



The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

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August 12, 2014

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Q: You played a role in the 1980 election, the Carter --

LOCKHART: I did.

Q: -- re-elect.

LOCKHART: I did.

Q: Obviously, the 1996 election, the Clinton re-elect. And my question is, did those experience working for presidents seeking reelection, give any insight to you into the advantages, the disadvantages, the challenges facing Bush in '04, your opponent?

LOCKHART: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I've been on both sides, which is I've done, I guess, two presidentials challenging an incumbent, and two presidentials -- in varying roles, very junior in the Carter campaign -- of incumbents. There are vast advantages to being an incumbent. You get to, in some ways, on some days, really control the agenda. You get to do things, and you get to point to very specific things that you can take credit [00:01:00] for. On the other hand, the agenda can take over your campaign, things that happen overseas, or you know, cyclical moves. The economy is weak, and maybe it's getting stronger, but it's not going to be strong



enough. You know, the most on-point example would be Carter and the hostages. It dominated the campaign.

So there are advantages and disadvantages. I think there's a reason that incumbents win more often than not, because I think the advantages generally outweigh the disadvantages. I would say from my personal experience, the biggest advantages, it's why the debates are so important. It's very hard for the average voter to see a challenger as being president. It's a little bit like you're a kid and you're looking at your parents. You're not quite sure why they know things they know, but you just figure, [00:02:00] because you're -- they're your parent, they know something. I think presidents are like that, which is they've been in the office, and in times of tumult and change, which is almost all the time, there's a security in that, and that's the biggest thing.

Q: I was thinking, there's often a huge difference between a president who has to fight for renomination, like Carter did, and a president like Clinton in '96 or Bush in '04 who doesn't have to worry about that at all.

LOCKHART: Yeah, I think, to that, I'd argue that the real story there is if a president's fighting for the nomination, it means he's in trouble already. So it's just a reflection; it's another symptom of the disease, which is a presidency that's in trouble. You know, I think a nomination fight can energize you. I mean, if you look at Carter, you know, using his words, "the malaise," the fight against Ted Kennedy energized his presidency. [00:03:00] He just then [didn't ascend?] and things happened in the world. But I think, to me it's more about you don't challenge the president of your own party unless you think that president's weak, and part of the calculation is, and part of the thing you say to your fellow Democrats and Republicans is, he's going to lose in the fall. I need to challenge him. So, I think that fits for -- particularly for Carter in 1980.

Q: We'll come back to the '04 general election debates later, but one thing you hear frequently said is that a president running for reelection almost never gets up to speed for that first debate in the fall.

LOCKHART: It is the most predictable thing in the world, and no one has figured out a way to convince a sitting president that he's not ready for a debate. [00:04:00] Well, no one. You know, so I think you saw that with George Bush in 2004; you saw that with Barack Obama in 2012. There's a sense that you're doing all this stuff every day; you don't really need to prepare. And the other guy doesn't know as much as



you, and that kind of belies the whole nature of the -- how a debate really works, and how it really plays out.

I remember we did -- we were preparing President Clinton for the first debate in 1996, and he did better than anyone I've seen, you know, since I've been watching debates. But he was not doing well in the prep. The prep was not going well. And he was just having trouble focusing and understanding the challenge. I mean, he knew he was better as a debater than Bob Dole. He knew he knew the issues as [00:05:00] well or better. And he had advantages, but he just couldn't focus, and I remember Paul Begala, who was there as part of the prep, grabbed me and said, "Let's have some fun, but try to get his attention," and we sat down and wrote a *New York Times* story, a fictional *New York Times* story from the day after the debate with Clinton getting his clock cleaned by Dole, and gave it to him. And, he wasn't real happy with it, and I'm sure that that isn't what got him, but I remember thinking, you know, got to find a way to get his attention.

For whatever reason, I would -- the last prep was started, like late one afternoon. He'd frankly been terrible for two days. He showed -- he went away. He showed up for that last session, and you saw the best of Bill Clinton, and you saw what you saw in the first debate. But most of them, you know, ended up, and you can go back to -- you know, you can go back to Reagan. [00:06:00] Go back to George Bush 41, Bush 43, Obama just tanked in the first debate. And it's predictable.

Q: So in the debate, again I'm getting way ahead of where I want to be, but in the debate prep in '04, were you able to sort of tell your colleagues in the campaign, "Look, Bush is not going to be ready for this, and therefore it's an even bigger opportunity"?

LOCKHART: Yeah, I think there was a sense, and I don't want to take credit for the strategy in saying that I told my colleagues, but I think there was a sense in the room, and you know, Ron Klain and Bob Shrum and some others did a really great job preparing Kerry. You know, I got there kind of in the middle of it, and these guys, they really did a good job. And I'm sure there were more people involved, and I remember Ron and Bob being very involved. But I think there was a sense that Bush would come and would be somewhat passive, and that was an opportunity for Kerry to be aggressive, and sort of drive the debate, and he did it. He completely



[00:07:00] delivered on it. And it was the first time I'd been around him in that intense a preparation and then an event, and I worried a little bit. Like, frankly I thought, "Yeah, he's doing great in here," and he was. He was doing very well in the prep, but what's it going to be like when it's for real? And he did even better.

Q: You also were involved, and you mentioned this in passing, in two challengers' campaigns. I mean, the '84 Mondale campaign, and then in effect the Dukakis campaign running against Vice President Bush. And I wonder, sort of same questions, did those experiences give you any insight into the advantages and disadvantages facing Kerry in '04 as the challenger?

LOCKHART: Yeah, I think -- not so much in the -- and I don't know that I'd put it in that vein. I think the -- you know, the first Mondale [00:08:00] debate I think the strategy was very similar, even though the country was (inaudible), the strategy was the same as Kerry, which was, take it to him at every chance. Don't back down to anything. You don't have to defer to the President. You know, it's about something, you know, more important. I think the lesson in 1988 was how -- you know, we learned it painfully, these debates are about moments. And you need to create positive moments, and avoid these seminal negative moments, and Dukakis fell a couple of times.

You know, I still believe if you were grading the way that you grade debates in debate clubs and things, you know the Los Angeles debate with Dukakis, Dukakis won on points. You know, like if you took every answer and all that. But there were a couple of moments where, you know, he showed weakness, or it was perceived as weakness, [00:09:00] and that was it. And the -- I mean, this is a side point, but it's really why it's important as much as people make fun of it, to be out there talking about how your guy did, because people tend to look for cues on who won and who lost. And, it was -- I remember, I think the first time I actively used, you know, dial testing during the debate to shape the spin afterwards was with Kerry, and it was -- you know, so it wasn't like, you know, me saying -- me telling everyone to go out and say, he did really well in this, we knew what scored well, that would reinforce people's thoughts, and while you wouldn't say it in an interview with a camera rolling, but you could say to a reporter, look at the numbers, like 70% of the people thought that was the best answer in the debate, [00:10:00] and you know, and thought Bush's answer was incomplete, or not compelling, or -- so, those sorts of things are important.



Q: Debates aside, anything else that you sort of had derived from your early experience with a challenger running against an incumbent that gave you insight into the situation -- the challenge facing Kerry?

LOCKHART: Yeah, I mean I think looking at -- you know, this is a very broad statement, but looking at all of the campaigns that I've worked in, and some that I've watched, they -- each side has a strategy. The incumbent is always arguing that stability is the most important thing, continuity. Building on what we've got done, where it's incomplete, and even if it's bad news, but we're fixing it. The challenger is always arguing change. [00:11:00] And it comes down to who makes that argument most effectively.

Most campaigns, I think, develop a sense early whether they're a change or stability campaign. 1984 is the classic example of a stability campaign. You know, I spent two years working for Walter Mondale; there's no one in the world I respect more. We didn't run a great campaign. We could have run the best campaign in the history of the world, and we still would have lost. It's not -- the country wanted continuity. And the Reagan people ran a good campaign. They executed very well against their strategy.

Ninety-two is an example of, you know, classic change, which is, I think the public said, Bill Clinton's a young guy. We don't know where he's from. We've never been to Arkansas. It's a little state. But boy, you know, he's got to be better than the guy who's in there now, [00:12:00] because things aren't going well.

Two thousand four was a campaign that never settled on it. It settled at the very end, and I think it was determinative in the race, but it was one of those campaigns that for a lot of it felt like a change campaign, but at the end of the day it wasn't. And that's -- we were driving hard though, this idea that, you know, it's -- this has to -- the country needs change.

Q: I imagine it's tougher to sell that in wartime.

LOCKHART: Oh yeah, and that was a big -- I'll get ahead of myself here, and we can talk about this, but I think both from instinct and talking to the pollsters at the time, the electorate was swinging. I mean, it moved a good bit. It oftentimes doesn't post-Labor Day. It kind of gets set. But in this one it moved, and it moved [00:13:00] after the first debate in Kerry's favor, because people were convinced when they saw him standing head-to-head with the president, this guy can do it. And then



things happened in the world. There was a terrorist attack, Chechnya terrorist attack, and then --

Q: Beslan.

LOCKHART: -- secondly, the Bin Laden tape [for the weekend?] and it just reminded people that, boy this is a dangerous world, and you know what, the economy stinks. I don't think this -- you know, this President Bush guy, I don't think he's that smart, but boy, he hasn't let any terrorists shoot us or attack us again, and I think that was something we -- I don't have data to back this up, but I believe that without the Bin Laden tape, the election would have been different. I mean, it only came down to, what, 65,000 votes in Ohio. And -- but, I think that crystallized this with a lot of the electorate of, let's just go with the guy we know. This isn't the time [00:14:00] for change.

Q: One -- I think probably my last question about your coming into the campaign, so to speak, what you've picked up from the past, but what was different about the presidential election process in '04 than had been true in the eighties and nineties?

LOCKHART: Well, technology changes a lot of things, and you know, I always go back and look at campaigns by what piece of tech -- you know, in 1980, someone put the first fax machine on my desk, and it literally was one of the first fax machines, there was a GSA program, testing for the government, do these things work, how do they work? They gave them to both campaigns, you know, see what you do with them.

Q: Who could send you a fax? (laughter)

LOCKHART: Well, you know, we could -- we would send a machine to our field offices, and we would send faxes back and forth. That's it. We never sent them to anybody else, because nobody else had one. But it was very useful for internal communication. You know, in 1984 [00:15:00] we used satellite technology so like on Super Tuesday campaigning, rather than having to go to 13 states, we'd sit in the studio. We really -- maybe we could have done that in 1980, but we didn't know we could.

And you know, it goes on and on, to cell phones, to -- 2004 was the beginning of the kind of blogging internet culture, where you know, it was often -- it was harder earlier to get some story going. And if you had some -- you know, sort of negative meme or, about your opponent or really positive story about what you were doing, you know, you had to go through this very heavy mainstream media filter. And sometimes you'd get through, and sometimes you wouldn't. 2004 was very



much like, it was the beginning of, people would throw stuff up on a blog, and because it was out there [00:16:00] and everybody was reading it, it would become news. So it really -- it's -- everything that -- nothing particularly new happened, but things happened faster, and there was less -- I felt like there was less institutional control; less of a referee. Which, it's comical to look at it now. I mean, the difference between 2004 and 2014 is light-years. I mean we have -- it has exploded. You know, there are no rules now. There are no referees. There's no parental guidance in the process; it's just a free-for-all. But, it did feel different. It felt -- particularly for me, because I came into it late, and had not done a political campaign in four years. In fact, I had not done a campaign in eight years. And you know, in 1996, you know, I got [00:17:00] credit for being very aggressive by, you know, getting our campaign staffers around the country to follow Bob Dole around, and to put things under the reporter's doors in the hotel room -- in the hotel rooms, and that seemed like it was aggressive. Like, but literally, they had pieces of paper they Xeroxed and put them under the door. That's laughable now. It's like, you know, with email, texting, Twitter, you know, everything. But at that time, it seemed like, oh boy; that's really aggressive; that's really interesting.

Q: I've read comments you've made about the '96 campaign, and you talked about its effectiveness in terms of -- and the word I often saw you use was "efficient"; in other words, develop a strategy; implement that strategy is how I took that to mean. In the changed information environment of '04, could you really run a campaign?

LOCKHART: Yeah, I mean, listen, there's -- I think there are things that are [00:18:00] constant in a campaign that change gradually, and then there are things that change -- that fundamentally change. I don't think that '96 and 2004 were fundamentally different campaigns; I don't. I think 2008 was a fundamentally different campaign than even 2004 with the way Obama ran with the influence of social media and the interne. But I think there was enough data and experience out there so that Kerry's effort could have avoided some of the mistakes that were made, and been in a stronger position going into Election Day. Would they have won? I don't know.

As opposed to, like looking at 2008 where it was clear that the Obama campaign had figured something out that the McCain campaign hadn't [00:19:00] figured out, and there was a big advantage, technologically, and organizationally. They



just couldn't compete, because they were behind. They just hadn't figured it out in time. But I don't put 2004 in that category. There were -- there were a lot of changes, but in fact, most of the changes worked, I think, to the advantage. You know, you look at a seminal moment in that campaign, which was, you know, an independent group coming out and running a bunch of really harsh, negative ads; that happened plenty of times before. My first campaign was in 1980, and with -- what were they called, NCPAC?

Q: Yeah.

LOCKHART: With NCPAC, and you know, the --

Q: The National --

LOCKHART: -- "slaughter in the Senate," and you know, I think Democrats lost 18 seats because of these unresponded negative ads. Dukakis, 1988, don't respond to Willie Horton. John Kerry, 2004. You can draw a line between those, you know. [00:20:00] Was it a mistake? Yes, I think it was a mistake. I think everyone has a right to their view, and the people who were there will defend the rationale behind doing it, and they may be right. But I don't think it's -- it's not the same as, they were -- something fundamentally changed about campaigns that they hadn't realized. That was old school, and I think 2004 was kind of the dividing line. It's the end of a political era and the way campaigns are conducted, you know, 30-second ads being the single most important element of your campaign. Trying to get on network TV every night is an important thing, and I'd say 2008 starts a new era. So, it's -- in looking at these campaigns, I would want to look at 2004 and compare it backwards rather than compare it forward, because I don't think the comparison works, [00:21:00] going forward.

Q: What about a point some people have made, which was that McCain-Feingold, and '04 was the first election under McCain-Feingold, by banning soft money that would have gone to the parties, freed up all that money to go these independent groups that just, it was a change in degree that was almost a change-in-kind, because there was so much more money, for Swift Boat Veterans, for MoveOn --

LOCKHART: Here's what I'd say about that, and this is why I still don't believe it was (inaudible) -- there was more money, but there was balance. Democrats were used to fighting with a lot less money in their campaigns, but we raised -- I don't remember what the numbers said, but we were competitive. I think we may have raised more. And again, the strength of the Swift Boat ads wasn't the size of the buy, it was the ruckus it created that they got free media out of. [00:22:00] I don't



remember what the size of the buy was; I wasn't there. But again, I don't know that it was any bigger than the Willie Horton buy.

Q: Half a million dollars was the buy.

LOCKHART: Yeah, so say, Willie Horton was quarter of a million. That has nothing to do with McCain-Feingold. I can find you a Democratic donor, or a Republican donor, even back then who could run half-a-million dollars in ads. The interesting -- one interesting part of the ads, as I remember, is at that point, there was so much attention, and there was a level of sophistication on the ad-makers part, that they knew what their ad would do. They had the ability to anticipate what the response would be, and back-and-forth. I don't think -- you know, I can't remember what the number was, but it was hundreds of millions of dollars spent on an ad that really didn't influence the election. What influenced the election was \$500,000 in ads [00:23:00] that the campaign decided to ignore, and the weeks of conversation about it. And you know, I came out of 2004 thinking that these 30-second ads were dead. They're not dead yet; people just haven't figured what to do with the money, but they're going to. And you're going to see that change.

Q: Well, again, I'm not arguing with you, but you have Fox News in '04 as a megaphone for conservative Republican point of view, and I think that was kind of the megaphone for the initial Swift Boat buy, where it crosses over into news coverage.

LOCKHART: Sure, but I would -- here, I'd argue that in '96 and 2000 you had talk radio as the megaphone that we used to put stories in. So I'm not diminishing the change, but I still believe that the 2004 campaigns were run [00:24:00] by the same rules as 2000 and '96, whereas in 2008, it seems like the rules had changed.

Q: OK, let's bring you into the campaign. What led to your joining the Kerry campaign, in August?

LOCKHART: Yeah, August I think. I think it was 10 weeks before the election, maybe 12 weeks. I was -- I had not really been involved in the primary process. We were starting our company here; we were all pretty busy. I had helped various candidates through friends. You know, friends would call me and say, we've got this issue, what do you think? So at any given time, I was talking to someone at the Kerry campaign, or someone at the Edwards campaign, and was happy to help, but not particularly interested in spending a lot of time in Iowa and New Hampshire, and South Carolina, it's like, been there, done that.



There were several upheavals within the [00:25:00] Kerry staff. There was one early in the campaign where the first group of people led by Jim Jordan were pushed out. Mary Beth [Cahill] and others were brought in. I think the aftermath -- and again, I never -- I didn't -- (inaudible) close question (inaudible), people is, why are you calling? But I think in the aftermath of the Swift Boats there was a sense that the -- new blood was needed, not necessarily to push people out, but to give some new thinking. So, one of the colleagues here got a call, and we kind of came over as a package.

Q: Who was that?

LOCKHART: Joel Johnson. And what they initially asked, my initial role in the campaign was to travel on the plane with Senator Kerry. And I don't know if this was good or bad, others will have to -- but I said, well -- I don't want to go on [00:26:00] a trip until I've spent some time in the office. I want to figure out who's who, and what's what, and how you do things. So I spent about three or four days in the office before I took the trip. I took the trip, and I went back to Mary Beth and, the senator and said, honestly, I think I'd be much more valuable here, because there's a lot -- I think we can do things a little bit differently. I think if we kind of reorient some things, we can be much more effective. Here are my ideas, and I remember, I think it was Mary Beth who said, that's fine, but you've got to find someone to go on the road. So that's when I drafted Mike McCurry. You know, Mike had always been sort of my mentor, sort of, I was his deputy, and you know, worked alongside him, and I was like, "Mike, I need you," and he ended up doing that job, of kind of being a senior advisor on the road, someone who Kerry could bounce things off of, and who could talk to the press, and you know, sort of be the sort of "wise man," and Mike was very good [00:27:00] at that.

Q: Well what did you observe at headquarters, and what did you end up recommending?

LOCKHART: Yeah, I think that there was -- I didn't -- and at the time, I didn't know whether I just wasn't asking the right places, or going to the right meetings, but I didn't get this sense that there was a coherent strategy for communicating, you know, day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to month. I think it had -- I don't know this for sure. But I think there had been a couple of different upheavals in the staff, and it just got to the point where there wasn't great coordination between different sides, and you know, the great value of coming in is new, is nobody's mad at you yet. That changed in about two days, but --and I just said, you know, let's all convene, you know, and it was easy to sort of say, I'm just trying to find out, you know.



[00:28:00] And, you know, so I think we quickly coalesced around the idea that we needed to get everybody in the same room talking together and having a more strategic plan, as opposed to just sort of -- there was a little too much, I think, of reacting to things day-to-day. So I think, you know, Joel and I focused heavily on, let's look at this in blocks. Let's look at this in week-long blocks, of what do we -- how do we make a week thematically coherent, and you know, what do we talk about -- you know, we had some individual problems that needed to be -- one important one that needed to be sorted through, which was, his position on Iraq was -- what's the right word? He couldn't campaign on it. You know, he couldn't be -- it just -- [00:29:00] it wasn't compelling.

Q: Too complicated?

LOCKHART: Yeah, you know. Here was what the strategic problem was, and I think a lot of people in the campaign were hung up on it, and you know, sort of coming in late, and not being involved in the first 14 rounds of a policy boxing match, you can sort of say, everybody's about to drop, like let's do it this way. But I think they were very hung up on the idea of, the country was against the war at this point. The war -- we went in for the wrong reasons. We, I think were deceived as far as the rationale. But, Saddam Hussein was still captured, and still out of power. And it was -- I think there was a little bit of an obsession with, well how do we answer that question? Which was, you know, aren't we better off without Saddam Hussein? And you know, it just seemed to me [00:30:00], and again, I don't want to act like I'm the person who had this idea. There was a healthy debate going on, but it needed resolution. And I felt very strongly that we -- that the central issue in this campaign in addition to the economy was going to be the War in Iraq, and whether it made us safer or not, and by definition, we'd lose if we took a position of Bush Lite. We had to be against his position. We had to have a different position.

And that's where Kerry was, personally. So it's not like we were saying, you've got to change your position. He was there personally. He knew that. I think there was just some reluctance to go out and articulate that, because, you know, we had caught Saddam Hussein. And often in these grand policy things, it's the vignette that defines the policy.

[00:31:00] You know, President Obama, fairly or unfairly is not popular right now, but people really believe in his ability to fight terrorism, because he killed Bin



Laden. Now, he is fighting terrorism; he is very effective. Absent the Bin Laden capture and death, who knows where he'd be on that issue? So, these things are defining, so I believed, and others did, that we needed to find a very aggressive place to go, and for him to, you know, evolve and take the next step on Iraq and come out in opposition, and say the war was a mistake.

Q: Well, when you --

LOCKHART: He knew that. I mean, there was no having to convince him. There was a little bit of like, you know, well, why did you vote for the resolution and all of that, and you know, listen, Hillary had that four years later. It's a hard issue. But it took -- it wasn't like one of these things where -- and I realized this quickly, [00:32:00] that we could also just come out and hold a news conference, say, you know, I've changed my position. It was a series of speeches that built an intellectual foundation for making this political, aggressive move. And I think the advantage of, whether it was me or somebody walking off the street coming in late and without the baggage of the earlier debates was, it was easier for me to say, you know, I don't know what you guys have been arguing about. Let's try this. And bringing, you know, trying to get everybody on the same page. And it took awhile, but we got there.

Q: One of the things people have observed about the Bush campaign was, this was the team that started in 2000 and had been planning the re-elect for four years, and they were people who were loyal to Bush. And some people draw a contrast and say, well, the Kerry campaign was hired guns who didn't have a long relationship with each other, or with him, [00:33:00] which sounds consistent with -- the fact that there's a strategic incoherence in August after the convention, that sounds -- that's a surprising thing --

LOCKHART: Yeah --

Q: -- for a campaign at that stage.

LOCKHART: And I -- I'm not sure, I wouldn't -- I didn't -- and I'm not sure I'd use the word "incoherent." What I would say is not -- I would say, not consistent and disciplined, and -- because I think, you know. And this happens when you're in a campaign where you're ahead, something bad happens, and all of a sudden you're behind, and you're being buffeted -- you start reacting to what's happening as opposed to moving strategically. So I think, you know -- I think all we were trying to do, and anything, I want to go to great pains to not pretend to have come in and been the architect of anything, was just to say [00:34:00], let's have a strategy here, at least on the communications side, where every day has a direct



connection to what happened the day before, and what's going to happen the next day, as opposed to, we're going to this event this day, and that group wants to hear this, or Bush has said that, and we're going to say -- and you know, it's interesting on the Bush side. I think they were well ahead of us as far as voter contact and technology, and the mechanics of campaigns. I think they were a small, disciplined group, but they had a lousy candidate who had a lousy record at that point. I mean, it got to the point where almost every time Bush went out and did something major where he did an interview, it was a bad thing for them. You know, you could just go one after the other, and you know, with -- and I have enormous respect for the Bush family, through -- and I -- you know, [00:35:00] and for anyone who's president. But particularly sitting in 2000-, I think 2004, the presidency -- his presidency was in trouble. And we saw it play out afterwards; I don't think it was a particularly strong presidency. I mean, you might argue if it was so weak, how come we couldn't beat him? Well, I don't know if I know the answer to that; we should have.

Q: The campaign that you came into, there's two things I want to ask about it. One is, because of the decision to take the federal funding for the fall campaign, and because of the timing of the Democratic convention, and the Republican convention, you in effect had to take that 70 million -- 75 million dollars and make it last three months. They had to make it last only two months. Did that -- was that part of the reason why August was -- they were holding back on really launching the campaign? [00:36:00]

LOCKHART: Yeah. And again, I wasn't there for a good bit of this. The decision that were made on response to Swift Boat were made before I got there. I'm not saying that to divorce myself from them, or whatever; I just wasn't there. But certainly in talking to people, there was a sense that money was to be saved at all costs. And there was a sense that these attacks were not working.

Q: The Swift Boat attacks?

LOCKHART: Right. And I think that on the first part, I agree. And it's just, I don't think you'll see again, because no one takes federal money anymore. But that was a huge disadvantage. And I'm not sure that they could have anticipated that, or should have anticipated [00:37:00] that, but it was a huge disadvantage. So I completely agree. I just disagree with the -- it's not working, because these things, they don't show up in the daily tracking poll. I mean, the day I started the campaign, I think the daily track had Kerry ahead four or five points. But if you looked at the polling and the underlying attributes, this was a house that was about to collapse. And



you could see it, you -- we knew, you know, or at least I had the sense, I think many others did too. I don't -- again, I'm not arguing that I came in and said, "Look at this, it's broken," that his -- he was weak, and he had been weakened by this. And you didn't see that. My guess is they probably didn't see that right away at the beginning.

I'm not particularly adept or driven by daily polls, partly because I'm not smart enough. [00:38:00] I am driven by past experience, and I sat through Dukakis. And I got hired by the Dukakis campaign; I had sort of done communications for the Democratic convention with the understanding that the day we moved out of the convention, I was moving over to the Dukakis campaign, I did. We were 17 points ahead. I was on that campaign for a month, and we were 10 points behind. (laughter) It's not my fault. Or maybe it was, but you know. So I viscerally remember from 1988, if you just let -- if you let one side go, and don't find an effective way to push back, it has a real impact. I think, you know, when you've got even amounts of money fighting each other, you can neutralize almost anything. But, you know, in this case, at least watching from the outside I was curious, really curious [00:39:00] to why this was going on, and I think --

Q: You mean the absence of response to the Swift Boat ad?

LOCKHART: Yeah, yeah.

Q: What would have been the right way to respond, the most effective way to respond in August?

LOCKHART: I think -- and hindsight is 20/20. I think there was certainly, if there were independent groups on the Republican side, there certainly could have been independent groups on the Democratic side. But I think, again, hindsight being 20/20, I think this could have been a moment for Kerry to challenge Bush directly, as in you know, you were -- I actually did serve. I actually saw combat. I actually saw friends lose their lives. I respect your decision to not -- to join the Guard, but I don't respect you allowing your political allies to launch these attacks. [00:40:00]

The risk there was -- at the moment was, if he does that, it elevates this. Well, looking back on it, it's easy for me to say, it elevated anyway, and by the time it elevated, there was no way to put the genie back in the bottle. So again, if I'd been sitting in the room, I can't tell you that I would have argued for responding. I would hope I would have raised my hand and say, let's remember 1988, but there were people in the room who were there, so they knew that. And others will



know better how much of this was political strategy; how much of this was political economy, that we just can't spend the money. And how much of it was that it was August, and people were tired and they needed a couple weeks off, or a couple days off, and you know it's -- people want to draw these grand strategic conclusions about everything that happens in politics, [00:41:00] when if you dig a little deeper, you'll often find that it's something a little simpler.

I am convinced to this day that President Bush's response to Katrina had as much to do with the fact that his communications director was getting married that weekend, and half his staff was there, and the people who would have said, "Whoa, don't do this; don't do that," then, like the president not caring. You know, do I know this? No. But when you look at campaigns, you -- it's so common that it's predictable that the campaign that finished -- you know, does their convention in July, and then has some time, that lull can often kill them. And it was fatal to Dukakis. I wouldn't say fatal to Kerry, but damaging.

Q: I have read that you did [00:42:00] have the idea of sending Senator Max Cleland, or former Senator Max Cleland --

LOCKHART: Yeah, yeah it was --

Q: -- to Crawford, Texas. Could you talk about that?

LOCKHART: Yeah, it was interesting because there was a lot of -- I think there was a lot of resi-- you know, when you commit to a strategy, you need to stay committed it; you need to see it through. And I think there strategy was to dismiss this, and you know say it was beneath it, and you know.

Q: You mean the Kerry campaign strategy?

LOCKHART: The Kerry campaign. And I think, two or three weeks. And again, not an unreasonable place to land, in the strategy. I think, in the end, it proved to be flawed, but it's not like the people who were sitting around the table didn't know what they were doing. It was a political call, and they made a lot -- most of the calls that that group made were right in that campaign, and some of them were wrong, like in any campaign. But I know when I got there, it just felt like, that the gloves had to come off, and Kerry had already paid a big price, and the only way [00:43:00] to mitigate this at this point was to make Bush pay a price too.

And I remember, I hadn't even joined the campaign yet. And, we were on a call, and they were talking about response, and I -- you know, someone said, what are you thinking? I said, this may seem -- this just seems self-evident to me, but we've



got to get aggressive, and we've got to just assert that President Bush is behind this, even though we can't prove it. And we all know that Karl Rove went directly to someone, who went directly to someone. So it wasn't like an absurd assertion. And I think Max Cleland, Senator Cleland was on the phone, and he was hot and bothered by all this, and I just said -- maybe he wasn't, because I think someone had to go ask him. But I remember he was enthusiastic about the idea. And you know, I said, you ought to just go down to Crawford and knock on the front door, and tell the president, as a wounded war hero, someone who actually knows [00:44:00] what it was like to serve in that war, that you're personally offended, and he should apologize.

Max was not the problems. I mean, I think there was enough sort of agita in the campaign to, boy, can we do that? But, kind of push through through that. And you know, I don't think that turned anything, but I think maybe the Bush people were done with this, and you know, the Republicans were not going to push Swift Boats anymore, and the Vietnam record. But they -- you know, so it may have just been a timing thing, but the -- it did feel like it neutralized a little bit of it, and actually -- you know, it's like -- you know, it's like a street fight, you know. The other guy gets five good shots in, and you're willing to take a few more shots just to get one in, you know, and to bring either -- they pushed him down a notch. We wanted to drag the President down with him, and Senator Cleland was [00:45:00] the right guy to do it, because of who he was, and what he'd been through. And I do think it also had the impact of, a lot of the political press was just reporting this tactically, like it's this tactic -- and you know, Senator Cleland didn't walk up to the front door; he wheeled himself up to the front door, and I think that had a visceral impact on a lot of the people saying, this is screwed up. This is totally screwed up.

Now, you can argue, and you know, others have argued, I just don't know, I wasn't there, that the convention overplayed, you know, sort of set him up --

Q: Set Kerry up, yeah.

LOCKHART: -- yeah, set Kerry up as, you know, the Vietnam experience being so prominent, and it set him up. I don't know, I think they were going to do it anyway, so.

Q: The Bush National Guard story that CBS ran, is this part of the same narrative, in other words --

LOCKHART: In what sense? [00:46:00]

Q: -- in other words, is this a story that the Kerry campaign kind of urged CBS to do?



LOCKHART: No.

Q: Or, it just --

LOCKHART: No.

Q: -- it just happened?

LOCKHART: I'd say -- well, stories in campaigns never just happen. It's -- particularly in the reporting culture now. But I -- if that story was true, and that story was on the air, that's devastating to the person we're running against, so did we want to see that story on the air? Sure. Did we know whether it was true? No. Did CBS talk to us and anyone else we talked to to try to get information to corroborate it? Sure. But frankly, we didn't have anything. There's, you know -- there were players that we didn't know. I mean, we had some sense of who they were. There's lots of gossip. [00:47:00] There was Ben Barnes who, I think has a role in this as someone who was close to Bush, and a Democrat, and who had certain feelings about this.

Q: Former Lieutenant Governor of Texas.

LOCKHART: Former Lieutenant Governor. But -- and I know Ben, but Ben wasn't in our strategy meetings, so it wasn't -- it wasn't the strategy of the campaign to get the story, and it wasn't our story to get out. We had no way of knowing what the facts were; we were not -- we didn't have the ability. You know, we were not the incumbent. We couldn't go in. The president -- Senator Kerry couldn't order military records to be opened, and you know, wouldn't have been appropriate if he had been, but many others have done that. Certainly, it was done in the Bush campaign against Clinton, where you know, records were accessed.

But, so we were aware of this. [00:48:00] But we had no ability to fuel it or ascertain its credibility. In that sense, we were viewers. We were certainly ready to comment on it, because if true, it says something about the character of the President, particularly a president whose loyalists have attacked their opponent for his military record, but this was not our story.

Q: And how do you think it played out in terms of the election? Because it was pretty seriously challenged.

LOCKHART: Yeah, it turned out to be oddly a net positive for Bush, because it played into this Republican idea that the media makes things up, and is a liberal engine. And in fact, when you juxtapose the two things, [00:49:00] the Right went after Kerry for his record, and Kerry didn't have a really effective response. The Left, as they said, it wasn't the Left; it was just some guys in Texas go after Bush, and he's able to debunk it. So the feeling was, you know, Bush is virtuous. Kerry, you can't believe



him. And you know, there was a sense pushed heavily by the Bush campaign that we were behind all this, and Democrats were forging -- couldn't be further from the truth. But in that environment, how do you disprove that?

Q: I know you joined the campaign after the ticket was formed, so it wasn't just Kerry, it was Kerry and John Edwards. In the context of '04, not in the subsequent events, did you think Edwards was an effective candidate?

LOCKHART: Yeah, this is a weird one because there were a lot of people inside the Kerry campaign who were very unhappy with John Edwards. I think some of that is normal, you just, there's always [00:50:00] like -- you know, there's a difference between the first date and the second date. (laughter) You know, it seems in theory, and then when you're out working, you know, it's people's strengths and weaknesses are exposed. But there was a series of stories about senior Kerry people being unhappy, and for whatever reason --

Q: Unhappy, unhappy, yeah.

LOCKHART: Unhappy. Maybe they were; I don't remember a lot of it. But for whatever reason, several people indicated that I was the person who was unhappy, and I remember having a conversation with John about it.

Q: John Edwards.

LOCKHART: John Edwards. And first saying, you know, this isn't true. And the reality is, of all the candidates in the primaries that I had actually offered advice to, Edwards was the leader of that. I thought it was a really smart choice. And I actually thought that he did a very effective job in doing what his job was. His job was to go around on local TV markets. That's it. [00:51:00] Go and get on local TV, and he did a nice job. He would push back on some of the things we'd ask them to say, like there was one thing in particular that I wanted him to say. (laughter)

Q: What was it?

LOCKHART: It was after the -- again, I hadn't joined the campaign yet, but I was on a call, and it was after the night that Zell Miller and Dick Cheney, you know, got up on the podium and eviscerated Kerry --

Q: At the Republican convention.

LOCKHART: -- at the Republican convention, and I suggested -- I didn't even suggest who say it, I said that the campaign should say, that it was like the sequel to *Grumpy Old Men*.

Q: (laughter)

LOCKHART: And, you know, Edwards didn't want to say that, and it came back to me that he'd said, you know, if he thinks it's so good, why doesn't he say it? So I hadn't joined



the campaign yet, so I don't think I was in a place to say it. But you know, I didn't - I didn't take any offense to someone saying, "I don't think that's a good one-liner." It's like, OK, we'll come up [00:52:00] with another one, or what do you think? So I remember having to have this conversation with him where, you know, I just basically said to him, you can believe this or you can not believe this, but I'm your biggest supporter here. And every reporter who calls me, I tell them what a good job you're doing. You do have a problem here, and I can't tell you exactly who the problem's with, but don't waste a lot of time talking to me, you know.

And you know, I think there was -- I think there was a little bit of the campaign wasn't -- this was before the first debate -- the campaign wasn't going as well as it should have, and people were looking for people to blame. And I think some of it may have been coming from Kerry; I don't know. He never -- I don't remember him ever specifically saying in any of the conversations we had, "I wish John was doing this," or "I wish John was -- I wish he was tougher; I wish there was" -- [00:53:00] I think there were people in the campaign who wanted him to be like a vicious attack dog, and that wasn't how John was effective. John was effective in sort of the Southern, almost charming attack, and not with -- you know, so like, I understood, like *Grumpy Old Men* just didn't work for him. And my attitude was, OK, let's find something that does, you know. Or, let's have someone else do it. But I -- you know, I think there was -- I think he did fine.

Q: Do you think that the disappointment that some people had was a disappointment with the fact that he was chosen? I mean, John Edwards was not an attack dog, and that should have been clear at the time he was chosen.

LOCKHART: Yeah, but I think it was the right choice. I think others may have had other choices. [00:54:00] My guess is, now that I'm thinking and remember this, because this was a while ago, that -- yeah, there was probably more that I've acknowledged here that they wanted him to be more aggressive. But, again, that -- he wasn't -- he was more effective when it was a subtler attack than a full-blown, I'm going to hit you over the head with a baseball bat. And again, I on occasion would write baseball bat-like lines, and say, here, and there was often pushback. I guess where the disconnect for me was, I viewed that as pushback, and let's fight about it, but I mean, I never went to anyone and said, he's just not doing what he's supposed to be doing, and -- but there was a current -- an undercurrent of that. [00:55:00] And it was unfortunate, because as I like to



remind people, every day we spent talking about that, we were not talking about the president, and it was like a gift to the White House every day where we were fighting amongst ourselves. And you know, for better or worse, there was a lot of internal debate about the campaign, who was in charge, who was doing what, and I think the first debate kind of put that to rest. And you know, I give, most of all, Secretary Kerry the credit for that. Because I think that debate crystalized this idea of, we can win this thing. Like, let's stop this childishness all around, and I think it did, in addition to changing the dynamic of the race, I think it changed the dynamic in the campaign. And I think the last six weeks were -- you know, we ran [00:56:00] a good campaign. We didn't win, but we ran a good campaign.

Q: What was your role in the debates?

LOCKHART: Not very much. I mean, the -- there was a great team. I mean, Ron Klain who has a history of this, and Bob Shrum who has -- could access John Kerry's brain as well as anyone, you know, went off to the side and prepared all of this. I mean, we were executing the campaign day-by-day. So the smartest thing for people like me was to come in and just watch, and you know, give little side notes, or tell Kerry, you know, pump him up and tell him how well he was doing, and, or to say this is a problem, but not try to change the strategy. The strategy was sound though.

I remember the only thing that I came back -- that I talked to him a couple of times about, to the group and [00:57:00] to Senator Kerry, was, you know, in the debate prep, he was relentless in his attack on whoever was playing Bush, I can't even remember. And my advice, and I think -- he did a nice job of this was, it's 90 minutes long. At some point, you have to look gracious. At some point, he has to say something where you have to say, yes, you've done a good job on that, or just lighten up for a minute, or otherwise you'll -- and in the debate, I think he did. I think -- but, the strategy, the preparation, the work was really -- I mean, I give Kerry the bulk of the credit for that. But then, sort of Bob and Ron, and their whole team, the rest of it, because you know, it was almost -- you know, it was like, you know we in our communications operation felt like we had the care and feeding of the candidate [00:58:00] every day for the last 45 days, whatever it was, except for these debate preps, and it was almost like, the campaign stopped. He'd step out of the campaign and step into this bubble, and these guys had the advantage of really being able to think through, this is exactly what we want to do;



this is the environment. And they were great, and they gave him, like a great strategy.

Q: After the first presidential debate, you had the vice-presidential debate, and I think probably the expectation was, Edwards' skills of a trial lawyer, young, attractive, against the grumpy old man, sort of taciturn, laconic, and after that debate, that wasn't the --

LOCKHART: No.

Q: -- the way it turned out.

LOCKHART: Yeah. I'd say that the one criticism that I thought was fair that I heard, and then didn't see, but just seemed fair based on the number of people telling me, was that Edwards didn't put in the time [00:59:00] to prepare. He didn't prepare for it the way he would prepare for a trial, and he suffered because of that. I don't think he lacked the strategic sense, but he got schooled. And you know, to the extent that his career went in a different direction if he'd been back and viable later, I think actually he was viable for the next election.

Q: In '08, for awhile.

LOCKHART: He was much better in the debates. I think he knew he had done well in the multi-candidate debates in 2004 where he was not the frontrunner, and he was a voice that, he could basically take himself and say, I -- this is beneath me; I am up here. And he thought he could do that in the same -- and you can't. And he got schooled. It happens.

Q: The Bush campaign people sometimes will say that, regardless of how each debate turned out, Bush won the debates, because the quotes [01:00:00] that sort of came out of those debates, and you've mentioned moments, in the contest of the Dukakis debate, were global test, out of the first debate, and then the two Mary Cheney references by Edwards, and then Kerry, and the opportunity to sort of take a righteously indignant attitude toward bringing her into the mix.

LOCKHART: Yeah.

Q: What do you say to --

LOCKHART: That's nonsense, and I think they know that, that spin. Before the debates, we were going to lose that campaign 100 times out of 100 times. After those debates, we were going to win that campaign 48 out of 100 times, and lose 52. It was that close going into Election Day, and the debates changed that dynamic. It's nonsense. And -- it's not nonsense; it's spin. It's like, it's your reflex to -- if you, you know, do I want to sit here and say that John Edwards lost the debate? No, I want to say [01:01:00] that he won. I mean, if he hears about this, I want him to



think that -- but he didn't. So, it's -- and, Bush did not -- Bush didn't even show up for the first debate. Did not even show up. And if you want to know what the most talked about thing after that first debate was, it wasn't global test. It was whether he had a microphone in his back and someone was talking in his ear. And you know what, he finally had the most effective answer for that, three days later, which was, "If someone was talking in my ear, I would have had better answers." So, it's -- that's not serious.

Q: I was thinking the famous Kerry moment in that debate was, you know, "I might have misspoken about something, but I didn't take the wrong action."

LOCKHART: Yeah, yeah.

Q: I'm paraphrasing this very badly. You probably remember the line better than I do.

LOCKHART: Actually, I don't. But I do remember sitting there, and I know they -- the Republicans were sitting there watching the dials, and it was no contest. It was very, very similar to [01:02:00] Obama-Romney.

Q: The first debate.

LOCKHART: The first debate, which was, one candidate had energy and a strategy. The other candidate was there to run out the clock. And Bush was better in the second and third debates, but I don't think he won them. So overall, if -- I think if you look at the -- what are the impact of the debates? I think it seriously changed the dynamic and provided a new opening for Kerry to get to the finish line victoriously. And again, we came up short, but not by much. And there's lots of reasons why we lost. If he had lost the debate, it would have been like a Dukakis slog until Election Day, I believe, and we would have lost by three or four points, with a very weak presidential candidate. I mean, I don't mean he's weak; I mean that his message was not resonating. People didn't -- people believed that we shouldn't [01:03:00] have been in Iraq, and the economy was weak, and nothing was going right. And the only thing that they held onto was, that terrorists hadn't hit us again.

Q: Bill Clinton supposedly advised Kerry to defuse the same-sex marriage issue, which was on, I think, 11 states in the form of a referendum, by endorsing a constitutional amendment to define marriage as between a man and a woman. Do you have any awareness of that?

LOCKHART: I don't remember that. I remember that this was on the ballot; it was on the Ohio ballot I believe, and the smart numbers, people believe that this was a very important -- I just don't -- I'm not a smart numbers person, so... You know, what I



remember about Ohio was, if you lived in a white, rich suburb, you could go in and there were 28 working machines. If you lived on a college campus, [01:04:00] in a campus town, or in a poor neighborhood, you waited on line for four hours.

Q: You have, at various times, sort of talked about the press's the media's focus on -- and this is a quote, "how we make the sausage." I wonder if you could elaborate on that; in other words, did the -- in what ways did the media coverage of the election disserve the public?

LOCKHART: Well, I think, let's go back to Swift Boats. I think it was a lot easier to cover the tactics and the strategy than the substance. I mean, who wanted to go spend three weeks at the archives checking Kerry's war record? There were a couple of news organizations that did, and they wrote impressive stories on it, that gave it a good accurate sense --

Q: Do you recall in particular?

LOCKHART: -- of what it was like. I think [01:05:00] the -- I think maybe the *Times* or the *Globe*, and their coverage -- and not all of it was good news for Kerry, but you know, they did the legwork. Most of the other people -- and there are exceptions, I'm not -- you know, this is always the danger, because you end up insulting the people who are doing good work. But most of the press in that campaign wanted to just focus on who was gaining the strategic advantage by this. So it reinforced the idea that -- and I think Karl Rove was well aware of this, was -- you can say anything. And as long as you couched it in strategy, no one would ever go back to the underlying. You could say -- you could accuse your opponent of anything, and there was no price to be paid for that. Bush paid no price for what Republicans did; none. And if they put as much attention into the substance of that [01:06:00] story as opposed to the strategy, I think things -- the coverage would have been different.

Q: Was Swift -- was Swift Boat --

LOCKHART: And I'll give you a flipside example, where it benefitted the Kerry campaign. There a story -- a significant story, but not a story that should turn a presidential election, about some weapons being lost in Iraq, misplaced. Like they were under our control, all of a sudden -- we had a five day field day over that. We pushed it as hard as we pushed anything in the campaign. Again I don't think it was something that -- a presidential campaign should have turned on. It wasn't significant enough, but it was symbolic of this president not knowing what he's doing, and rushing into things without any -- you know, and he's throwing money, and weapons around, and it's all going to come back to bite us, and very few



people [01:07:00] tried to take that story and put it into perspective. So, it worked both ways.

Q: What's your sort of campaign professional's evaluation of the Bush campaign, the effectiveness of it?

LOCKHART: Technically, and I think -- I think very advanced, as far as the technical aspects of running a campaign, voter contact, reaching people that was -- you know, there were all sorts of stuff, about, you know, they were running ads in health clubs, because that was what their target was. I don't know how they were doing it; I'm not an expert on this. But I do remember -- we knew every TV ad they had. Because it was all a matter of -- not public record, but the stations told you. It was in the station's interest to say, "Bush just bought two million dollars on us. What are you going to buy?" So they -- we had a map of what they were doing, they had a map [01:08:00] of what we're doing. We had maps of what independent groups were doing, and we had the same amount of money. And I remember, near the end, looking up and asking, like I didn't know, I said -- what -- all the money's spent, but they've got like two or three million dollars, and we don't know what they've spent it on. What did they spend it on? And we didn't know.

And I think they were doing things that were -- that were the precursors to the Obama microtargeting that really has developed into a weapon. It was a crude weapon, I think, back then, but when you win an election by 65,000 votes in Ohio, you can't tell me that it may not be an important and crucial weapon, so I think -- I give them credit for being more advanced than the Democrats were at that point. Democrats came back with a vengeance in 2008, and I think we -- Democratic Party owns a technological superiority [01:09:00] that, we'll see what the Republicans do. I think they were very disciplined. They had a strategy; they stuck to it. I think they get points for that. I think the candidate performance was mediocre, at best.

I would say for the Kerry campaign, Kerry's performance was inconsistent, and not always disciplined, but at times superior. I mean, he had weeks where, he was a great candidate. And he some weeks where he was mediocre, where for whatever reason, he decided to go off-script, and talk about something else, or you know, and you know, it's -- I say this, and I have to put it in the preface; it's the hardest job in the world to be -- it's easier being presidential than being a presidential candidate. You don't have any other resources, and you're out there



with a camera in your face all the time. So some of the missteps [01:10:00] I think were inevitable. But there were times where he was an incredibly potent political weapon. There were times when he was just OK.

I think Bush seemed -- never seemed like, you know, Bush being out there helped that much. The situation in the country and the world helped them. And again, the most dynamic candidate doesn't always win; often doesn't win. But I think if you look at, you know, they had very good -- very professional campaign staff, very disciplined strategy and message, and I think they were hurt by the fact that, you know, Bush didn't show up a lot of the time. I think he had what a lot of incumbents had, which is, you know what, I got a day job, and I'm doing it pretty well, and you know, the voters will understand.

Q: You mentioned a couple times that 65,000 votes [01:11:00] flip in Ohio, and Kerry is President. But he would have been President with like 48% of the vote, and what I wonder is, going on Election Eve, is the hope that, we'll get an electoral college majority, even though we're probably not going to get a popular vote plurality?

LOCKHART: I don't know anyone who cared anything about that. There may have been people who were working in the transition that cared about that. I can't remember someone rubbing -- you know, sort of hammering and saying, "Well, we're going to win, but -- you know, what are we going to do, we'll have no mandate" -- We just wanted to win. And that was enough. I mean, taking down an incumbent. You know, I think -- I know where you're coming from this, but I think -- the model for these things, or conventional wisdom, is when you're the incumbent, if you can't get 50%, then lame duckness starts very soon, but if you're a challenger, it doesn't matter. You just need to get one more vote [01:12:00] more than -- and people blow that up into, you know, something probably more than it means, but --

Q: I was wondering if maybe this was a consequence of 2000, because in 2000, you hadn't had an election in which the winner got fewer popular votes than his opponent since 1888.

LOCKHART: Yeah.

Q: But 2000, that happens, and by 2004, I thinking maybe there's no longer a stigma attached to that anymore.

LOCKHART: Yeah, and again, I don't think there was a stigma, as far as the country goes, and that's probably the most important, because remember, Bush was foundering in



the summer of 2001. His ratings were dropping, but by the end of 2001 because of 9/11 and because of his response to it, he deserves credit for that, the country was more unified than it has been in a generation, and his poll ratings showed that, [01:13:00] so I don't think there -- I don't think there was -- in fact, I'd argue that there's a lot -- 2009, there was much more sense of illegitimacy of the president in this country than there was in 2001. In 2001, you had a president who didn't get -- who lost the popular vote, and by many smart people's observation, that except for political reasons, would not have won the electoral -- didn't win the election, period, every which way, and was denied office. And the country accepted that, even liberal Democrats. Whereas in 2009, there's still 20, 25% of the country who believe -- mostly, I think, for -- on racial lines, that he's not a legitimate president. You go out and do a poll right now on whether he was actually born in the United States, you'll still find 30% of the country who [01:14:00] think he's illegitimate and shouldn't be in office. And he got, what, 53% of the votes?

Q: Mm-hmm, 54 I think.

LOCKHART: Fifty-four, 65 million votes or something, some ridiculous number.

Q: Yeah.

LOCKHART: So no, I don't think there's any stigma. I don't think there was -- and the election was so close that no one was arguing for setting a number where, you know, we can govern at this number, and we can't govern at that. It was, we're either going to win, or we're going to lose. And you know, the -- one of the -- you could make the argument that any campaign that has four pollsters retained is going to have a little bit of schizophrenia. But I remember going the night before the election and asking all four of them, are we going to win, or are we going to lose? And three of them said we're going to lose, and one of the them said I think we're going to lose.

Q: Was that Mark Mellman?

LOCKHART: That was. And [01:15:00] again, I don't understand polling and modeling and all that, and it really was so close, that I don't know that -- they were all in the ballpark, this very easily could have -- but I think there was a general sense of -- there was a general sense of confidence going into the last week. We had a great Monday through Thursday; we had a terrible Friday, with the Bin Laden attack.

Q: Because of Bin Laden.

LOCKHART: And that was the hangover for the weekend, so I think that caused everyone to stop thinking about what my White House job is going to be, and more focused on



doing everything we could. But I think the night before the election, people were optimistic. Again, the election polls were off the charts.

Q: Yeah, let's turn to Election Day, which is really the last set of questions I have for you. What was Election Day like? You woke up optimistic.

LOCKHART: Woke up -- you know again, I probably wasn't the same as everyone who'd been [01:16:00] there for 16 months. You know, it was 10 weeks. I was tired, but I wasn't exhausted.

Q: Yeah.

LOCKHART: You know, like every -- the men and women who'd been in the trenches and just done everything, and should get all the credit for getting him there. I was -- I think I was skeptical. It was one of the reasons why asking, you know, three of the pollsters -- who are all very good pollsters, and all people who I've known, and trust, I went and kept asking -- I don't know why I was skeptical, but I was. When the exit polls came out, I thought, "You know what, I'm just being a skeptic. OK, this seems good." And so for a few hours -- not even for -- maybe an hour, I thought, "OK, this looks very good." And I'm trying to remember who it was. I think it was, there's a guy by the name of Doug Sosnik who is the smartest guy I know when it comes to politics. And I had been going out and doing his briefings [01:17:00] every couple of hours, just to fill airspace, you know. We had various reasons (inaudible), there were places that there was some voter fraud, we thought, or some harassment, so we'd want to go out and put pressure, you know, and -- and it's interesting because I think -- the one at about five o'clock, and I was just trying to be deadpan in all of these. And the one about five o'clock, I talked about, you know, things looking good and blah-blah-blah, and I remember Doug grabbing me, and saying, you know, come here, and he sort of showed me some of the exit polls, and he said, "These can't be right." And again, he's way smarter than me. And I said, "Well, what do you mean?" And he said, "There's too many women." You know, totally over -- this can't be who voted. And I think he knew that looking at it. And so he said, "Just be careful. Don't" -- he said, "you haven't made a mistake yet, but don't lean into this, just" -- and I remember going out for like the seven o'clock briefing, and same message (inaudible), [01:18:00] and I got a call from a guy I know really well who's a very smart guy, who said -- or sent me an email or some sort of messages saying, "We're going to lose, aren't we?" I said, "What are you talking about?" He goes, "I know you, we're going to lose horribly." (laughter) I said, "I'm not doing any more of these briefings." I mean, I don't know that anybody else figured that out. But, so, I think by seven,



7:30, you know, what Doug had said earlier, was starting to be reflected, I think they, in their model, they looked at it and said, they saw the same mistake.

Q: Who saw it?

LOCKHART: You know, the networks.

Q: The networks.

LOCKHART: The pollsters.

Q: Well you know, you'd been involved -- every campaign you've been involved in had exit polls.

LOCKHART: Yeah.

Q: So what went wrong in '04?

LOCKHART: Well, I think exit polls -- you know, I have 25 years experience of at least having someone tell me what they say without really understanding how they get there, the mathematics behind it. But, [01:19:00] they're generally in the ballpark, you know. If they're within a point or two, then they mean nothing. But if you have a four, five, eight point lead in a state, well, you feel pretty good about that. Again, I don't know, and they can speak to how they got it wrong. And again, they got it wrong twice in a row, because in 2000, they were all over the place -- these -- anyone who, I think, was an objective observer who knew about polling could look at these, and say, this doesn't look right. This doesn't look like the electorate, because it was too skewed toward, you know, traditional Kerry voters. And I don't know how and why in the day they corrected that, but later in the day, all of the numbers shifted. And all of a sudden, it was a toss-up.

And I remember -- [01:20:00] well, a couple of things. One is, I talked before about, I thought how the Bush campaign was very good at some things. I think they were better than us at knowing who actually was going to vote, because we -- you know, we spent a lot of money in Florida, and we lost by, I think a million votes. We should have known. At some point, that was -- I don't know whose mistake it is; it doesn't matter whose mistake it is. We should have known that we had no chance there. And, diverted our resources. We didn't have as clear picture, and I think in Ohio, we had a very good sense that we were going to win there. And there were maybe 150,000, 200,000 voters that we don't know where they came from, and that was the difference.

Q: And you're not suggesting any illegal here?

LOCKHART: Oh, no, no, no. No, no, this is -- no, not at all.

Q: [01:21:00] Just, great turnout, better turnout operation.



LOCKHART: That, they were better at finding people who either traditionally didn't vote, or didn't -- that the models said were either going to stay home, or they don't vote anyway, or -- and I don't think it was a great persuasion campaign; I don't think they took blocs of Kerry voters, they just turned out. And I think they did a better job of turning out important pockets of their people, and you know, I'm sure in other places too, but Ohio being one of them.

And, so that -- you know, this now -- you know, I think we realized by seven o'clock at night, that this was going to be a long slog. And you know, with each half-hour, we're -- it became more and more negative, and the -- my memory is, I don't know we're now at 10, 10:30, 11:00 at night, [01:22:00] the national press, the Bush people, they're becoming a consensus that Ohio had moved toward Bush and he'd win, by a small, but comfortable -- a non-recountable margin. You know we wouldn't replay 2000, and I remember being on the phone with our Ohio people, you know, saying, you know, is -- is this right? You know, and the Ohio staff, and they had a pollster on their staff there who knew the state, and has his - - had a model for the state, adamant.

This is why we didn't concede. Kerry eventually said, you know, we sent him to bed, because it's now 11:30, 12--adamant that everyone had -- that the consensus was wrong, and that we were going to win Ohio. And this wasn't, sort of crazy, let's just stick it out, adamant. And I remember we -- you know, one of our pollsters, Tom Kiley [01:23:00] eventually like grabbed the phone from me, or (inaudible) speaker, but he jumped in, and it was like a heartbreaking conversation, because they started talking in polling speak, and modeling, and I had no idea what they were talking about, but I heard the most painful "Oh," that I've ever heard, because -- I don't even know who the guy was; never met him. He had made a small but crucial mathematical error. Tom said, "Wait a second," you know, he said blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, and changed that, and the guy went, "Oh." And there was just like this long silence, and Tom, you know, had this look saying, you know, he knew before I did that that "oh" meant, "Oh, I screwed up; I had a number wrong. We've lost." And that was, I don't know, one o'clock in the morning, twelve o'clock at night, I don't know. And it was like, OK. But, we were not going to go wake up-- [01:24:00] at that point, most people were asleep, it was like, let's leave this to the morning. You know, when the numbers come in,



we'll actually see. It's close enough, but it was at that point we thought, based on our knowledge, we'd lost.

Q: Thank you so much, Joe Lockhart. This has been enormously interesting and helpful.

LOCKHART: Great. Appreciate it.

Citation

Richard Cheney Interview, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University, The Election of 2004 Collective Memory Project, 18 November 2014, accessed at <http://cphcmp.smu.edu/2004election/richard-cheney/>

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