



The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Jay Timmons

Current: President and CEO, National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)

In 2004: Executive Director of the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC)

Interviewer: Dr. Michael Nelson

Fulmer Professor of Political Science, Rhodes College

Fellow, SMU Center for Presidential History

Disclaimer: *This transcription has been prepared according to the strictest practices of the academic and transcription communities and offers our best good-faith effort at reproducing in text our subject's spoken words. In all cases, however, the video of this interview represents the definitive version of the words spoken by interviewees.*

August 12, 2014

Q: So what is the National Republican Senatorial Committee, and what did you do there in 2004?

TIMMONS: So the NRSC is responsible for helping to coordinate, if you will, the 33 Senate races on behalf of Republicans throughout the country from a national perspective. We assist the campaigns -- we assisted the campaigns in some of their strategies and some of their fundraising tactics. Obviously, some campaigns needed help more than others. Incumbents tend to not need as much help as challengers or folks running for the open seat, and my role was to serve as executive director of the NRSC during the 2004 cycle, so I was brought in 2003 by George Allen, who was the senator from Virginia, chairman of the committee. I had been his chief of staff and he asked me to go over and run the committee.

Q: And how would you decide what races to invest [00:01:00] more heavily in; invest the resources you had that could be helpful?

TIMMONS: Yeah, so this year was particularly difficult for not only the NRSC but the Democratic Committee as well. All national political parties were coming to terms with a new law, the McCain-Feingold Law, and it was very restrictive on what political parties could do. It pretty much, right off the bat, cut out half of our resources by not allowing us to raise so-called "soft money." We had to focus on hard money contributions.



Q: And the difference is?

TIMMONS: Well, the difference is \$2,000 per person at the time, I believe \$2,000 per person per election cycle --

Q: Is hard money.

TIMMONS: -- versus -- which is hard money -- versus soft money, which is corporate contributions and large-scale contributions that could be used in different ways by the campaigns. And we lost the ability to do that, obviously, the soft money side of it, so we had to focus [00:02:00] only on hard money. So we were changing all of our tactics; we were changing all of our fundraising strategies to adapt to that, and that became pretty difficult at the beginning of the cycle because nobody knew what we were dealing with. And we had this potential of nu -- I can't remember the number, but numerous races that were open-seat races, challengers that had a great opportunity to beat incumbents. And so trying to figure out where to dedicate those resources at the beginning of the cycle was almost an impossible task, and in fact, as we started to go through the primary cycles, and we began to see who had a better chance than others. Unfortunately, for us -- it turned out to be very fortunate in the end -- but unfortunately at the time, we had a bounty of riches. We had a huge playing field and we weren't sure where we were going to be able to effectively invest our resources. It turned out that either through luck or through skill, [00:03:00] I don't know which it is, (laughter) we ended up winning 55 seats in the end, so the strategy turned out to be a good one, but quite frankly, just a little change in the political winds, it would have gone the other way.

Q: So staying with the money, overall, since you weren't able to raise soft money, had to raise it through hard money, overall, how much did you have to spend, compared to, say, pre-McCain-Feingold?

TIMMONS: Yeah, I was trying to remember the number. I believe that pre-McCain-Feingold, it was over \$100 million, and so our goal was half of that, or we assumed, I should say, we assumed we could raise half of that, and so we had a much higher goal in the end that we surpassed. I don't remember what the exact number was. I don't think we made it to the pre-McCain-Feingold numbers at that particular election cycle, but we came pretty close.

Q: And the Democratic equivalent is having to deal with the same challenge, right?

TIMMONS: Exactly. And their issue, of course, was [00:04:00] -- they had a pro and a con. They had the ability to try to take control of the majority in the Senate, so that was the offensive message, but their defensive message was they were running against, at that time, a very popular president, in President George W. Bush, and



they were running -- they were trying to figure out how to deal with three wars that were going on in the world and how they were going to respond to that in a way that --

Q: Three wars?

TIMMONS: -- didn't look like they were questioning our troops or our commitment to ensuring that we weren't terrorized as a nation.

Q: So Iraq, Afghanistan, and --

TIMMONS: And the War on Terror, in general.

Q: -- and the War on Terror. In addition to money, what other resources did you have that would be of benefit to candidates?

TIMMONS: Well, I would say that if you were a candidate, you were looking specifically at money. [00:05:00] You were looking at two things. You were looking at coordinated expenses, which is set by the FEC, an amount that you can -- the candidate can talk to the NRSC about how to spend it, what to spend it on, and that varies from state to state, based on population.

And then, there's this other pot of money that exists that the committee decides what states to employ the resources in, so that comes in the form of independent expenditures. It was extraordinarily complicated that year. I think it's been worked out since. And certainly court cases have helped settle the anti-freedom restrictions that were in McCain-Feingold. But at that time, I couldn't talk to some of my own staff members about where the money was to go, or what it was to be used for. I could say we're going to spend X amount of dollars in this state. I couldn't say what it was going to be spent on. And I think various committees interpreted it different ways. Our committee [00:06:00] interpreted it very strictly. We were not going to do anything that would compromise the brand of the NRSC, and we weren't going to do anything that would violate either the law as it was written, or the intent of the law. So there was a big firewall between myself and my political director that the two of us, and against those who were spending money on independent expe-- spending the money that we allocated for independent expenditures in various states.

Another thing, you asked a question about what resources. So, that's the biggest resource, but we were also able to help with strategic -- strategy development. That happened in a few states, again, where there were challengers or there were candidates that were perhaps newer candidates, compared to some of our other states. We could also help direct resources into a state. We would have folks



who would ask us well, what are the hot campaigns going on in the country, and we had regular briefings around town to talk about where -- [00:07:00] you know, where Republicans had the best chance, and so a lot of resources would end up going to those states.

Q: Something you said earlier was kind of interesting, and that is even though this turned out to be a big Republican year, at the outset, you've got a 51-49 majority--

TIMMONS: That's right.

Q: -- in the Senate, which meant the Democrats could reasonably think of regaining control.

TIMMONS: And if you think about what my predecessor went through, Mitch Bainwol, what he went through to get to that 51-49 majority when George Bush was elected with a majority Senate, Jim Jeffords switched parties, so I guess he was elected with a 50-50 Senate, with the vice president that made a majority. Jim Jeffords switched parties and suddenly, the president's party was in the minority in the Senate, so gaining that back was a pretty difficult thing for Mitch Bainwol and Bill Frist, who was the chair of the NRSC at the time. So in addition to maintaining that 51-seat majority, obviously, [00:08:00] we wanted to run the number up; we wanted to get it to a higher number. And you're right, we -- it could have gone either way. We could have easily have had 47 Republicans and not 55, but it just happened that -- and it was really right at the end where I -- where we really saw a lot of polls moving in our direction. There were few candidates and campaigns that were always in the lead and always consistently ahead. But toward the end, we started to realize that the majority was going to be bigger than we once had anticipated.

Q: It's interesting because...

TIMMONS: John Thune, by the way, was a perfect example of that. We were going back and forth on the lead with Daschle and Thune right up until the last week.

Q: And we will come back and talk about that South Dakota election, but overall, 19 Democratic seats on the ballot in 2004, 15 Republican --

TIMMONS: Right.

Q: -- seats. [00:09:00] Overall, incumbents ran for reelection in 26 out of the 34, total. And --

TIMMONS: You're giving me some reminders, here of those numbers. (laughter)

Q: Well, none of -- with one exception, and of course, we keep coming back to South Dakota, so we should get there quickly. But with that one exception, all the incumbents were reelected, and --



- TIMMONS: We had a lot of open seats.
- Q: And it was the open seats where the gains took place, but again, in deciding -- so incumbents running for reelection had a very good year. In fact, they won by an average 64%.
- TIMMONS: But it really wasn't, from the start, perceived as a good year. So if you look at Pennsylvania, for instance, Arlen Specter had a very, very tough challenge in the primary, and you know, that was -- so one of the roles of the NRSC -- and it's really ironic when you look at the Specter race -- one of the roles of the NRSC is to always protect incumbents, at least it was at that time, it may be different now, I don't think it is. But we -- you know, we had to make sure that [00:10:00] incumbents were first and foremost at the top of our priority list. Well, Arlen Specter was in a tough race in the primary, and Rick Santorum was a trooper. He was not at all simpatico with Arlen Specter, philosophically, but he was in there pitching for Specter. The president was in there pitching for Specter. We spent money from the NRSC on the Specter primary. I think that was the first time that the NRSC had gotten involved in a primary, at least to that degree. We got through that primary and then he did a lot better in the general election, but the primary was tough.
- Q: Was this just a matter of -- I mean, it sounds like you were doing more than just the ordinary to support an incumbent, seeking a renomination. Was there a fear that --
- TIMMONS: I sure was there, yeah.
- Q: -- the challenger would be a weaker candidate in the general, and you might lose the seat if Pat Toomey got the nomination?
- TIMMONS: You know, I think that's part of it. I think the other part of it, too, was that Specter, at the time, was a quasi-member [00:11:00] of the Republican leadership. He wasn't an elected leader. He was -- he sat, though, at the leaders' table, and he was always part of Bill Frist's leadership cadre, and I think that Republican senators generally wanted to rally around one of their own. I don't know if that's the case today; I can't speak, obviously, for how the caucus operates today. But at that time, it was very collegial, and if you were elected, your colleagues generally wanted to help you out.
- Q: Did the NRSC in 2004 -- did you coordinate your work in any way, even informally, with the Bush reelect Campaign--
- TIMMONS: Sure.
- Q: -- and how did that work?
- TIMMONS: Well, we met quite a bit with Ken Mehlman, who was the campaign manager.



We also met regularly with the RNC, so Ed Gillespie was the chairman at the time, and we even met with the House Committee, so Tom Reynolds and Sally Vastola [00:12:00] became very important allies in our efforts, and hopefully, we became allies in their efforts. It really was, I think, a team effort to help build the president's -- to help the president in his reelection, and also to build majorities for him in the Senate and the House.

Q: Do you think this was to an unusual degree, this cooperation?

TIMMONS: You know, I don't know because I don't have that perspective. It was -- I have to say it was -- in my mind, it was an extraordinarily positive effort. It was, you know, Ken Mehlman was somebody who understood the importance of teamwork. He understood the importance of building allies that could help with the overall cause, and I think in his mind, and I think the President's mind, was that this was just more than just a presidency; this was leadership for the entire country, which included the House and the Senate.

Q: Well, there's a [00:13:00] quotation from George W. Bush that came out after the election where he said, when he was thinking about other presidents who got reelected often by landslides and their party lost seats in the Senate, and he's quoted as saying -- having told Rove or Mehlman or somebody, "I don't want a lonely victory. I don't want what Reagan had. I don't want what Nixon had," which suggests the pos...

TIMMONS: Well, we wanted to surround him with his friends. (laughter)

Q: (laughter)

TIMMONS: I think we succeeded.

Q: Do you think he was actively interested in running a party campaign, building...

TIMMONS: Well, you know, I think every campaign starts with the candidate focusing on their own race, which I think is an important thing to do. And if you start to see that you have some -- I don't want to use "coat-tails" because I think that's really trite -- if you think you're going to have a positive impact on the outcome of certain races, because of the platform that you're running on -- and the focus that year was the War on Terror. It was whether we were going to continue to [00:14:00] ignore what was happening in the Middle East or whether we were going to try to do something about it. The president was very aggressive on that message, and candidates began to echo that sentiment. They started talking about supporting the administration in Iraq and Afghanistan, and on the War on Terror generally. It was also a referendum on the domestic side on his tax cuts that were implemented in 2001 and 2003. And so our candidates were echoing all of those principles, all of those -- all of those challenges that he was



presenting to the nation.

It was really a referendum on George Bush. A lot of times, campaigns are referendums on the challengers, but he seemed to happily make it about his record and what his vision was for the future of the country, and I think the Republican candidates that year generally felt comfortable in associating themselves with that platform that he was running [00:15:00] on.

So yeah, I think he was very interested in building that majority. He gave a lot of time to the House and the Senate candidates on the road, particularly during the last month of the campaign cycle. So, you wouldn't do that if you didn't think that you could be helpful and help run up the numbers.

Q: And it's interesting because if you look at the list of battleground states in the presidential election, there's not a whole lot of overlap with the open seat --

TIMMONS: Yeah. (laughter)

Q: -- Senate elections that year.

TIMMONS: Right.

Q: So, I'm thinking, every minute that Bush spent in Florida or --

TIMMONS: Right.

Q: Bad example.

TIMMONS: Florida is actually a bad example.

Q: Bad example, but you know what I'm talking about.

TIMMONS: And he did spend a lot of time down there with our candidate in Florida. (laughter) There was some overlap.

Q: Bad example on my part, but South Carolina, North Carolina.

TIMMONS: Right, right.

Q: Was time away from --

TIMMONS: Oklahoma.

Q: Oklahoma, was time away from the most efficient use of his --

TIMMONS: The battleground states [00:16:00] for the presidential, right.

Q: So, I guess my question is, not only did you think of the Bush campaign as interested in winning a Republican majority in '04, but building an enduring Republican majority, kind of equivalent to the -- what had been the New Deal Democratic majority. Did you get the sense that you were doing -- you were laying a foundation for a hoped-for...

TIMMONS: Yeah, there was no question --

Q: Future?



TIMMONS: -- about that. There was absolutely the hope that this would be -- this would translate into a generational majority. Ronald Reagan did it; as you noted, FDR did it; maybe to some degree [John F.] Kennedy did it. I would argue that Bill Clinton was somewhat successful in doing that as well. So this was, I think, the hope by a lot of folks. Maybe we didn't realize it at the time, but it was a hope that we were building something that was sustainable. It wasn't, but we had hoped that it would.

Q: Yeah. Well, if you don't mind, could we talk [00:17:00] about some of these individual --

TIMMONS: Sure.

Q: -- races, and we could start out, roughly, alphabetical, but...

TIMMONS: Now, you're really testing my memory here. (laughter)

Q: (laughter) Well, we will go as far as we can, again starting with the As, and Alaska, here you had...

TIMMONS: Lisa Murkowski, who was appointed by her father to take a Senate seat. The charges of nepotism were rampant in the state, and I think, you know, it was 10 years later, and I think Lisa Murkowski has proven that those charges were very unfounded because she is -- she is an extraordinary senator and I think most people knew that if they had seen her in action. She had been a leader in the general assembly in Alaska, so obviously, she was not new to politics, but she had to prove to the voters that she could stand on her own. So she had a really rough primary.

I had [00:18:00] two trips to Alaska, myself. One of them was in 2003 to talk to prospective primary candidates, one of whom lived in Wasilla, Alaska, and got to have a Diet Coke, at the local Woolworth's with Sarah Palin and chat with her about her ambitions and came back and said, "Wow, if she runs, we're going to have our hands full. This is going to be a problem." We were fortunate that she did not run at that point, obviously. But there were other candidates that were looking at the race and decided against it. Ultimately, she had one primary opponent, and it was a pretty difficult primary. Her ground game was not as strong as it needed to be.

When I went up in 2004, we brought some reinforcements from the NRSC who stayed on the ground to help ensure that all of those people who were out there who really liked what they saw in Lisa Murkowski were helping to spread the word to their friends and their neighbors. [00:19:00] And ultimately, she obviously prevailed in



the nomination.

Q: And she had -- I'm sorry, she had a tough opponent in the general, too.

TIMMONS: And then in the general election, a former governor, Tony Knowles, extraordinarily popular guy, but it was -- you know, there was a little bit of luck in that Alaska is -- at that point tended to be a fairly reliably -- reliable Republican state, if you didn't have other issues to contend with. Obviously, the issue was the appointment by her father. That certainly helped propel her for her first victory. I also think, though, that in the end, she had a stronger ground game. She was very active and strong with the native population and she was extraordinarily well known in the Anchorage area as well, so I think that helped her out tremendously.

Q: And that was one -- if you were a Democrat planning how you were going to get to a majority, that was a big one to lose.

TIMMONS: You had to have Alaska, yeah. [00:20:00]

Q: I'm going to skip Colorado because I know that there's a Kentucky connection there. Let's go down to Florida. Five Democratic incumbents in the South retired that year, one of whom was Bob Graham in Florida. How did that election play out?

TIMMONS: So again, we -- this was one where we were recruiting heavily and Mel Martinez, the former Secretary of Housing in the Bush administration, was somebody that we very much wanted to run. He had a great story. He was well-known and very popular in the central part of the state, which was very key to a Republican victory, and we knew that he would be able to have a great message with the Hispanic community, particularly those who were of Cuban-American descent. So when he finally decided to run, it was great news, late in the race. I don't remember how late it was, and as I recall, Florida was a pretty [00:21:00] late primary as well, so he entered the race fairly late and ended up winning the nomination -- as I recall, handily; I can't remember what the number was. But then in the general election, we had a pretty difficult opponent in Betty Castor, who had been around and folks knew who she was. She had a good profile for the state. She had a good message for the state, but in the end, I think the connection, again, with the president, I think actually helped pull Mel over the victory line, and he did a lot better in the Miami-Dade area and Broward County than I think any Republican had done before that. And I can remember sitting there all night long waiting for those numbers to come in, and we knew that that was going to be victory or defeat for Mel Martinez, and of course, it turned out to be a victory.



- Q: He won by a little over a point. [00:22:00]
- TIMMONS: Right.
- Q: And Bush...
- TIMMONS: He didn't trail most of the night, but we knew going into that -- the Broward County results, that that would matter.
- Q: Did President Bush campaign with him a lot when he was down there?
- TIMMONS: As I recall, he did, yeah, because he -- again, he was a member of his cabinet, so the connection was clearly there.
- Q: Yeah. George -- although it turned out him not being a very competitive general, another example of a Democrat incumbent retiring, Zell Miller, who ended up speaking at the Republican convention. What was that all about?
- TIMMONS: I can't imagine being a Democrat in Georgia during that time, so you had your governor, your former governor, your former senator who always pledged allegiance to his party suddenly saying hey, let's elect a Republican as president. So that had to be a little bit demoralizing, and I think it's one of the reasons that frankly, we didn't really play in Georgia much, [00:23:00] other than to provide coordinated dollars to Johnny Isakson. The state had turned very reliably Republican at that point, and we knew that that seat was going to be in our column.
- Q: And he ended up winning pretty handily.
- TIMMONS: He did.
- Q: Another Republican pickup. Illinois, you know, here's a Republican incumbent who retires, Peter Fitzgerald, and they're off and running for a really eventful year. Can you talk about your --
- TIMMONS: So I don't think anybody solved the saw the results of either the Republican or the Democratic primary coming. There were several candidates on the Democratic side. A little-known state senator ended up emerging victorious, and I think a lot of folks thought that he wasn't going to be a serious candidate.
- Q: Whatever happened to -- (laughter)
- TIMMONS: He's now the President of the United States, so I think he was probably the most underestimated state senator in the history of the United States. Jack Ryan ended up being the candidate that the Republicans nominated. [00:24:00] He was a very, very strong candidate and ended up with a lot of issues that no candidate wants to deal with publically; it had to do with his divorce years ago from a very well-known actress, and in my estimation, the party apparatus in the state was -- terribly overreacted, and they didn't handle the situation well at all.
- Q: He wasn't really their candidate anyway.



TIMMONS: He wasn't their candidate from the start, so it was a little power play, I think to show them -- show the eventual nominee, who was boss, and they drove him out, and he resigned as the nominee. And then, they nominated somebody from Maryland to run in Illinois, which was a disaster -- a huge disaster, and it was a state that we frankly didn't play in. After the nomination, I think if Jack Ryan had continued to be the candidate, even though he had issues that he had [00:25:00] to deal with -- and he had to deal with those; nobody else could deal with those issues except him in the media's eyes. I think it still would have been a very viable race against State Senator Obama, but that just wasn't to be. So once he left the race and the Marylander came in, it was pretty obvious that the Democrat was going to win that state.

Q: And in hindsight, I mean, one of the significant aspects of that election is that Barack Obama, once again, didn't have to face a tough campaign, which meant four years later, he's coming in pretty much unbloodied.

TIMMONS: So in hindsight, you could say that the Republican Party was responsible for Barack Obama being President of the United States.

Q: What would have happened, do you --

TIMMONS: Which I actually believe. I really believe that had the Republican Party locally acted differently after the Republican primary and not stomped out of the room because their candidate wasn't nominated, that there would have been a competitive race in Illinois. And even if you had a competitive race, it might have been [00:26:00] tougher for the president to compete in 2008 in his primary against Hillary Clinton.

It's really amazing, when you look back in history and you see what -- you know, what steps lead from one thing to another and how history is made, and I think history was made when Jack Ryan stepped out of that race because of the pressure he got from the chairman of the party and others.

Q: What are the political wounds that you think Obama would have carried out of that campaign?

TIMMONS: Oh, I don't know. I have no idea. I'm sure that there was plenty of opposition research on the poor guy, and I'm sure it all came down to the 2008 and other elections. But having a competitive race I just think would have had the dynamic very different. I think it would have made it much more difficult for him to quickly establish himself in the Senate and then turn around less than two years later and announce he was running for president.

Q: In Kentucky --



TIMMONS: It wasn't two years, but about that.

Q: -- Kentucky, another [00:27:00] sort of vulnerable Republican incumbent running for reelection, Jim Bunning, famously the former star pitcher for the Philadelphia Phillies, but...

TIMMONS: Also famously -- also famous for saying things that aren't quite -- aren't good to have to have your press secretary defend, if you catch my drift.

Q: Well, this makes me wonder. I guess I'm more -- stepping back from this race for just a second. Did the NRSC sometimes have an opinion about whether, in a race like this, the Republican Party could field a stronger candidate than the incumbent, and maybe even act on that opinion in some subtle ways?

TIMMONS: Certainly not in '04. I mean, in '04, again, you protected your incumbents first. I don't know what the policy or the thinking is since that time, but at that [00:28:00] point, we protected our incumbents. Senator Bunning, I think a lot of folks actually thought he was going to retire; he decided not to retire, and for the most part, he was leading, although it was narrowing as the election got closer. But if it followed the wave of the other elections, one would have assumed that he would have maintained his lead, or it would have increased. But what happened is he made some errant statements toward the end of the campaign, about -- if I can recall, two weeks to 10 days out--and all of a sudden, his poll numbers dropped fairly significantly. We were polling all of these races and we saw that his numbers dropped, so we had to make a decision at that point. We had very little resources left. We were balancing our resources at that point between Kentucky, Colorado, and Louisiana. And I know we'll get to Louisiana later, but we had to figure out whether to reserve resources for a potential runoff election in December or [00:29:00] whether to pile the money into the pre-Election Day activities. So we really wanted to preserve our resources in Louisiana, and it came down to Colorado and Kentucky, and it came back to that maxim that you protect your incumbents. So we moved money out of Colorado, whereas I think if we would have kept it, we would have won Colorado, in order to protect an incumbent Jim Bunning in Kentucky.

You know, it's one of those hindsight is 20/20 decisions. I don't think Jim Bunning would have won, had we not moved the money into that race. As I recall, it was maybe around a half million dollars, perhaps three-quarters of a million dollars, and that was it. That was the last move that we could make. So we couldn't put that money into Colorado in the last week, where I think Pete Coors really needed it. Pete Coors was at a 50-50 race right up until the end, and he ran out of money



one week before. [00:30:00] His campaign ran out of money. He went dark and we saw that he was going dark, and I was thinking, gosh, surely he's going to figure out a way to get money in there. We had money on points in Colorado in that last week, and had to pull them right out.

Q: So in Colorado, Republican incumbent retires, Ben Nighthorse Campbell. You've got Pete Coors as the Republican nominee after a primary, right, he had to fight -

TIMMONS: After a primary, right, a very difficult primary.

Q: Ken Salaz--

TIMMONS: Ken Salazar was the...

Q: State attorney general, Democrat.

TIMMONS: That's right.

Q: Was part of the thinking that -- and I don't know, I may be wrong about this, but when you hear former chairman of the Board of Coors Brewing Company, you think, this guy could write a half million dollar check himself.

TIMMONS: Yeah you know -- you don't want to think that, right? I mean, you want to think in terms of support from your -- his contributors. You're hoping that they are going to come forward and you're hoping that you have the resources [00:31:00] to be able to help.

I'm one that never really wants a candidate to have to spend their own resources, but when you're Jim Bunning, you didn't have any other resources. Pete Coors might have other resources, so the decision had to be made to go into the Bunning race. And of course, that's a factor. Was it the factor? No. The factor was protect the incumbent.

Q: Well, you mentioned Louisiana, and maybe it would be worth explaining that kind of odd --

TIMMONS: If I can. (laughter). So it's an open primary. At that time, it was an open primary and there were two very viable Democrats. It was Chris John, who was a very, very moderate Democratic congressman -- great guy by the way -- and then, John Kennedy, who I think was the state treasurer perhaps.

Q: Exactly right.

TIMMONS: And then, David Vitter, who was a member of Congress and a very, very strong candidate.

Q: And the primary, the open primary takes place -- [00:32:00]

TIMMONS: On Election Day.

Q: -- in November.



- TIMMONS: That's right. And so then the top two vote-getters, whoever they are, go on to a runoff in December.
- Q: Unless...
- TIMMONS: Unless somebody gets 50% or more.
- Q: So was that...
- TIMMONS: And I was trying to remember if -- I was thinking about this earlier today. I was trying to remember if at that time, one party -- it was one from each party or if it was just the two top vote-getters --
- Q: Top two vote-getters.
- TIMMONS: -- at that time. So, our decision was whether -- we saw David Vitter's numbers going up pretty significantly. He was running an outstanding campaign, probably one of the best campaigns in the country, and we saw his numbers going up, so then we thought well, can we help push him over 50% on November 4, so we don't have to deal with this December runoff. And what had happened in previous cycles was it was always assumed that there would be a runoff, so the committees oftentimes spent all of their money before the November election, [00:33:00] and then they would raise money for the general election. I really didn't want to do that because we had just run a very expens -- we had tapped as many of our contributors as possible. Even though you could raise extra money for a runoff, it's like the third cycle, primary, general, and then runoff. You could raise another \$2,000 a person. But I think the wind was out of a lot of sails at that point. You had a presidential campaign that was the most expensive in history, by far, at that point. You had an extraordinarily expensive campaign for the House and the Senate, and we just figured donors were tapped out, so we rolled the dice and we decided we were going to go for it. We put a lot of money into that race. I think we ended up with \$2 million right at the end in that race, and hopefully helped to contribute to the difference. David Vitter ultimately was the reason that he achieved majority in that election, but that was the one that we really felt strongly about.
- Q: So he got 51% and was elected [00:34:00]
- TIMMONS: Outright.
- Q: On -- in November.
- TIMMONS: On Election Day, right.
- Q: But I wonder...
- TIMMONS: Which might have been the first time that had happened in a long time.
- Q: Thinking back to McCain-Feingold, if soft money had still been legal, would you have felt like we'll be able to spend the money now before, and then if we need



to --

TIMMONS: Probably.

Q: -- raise it afterward.

TIMMONS: Probably. I don't know. I never operated in the soft money world. I never had the luxury of doing that. (laughter) I looked back in envy of my predecessors who had tens of millions of dollars to spend that I didn't.

Q: Well, Louisiana was another state where a southern Democrat retired, John Breaux, and now -- North Carolina, a state where the Democratic senator goes on the national ticket, John Edwards, and so it becomes an open seat kind of late in the year.

TIMMONS: Yeah, so it definitely had to be -- it definitely had to be watched carefully because -- [00:35:00] because there was -- the North Carolina senator was now the vice presidential candidate, John Edwards, so we knew that there would be some potential coattail effects there. Erskine Bowles had been President Clinton's chief of staff. He was very well known in the Charlotte business community, very, very well liked. But nobody does their homework like Richard Burr, I mean nobody. I mean, this guy had knitted a winning coalition together right from the start. It didn't mean we weren't there, it didn't mean we weren't trying to help, but again, that was just -- he was such a strong candidate that had done his homework and he had gotten the business community to rally around him very early.

Q: You know, you referred to Vitter and Burr as both extremely strong candidates. What's your -- how do you assess a candidate and what are the elements that cause you to conclude this is a really strong candidate?

TIMMONS: Well, it's somebody that that has a little bit of name recognition, [00:36:00] and I don't mean just in polls. I mean, if you go to a member -- if you go to influencers or thought leaders and you say, what about this person, and they can come back to you and talk about that person's accomplishments, what they've done in the community, what they've done for the state, then you know that there's somebody there who has a strong presence in the state, and that really matters.

When you're a congressman and you're running in a state that has -- North Carolina had 11 congressional seats, 12 maybe now -- if you're known outside of your congressional district, and the media knows who you are, the party leaders know who you are, business leaders know who you are, community leaders know who you are, then you know you have somebody who's very, very viable.



And the other side of that is, too, somebody who is not afraid to ask somebody for a contribution, and believe me, Richard Burr is not afraid to ask somebody for a contribution. (laughter) He's one of the most prolific fundraisers I've seen. He does it extraordinarily well. People want [00:37:00] to contribute to him because they want to see him succeed. So I think, you know, the fundraising side is important as well.

Q: I think I may have --

TIMMONS: And you know, I should add one other thing. A strong candidate is one that does not have a propensity to put their foot in their mouth. I mean, you've got -- it was very different then, I mean. You had a news cycle that was much longer. I mean, today, it's 24/7. You say something at ten in the morning, and it's responded to and you're responding back three or four times by the end of the day. At that point in time, the news cycle was much longer, but still, you could harm yourself if you said something that wasn't a very intelligent thing to say. And certainly, Richard Burr didn't fit in that category.

Q: I think I said something a little misleading earlier, when I suggested that Edwards dropped out of the race when he became vice presidential nominee. He really dropped out when he [00:38:00] decided to run for president.

TIMMONS: That's right.

Q: And --

TIMMONS: It was still late, though. So, Richard decided to run against Edwards and then ended up in an open seat.

Q: Well, that's kind of -- sets up my question which is, were you expecting to take on Edwards in a pretty serious way even if he had been the nominee?

TIMMONS: We would have beaten John Edwards. It was going to be easier for us to beat John Edwards as a Senator than it was to beat Erskine Bowles as a candidate with John Edwards as a vice presidential candidate.

Q: Why?

TIMMONS: Well, suddenly, Edwards had national prestige. Suddenly...--

Q: No, I mean, why do you think Edwards would have been easier to beat than --

TIMMONS: Well, he didn't have a very good -- well, I should say he didn't have a record that reflected North Carolinian traditions and values, so I think he was out of step with the state already, and I think Richard Burr had done his homework and had done a tremendous amount of opposition research, and all of our polling showed that he was doing quite well, which is one of the reasons I [00:39:00] think John Edwards, at the time, decided not to run for reelection, and instead run for president.



Q: Are there ever tensions -- this occurs to me when you're doing polling in a state and making some judgments about how to invest resources, it makes me wonder if there aren't, maybe more than occasionally, tensions between a candidate and his staff wanting to get his resources, and you making judgments about their viability that are in conflict with their own self-perception. And they'll say, "Well, I've got a poll that shows," you know, such-and-such.

TIMMONS: Tensions in politics? I've never heard of such a thing.

Q: (laughter) Well, I wonder, how do you --

TIMMONS: There are definite differences of opinion; there's no question. I can give you two examples of that, and for very different reasons. South Carolina, where Jim DeMint was clearly the favorite, clearly. I don't think that there was any prognosticator that did not say that Jim DeMint was [00:40:00] not going to win, and win handily. They -- Jim DeMint, however, very much wanted his coordinated dollars to come into the state. And that point, you know, we could spend --

Q: What is that -- I'm sorry, coordinat--

TIMMONS: Well, the coordinated dollars, he wanted money that -- which I believe is probably about \$800,000. That's a number that's set by the Federal Election Committee -- Commission, on how much money you can actually coordinate with the candidate about where you want the money to be spent. Everything else is an independent expenditure.

Q: You, meaning the NRSC?

TIMMONS: Correct, sorry. Or the political -- or the party itself, so that money could have come, I think, from the RNC, or wherever. But it was coming through us. Now we could have spent that \$800,000 on say, Colorado at the end. But he was insistent, and lobbied some Senators and some others to put pressure on us to work with him to [00:41:00] run ads in South Carolina. Ultimately, that benefitted him, right? I mean that's -- I don't blame him for doing it. There could have been much better uses for that money than spending it on somebody who's definitely going to win.

Then you look somewhere else, and actually this would be a great example of where to spend that money, Washington State. And this was my -- this was my heart candidate, George Nethercutt, who was one of the finest examples of a human being I'd ever met. He happened to be running against Patty Murray at the time.

Q: Incumbent Democrat.

TIMMONS: Incumbent Democrat, and he had beaten Tom Foley, Speaker of the House back



in --

Q: Eighty.

TIMMONS: -- ninety-four.

Q: Oh, '94, I'm sorry.

TIMMONS: Ninety-four. And, he didn't have the resources, and he needed the resources. So we invested a little bit at the beginning of that race. We did some coordinated with him. His numbers just did not take off, and it was pretty obvious, it was the flipside of South Carolina. We saw that there was no way [00:42:00] we were going to be able to save -- or to help him get to a better place, or get toward victory. So we had to pull out of that state. That became very public. My counterpart at the Democratic Senatorial Committee trumpeted very quickly, "The NRSC pulls out of Washington," when we very quietly just pulled down our ads. Again, I don't blame them for doing that. Pretty smart strategy on their part. But it was a pretty difficult decision, because I just thought George was a tremendous guy; would have been a tremendous senator.

Q: Were there ever candidates, in your experience who, at the outset, you didn't think were going to merit the support you could give them with limited resources, but who surprised you and came on strong, and persuaded you, yeah?

TIMMONS: In the '04 cycle -- it was more the opposite, folks that you thought were strong that you had to help. Jim Bunning was a really good example of that. [00:43:00] I can't really say that, again, we found ourselves with a bounty of riches at the end. (laughter) And no money to help, so no, not in that cycle. There were not any surprises; they just all were good from the start and merited support.

Q: You mentioned South Carolina and the general election there, but that was one of those states where there was a pretty intense primary --

TIMMONS: Yeah.

Q: -- within -- for the Republican nomination.

TIMMONS: Right. It was assumed -- I mean, it was assumed that whoever won the primary, whether it was Charlie Condon, or David Beasley --

Q: Ravenel.

TIMMONS: Arthur Ravenel was in there as well. We -- that was a pretty competitive primary, and we assumed it was either going to be Beasley or DeMint, and either of those candidates we thought would be very strong for the general election against Inez Tenenbaum. It's ironic when you look at, kind of how you set the table for the future. You have Jim DeMint, who's [00:44:00] now the head of the Heritage Foundation, and you had Inez Tenenbaum, who is the head of the



- Consumer Product Safety Commission, that's two very different worlds.
- Q: Absolutely. A race we haven't really talked about, another Republican incumbent retires, Don Nickles in Oklahoma. Was there any doubt there how that was going to play out, even as an open seat?
- TIMMONS: Not initially. Initially, we assumed that it was a strong seat, although I think we probably rated it "Likely Republican," not "Safe Republican." Brad Carson was a very moderate Democrat, very well-liked. Tom Coburn obviously was well-liked as well. But the race got a little dicey as it unfolded. I think there were some things that the Coburn campaign did that became controversial; I can't [00:45:00] even remember what they were. So I remember, we had to look at that as a place that we needed to invest, which I didn't think we wanted to do right at the -- as I recall, that was not a state we thought we'd have to play in very much at the beginning of the cycle, but we did end up having to go into.
- Q: Can we talk about your activities over the course of the year, what is it that the executive director of the NRSC is doing, from -- maybe not day-to-day, but week-to-week, month-to-month? Are you traveling, are you --
- TIMMONS: You're doing a lot of traveling, because you're raising money for the committee, obviously. You are making sure that the chairman is being used effectively. The chairman has to be a United States Senator full time, and in his off time, he gets to be Chairman of the Republican Senate Committee, and raise money, and get on the phone for candidates. You're also helping to set the direction for the political operations to ensure that in the beginning, you're recruiting -- you're doing [00:46:00] heavy recruiting in the first year. I can remember spending a lot of time in Illinois, for instance, at the beginning of the process. The other states you spend a lot of time in, you spend a lot of time on the phone trying to recruit, in addition to raising money and helping set that fundraising strategy at the beginning.

And the one thing that I was working on, and I know that Andy Grossman, who was my initial counterpart at the Democratic committee was working on, was figuring out how to deal with McCain-Feingold. I mean, we spent a lot of time with lawyers, and it took me probably three months to find my attorney that I wanted to work with there. We were working with our outside attorneys, Ben Ginsburg, and others. And it was -- there were a lot of briefings on how we had to deal with McCain-Feingold, what we could do, what we couldn't do to stay within the bounds of the law.



As you move on later in the cycle, and you have candidates that you've helped recruit, you're [00:47:00] helping them develop their campaign plans; you're looking -- at times, you're looking for campaign managers for them. You are -- you're managing expectations in the media, or talking about some of the things that the media may not know that you want them to know. You're also working with campaigns on their ground game to make sure that they're not just raising money, which is a very easy thing to do, again, particularly post-McCain-Feingold, but they've got to really focus on ensuring that they have a very strong farm team throughout their state to get the vote out and get folks registered and out to vote.

Q: And you talked about working to recruit candidates, which I think might take some people by surprise, that the national party would be out there encouraging people to run. I think maybe many of us would assume that candidates emerge spontaneously, [00:48:00] and then you wait and see how they evolve.

TIMMONS: Well, sometimes they emerge spontaneously, and you would like to that they shouldn't emerge spontaneously. (laughter)

Q: Well, who would be a couple examples of candidates you actively recruited in '04?

TIMMONS: Who we actively recruited?

Q: I was thinking you in particular, but --

TIMMONS: The committee, or the party, yeah.

Q: You, and the committee, generally.

TIMMONS: Well, Mel Martinez is clearly one of those. John Thune was on the fence about whether he was going to run again. He had run two years before and lost, and we wanted him to run against Tom Daschle who was the Majority Leader -- Minority Leader, I guess, during that cycle. So we were able to recruit him. We also helped to recruit some other candidates in states that weren't successful, and we didn't win those, so I won't mention those.

Q: John Thune, that's, I guess last on the race -- particular races.

TIMMONS: That was our marquis race that year.

Q: Pardon?

TIMMONS: That was our marquis race that year for sure.

Q: Could you talk about that race at whatever length [00:49:00] you'd like to?

TIMMONS: Yeah, so, you know it's funny, I think when we started the race -- when the race started that cycle, there are a lot of people who said he's -- you know, we love John Thune; he's going to be able to do this. This is an easy, easy race. Those by-and-large were people that weren't trying to raise money against the leader



of the Democratic caucus. (laughter) And, I think there was a lot of expectations that were put on John's shoulders at that point, which is really -- it's tough for a candidate to have to manage those expectations, but he did it beautifully. And, he raised a lot of money on that race. He ran an incredibly good race, because the man never tires. He just never tires. He was everywhere in that state, and we were very pleased to put a lot of money in that state. I think it was probably four million dollars that we put into a state that is not a very expensive media state, [00:50:00] so that tells you how much we invested in that state. We did a lot of research for the candidate, and in fact some of our research I think actually probably tipped the balance right at the end of the race.

Q: For example?

TIMMONS: For example, finding a document signed by Senator Daschle, that declared that he was a full-time resident of the District of Columbia. That was a very effective ad to use against him. And Thune ran a largely positive race, and so he, I think, was a good alternative for folks who thought that their incumbent Senator perhaps a little bit out of touch with their state. So he ran a good race. He won narrowly. He's become an outstanding Senator that doesn't even attract opposition anymore.

Q: Thirty-three million dollars spent in that one election in South Dakota.

TIMMONS: In South Dakota, right. [00:51:00]

Q: Eighty-seven dollars per vote. I mean, so your committee puts in four million, but there are over ten million more dollars, 15 million more dollars that are coming from --

TIMMONS: All over the country, because every knew what a great senator John Thune would be, what a great leader he would be for the country. So I think it's pretty safe to say that if you know John Thune, you are -- you're highly impressed. So we made sure as many people in this country knew who John Thune was as possible.

Q: Well, how much of this was pro-John Thune, and how much of it was defeat Tom Daschle?

TIMMONS: I'm sure there was some of that. But you're not going to just defeat somebody with nobody. I mean, you've got to have a good alternative. I mean, you don't just try to defeat a member of Congress, or a member of the United States Senate, unless you have somebody that you really believe in, and I think people really believed in John Thune, and they still do.

I'll tell you the one factor about that race that most people [00:52:00] don't know is we also



invested a lot on ballot security, because there were questions about the security of the ballot box in the 2002 race, and a lot of folks thought that John Thune should challenge the results of that election, and to his credit, he didn't. So I wanted to make sure in 2004 we didn't have those same questions. And we had an incident of a ballot box disappearing, and an election official putting it in a station wagon, and driving off with it, and driving to some barn to open it up, and I had lawyers following him all the way, and demanding to be inside the barn, and finally they got inside the barn, and as soon as those ballots were counted, he was declared the winner. John Thune was declared the winner, because there was no question that all of the ballots were accounted in an appropriate way.

Q: Why was ballot security an unusual problem in South Dakota?

TIMMONS: I'm not sure it's unusual in South Dakota. I think it's always an issue in close races, and there are [00:53:00] some precincts in this country that are a little bit less vigilant about the security and the integrity of the ballot box than others. And that just happened to be one precinct where it was a problem.

Q: Was this focused on -- or concentrated on reservation land, the concerns?

TIMMONS: Yeah, so I'm not -- I don't remember how the whole thing unfolded; I just remembered that there were some concerns around the state, and I don't remember which precinct this was, but I knew it was one that was in question.

Q: Really unusual aspect of this election was that the Senate Majority Leader, Bill Frist, went out and campaigned against his Democratic equivalent. I don't know that that had ever happened before.

TIMMONS: Probably not, but it certainly has happened since. (laughter) So, I'm not sure that that's a good thing to do for the comity of the Senate, but it seemed to pay off for Bill Frist at that point.

Q: Well, when [00:54:00] you said that toward the end of the general election campaign, you were getting indications that this --

TIMMONS: Right.

Q: -- that a lot of close races were starting to break in the Republican direction. I don't know that that was the trend in the presidential polling at that time, when it really seemed to be still neck-and--

TIMMONS: Right, it was difficult.

Q: -- neck-and-neck. So why do you think Senate races were breaking Republican before the presidential broke Republican? And here's a chance for you to claim credit.

TIMMONS: Well, ultimately -- no, you know, it takes a team to build any of these things, and



the credit always is the candidate. I mean the candidates are the ones that ultimately are on the ballot. They're the ones that put their names forward, and I think the Republican candidates had made their cases, not only for the direction that they wanted to see the country go in, but also for their ability to do the job as United States Senator. And I just think they made those connections, and they held, those connections [00:55:00] held, and they didn't make mistakes, mostly, at the end. And they ran really good campaigns.

Q: Can you give your sort of professional opinion of the Democratic committee that was the equivalent of the NRSC, how energetic, how skillful they were at playing the hand they were dealt?

TIMMONS: I think they were very good. I mean, look, Andy Grossman who ran the committee -- the Democratic committee in the 2002 cycle, and started running the committee when -- in 2004, before he went off to do, I believe it was Organizing for America at the time, there's no better professional on the Democratic side. He and I had a very good relationship. We decided to meet early on to kind of set the ground rules at the beginning, and make sure that each other understood that we were going to be focused on these races, and it wasn't going to be a staff-to-staff fight, or any of the [00:56:00] silly -- none of the silly stuff. We wanted to be as professional as possible during -- you know, during the election cycle. And I think, generally speaking, they were very, very tough opponents, and made a lot of good decisions. It just turned out not to be their cycle.

Q: You know, another way of interpreting this election that maybe diminishes the role of the campaign, is the South had been trending Republican.

TIMMONS: Sure.

Q: Lots of Democratic incumbents saw this coming, retired, and basically you happened to be in place when the harvest came in.

TIMMONS: (laughter) Well, a lot --

Q: That's -- I'm stating that strongly.

TIMMONS: Let me tell you what, a lot of these things are all luck. (laughter) So, I was lucky to be there that cycle; there's no question.

Q: And then six years later, this class did very well.

TIMMONS: Sure, yeah, well --

Q: Two thousand ten.

TIMMONS: Well, and again, you said a lot of the trends had embedded themselves into certain regions of the country.

Q: In hindsight [00:57:00], are there any -- other than Colorado, are there any



elections from 2004 where you think, you know, if we had gotten in early, and done all we could, we might have elected another Republican?

TIMMONS: I don't. I wish I could say that about Washington State, but I just don't think it was meant to be. You could not have asked for a better candidate, and that's another example of a candidate that we helped recruit. You couldn't have asked for a better candidate than George Nethercutt, but the political environment just wasn't there for him. If I could wave a magic wand and say, if we could pick up one more, where it would be, it would be Washington. But it just wasn't meant to be. I do think Colorado, though, is the one area where -- the one state that you can point to and say, if not just for another half a million dollars, we would have had 56 instead of 55 Republican senators.

Q: Well, you know, the record shows that [00:58:00] both parties sort of invested their money intelligently, because as I said earlier, 25 out of 26 incumbents reelected by an average of 64%, so it doesn't seem like there were any other opportunities waiting to be seized out there.

TIMMONS: Right. Yeah, I think that's a fair assessment.

Q: What kind of legacy did you leave for your successor? In other words, this is an institution, and how was the NRSC different when you left it and the next person came in?

TIMMONS: Well, I think one of the things that we had to do is we had to figure out how to deal with a post-McCain-Feingold world, and our experiences were -- you know, our experiences, and the bumps and the hurdles that we experienced during the two-year cycle, and trying to figure out how to navigate in the world of McCain-Feingold was something that we were able to pass on to [00:59:00] the next team. And a lot of the folks who worked in the financial side of the -- the fundraising side of the committee stayed on under Senator [Elizabeth] Dole when she came in to take the chairmanship. I think she probably was glad to have those folks that had that experience.

Q: So what did you learn in 2004 about how to navigate this new world?

TIMMONS: Well, you just had to look at different ways to raise money. So, one of the things that was really built out during that cycle were low-dollar donors. So, say "low-dollar," it's a lot of money, but thousand dollar donors, two-thousand dollar donors, those folks when they start to get involved in the process, and they start to understand how they can help make a positive impact with a party committee, then graduate to become five-thousand dollar donors, and if they have the capacity, even more in future years. So, starting that -- or I should say, [1:00:00] developing that team of donors who can be ambassadors for you, who



can get other donors that are entry-level donors, and who can also grow as larger donors in the future, I think is one of the things we learned during that cycle.

Q: Were there things you observed about the -- and I'm sure you were an interested and informed observer of the 2006 election which turned out to be a terrible year for the Republican Party, losing the Senate, were there things you observed where you thought, you know, if they had done this, if they had done that --

TIMMONS: No. (laughter)

Q: -- we would have come out better, or --

TIMMONS: No, you know, I just don't think you can second-guess any cycle. I don't think you can second-guess any campaign, because every single campaign is different. Every campaign, every cycle for a political committee is different. [1:01:00] And I don't think it's fair to compare one cycle to the next; I really don't.

Q: Last question, and this is back to fundraising. Oh-four was really the election that demonstrated the ability to raise political money on the internet. I mean, Howard Dean does that in '03, and then the candidates in '04. Was this something that you were able to introduce into Congressional fundraising?

TIMMONS: So, "introduce" is a really good word. A guy named Chris [inaudible] was responsible for that new realm, (laughter) you know, of fundraising, and he did a tremendous job. In fact, we were shocked at the returns that we got on small, small dollar donations from the internet. Having said that, at that time, and I guess probably still today; I don't know; I've been out of it for a good number of years. [1:02:00] But you had to invest a lot of money going into it. So you didn't make a lot of money back, but what you tried to do is you tried to then turn those donors into higher dollar donors later on. But it was the start of the process. They had actually started it the cycle before in earnest, and we just picked up on that. I would imagine what goes on at the committees today just puts what we did to shame. But it was the beginning of kind of a new era.

Q: Well, there you are comparing. You shouldn't compare.

TIMMONS: That's right. (laughter) You really can't compare that one. That's very different.

Q: Jay Timmons, is there anything I haven't asked you about, that you would like to talk about with regard to the NRSC and the Senate elections in '04, and anything else in '04?

TIMMONS: Well, you know, you talked a little bit about recruiting; we touched a little bit on that. And I don't think that there -- this is the thing that folks really don't see, and it's the thing that is -- it's the thing, I should say that most in [1:03:00]



Washington circles, it's the thing that they know least about, but it's the thing that they comment most on, early in the cycle, because there's nothing else to talk about. So I know that during this cycle, the committee was criticized in the first year for its recruiting efforts. And if you look at today, they have a tremendous group of candidates, and nobody's going to --

Q: In 2014.

TIMMONS: In 2014. And nobody's going to be criticizing their recruitments after the election, whether they win or lose. I remember vividly in 2004, all the criticisms that George Allen, as chairman, and I got on the recruiting side, but nobody knew what we were doing behind the scenes. So I actually find that to be one of the more fascinating things about the committees, and the work that they do, and that's what I think most people don't understand, is how much activity the political committees have in trying to recruit candidates, and trying to help them understand, how they can put together a [1:04:00] a campaign operation, how they can put together a fundraising operation, and what the political environment -- prognosticating what the political environment might be a year later. We had a great group of candidates, and I'm really proud of them, and I'm really pleased -- we could have probably recruited a few others, but in the end, I think we focused on the right states, and we got the right candidates.

Q: Well a follow-up question to that, because, sort of famously in '02, before you got there, the White House intervened in some recruitment efforts, Minnesota in particular, right? Tim Pawlenty, you're not running for Senate because Norm Coleman is. Anything -- was White House involved in any equivalent way in '04?

TIMMONS: No, not in '04. I think that they had decided after their '02 experiences that it might not be helpful in '04, I would say --

Q: Really, because --

TIMMONS: -- general -- I should say, generally speaking. I will say that they were extremely helpful with Mel Martinez. They [1:05:00] were very helpful with -- they were helpful with a couple other races. But generally speaking, I think they wanted to stay out of the limelight, because he had his own race to run. I mean, the President needed to worry about his own campaign. But there were a few races that they were involved in, but not nearly publically -- as publically as they were in 2002, and they were also, as I mentioned, very helpful in Pennsylvania when you had an incumbent that was in trouble.

Q: Well listen, thank you so much. This has been fascinating, and illuminating.

TIMMONS: Great to talk to you, and great to relive a lot of old memories. Ten years later.



Citation: Jay Timmons Interview, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University, The Election of 2004 Collective Memory Project, August 12, 2014, accessed at <http://cphcmp.smu.edu/2004election/interview-with-jay-timmons/>.

Transcription services provided for your convenience by the Audio Transcription Center, of Boston, MA. In all circumstances, audio and video remain the definitive version. Please contact CPHinfo@smu.edu with any discrepancies or comments.