nashville ended up flying back to Washington all the time to see Gore because that was where he’d be for meetings. It was just a terrible mess. Gore himself by this time was worn out and pissed off and it showed. The difference between Gore in the first term—where he had a lot of energy, his mind was always focused, he had a good sense of humor about things going wrong—and Gore in the campaign was like night and day. I’ve always half-jokingly blamed it on his stupid diet. He got very thin during this period. He looked terrific. He looked like Superman. In fact, in this picture he’s very thin.

Kamarck: That’s from—


Kamarck: He’s svelte.

Riley: He’s extremely thin.

Kamarck: It’s not from worry and anxiety?

Riley: No, he was thin because he was on this unbelievable [Robert D.] Atkins diet, where all he ate was nuts and steak and he was hungry all the time, and grumpy. He was completely grumpy. That campaign was not fun. He wasn’t focused. He didn’t have a sense of humor and it showed. It showed to the reporters traveling with him, it showed to the staff around him, etc. The slightest little thing that went wrong, he’d blow up. In ’99 he started firing people who had been with him for a long time. He fired Ron Klain, one of his most talented, wonderful chiefs of staff. That campaign was doomed from the get-go.

Riley: How did you develop a fresh policy initiative for somebody who had been Vice President for eight years?

Kamarck: It was very tough. It really was very tough because we were in this—We did a lot of “next-step” stuff. We did sort of “the continuation of,” that therefore we couldn’t be criticized for going back on having been Vice President. Frankly, the policy worked fine. When we were unrolling the policy, we got lots of kudos for it, it’s just that our timing was completely off on the policy. It was hard, though, because we had to be consistent. You couldn’t take a dramatically different tack than Clinton had taken, because then people would say, “Wait a minute. If you really believed this, what were you doing for the last eight years?” You’re very constrained in that situation, but Clinton had done a lot of policy, so there was stuff to build on.

Riley: Was the timing problem fixable? Was it driven by the necessity of changing the subject?

Kamarck: It was driven by the necessity of changing the subject.

Riley: He had to do it when he did it.

Kamarck: Yes.

Riley: It was just one more consequence of what was happening.
Kamarck: Yes.

Riley: His relationship with Clinton by this point—

Kamarck: Was almost nonexistent. He would take calls from the President on the road from time to time. He was still involved with [Viktor] Chernomyrdin and with some tricky foreign policy things. Have you talked to Leon?

Riley: He’s on the list. We’re negotiating time, but he’s also very busy.

[INTERRUPTION]

Kamarck: What were we talking about?

Riley: His relationship with Clinton.

Kamarck: It was nonexistent. They talked on some foreign policy things that Gore still had, but they were not even talking and were angry at each other.

Riley: One of the pieces of conventional wisdom about the 2000 campaign is that Gore underutilized Clinton during that campaign.

Kamarck: That is a completely wrong piece of conventional wisdom.

Riley: Then I’m glad I asked the question.

Kamarck: I’m hoping that historians will straighten that out. First of all, I’ll tell you why there is that conventional wisdom. When Gore lost, it was in Clinton’s interest, for his legacy, to say that that was the reason. In fact—and I saw Mark Penn making this argument, right after March 2001—I said to Gore, “Look, I can refute this. You lost because Bill Clinton was impeached. That’s why you lost. Had he not been impeached, this wouldn’t have happened.” But he, Bill Clinton—Let me step back for a minute. Beginning with the end of Monica, Bill Clinton was obsessed with his legacy. He knew he had just fucked up his entire Presidency and was always going to be remembered for his total utter carelessness, for being impeached, and that he had wasted the whole second term. The first thing he did was the Camp David thing, which of course was going to fail because there wasn’t the groundwork laid for it. It’s funny to see Bush trying to do—All these Presidents think, “Oh, well, I fucked up my Presidency, so I’ll try to make peace in the Middle East,” as if this is going to save these guys. He was completely, completely obsessed with his legacy.

Gore could not use Clinton in the general—Forget Clinton campaigning for him. When Clinton was in the news, the two groups of voters, married women and older voters, moved away from Gore. What was happening was that even when Clinton was dominating the news and not
directly campaigning, Gore was getting killed by it. Clinton at this point was really bad news. Gore did talk about the future, etc., but he was walking a very tight line, where Clinton was still radioactive.

How do we know that it was the right decision? If you talk to Stan Greenberg or any of the people working for Gore, they’ll tell you this too. It’s one of the few things on which I agree with Bob Shrum, who I thought ran a crappy campaign for Gore, but we agree on this. We had daily tracking polls. You could see this happen with key voters. The way it showed up in the exit polls was that in most subcategories of the electorate, if you compared the Democratic vote in 2000 with the Democratic vote in ’96, Gore did either as well as Clinton, who after all won, or he did better than Clinton. He had more absolute votes, say amongst black voters and higher proportionates.

There’s one category where that was not true: married women. Gore lost married women compared to Clinton in ’96. You can’t tell me that married women were concerned about Social Security or gun control or anything else. This is an absolute direct reflection from the scandal and impeachment, so it stands out. With the married women, it was a 6-point drop. It stands out there.

Subsequently I’ve written this, but why was that not known at the time? Because Clinton himself and his people went into overdrive to make sure that the Gore loss was Gore’s fault, not Clinton’s fault, because they were still obsessed with legacy. Clinton today is obsessed with his legacy. You hear him on the stump. They get very mad when people say things weren’t great in the Clinton era. But then he was really obsessed with his legacy; his Vice President had lost; and he hadn’t been used, so there developed this conventional wisdom: “If only Clinton had been used.”

It has taken a long time for Clinton to be rehabilitated, and it is only the disaster of George Bush that has rehabilitated him. In the off-year elections in 2002 I had two people, one running for Governor, one running for Senator, Bill Richardson and Erskine Bowles, tell me that they wanted to invite Bill to campaign for them and their pollster said, “Uh,” polled it, and realized they would lose their swing voters. In 2002 he was radioactive. If he was radioactive in 2002, what do you think he was in 2000 with swing voters?

The other argument made was that Clinton could have shored up the base. Well, Gore exceeded Clinton’s base vote by any measure. He exceeded his African-American vote and exceeded the other metrics. He didn’t need Clinton for the base. What he needed was more of those independent and swing voters, and that’s what candidates were discovering in 2002. Guess what? In 2004, when John Kerry heard that Clinton had been invited to Philadelphia to campaign for him, he had a fit. Because even though John Kerry wasn’t the most gifted of politicians, these politicians have a good sixth sense. Sure enough, Clinton came in, and I am told that when Clinton campaigned for Kerry, Kerry’s numbers in Arkansas dropped. They didn’t go up, they dropped.

By 2006, by the way, Clinton was being invited into swing races, but it took six years, and it took the Bush Presidency making Clinton look good and making people decide they would forgive his failings because he was, in fact, a good President on the substance. But it took six
years for that to happen. If you were seeing a negative Clinton effect in 2002, and you were seeing a negative Clinton effect in 2004, what do you think the Clinton effect was in 2000? It was awful, so that was the right decision, and I hope history gets this one right.

Riley: I’m sure it’s going to be pored over, but I’m glad I’ve had the chance to ask you that. Were there discussions about giving a major speech that was more critical of Clinton and his behavior? I don’t think that ever happened.

Kamarck: He did it in his announcement speech. After his announcement in Nashville, he gave an interview with ABC [American Broadcasting Company] News and was very critical. That reverberated through the White House and everybody was mad. He was very critical, and he distanced himself from Clinton’s behavior.

Riley: Was there consideration of doing more of that during the course of the campaign?

Kamarck: By then it was sort of water under the bridge. The announcement, remember, happened in the summer of ’99. Gore announced in Nashville, in Carthage, in the summer of ’99. It was all still an issue; it was only a couple of months after the impeachment vote. By the time we were full into the campaign, the fall of ’99 or 2000, there was no point in bringing it up; everybody knew it. There was no point in talking about it.

Riley: Were there missed opportunities that you reflect on during the course of that campaign, not necessarily related to Clinton, but elsewhere?

Kamarck: In the Gore campaign?

Riley: Yes, in the Gore campaign.

Kamarck: The big missed opportunity was the fight that I had with the consultants over the environment. They did not want Gore talking about the environment. It didn’t poll well and they thought people already knew that.

Riley: The consultants being at this time?

Kamarck: Tad Devine, Bob Shrum, the pollster Greenberg, and one other one. The people who were running the campaign day to day didn’t want him talking about the environment, so Gore gave me the job of fighting with his own consultants—because his own consultants didn’t understand him—to get him to do a big environmental speech. We did a big environmental speech in June. It’s still great policy, by the way. I can unwrap that today. It’s the best global warming policy ever, because it is all about weaning us from oil and building infrastructure and things like that. We did this huge policy thing and the campaign consultants and the press people previewed it and spun it as having to do with what was at the time a very small and transient increase in the gas tax in Wisconsin, robbing all the vision out of it.

Gore at that point was furious, and called Katie and me into his living room—We were at the Vice President’s house—and said, “What happened?” I said, “They never want to do the environment and that’s what they did.” I fought them pretty hard on this but the bottom line was that when Gore talked about the environment he was passionate, alive, human. Talking about the
environment would have achieved many of the things that they kept trying to achieve by other means that kept backfiring, like putting him in earth tones, stuff like this that just kept backfiring. That was a real missed opportunity. Gore should have campaigned on the environment.

Gore had a group of consultants—this is also part of the Clinton problem. The Clinton ’96 team was a very good team. They were very good. But Gore’s antipathy to Clinton in the second term became so extreme that he didn’t want anybody associated with Bill Clinton. He then put together a team, beginning with Tony Coelho, that didn’t know him, didn’t know Clinton. Tony Coelho at one point said to me, “Well, of course we’re going to cut the Pentagon budget.” And I said, “No, we’re not, Tony. We’re raising the Pentagon budget.” That showed me that he had no idea of who Al Gore was and where his priorities were. That was the same—Shrum didn’t know Gore. Tad Devine didn’t know Gore. The person who knew Gore was Bob Squier, and Gore fired him.

Not to read too much into this, but part of what happened was that Gore was so angry at Bill Clinton that everything to do with Bill Clinton was shoved aside. He went into the primaries and the general with a team that didn’t know who he was, didn’t know what he’d done, didn’t know what his preferences were, didn’t know what he was passionate about, and crafted a sort of cookie-cutter campaign onto him. By this time he was exhausted enough that he didn’t fight back adequately, and played right into the Republican stereotypes of him.

Riley: Some of what we heard indicated that some family members were important in this period, trying to get him righted.

Kamarck: Kareena [Gore Schiff] was the only family member really playing in this, and would occasionally try to get involved. She brought in this joke of a woman, Naomi Wolf. Again, it was more of a symptom than it was the problem. The symptom was that he was badly off his game. His campaign was off its game.

He knew something was wrong with his consultants, but at the same time he was pushing away everybody who had been close to him, including me, by the way. He fired Squier; it’s a miracle he never fired me. I watched him fire his first string, thinking, Oh gee, when is it going to be my turn? Instead, he just stopped talking to me. He didn’t fire me, he just stopped talking to me. He was pushing away everybody who had been with him a long time. He had thrown his lot in with this crew of people who were not Al Gore people, with the exception of Carter Eskew. When Kareena brought in Naomi Wolf—who didn’t know anything about politics but was not a bad person—it was a symptom of a campaign that just was not right.

Riley: Did they in any way underestimate George W. Bush?

Kamarck: They underestimated the Republican attack machine. This is still burned deeply into everybody’s brain. By the way, the whole Democratic Party is terribly afraid that Obama doesn’t get it. They underestimated how the Republicans do this: drip, drip, drip. The drip was he invented the Internet. The drip was Love Canal. The drip was the movie Love Story. They took the slightest little things that he said and managed to turn him into a liar, so that when you got into the general election, he was not a trustworthy person. Those trust questions are very
predictive of votes. That was the drip, drip, drip. It wasn’t Bush so much; it was more [Karl] Rove and that Republican machine.

Then Gore allowed himself to have a series of disastrous debates.

Riley: Were you involved in the preparation?

Kamarck: I was involved in preparation, although—By this time I was in full-out war with the consultants, because of the way they looked at the problem. They said Gore was too cerebral, that was his problem with the voters. He was too cerebral, so therefore they’d better keep Elaine, the Harvard professor, away from him and not let him talk policy.

Riley: They didn’t know Harvard very well. The Kennedy School is a different kettle of fish. [laughing]

Kamarck: They didn’t quite get that, but they kept putting him through these phony-baloney exercises. He, in the first debate, was way over-caffeinated and took on faith that there would be no cutaways from the camera. When there were, you saw him sighing and being obnoxious and he lost the first debate. Then, of course, he was so freaked out by that, that in the second debate, on foreign policy, where he should have nailed Bush to the wall, he sat there like milk toast. I just played for my students the two Saturday Night Live send-ups of this and they are right on. By the third debate, it was over.

In contrast, in the debate prep for the primaries, where I was more in charge, Gore sat at a table with a yellow pad and thought about how he’d frame his answers, which was the way he liked to prepare. It wasn’t this phoniness. That was a big problem. A big problem was the way they prepared him, but also, he was just off his game. He was not the focused guy who took Ross Perot to the cleaners.

Riley: Were you around for the Florida recount business?

Kamarck: By that time, Roy Neel and I were in charge of the transition. The one thing Gore and I had learned, which is very interesting, is that if you want to kill an agency in the federal government, and you want to do some real streamlining, you have to do it before you put a person in the job. If there’s a person there, then suddenly you have all the politics around that person; the person fights for his or her job, etc. Gore asked me to think about the transition and especially to think about what pieces we might want to get rid of down the line so that we didn’t put somebody in there. That way we could have some time to do some real streamlining and reorganization without the politics of a person in the job. Roy and I pulled up names and made a transition plan.

Riley: This was before the election?

Kamarck: Yes, this was in October. We had lists of names of Cabinet Secretaries. Roy was working on what the legal requirements for office space and all that were in Washington. We came to Nashville on election night with a suitcase, one of those rolling bags, filled with enough memoranda for a 20- to 30-person meeting the day after the election. Then, of course, Florida happened.
I’m not a lawyer, so I never went to Florida or anything like that. For that period, I would go to Washington about once a week. Roy and I would sit in the Hay-Adams Hotel restaurant, and wait to be called to go over to the White House and do a transition briefing. We never did. I must have been there three or four times: we’d wait for a little bit; it would be canceled because there would be something breaking in Florida; I’d go downtown, go Christmas shopping, and then I’d go home. That was the day. I never really did much in Florida, and neither did Roy. We were sitting there, waiting.

**Riley:** For a transition that wasn’t going to happen.

**Kamarck:** As it went on, it became clear it wasn’t going to happen.

**Riley:** Were there any big pieces of the transition? Tell me two or three of the pieces. What were you talking about zeroing out? What were you recommending?

**Kamarck:** I don’t remember anymore.

**Riley:** See, these aren’t Presidential records, so historically nobody would ever have access, so if you have one of those—You said you had enough for 20 or 30 people.

**Kamarck:** I probably have transition memos.

**Riley:** That would be fabulous. Our work at the Miller Center is exclusively on the Presidencies that made it, and I’ve often felt we shortchange history by not going back and interviewing people who were in losing campaigns to find out what lessons they learned and things of that nature too.

One final question. I wanted to ask about Clinton’s legacy for the Democratic Party. This is, for me, a perplexing issue, and I’d like to get your take on it.

**Kamarck:** I wrote a piece on this and I’m not sure it’s in here.

**Riley:** It probably isn’t, or I would know.

**Kamarck:** No. It was called—

**Riley:** If you remember where it appeared, I’ll use that as the answer to the question.

**Kamarck:** It is still, I think, the best piece I wrote on it.

**Riley:** You can imagine why it is a puzzling issue. Some very favorable things happened, but at the same time, losing Congress and also not having the Democrats pick up the Presidency in 2000. . . .

**Kamarck:** I’ll put that on the list. The piece you should put in there that deals with the legacy is called “The Politics of Polarization.” You go to thirdway.org. Bill Galston and I published it. Essentially, we make the argument that on domestic policy it’s a very good, positive legacy. What the Clinton Presidency did was squeeze all the left-wing socialist junk out of the
Democratic Party, and even though they occasionally go to Ohio and complain about trade, Clinton brought us firmly into the global economy and into the modern economy.

On foreign policy, we say there was a wash because Clinton didn’t really have many opportunities to have a foreign policy legacy. We say that on cultural issues he left a very bad legacy. He essentially identified the Democratic Party—because it wasn’t just Clinton, it was all the people who were apologists for his behavior—as the party that was culturally out of step with America. This is something that we’ve tried to fight back on.

Riley: Can I take this? This is the *National Performance Review* from ’93.

Kamarck: You can take this, because I’ll show you in here, “The Clinton Legacy,” that’s the piece you want to include.

Riley: My time is up. You have been very generous and very forthright. This has been fascinating for me.

Kamarck: You’re welcome. This was something I know I needed to do.

Riley: You did it. It was a fabulous contribution. I’m very grateful. All these things are pieces of a mosaic, and if you put 125 of these together, as we’re doing, this is going to be quite a—

Kamarck: I will try to get you a couple of more things. I have a box in my basement.