



The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Chris LaCivita

Current: President, Advancing Strategies, LLC

In 2004: Principal Media Advisor, Swift Boat Veterans for Truth
Consultant, National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC)

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Q: Chris LaCivita, you had almost a quarter century in politics at the state level in Virginia, and in various national functions before 2004. And I wonder, in 2004, what did you bring from those long and varied years of experience that was useful to you in 2004?

LACIVITA: Right. Well actually, I have nearly a quarter century now. I went in -- I was -- I guess I was probably in year 13 professionally in politics in 2004. You know, I served in the United States Marine Corps, and fought in the first Gulf War and came home from that experience, and went straight into the profession of politics. And so, in mid-1991, [00:01:00] and had been involved in a lot of different campaigns, managed a US Senate race. One of the top US Senate races in the country in 2000. Chuck Robb versus George Allen. And of course, Allen had won, was the national political director at the National Republican Senatorial Committee in the 2002 election cycle. Bill Frist was the chairman of the committee. And that was actually the last year that quote unquote “soft money” was allowed in party system on a federal level. That was the year before they actually had passed McCain-Feingold in 2002, I believe. So, that was a year where we had a --

Q: But it didn't take effect in that --



LACIVITA: And it did not effect in that election cycle. So I had a \$90 million political budget that we used to write and produce TV ads all over the country. And granted, and, you know, of course that was the president, President [00:02:00] Bush's first midterm election that he faced, and generally the party in power, you know, suffers. But that was a historic year, because we actually took back the majority in the US Senate. It was the first time that had happened since I believe direct elections of US Senators started at the beginning of the twentieth century. So, that was a challenging year from the standpoint of a challenging election cycle, because, you know, as it was, I know for the president, from a governing standpoint, because it was 9/11, it was all post-9/11. So everything was changed, everything was different. While there was this short respite in terms of how campaigns would be run, and maybe they would be a little bit more civil, it didn't last long. You know, once we got into the full swing of the 2002 election cycle, [00:03:00] things really took off. But, you know, the political experience really, I mean, the more time you spend doing this, the more you learn. I mean, it's a business that is based really on experience. I mean, there's not a whole lot that you can do in politics that can prepare you for some of the things -- there's not a whole lot you can do in life, really, that'll prepare you on a daily basis for some of the things that you encounter in the context of a political campaign, unless you've had previous experience, you know, politically. So, there's -- you know, I had -- we'd been through a lot of tough campaigns and tough candidates, and so I think the body of work, up until 2004, had prepared me for a mission that, you know, was materializing as quickly as it did.

Q: Had you developed over the years [00:04:00] any sort of theories of what moves numbers in an election, that maybe attacking your opponent moves numbers more than positive ads for your candidate?

LACIVITA: Right. Well, you know, in terms of everybody has their own maxims, if you will, or has their own theory in terms of what drives a political campaign. From my standpoint, if you're a challenger, for instance, and you're running to defeat an incumbent, you have to do two things. You have to provide voters a reason to vote for you, and fire the other guy. If you're a challenger and you don't do that, you're not going to win. Just, you're just not. If it becomes a popularity contest between a challenger and an incumbent, the incumbent's going to win. People want differences. Campaigns are about differences. Campaigns are about contrasts. And so, you know, if you provide those contrasts in clear, [00:05:00] concise, easily understood manner that's based in fact, then you have a good



opportunity to defeat an incumbent. Granted, it's also, it's nice to have a head -- you know, a tailwind, you know, if the political environment favors you. 2002 was an election cycle where I think the political environment was just really up in the air, it didn't really -- I don't think it was unusually Republican. It wasn't a tailwind like the Democrats had in 2006, it wasn't a tailwind like Republicans had in 2010. So it was a little -- those races were won tactically. I also believe that in terms of campaigns, that my personal philosophy is I don't win campaigns. I just keep candidates from losing them. Quite frankly, the candidates are the ones who win, they're the ones who get themselves elected. You know, my job is to keep them from making mistakes, which they do because [00:06:00] they're under an enormous amount of stress, and they're worried about day to day things, and I have to keep a bigger picture focus. So it's about providing strategic guidance. And so that's, you know, another aspect of, you know, at least the way I view things. I think it's very important also that you have to have -- if you're running for public office, if you're a candidate, you have to have -- people have to know who you are, they have to like you before they'll vote for you. And I mean, and there are plenty of cases where people have gone to -- I've been involved in campaigns in the past where the strategy was, make the other guy as unfavorable as my guy, and maybe I'll have a shot at winning. And I've succeeded in campaigns like that, those are always tougher. But generally, you want people to have a higher positive vision of your candidate than they would a negative one. And [00:07:00] they have to know what you stand for, and they have to have a pretty good idea of those points before you, yourself, as the candidate, have any credibility in attacking your opponent. If you attack your opponent, and you have minimal name ID, and -- or you have wide name ID, but it's very thin, you don't have the credibility to carry a negative. You will increase the negatives of your opponent, but your negatives that you will -- you will take on water very, very rapidly, and that it'll come to a breaking point, and it'll come to a tipping point, and so you have to spend as much time, resources, and effort talking about yourself as you do your opponent. If you don't, you know, those are the races that are generally pretty close on Election Day.

Q: Now you're talking about a challenger running against an incumbent.

LACIVITA: A challenger, right, right.

Q: In '04, the challenger running against the incumbent was Kerry against Bush.

LACIVITA: Right.

Q: So how does that [00:08:00] affect the analysis?



LACIVITA: Well, it changes things quite a bit. I'm involved in races in this election cycle where I'm finding that the issue environment, for once, actually favors the Republican candidates. Republicans in the past would never want to talk about -- and this was the same as it was in 2010, Republicans would never want to talk about healthcare. I mean, you know, that'd be the last thing -- or for that matter, education. Those were issues that just were deemed to be more favorable to Democrats. While -- so Republicans are out trying to initiate discussions on those issues, and Democrats want to attack on character. So what happens is when the issue environment generally does not favor your candidate, whether he be an incumbent or not, you try to take the election somewhere else, on something else. In 2004, specifically as it related to the presidential campaign, it was -- you know, it was interesting, because, [00:09:00] you know, we weren't involved with the campaign. We did not talk to the people at the Bush campaign. I had a lot of friends there in, you know, key positions, but neither them nor I looked good in orange jumpsuits, so... (laughter)

Q: And just for the record, why?

LACIVITA: Well, it would be -- it's illegal. I mean, you cannot have a conversation -- and this, remember now, 2004 is the first year, it's the first election cycle post-McCain-Feingold. And, you know, I think one of the unintended consequences of McCain-Feingold -- there were plenty of us who saw this coming, but you're never going to be able to eliminate the influence of individuals or groups of individuals from being engaged in the political process. The Founders didn't [00:10:00] set it up that way. So the 527s started popping up all over the place back in 2004. And 527 is a code in -- is a section of the IRS code which allows the individuals to form a political committee to engage in political debate. And there are certain rules and regulations that you have to follow. But that was the first year of McCain-Feingold, so if you're staffed up with good enough lawyers, they'll find the holes for you. And then -- and, you know, that's essentially what we did. And -- but getting back to the -- you know, the issues set, so we weren't involved in any discussions with the Bush campaign. Matter of fact, I knew it very well that as we proceeded with the Swift Boat operation, they didn't particularly care for it. [00:11:00] There were some at the very highest levels of the Bush campaign that weren't too thrilled with what we were engaging in. But for us, who were doing the Swift-- it wasn't about the president. It wasn't about President Bush. It was all about John Kerry. And we frankly didn't give two hoots what the campaign thought about what we were doing. I mean, we clearly did not want to do



anything that would damage the president. I mean, we were all supporters, and clearly wanted to see him win. The vast majority of us -- there were some members of the Swift Boats who were Democrats, not many -- but the vast majority of us, you know, would have been very distraught had the president lost. Especially if it had been anything that we had done. But at the same time, you know, we had to tell a story, a story that needed to be told. And the venue that allowed us to do that was the -- setting up a 527. So, [00:12:00] we set up this 527 -- and yeah, go ahead.

Q: I mean, how did you know that the Bush campaign people were --

LACIVITA: You just hear. Oh yeah, there was --

Q: Because you couldn't talk to them.

LACIVITA: Well, you couldn't -- well, I mean, you could just -- you would hear it. I mean, you know, Washington in a presidential campaign is a very small town. During a presidential year, it's a very small town. And, you know, we're all talking to the same reporters, and the press is a conduit. They're a conduit. You know, they'll share with you things off the record, and you share things with them off the record, and they'll be like "Man, Karl's really pissed about this." And, you know, stuff like that. (laughter)

Q: Why?

LACIVITA: Well, because in some -- I mean, I'm not going to speak for Karl, but -- I clearly can't, but you know, you would hear things like, well, they hijacked the campaign. You know, which is a legitimate criticism, and a legitimate concern. As someone who runs political campaigns all over the country, I hate it [00:13:00] when an outside group comes in and throws a wrench in the works, and they start talking about something that I'm not talking about. I don't like that. Because that takes control away from me. So, it's not like any of the concerns that may have been expressed were unfounded, quite frankly. I mean, I probably would have had the same exact -- and I have had the same, you know, whether it be the US Chamber, or whether it be whoever would come in and play in a particular race. You -- as a political operative, you want to maintain control as much as possible, you know, over every aspect of the campaign. And so when you lose that to an outside group that legally you're not even allowed to blink, excuse me, at, you have those concerns. So -- and again, not unfounded ones. But we would hear things, and -- but, you know, and of course there were all kinds of accusations about, you know, that we were coordinating, [00:14:00] and it was all Karl's grand idea. And that was the other thing. I was like, you know, Karl's a smart guy, but he ain't the only



smart guy in politics, right? There's a couple other people that may know a little bit. So, you know, we got a kick out of that. But, you know, and we had some of those same issues that arise again in -- when I did something similar in 2008 in the presidential race. But, you know, they -- you know, you would expect -- you expect the opposition to make -- you expect them to make an accusation that there's illegal coordination, or that there's something in order -- I mean, it's a smokescreen.

Q: Let me back up.

LACIVITA: Sure.

Q: To -- and we will get the Swift Boat story at length. But you mentioned McCain-Feingold, and it was new for '04, right? What was new? In other words, in banning soft money, money that -- in large amounts that could be [00:15:00] given to the political party organizations, what effect did that have on the 2004 elections?

LACIVITA: The effect it had on the 2004 -- well, yes, so McCain-Feingold, first campaign season that -- the first campaign cycle that it was in effect was the 2004 presidential campaign. And essentially there were two types of political money. There is money that's regulated by the Federal Election Commission for federal elections, and that's called hard money, and this quote unquote "soft money" which is regulated by the states. It's not like it's unregulated money. You know, but it's just not regulated by the Federal Election Commission. And so basically, McCain-Feingold eliminated the parties' ability to use this money, and to raise this money, and to spend this money, and the committees became reliant clearly on hard money, which is raised in \$22-, \$2,400 levels, as opposed to an unlimited [00:16:00] level. You know, or even a corporation check, you couldn't take corporate money, anything like that. So at that point, previous to McCain-Feingold, campaigns and the party system were the movers and shakers in Washington. The Republican Party and the Democrat Party exercised discipline and control over their candidates and over their, you know, from a political standpoint. Because they were the center of the universe, and they raised money.

Q: And how do you -- I'm sorry. And in '02, you said --

LACIVITA: I had a \$90 million budget.

Q: Soft money?

LACIVITA: Soft money. And that just required that I couldn't specifically for the election -- the defeat of a candidate in a TV commercial, and so we did issue ads. But those issue ads, the vast majority of the issue ads, you spend a lot of that on negatives



as a political committee, but the campaigns then spend more of their money on the positives, about why [00:17:00] they're running. So McCain-Feingold I think really undercut the heart of American politics by essentially cutting -- weakening, I believe, the two party system by taking the money out of the parties and just allowing people like me, to be perfectly blunt, establish (c)(4)s, (c)(3)s, (c)(6)s; if there's a code cite in the IRS, we'll find it and set up a committee behind it. And so, it takes the money out of the party process, and puts it in the hands of a few, or too many folks. I mean, it just depends. But -- and, you know, whether it's a corporate interest or a personal interest, or I mean, it runs the gamut. And so, in 2004, we were still in the infancy of figuring out how we deal with campaign finance, but 527s, there were two mechanisms that you could use. You could use a (c)(4) or a (c)(6), which are nonprofit social welfare organizations.

Q: And these are IRS?

LACIVITA: [00:18:00] These are IRS codes, or categories. It's what they're named for. And then there was this particular, you know, 527, which was relatively new. Our campaign lawyer was Ben Ginsberg, who's the one who brought me into the whole Swift Boat thing. But he is -- you know, he's probably one of the foremost, you know, experts in campaign finance law, and so helped devise the proper legal way to initiate this, and to initiate, you know, the organization as it was as a 527. Interestingly enough, it was in 1996 that issue advocacy, the use of soft dollars, was used extensively, and that was basically done by Dick Morris when he was doing issue advocacy on behalf of President Clinton. They were spending money to go after Newt Gingrich. But, so I'd had a long history, and of course [00:19:00] 2004 changed everything so, you know, we set up our group under this particular code of the IRS, and a lot of -- and then there were, you know, there was another group that I was involved with, Progress for America, they were engaged, they were more of a -- they were a (c)(3) or a (c)(6) organization, which is based on the IRS code. So a little different than us, but we had to report our donors. And within a certain window.

Q: As a 527?

LACIVITA: As a 527, had to report them. Yeah.

Q: So it was tens of millions of -- hundreds of millions probably, that prior to McCain-Feingold, were going to party committees like the RNC and the Democratic equivalents, and so on. Now that money is going to --

LACIVITA: Organizations set up by consultants.



Q: And you mentioned Swift Boats, and you mentioned Progress for America, which was another, if you will, loosely defined pro-Bush or anti-Kerry program, really.

LACIVITA: Right. Oh yeah.

Q: But the Democrats had their own, right?

LACIVITA: Oh yeah, no, no, [00:20:00] and to be fair, these political committees and these (c)(4) organizations, they existed prior to McCain-Feingold. Because I mean, from -- you know, the Founders clearly want normal people involved in the political process, not just, you know, the consultancy, if you will, or the professional politician, be it an elected official or a consultant or, you know, an operative. So, these organizations have always existed, it's just that there are so many more now. They dominate -- the parties used to dominate the political scene, they don't anymore, they're bit players now. And so, 2004 was the start of that, and, you know, and of course it became the -- I'm trying to remember some of the groups that came out of -- that were on the Democrat side in 2004, there were so many of them. [00:21:00]

Q: MoveOn.

LACIVITA: Well, MoveOn was huge, that's right, had started up earlier. You know, it's funny, because they were -- that -- part of the concern going into the 2004 election cycle was Republicans don't have the equivalent, you know, that we were the ones that were under gunned, we didn't have -- because the administration had basically said, we don't want to have anything to do with them, and you know, the political class was going, well why are we going to fight with one hand tied behind our back? And of course, Progress for America had been around, and was very much involved in pushing the agenda post-2001, but -- and very involved in 2002, but -- and then the Swift Boat's just sort of one of those things that happened.

Q: I want to ask you this. McCain-Feingold was new for 2004, made 2004 different. Anything else that made 2004 different? The rise of the internet, or anything else that comes to mind?

LACIVITA: Well, we were at war. [00:22:00] I mean, Iraqi Freedom started in 2003. We were in year one of a 10 year conflict. You know, we were in Afghanistan, you know, we were in -- and so, you know, it was -- we were in a reelection campaign, not for President of the United States, we were in an election campaign for commander-in-chief. And...

Q: In 2004, really the first effort to draw attention to John Kerry's Vietnam record was by the Kerry campaign.

LACIVITA: Yeah.



Q: And in this book that came out of a post-election conference at the University of Pennsylvania, a Democratic -- a Kerry campaign ad [00:23:00] called "Heart" where he's got Vietnam veterans like Del Sandusky saying the decisions that he made saved our lives. And then, Jim Rassman, "When he pulled me out of the river, he risked his life to save mine." My point being that this was something that Kerry thought was going to -- was working for him. The Swift Boat response--start with the equivalent of Genesis 1:1. I mean, how does this come into being? And then, how do you get involved?

LACIVITA: So, back in May of 2004, Admiral Hoffmann, Roy Hoffmann, who was the commanding officer of the Swift Boat detachment that Kerry belonged to, started calling some of his [00:24:00] former men and said, "You know, we have to stop John Kerry." Now in May, I was heavily engaged in primaries, US Senate primaries in Illinois and Colorado and other places, and, you know, I didn't even -- the Swift Boats didn't register for me.

Q: You were a Senate guy, right?

LACIVITA: Yeah, yeah. I mean that's predominantly what I'd been doing up to that point in time. And so, and I had always heard that there was some controversy over John Kerry's military record, but I'd never really spent a whole lot of time delving into it. But in May, the -- you know, there was a group of the Swifties, held a press conference here in Washington at the National Press Club, and they, you know, they had a lot of press show up. But they didn't get any [00:25:00] press coverage. I mean, *The New York Times* wrote a one, maybe two paragraph story on page A-22, and basically couched the story from the standpoint of Nixonian dirty tricks and, you know, I mean it wasn't reporting, it was an opinion piece. And so --

Q: What did they --

LACIVITA: Well, they basically came out and said "Look, you know, we have some problems with John Kerry's claims." What happened was, there was a book written by --

Q: Douglas Brinkley.

LACIVITA: Doug Brinkley. And I -- you know, for the life of me, I can't remember the name of the book.

Q: *Tour of Duty*.

LACIVITA: *Tour of Duty*, thank you. And I've said this and, you know, it's been 10 years, so forgive me. But -- and I've said this, and I still hold this belief. Doug Brinkley started it. [00:26:00] He started it. That book pissed these guys off. Because what was written in that -- it's all coming back to me -- what was written in that



book was a glorification of, you know, John Kerry the soldier. And these men objected greatly to what they read, and the way things were characterized, and it wasn't just based on what Kerry said when he came home. You know, the press wanted to say oh, well, you know, they don't like him because he said all these horrible things about veterans when he came home. He cast these wide general aspersions on all veterans and claimed that they were all murderers, or -- and whatever.

Q: Based on their conduct in Vietnam.

LACIVITA: Based on their conduct in Vietnam, correct.

Q: (inaudible). [00:27:00] This was in '71 I think.

LACIVITA: When he testified in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, right. And so, you know, they raped, killed, tortured, murdered, you know, etc., etc. And of course, that was plenty to mobilize veterans, Vietnam veterans, you know, but we had -- the American public had exorcised its Vietnam demons in 1991, in 1992, in the first Gulf War. I mean, that was the breaking -- I mean, that was the put it behind us and consider it part of history, and you know, the American public had gone through this 20 year period of time where I mean, I'm not a sociologist, but they have gone through this point in time where, you know, American servicemen weren't looked up to in any capacity, [00:28:00] there weren't nearly the amount of charities or organizations, anything done for veterans. It was done in large part because of the characterizations that they suffered from. Kerry was one of those people who helped create those characterizations, in my opinion, that became part of the American psyche, and then at the end of the first Gulf War, then I think things started changing from the standpoint of how we looked at our veterans, and Kerry knew that. So Kerry then tried to wrap himself in this aura of, you know, I'm -- you know, I'm a military man, we're a country at war, I can be a commander-in-chief. So, and I don't want to get too far ahead of myself. But those were very important -- those were some very important decisions that the Kerry campaign had made. But one of those ways -- they made a calculus. They made a calculus, they've made some decisions. I'm running for president in a -- and of course, now granted, [00:29:00] I wasn't in the room when they were doing this, but I can only imagine, having made similar calculations for political candidates at varying levels, you go through and say, how do you position your guy? What's my guy's story? What's the narrative we want to create? What are we facing, how do we go in? And, you know, you're a country at war, and you have a combat -- by all accounts, an impressive combat record, of course you're



going to -- and you're a politician, of course you're going to try and utilize that. And of course, every campaign has a book written about it. You know, presidential campaign, somebody's writing a book. And so Brinkley's book really glorified, I think, a lot of the things that happened in Vietnam, and tried to reshape John Kerry, and retell the Kerry story, [00:30:00] and the Swifties just were -- I mean that set them off, that was the catalyst.

Q: So why, as people are trying to make sense of this, Kerry had his fellow veterans from the war talking about -- backing up his version of his heroism. And the Swift Boat veterans who formed this organization have an entirely different take. Is this a matter of fact, or is it a matter of opinion, or a matter of different people witnessing different things? I mean, did you feel like the Swift Boat veterans were telling the truth, and the pro-Kerry veterans were lying, or mistaken, or?

LACIVITA: I -- there were two people, two or three people, who were on Kerry's boat [00:31:00] who backed up John Kerry's, you know, story. Or various stories. We had -- I had one gentleman who was on Kerry's boat, a gentleman named Steve Gardner, and then I had every other Swift Boat captain who was at the same level that Kerry was, a captain, and their crews in their -- in his platoon and in his company I guess you would -- of boats, including the entire staff, command staff, from the admiral on down. So people who -- so I had people who were not only there with John Kerry, and not only did I have people who served alongside John Kerry, but I also had people who were in charge of John Kerry. [00:32:00] So we had the -- there were folks that ran the entire gamut, who all had similar stories that, you know, that they would share. But they had come to me -- I guess you want me to talk about, you know, the infancy. So it was funny, I was doing some stuff for Progress for America, and I got a phone call from Ben Ginsberg who would represent me; you know, every political consultant needs a political lawyer at some point. And so, and I've done things with Ben, and Ben came to me and said "Hey, I want to introduce you to a couple gentlemen you may find interesting. They have a story that probably needs to be told and, you know, you're probably better equipped to understand what they're talking about."

Q: Did he feel like, or did you feel like one of the reasons that the initial announcement, the initial press conference didn't resonate was that they really didn't know [00:33:00] how to package this, or how to present it?

LACIVITA: Yeah, I think that's -- no, I think the reason why it didn't get the coverage it got was because people didn't want to tell the story.

Q: In the press?



- LACIVITA: In the press. I mean, they just flat out dismissed these guys as kooks and whacks, and you know, and they just, they made a judgment. They made a judgment based on what they were hearing, and at that point in time, it wouldn't make a difference what these guys did.
- Q: But if this group had come to you before they did that initial event, you or some other professional, would they have made a more effective presentation (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?
- LACIVITA: They never would have done a press conference. Because I never rely and would never rely on the national media to carry my message.
- Q: Because?
- LACIVITA: There's a filter. There's -- they have a filter. The national media imposes a filter, what -- the first filter you encounter is the editor, [00:34:00] I mean, is the writer. The second filter is the editor. And the third -- you know, and then you've got a headline writer, and you have all these people who have a -- who weren't there, who are supposed to report, but there's -- I mean, we've lost reporting. And I -- look, I work very well with the media all over the country, and all the big papers. But on an issue like this, you don't rely on the media to get your message out.
- Q: You think -- are you talking about --
- LACIVITA: I just didn't think we would get a fair shake.
- Q: Are you talking about an ideological bias that is the filter or is it just wait a minute, we all know that John Kerry was a war hero before he became a war objector.
- LACIVITA: Right, right.
- Q: So, you know, since we know that we're not going to reexamine it?
- LACIVITA: I think it's a little bit of both. You know, I know a lot of reporters who politically are left of center, but who do a damn good job of being objective in writing the news. Because they take their trade, [00:35:00] you know, seriously. And they take their role as a fact checker or as a, you know, the fourth estate, if you will, they take it very seriously as a watchdog. And I look for those reporters, because those are reporters -- I don't care what they personally believe, as long as I'm not reading it as news, you know, and we found some reporters like that in 2004.
- Q: Give a good one.
- LACIVITA: Jim Vandehei of the *Washington Post*, who's now with *Politico*. I mean, you know, there weren't a lot of people at the *Post* that would be really interested in sitting down and hearing our guys. And he wanted to hear it. He wanted to hear the story. NBC National, you know, were helpful. I mean the *Times*, you know, *The New York Times* was more interested in telling the story of who was behind it,



who was behind Swift Boats, and what was their connection, you know, to the president, so they could make this charge. But the guys had come to me and Ginsberg, you know, and I knew Ben was also the [00:36:00] lawyer for the president's reelect. But, you know, there's a provision, as there's always a provision in the law, that exempts the lawyers. And (laughter) you know, it's amazing how that happens sometimes. But the issue of, you know, because Ben doesn't make political decisions, and budgetary decisions, he can advise groups that have similar, you know, goals, but because he doesn't make political recommendations, he can provide legal counsel. So he comes to me and says, "Look you need to meet with two gentlemen who are very involved with -- in the Swift Boats. And they're Vietnam veterans, and because they want to share some insight with you." And he said, "I don't understand this stuff, and you're a combat veteran; maybe you would." And so, I remember we met with them. I met with John O'Neill and Bill Franke. And John is -- you know, he's a [00:37:00] very distinguished trial lawyer in the state of Texas, Bill Franke is like six foot eight, very imposing man, who, you know, was CEO of a company that did an awful lot of development projects in Vietnam. And these are extremely well off individuals who don't need to stick their toe into the middle of a political campaign because they're starving for attention. John O'Neill is actually a Democrat. So I met with these two gentlemen, and John gave me -- and we had a brief conversation, about an hour and a half. And they told me things that they firsthand witnessed John Kerry do in Vietnam. And then John said, "But wait, you need to read this transcript." And it was a transcript for the book, [00:38:00] *Unfit for Command*.

Q: Which he had written.

LACIVITA: That he -- which he had written.

Q: Had it been published yet?

LACIVITA: No, no, it was a transcript.

Q: Manuscript.

LACIVITA: Manuscript, thank you, thank you, thank you. And so I said OK, well let's get together tomorrow, and I'll read the manuscript tonight. So I went back to my hotel, drank a lot of coffee, smoked too many cigarettes, and read the whole thing overnight. And just, and some of the things that were in there, you know, some of them I felt were probably -- and I had already made the decision that these were two individuals that I could believe. They told me a story about, you know, John Kerry had fired an M79, which is a small -- they used to call it the Thumper, it's a grenade launcher. And it's a single shot, you know, you break open the barrel and



you pop a 40 millimeter grenade [00:39:00] in, and you pop it open, and there was always one of those guys in a squad. But they would always keep that, because that gives you the ability to fire a grenade a little further distance, throw a grenade a little further distance. And that Kerry had thought he had seen an enemy soldier behind, you know, a pile of gravel. So he took a 40 millimeter grenade and took the M79 grenade launcher, and locked and loaded, and at point blank range, shot it at this pile of rocks. And so they're telling me this, and I'm like, well, why would you do that? I mean first of all, it's a point detonating fuse, so when it hits, it explodes, and it produces shrapnel. If you're shooting at point blank range at a pile of rocks, you're going to get hit with your own shrapnel. And they're like, "This is how Kerry" -- you know, and they're telling me this story, and I'm completely getting it. Because I mean, I've seen people do similarly stupid things. (laughter) And I [00:40:00] was like, "Well, OK, I never knew that." And so, you know, they were -- it was this level of detail that was in the book, and there were some things that were in the book that didn't stay in the book, and I won't go into them. But some things that I felt were probably a little hard to believe. Not from the standpoint of -- these guys, you know, they witnessed what they witnessed, and they wrote down what other people had witnessed. But I felt much more comfortable with what John and Bill and then it became a wider group of people that I got to know, when they started telling me firsthand, you know, certain things, then those things, you know, and the vast majority of the book stayed intact, and -- but, you know, we just tinkered with a couple things and [00:41:00] because at that point, we had made the OK-- well they had made the decision-- we set up, Ben had already set up the 527. It was already set up, I didn't have anything to do with that. They set it up --

Q: This is Swift Boat Veterans for Truth?

LACIVITA: Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, John and Bill had already set it up, they had already put \$50,000 of their own money into it. And Ben had already established it as a 527, they just needed somebody to -- a political consultant, somebody -- you know, if they're going to play in this world, then they need, you know, professional guidance. So.

Q: At some point, Ben Ginsberg, not for political reasons I think, but for other reasons, resigns as counsel, right?

LACIVITA: To the Bush campaign.

Q: To the Bush campaign? He stayed on as counsel for Swift Boats?

LACIVITA: Yes, yes. Correct, yeah, he stayed with us.



- Q: Because the Bush campaign didn't like (inaudible)?
- LACIVITA: I don't know. I mean I can --
- Q: Back to your story.
- LACIVITA: -- I can only imagine (laughter) the phone calls that went on. [00:42:00] And Ben paid a price for that. I mean, he was our counsel, and then he became a pundit on MSNBC. I still give him hell about that. But he -- yeah, so he'd come to us, the group had already been formed, and they needed to, OK, how do we get this story out there? Because we tried it with a press conference, it didn't work.
- Q: When was this?
- LACIVITA: This was in early June.
- Q: Shortly after the press conference.
- LACIVITA: Yeah, it was -- yeah, the press conference, I believe was on 4 May, and so this was probably, you know, maybe a month later. And so it took us about, you know, it took -- and maybe it was even later, in middle June. I remember because the way -- there's a couple things I remember from a timing standpoint, because I was getting ready to go on vacation, because I always disappear around July 4th. You know, I head to the beach and just chill, and that's my time to [00:43:00] decompress, in the middle of a cycle. And I remember it because while I was at the beach, I was writing copy and ad ideas, and the hard drive on my computer died. And I remember being at my vacation home in the beaches in South Carolina, and spending a whole day on the phone with some guy in India trying to explain to him how the hell to fix my computer, and he finally gave up and said, "I'm shipping you a new one." And the next morning, at my vacation home, I had a brand new computer, and then I didn't know how to transfer -- I mean it was just a wreck. But I was able to get all my stuff back. But I remember it because when I got home, I had to leave the beach early because we had a meeting at the Key Bridge Marriott, where we were bringing in all the Swifties, and then we did our first photo shoot, our first film shoot. [00:44:00] But basically, in the earlier conversations with John and Bill, it was like look, we're going to have to run an ad campaign, because they're not going to be able to -- they're going to, if we try to do a press conference, we're relying on the press to carry your message, that's going to be a mistake, number one. Number two, we're going to have to put it on TV. And here's what people don't realize. Getting an ad on TV is not hard. Keeping an ad on TV, in the context of a political campaign, and you're a third-party group, is not easy. Because a -- I mean, it's become easier as TV stations grow accustomed to the sheer volumes of money that they receive, but TV



stations are under no obligation to run a third-party TV ad. They have to run campaign ads from the campaigns. But a third-party group, they don't have to run their ads. And when they do run them, we pay the same level of advertising that Coke, Pepsi, McDonald's, [00:45:00] everybody else pays. So, and because of that, they are -- we're under a much tougher set of rules in terms of facts. And you have to be able to verify every single claim made in an ad, or the John Kerry for President campaign's lawyers are going to come in, scare the hell out of some local TV station, and get the ad pulled. And then if you get an ad pulled, then you have a whole new set of problems, because then your group starts losing credibility. So, our strategy was get an ad up and keeping it up was going to be our focus. So, and we utilized a little bit of talk radio to ensure that our ad stayed up. We were communicating with Rush [00:46:00] Limbaugh about a TV station in Toledo that was threatening to yank our ad, and he went nuts, and started telling everybody call that TV station who's -- they're trying to suppress, and so they called -- I mean, and that -- those are things that were happening when the first ad went up. But we had made the decision, I brought on Rick Reed, who is a very well known ad guy, Republican ad guy, whose uncle is actually one of the Swift Boat vets, Admiral Lonsdale, who had the distinction of being the only Coast Guardsman that was a Swift Boater. And he actually lived in Massachusetts. But, so because of his connection to Adrian [Lonsdale], and because Rick is a good friend of mine and I could trust him, and he does great ads visually and has a very keen eye, so I brought him in, and so he and I coproduced and did everything together on the ads. But we had made the decision and the recommendation that [00:47:00] we needed to do an ad campaign. And we received some initial seed money of like \$30,000 to put together a full day shoot with as many people as possible. We made the decision that we would do this in the voice of the men themselves, instead of a studio spot, because individuals carrying the message for you who have a real-life story who were there tend to be a lot more credible in the political context. Normal people. So we made that decision, and there wasn't -- you know, there wasn't a whole lot of writing involved. There's writing in some of our later ads, but the first ad, and then the second ad, which Rick produced with Kerry at the --

Q: The Senate.

LACIVITA: The Senate hearing, you know, used -- the two things we decided to do. We would use their [00:48:00] own words against them, and we would use firsthand



accounts of the Swifties themselves. And so, we did that, and we knew we had to carry that narrative.

Q: The first thing, you didn't have that much money at this point.

LACIVITA: No, I had next to nothing.

Q: And the first ad was -- well, talk about the first ad. Because I think most people when they remember Swift Boat, that they remember the first ad.

LACIVITA: Yeah. Well, that was the one that, you know, clearly -- the most effective one was the second one, but effective -- or I should say the most damning was the second one, just Kerry's own voice. But the first ad started it all, because the first ad had the Corpsman -- no, the doctor who treated Kerry, it had all of these -- "I served with John Kerry," "I served with John Kerry," and it was funny because the -- you want to talk about the stars lining up, things happened during the course of this event that [00:49:00] just don't happen all the time. I mean the stars don't always align, and they did in everything that we did in this particular campaign. From John Kerry standing up saying, "I'm John Kerry, I'm reporting for duty" --

Q: At the convention?

LACIVITA: At the convention in Boston, to the morning that we're filming, the morning that we are filming the veterans and the Swifties, Rick comes up to me and says, "Have you seen this video of John Edwards?" And I'm like, "No." And I remember he comes and he sits down next to me, he pulls out his laptop. In 2004, there wasn't wireless everywhere like, right? I mean, you know, you think about the things that have changed just from 2004 to today, and it was John Edwards saying, "If you have any question about what John Kerry's [00:50:00] made of, just ask the men who served with him in Vietnam." And I still get goose bumps, because I remember seeing that, and I went, holy crap. And I just, I was just -- and then I remember John and Bill were like, what? I'm like, "You guys have got to see this." (laughter) I have all the guys there that day, that morning, sitting right there. And this video had just popped up of John Edwards saying this. And of course, John Edwards being the VP pick. And I remember showing it to John and Bill, and Bill goes, "Well, guys, let's ask them." (laughter) So, we had all the guys there, and I think that was one of the few lines that Rick and I actually wrote, which was, "I served with John Kerry." "I served with John Kerry." [00:51:00] And we just happened to have them all there. I mean, because we could have easily not seen this video, shot everybody, and may not have said, "I served with John Kerry" in the fashion in which we wanted to do it. Because we showed every one of the guys the video.



- Q: The second ad was, I think probably the attack the Kerry people were expecting, right?
- LACIVITA: It was. It was exactly what they were -- and that was -- and thank you for raising that point, because we -- when we were going through the ad progression, because we -- what we like to do is we war game these things out. OK, you have ad one that we want to say this. And ad two, you want to say this. And then somewhere in there, you've got to be prepared to respond, because we think they're going to do X, Y, and Z. And we had a conversation, and Rick and I had a conversation, and trust me, I reminded the Swifties, who were all sailors, every day, that they put their political hands in the hands of a former Marine sergeant. (laughter) I -- you would love to give Admiral Hoffmann a hard time about that. But we -- so we war gamed several scenarios. And the decision to go with the John Kerry didn't earn his medals, if you will, we made that decision because we knew that's not what they expected. Because we knew ad two -- ad two was not even -- we talked -- we knew that there would be something about what he said, but the concept of it hadn't -- Rick hadn't done it yet, hadn't produced it yet. We just knew it would incorporate it in some fashion.
- Q: Ad two was basically Kerry the antiwar witness before the Senate Foreign Relations.
- LACIVITA: Correct. And he's speaking in this, you know, very Bostonian accent, and his (inaudible) and it was sort of like a, you know, such a gratuitous manner in which he was speaking down [00:53:00] to everybody. So yeah, that and -- that ad just stirs more emotion in more people, but our ad where "I served with John Kerry," "I served with John Kerry," and then the doctor says, "You know, I served with John Kerry, and he didn't deserve his first Purple Heart, because I was there and I treated him for that injury." And so when we incorporated those aspects, it was something that they never anticipated, and every one of those guys wrote an affidavit, signed an affidavit, attesting to the -- to what they saw and that's what we submitted as our backup to the TV stations to keep the ad on the air.
- Q: This first ad runs right after the Democratic convention.
- LACIVITA: Right after.
- Q: Which featured John Kerry reporting for duty, John Kerry (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) war hero.
- LACIVITA: Right, I remember when the -- I remember sitting in the living room of my house with my wife, watching the op-- and I didn't watch, and I don't really watch a whole lot of political stuff on TV, but I knew I had to watch [00:54:00] the speech.



And I remember, as soon as he did that, my phone rang, it was my mother. She said, "My God, Chris," she said, "I sure hope you have your phone number unlisted." Because see, she had already seen the ad. The ad was done, it was in the can, it was already complete before the Democratic -- about a week before, we had just finished it. Because at that point, we were shopping it to donors.

Q: How big a buy for that first ad?

LACIVITA: Half a million dollars. Bob Perry, God rest him, Boone Pickens were the guys who stepped up.

Q: You didn't expect that the effect of this ad was going to come through, that the people who saw [inaudible], right?

LACIVITA: No.

Q: Where was the (inaudible).

LACIVITA: No, and that -- so what I did was, OK, we figured where do we place this ad where we have to play a couple -- we have to do [00:55:00] a couple things. One, we wanted to pick small markets where the local TV stations would appreciate the revenue. (laughter) OK? And there's not going to be a whole lot of competition. I mean, you know, so there's going to be a financial incentive for them to keep the ad on the air. I mean, these are all, you know, points that we have to go through and think about, you know, it's very -- I mean, it's conniving, but it's very thoughtful and strategic in how you place these types of things. Especially in this particular -- for this launch, it was very important. It was also very important that we did it when there wasn't any news, OK? We had to find a vacuum, you know, and politics loves a vacuum. And controversy loves a vacuum. So, I picked, you know, a couple -- the Toledo market and [00:56:00] I didn't have enough money, plus it was just cheaper. I mean, you know, it's 38 bucks a gross rating point, as opposed to, you know, 212 in Cleveland or what have you. So we picked smaller markets, but we picked them in key battleground states where, you know, and remember we're doing this within the confines of the law, which are you can't call for the election or the defeat of anyone, so you can't say, vote for George Bush, or vote against John Kerry. So you can't say that. You can infer it, but you can't specifically state it. And so, and matter of fact, we never conducted a survey, a poll. We didn't focus group the ads. Because I know people would have said, "Oh, it's negative; I don't like it." Well, OK, whatever. So, you know, and I didn't need to hear that. And it was a -- [00:57:00] you know, we were playing to a character flaw of Kerry's. There was something out there about John Kerry that people didn't like. And the Bush campaign had already picked up on it. You know, they



started running that ad with him on the surfboard, on the wind board. And so, you know, the climate was there, it's just how do you exploit it and, you know, so we picked a -- you know, I think we picked Wisconsin, a couple ads in Wisconsin-- a couple places, two or three media markets in Wisconsin, Ohio, there may have been one more, I just can't recall the state. But we had to pick a battleground state and it had to be a half a million dollar buy. Because we had to prove to the press that this is not just an internet ad. Because everybody tries, since we did that, it's been let's try and do this -- every outside group tries to do that now as a way to launch, and so the -- because the accusations were [00:58:00] so sensational, and they came at the heels of the convention, and just a week before the Republican convention, and that downtime between the two conventions, again, there's another star that aligns. You know, and then we had a couple big shots in Texas who, you know, said yeah, damn it, we'll do it, and weren't afraid of the subsequent controversy. So they were -- they put the money behind it, and then the ad went up and I mean, we knew, as soon as John Kerry did that, I mean I knew all bets were off, this was going to be huge. I never would have guessed that 75% of the American public would have said, after 10 days, they're very familiar with the accusations made by the Swift Boat veterans. [00:59:00]

Q: How did that come about? Since only a few people saw it?

LACIVITA: The sheer volume of press coverage at that point in time.

Q: And that was the strategy, right? Run this --

LACIVITA: Yes.

Q: -- ad (inaudible).

LACIVITA: Force the press to cover it. Force them. And we're not just talking about newspapers, we're talking about TV news, the vast -- nothing against TV, I mean nothing against newspapers, but most people get their news from the TV. And they still do, even with the internet. And the internet was big in 2004, but from a political standpoint it was an infant to where it is now. But we recognize that, we had, you know, we did stuff online and, you know, we're making 200-- raising \$200,000 a day once things finally took off.

Q: My timeline from the --

LACIVITA: Right.

Q: -- back of the [01:00:00] Harvard book, *Campaigning for President 2004*, shows the ad running first on August 4th.

LACIVITA: Right. Yeah, last week it was the 10 year anniversary of the ad.



- Q: Which was -- that's right. Because five weeks be-- well, three and a half weeks before the Republican convention.
- LACIVITA: Right. OK, so it was a little further.
- Q: So here you had basically the month of August --
- LACIVITA: Vacuum.
- Q: -- and what did you expect the Kerry campaign's response was going to be, if this got the kind of news coverage that you ended up getting?
- LACIVITA: Well, we knew that because we are in politics too, Rick and I. And by then, we had brought on Greg Mueller and Keith Appell, they're with a PR firm called CRC, CRC Public Relations. And they actually did John O'Neill's book, did the PR for the book. But [01:01:00] --
- Q: Which sold almost half a million copies.
- LACIVITA: Yeah, oh yeah. It just took off. And Greg Mueller, who's the principal in the firm, he's an old warrior. I mean, he was Pat Buchanan's comms director, I mean, so this guy is, you know, used to hand to hand combat. So --
- Q: You mean when Buchanan ran --
- LACIVITA: When he ran for president in 1988. So --
- Q: Ninety-two.
- LACIVITA: Ninety-two, '92, thank you, for the nomination. And so, we brought Greg on to handle the day to day interaction with the media. Because you want to talk about a real slugfest, they all wanted to get me, you know, but -- and Greg's job was to -- I'm like look, you know, Rick and I aren't doing interviews, the guys are doing it. It's not about us. The press wants to -- their first reaction, let's get to the political guys. And it's not about us telling these guys' story, it's about these guys telling their story. So, we did -- Greg devised this brilliant media strategy, earned media strategy at that point, [01:02:00] even though it was a filter, that wasn't built on newspapers. We knew we had to deal with the newspapers, but we wanted TV coverage. Because TV coverage, by and large, if they're interviewing them, with -- aside from editing, you're going to get most of your points across. And it was such a sexy, you know, issue that what we decided was we started bypassing -- I mean obviously the [Sean] Hannitys of the world were all over us, and we more than happily obliged them. But what we -- Greg wanted to do was, and we ended up doing, was we set up these satellite tours. And people didn't see this going on. But we would bring in four or five veterans who had a connection to a particular state, and we'd call producers and say, "How would you like" -- for a local TV station in Cleveland, and say "How would you like to have our guy on your show



live via satellite for the six o'clock news?" (laughter) None of them [01:03:00] said no. They were all like yeah, that'd be awesome. So we did these in key markets. We did it in Florida, we did it in Pennsylvania, we did it in Ohio, we did it in -- I mean we did it everywhere, in states that mattered. And even some that didn't. But -- so we were force multiplying in a big way, in terms of the messaging, but doing TV for -- by doing it via satellite, shipping it out to people, and talk radio, and all of these things were going on. So, you know, it was a very well executed, organized operation. Our biggest problem at the time was keeping up with the donations. And then, you know, we're into week three or week four, and we've -- we're a bona fide political operation now. And [01:04:00] we're in a rhythm, and that rhythm is, you know, attacking, counterattacking, defending, on any number of points at any given point in time. And so, you -- when we're trying to maintain a long-term 30,000 foot level, but we're also -- you know, and Bill Franke is trying to run an international company, and he's running the day to day of the operation, and John is doing -- John O'Neill is probably the, you know, one of the best -- I mean he was the best spokesperson for the group. This is a guy who debated John Kerry in '72 on the *Dick Cavett Show*. And what's funny is, I remember talking to Boone, Mr. Pickens, about, you know, who was helping us organize. And I said, well, I said, "You know, John O'Neill." He said, "John, that son of a bitch," he says, "That lawyer sued me and won." He goes, "I'll get in with him." [01:05:00] I mean, you know, they had a history in Texas. (laughter)

Q: I want to -- I want you to -- again, what did you expect the response of the Kerry campaign to be?

LACIVITA: Well, thank you. The -- we expected two things. One, that they would ignore us. Because we were all political operatives, so we knew that when you make an accusation, the last thing you want to do is pour gas on the fire. You're just praying that the story ends, right? That the story ends, it just goes away. So we knew the initial reaction would be dismissive. And move on, and try and change the subject. But, you know, the ads weren't going anywhere, and because we not only decided to air an ad, but then we decided to put the men themselves out there on a daily basis, I mean we sat them down in some very hostile -- I mean, [01:06:00] we put them on MSNBC with -- oh.

Q: With Chris Matthews?

LACIVITA: With Chris Matthews. I mean, and I remember we -- I can't remember his name, but he was a Swift Boater, you know, he was a Swift Boat captain, Thurlow, Larry Thurlow. What a great guy. Farmer from Kansas. So, big guy who, you know,



fought in Vietnam and probably saw more than any man should see in a lifetime, and came home, did his duty for his country, came home, and worked the earth. This guy comes out as part of our -- you know, and we send him -- put him on -- I remember we made the calculus, we put him on with Chris Matthews, and we knew that Chris Matthews, we knew Chris Matthews was going to blow him up. Just that Chris Matthews was going to be Chris Matthews. And that Larry Thurlow, [01:07:00] the farmer from Kansas, was going to be respectful, quiet, make his points, no sir, and Chris Matthews was going to put on a show. And we knew that was going to backfire on them. And it did. Those types of things we did continuously, so it was more than just TV ads, it was in how you utilize your primary messengers, and that your primary -- and we would always tell our guys, look, just speak from the heart and speak from what you remember, and don't change your story, and be consistent and, you know, everything will be fine, and I think that's what helped -- I think that's what made the Kerry no comment, if you will, or we're not going to legitimize this with a response, I think that's what hurt him. And then we started debating the process. Because the press loves to talk process. So then we got into a discussion about why wasn't the Kerry campaign responding? [01:08:00] (laughter) And that's when I knew that things -- that we were going to grow roots at that point in time.

Q: The Republican convention, you all make a huge buy during that convention. Am I right?

LACIVITA: It was over a million dollars, and I know we put half a million of it on Fox News nationally. So we bought network.

Q: Why wouldn't that be a time to let the Republican Party, the Bush campaign, tell its own story? Why isn't that a week that instead of buying heavily, you stepped back?

LACIVITA: We actually thought long and hard about that. We didn't want to do anything to step all over, you know, what the president wanted to push at the convention. But Admiral Hoffmann made it perfectly clear to all of us that [01:09:00] this had nothing to do with George Bush. I mean, Admiral Hoffmann was the boss, at the end of the day. And they still called him admiral. And we kind of -- we would always chuckle at, you know, the four foot eight admiral, but everyone was scared to death of him. I mean, he has a commanding presence, and still did in 2004. And every single one of those men respected him and paid him his deference, and the respect that the rank commanded, even in retirement 30 years later. So, he wanted -- he had to keep it going. The other thing is, we had to keep it going in



order to keep the news from being stale. And then at that point in time, we were receiving such an overwhelming response from people, we couldn't keep up with the donations, and [01:10:00] every time we filed a new TV ad, we had to file a list of donors that paid for that TV ad. Well when you're getting, you know, 40, 50,000 donations a day, and we had two people whose responsibility it was to input this stuff. It was starting to hold up our ad buys. And the one thing I can't stand are when bureaucrats, whether they be political ones or gubernatorial ones -- I mean, or governmental ones, that are standing in the way of progress. And I'm like, I can't have an accountant tell me I have to delay my ad buy a week because they can't enter in -- so we literally, you know, brought on 20 or 30 people in a low level grade, just to come in and start inputting, so we could stay. But that's when we became this political operation, so we had to start functioning like one, and doing all those things that are required. But --

Q: You started out with seed money from Bob Perry and --

LACIVITA: And Boone.

Q: -- Boone Pickens, OK, and some from John O'Neill, you said.

LACIVITA: [01:11:00] John and Bill initially gave us like \$50,000 to start off, and then we also had some from -- oh, gosh. Another Texas donor, he just passed away. Used to own Rite Aid. Harold Simmons.

Q: How much did you end up raising and spending?

LACIVITA: Oh, \$25 million, from August to November.

Q: And how many ads, how many different ads did you run?

LACIVITA: I want to say seven or eight, somewhere in that -- may have even been more, because we did the first ad, then we did the ad with Kerry, and then we did the ad with Kerry throwing away his medals. No, it was my ribbons, no it was my medals, we usually -- we used footage of him giving an interview on ABC, *Good Morning America*, where he was talking about how he was throwing his ribbons away. And then [01:12:00] -- but then we had footage of him on *The Dick Cavett Show* in '72 when he was talking about how he threw away his medals. And so ribbons, medals, we were basically running footage of '72 to 2004 back and forth on the TV ad. It was kind of humorous. But then we did an ad with -- we joined with the POWs, the POWs wanted to make -- we clearly, at that point in time, had created -- we knew that there was going to be a point when we had to make the move to what Kerry said, and how that impacted the POWs. And so, we -- you know --

Q: In Vietnam?



- LACIVITA: In Vietnam. And so we brought in the POW wives, and did a -- ran a TV commercial in Ohio and Pennsylvania where it was, you know, Paul Galanti's wife, and the wives of some well-known POWs, and we just said, well what did John Kerry say, how did that impact you when you were here [01:13:00] at home, when your husband's rotting in a POW camp in Hanoi? So we ran the TV ads on that.
- Q: What do you do when probably the most famous POW in America, and a Republican, John McCain, says I don't like what the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth are doing to my respected colleague, John Kerry?
- LACIVITA: We anticipated that. It was funny, Rick Reed, Rick Reed's business partner is -- was the late Greg Stevens. Greg is actually with Roger Ailes, they're the ones that did the old Dukakis ad, the tank ad. Greg at the time was John McCain's go-to guy. And so Greg knew about these ads before -- I mean matter of fact, I called Greg and wanted Greg [01:14:00] to do them with Rick, and Greg said he couldn't because of his relationship with Senator McCain. But we approached Greg because we wanted to make sure that he would help us when the time came with John McCain. We knew John McCain would not like it. But John McCain's a politician. The guys we had on our TV ads were not, and are not. And we had to make that --
- Q: And McCain campaigned pretty actively for Bush in '04. So, that complicated things. I read somewhere that in your ad buys, once you had the money to really buy ads in volume, you aimed at the 35-plus age group. Why?
- LACIVITA: When [01:15:00] -- 35-plus demographic is the most expensive, and it's what everybody watches, and it's what every political campaign buys. They buy 35-plus.
- Q: So there's nothing distinctive about it?
- LACIVITA: Nothing.
- Q: Now you said earlier that 527s can't coordinate -- can't even talk with the campaign people. But as I understand it, 527s can talk with each other. I know the Democrats did that a lot --
- LACIVITA: Oh yeah, they coordinated, and they can.
- Q: And I noticed that in 2003, you'd been the president of Progress for America.
- LACIVITA: Right.
- Q: And that Brian McCabe took your place. Progress for America, of course, in '04, ran that other --
- LACIVITA: Ashley ad.
- Q: -- very famous ad, the Ashley ad.



LACIVITA: Right.

Q: Young girl whose mother had died on 9/11 and said on -- in the ad, [01:16:00] you know, I'm so glad President Bush was here to protect me, or words to that effect. That was a very effective ad.

LACIVITA: He just walked up to her, somebody had -- she was in a line somebody said, "Mr. President, she lost her mother." And the president just walked up to her and put his arms around her and just, you know, said a few words. And it was a very, very powerful ad done by Larry McCarthy. But -- and Progress for America, yeah, they paid for it. But we worked very closely with PFA.

Q: So talk about that, because here they are running this very positive, heart tugging ad, and your ads are much more critical. By the way, I don't think of negative as a harsh word. You know, my colleague John Geer at Vanderbilt wrote a book called *In Defense of Negative Advertising*.

LACIVITA: That's a great book. (laughter)

Q: He makes a very strong case for the value (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

LACIVITA: Right. Well it's -- I mean, if you [01:17:00] compared what we do now to what they did, you know, in the 1800s, I mean it's child's play, I mean.

Q: So, talk about your conversations with Brian McCabe, or --

LACIVITA: Right.

Q: -- more generally with PFA.

LACIVITA: Well with -- it was -- our focus was, I mean we had our mission, and, you know, our -- my job was to ensure that -- I mean I had a lot of different hats I had to wear. But it was to provide strategic direction, and some of the tactical aspects of politics, bringing that expertise to the table. But to keep this Swift Boat operation as organically Swift Boat and as organically -- as legitimately Swift Boat as possible. I mean, we wanted a political organization that wasn't political, if that makes any sense. I mean I remember Admiral Hoffmann saying one day, he says, "Well, damn it, I'm timing this guy," and the cusses like a sailor started with him, [01:18:00] that phrase, but he -- I remember he said one day, we're on a conference call, and he said, "Well, I'm tired of all these damn people saying that we're doing this to elect Bush. I'm not trying to get Bush elected. I just want to -- I just -- you know, the people need to know the truth about John Kerry." He says, "Chris, if you think it's smart, I'll go up and trash the President of the United States on TV tomorrow." And I remember going, "You know Admiral, that's not really necessary." (laughter) You know, he wanted to make it clear that, "I wasn't doing this for Bush." And I'm like, no, no, no, no, no, you do not have to do that. That's



-- appreciate it, great idea, you know, maybe we'll do it another time, but we're not going to do it this -- and I remember John O'Neill and Bill Franke just going, "You see what we're dealing with?" And the admiral was, you know, but my job was to provide that guidance, and the tactical aspects of it. But these guys were the messengers, and I had to keep it as, you know, them as possible. And that was the focus, and I think that what made it so much more [01:19:00] genuine and effective. PFA was helpful, just from the standpoint of the fundraising aspect. They had, you know, the fundraising mechanism nationally that we just piggybacked on, quite frankly. I mean --

Q: Meaning what?

LACIVITA: We had some fundraisers, and I would give them an -- I never went -- there's only one or two fundraising meetings I ever went to. I didn't have to really deal with all of that. I -- Brian McCabe would flip it to one of his fundraising folks, and they'd sit down with guys in California or whoever, and they would write us a check, and I mean, because we were receiving checks from, at that point -- you know, it wasn't just the low dollar donors and the original seed money. But then we were getting -- you know, [Joe] Ricketts gave us 25 grand, and you know, there were people from all over the country.

Q: Who's Ricketts?

LACIVITA: Oh, I think he's part of the ownership team of the Cubs, and the guy -- the Spanos family, I think, that are tied in with the -- they -- with the Chargers, San Diego Chargers [01:20:00] gave us a good bit of money, millions. So I mean, a lot of the fundraising activity was, we just piggybacked and worked with PFA on that. And they were much more institutional. And coming from that organization, I knew what they had to offer from a fundraising standpoint.

Q: Did you coordinate your advertising messages with them at all, discuss it with them at all? Because it sure worked out (inaudible).

LACIVITA: We talked, I think, you know, occasionally. But those were our calls. I mean, it was -- it probably-- I remember one conversation we had toward the end, where we made a concerted -- I was on the phone with a couple of the guys from PFA, and I told them, I said I'm going to go up and be in Pennsylvania. And they're like, "What the hell are you going to do Pennsylvania for?" I said, "It's a head fake." I said, "We're going to drop, if we drop a half a million dollars or a quarter of a million dollars in [01:21:00] the Philadelphia TV market, they're going to go, 'oh crap,' and they're going to spend a quarter of a million dollars" --

Q: They meaning?



- LACIVITA: The Kerry campaign. Or one of their affiliated groups. And if they do that, then they're not going to spend the money in Florida. So we did stuff like that. And those are the kinds of things that we discussed. Like I remember they -- but you understand this, that, you know, in twenty-first century politics, everything strategy and the states that you're playing in, I mean everybody knows. Everybody knows what the battleground states are, and everybody knows it's Ohio, and it's Florida, and it's what method did you use? And that you used to communicate your message, and what area, and so there's not a whole lot of secrets left out there anymore in terms of, you know.
- Q: Yeah, I asked you earlier about the Kerry campaign's response to this. And you said [01:22:00] I think maybe with some appreciation for their situation, they didn't want to draw attention to this, they were hoping it would go away. And you talked about how you were doing things to keep it from going away.
- LACIVITA: Right.
- Q: What would their best response have been, once they realized that this wasn't going to go away?
- LACIVITA: That's a great question. And I know I've been asked it before, and I don't think I've ever been able to really give it justice in terms of a proper response. I guess the question is this. Was their mistake in not responding, or was their mistake in helping make it an issue? And what I mean by that is, I seem to think that they made the wrong political calculus on the front end about how to package John Kerry, as opposed to how they didn't respond, [01:23:00] did or did not respond once all hell broke loose. They made a decision that they were going to use John Kerry's military record as a positive, that they were going to use that as a, you know, a weapon. And they underestimated the animosity, I think the breadth of it, of what John Kerry said and actually did in-country that, I don't think they understood it. I also don't think that, in terms of the response -- so I think on the front end, the biggest mistakes were made from my -- in my opinion, on the front end, in packaging it the way they packaged it. Now they'll say, "Well, I mean, you know, everything was true, so why wouldn't we do that?" But they underestimated, you know, the fallout of [01:24:00] some of the accusations.
- Q: Well, you know, some Republicans I've interviewed have said even apart from that, they thought it was a mistake to focus on Kerry's Vietnam record, because it was a story about ancient history for most voters. In other words, apart from whether that record was accurate or not, it wasn't going to resonate, even if it



were -- even if people believed it. So you're introducing another element here, which was it was a more controversial record.

LACIVITA: They didn't understand the controversy of it because they didn't do the proper research.

Q: Well, you know, and isn't it the case that in Kerry's '96 reelect in Massachusetts against Bill Weld, a pretty serious challenger, that this issue had come up and been easily disposed of, in terms of, you know, resonating with voters in that year.

LACIVITA: Correct. Yeah, but that's Massachusetts. [01:25:00] I mean, you're running for President of the United States, you have the South, you have the Heartland, I mean not every state is the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Q: I think that gave them maybe a false sense of assurance.

LACIVITA: Completely gave them a false sense of assurance. And the manner in which -- and understand that what Governor Weld went after was what John Kerry said. It was not what John Kerry did in theater. They never saw that coming, because they never spent the time investigating that stuff. I mean, when you're running for the President of the United States, you'd better know everything inside -- your team best know every potential controversy, and then extrapolate that out, and game it out, and see how it plays out. And I don't think they did that, because I don't think they really understood that. That in order to go home early, if you got three Purple Hearts, you could get discharged early and sent home, no matter how you got them. And then that was part of the [01:26:00] claim. And again, they're very sensational claims, gaming the decorations aspect of the United States military is not an easy thing to do. Which is what these guys said that they were doing.

Q: I have -- that's all my questions in the Swift Boats, but is there anything else that you care to say about that?

LACIVITA: No, I mean it was -- well it was a -- again, there were -- the stars don't always align in politics. I mean they don't align in many things, but they certainly don't always align in politics. But this is one of those cases, you know, where a lot of things fell into place that, you know, a little bit of luck here and there helped push along, some missteps from our opposition. Our ability, I think, to take advantage of opportunities that were given to us. But, you know, the power of the message, [01:27:00] I think, is -- was preserved because of who was giving it, at the end of the day. This was not a story concocted by a bunch of political operatives; this was a story that was retold by men who were in Vietnam and saw things a different way.



- Q: Are there things, speaking generally now, that 527s can do effectively in a campaign that campaigns can't do for themselves, or can't do as well?
- LACIVITA: Probably touch more controversial subjects. I can assure you this, the Bush campaign would have never have touched, and rightly so, would never have touched the claim about what Kerry did in Vietnam.
- Q: Quite rightly so.
- LACIVITA: Oh it's a -- I mean, well how would the Bush campaign know that, you know, that John --
- Q: (inaudible).
- LACIVITA: No, I mean yeah, [01:28:00] I mean I'm talking about in terms of the claims that, you know, Kerry didn't deserve his Purple Heart, and that -- those were the claims that launched this. That launched the -- you know, that was the left hook. And that was promptly followed up by what Kerry said about veterans. So we set it up with the controversy, and then -- and people are left to make their decision, wow, could you really game the system, could you really do this, could you really do that? Did he really lie about his Purple Heart? Did he really lie about -- and then you introduce point two, where John Kerry calls veterans all of these things. And then people go, "Oh well, if he said that, yeah, he could have done that."
- Q: Well, let me ask this in a different way. If there were no 527s, and --
- LACIVITA: So the Bush campaign, I think, [01:29:00] would have been -- would never have touched John Kerry didn't deserve his Purple Heart. No way. Because one, they wouldn't have had the credibility to deliver that message, because it would have been the campaign doing it. And because George Bush didn't serve in Vietnam. And they're not stupid, they would never make that argument.
- Q: I want to take you back to your role in Senate elections, and in 2002, you're political director for the NRSC. In 2004, you're still keeping your hand in (inaudible).
- LACIVITA: Oh yeah, I did a lot of the independent expenditure aspects, yeah.
- Q: What struck me about both those elections was in 2002, the president is intensely involved in --
- LACIVITA: Very.
- Q: -- campaigning, fundraising, I mean record-setting amounts of these activities. Getting involved, at least through Karl Rove, and talking --
- LACIVITA: Very.
- Q: -- say Tim Pawlenty out of running for Senator, and --
- LACIVITA: I remember that day. [01:30:00]



Q: How -- what does it say about George W. Bush that he put himself that much on the line, to an unusual degree for any president, in Senate elections, starting with 2002?

LACIVITA: Well, in 2002, first of all the degree of coordination between the White House, the House committee, and the Senate committee, the Senate was, you know, I don't think there was ever a level of -- in the RNC, I don't think that we worked -- I just can't remember a time where it was that close. We -- every Tuesday morning, we'd meet 7:00 a.m. over at the RNC with Ken Bowman, the E[xecutive] D[irector] of the Senate committee, who was Mitch Bainwol, myself, the House committee guys, and the RNC guys, and we'd meet at the RNC, and we would discuss candidates, we would discuss strategy. I mean, all of these things are coordinated, so they're -- you know, and the White House was very respectful politically of the fact that we're there working for the Senate caucus, and the House guys are there working for the House Republican caucus, and that they represent the executive branch. And so, there's this understanding that they're the legislative, so we can't be dictating but, you know, we'll be very helpful in terms of raising money, and using the power of the White House to help recruit people. You know, you call Karl and say, "Could you call Tim -- could you call, you know, Norm Coleman?" And it was funny, because that was, you know, my first introduction to big-league DC politics was I was told, you deal with Tim Pawlenty. And so, I would go to meet with Tim Pawlenty, who was, you know, at the time, the House minority or House majority leader [01:32:00] in the state legislature. And I'm grooming him to run, I had no idea that at the time, they were working Norm Coleman.

Q: You're grooming Pawlenty to run for US Senate?

LACIVITA: US Senate, and the White House and my boss at the Senate committee are grooming Norm Coleman, and I had no idea. And so, you know, when they call him and say don't run, he's like, well what -- but this guy LaCivita is giving me -- lining me up with all this stuff. They're like, "Yeah well." I mean, and that's just the way DC works. And, you know, it ended up working out fine, you know, for Tim Pawlenty at the end. But, you know, they were instrumental in getting -- in helping us get some key people involved. You know, John Thune running against Tim Johnson. You know, just a lot of key candidates. So being able to recruit -- to have the power of the White House, to lend -- the credibility of the White House to go after somebody, I mean that's a big thing. [01:33:00]

Q: Did they ever say why they were getting involved there?



LACIVITA: Well, they clearly needed a legislature that they could work with, that would help pass an agenda, that would get things done. I mean, that's -- I would imagine the only reason why one puts himself through, you know, the added torture of attending fundraisers and, you know, recruiting candidates when you're running the country in a completely different, you know, when you're president and it's post-9/11, I mean it just -- you know, there were a lot of things that the administration was working on, the Patriot Act, and there were just all these other things that they wanted to get done. And, you know, having a legislature that would be willing to move with them on those things. So, the Senate was, you know -- I remember we -- you know, I managed George Allen's Senate race against Chuck Robb. We were the -- in Virginia in the 2000 election. We were the only [01:34:00] successful US Senate challenger race that cycle. And when George won in Virginia, he saved the majority for the Republicans. Because the vice president was the tie-breaking vote. And then, I can't remember his name.

Q: [Jim] Jeffords.

LACIVITA: Jeffords from Vermont, switched, gave control to the Democrats, changed the makeup of the Senate. And I remember, because we went into -- and I -- because I literally left the Allen campaign and went straight to Washington, the Senate committee, when Bill Frist was chairman. And we knew, we were like OK, we're tasked with defending a one seat majority. And then we were tasked with winning the majority. So, it was a -- but the level of coordination was -- I mean, it was fantastic. And, you know, I remember they didn't get involved too much in the day to day operation, although I [01:35:00] do remember at one point, I had a particular -- I wanted to run a particular ad in North Carolina against Erskine Bowles, who was running against Elizabeth Dole. And Karl called me, and said "Don't run that ad." And I'm like, "Well, why not?" He goes, "I think it's a bridge too far." And I'm like, you know, it was a -- we were making some points about something, and we still ran it. But (laughter) --

Q: You knew Karl was watching.

LACIVITA: Well, yeah, I mean you did not want to get a call from Karl and say, you know, but Bill Frist, at the end of the day, had to make those calls. And those calls were respected, the decisions were respected. He, you know, everybody had an opportunity to express themselves, but our job was to win the Senate race and, you know, to win a particular Senate race and engage and they -- look, we would not have been nearly as successful had we not had [01:36:00] the power and the



assistance of the executive. I mean just -- I don't -- I mean they played a big part in that.

Q: In '04, there's this famous I think quote from Bush, reportedly said to Karl. "I don't want a lonely victory. I don't want what Nixon had, I don't want what Reagan had." Meaning, you know, Nixon, Reagan, Eisenhower, Clinton for that matter, win landslides, but their party loses seats in the Senate. Did you have that sense that even in '04, I know your involvement was limited, that Bush was about building a Republican -- an enduring Republican majority, starting in '02, carrying over into '04? Doing things to help Senate candidates that reelection-seeking presidents usually don't do? Because they're looking out for themselves? Was that your --

LACIVITA: [01:37:00] Well, I mean, it was the -- it was -- and I guess the guys internally at the committee could answer better than I, but as an observer and a player in that cycle, it was a quintessential team operation, right? I mean, it was your -- it was -- the RNC was tasked with identifying and turning out voters, and so the level of coordination from the lowliest county committee all the way up through the ranks of whether it be a Senate race, a House race, all the way up to the president's reelection, the level of coordination and detail that went into planning and execution was unprecedented. Just, you know, if you were running a Senate race in an important state to the president's reelection, [01:38:00] unless you really said something or did something dumb, you were -- your campaign's success or failure was directly linked to the president's success and his failure. Not just from, you know, a wave standpoint or a mood -- you know, these factors that are hard to measure--but tactically, the amount of volunteers working in a particular county. If you were a chairman of local county that was essential to a state's victory, you were loaded for bear. And if you were -- because you had everything you could possibly want to execute and implement. If you were a county chairman who -- in a state that had a competitive House, Senate, and president-- you know, and key to the president's -- really, God help you. Just because the sheer volume of [01:39:00] people, material, money, to implement, I mean it was highly coordinated. You know, and it was funny, because I remember election night, when the first set of exit polls came out. They had Republicans losing, Republican Senate races losing, and this was like the three o'clock numbers or something. You know, and I remember saying there's no way, because I was privy to independent expenditure polling data for the Senate races. So I knew what the numbers were, and I'm like, "These guys have totally screwed it up." And we



thought it was some, you know, our initial reaction is, it's got to be some kind of conspiracy to suppress turnout. You know, and then we quickly regained our senses and said no, some idiot made a mistake. But sometimes you wonder, but I remember when those numbers came in, we're like, there's just no way that that's -- that these early exits are feasible. [01:40:00] But yeah, I mean it was amazing, the amount of coordination. I mean, and they -- what we did in 2002, they perfected in 2004.

Q: Republicans ended up gaining four seats, but a seat they lose, net of four. But a seat they lose is in Illinois, to Barack Obama --

LACIVITA: Right.

Q: -- who wins by a landslide.

LACIVITA: Right.

Q: Against what ended up being a pretty easy candidate to defeat, Alan Keyes. Were you involved in --

LACIVITA: Yeah, it's a great segue. So, very involved. The -- in 2004, of course I had just left the committee and was at the committee, because I had just started my own consultancy, if you will. And Jay had me onboard and let me --

Q: This is Jay Timmons?

LACIVITA: Jay Timmons, who's the -- was the incoming executive director. And I wanted to -- I didn't want to stay at the committee, [01:41:00] I wanted to do races on my own. And Jay let me stay at the committee, and was very instrumental in helping me get started. And one of the first candidates they said, you know, you need to talk to is this guy named Jack Ryan. He's worth \$150 million, he's good looking, he's a former partner at Goldman Sachs, he just -- all he wants to do is talk about education, he teaches at an inner city school run by Jesuits in South Side Chicago, he's got a great story, blah-blah-blah. And I'm thinking wow, OK, so I go out, and I meet with Jack, he hires me. I quickly realize that he's got to run against the establishment, the political establishment in Illinois. Which, you know, is an old machine state. Machine political state.

Q: To get the nomination?

LACIVITA: To get the Republican nomination from a Republican standpoint. Denny Hastert was the Speaker of the House, and he didn't like Jack, because Jack was an outsider. So, [01:42:00] we had to run a primary against -- it was a multi-candidate, I think there were like four or five people who were in the primary. And a couple of them were perennial candidates, but you know, we had to do our own thing. The local party was not favorable to Jack. Because again, he didn't



come up through their system, and they hadn't laid hands on him, and all this other stuff. Jack spent \$5 million in the primary, and we had a very compelling primary message. We crushed them all, won by 14 points. And so, we're -- you know, we're positioning to go into the general election, and understand that the Democrats at the time had their own sort of sordid tale that was going on at the time. You had a gentleman named Blair Hull who was -- there was a three-way race for US Senate, Democrat nomination. Blair Hull, who was the frontrunner, [01:43:00] and I can't remember the second guy's name, and then some social worker or community organizer dude named Barack Obama, who was a state Senator. That's how we referred to him, I mean it was like who? I mean, I remember I saw one of his billboards in Illinois. I was like man, God, boy this guy's not going anywhere if he's putting ads on billboards. I mean that's like a joke, if you put an ad on a billboard, you're -- you know, that's -- no one buys billboards, advertisement, no one does that. No campaign worth its salt buys advertising on billboards. So I just remember seeing one of them, and I thought it was odd.

Q: Why?

LACIVITA:

It's just -- I mean, no one pays attention to billboard advertising. It's just not, you know -- I mean, you do it for public -- you know, you'll do it for earned media or you do something, you know, but it's not an effective tool of campaign advertising. But I remember the two top guys, Blair Hull and this other gentleman who were running were beating the living hell out of each other with tens of millions of dollars of TV advertising. [01:44:00] And Blair Hull, who was going to win, I mean he was -- and even though he was a very crippled candidate, and they were pounding him, and this guy named Barack Obama has no money, no contacts, no nothing, was just sitting back watching the two top guys take each other out. We now call that the Mike Rounds effect, Mike Rounds being the governor of South Dakota, soon to be US Senator, who won because the two Republican nominees' top guys took them out, and he slid up to top and won the nomination. But, you know, mutually assured destruction results in a victory for someone. And so, Blair -- and then Blair Hull's divorce papers get popped out, found out that he engaged, whatever, there were some things that he did, and Barack Obama literally walks in, wins the nomination by default. Jack wins the Republican nomination and, you know, we're plotting and doing all these things, and Jack's married to a former movie star, Jeri Ryan, [01:45:00] who was on *Star Trek*. And there's a lot of things that I can't discuss, just because I've signed a confidentiality agreement, but there's nothing bad. I mean in today's world of



politics it's, you know, a husband and wife have a dispute, accusations are made in the context of a child custody case, not a divorce case, child custody, that are made in California, and the court papers are sealed, and the judge -- and so people are saying oh, there's stuff in there about Jack Ryan, and it's going to come out, and blah-blah-blah. And so, and it's all sexy, because it's a former movie star. And so, they make -- you know, they force us to -- we go to court to try and keep the child custody papers sealed, and a judge in California, I'll never forget the ruling, he said, it may be in -- because they had a son, a young son. He said, "It may be in the best interests of the child to keep [01:46:00] these sealed, but I'm unsealing them." So he unseals these records, and there were some, you know, things that again, involving a married couple that aren't that bad. It's not like he had a girlfriend or a boyfriend or whatever. I mean, you know, accusations that were made between a husband and a wife. But the Republican Party of Illinois, still smarting over the fact that Jack had beat their ass in the primary, decided, you know, I don't -- we're not particularly happy with this. We think this is awful, and you're a bad representation, and so they essentially forced Jack out. Now understand, we had spent -- Jack had spent \$5 million of his own money, he was prepared to spend probably \$10 million more to engage in a race against Barack Obama. We had done over \$100,000 in opposition research on Obama, we had [01:47:00] tons of ideas and I mean, it was a real -- this was a real operating campaign, it was the real -- I mean, we were prepared. And, you know, I remember Jack coming to me and saying, "Can I win this race?" Because all Jack wanted to do was talk about education. He had some great ideas about education, and he said, "Do you think I can win this race?" I said, "Look, it's a crapshoot. It's a Democrat state, but in a presidential year, but if we" -- and I remember telling him this, and it was telling him this in a hotel room when we were meeting. And I told him, I said, "We have to create a -- we have to blow the state up. Just, you know, we have to make Obama's unfavorables as bad as yours. We have to totally annihilate him politically, and make him untenable. And hopefully, [01:48:00] people will walk in and say they're going to vote for the lesser of two evils, and hopefully you'll be the lesser of the two evils." That was my strategy at that point, just because of some of the things that were said about Jack that the press would -- and Jack wasn't, you know, that's not what he wanted to do, he didn't want to run that kind of campaign. But what pushed that chain of thought for him along was the fact that he's got his own party deep sixing him, demanding that he push out, and that he pull out, and if you're not getting any



support from your own party, I mean then what's the point? So here he secures the nomination soundly, and his own party is out there knifing him. So he just says to hell with it, he drops out. He drops out, and the party replaces him with some guy named Alan Keyes, who at the time was living in Maryland. And who couldn't raise any money, was not a credible candidate, and didn't lay a glove on Obama. And Obama walks into [01:49:00] the Senate -- you know, get reelected, and the rest is history. I can assure you of this. Had Jack Ryan had the support of his party, he would have stayed as the party's nominee, and I don't know how 2004 would have ended up at the end of the day.

Q: Do you think that at a minimum, Obama would have been --

LACIVITA: Damaged goods. He would not -- there's no way that -- there is no way that he would have been viewed as cleanly and as, you know, just I mean, there wasn't anything out there on him. I mean, he had no -- there was no serious opposition. I mean, none of the issues that were raised by the Clintons had been raised prior to that point, when he would have been at his most vulnerable, when (inaudible) would have been at his most vulnerable with dealing with that. And we would have had a resource [01:50:00] advantage. Clearly had a resource advantage. So, and it's one of those moments in history when, you know, hindsight, but wow.

Q: Well, that's part of the 2004 story.

LACIVITA: It absolutely is.

Q: (inaudible) Well, listen, Chris, thank you so much for your time and talent and commitment to this enterprise.

LACIVITA: Well, I'm glad to be here and thanks for the opportunity. Appreciate it.

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