



## The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

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### **December 11, 2013**

Q: OK. I doubt there's ever been anything that's the equivalent of what came to be called the Shrum Primary in the lead up to an election, as there was in 2004. What's the Shrum Primary, and why would there be such a thing?

SHRUM: Well, it was a journalistic artifact. It was because I had previously worked for John Kerry, I had previously worked for John Edwards, I had previously worked for Joe Lieberman. And so, there was this whole sense -- the press created it. You know, I found it annoying, actually.

Q: Obviously there's a back story to this, which is your long involvement in multiple Democratic campaigns for president, as well as senator, governor, and so on.

SHRUM: Yeah, well, I'd done the John Edwards campaign in 1998, when he came out of nowhere to get elected to the Senate in North Carolina. Thought he was immensely [00:01:00] talented. I had been a friend of John Kerry's for almost 40 years, and in 1996, when he faced a really tough race against [Bill] Weld, I'd been brought into that race in the beginning of September. Lots of people -- Lots of the smart guys in Boston didn't think we could win at that point, and we won by seven or eight points. And I'd worked on Joe Lieberman's reelection campaign. So, that's the back story.

Q: And maybe additional part of the back story is you were an experienced practitioner of presidential politics as well, right?



SHRUM: Well, I'd been involved in the Gore campaign, and I'd been involved in -- very involved in Dick Gephardt's campaign in 1988. That was the fourth person. That's why the Shrum Primary encompassed four people, because not only had I done Gephardt's race in '88, where he surprisingly won the Iowa caucuses, but we ran out of money on Super Tuesday. I mean, we were leading in all the Super Tuesday states [00:02:00] and then we didn't have the money, and the whole thing just collapsed. And I'd done Dick's congressional races after that, and actually had urged him to run for president in 1992. I mean, we had the meeting in 1991, and I said, "This is your time." He said, "Well, the Gulf War is on, Bush is very popular." I said, "The Gulf War's going to be over and the economy is going to become a very big issue, and you're ideally set up to do it." Like a lot of people that year, he just took a pass because he thought Bush was unbeatable. And Gore took a pass, and it opened the way for Bill Clinton.

Q: Speaking of Gore, I mean, during the first year or two after the 2000 election, there was a lot of speculation about whether he would run again. And I know that in Lieberman's case, at least, [00:03:00] it was Gore deciding not to run that he felt cleared the field for him. Did you -- Did you -- It's a bit of a counterfactual, but if Gore had decided to run, would that have changed the character of the 2004 contest?

SHRUM: Oh, I think Gore would have won the nomination had he decided to run. He did something very rare in politics: he had the mourning period that I think anybody who loses the presidency does. I mean, George McGovern told me that Walter Mondale once asked him, "When does it stop hurting?" -- and these are two guys who lost 49 states -- and McGovern said, "Never." But for a lot of these -- For anyone who loses the presidency, and especially if, in Gore's case, you actually believe you won it, you were elected, just not inaugurated, there's a period of about six months, a year, when you're really down. But what [00:04:00] he did coming out of that period was transform himself from a politician into a prophet. And I think he was too committed to what he was doing on climate change and everything else to think about 2004.

Q: Did you talk with him at all about running in 2004?

SHRUM: No. Well, I talked with him several times, but it was always clear to me that he was not going to run in 2004. I mean, we worked on an op-ed together that he wrote for, I think, the *Washington Post*, defending the use of the slogan, "The people, not the powerful," in 2000, and saying that he just wished he had done more of it, not less of it.

Q: Why, going through the candidates who you'd worked through -- worked for before, why didn't you go with Edwards?



SHRUM: Well, a lot of people assumed that I would, that we would, that my firm would. And [00:05:00] I just wouldn't -- I said to everybody, "I'm not going to make any kind of commitment till after the midterm elections." And, as it resulted, not do Kerry's reelection campaign in 2002. And you know, I was sitting on the porch at Teddy Kennedy's house, my wife and I, with Vicki and Teddy, in Hyannisport, in the fall of 2002. And he said, "Look, you have to make your own decision, but I really think you should work for John Kerry." That would have surprised a lot of people, too, because they assumed that Kennedy would build a relationship with Edwards, was going to be for Edwards. I decided that Kerry was the Democrat who had the best chance to beat Bush, number one. Number two, that he was fully prepared to be president. And actually, suggested at one point to Edwards that if he just went home to North Carolina and ran for reelection, there was a good chance he wouldn't [00:06:00] ever get to that election because he might be picked as the vice presidential nominee. When I saw him, I made the decision with my partners, and when I called John Edwards to tell him, he was quite angry. I mean, he said, "I'll never forget what you have done to me and my family, even on my deathbed." And I said, "Well, John..." Then we got along a little better when he wanted to be picked as the vice presidential candidate, later on.

Q: Did that surprise -- Did that surprise you? I mean, having had --

SHRUM: So, the vehemence of the reaction surprised me.

Q: And Lieberman?

SHRUM: I was -- I didn't agree with Lieberman on -- I mean, I had worked for him and I could see him in the Senate; I didn't think he should be president.

Q: And Gephardt?

SHRUM: I thought Dick's time had passed. That he was not going to be the nominee, number one. Number two, [00:07:00] that this notion that somehow or other, because of what had happened in Iowa 16 years before, he had great strength in Iowa, I didn't believe that. I have a theory about the Iowa caucuses, at least for Democrats. I mean, they're pretty good predictors and pretty reliable predictors of -- in the Democratic Party. And my theory is that around November, and this is kind of what happened to Dean, around November, people start asking the question that's going to dominate their choice of the caucuses. In 2008, the question was, who most favors change, or who stands for change? And the answer was Barack Obama, not Hillary Clinton. And in 2004, the question which Kerry could never explicitly articulate, he had to demonstrate it, was, who has the best chance to beat Bush? Because Democrats so



much wanted to beat Bush. And I thought the answer to that question would be Kerry. [00:08:00]

Q: Why?

SHRUM: His experience, the fact that he had national security credentials that he could carry into an election, that I had seen him campaign in Massachusetts and he was a terrific campaigner and a terrific debater. I mean, we had all these debates in '96 with Bill Weld, and Kerry was fabulous in them. So, these are not easy choices, but in the end, it was a clear choice for me.

Q: Going with Kerry?

SHRUM: Yes.

Q: Tell us --

SHRUM: I thought he should be president.

Q: Tell us about John --

SHRUM: And by the way, if you watch him as secretary of state now, you can get some indication of why I thought he should be president.

Q: Tell us about John Kerry: what kind of person he was, what kind of political leader he was?

SHRUM: Well, you know, there's a story, maybe apocryphal, about JFK, that after the '60 election, [00:09:00] *Time* magazine described the Kennedy campaign as coruscatingly brilliant, and he walked in one day and said, "I just want to tell you guys, change 60,000 votes that were coruscatingly stupid." And one of the things that happens, if you don't win, is you tend to get caricatured. Even if it's that close, even if 60,000 or 70,000 votes changing in Ohio would have made Kerry president, he is -- he's got a great sense of humor, he's very open and quite willing to hear arguments from people, he's a politician who understands that you actually don't want a bunch of people around you who say yes to everything. After all, you can always agree with yourself. You want people who you respect who are going to present you with an argument, say, "This is what we think you should do." He is very, very, very calm in a crisis and when things are, you know, most of the time, when things are very tough, John comes [00:10:00] to the right decision. And I mean, we had a bump in the road in -- a considerable bump in the road in late August/early September of 2004, when he wasn't quite that calm. But most of the time, he was incredibly calm. I mean, we were written off in October, November, and December of 2003. And I remember we would take these trips up to New Hampshire in a van, and I went on a lot of them. And, you know, got almost no press coverage because suddenly looked like, you know, Kerry was gone. And through that whole period, he made -- he remained very



steady and made three very tough decisions, in addition to making a change in his campaign. He made the decision first not to accept federal funding, and [00:11:00] that was critical. And we weren't, at that point, going to be able to raise the money on the internet because we hadn't paid the attention we should have to the internet. John and Teresa kept saying, "The internet is critical," and there was enormous resistance in parts of the campaign to that idea. So, he was going to have to, going outside of federal funding, he was going to have to finance his campaign by taking a mortgage on his house on Beacon Hill. And that's what he did -- that was the first critical decision. Second critical decision was not to attack Howard Dean on television. [Mark] Mellman's polling showed a series of arguments that rated around 30% of people said they were less likely to vote for Dean because of one of these attacks. Well, 30% arguments don't get you very far, and you pay a price in any event, in a contest, the Democratic contest, intra-party, in a place like Iowa, for going negative. [00:12:00] And that was a really hotly argued proposition inside the campaign. I said, "We've got to meet the voters where they're going to be, and where they're going to be is who can beat Bush. And we -- If we attack Dean on television, we're just going to make room for Edwards, for example, to move up the middle and win." And he made that decision. And the third decision was to basically abandon New Hampshire in January, until after the Iowa caucuses. That was a really hard decision for John because he was well known there, he was well liked there, although our polling numbers were -- in terms of who did you favor for president -- had fallen apart, his favorability was still very high. And the premise on which we made this decision was that if we won Iowa, which I thought we could, or even if we came second in Iowa, [00:13:00] we could slingshot into New Hampshire. Now, you could never say that. You could just say, "We're focused on Iowa right now; we'll be in New Hampshire right after Iowa." The one thing you can't do is tell voters in New Hampshire that they have to vote for you because you just won Iowa. That was Obama's mistake, actually, in 2008. He kept mentioning Iowa over and over and over again. When John got off the plane, the morning after we had won Iowa, he had one big rule in his head: thank Iowa in that first speech, and never mention Iowa again, and tell people in New Hampshire that they were the ones who were going to decide. So, he's a -- he would -- if I -- when I wasn't out there, he would call me and he would say, "Could I sneak back to New Hampshire for a night?" And I'd say, "No, I think that would be a very bad idea." And he'd say, sort of grumpily say, "OK."

Q: Well, that was a huge strategic [00:14:00] gamble, right? Because if --



SHRUM: There was only one way forward for us. We had to either win Iowa, or come in a very strong second. A very strong second to Dean, I think Kerry would have won the nomination, ultimately, because the party would have -- a lot of people would have focused on the fact that Dean would have a hard time winning. That puts it mildly. I think he would have had an almost impossible time winning. But it was the only way forward. Sometimes in politics, the best strategy is necessity -- just recognize what you have to do, and go do it.

Q: So, the thinking was if he writes off Iowa, finishes third, fourth --

SHRUM: If we had finished third or fourth in Iowa, we...

Q: Wouldn't have won New Hampshire.

SHRUM: Well, no, we would not have won New Hampshire; we would have been out of the race. There was no thought of writing off Iowa. The only thought was, we're just not going to go to New Hampshire for the first part of, [00:15:00] you know, while we're in Iowa, for the -- in January. And we had been up there a lot, but that the way that -- Look, voters in New Hampshire, who had a very favorable opinion of John Kerry, thought he was going to lose, so they were voting for somebody else. If he won Iowa, then that favorable opinion could become the fuel that would drive the race forward. By the way, he never attacked Dean, but in a debate, in early January, two things really helped us in Iowa, aside from -- three things, actually, aside from that. The first was the Jefferson/Jackson Day dinner, where we tore up all the signs that people had planned and we had a whole new argument, and just called Kerry the real deal, and all our people were holding up signs, "the real deal." And the real deal really meant, he's the guy who could beat Bush, he's the guy who could be president, plausibly. And that was the question that Iowa voters were asking, and [00:16:00] it had to be the question. If they were asking a different question, you know, like, "Who's the most radical guy?" then Howard Dean would have won. But they weren't asking that question, so that was a critical moment. Kennedy coming to Iowa in early January was critical to when he came back. Because he could explicitly make the argument, "This is the guy who has the best chance to beat Bush," and he could do it with -- we got huge crowds when we brought Teddy, but he'd also do it with a little humor, saying, "You know, you supported my brother in '60, you supported my brother, Bobby, in '68, you didn't support me in '80, you owe me." (laughter) And the third was a debate that -- where the candidates got to ask each other a question, and it was on the day where Kerry was going to appear on *Meet the Press* as well. And we were supposed to have a briefing, like, at ten o'clock at night. And of course, he was late, coming from somewhere else in the state, [00:17:00] so came in about midnight or



12:30, and not happy that he didn't have more briefing time. And the candidates could all ask each other a question, and they had a minute to ask it. And Mike Donilon, my partner, and I wanted Kerry to ask a very brief question, which is, "Governor Dean, you recently said that you wouldn't assume Osama bin Laden was guilty: what in the world were you thinking?" And Kerry said, "But I have a whole minute." And I said, "But you don't want to use the minute, you just want to do this." And he asked it, adding an extra couple of sentences to it at the front, but it was very short -- maybe 20 seconds, 15 seconds. And of course, there's no answer to that question. What that said to Democrats sitting out there is, "He'll just get hammered in the general election." And you know, he could give the answer, "We're a country of laws and the rule of law and we have to try him in court," [00:18:00] which is kind of what he did. But that goes nowhere with voters, at that point. Even if they kind of half-agree with him, some of the more liberal Democrats, they say, "Oh, my Lord, if he says that, what's he going to say in a debate with Bush?"

Q: What do you make of the Dean phenomenon? Because he came out of seemingly nowhere and was all the rage during the summer of '03. The Bush people thought he would be the nominee. Did you ever think that?

SHRUM: I didn't, but I also understood that we had only one road to the nomination. Dean was originally -- originally ran, and I don't know what Joe [Trippi] told you, but Dean's original notion was, "I've been a governor, I've balanced budgets, I can be the fiscally sensible candidate." And if Kerry had voted against the war, or if Edwards had voted against the war, I don't think the Dean [00:19:00] phenomenon ever would have happened, despite the brilliance of what Joe Trippi and his then-partner Steve McMahon, who gets less credit for this than he should, did, both with the internet and with seizing on the war issue. And the reason I thought Dean would not be the nominee was because I did believe that the question Iowa voters were asking was who could beat Bush, and Dean wasn't the answer. Kerry was the answer. Edwards might have been a far-fetched answer. And as I say, I just don't think Gephardt was top of mind for people. The other thing that happened to Dean in Iowa was -- that we had nothing to do with -- is Gephardt, the Gephardt campaign did exactly what we resisted doing, which was they attacked Dean in television ads, so Dean attacked back, so suddenly, you have Gephardt and Dean going after each other, and you know, [00:20:00] they end up finishing third and fourth.

Q: So, the net beneficiary in a multi-candidate race is the one who's not involved either as the attacker or the attacked? Is that --



SHRUM: Yeah, I think especially in a multi-candidate primary. I mean, there are times in, you know, I mean in Oregon in 2000, in the Gore campaign, it was -- we took a poll and it was pretty close, in a state we should win in, it was pretty close because Ralph Nader was getting a lot of votes. So, we attacked Ralph Nader on the air, and -- but the people who were seeing those ads, who were the targets of those ads, they were going to vote for us or they were going to vote for him. They weren't going to vote for George Bush. So -- But in most multi-candidate primaries inside the same party, if -- you got to be very careful. If you're going to try -- If you've got three candidates and you want to try to take out one or go after one, you better go after the other one, too.

Q: Well, you joined the campaign, [00:21:00] or your firm joined the campaign, first of all, maybe tell us a little bit about the firm. "Shrum joins the campaign" is shorthand for what?

SHRUM: For Shrum, Devine & Donilon. Tad Devine, who'd been my partner since 1990, had worked in a lot of races. Worked in the Dukakis presidential campaign, and although, as he always reminds people, he was the campaign manager for the vice president, or vice presidential candidate, Lloyd Bentsen, and that was a rather more successful part of that enterprise. And we'd done a lot of campaigns, Senate campaigns, gubernatorial campaigns together, and we'd done campaigns overseas together, in places as different as Colombia and Bolivia and Israel and Britain and Ireland. [00:22:00] So, that's Tad. Mike Donilon was my partner from 1991, for a couple of years. He was part of the Clinton media team in 1992. James Carville said to me, "Look, I want to get you down here, but they're mad at you, so I can't get you down here. But I want Mike," and Mike was there and in the war room, and really was responsible for a lot of the advertising in the Clinton campaign in '92, and then went off for two years with Carter Eskew, who later became a partner of mine, and Mandy Grunwald, and then in 1994, when -- or after 1994, early '95, I think, when Carter decided he was going to leave political advertising, he came back [00:23:00] for the Gore campaign, but only for the Gore campaign, because Al Gore's a very good friend of his... Tad came into my office one day and said, "Mike would like to come be our other partner. What do you think of that?" I said, "Let's go have lunch and do it." And you know, since then, he's very close to Biden, he was Biden's counselor in the White House, he left the White House for the reelection campaign in 2008, and was responsible -- he never talks about himself. He's brilliant, and he never talks about himself. And did a lot of the advertising in the 2008 Obama campaign.

Q: So, what -- what were you hired to do, your firm? Formally, what was your role?



SHRUM: Media and strategy.

Q: OK. And what kind of shape was the campaign in when you joined it?

SHRUM: Well, Kerry was leading among Democrats, you know, 17-18%. [00:24:00]

Q: This was February 2003.

SHRUM: Yeah, but that was when the -- I mean, I sort of made the decision a little before that, but -- we made the decision a little before that, but we had to go through the process, to be fair. And you know, the war vote was beginning to hurt, even though -- by -- and by May, by South Carolina, the debate in South Carolina, the war vote was hurting Kerry badly, and Dean was, as you suggested earlier, was starting to move. I didn't have a good relationship with the campaign manager, a fellow named Jim Jordan, who'd run the DSCC, the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, too. I never knew why. And ultimately, he left in November of 2003, [00:25:00] late October/early November of 2003. At that point, I would say that I didn't think the campaign had a strategic plan, and I don't really think we effectively developed one until the next fall because there was such internal disagreement about what to do.

Q: Fall of '03?

SHRUM: Yeah.

Q: Well, let's talk about those three major strategic decisions that you identified earlier. One, a decision not to take federal funding, which now has become accepted, but back then was unusual. Why not? I mean, that's leaving a lot of money on the table, and having to spend a lot of time raising money.

SHRUM: Because there were spending limits on what you -- how much you could spend if you took it. And because Kerry did have -- we couldn't raise money very effectively at this point -- people didn't think we were going to win. [00:26:00] But Kerry had money of his own that he could put in. So, it was an essential decision. We would not have competed successfully in Iowa without it, and in fact, we should have turned down federal funding in the general election, which John Kerry would now tell you. We were raising huge amounts of money on the internet. I mean, as Dean fell out of the race, folks just came to us and we had, by then, a very robust internet presence, and actually were doing some things that I think were precursors to what Obama did in 2008 and 2012, but the technology had moved on and they could do a lot more. And you know, I think Secretary Kerry -- Secretary Kerry would tell you that that was a decision we should not have made in the fall.

Q: And the Iowa caucuses, what happened in Iowa [00:27:00] that turned it around? Was it that Dean fell, or was it that Kerry caught --



SHRUM: I think it was that people, as I said, I think people in Iowa, each time, it's not the same question each time, they ask a determinative question. And you know, in 2008, as I said, the question was, "Who stands for change?" And Obama was running on change, and Hillary Clinton was running on restoration and experience. In 2004, the question was, "Who has the best chance to beat Bush?" And you could, as I said, you had to demonstrate that. Not -- You had to let people come to that conclusion themselves, but there was a lot you could do to help them. I mean, Kennedy could explicitly say it, you could do very well on the debates, you could advertise in a way that elevated your stature, that people could see you as the most plausible person. And Kerry was a terrific campaigner -- I mean, [00:28:00] a terrific, tireless campaigner in Iowa, just going from place to place to place. So, I think Dean fell because he wasn't the answer to the question they were asking. You know, there were other things that you could throw into this equation. I mean, they brought several thousand people, all wearing orange hats, into the state to canvass for them, and that's not a very Iowa thing to do. You know? Iowans expect other Iowans to be talking to them or canvassing. So -- But that wasn't what hurt. By then, I think Dean was -- that was the weekend before Dean was gone. I mean, on Saturday, when the word hit that the *Des Moines Register* poll was about to come out on Sunday and show Kerry leading, people were stunned. I mean, you know, much of the national press was still writing stories saying, "It's a contest between [00:29:00] Dean and Gephardt and, you know, Kerry may be moving some because he seems to be campaigning effectively, but he's going to -- you know, his best hope would be third."

Q: His victory was, in that way, a surprise, and certainly a vindication of the decision to put so many chips on Iowa. Edwards did very well. How do you account for that?

SHRUM: Well, I think that Edwards captured people's imagination. He was young, he was very -- he was a very good campaigner. I don't -- you know, I don't -- he had a -- you know, and people were attracted by what he was saying. I just think he fell short in part because he wasn't the answer to that question. Four years later, he might have been, but he couldn't be [00:30:00] four years later because there were these two you -- A, the question was different, Bush wasn't running, obviously, and two, there were these huge, huge figures, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, and there was no room for him.

Q: The Iowa caucuses, I mean, in effect, is that when the nomination was won? Is there a plausible scenario that leads to somebody else besides Kerry getting it after you win in Iowa?

SHRUM: I think very, very difficult for someone else to get it. Very -- First of all, once he won Iowa, I believed he was going to win New Hampshire and win it big, which he did.



Edwards could then be a threat in South Carolina, which he was -- he won it -- but at that point, people in the Democratic Party had always liked Kerry, and now that he was winning, people rallied to him. So, I think it would have been very, very hard. Dean was finished the night of Iowa. He could go to New Hampshire, he could go on [00:31:00] to Wisconsin, but it was over. And it's not just the scream. I mean, I think Iowa voters had, as my partner Tad Devine often said, their function is to winnow the race down to, like, two people. And I think he was winnowed out in Iowa. And --

Q: Well, the scream came after he finished third.

SHRUM: Right, yeah. And -- But the scream isn't what hurt him in New Hampshire. At that point, in New Hampshire, Kerry, as I said, had these very high favorables, and we were, you know, we were on a roll. And you know, Kerry won almost everything else.

Q: Well, it's interesting because, you know, in a lot of years, governor -- being governor had been a more desirable credential among voters than having Washington experience, and that was, I guess, Dean's thought originally. But, you know, 2004 was foreign policy, national security were more prominent issues than [00:32:00] they had been in quite a while.

SHRUM: Well, sometimes, you know, I think social science is not so scientific, and we say things like, "You're more likely to get elected president as a governor than as a senator." You know, Kennedy won, but you know, who else was there? Well, Richard Nixon, who was vice president at that point, had been a senator. Lyndon Johnson was a senator. And by 2008, the contest came down to three senators. So, I don't -- you know, I kind of reject that. And you --

Q: You don't think that was ever true? I mean, Carter, Reagan, Clinton?

SHRUM: Well, I think, you know, Carter -- Carter won the nomination in part, in my view, because Ted Kennedy didn't run. If Kennedy had run in '76, I think it would have been very difficult for Carter to win the nomination. Reagan was a preternaturally good politician who I almost could say embodied the heart and spirit of the Republican Party. So, [00:33:00] I don't think it was that he was a governor. I don't -- you know... But that was -- In 2004, you're right, was also national security credential was very important, and saying something like, "I don't think Osama bin Laden is guilty," was not by itself disqualifying, but it was certainly hurtful.

Q: Well, so, you joined the campaign, Jim Johnson ceases to be campaign manager --

SHRUM: Not Jim Johnson -- Jim Jordan.

Q: Jim Jordan, I'm sorry. Jim Johnson comes in later in this story.

SHRUM: Jim Johnson's one of my closest friends. (laughter)

Q: And Mary Beth Cahill was brought in as campaign manager.



SHRUM: Yes.

Q: Do you have a good working relationship now with the whole campaign?

SHRUM: Yes.

Q: OK, and what were you doing?

SHRUM: Well, strategy and media, and spending a lot of time with the candidate.

Q: So, you were on the road a good bit?

SHRUM: A lot.

Q: OK. What do you think the virtue that the -- you know, what's the benefit [00:34:00] to the candidate, the specific benefits, of having somebody who's done this before, has been down this road before, which Kerry had never been, running a national primary campaign?

SHRUM: Yeah. I think you'd have to go back pretty far to find a campaign that -- where there wasn't someone involved at a pretty high level, who had some experience in presidential politics. I mean, some people would cite the Kennedy campaign, but actually, Robert Kennedy had spent the entire '56 campaign traveling with Adlai Stevenson, where I don't think he was much talked to or listened to, but he observed a lot. So... You know, and if you look at Obama or you look at McCain, I mean, you know, any of these folks who win the nomination, or Hillary Clinton, for that matter, they're going to always be veterans of presidential campaigns around.

Q: And again, what [00:35:00] -- what's the added value, the kind of experience you have versus the candidate?

SHRUM: Well, you know a lot about, say, the dynamic of Iowa. You might, you know... I mean, I felt pretty confident arguing the centrality of Iowa for us because we were not in the same position as Gephardt. First of all, Gephardt, because he was seen as protectionist in '88, was not as acceptable to a lot of people in the Democratic Party as Kerry was, generally, once he started to win. And secondly, if we won Iowa in the way you raise money in the world now, I believe the money would come pouring in very rapidly, and we would not be in the same position that we were in, in 1988. So, that's an example.

Q: So, once Kerry became the de facto --

SHRUM: You know, you also know -- you know, you don't -- you know how to read a poll, you know how to translate the poll into 30-second ads, or hopefully you do. [00:36:00] You know how to form and shape a message.

Q: Well, you're still being more modest than I think you need to be.

SHRUM: Well, I mean, I don't -- you know, I -- Look, I had a very good relationship with John Kerry, I still do, and you know, we talked about almost everything.



Q: He -- I think you wrote in your book that Kerry would have been great as president for the hard decisions, and you mentioned earlier how good he was in a crisis, but the easier decisions wouldn't have come as easily or as well.

SHRUM: I think his great strength, and we're seeing it now as secretary of state, is how well he does when things are tough. When things got tough, and the combination of Swift Boats, the internal campaign disorder that we had for several weeks, and the Republican Convention held in New York on the anniversary of 9/11 [00:37:00] left us in a deep hole, he just one day said, "Look, we're going to stop all this arguing. The only thing that matters here right now is the first debate -- we're going to focus on the first debate and, you know, Bob's going to run the debate prep and that's that and we're not arguing about it." He was very good at things like that. He was -- Once he had the nomination secured and we had the unity dinner and Bill Clinton spoke at it and everything else, we had the great benefit in leading up to Iowa and even New Hampshire that not a lot of people wanted to give us advice. That made it really easy to execute -- come to a strategy and execute it. Once he had the nomination, everybody wanted to give us advice. And there was too much of a tendency to listen to everybody for a while.

Q: So, by sometime early in '04, the Bush people know [00:38:00] they're running against John Kerry, and launch a series of critical ads, and in particular, seize on this -- Kerry's voted for the \$87 billion, voted against it before he voted for it, or whatever it was.

SHRUM: That's actually -- It's a more complicated story than that.

Q: Please tell it.

SHRUM: They ran -- The Bush people ran ads accusing Kerry of being a flip-flopper because he had voted against the Gulf War when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and he had voted to authorize the use of force in Iraq. We tested those ads, both in polling and in focus groups, and they had no impact whatsoever. I mean, people said, "Well, that was, you know, 12, 14 years ago, that was a long time ago, I don't remember all the details on it." And so, the flip-flop argument had no life, at that point. But they threw in one of their ads -- and I think they knew exactly what they were doing, it was very smart -- that Kerry [00:39:00] had voted against the \$87 billion supplemental to support the troops in Iraq. And Kerry, who is a veteran and has worked very hard in veterans' issues, is very sensitive about anything that implies that he doesn't care about the soldiers in the field, especially the ordinary soldiers in the field. And he went to a campaign event in West Virginia where there were a lot of vets. And the Bush ad had run in West Virginia, and he got asked about the \$87 billion. And for once in his life, he was not nuanced. He was always accused of being nuanced -- well,



being nuanced here would have been very helpful, where he would say, “Of course I favored the \$87 billion, but I wanted to see to it that we established the benchmarks so we knew whether we were succeeding or failing in Iraq, and I wanted to pay for it, and I wanted to pay for it by repealing part of the Bush tax cuts for the folks at the top.” [00:40:00] That would have been -- That answer would not have gotten him in any trouble at all, but I think when this vet -- and I think it was a vet who asked him -- asked about it, he was incredibly pithy. He said, “Actually, I voted for the \$87 billion before I voted against it.” Mary Beth came and got me -- I was in Washington, so was she -- and said, “We have a problem.” And that was the foundation of the flip-flop argument, and really, really made it more credible to voters.

Q: By the way, it was P-I-T-H-Y, right?

SHRUM: Pithy.

Q: Pithy, yeah, (laughter) just for the transcriber. Well, what did you think the challenge was going to be, the strategic challenge, of defeating President Bush?

SHRUM: Well, you had to pass the commander-in-chief threshold, which despite Swift Boats, if you look at the exit polls, [00:41:00] I think Kerry ultimately did. And you had to pull the race. You had to make sure the race wasn't just about national security issues, but was about jobs and social security and Medicare, you know, issues that are good for Democrats. The Bush campaign never wanted to talk about domestic issues, throughout the entire period. They understood, if I reflect back on it, I remember right after 9/11, assuming that Bush was going to become a kind of president of everybody. That the rallying around that we saw after 9/11 could be built upon, that he could widely consult Democrats, make them part of the whole effort to respond to this. Means he probably couldn't have invaded Iraq because people would have said, “Let's wait and see what the weapons inspectors find,” but I [00:42:00] assumed that's what he was going to be, and that the Democrats couldn't win in 2004 if Bush was like that. But Bush decided to run a base campaign, where it was all about just turning out the base and really pushing the right. I mean, that's why I think the president's initial reaction to the Constitutional Amendment to ban gay marriage was, “Why would we put that in the Constitution?” And I think Rove then explained to him, they weren't putting it in the Constitution, they were putting it out there in certain swing states to drive certain fundamentalist voters. So, they didn't want to talk about any of these issues, and in fact, they ended the campaign in Ohio, which was the most critical place -- it was actually not their ad, it was the ad of a group that was supporting the president with an ad called “Ashley,” where there was this little girl who tells the story of her mother being killed on 9/11, and the president



[00:43:00] coming to Ohio and comforting her and saying, "I feel safe because of him." That, combined with the Osama bin Laden tape, really hurt us. I don't know whether Mark [Mellman] told you this, but in the polling before the Osama bin Laden state, in the swing states -- the tape in the swing states, we were four points ahead, and by Monday, we were one point ahead, and so, the tide was moving the wrong way. So, strategically, in -- with the exception of a stupid excursion into talking about a weapons dump in Iraq that, you know, was looted, which we spent several days on until both John Sasso and I thought it was stupid, and Kerry finally said, "This is ridiculous, I'm not doing it anymore." We were spending a lot of time at the end talking about social security, education, the economy, and our polls showed us doing very well by doing that.

Q: What were [00:44:00] the odds, in your view, at 10 months out from the election, that Bush could be beat?

SHRUM: Oh, 50/50.

Q: And --

SHRUM: Even though -- By -- He could be beaten not by anybody, could be beaten by Kerry.

Q: Exactly.

SHRUM: I don't think Dean couldn't have beaten him. I don't think Edwards would have beaten him. And I don't think Gephardt would have beaten him. I -- Certainly, I don't know what -- I mean, Lieberman agreed with him on everything. I don't know what -- that would have been a weird campaign, except the social issues. So, no, I thought about -- I thought Kerry was potentially an unusually strong candidate. And as I said earlier, one of these things is if you lose, even if you lose by an inch, you tend to get caricatured -- which happened to Al Gore. But I just thought Kerry would be a very effective candidate.

Q: Let's move to the choice of a -- of John Edwards as his running mate. How did [00:45:00] that come about?

SHRUM: Well, it came about for several reasons. One was John McCain wouldn't do it.

Q: Did you think that would have been a good idea?

SHRUM: Yes. We would have won the election. I mean, I think it might have been a tumultuous four years in the White House, but we would have won the election, which, for me, is the first criterion in picking a vice president. I know the conventional wisdom is they don't matter; they actually do matter, and not just in the case of Lyndon Johnson. I think there are other occasions when they mattered a fair amount. I think Biden mattered a lot to Obama in '08 because of his capacity to speak to blue-collar folks in places like Pennsylvania and Ohio, and because of his strong ties with



the Jewish community, which made him a huge asset in Florida. So, it became a saying, though, and really it was going to come down to Edwards or Gephardt. And I think we made the wrong choice. [00:46:00] And that's just my view.

Q: Why?

SHRUM: I think Gephardt would have helped us a lot in a place like Ohio. I mean, he -- just as Biden could, he could speak to those voters in a way that really amplified what Kerry was saying. And you know, I just think -- and, by the way, I believe he would have done better in the debate against Cheney. One of the most stunning things for me in the campaign was that John Edwards did not do very well in the debate with Cheney.

Q: Now --

SHRUM: Which stunned me. I mean, here's a guy who spent his life as a trial lawyer, and my assumption had always been, I mean, when Gore considered him for vice president in 2000, one of the reasons he was considered was because everybody said, "This guy'll be great in the debate."

Q: Well, you say in your book that Kerry actually had --

SHRUM: He had misgivings. [00:47:00]

Q: And had a better interview or better session with Gephardt than with Edwards, had misgivings about Edwards. Your --

SHRUM: And then had another meeting where somehow or other, those misgivings got allayed. Look, one of the problems is sometimes, you believe your polling when you shouldn't. So, our polling showed that people in the Democratic Party, Democrats in general, preferred Edwards over Gephardt as the nominee, and that was true even in Missouri. Should have ignored that poll. I mean, what they liked was that Edwards seemed new and young and fresh, but that wasn't, you know, that wasn't where the game was.

Q: Other than the debate with Cheney, did Kerry -- did Edwards disappoint you in other ways?

SHRUM: He was quite reluctant to attack Bush. I think he was -- which is his job, or was his job -- and I think that was because he was planning on [00:48:00] running again in 2008, even though he had told Kerry he would not run again if Kerry lost narrowly and wanted to run. But I think John was planning to run for president in 2008. If he got elected vice president, great, he could run in 2012. If he didn't get elected vice president, he was already off to the races. So, he was quite reluctant. Now, the campaign would send something out, you know, an attack line, and he just wouldn't do it.



- Q: The convention, which had a lot of elements to it, but the memorable moment was, “I’m John Kerry and I’m reporting for duty,” which sort of bespoke the theme of his experience in Vietnam as a relevant character credential or national commander-in-chief credential?
- SHRUM: National security credential. But look, in a way, I’m responsible for that line, for better or worse. [00:49:00] It was actually Max Cleland -- we were coming out of the practice room under the stage and Max was coming in, and he said, “Bob, let me tell you how I’m going to introduce him. I’m going to say, ‘John Kerry, report for duty,’” because he was introducing him. And I said, “You know, Max, I think we should take that line, if you don’t mind.” And he didn’t mind, and we did. And afterwards, you know, people -- some people, in fact, some people who told me at the time, speech was a home run, convention was a home run, but of course, whatever momentum we got out of it went away because the orange alert was issued on Saturday. Every time we did something, the threat level was elevated -- Pick Edwards, threat level elevated. Hold your convention -- threat level elevated. And I know they say it was all coincidental, but there were a lot of coincidences. And there was -- there were folks who thought the convention had gone very well, [00:50:00] who, a month later, were saying, “Well, gee, it was a mistake to talk about national security so much,” because that opened up the Swift Boat possibility. Well, anybody who believes the Swift Boats weren’t going to happen in any event is crazy. I mean, they happened in the ’96 Senate race, except at that time, Elmo Zumwalt, the former chief of naval operations, was alive, was so incensed by the attacks that he came to Boston, stood on the State House steps, and denounced them, and that was it. But I think that -- I think Kerry had to give people the sense that he would defend the country, that he would be tough on terrorism, and that he had the credentials to do that. And the real, in my view, the real motivating force, aside from a lot of very wealthy Republican money that went into promoting the Swift Boat ads, but for some of the people who were in them -- none of whom actually were on John Kerry’s crew, by the way -- [00:51:00] they’d say things like, “I served with John Kerry in Vietnam.” Yeah, OK, they weren’t on the boat. I -- The motivating force for them, I think, was an incredible animus about the fact that Kerry had fought bravely in the war, had won the Silver Star, and then had come home and opposed the war. You know, so... But that was sort of the - - you know, look, the convention, we went into the convention either a little ahead or about tied with Bush, so we weren’t going to get a big bounce. This was going to be a 50/50 election, one way or another. And Kerry might be -- could have been the first nominee to defeat an incumbent president in a time of war. But we weren’t going to



get the Al Gore bounce. I mean, Gore got a bounce in 45 minutes of [00:52:00] 13 to 15 points from his acceptance speech. That couldn't happen for us. But we could, in the acceptance speech, which is kind of unmediated communication with the American people, in that speech you could pass the commander-in-chief threshold and lay out the domestic argument that you wanted to make. And you know, that's why "stronger at home, respected in the world," was the argument I think we wanted to make. We could have had a more populist argument, and probably should have.

Q: The Swift Boat ads started running about a week after the convention was over, got a lot of play on cable news programs. How did you all react to those ads and decide what to do about it?

SHRUM: Well, Kerry's instinct, which turned out to be completely correct, was to respond immediately. There were two barriers to an immediate response. One argument which was, it'll get them more attention, [00:53:00] I never took seriously, I mean, people always -- you know, either they're going to get attention or they're not, and you know, if you think they're a problem, you respond to them. When we made the decision to accept federal funding, it meant that the moment Kerry accepted the nomination -- and during that speech, by the way, when he asked people to go to johnkerry.com and give money, we raised millions of dollars in 30 seconds, which we couldn't spend, by the way, because he just accepted the nomination. You could give it to the DNC, for example. And the implication of the decision to accept federal funding was that you would not be advertising on television in August because Bush's convention was in early September, yours ended in late July. He could keep spending, raising and spending primary money outside of the limits because he was not in federal funding either, and then starting in early September, he would have [00:54:00] his \$74 million, whatever it was, to spend to Election Day, and you would have \$74 million minus whatever you spent in August. So, that was the first reason that, you know, there was a kind of decision which we should have just simply overturned, that we weren't going to be on TV in August. The second problem -- or not problem -- the second thing was that Mark Mellman's polling was telling us that this wasn't having much impact. And it wasn't until about, you know, 7, 8, 10 days in that Mark came around to the view that this was hurting, and that we had to deal with it. Kerry, at that point, said, "I am dealing with it, we are dealing with it, I don't care what any of the rest of you say." But he had been right at the start -- we should have responded immediately.

Q: Was this an example of where you wanted Edwards to be out there?

SHRUM: No.



Q: No?

SHRUM: No, Edwards -- [00:55:00] Look, this, you had to respond to this directly, and Kerry did it in a speech and we did it in TV ads. And as I said earlier, by the time we got to election day, and especially after the first debate, people didn't have any doubt that Kerry could be commander-in-chief. I mean, a majority of Americans thought he could be commander-in-chief, thought he could do the job. He passed that threshold. What the Swift Boat ads really did to us was disrupt our own campaign for a two-or-three-week period.

Q: Well, as you said, you had to run a three-month general election campaign on \$75 million. Bush, only a two-month general election campaign on \$75 million. But that -- The predicate of that is you decide to take federal funding. What went into making that decision?

SHRUM: I was -- Well, there was a big division in the campaign. Mary Beth Cahill wanted to take federal funding, and actually, I think lobbied very, very hard [00:56:00] for it.

Q: On -- With what arguments?

SHRUM: That it would be distracting and take time from Kerry and Edwards' schedule to raise the money, and you know, the places where you would fundraise, Los Angeles and New York, for example, were not places that were in contest, that we already were going to carry them. You know, my response is, you know, we do have airplanes, and you know, we can do a fundraiser at night, and we also are raising a huge amount of money on the internet. It got pretty -- It was a pretty brutal argument inside the campaign. I mean, Tad Devine and Ron Rosenblith, who was an old friend of Kerry's, and someone who I had worked with all the way back in the Kennedy campaign, they were just absolutely convinced, as I was, that -- and Ron really lobbied this hard, really pushed [00:57:00] for a long time, that it was key to Kerry winning the election, and that this time gap in August was really bad. Tad had actually, at one point, said in a meeting with the candidate, "If, you know, if you take federal funding, I think you're making a decision that will lose you the election." And you know, obviously, I suppose that I'm giving the arguments the spin of my own belief, but that's because I believe them. And then somebody argued inside the campaign, "Well, of course Shrum wants Kerry outside of federal funding because he gets a percentage of the television advertising and there'll be more television advertising." And so, without consulting either of my partners or Bill Knapp, who ran, and still does, SKD, and who we had brought in [00:58:00] to work with us on the media, I got up and I went and got in the plane. Kerry was flying to Nantucket, and I was just going to go over for a day to a house we had in Sagamore Beach, on the Cape. And I said, "Look, here's the



argument that's being made. So, here's my answer: whatever we were going to spend on media in -- if you take federal funding, that's what we'll take our percentage on, and anything above that, we'll take no percentage."

Q: That's putting your money where your mouth is.

SHRUM: Well, I wanted to win the election. I mean, you know, we actually gave up commissions in the last couple of weeks, too. I wanted this guy elected. And -- You know, but I think, you know, there was a lot of pressure from the good government types, from the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, all those people, to take federal funding. There were people who said, "Well, Bush can raise more than Kerry can, if we're outside [00:59:00] federal funding." I said, "Well, there's no evidence of that, given what's happened in the primaries." So, I think it was a close call in which he ultimately decided to take federal funding, and I know that he would now say that was a mistake.

Q: What about the role of the 527s? I mean, you mentioned the Swift Boats ad and the Ashley ad -- those are both 527 groups that were pro-Bush.

SHRUM: I think their 527 groups did better than our 527 groups. And I can't really talk to you much about it because I couldn't talk to our 527 groups. I mean, I took seriously the prohibition in the law. You know, I do think it's interesting that in the Bush campaign, message was very clear: he's the guy who's going to protect us from terrorism. Their first ad that they ran was an ad about -- that showed pictures of the World Trade Center after it was crashed. In Ohio, you have this [01:00:00] Ashley ad at the end, along with the Osama bin Laden tape. That was their campaign.

Q: The debates, you said that Kerry got focused pretty early on, that first debate. Can you talk about it -- and talk about it in some detail -- how he got ready for that debate? And --

SHRUM: Well, first of all, Jim Baker made a mistake, which Vernon Jordan picked up immediately, and I agreed with him on it. They said they would only do three debates if we let national security be the first debate. And your first reaction to that is, well, you know, that's Bush's strong suit, so he wants to start on his strong suit, so we should insist that it be the way the Debate Commission wanted it, which was on domestic issues and the economy. Vernon's view and my view was that this was a grand opportunity, that if Kerry could win there in the national security debate and win [01:01:00] the national security debate, that would be a really big moment for us. So, Vernon agreed to it, you know, and there were people in the campaign, Mary Beth did not want him to agree to it, but he agreed to it. And that's where -- And we ended up with the national security debate. And then we went off, I believe, to Wisconsin,



and did a three-day prep. Kerry's a very good debater and he's very focused when he preps. And one of the things -- one of the things we had always tried to do, and had been very difficult, was break the connection between 9/11 and the Iraq War. And Kerry actually went into the debate with the mnemonic in his head, "He says Saddam, you say Osama," and the moment finally came, when [01:02:00] [Jim] Lehrer asked a question about would you -- how would you decide whether or not to go to war, future wars, Mr. President, etc., and he said, "We went to war because we were attacked." And then talked all about Iraq and Saddam Hussein. And Kerry says, "We weren't attacked by Saddam Hussein -- we were attacked by Osama bin Laden, and the president took his eye off the ball." And Bush, who at that point should have just quieted down and not said anything in response, he didn't have to respond, and just let the debate move on, said something like, "Well, of course I know we were attacked by Saddam Hussein -- by Osama bin Laden," which made the thing worse. So, it was -- but it wasn't just that. It was Kerry's overall mastery in that debate was very clear to most people, and [01:03:00] the polling showed considerable -- it showed that people thought that Kerry had won the debate by a good margin. And our poll numbers in the horse race went up, and we were back, basically, to the kind of tie race that we had all along. He then won the -- we did the same kind of prep for the second debate, same kind of prep for the third debate. He won all three debates. There was -- Which no one has ever done. I'd rather win the White House and lose the debates, by the way, but Kerry won all three debates. The third debate, and to this day, I don't know why he did this, in the vice presidential debate, Edwards had mentioned Dick Cheney's daughter, you know, in a complimentary way, and that she was gay. And nobody kind of noticed. It was fine. Kerry, [01:04:00] in the third debate with Bush, mentioned Mary Cheney. And I think the question was, is homosexuality or being gay an inherent characteristic or is it something developed by the environment or choice, or something. And Kerry obviously said it's inherent, and then said we should have compassion or tolerance, or whatever, toward everybody, everybody should be treated equally. And you know, look, the vice president's daughter, Mary Cheney, is gay. And as soon as I got to the spin room, I understood that the entire Bush argument about the third debate was going to be, "How dare he bring up Mary Cheney," because they couldn't argue the substance of the debate. So, that was a blip in the third debate, and [01:05:00] he had never done that in practice. You know, in practice debates, he had never come remotely close to doing that.

Q: To making a remark like that?



- SHRUM: Yeah, and it wasn't a mean remark. It was just, if he'd said it in the practice debate, we would have said, "Don't say it," and we'd actually talked after Edwards had done it in the vice presidential debate. And we agreed and he agreed that we wished Edwards hadn't done it. Although he didn't get criticized for it, he could have.
- Q: Well, that first debate, something else the Bush people insisted on was the sort of red light.
- SHRUM: Oh, the time limits and the lights? Well, that was fabulous because I -- the other thing, that I was all for those. You know, sometimes your caricature of people is completely wrong. Kerry is capable of being totally disciplined, and Kerry never went over time, never got the red light turned on. Bush got the red light turned on. And the other thing is the great unsolved mystery, is what was that box on the back of Bush's back? I have no idea. I mean, you know, some people in the campaign said, "Well, maybe [01:06:00] it's so they could tell him things during the debate." I said, "I cannot imagine that anyone would do that because you're standing there in front of 80, 100 million people, and you have to talk, and somebody's talking in your ear." I said, "I don't know if any of you have ever done television, but when you're on TV, if you're getting feedback of your own voice, it's distracting. If you're getting somebody else talking at you while you're trying to talk, it's incredibly distracting." So, I still have no idea what that box was. Maybe [Ken] Mehlman will tell you what the box was.
- Q: Well, maybe so.
- SHRUM: Or an ill-fitting suit. (laughter)
- Q: The debates, as you say, polls showed, media commentary supported it, Kerry won every one. But it seems that the Bush campaign came out with the two sort of vivid memories. One was "global test" in the first debate --
- SHRUM: Didn't hurt us at all.
- Q: -- and then the Mary Cheney things.
- SHRUM: Yeah, the global test thing didn't hurt us at all. They tried to do that after the first debate. That had no traction -- [01:07:00] it just sank. And the first debate, there was no possible spin for them coming out of that first debate, I think, because Kerry had done so well. On the Mary Cheney thing, was useful spin for them.
- Q: So, my question is, can you win every debate and lose the debates?
- SHRUM: Yeah, but I don't think that happened. I think Kerry won the debates, and you know, as I said, to win the presidency, I'd be happy to trade and lose all the debates and win the presidency. That'd be fine.
- Q: Well, especially because you were involved in debate prep. Can you talk about what the -- you said three days' prep. What's that like?



SHRUM: It's intense and very disciplined. At least, it was with Kerry. And I had done so much debate prep with him in '96, although our first debate prep, when I was hired in early September, was actually on his boat. It was just the two of us, going from Nantucket over to Fall River, where he was putting the boat in [01:08:00] dry dock for the winter. And we just spent, like, three hours getting ready for the next debate, which I think was the next day. But that was just because I'd just arrived, but we had a very disciplined process in '96, and a very disciplined process in 2004. You had folks like Ron Klain, you know, who was very involved with Obama in this, doing these big books. So, you get ready for the debates, what are the likely questions, what are the likely answers? You'd then try to boil it down. You have all the big books, but you want to boil this down to something more manageable, like the 25 or 30 most likely questions. You have somebody who is playing your opponent, in this case, Greg Craig was playing Bush, and brilliantly so. I mean, although Greg was better than Bush was, but he really had Bush down. [01:09:00] And then you go through a series, you start with some informal sessions where you talk about the questions and answers, then you do a series of practices, which aren't the full hour, hour-and-a-half, but are maybe 20 minutes, and then you do some full debates. And after each talk, and Mary Beth had made a rule that limited -- everybody could talk, we could all talk, but it limited who could talk to Kerry. You know? So, I could talk to Kerry, Sasso could talk to Kerry, and there was some room for Ron Klain to talk to Kerry, but everybody else -- so, it was a very disciplined process.

Q: You resisted a generalization earlier about governors and senators, maybe you'll resist this one, too, but incumbent presidents invariably --

SHRUM: Lose the first debate.

Q: -- lose the first debate because they just [01:10:00] don't want to do that kind of homework.

SHRUM: Well, actually, Reagan lost the first debate in '84 because he was over-prepared. They spent days and days and days hammering on him, and he was just lost in all this morass of detail. But the evidence isn't -- Clinton didn't lose the first debate in '96 to Dole, but he was debating Dole. So, yeah, there's some indication that this is true, although I think it's a dangerous generalization based on a very small number of cases.

Q: OK. The --

SHRUM: Carter lost the first and only debate to Reagan because whatever prep he did, Reagan did two brilliant things in that debate: the first was he told people he wasn't going to take America to war, and the second was, he wasn't going to take away their Social



Security and Medicare, and he did that one with a very memorable line, “There you go again.” [01:11:00] Even though Carter was actually technically accurate in what he was saying about Medicare, Reagan had opposed it, Reagan disposed of the whole issue with a smile and a line. So, I don’t resist the generalization -- I’m just not sure that we have enough examples to be certain of it. If you make a different generalization, which is a lot of incumbent presidents have spent four years in the White House, where people are mostly saying, “Yes, sir,” and so they don’t necessarily like the prep process, I would accept that. Kerry actually liked the prep process and was very good at it, and ironically, played Romney in the debate preps with Obama in 2012.

Q: You know, we’ve talked about the public features of the campaign, but I know there was a huge focus on voter registration and turnout by both campaigns, including the Kerry [01:12:00] campaign. Can you describe that? Was it focused on certain states you identified?

SHRUM: Yeah. It wasn’t what I did, I mean, number one. Number two, I was strongly in favor of it. I was also strongly in favor of using the internet to whatever extent we possibly could. I mean, you couldn’t use it -- the internet, in those days, couldn’t give you the kind of data that you can get now, that say -- lets you almost micro-target television advertising, which the Obama campaign did very well in 2012. But if you had told me -- and Donna Brazile, I think, would have, who cares deeply about all these turnout operations and GOTV operations -- that that many people were going to vote, I would have said, “There’s no way we’re going to lose.” You know, you get voter turnout that high, there’s no way we’re going to lose. And [01:13:00] of course, I believe the lever of social issues was used to get a lot of otherwise marginal voters, who were fundamentalists or evangelicals or conservative evangelicals, in places like Ohio, to turn out. And you know, we had a very good get-out-the-vote operation. We got out a lot of vote. They got out some vote nobody expected to come out.

Q: You had a lot of -- maybe a dozen or so -- same-sex marriage bans on state ballots?

SHRUM: Yes.

Q: Did you know that was coming and know that might be a...

SHRUM: Sure, sure, but I mean, you know, Kerry wasn’t going to -- Kerry wasn’t going to support something like that. I mean, he -- you know, his position was that he favored civil unions, not marriage, although he was very frustrated by it. He would say to me, “Explain again what the difference here is, except that we’re denying [01:14:00] these people the word marriage?” But there was not a single person that I talked to in the campaign, including gay people in the campaign, who thought that Kerry should be for



marriage at that point, which illustrates how fast this issue has moved over the last 8 to 10 years. So, yeah, you knew it was going to be exploited and it was going to be used to turn out these folks, and... But Kerry was not going to endorse anything like this, or endorse a federal constitutional amendment.

Q: That reminds me of a conversation you wrote about in your book that he had with Bill Clinton during the campaign.

SHRUM: Yeah, he told me that Clinton had suggested that he consider just being for a constitutional amendment, and that would, like DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act], take the issue out of the race. Well, you know, that was a step way too far for Kerry. I mean, Kerry was the only incumbent senator up for reelection in 1996, and he was in a very tough race against Bill Weld, who voted against DOMA, and called it -- I think he called it "Bigotry on the floor of the [01:15:00] United States Senate." So, he wasn't going to do that.

Q: Was Clinton, as the, you know, the Democratic president who'd been elected twice, was he a frequent informal advisor to the campaign?

SHRUM: Yes.

Q: And if so, what was the quality of his advice?

SHRUM: Diffuse. Sometimes completely right, sometimes, you know, talk about economic issues, talk about healthcare, talk about, you know, we agreed with that. At one point, he suggested that we attack -- this was when he was in the hospital, about to have his heart surgery, and we were on a conference call with him -- Bush as the flip-flopper. And I openly disagreed with him during the call. I said, "You know, we're going up a 180-degree cliff if we try to do that." And so, you know, it was -- I think Bill Clinton is a [01:16:00] brilliant political strategist for himself; not always as brilliant for others. I don't think, for example, that he was particularly helpful to Hillary Clinton in 2008. In fact, I think he was at times hurtful, seriously hurtful. Now, he's a different person, now, by the way, than he was. You know, the more you get away from his presidency, the more people look back and say, "Gee, the economy was great." There is a kind of tendency to forget how bitter the impeachment stuff was, which was not his fault because they went after him, just the same way they're going after Obama. And I suspect that if Hillary runs in 2016, he will be a big asset, and he will be disciplined.

Q: Well, November 1st, thereabouts, do you think you're going to win? And if so, how do you think you're going to win?

SHRUM: Well -- Well, I thought we were going to carry Florida, [01:17:00] and I thought we had a very good chance to carry Ohio, which we had not competed in, in 2000. We didn't



have the resources. I thought we were going to carry Ohio. And the shadow came the Friday before, when we were in West Palm Beach, and somebody -- one of the advance people comes up and says to me backstage, "You got to look at what's on TV," and it was the Osama bin Laden tape. And we all piled into the SUV with the candidate on the way to the airport, and he got out and made a statement, a very tough statement, about Osama bin Laden. But you know -- you knew reintroducing him at this point, with a tape that essentially told Americans to vote against Bush, was going to have exactly the opposite effect. It was going to help Bush. And I think Osama bin Laden was pretty smart -- I think he saw Bush as a great recruiting tool for him. [01:18:00] And so, anyway, you had the tape, you had the Ashley ad running in Ohio, but I felt pretty good when, on Tuesday morning, we went to Massachusetts, and then when the exit polls started coming in, felt even better, and thought we were going to win.

Q: How do you explain why the exit polls were so misleading in that way?

SHRUM: I don't know. I -- You know. You know, I didn't spend a lot of time afterwards trying to figure that out. Mark probably could give you a better answer to that question. And of course, by the time they're done, they all get adjusted so they're kind of accurate, but you know, if the five o'clock exit poll dump says you're winning, it should be pretty accurate. And [01:19:00] that's when I made -- I actually don't even care, it's, you know, somebody, and I think I know who, actually, but I don't care, told people, and it was true, that I had called Kerry "Mr. President" in an elevator we were taking down to the garage to go over to his house. And I thought we'd won. And I should have known better because I'd been through this in 2000.

Q: So, as the evening unfolded, when did you realize that that wasn't the case?

SHRUM: We were at Kerry's -- Mary Beth and I were at Kerry's house, and -- along with Josh Gottheimer, who was a speechwriter, and practicing an acceptance or a victory speech. And we got a call about 9:30, saying, "You better come back here." [01:20:00] And through the rest of the evening, Florida slipped away. You know, it went -- they'd say, our people down there, and the people we had sort of monitoring all this, that went from, "It's going to be closer in Florida than we think," to, "Gee, we could lose Florida," to, "Gee, we have lost Florida." And the same process went on in Ohio, and we had a lot of lawyers prepared to go out if this became a legal fight. And it was just clear, there weren't enough provisional ballots in Ohio. Now, I think a lot of shenanigans, like Ken Blackwell was the secretary of state, making it nearly impossible for a lot of African Americans to vote and a lot of students to vote, unless they waited in line 8 or 10 hours, and a lot of them just went home. But you know,



maybe historical records 50 or 100 years from now will prove that, but there was no way to prove that at the time. And you know, so, we told Kerry, [01:21:00] and then he called me on my cell phone and said, "Isn't there anything we can do?" I said, "No. There's..." And some people were mad that we didn't contest Ohio and the provisional ballots, but there wasn't anything we could do. I mean, Ron Klain and all our legal people said, "There's no room here." And so, Kerry said to me, "Will you do a draft of a concession speech and come over here at 9:00 in the morning?" So, it was about three o'clock, and I went back to the hotel because my wife and I were staying at a different hotel than the headquarters hotel because I wanted to be able to get some peace and quiet if I needed it. It's about three blocks away. And wrote a draft, and I don't type, and I asked my wife if she would type it, and she did, and took it over to Kerry's house. [01:22:00] Teddy and Vicki Kennedy were there, and John and Teresa. He went through, made his edits, got ready, and went over to Faneuil Hall. Mary Beth came to the house, too. We went over to Faneuil Hall, and he gave the speech. And afterwards, for me, it was an irony -- a lot of people who had been lining up to be part of the new Kerry Administration, or to wave the flag about the contribute they'd make -- they'd made to the campaign just kind of disappeared. They just left. Then there were a lot of folks in the back, CNN, you know, CBS, ABC, people like this, who wanted to interview someone from the campaign, so I said, "OK, I'll go do it." I wasn't going to not do it. And you know, even though I knew [01:23:00] the Shrum Curse was an inevitable... Mary Beth, on election night, we thought we were going to win, and she and I had had our disagreements, but I think she did a very good job. On election night -- you can't go through a campaign without having disagreements. On election night, looked at me and said one of the things that she was very happy about was that all the guff I had taken would be upended. But I -- You know, when that didn't happen, you just move on with your life. And you don't, you know, you don't let people sort of send you into a tailspin, or say, "I can't talk to the press because, you know, they're going to ask me about the Shrum Curse, or they're going to say, 'Did you do this wrong or did you do that wrong?'" I didn't think it was right to leave Kerry on his own.

Q: Well, we're close to the end, here. [01:24:00]

SHRUM: I'm sorry I'm drinking. For anybody who looks at this, sorry I'm drinking the Diet Pepsi. (laughter)

Q: What did the Bush campaign, what did they do well?

SHRUM: The convention. Putting it in New York, having it basically on the anniversary of 9/11, not literally, but basically. Focusing as heavily as they could on national security as a



message. They did a terrific job on the flip-flop argument once they had the \$87 billion line, and they were very agile about it. I mean, you know, when we were in Nantucket in August and we were doing one of these early informal debate preps, Kerry took one of his exercise breaks [01:25:00] and Mary Beth said, “John, whatever you do, don’t go” --

Q: Windsurfing.

SHRUM: -- “don’t go windsurfing.” And he came back an hour and a half, two hours later, I said, “Did you go windsurfing?” And he said, “But there was no one around.” I said, “There’s always someone around, and you are, like, one of the two or three most recognizable people in America.”

Q: So, you all saw the ad?

SHRUM: Oh, yeah, we got --

Q: He just thought nobody had been there to see the windsurfing?

SHRUM: Yeah, yeah. But they were very agile at stuff like that. So, they, you know, and they did a very good job -- I mean, I hate -- they did a very effective job -- I cannot use the word “good” here -- in exploiting bigotry against gays to increase voter turnout in some critical states.

Q: Now, are there -- you’ve been involved in campaigns for, I guess, over 30 years before this one. Did presidential campaigning change in any fundamental ways in [01:26:00] 2004?

SHRUM: Yeah, the rise of the internet and social media, you know, it was the internet, then. I mean, Twitter was, you know, wasn’t a factor, and, you know, Facebook was just beginning. But the internet was a very, very powerful transformative tool. It enabled you to raise money. And it was enabling one other thing that was only primitive, then. It was enabling a kind of two-way communication in which your supporters could actually think, that they weren’t just observers, but you know, that you could talk to them but they could talk back. And I actually used to occasionally go down to the place where we had all the internet stuff and read some of the comments and messages that people sent in. It’s much more sophisticated now. I mean, you -- you know, somebody could send a comment to the Obama campaign saying they were really worried about the Keystone Pipeline, [01:27:00] and the next thing you knew, they’d get a statement on the Keystone Pipeline. You know, the logarithms have so developed and you can find stuff. So, I think that was a huge change. Some things remain the same. The fight to define what the race is about is really critical. And you know, there’s no micro-targeting or social media that can make up for that if you don’t do it. I mean, that’s why the Republicans have a problem now, because they



think, “Oh, if we could just technically do what the Democrats would do, we’ll be fine.” Well, no, they won’t be fine until they figure out how to deal with their divisions, for example, on social issues, or until they’re -- because they’re so out of step, generally, with the country on this stuff, [01:28:00] and with younger voters. So, that hasn’t changed. The power of television is very interesting. I think the biggest change there is you had only, you know, in 1960, you had three networks. If someone had come to Walter Cronkite and said, “Look, there’s this group called the John Birch Society and they’re holding a press conference where they’re going to say that Eisenhower was an agent of the Communist conspiracy and Kennedy’s a socialist, and we’re going to send a camera crew,” he would have looked up and said, “You’re fired.” So, there were media filters, where now, with the multiplicity of channels, with the impact of something like Fox News, for example, which promoted the Swift Boats over and over and over again, that’s a big change. You don’t have a common base of knowledge upon which people are making decisions. So, you know, Pat Moynihan had a line, “Everybody’s entitled to their own opinion, but no one’s entitled to their own facts.” [01:29:00] Today, everybody can get their own facts, and that’s true not just about presidential campaigns, that’s true about governing. You know, it doesn’t matter how many truth boxes or whatever the newspapers establish; the fact of the matter is, is, you know, well, what did Neil Newhouse, who was Romney’s pollster, say? He said, “We don’t care about fact-checkers.” And you know, he shouldn’t have said it, but that was the truth. They didn’t care about fact checkers. So, the -- You know, I could go on about this, but that, that’s a huge change in politics. And the other big thing that’s changed is the competitive map has shrunk radically, you know? New England, despite Republican attempts to compete in that one congressional district in Maine which has its own electoral vote, has been pretty hopeless, [01:30:00] except under extreme circumstances. Pennsylvania, by varying margins, can be narrow or wide. Republicans always talk about they’re going to get it, and they never do. So, you -- you’re -- you know, you’re down to maybe 17 competitive states, and that’s where the resources, candidate time is put, and that’s why, for example, if you’re sitting in New York, you never see any of the ads. If you’re in Jersey, you can see them, South Jersey, because you’ll see Philadelphia ads because the Republicans always, at the end, try to make a feint for it. In 1960, Kennedy and, you know, the big news was that Nixon competed in some Southern states, which before that had been unattainable for Republicans, and he won some states that you know, Oklahoma, Kennedy got crushed, in part because he was a Catholic. But it was a much bigger map, and now, it’s a much smaller map.



Q: Well, [01:31:00] I'm an imperfect interviewer, so if there's anything I haven't asked about that is an important part of the story or an interesting part of the story, this is your chance to...

SHRUM: No. I mean, you know, listen: you look back, you know, when I got the letter from you, I thought, "Oh, Lord..." But you look back on it and you have regret about the end, especially because if not many people in Ohio had changed their minds, or more had voted, Kerry would have been president. And I also look back on a lot of it with pride. I mean, pride in Kerry. I mean, he was so disciplined in those dark days, in October, November, December, into early January, and yeah, I just wish we had won.

Q: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Shrum.

SHRUM: Bob.

Q: Bob.

SHRUM: Thank you. [01:32:00]

Q: Thank you for that, too.

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