



The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Margaret Spellings

Current: Director, George W. Bush Presidential Center

In 2004: White House Domestic Policy Adviser

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Q: Secretary Spellings, Margaret, 2004 is usually thought of as an election that was pretty much about national security, and people compare that with 2000, where George W. Bush, Governor of Texas, seemed to center his campaign on domestic initiatives like education. How were you involved in either of these elections, or both of them, and did they feel different to you?

SPELLINGS: Well, I was involved in quite similar ways in both elections. I was working for the State of Texas in the governor's office during the 2000 race, and eventually joined the transition team and so forth, and was one of the people that, you know, obviously abiding all the right, you know, laws and procedures, you know, was -- you know, cross-pollinated with some of our friends in the campaign world, because obviously the president's record [00:01:00] and his experience in Texas had anchored many of the policies, and you know, obviously when you're running for elected office, what you've done in the past is highly, you know, relevant.

And likewise, in 2004, the subject of this interview, I was at the White House as the domestic policy advisor. I was named the Secretary of Education-designate after the election, but in that lead-up to, which I would say, goes over the course of about a year really, through the convention and those sorts of things, very involved, obviously in some way with the campaign.



So, I would say a couple of things. One is -- and this is certainly true of the Bush presidency, and maybe other presidents -- you know, the first thing that people are going to ask is, you know, what have you done, what have you accomplished? When you ran in 2000, you said you would, X. And in that four-year period, what have you done, you know, to live up [00:02:00] to your campaign promises? And I remember, clearly that was something that we monitored and worked on from day one, and were very aware of, you know. We have a little blue book; I'll show you the little blue book, which is the president's, you know, 2000 campaign speeches, you know, what he called for. And we literally kept a report card ongoing, you know. What have we gotten done, what have we not gotten done, and what have we gotten some, you know, half a loaf on each of these various -- in my case, things I was monitoring, you know, domestic initiatives. Clearly, No Child Left Behind was a signature accomplishment of the first term. And, you know, there were many others obviously, but one I was very much involved with. And as we, you know, went through, not only what have we done, but how are we going to build on that? Why -- what was the imperative, why did it make sense for people to vote for, and ask for -- you know, renew [00:03:00] George W. Bush's lease on the White House? And so we looked at those policy things, both from accomplishments, but what were the next steps? And clearly, I can give you some illustrations about how we built on those policy themes throughout.

I can also remember, and this is kind of a funny story, no one will remember, but I shall never forget. We had vaccine problems, the various vaccine manufacturers, and there are not very many in the world, I've learned -- certainly learned, new at the time--that produce the influenza vaccine. Making a flu vaccine, at least then, you know, is a process, where, you know, eggs, and chickens, and incubating, and you know, it just takes a certain amount of time to make vaccine. And we had had breaches in some of the manufacturing facilities, and we didn't have enough vaccine, simple as that. [00:04:00] Further, we had a quite virulent flu outbreak in that fall, and I remember, you know, calling on my healthcare people to provide, you know, very regular, and I'm talking more than once a week, every couple of days, you know, updates on where was the flu, how was the vaccine tracking, and -- you know, because these are real-time, when you're running the government, you know, issues that the American people are confronting, and we



wanted to make sure that, you know, that we were on top of where the big flu outbreaks were given our limited supply that year of a flu vaccine.

Q: Well, we're going to come back to a lot of the things you've touched on, but let me start with this: what did you do in the 2000 campaign, and what did you do that was at least related to the 2004 campaign?

SPELLINGS: Well, my own personal lens, obviously, was primarily in the field of education, though [00:05:00] in 2004, I was the domestic policy advisor, and had a broader portfolio, and you know, monitored and oversaw a full range of, you know, campaign promises, and what we had done to fulfill those, and so forth, including immigration reform, among others. But you know, my deepest experience, and frankly at this late juncture, you know, my most vivid memories would be in the field of education. So in 2000, we -- you know, used what Bush had done as Governor of Texas to anchor the development of No Child Left Behind, what came to be known as No Child Left Behind. And it was really a pretty simple piece of legislation in its grounding, and that is that, you know, we needed to close the achievement gap, that, you know, way too many of our poor minority students were falling way behind, that the federal role in education had always been around the needs of those students [00:06:00] since the federal role was established by LBJ, another Texas president, and you know, furthered. But what was missing was true accountability for meeting those objectives. It was more of a moral, you know, do-gooding than it was, we're really going to hold ourselves accountable for the policy. So given what we'd done in Texas with testing, and assessment, and transparency, and disaggregated data, and consequences, and so forth, we used that to incubate what became this national, you know, platform for No Child Left Behind. We had passed that law, in early 2001 it was signed into law, and we were in the early days of implementation, taking states that went from, you know, having virtually no accountability or standard systems at all into full implementation to the law, and then meeting in 2004 to describe, you know, what's next, or how did the law need to be refined, what were other things that could be built on, [00:07:00] or around, or perfected out of No Child Left Behind. And in 2004, we called for, you know, the securing of a reauthorization which, Mike, I'm sad to say, sits unreeuthorized to this day, you know, some 12 plus years later.

Q: Education isn't usually an issue that you think of at the core of a Republican presidential campaign.

SPELLINGS: Yes, I've noticed that.



Q: How did it become that for George W. Bush in 2000?

SPELLINGS: Yeah, well you might recall, President Bush -- or Governor Bush, at that time, you know, fancied himself, and described himself in two ways: one as a different kind of Republican, and that different kind of a Republican was as a compassionate conservative. And he talked about education reform, when the standard Republican orthodoxy was, you know, abolish the Department of Education, return -- you know, stop spending money, and/or return all authorities, or prerogatives to states [00:08:00] solely. And Pres—then-Governor Bush believed that well we had established this role, it was around the needs of poor minority students primarily, that we had done -- you know, had fallen far short of really doing that work on their behalf, and that we needed to really muscle up, if we were going to invest those resources, we needed to have something to show for it. And you know, what was Republican about that was, you know, accountability, and kind of a no-excuses approach to, we're going to do what it takes to meet the needs of those students. So compassionate conservatism was part of his orthodoxy. It manifested itself in education, but also in the faith-based initiative, and very -- you know, immigration reform, family reunification, just a variety of ways. Of course, you know, AIDS, PEPFAR, that was another manifestation, eventually. But he was a different kind of Republican [00:09:00] and, you know, I hope that compassionate conservatism still is.

Q: And there are people in the White House from essentially the day after the inauguration who were thinking in terms of, how are we going to get from here to 2004 with a clear majority rather than a very contested majority. I'm thinking of people on the White House staff like Karl Rove, and then people who were still in the political community like Ken Mehlman. And I wonder, as domestic policy advisor, did you feel like what of what you needed to pay attention to how is what we're doing now going to lead us to successful conclusion to the first term, meaning reelection?

SPELLINGS: Well, you know, as my friend Karl Rove often says, and I heartily agree, you know, good policy makes good politics. And what I'm reminded of, and this was clear in 2000, and [00:10:00] was true in 2004, and I think we've drifted from this, is how meaty, how substantive, how dense our policy proposals and recommendations were. The standard was, not only did you need to have an idea, you had to describe how much it cost, where you were going to, you know, get the money for it. I mean, just a standard that goes way beyond kind of the bumper sticker kind of politics that maybe we sometimes see today, just the level of expectation, and



certainly when you're in the White House, I mean the standard of care for a sitting President of the United States, as far as the doability and the practicality and the reality of policymaking, not to mention the fact that it has to be anchored in your record for the first four years, is just a different level of ballgame than, you know, rhetoric solely.

Q: And No Child Left Behind was really, I mean, a truly bipartisan legislative accomplishment. [00:11:00]

SPELLINGS: It truly was.

Q: How did that come about, because you ordinarily think of presidents in this era of polarized politics as operating from their base in Congress, their base in the country, but No Child Left Behind seemed to be very different.

SPELLINGS: Yeah, and I think, you know, you talked about political characters, you know, Mark McKinnon, who did the president's media in the 2000 campaign. I mean I think -- and I believe Karl feels this way also, that education -- as you are well aware, it was a very close election, you know, had something to do with, you know, the outcome of the election. I mean, I think people were not used to seeing a Republican talking that way about a kitchen table issue like that. And that engendered, I think, trust, and an opportunity that the late Senator [Edward] Kennedy and Congressman [George] Miller and others, the Democrats, saw in President Bush [00:12:00]. In the immediate aftermath of the election, then Governor Bush hosted a luncheon. I remember Congressman Miller, I met him for the first time when Bush invited him prior to the inaugural, to come to Texas and talk about how we were going to work together on education, which he intended to be the first issue out of the box. Now Leader [John] Boehner, then Congressman Boehner had been newly selected -- or elected to lead the Education Committee, which was sort of a consolation prize for being turned out of the leadership by then leader DeLay, Speaker [Tom] Delay. And so, it was kind of a -- you know, crazy set of circumstances that brought these four, you know, principals around this issue. Bush demonstrated very early his commitment to lead out on this. I'll never forget the first week of the White House, you know, we hosted, you know, members -- the Big Four, members of the congressional leadership [00:13:00] that were going to be empowered to act on his behalf on No Child Left Behind. You know, we hosted them for a movie night at the White House. They visited a school together. And I think that was a very unique thing for a Republican president to do, to day one, lead with reforming education, No



Child Left Behind on behalf of poor minority students. It wasn't standard stock and, you know, fare, for a Republican.

Q: If I remember rightly, the movie was *Thirteen Days* --

SPELLINGS: It was *Thirteen Days*.

Q: -- and Senator Kennedy was invited to watch that movie about his --

SPELLINGS: Brother.

Q: -- older brother -- two older brothers.

SPELLINGS: Two older brothers, and -- even, it was what I used to call, "pinch me moments," I'll never forget that, this was the first week of my job at the White House, seeing Senator Kennedy and President Bush sitting on the front row together, in the White House movie theater, which as you know, Mike, is right off the colonnade, you know, mere feet from the Oval Office where virtually the entire movie *Thirteen Days* takes place. [00:14:00] Pretty surreal.

Q: Good politics -- or good policy makes good politics. How did No Child Left Behind translate into good politics in 2004?

SPELLINGS: Well, it allowed us to talk to some of the key, you know, swing voter groups, women, Hispanics -- you know, and you know the numbers. I mean, President Bush, and then Governor Bush had, you know, the high water mark of Republicans, you know, gaining support from the Hispanic community, you know, has been by George W. Bush and probably by his brother, Jeb, in Florida. And it's, you know, deteriorated since. And so, you know, he had not only credibility on these issues, but had a track record and we had results. I mean, we were being -- we, Texas, were being heralded as, you know, real gap closers, and putting the needs of Hispanic students, you know, prominently in the forefront. And we enjoyed support of many of the [00:15:00] civil rights groups accordingly.

And so that was a very, you know, different dynamic, and I think people, you know, saw something different in that. So Hispanics, women obviously are the -- you know, often the primary consumers of education, on behalf of their children, and obviously teachers are, you know, predominantly a female workforce. So it had a lot of kind of residual political effects, but mainly it was good policy on behalf of our country.

Q: And 9/11, I think I've heard President Bush quoted as saying, in the aftermath of 9/11, "This is what my presidency is about." It was very different from what he thought his presidency was going to be about when he was elected, which was



much more domestic policy. How did that affect the work of domestic policy staff, headed by you?

SPELLINGS: Oh, my gosh. Needless to say, it was quite dramatic. And when that, you know, events [00:16:00] happened, we -- and I'll never forget Andy Card, you know, helping, or working with us to figure out, you know, what was the -- what were the top-order policy issues that needed to be wrangled with, and how was that work going to be divided, and the things that fell into -- in addition to all the stuff that we thought we were going to do, including -- I mean, No Child Left Behind was well on the way. And I'll talk about what the disposition was, and how 9/11, oddly enough, you know, served to bring that result about, because of the, you know, emboldened bipartisan spirit that was on the Hill, you know, in the aftermath of that.

But you know, the things that were in our bailiwick included the TSA, the airline security, the liability issues that the airline industry was confronting, the -- you know, obviously grave reductions in the flying public [00:17:00] that you know dramatically affected their bottom lines. Issues related to DC, and the Capital Planning Region, the Pentagon, securing the area around the various federal buildings, all of those sorts of things were in our bailiwick; likewise the area around the World Trade Center and liability issues that came up and out of that. The 9/11 Commission, I know you're going to talk with Jay Lefkowitz about that. So a variety of things were in our bailiwick, immigration, so on.

Q: And did you feel -- you were going to say some more about how 9/11 affected --

SPELLINGS: Yeah, so you know, as I told you, 9/11 -- I mean, No Child Left Behind was, you know, an immediate priority, along with the tax cuts. Those were the first things that, you know, Bush moved out on. And we worked on that, and worked on that, and got a lot of -- made a lot of progress. [00:18:00] When we got to the summer stall, and to August, and the dog days of the Washington summer, and things had sort of stalled out. And in fact, you'll recall, I mean President Bush was in a school in Florida when the event happened, because we were trying to reenergize and, you know, put the turbo charger on getting the education legislation, you know, over the finish line. Well then, the event happened, and you know, obviously, there was the immediate, you know, aftershocks. But then, a spirit of goodwill came about which was, you know, we'd gotten two-thirds, three-quarters of the work done, and we need to press on and finish it out. And I remember, you know, Senator Kennedy being particularly instrumental in that. And so, from that, you



know, 9/11 to year end, to Christmas, you know, we got that bill done. And then of course it was subsequently signed into law in early January, when you know, President Bush traveled with the three of them, we went to [00:19:00] New Hampshire, and to Massachusetts, and to Ohio. We did not make it to California on that same day, but three stops on Air Force One with the delegation.

Q: Even though President Bush campaigned on this issue, cared about it deeply, and it was an issue that Democrats in general are sort of interested in, do you think No Child Left Behind would have passed had it not been for 9/11?

SPELLINGS: Eventually, it probably would have. That's hard to handicap; we'll never know. But, you know, to your point about bipartisanship, it was something that was -- had been worked on in a very deliberate and legitimately bipartisan way, with very, very senior people in both, you know, bodies of the Congress, and we were so close, and I think it was going to be an exemplifier of, you know, when we can come together as a country, not only [00:20:00] around issues of national security -- not only around issue of national security, but around, you know, meeting the needs and demands of the American people. And it was exhibit A in that regard.

Q: Inevitably, though, you've come up against an election, and in this case a midterm election, 2002. President Bush, I think spent more time, and raised more money on that midterm campaign than any president in history. Meanwhile, developments about -- related to the possibility of a war in Iraq are introducing a new source of political controversy. When an election is coming near -- we're not even talking about the presidential -- when an election is coming near, how does that affect what you're doing in the White House policy operation?

SPELLINGS: Well, President Bush and Governor Bush, I mean he is, you know, as many have observed [00:21:00] and I certainly would, you know, a terrific, you know, retail politician, and someone who developed strong, strong relationships with people. In fact, you know, he had to get, in 2000, you know, a cast of Republicans that he campaigned with all along the way in 2000 kind of on board with -- and a Republican president, a standard-bearer, the person at the top of our ticket who's talking about education in ways completely antithetical to the past.

And so, I mean, he did a lot of just retail-- here's why, here's why it makes sense from a policy point of view. We're the party of Lincoln. You know, so he had developed a lot of those relationships, and then of course in 2002 went back to those guys, helped them get elected, and then, you know, again it's back to these relationships. And, you know, he's -- the person, any president with the biggest



microphone on issues. And so those things, you know, mattered a lot, then and [00:22:00] now. That's stewardship.

Q: Say a little more about that, "stewardship."

SPELLINGS: Well, you know, even now as we sit here in the Bush museum, you know, there's a -- if you haven't seen it, Mike, you need to, the thirty paintings of world leaders that President Bush served with. And I think you have a sense that, you know, to do that, you've got to know these people. You have to have looked them in the eye. You have to have, you know, developed some sort of view around them. And you know, he's famous for knowing everybody's name, and about their children, and their families, and you know, people want to do business with people. And that certainly was true as we passed No Child Left Behind. I mean, every week, or twice a week, we had pizza parties on the Hill, and Senator Kennedy's dog would come to our meeting. (laughter) You know, all these sorts of things, and it's just that ongoing stewardship of the relationships that matter so much, and is often overlooked as kind of a silly thing, but that's how you get stuff done. [00:23:00]

Q: How do you think President Bush's education reforms affected the public's perception of him? And I'm thinking now, especially when he comes before the voters for the last time in 2004.

SPELLINGS: Well, I think people saw, and see in President Bush someone who, you know, dared to call out the -- you know, as he called it, "the soft bigotry of low expectations," and I think that hit a nerve with people; it hit a nerve with elites, and certainly hit a nerve with poor minority students and the civil rights community. And so, there was a little bit of a "Nixon to China" kind of element to this, if you will. And I think it engendered -- if not support, because these were tough policies, and you know, represented a major sea change in education reform. But it represented a level of [00:24:00] commitment and understanding about what this was fundamentally about in our country. I mean, this same issue is manifesting itself right now in this whole wage gap issue, and the solution is, you know, addressing, you know, do our people have the ingredients to even pursue the American Dream? And that's often rooted in quality of education, as you know, as an educator yourself. And so I think it gave him credibility and authenticity and a sincerity, even if people didn't like, you know, standardized testing. He got a lot of benefits of -- political benefits, but obviously, you know, he truly believed in the policy, because it's real hard to do this stuff if you don't.



Q: That's really interesting, because even Democrats we've talked to about the campaign have said that one of the best things going for President Bush was people would say, "Well, I may not agree with him, but I know where he stands."

SPELLINGS: Yeah.

Q: And almost always, they're thinking in terms of national [00:25:00] security issues, but it sounds like, you think education ought to be part of that, knowing --

SPELLINGS: Absolutely. Absolutely, and I think, you know, what you know about -- what you see in President Bush, whether you know him or just see him on TV is, he's a person of principle. As you say, you might not agree with him, but you know, you know, that he's thought about it, why he thinks it, and what that's anchored in in his, you know, philosophy, and in his world view, in his principles.

Q: What's it like being in the White House in an election year like 2004 when it's clear it's going to be a closely fought contest? How does being there during the election itself affect the work you're doing, and your other activities?

SPELLINGS: Well -- and you know, this is human nature, and this is true in any election. I mean, there's always, you know, an anxiety -- a low-grade anxiety of, you know, what might erupt from [00:26:00] God knows where. And you know, when you're senior level in the US government with, you know, tens -- hundreds of thousands of, you know, people working, and multitudes of agencies doing a wide variety of things, you know, anything can happen any day, and you know, I could tell my vaccine story, but who would have predicted that, you know, most of the vaccine suppliers would go offline in the midst of a flu epidemic? You know, that's just not a good thing to have happen under any circumstance, and certainly when you're standing for, you know, weeks before, days before you're standing for a national election completely beyond your control, but not beyond your control in terms of what you could do as far as oversight, and monitoring, and staying on top of.

But, so you're afraid of what lies beneath the surface, and what might erupt from, you know, the most mundane things to, you know dramatic, horrible horrible. [00:27:00] And secondly, you know, I think you're also trying to -- you know, at the top line, think about what have we done, and what are we going to do next, and how do these things build upon each other? So in education's example, we had, you know, started working on, obviously standards and assessments, but we wanted to talk more about how are we going to get the right kind of people into our schools? We -- you know, part of the No Child Left Behind law, frankly a part that George Miller was a strong supporter and urger of was the highly-qualified



teacher idea, that we cannot, you know, close the achievement gap without excellent people teaching our kids. And we learned in the early implementational days that that wasn't the case, and they were going to have to do some things around, you know, better deployment of capital, and urging people, particularly in the STEM fields, to come into our classrooms that, you know, might not be fully certified teachers. So we talked about a program called, you know, Adjunct [00:28:00] Teacher Corps, just like in higher education, where you can't run, you know, any community college in this country without, you know, a strong core of adjunct professionals and academics, that we ought to embrace notions like that in our schools. So, you know, what's the next chapter of a policy, as it develops.

Q: President Bush didn't have a primary opponent the way his father did in '92.

SPELLINGS: Right.

Q: But, I wonder, looking at the convention, was there any liaison between your office and the platform committee, for example?

SPELLINGS: Well, one of -- a woman who had worked for me at the White House who had left the White House, who ran the healthcare portfolio, was hired by -- I believe it was either -- I think it was Senator [Bill] Frist that ran the platform committee that year, if I'm not mistaken. But someone who had worked for me at the White House, was the staffer -- obviously she wasn't employed by the [00:29:00] US government at this point, but she had been, you know, a key person -- healthcare person, actually, in the White House. And she went off to manage and run the platform, somebody who could pick up the phone and call us if need be, ask a question, somebody we knew and trusted, you know, etc. She had been on the Hill prior to that. Very able person.

Q: How about during the campaign? Did you have to maintain a sort of strict separation between working for the White House and therefore not being involved in the re-elect, or were you able to do some things to help the re-elect?

SPELLINGS: You know, we -- I do remember, and of course I'm not going to remember every bit of the protocol, you know, sitting here today many years later, but you know, we had staff trainings around how we -- how and when and whether we could interface with the campaign on particular things. More often than not, they called us than the other way around, so, you know, if they needed a question answered, and a media response or something and [00:30:00] we were the holders of that factual answer, we certainly provided it, and everything was kosher. We were very mindful of that. That's the last thing you want to have happen, and you know, we were -- as to your point, we didn't have a primary appointment but,



you know, it was a well-resourced operation, highly professional, great people, but you know, we sort of waited to be called on for answers.

But likewise, what was in our bailiwick was to think, what have we done to capture the accomplishments, as any, you know, good management person would do, and to think about, if we're going to be here another four years, what will we do as a matter of policy? And so the policy development itself was done in the White House.

Q: And during the debates, for example, were you involved in helping prepare President Bush for the debates at all?

SPELLINGS: I do remember going to Arizona, and because, as I recall -- I mean, again, this is all distant memory, but that was the [00:31:00] debate where domestic issues were to be discussed. And so, you know, I must have -- needed to be some sort of resource in that regard, and I remember, you know, feeling that it hadn't gotten -- of course I always feel this way, Mike, but that it hadn't gotten its just due, but -- and I remember seeing President Bush backstage with Condi Rice, you know, as we were entering the hall, or -- you know, I used to have a picture of that somewhere around, but yeah.

Q: One of the sort of standard criticisms of the Bush 41 reelect campaign was that the White House operation and the campaign operation were such separate worlds, that the campaign people found it very hard to do their job. Did you see any -- do you have any sense in the Bush 43 reelect that they were aware of that, and had thought about how to keep that from becoming a problem?

SPELLINGS: Yeah, I mean [00:32:00] you've heard me tell my story about the person who went off to run the platform committee with someone we knew and had had experience with, and likewise, there was sort of a mirror message of the domestic policy, you know, apparatus, not fully, you know, complete as you would be in the US government, but someone from my staff had gone -- had left the government, and you know, was gone for good. But he was, you know, the domestic policy chair, if you will, of the campaign, someone who had been on my staff, had that level of knowledge, and so forth, and, you know. So, it was more, you know, who was there, as opposed to, you know, how much we were involved. They sort of -- they had been party to the conversations, and you know, just knew it.

Q: By 2004, you had known -- worked closely with President Bush for what, six years, maybe longer?



- SPELLINGS: Let's see, I had worked for him in the entirety of his gubernatorial -- well, I'd worked in the gubernatorial campaigns, and when was that? '94.
- Q: Ninety-four? [00:33:00]
- SPELLINGS: I worked for him since '94.
- Q: So ten years.
- SPELLINGS: Yes.
- Q: How was he different in 2004 from how he'd been at other stages of your acquaintance with him, working with him?
- SPELLINGS: Oh, well in many ways different, you know, more sophisticated, more, you know, breadth of issue -- you know, much larger management talent in terms of building a team with the right kind of capabilities, and the oversight systems, more complicated apparatus. But in many ways, you know, exactly the same. And this is why, and frankly why I came back to work for him, even now, to lead the Bush Center just a few months ago, is, you know, (inaudible) find a good boss, and stick with him. And I've done that in President Bush. He's someone who, you know, isn't going to micromanage the details, understands who he is, what the principles are, what his expectations are, and wants capable people to go chart the way forward, [00:34:00] and you know, obviously he's an active boss, but you know, somebody who I've very much enjoyed working for.
- Q: He described you in his book as "smart and feisty."
- SPELLINGS: I'll take that. (laughter)
- Q: "Feisty," what do you think he meant by that?
- SPELLINGS: Well, you know, I'm kind of a persistent Texas gal, and you know, if you're trying to get something done in Washington, you have to be patient and persistent, and a little bit wily. (laughter) But yeah -- thank you for the compliment, but maybe I was born that way, like Lady Gaga. (laughter)
- Q: After the election, I mean right after the election, President Bush gave a press conference in which he said, you know, I've earned political capital, and I intend to spend it, words to that effect.
- SPELLINGS: Yes.
- Q: Had he earned political [00:35:00] capital in that reelect? In other words, had he talked about what he would do during the second term?
- SPELLINGS: He did; he absolutely did. And I remember in the early days, you know, after the election -- of course, I was about to disembark for the US Department of Education, and you know, another one of the issues that I had worked on in the very, very early days of the Bush administration the first term was immigration



reform. And he had talked about that, again, different kind of a Republican, much to the dismay -- although not to the extent that it's playing out here and now in the Republican side of the aisle -- but still, you know, a little bit of a third rail. Social Security and immigration were the two things he said he was going to tackle early on in the second term. And of course -- and he observes this in his book, that you know, he wishes he'd led on immigration. Again, we had that same kind of coalition, John McCain, Ted Kennedy, Mel Martinez, you know, among others, Democrats of course as well, and we were not able to get [00:36:00] that done. He spent the first year instead, you know, working on, you know, Social Security reform again with his own partisans, you know, blanching at the -- you know, at the prospects, and so we knew when the -- in Texas, we say, "when the horse dies, get off," and it did, and we did, and then moved on to immigration, which of course, was not successful.

Q: After the election, there seems to be a decision by President Bush that he's going to take people from the White House staff and move them into the departments, you to Education, Condoleezza Rice to State, Alberto Gonzalez to Justice. Why then, and what do you think that was about? Why move you, and them from the White House into the departments?

SPELLINGS: Yeah, no, I think it was actually -- there's a great rationale for it, it made a lot of sense, and it's this, so if [00:37:00] somebody like me has been involved with, you know, the development and the legislative passage of key priorities of the president, then the second phase is implementational, and making sure that, you know, the structures and the undergirding is within the US government to make them longstanding and long-lasting policies, and you know, I'm proud to this day -- obviously, I wish that No Child Left Behind had been reauthorized, but as a law that stands on the books, when I went to the Department of Education, I reorganized it. It's my understanding that that's the same structure that Secretary [Arne] Duncan uses to this day, you know, that, so that the extension and whether these policies are going to live long after, you know, the president serves officially, you know, is informed by the kind of work that's done [00:38:00], you know, in that last four years, I believe, and why he wanted us to be in that -- worried about this, that kind of work.

Q: Back in 2004, were there things you heard sort of either by the Democrats or by the media that you thought, "That's not the President Bush I know."

SPELLINGS: In 2004?

Q: Yeah.



SPELLINGS: Yeah, I -- I'm sure there were. I can't remember, you know, specifically. I mean, the thing that always bothered me the most was, you know, how underestimated his intellect was, that he was seen to be cavalier, cocky, hair-trigger, you know, those -- you know, words like that. You know, I've worked for him for a long time to that point, and since, and I don't find him to be that way, and you know, often people would say things about President Bush, and I would say, "Well, do you know him?" [00:39:00] (laughter) Because I do.

Q: And are there any other things about 2004 that I haven't asked you about that I should have, or that you'd like to get on the record?

SPELLINGS: You know, the other thing I would just say, and this is -- it's also a time that people are thinking about themselves individually in their careers, and you know, I've done the first four years. You know, it's a long, hard run. It is hard work, as you know, in every White House. And so, it's a natural kind of pivot point for people to think, well am I going to suit up again? And if so, in what role? Am I going home? What about my family? And so, you know, there's the management of anxiety, professional anxiety, and of course, it's also a distinct possibility that everyone will be out of a job. And so, just, you know, keeping your eye on the ball, and understanding that there's going to be personal consequences, professional consequences [00:40:00], and in particular, and you know Bush has been heralded with this, kind of -- the people that had been around him were long-standing. We did not have a lot of coming and going. People had been there; they were steady and solid, and yet it was that natural pivot point, so putting all of that into the mix as well, was kind of interesting management.

Q: Along the way, you've talked about the value of working No Child Left Behind in a bipartisan way, and that was at a time when the Senate was -- had a Democratic majority. For the rest of his term, after the midterm, he had a Republican majority, and then for the first two years of the second term, a Republican majority. Was he better off when he didn't have a Republican majority in Congress, when the Democrats controlled one house?

SPELLINGS: Oh gosh. Well -- I mean, they're -- that -- I think would -- I'd have to answer that as a case-by-case kind of situation depending on the piece of legislation. I would say for [00:41:00] education, as it turns out, it -- you know, having Senator Kennedy in the chair was a very good thing for enactment of the law.

Q: Thank you, Secretary Spellings.

SPELLINGS: Thank you, Mike.



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