



The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Joe Trippi

In 2004: Director, Howard Dean 2004 Presidential Campaign

Interviewer: Dr. Michael Nelson

Fulmer Professor of Political Science, Rhodes College

Fellow, SMU Center for Presidential History

October 14, 2013

Disclaimer:

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

Q: The Dean campaign, as I understand it, was the seventh presidential you'd worked in. Is that right?

TRIPPI: I think so. I -- let's see: Kennedy, Mondale, uh, Gary Hart in '87. Then ended up with Gephardt when Gary Hart got out of the race. That's four. I did a couple of brief -- I've pretty much stopped doing presidential after '88. But in '92, I did do a quick stint with Doug Wilder's potential campaign for president. He got out way before New Hampshire ever happened. And then, I helped a good friend -- Jerry Brown -- in the ninety-t-- in the rest of the '92 election -- enough to put a scare into the Clinton campaign in Connecticut and Colorado and New York. And then, I think that was it till Dean. So, Dean was probably six or seventh --

Q: Mm-hmm, reading about you --

TRIPPI: -- depending on how you count. (laughs)

Q: [00:01:00] Yeah. Reading about you, and reading the book you wrote, it seemed like there were things you picked up from other campaigns that turned out to be especially applicable to the Dean campaign. And I'm thinking, for example, you say at some point that Gary Hart's notion in '84 of finding someone in a town, and -- who could build a network for you was like throwing a pebble into a pond, and it ripples.

TRIPPI: Yeah, it -- yeah, it was a concentric-circle organizing, where you'd -- the way to imagine it is as you throw pond -- a pebble into a pond it ripples out. If you can find



one person, decentralize. Let that person organize and ripple out. And if you could do that nationally, or in -- across the count-- you know, various areas, it could be very powerful. I saw -- the first time I s-- heard that notion was from Gary Hart in the '87 campaign. [00:02:00] I saw it. I worked for Mondale in '84, against Hart.

And so, I saw it. I mean, it al-- it nearly defeated the Mondale campaign in '84. I was fortunate enough to run Iowa and Pennsylvania for Mondale. We won both those states. But I was always looking over my shoulder at the Hart campaign, because of the way it was organizing. So that influenced my thinking a lot, in terms of how to put the Dean campaign together in 2003, 2004.

Q: Could you talk about that? How it -- how it influenced...?

TRIPPI: Well, I -- it was Hart in Iowa, for instance, where he came in second to Mondale, would go into a town, find that small group or one person, and sort of leave them to their own devices about how to organize. In -- you know, in '87, or '84, when he was doing it to us in the Mondale campaign, it was effective. But it was -- it took him [00:03:00] going to the town because there was no internet. There was no way to sort of do that through what -- how we now take for granted, after the Obama campaign, or after the Dean campaign, too. And so it hit me that if you could -- given where the technology was at the time in 2003, that maybe there was a way to take that Hart had in two-thou-- in eighty-- that I saw firsthand in '84, and use the internet, and the way people could connect with each other, and the way we could have Howard Dean literally connect to one person in every town or multiple people, and unleash them, that it would be concentric circles on steroids if you will, with the -- with the internet. It turned out to work. I mean, it turned out to really be some-- I think, still premature. [00:04:00] It wasn't quite ready yet, as we found out. And by 2008, it was the way, now, every campaign tries to organize it. I mean, I think we s-- we were just three or four years ahead of where it really hit the sweet spot.

Q: What wasn't there in the Dean campaign that has come along since?

TRIPPI: Just about everything. (laughter) I mean, you know, people forget, in the Dean campaign, you know, there was no broadband. There was no video. You couldn't -- there was no YouTube. YouTube did not exist. You -- the will.i.am video that famously, really moved in the Obama campaign of 2007, 2008 -- that video could never have happened. A group like that, making that tape of his speech with music, and millions of Americans watching it, couldn't have happened. It was zero people on something called YouTube. [00:05:00] We had created Dean TV, which was, essentially, YouTube. And we had about two hundred thousand people on it, who -- you could tune in, go online, watch a video, rank it. I mean, it was literally YouTube.



Our only mistake was, we didn't take it to a bunch of VCs right after the campaign and get rich starting YouTube. But in terms of YouTube, there was no... Facebook was on two college campuses. It was just hopping off of Harvard at the time. There was no Twitter. The iPhone wasn't launched until 2007 -- was the first release of the iPhone. So, in a lot of ways, the Dean campaign was -- we were -- you know, I -- I'll take it -- look -- I tell people we were the Wright Brothers. You know, we were doing it with a rubber band and a propeller, and making it up as we went along. We were right about the direction everything was going -- pioneered a lot [00:06:00] of the techniques and things that happen today. But, you know, f-- the technology moved so fast that, three years later, there were hundreds -- a hundred -- a hundred million people on YouTube -- on a thing called YouTube -- per month. The -- I -- Facebook was hundreds of -- I mean, just millions and hundreds of millions of people on it. It was everywhere. You had the iPhone. You had all these things by 2008 that we didn't have. And one of the best stats I can remember was, the day the Dean campaign ended -- the day it ended, there were 1.4 million blogs in the world -- 1.4 million blogs in the world. We were the fir-- or the second -- Gary Hart beat us to launching the first presidential blog. But the Dean for America blog was the -- he had -- he was running in 2004. [00:07:00] People forget that. But we -- he -- by a week, he beat us to putting a blog up. We put the first presidential blog -- campaign -- second presidential-campaign blog up. By the day the Obama campaign started -- started -- there were seventy-seven million blogs in the world. So, you're -- that's how big and how fast, not just the technology, but the number of people using blogs and things like that to communicate -- that's how big and exponential that move was, in three years. So we were there at the 1.4 million-blog moment. Obama starts at the 77 million-blog moment. And there's a difference. I mean, there's a -- there -- that, that penetration really mattered. Carville used to say, "It's the economy, stupid." And hey, the economy is always going to play a point in the presidential politics. But I think, from the Dean campaign on, it was the network, stupid. The network's getting bigger every year. [00:08:00] More people are on it. And the tools on the network have grown much more powerful every year. So that, by 2016, 2020, just like the Obama campaign made the Dean campaign look like a little tiny blip, I imagine that there will be another campaign that we look -- will look back and think the Obama campaign was such a cute little primitive thing, by the time the network grows and the tools on the network -- the thing -- the power in people's hands, the tools that are in people's hands, to impact a presidential campaign and the -- and issues is going to



be much more powerful than they are today. We're just at the -- still at the very nascent beginning, I think.

Q: And you also mentioned, somewhere along the line, that when Jerry Brown ran in '92, his use of the 800 number and, and the hundred-dollar ceiling on don-- [00:09:00] I remember in a debate where Tom Brokaw was basically trying to get him to shut up, and he just was relentless about that. And then one other one other camp-- well, go ahead. Go ahead and speak on that.

TRIPPI: Well, no, that was one of the other -- you said, "campaigns --

Q: Yeah, yeah.

TRIPPI: -- that influenced you." And that -- in the '92 campaign, there was a guy named Joe Costello who worked with me -- who worked in the Brown campaign. The two of us came up with the idea of the 800 number at the same time. I mean, we were -- he was in the California office. I was at home in Washington. And we got all excited and started to try to figure out, how do you make that TV...? I've always had this thing: how do you make that damn box not a one-way mechanism? And back then, we didn't have the internet or anything. We did have phones. And we thought, well, maybe we could get people to interact with what we were doing on TV by calling in. And so, we used the 800 number. I think we raised about seven or eight hun-- \$8 million on -- um, [00:10:00] by people calling into Jerry Brown's number and contributing, using their credit cards. And we had the hundred-dollar limit, and it worked. I mean, it looked -- worked beyond our belief. And, as you pointed out, in the middle of the NBC debate, Jerry would just keep holding up the number after every question and going -- well, you know, "Let me answer your question on education. And, by the way, call eight hundred..." You know, and it worked. And it -- Brokaw, by -- there was a f-- a break somewhere in that -- I think a five-minute break in the middle of that debate. And Brokaw was calling every one of us -- I remember him calling a colleague -- uh, Mike Ford, who was helping Jerry Brown -- and begging him to get Jerry Brown to stop doing that in the second half of the debate. Well, that didn't work. Jerry kept doing it. But the 800 number did work. And, at that point, um -- that, again, was something that -- Gary Hart from '84 [00:11:00] experience, Jerry Brown from the '92 experience -- start to s-- you could start to see how all those things influenced the Dean campaign, in terms of the way we raised money online. We now had something -- not phones, but the internet. And, and the ci-- concentric-circles organizing that I'd seen firsthand fighting -- both fighting Hart in '84, and then working with him in '87. So, yeah, those are two that really stand out as campaigns that clearly influenced the Dean campaign. That's something people, I think, lose in



all this. Those -- there's three losing campaigns, right? I mean, the Mondale campaign didn't -- we won the nomination but we didn't win the presidents; we -- the Jerry Brown campaign, that many people probably don't even remember today; and the Dean campaign, were three losing campaigns. All of them are -- [00:12:00] in some way, I think, lead to the Obama campaign.

Q: Let me add one to that, which you also mentioned -- and that is John McCain's campaign for the Republican nomination in 2000, where I think he was the first to raise a substantial amount of money -- nothing like what you all did, but a substantial amount of money, on the internet. Is that right?

TRIPPI: No, yeah -- no, the, the first campaign that -- where I saw, you know -- we do the phone thing with Jerry Brown, and it's eight years later, in McCain's campaign -- and I wasn't involved in the 2000 campaign, but I'm watching it. And the McCain campaign are doing some really interesting things on the internet. That have a thing called a website, and people are -- and they're using -- and people are contributing to them online. And I was thinking, you know, this is gonna really be something. And that -- and so, the McCain campaign, actually, also ends up having an influence on the Obama campaign. I mean, [00:13:00] whether anybody in those -- these future campaigns realize that, I doubt it. I'm not -- and no one should take credit. I'm just saying -- that's not what I'm s-- talking about. But these -- you know, peop-- "Oh, you know, that campaign lost." Most of the campaigns out there are influencing the future politics of the country, whether on issues, like the Dean campaign leading the fight in the Democratic Party against the war... You know, by 2008, it's one of the critical things that cost -- I think, that ends up making Obama win the nomination over Hillary. Hillary had been for it. Obama had been against the war. That impulse within the party, first really engaged by Dean in the 2004 campaign, when you have Kerry, Edwards, and Gephardt all frontrunners before we became the frontrunner. But those were the three everybody thought were gonna be the nominee. [00:14:00] All three of them had been for the war. Dean was the only viable -- candidate who became viable, who was against the war. But that organizing that we did -- that decentralization, and all those pebbles were still out there -- And Obama picked a lot of them up. And I think that was part of the difference between him and Hillary. So, you get to -- you know, it's not just the organizing, but where issues are going, and things like that, really can... A losing campaign, in the end, can help the party win, over the long haul.

Q: The war became the theme of the Dean campaign, but when he first decided to run for president, what motivated him?



TRIPPI: He was a doctor who, as governor of Vermont, had done a lot of innovative things on healthcare [00:15:00] and was very deeply energized by providing national -- moving the country towards a national healthcare answer, solution. And I think that was the prime reason for his -- I mean, that was the impetus behind his initial looking at running, and his desire to run.

Q: He -- I mean, there's a sense in which he was going with the recent flow, because most of the presidents elected in the years up to him were governors, and there were no other governors in the field. But he was from a very small state, did not have a... What made him think that he had a shot, or did he think he had a shot (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

TRIPPI: I don't think he had a shot. I don't think -- I don't think that was the -- I don't think it was... I mean, did he understand that it was a long shot? Yes. I don't think there was, like, a, [00:16:00] you know, "I'm gonna get in. I'm gonna become a frontrunner. I'm gonna..." You know, "I'm gonna have a shot at the nomination." I don't think that's -- I think he got in because he thought there was an issue like national healthcare that he wanted to push to the fore. And, hey, you know, "Let's give it a shot, and let's see what we can do here." But, you know, to be honest with you, I came relatively late into his. I mean, I was -- I joined him well after he had decided to run, so I'm not -- when I joined the campaign, or when I first really saw him as a presidential candidate, he was out there talking about healthcare. Like, all that was his lead comment, that -- you know, the -- if you listen to any of his stump speeches back then, they all were about it -- being a doctor and unders-- you know, and the country needed healthcare, and... [00:17:00] And I think, you know, it was for single-payer healthcare, if I remember right. But I'd have to go back, and it's been a while (laughs) unfortunately.

Q: When did you first either see him and form an impression of him, or meet him, or maybe both?

TRIPPI: Well, my firm, Trippi McMahon & Squier, had been always doing his races for governor -- his television ads and things like that. I hadn't really worked on his campaign. And one of my other partners had done that. I had been working on John Kitzhaber for governor of Oregon, and, uh, Ron Wyden for senator of Oregon, and other, uh, uh, campaigns out there. Um, you know, we had three partners, and one worked on this one, and one worked on that one. And Steve McMahon was the -- worked on the Dean campaigns for governor. So, I really didn't know him -- I mean, I knew him. I'd see him in our office [00:18:00] every once in a while making phone calls and things. But I really wasn't a player in the Dean campaigns for governor at all. And he -- and the last thing I wanted to do after the '92 -- after bailing out of



presidential politics post-'88, playing a little bit of a role with Wilder and Brown in '92, and had successfully stayed out of the '96 and 2000 campaigns -- the last thing on earth I wanted to do was to get tangled up in another presidential campaign. And so, Steve would call me up all the time, while I was on the road doing a campaign, in probably 2002, 2003, "Hey, H--" Uh, 2002, "Hey, my guy Howard's gonna run for president." I'd go, "Great, good for him. (laughter) More power to you." And he'd keep calling me up [00:19:00] and saying, "Hey, Howard's gonna go." And I'd keep going like, "Great, good for you. Good for him. Wonderful." And I had no interest at all in doing another one of those things. They are the greatest experience you'll ever have in your life, and the worst experience you have ever had in your life. You get done at the end of them, and you think -- say, "Thank God that I had that experience, but please, God, don't ever let me do that again." And that's just the way it is. That's -- most people do not do more than two or th-- you know, that I know of, I'm the only crazy man out there that I know of is -- that worked in as many of them as I have. And I didn't want to do it. And they called me up one day and said, "OK, he's gonna be giving a speech at the winter meeting of the DNC." And I was like, "Um, uh..." [00:20:00] And, you know, like, "Joe, all you've got to do is just come over and watch the speech. He's a client of the firm. You know, you can come over, watch it, you know, tell -- say -- you know, tell him what you think, and leave." I mean, "You are a guy who's run Iowa, you know, for Mondale, and won it. Worked for Dick Gephardt when we -- and made the -- or came up with the idea for the Hyundai ad that won Iowa for Mon-- for Gephardt in '88. You know these places. You've been in presidential campaigns. It -- we've got a guy running for president. It would be good for you to show up." So, I got in my car and went over there.

Q: This was in Washington, and you were --

TRIPPI: In Washington, DC. It was like I had to roll out of bed. (laughter) It was, like, pretty easy. All I had to do was get up, go over there, and I was like, "Yeah, OK, fine. But I'm not doing another presidential campaign." And so, he [00:21:00] -- I remember they told me to come over to his hotel room, and the -- you know, the ball-- the sp-- the speech was downstairs in the ballroom. "Come to his hotel room at 10:45." Got there. He was -- the speech was at 11:15. And I get there and he comes walking into the room, and looks at everybody -- you know, his team -- and says, "So, what should I say?" And I'm like, thinking, "What should y--?" You know, "What should you say?" I mean, everybody el-- this is the meeting in which Bill Clinton launched his 1992 candidacy. Everybody else has been practicing in front of Teleprompters or in front of mirrors for a month for thi-- for what they're going to say downstairs. And this guy is



walking in there doing, "What am I gonna say?" And I was like, "Oh, no." But I didn't -
- I mean, I was sitting there "No big deal. That's great." And one of the staffers said,
[00:22:00] "Well, you know, you do your healthcare thing. You're a doctor." And I just
looked at these guy-- I looked at him and said, "Look, the guy who..." I don't know
how I can do this on tape. It's a lot of expletive bull-- deleted, but --

Q: (laughs) Go ahead.

TRIPPI: -- is that good? Well, he -- I go -- I said, "Look, the guy who's gonna blow the roof off
downstairs is the guy that walks down, takes that podium by both sides with
everything he's got, looks out at that crowd, and says, "What the fuck has happened
to the Democratic Party? Why the fuck are we supporting George Bush's war in
Iraq?" And I'll never forget this. For a long time, Howard looked at me -- looked up --
the whole room kind of like gasped. And Howard looked up at me and said, "I can't
say, 'What the fuck happened to the Democratic Party.'" And I'm like, "I didn't mean
literally. (laughter) I mean figuratively." This was like -- it was -- this was literally one
of my first real interactions with him. [00:23:00] So he took an envelope out of his
pocket, and a pen, and he put a star, and said, "What's a better question?" And we,
collectively, the whole room, came up with, "What I want to know is, why -- you
know, what's happened to the Democratic Party? What I want to know is, why are we
supporting George Bush's unilateral war in Iraq? What I want to know is, why are we
standing by and not taking, you know, some -- fighting for single-payer healthcare?"
The -- what are -- I can't remember exactly, you know? And, "I'm here to represent
the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party." And he's writing these little notes --
little dots and notes. And, you know, we're both on the -- literally on the floor of the
hotel room with a -- on the coffee table, you know, on our knees, and he's writing
these notes as we're cooking up these questions in the speech. And he walked
downstairs on, [00:24:00] like, five-minutes' notice at that point. Walked downstairs,
grabbed both sides of that podium with everything he had, and bellowed out, "What
I want to know is, what is -- what's happened to the Democratic..." Just bellowed it
out, and the roof came off that place. I mean, it just shook. I remember Kerry and
Edwards and Gephardt all on stage, looking at each other, like, literally with, like,
"Who the -- what the hell is this?" because the He had just blown the doors off the
room. And, I don't know. He came off the stage and it was like the -- you know, we
were both looking at each -- it was like a shotgun marriage in a lot of ways, or love at
first sight, or whatever you want to call it. But that's how we... And then, from that
point on, the problem was, I'd get sort of like, "Do you -- I want you to come up and
run the campaign." And I'd be like, "I'm not doing that." And so, it was a lot of -- it



was a slow -- [00:25:00] it probably took another month before I ended up up in Burlington, and didn't avoid the 2004 presidential campaign, which I was dead set on trying to do, but failed at it.

Q: Well, we will pick up the narrative there in a little bit. But I wonder -- he forms his exploratory committee back in May of '02, when the war in Iraq was still way on the horizon and publicly was not being debated extensively.

TRIPPI: Right.

Q: He gives a speech at the DNC in February of '03, which is a month before the war begins. It's clear it's gonna happen. When, in that year -- do you know, when did he become focused on the war as an issue?

TRIPPI: I really don't know. I mean, my first -- like I said, my first interaction was right before that. [00:26:00] Probably the February meeting, because I think that was where he gave -- we gave that speech.

Q: Was it before the February -- and before the February DNC meeting?

TRIPPI: Was it DNC?

Q: -- or did it begin then?

TRIPPI: It had to be before... It probably was at the D-- I mean, it -- I don't know where he, personally -- but he was against it, I remember that from the -- you know, from our meetings. But I'm just say-- I mean, from that meeting. It wasn't like I was saying, "Why are we f-- against this war?" and he was, like, "I'm for the war." You know, he was -- no, he was against the war. That was in parallel with what he believed. I just don't know when that bel-- when that kicked in, you know, whether it was months before, or a year -- you know, I mean, all -- from the very beginning, or whatever.

Q: But, meanwhile, when the vote to authorize the use of force occurred -- in Iraq, occurred in, I guess, October of '02, Kerry was voting for it. Lieberman was voting for it.

TRIPPI: Right.

Q: Gephardt was voting for it. In other words, there was an opening [00:27:00] there among the prospective candidates for the nomination, for somebody who could come in afterward and say this was a huge mistake. In other words, was this, in part, driven by Dean's sensing a great issue there, that was waiting to be captured by somebody?

TRIPPI: No way.

Q: OK.

TRIPPI: There was like -- the -- there was -- no polling on the planet would indicate that you should have been against that war. It was something like 80% of the American people were for it, 20% were against it. There was -- I'm not saying it -- that any of the other



candidates -- Kerry, Edwards, Gephardt -- were all for it because of polling. But I'm just saying that there was no political reason at all for taking that position, or any indications of it. It was a -- [00:28:00] the -- just point -- you know, just a slam-dunk loser to take that position at the time.

Q: Even in the Democratic primaries?

TRIPPI: Yeah. I mean, in the Democratic primary, obviously, it was a closer call than that. But you wouldn't have -- uh, you know, again, you've got to remember the vast experience that the -- or, the like -- the only point that people could look back on -- and I think this did influence a lot of the reason people voted for that war -- was, a lot of Democrats -- in fact, almost all Democrats -- had voted against the first Gulf War. And it -- as we all know, it was over in a matter of days. A huge -- uh, viewed by the nation as a m-- huge success. And most of those Democrats feel like they [00:29:00] looked -- politically, became very vulnerable, and looked like they didn't know what the hell they were doing, because they had voted against that war. So, now, you've got another Gulf War, another Bush saying we're gonna go to war. And I think all of them, or most of them had been in office in 1991 said to themselves, "I'm not gonna make that mistake again." And so, the actual impulse within the party, and within officeholders on both sides -- I'm not talking about just Democrats -- was, "We've had a successful Gulf War. We -- you know, this guy's got weapons of mass destruction, and that's what intelligence is saying." You know, all -- and got caught up in that, and said, "I'm not gonna..." You know, "I'm not gonna get caught on the wrong side of that again." And so, this -- they believed the intell-- I mean, they -- the -- because of the experience of the first one, [00:30:00] everything leaned -- everybody was leaning into the second one, whether for political reasons or because, just policy-wise, they thought they'd learned a lesson and that it would be another short one, etc. And so, the most dangerous position you could take, even if it was a... I mean, think about this. Even if there was a primary -- I mean, in -- within the primaries, a large constituency in the Democratic Party that was against the war, well, that -- we'd seen that before. In 1991, almost all grassroots Democrats were against that first Gulf War. Guess where they all were five days after the war? Everybody in the country, all of a sudden, "Well, you know, I was for it." Well, except for the guys that had voted against it, who were in the Senate or, or in Congress... So, the most dangerous place you could be, probably -- the most courageous place you could be [00:31:00] would be to be against that war, given where the nation was already. Again, the nation -- one of the reasons I think the nation was 80% for it, 20% against, was because of the success of Gulf War I. It influenced a lot of people -- the American people's thinking



about Gulf War II, and a lot of our leaders. And so, you -- there -- you could have taken the position he took, which was against it, before it even started. Al Gore took that position. He wrote a -- we -- it actually influenced me quite a bit. He had written or given a speech on what was wrong with the doctrine of preventive war, and I had read it. I remember sending Dean a copy of it, right after we met -- right after he had given that speech at the DNC. I sent him a copy of Gore's speech and said, "You need to read this." I mean, it [00:32:00] really lays out a lot of the issues of what's, what's wrong with this thing. And he... "Preemptive war" was the doctrine, I think. And he read it, and, you know, we made that a major point of our campaign. And then, as the war didn't -- you know, it happened, and it wasn't quite over in 14 days, and it wasn't the same experience that the country had had in the first one, I think it started to grow. I mean, the voices against the war started to grow, and we -- that, along with a lot of other things. He -- Har-- uh, Dean had signed the first civil-unions law for gays in the... And -- which was a huge, controversial thing. People thought we were -- that that, on its face, was a -- [00:33:00] made you, you know, not a viable general-election candidate. So, you -- you know, look, you can't, years later, not even 10 years later -- roughly 10 years later, gay marriage is, in multiple states, legal. You know, so all these things were things that we were -- really, that campaign was leading the country in -- you know, on a number of issues that were highly controversial, that most people thought, you know, the combination of them, or even one of them -- those positions would be enough to make you -- to disqualify you in the ability to carry the -- a campaign, you know, out of the batter's box, let alone to first or second base, or to become the frontrunner. So, I mean, that's a -- [00:34:00] there were quite a few of those. We were really, I think, a courageous campaign that was leading on a lot of important issues, and, if you look around today, won on a lot of them. I mean, the campaign didn't win, but I think that a lot of the reason the country is where it's at today is because of the voice of that campaign, and Howard Dean, and what the staff did.

Q: Talk about joining the campaign -- how that came about, and was there an internet presence worth talking about when you did? Was Dean interested in that as an innovation?

TRIPPI: Yeah, I mean, I joined the campaign, and it was -- people just have no -- it -- today, everything that -- is, like, so simple. And I remember I joined the campaign and [00:35:00] everything that... Like, the best example I can give you is, I wanted to put a link on our website to Meetup.com, the -- which was the site we used to organize the concentric-circle campaign. And the campaign manager at the time, Rick Ritter,



wanted to check with the campaign attorneys to see whether it was legal or not to put a link to a website on our website. It took two weeks of, every day, fighting with the attorneys. They believed that Meetup.com would be an in-kind contribution. In other words, if I linked to Meetup.com [00:36:00] and said, "Hey, people who support us, go there. Have meetings," that that would be a service that Meetup.com was providing to the campaign for free, which would be an in-kind contribution. And I'm like, "You've got to be kidding me. This is a link." You know, it's, like, Internet 101. You -- everybody links to -- you know, you link to the people who blog about you. You link to this cool website. You link to this picture. That's what you do. You can't -- it -- and it took me two weeks to get just a link on our website to Meetup.com. Everything was a huge battle, not because people were trying to maliciously stop everything, but because it had never been done before. No one had ever tried it. The rules and the regulations were not written for the internet age. The other -- one of the great ones was, the Federal Election Commission [00:37:00] required that all donations -- all contributions -- be reported on paper. So, what was that for? Well, that was for a period -- a time when you mailed a check to me; I took the check out of an envelope; we wrote, you know, "Joe Trippi gave \$500. His address is..." Into a thing, because we -- you -- you're only getting, like, maybe five hundred checks in the last week, maybe a thousand checks in the last week. Well, no one -- the FEC, when they wrote that reg, never envisioned a day or a time when a campaign -- and Howard Dean's would be one -- would get one hundred and fifty-nine thousand donations in the last 24 hours or 48 hours of the filing period, all electronically, on the internet, using their credit cards. [00:38:00] So, how do you possibly make that regul-- I mean, how do you not violate that regulation? And w-- if you'll go back -- you know, people look -- we had those pictures of -- we picked the two smallest women in the campaign. And we'd get a huge dolly with -- and we'd print the thing up, and we'd have them rolling them into the FEC office, right? So, you -- the -- and the press would cover it, like, the amazing Dean campaign with its report, which was how we, at least, used the ridiculous reg to at least create, you know, some PR, some press. But it was insane. So, what -- the whole thing with --in the first, early weeks, and early month of that campaign, was literally fighting every day -- not your opponent -- not John Kerry, not Dick Gephardt, but just the stasis of the way [00:39:00] things had always been done before. And in the early day-- stages, I was -- you kn-- at -- the only person who, like -- I'd walk into the room, they'd all think, you know, I wanted to do a link to a website, and I'm the crazy guy, right? You know, I mean, I'm the one, you know, with law-- you know, trying to, like, explain why -- how... Today, it's the guy



who's saying don't put a link up on your website who would be seen as the crazy guy, right? The -- everybody else would be looking at him like, "Are you out of your mind? Of course." But back then, it was this strange, upside-down -- from -- to me, it was an upside-down world. So...

Q: Well, I wonder, too -- I mean, in addition to the lawyers' lawyerly concerns, was there a sense of, if you link up to Meetup.com, then you're sort of ceding a certain amount of control, because things will be done [00:40:00] through the Dean website, linking to that, and that'll somehow come back and reflect --

TRIPPI: Well, no --

Q: -- adversely?

TRIPPI: -- not inside our cam-- Howard got the internet. No, he w-- he was not one of the guys saying don't do that, or don't -- you know, telling the lawyer... I mean, he would tell the lawyers, "Find a way to do it." You know, he wasn't, uh -- by st-- he still wanted to make sure everything was legal and OK. I mean, that wasn't -- you know, it wasn't -- un-careful about it. But he was not -- he -- Howard always got what we were trying to do, and was enthusiastic about it. I don't mean that. But the other mechanism -- the Federal Election Commission -- the FEC lawyers who -- the -- every campaign's got to have them. And who did a great job, but just had -- they -- you're trying to do this newfangled thing, and they'd never heard of it before. But the other campaigns -- which was good for us -- [00:41:00] thought that it was ceding control. They did not want to do that. And, in fact, that -- I think that's wh-- frankly, again, another one of the reasons Hillary Clinton lost in 2008. They had this impulse to not turn over that -- any control over to anybody -- to not decentralize. The Obama campaign found -- one, had better tools than we did. But they got it. And they -- and all -- frankly, a lot of them were -- Joe Rospars and others were people who worked on the Dean campaign. The Clinton campaign had no one that I know of from the Dean campaign.

Q: When --

TRIPPI: So...

Q: -- when, when you s-- put in the link to Meetup.com, what was going on, on Meetup.com, already, as far as the Dean camp (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

TRIPPI: Uh, no, there wasn't much going on with Meetup.com. Jerome Armstrong, who had been a blogger for MyDD, which was a very influential -- for me -- to me, there were a couple of blogs. [00:42:00] His was one that I had been reading quite a bit. And we got into a huge fight. I can't remember. I had said something about a state, commenting on something he had blogged about, and he ended up blogging that I was an idiot and



didn't know what I was talking about, and that's not how Iowa worked, or something. And I can't remember. But we got into this fight. I often say he was the first guy to -- when any blogger today, calls me an idiot, I go, "Get in line. Jerome Armstrong was the first." But he had mentioned... Finally, we had -- because we had been commenting back and forth on his blog, he f-- one day, mentioned, "Hey, Joe, you should check out... I know we don't agree on a lot of stuff, but I respect you. You should check out this site -- Meetup.com. I think it might be really cool, if you ever -- [00:43:00] if you end up doing anything." Because I'd -- by then, people were starting to get that I was helping Dean. And so, I went to the site, checked it out, and it was, like, oh, man, this is -- I mean, that -- now I'm thinking Gary Hart, concentric circles, you know, the whole thing. This is it. It -- thanks, Jerome. You're a genius. And as soon as I got -- the first thing I wanted to do -- the very first thing I wanted to do the day I sign-- you know, s-- went up to Burlington, was get -- let's get Meetup.com going. And as soon as we did, it was like wildfire. I mean, we had something like a thousand -- over a thousand meetups happening nationwide, hundreds of people attending them. I mean, we went to -- we would come up with the idea of let's just surprise one of them by having Howard show up, knowing that those people would all be screaming on Meetup.com that Howard just showed up at the [00:44:00] New York one. And we didn't tell them we were coming, because we wanted that energy there, that... People started -- and we'd stop them -- from that point on, we'd stop -- we'd plan on when's the next meetup, and we would just show up at, you know, where -- we were in Indiana that day, we'd go to a meetup in Indiana. Wherever we were on the road that day, we would go to a -- we would stop in at a meetup. And so, people started to get the notion, "Hey, if I show up, who knows? Even Howard might show up." I'd go. I mean, diff-- so, we kind of built the whole thing. They built it, but then we would -- we learned how to -- you know, how to sort of engage people and get them to realize the campaign was -- you know, took meetups seriously. We'd do things like, I would do a conference call into every meetup, so there was -- you'd have [00:45:00] somebody with a speakerphone or a phone with a mic to it, because -- you know, or however they could figure out how to wire us in, or a landline and they'd call into a conference-call number and I'd call in. And we'd have, every meetup, give them a report on the campaign, or Howard would call in. And so, we just -- the meetup phenomenon became -- I mean, they had just launched, I think, maybe six months, a year before us.

Q: How did Meetup work? Because I'm not sure everybody today will remember that.



TRIPPI: Oh, it's huge out there today. My mom goes to an over-50 meetup, and I go -- I'm like, "Mom, I..." You know, she emailed me saying, "Hey, I just went to this over-50 meetup." And I was like... She goes, "It's really interesting. It's really fun." And I was like, "Mom, you know I kind of had something to do with, you know, helping Meetup get going." "No, I didn't." [00:46:00] Where was she? (laughs) Anyway, the -- it -- basically, you put in your zip code and whatever you're interested in -- knitting, or Howard Dean -- and it would tell you that there was a meetup happening -- a meeting at a -- usually at a -- some kind of public building. Not necessarily a public government building, but -- I mean, like the library -- but it could be a community center, it could be a bar. We had -- we restricted it to not -- try to make it not be bars, but it's -- or, you know, because of young people and stuff. But it was -- it's just the way the site was set up. And you'd come, and you -- there'd be all these other people who had signed up that way too. And you'd have your first meeting, and then you'd have another one [00:47:00] each week or month. And what was interesting is, I had read James MacGregor Burns's book on leadership, in which one of the -- you know, he talks about transactional leadership -- which I, frankly, think we've got way too much of in politics right now. I mean, that's -- basically, both parties are really good at transactional pol-- leadership: "I'll give you a tax cut for your vote"; "I'll give you -- I'll do this deal"; "How about free tuition, tax credits for your vote?"; whatever. And most of the problems we've got today can't -- you can't do a transaction to get out of it. You're not going to transact your way out of the debt. But he -- one of the reasons -- one of the (inaudible) he said you recognize transformational leadership is when somebody who did not know they were going to be a leader yesterday show up and take and take leaderships -- to become leaders. Well, Meetup -- [00:48:00] one of the things I recognized after the very first meetups were, we were creating -- we were transformational leadership. Why? Because a hundred people showed up at this meetup for Dean, and somebody had to go up to the front of that room who did not know, before they showed up at that meeting, that they were going to become the leader of the Dean movement in that community, or at that meeting, and then go on. And we had thou-- we were doing a thousand of these meetings a week, and every one of them, somebody -- we didn't designate anybody. They all came to the room. They all were for Howard Dean. They all wanted to help him. And somebody had to go up there and say, "Come to order. What are we doing to talk about? What do we want to do for Howard?" And then, that person, generally, went on to lead the campaign in that area. So, it was a pretty amazing thing. In fact, a lot of those people [00:49:00] -- those meetup leaders became people -- politically active people who



work today, whether it be for Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton or another candidacy, or a congressional candidate. Some of them, I'm sure, are running for office today. So, it's -- it was a -- Meetup.com, I think, was a really important ingredient in the campaign. And I think became kind of a forbearer of how you can organize in the future, too. I mean, how you -- one of the big issues was, how do you take all these people sitting at home in the pajamas -- as the other campaigns used to... You know, "They're in their pajamas talking about Howard Dean. Great." How do you get them from, you know, sitting in front of their screen, out into the real world, doing something -- knocking on a door or talking to their friends. What the other campaigns didn't realize was, [00:50:00] no, they were talking to their friends online. But, yeah, Meetup moved it off online into the community, into the neighborhoods. So, that was pretty important.

Q: Then another really innovative use of the internet by the Dean campaign was in raising money -- in fact, raising more money than any other candidate was. And, I guess, in the fourth quarter of '03, raising more money than any other candidate ever had. Is that right?

TRIPPI: Yeah. Yeah, we -- Bill Clinton had set the record of \$10 million in a quarter. Now, gosh, does that seem so ridiculous or what, with what Obama's been able to do? But he had set the record at \$10 million -- raised \$10 million in a quarter. And he did not set that record in 1992. He set that record in 1996, running for reelection against Dole. So, he's a sitting president of the United States [00:51:00] -- raised \$10 million in a quarter. And that was -- I mean, that was, like, the most money anybody had ever -- in the Democratic Party at least, had ever raised in a quarter. And we -- I think it was June of 2003 -- so I think it was the second quarter -- but somewhere in there we --

Q: It was the second quarter.

TRIPPI: Yeah, we blew through it in seven days. It was the last seven days of the quarter that really kicked it in, and we raised \$15 million that quarter. So we -- I mean, we just blew through Bill Clinton's record. And we, by that -- at that point, frankly, were somebody that most people had never heard... He -- no -- most people heard about Howard Dean at -- because of that quarter. I mean, because of what happened, the exc-- no one could believe that this nascent internet-campaign guy [00:52:00] had blown out Bill Clinton's record in June of 2007. That's when ABC and CBS and CNN and the *LA Times*, and the *New York Times*, and everybody went, "Something big is happening here." And, of course, that fueled more people saying, "What's that?" and "Let's go check it out" and "Let's give him money." And that -- and then we were off



to the races. In fact, the -- probably one of the biggest moments of the campaign, at that point, was the Sunday before that quarter -- seven days before that quarter was - or so, before that ended, was the Sunday that Howard Dean went on *Meet the Press* with Russert. And by all accounts, blew it. I mean, by all -- I mean, if you go back and look at all the rep-- [00:53:00] the mainstream media reviews of that, just thought he had, you know, stuck his foot in his mouth 10 times, and had blown the interview. And they, literally -- everybody in the press was writing us off the next day. Monday morning, you couldn't pick up a paper without Howard Dean, you know -- who is this guy?

Q: Not -- yeah, not ready for prime time.

TRIPPI: Not ready for prime time. And I had, the day before, thought that could happen. I mean, that I wanted some protective... That, look, we're either -- what I wanted to set up for was, he hits a homerun out of that. I mean, everybody says it was an amazing interview. So, why don't we, for the first time, really send out an email saying -- so that it would arrive Sunday morning, and say, "Now, more than ever, we need to give -- we need you to give us money. We need your help." [00:54:00] And instead of it playing off this homerun interview, we're getting trashed everywhere, but one hundred and fifty-nine thousand people had just gotten an email. Most of them probably didn't watch the interview. Got an email saying, "Right now, more than ever, we need your help. Send us money. We're getting towards the end of the quarter here." And that day, the Sunday, happened -- turned out to be the biggest number of contributions and the largest amount of contributions that we'd ever received in the entire campaign. So, Monday, while the press is saying he's a has-been, he's gone, I'm releasing numbers saying we just had -- are you crazy? This is the big difference between you elite guys who think you know everything and the American people. They just gave us more -- you think we're done. They're giving us more money than we've ever gotten in the entire campaign, which then started the -- [00:55:00] that last week really strong. And we had another bunch of things planned out and we ended up breaking Bill Clinton's record that quarter.

Q: Substantively, was he ready for prime time? Was he ready to address the issues that he would have to as president?

TRIPPI: Well, Howard -- yes, but Howard was a different kind of candidate. I mean, you know, everybody you've seen -- like, John McCain is another one -- I mean, he's sort of got a maverick, tells-it-like-it-is... You know, I -- McCain has changed over the years, I think, and lost some of that -- I mean, in terms of the way people think of or look at him. But that early McCain, where, you know, he would tell it like it is -- well, guess what?



You're gonna get a guy who doesn't -- you know, isn't watching every word, isn't being extremely careful and cautious about everything he says. It's part of the reason they like them. But, yeah, you're gonna get in tr-- [00:56:00] you're also gonna get into trouble. But Howard was a -- I mean, that's what he was. He didn't watch every - - he didn't watch every single word he said. I think people find that, you know, refreshing. But -- and it made him different than the rest of the candidates. It also made us -- yeah, he's gonna gaffe. I mean, that's just the -- you know, you can't have one without the other. You can't have, sort of, a spontaneous candidate who's going to tell you what he's really thinking, and not -- you know, and not have what the world thinks is a mistake. He -- I remember once he went out and -- early on -- I'll never forget it (laughs) -- he went out and said that if Bill Clinton can become America's first black president -- because, by then, it was well-known that the African-American community [00:57:00] viewed Bill Clinton as the first African-American president. I mean, they -- people said that in the press, even major (inaudible). So, my guy goes out one day and says, "If Bill Clinton can become the nation's first black president, I want to be America's first gay president." And I'm like, "Whoa, Howard, we -- you can never..." You know, and he meant it. I don't -- I mean, he meant that he had signed the first civil-unions law, that he wanted gays to have the same rights as everybody else. But I think most TV networks would have run that tape over and over again, and showed you what a -- how incapable this man was of being president of the United States. Well, was it? I don't... Well, maybe for those -- for 10 years ago, yeah. But 2013? I don't know. But he -- that's where he was. I mean, he was a guy who [00:58:00] said what he really thought, until somebody like me grabbed him and said -- explained to him why he shouldn't say he wanted to be America's first gay president. So, after four weeks of slipping up and saying that, he would stop. But, I mean, what is that? I don't -- that's what I'm saying. I think it was -- part of it, too -- what people really don't realize, I think, about the -- just the amazing -- how amazingly capable he really was, was, essentially, that was the first time he'd ever run for anything. I mean, look, it's Vermont. I mean, let's, like, face real-- The governor picks him to be his lieutenant governor. So, he's running with an incumbent governor for lieutenant governor. He becomes lieutenant governor. The governor dies while he's cleaning his pool one day, because he had a heart attack. Our lieutenant governor [00:59:00] becomes a governor. The governor of Vermont -- not a place where Republicans tend to do very well. When he runs for reel-- for election in his own right, he doesn't have much of a fight to be the governor of Vermont. I mean, I'm not saying he never had a campaign. I'm just saying, come on. I mean, we're not



talking about a, you know, massive, bloody political battle. So, in a lot of ways, Howard Dean decides, at his first campaign -- I mean, real dogfight political campaign -- is not for city clerk, not for city council, not for mayor, not for governor of Vermont. It really isn't. His first contested race for anything in his life, really, is president of the United States. So, does he make some mistakes that the guy running for Congress in the tough fight for the first time would make? Sure, [01:00:00] of course. But that -- I mean, that's... You know, but was he great governor? He was a great governor. They guy could have -- I think would have done a good job at running the country. I'm just saying that the two don't necessarily mesh -- that a candidate who makes mistakes on the stump wasn't going to -- isn't going to be a good president. He really was -- the lights were on, the cameras were rolling all the time, really for the first time ever. It's not -- you know, it's not even like being governor of New York, I mean, where you've got the New York City media on you all the time -- I mean, Andrew Cuomo. It's Vermont. I mean, it's real. He really ran the state. But it's a totally different environment. And then, all of a sudden, you're out there, and you've got... I mean, we were on -- we had a 737 with the entire press corps flying behind us. That -- first of all, that's crazy enough. I've done it with Gephardt, [01:01:00] when we went from winning Iowa to the 737. That change is a -- and that amount of focus on you is crazy enough for somebody who's been like a Joe Biden, to somebody who's been, you know, in it quite a bit, because of their career course. Howard had never been in anything like that before. And, frankly, most of the people in the campaign had never been on a (inaudible). I was the only person in the campaign who'd ever sort of been in that environment, and knew how, you know, crazy it could be. But, for him, I think, he was -- he showed amazing ability to handle it. That doesn't mean he didn't make mistakes. It doesn't mean he didn't gaffe. Obviously, he did from time to time. But it's kind of like, I don't know how -- he was going to learn by doing. You're not gonna -- there's nothing that prepares you for that, other than [01:02:00] being -- having it thrown at you. And, yeah, it can -- and that's one of the reasons, by the way, when you're done with one you never want to do another one, because the amount of pressure... When that thing come off you, it's like the entire -- it's like you've been carrying the entire weight of a building on your shoulders. And when it's off, you never want to put that back on you.

Q: What was his --

TRIPPI: A staff position, I mean.

Q: As 2003 unfolded, with the volunteers signing up and meeting up with the money coming in, what's the strategy for translating that into winning the Democratic



nomination with, you know, the usual process there of Iowa and New Hampshire and Super Tuesday and all of that stuff? How did you translate this mass phenomenon, which was unprecedented in its scale and character, into a strategy for... [01:03:00] How did he think he was going to -- or how did you think he was going to win the nomination?

TRIPPI: Well, we were ahead in Iowa, and had a -- you know, you have 99 counties in Iowa, you have county coordinators in all of them. You have, you know, offices in every congressional district. I mean, all the -- I mean, I had won Iowa for Mondale in '84. I had been the state director, and had run it. And I'd worked in Iowa in 1980 for Kennedy, Gephardt in '88 when we won. So, you know, at that point, I'd been in Iowa three times, lost it against the sitting president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, versus Kennedy, and win it -- been either running the state or -- with Mondale, or with Gephardt as one of the strategists there. So, we had Iowa, organizationally, pretty much in hand. And our numbers there were up by 10 or 15 points, [01:04:00] in our own polling and in most of the polls that were out there.

Q: This was when?

TRIPPI: The summer of 2007, and the fall of 2007.

Q: Oh-three.

TRIPPI: Two thousand three -- yeah, I'm sorry. I'm getting my presidential years screwed up. Yeah, 2003. We were, I think, ahead in New Hampshire. We were ahead -- you know, we were ahead nationally -- went into the lead in September or October. You know, people forget now, Kerry was the huge frontrunner. I mean, the *New York Times* had written -- Nagourney at the *New York Times* had written, like, why do we even have to -- we can just -- why do we even have to go through this primary process, because we all know John Kerry is going to be the nominee? Turned out to be true, but it wasn't -- it wasn't that prescient a piece. We were like a midget in that race. They had -- you'd go to the DNC meetings where they have all the managers of the [01:05:00] different campaigns to go over rules for debates and stuff, and there was a big-kids' table -- I'm not making this up. There was a big-kids' table. The campaign managers for Kerry, Edwards, Gephardt, Lieberman -- I mean, just the big-kids' table. And then, there'd be this little-kids' table over to the side, which was Carol Moseley Braun's manager, Dennis Kucinich's manager, Howard Dean's manager. And we'd -- you know, and Graham, I think.

Q: And Al Sharpton.

TRIPPI: Yeah, that's (inaudible). There were, like, five of us sitting over here, and four or five sitting over there. And whatever they wanted -- if they said, "Well, we -- the debate



will last this long,” we’d be going, “No, no, it should be longer.” It didn’t matter. We’d -- just, like, “Yeah, yeah, you kids shut up.” So, like, we were -- we were like a complete, like, nothing, in terms of how we were treated, or what people thought, or what the press thought of us, until... And grew to, like I said, be first in Iowa, first in New Hampshire, first nationally. [01:06:00] Campaign offices in South Carolina, Washington State. I mean, we were way out... Mostly -- the other thing is, we had a lot more resources than any of the other campaigns, so we were able to open up field offices in states like Washington and South Carolina, well before Kerry even dreamed of doing it. And so, we were, you know, at a place organizationally -- we had something like -- I can’t remember -- I think we had like thirty-seven thousand ones in Iowa. So, you basically ID -- ask people who they’re for. If they’re for you, they’re a one. If they’re leaning, they’re a two. If they’re undecided, they’re a three. And then, if they were for Kerry, they were a four; Gephardt, five; and whatever system you’d have. But all the systems have a one. We had thirty-seven thousand ones in a state where most people thought a hundred thousand, [01:07:00] maybe a hundred and ten thousand people were going to vote. And there were five, six, seven candidates. So, we were -- and that jibed with what our polling and what the polls said. So, organizationally, that was all -- you know, everything was sort of, you know, at a place where you’d want it to be, going into the last six weeks of that campaign.

Q: Who did you think it would come down to, if all went well?

TRIPPI: Well, the problem with a multicandidate field like that is, you can’t depend on -- it’s not a -- how do you put it? It’s not like you can pick your opponents or anything. You’ve got to do what you have to do to get to your 37. And you can’t count [01:08:00] on the other candidates making all the right decisions or doing everything based on rationality or any of that kind of stuff. And you see this in multicandidate campaigns, not just for president, but for governor or anything else. So, what we -- you know, probably Kerry, because Kerry -- well, what happened was, Kerry had gone over -- had -- people forget, had bailed out of Iowa and gone to New Hampshire -- basically had decided he was gonna go up to New Hampshire and wait for us. And at the last minute -- not last minute, but wrote a \$7 million check. He was broke. He wrote a \$7 million check to his campaign to fund Iowa, and come back. We thought -- we nev-- we didn’t think he’d -- I mean, no one, I think, on the planet thought the guy was gonna write a \$7 million check to come back in Iowa. That was probably the thing that changed the dynamics of the race, because we thought Kerry’s done. [01:09:00] We’re -- it’s -- and we can win Iowa. We’ll go fight him in New Hampshire. At that time -- point, he writes a \$7 million check, goes back into Iowa, and at the



same time, what we don't know is, all of those campaigns -- all of them -- Kerry, Gephardt, Edwards -- are on a morning conference call -- all three of those campaigns are on a morning conference call, coordinating a strategy to take out Howard Dean: "we stop them now, or -- and then we'll fight between us about who gets the nomination. But we're gonna kill him now." And so, that's one dynamic that's going on. So, Kerry's coming back in. The three of them are doing -- are coordinating -- which, if they were independent expenditures, would be illegal. But it's OK (laughs) if you're three campaigns and you're trying to stop one guy. [01:10:00] But, basically, yeah, the establishment of the party had decided they were going to -- they couldn't let this -- whatever this was -- this decentralized thing. They weren't going to let it become the nominee of the party. And certainly none of the three who wanted to be the nominee were interested in doing that. And then, the other thing that really did it was, Gephardt's only -- he had one Iowa -- and I was there -- in '88. I helped him win Iowa. Gephardt has to win Iowa. If he doesn't win Iowa, there's no -- I mean, there's just -- his candidacy is over. He has to win it. And so, he's deci-- we've gone by him. We -- that means he's got to go kill us. I mean, he has to kill Dean or he's got no -- his... I mean, we're talking about somebody who ran for president in '87-'88, wins Iowa, sits back for, [01:11:00] let's see -- '92, '96 -- sits back for -- what is that, 16 years? Waits for 16 years to take his one last shot for president. And the guy who -- and this freaky internet campaign goes by him. So, he decides, "I'm gonna kill that guy." And, literally, what they did was, they pulled a grenade and hugged us. They went af-- they went negative on -- hard negative on television. When you do that, by the way, generally what happens is, the guy you hit loses votes, you lose votes, and the votes go somewhere. They never come back -- they never really go back -- in a multicandidate race, they rarely go to the guy who's -- who shot. [01:12:00] So, essentially, Gephardt was throwing in the towel. I mean, he was doing the only thing he could do to go by us, to have any shot. But, at the same, knew it was murder/suicide. And so, we kept swinging back, but the way we'd swing back is, "All three of them voted for the war." In other words, we didn't say, "Dick Gephardt," because it would take his pro-war votes and spread them to the other two. So, it, in a way, basic-- and then, we made mistakes too. I mean, we gaffed a coup-- I mean, I gaffed, the governor gaffed a couple of times, in that last couple of weeks. And, you know, people forget, we took third in Iowa. I mean, the scream was -- that -- I mean, there was a reason the scream could even happen, and that's because we had just lost [01:13:00] -- you know, lost. So, the -- there's sort of a misconception of the speech on the night of Iowa ended the campaign, or put us in the death throes. Now,



there were a lot of other things going on. That certainly didn't help. Don't get me wrong. But it wasn't -- the mythology of what that thing became is not really... We were in -- there was an event -- again, sort of, one of those first -- your first-congressional-race mistake. A guy -- an old, seventy-five-year-old guy had -- at a town meeting, had said that -- about -- I think about 15 days out, had said to Howard, in the meeting -- stood up at a town hall and said, "I've got a question. Why do you Democrats just come here and say nothing? All you do is attack George Bush, say bad things about George Bush. You never say any-- you say you're against the war. You say what you're against, but you're never for anything." I don't know who we hear that about today, but anyway... (laughs) But, [01:14:00] "Why?" And Howard goes, "You know, I understand you're a Republican, so -- and I will answer your question if you just put a question mark at the end of it, and ask me a question. I'll be happy to answer. I respect you." And the guy goes, "I just asked you a question. Why do you Democrats just come in here and say bad things about George Bush, and say you're against the war, and never say you're for anything? Why?" And Howard goes... Now, at this point, if you've had a couple of races for Congress -- at this point you say, "Thank you. Charlie, do you have a question?" No, Howard, for the third time, says, "Sir, I know you're a Republican. But if you want to ask me a question, I'll be happy to answer it. I really am. I respect you. I want to answer your question." This guy goes, "I've asked you the same question twice. You -- you know, why do you Democrats...? You hear this? Why do you Democrats," you know, "do this?" (laughter) And Howard says, [01:15:00] "Shut up and sit down. You had your turn. It's my turn now." Now, what happened that night was, every -- even the fairest TV station in the world is not going to show the 17 minutes of that -- of how you got to that moment. And so, what happened on -- in -- on Iowa television for the next several days, was Iowans watching their news or waking up to their morning to a clip of a 75-year-old man with a stunned look on his face, and Howard Dean saying, "Shut up and sit down. You had your turn. It's my turn now." And what -- so, you've got to ask just how you go from thirty-seven thousand ones to -- in our own dat-- [01:16:00] our own polling, we were starting -- we fell, like, 10 points in a couple of days. And so, we know... Now, by the way, you don't go out and hold a press conference and say, "We're in a lot of trouble. We could lose Iowa." No, you've got to go out and stick your chin out there and keep and... You know, but we knew we were taking on water. I did one. Oh, man, I can't -- I was on *Crossfire*, and Paul Begala says -- this is, like, I think, the Sun-- the -- two or three days before the -- or maybe four days before the caucuses. Paul Begala says, "Wow, you've got Al Gore. You got this endorsement. You've got that endorsement.



Who's next? Jimmy Carter?" Well, I knew we were gonna go to Plains, Georgia, that Sunday, and worship at Carter's church with -- he was -- as his guest. He wasn't gonna endorse us. I also knew that. You know, he had made it clear. [01:17:00] But he... And so, I said, on live television, "Come to Plains, Georgia, with us on Sunday and find out." As soon as I said it -- I mean, as soon as it came out, I want -- I was, like, on air. You can go watch the tape. I'm trying to like, (laughter) "Please take those words back. I am an idiot." But the whole press -- before I was even off the air, the breaking news -- Howard Dean is going to Plains, Georgia, to get Jimmy Carter's endorsement. Well, he -- we go down to Plains, Georgia. Carter walks into the press room before the event and says, "I just want you to understand, I'm not endorsing him. I didn't do this." We're -- it's like, you know, we're -- now, that Sunday is like a day or two before the -- I mean, before the caucuses. So, like, all I'm saying is, we had this -- I've -- that was probably the biggest gaffe I've had in my life in a presidential cam-- [01:18:00] Out of all seven, that's when I chose to do it. I mean, or that's when my... You know, so, I'm just saying, like, these -- all these little -- I mean, these forces -- the Gephardt campaign deciding, "We've got to kill this guy." The other three campaigns coordinating what they're doing. The most amazing thing that happened that no one's really -- is, on the Sa-- the weekend before the caucuses, 16 -- every Dean support-- think about it. Every campaign has done the same thing. They've all called everybody in the state, or talked to everybody in the state, and they all have their ones and their Dean people identified. And we have our ones and Kerry people... Well, the Dean camp-- the Dean people all got 16 robo-calls the day -- on a Saturday, all -- repeatedly, every half hour or every 45 minutes, your phone rang. And if you were a Howard Dean supporter in the state of Iowa, your -- the ph-- you picked up the phone, and it -- [01:19:00] the robo-call said this was the Howard Dean campaign. "And we just wanted to make sure you were still voting for Howard at the caucuses." Well, the first time, you might have said, "Sure, yeah." The 13th time, the 14th time, the Howard Dean campaign called you and said, "Hey, it's just us again." You -- it's just a -- and it's the same recording -- the same -- 16 times. By the time those people got the real Howard Dean call -- the one real Howard Dean call -- like, the next day, or later that day, saying, "Hey, this is the Howard..." They're -- they had pulled their phones out of the wall, or were cursing us for -- "This is the 18th time you've called me today. I'm not voting for Howard Dean." (makes sound of slamming phone) So now, who did that? Who knows? But, my point is -- I mean, for all I know, it could have been the RNC, forget about blaming a Democratic oppon-- the Kerry campaign. [01:20:00] But my point is, all these things were all happening, including our own self-



inflicted wounds. I'm not begrudging any of that. And that's how we come in third in Iowa.

Q: Let me ask you, quickly, about a few things we haven't mentioned at all.

TRIPPI: Sure.

Q: The Sleepless Summer Tour -- high point of the Dean campaign. Anything you want to say about that?

TRIPPI: The Sleepless Summer Tour was, like -- it was, like, just the most amazing thing on the planet, because it was decentralized. Again, I mean, we just -- we would -- we said which 10 cities we were going to. We got on that plane -- the 737 -- the *Grassroots Express*. And we -- I mean, I remember, we landed in Boise at the airport, and there -- you -- there was nothing but people. This was Boise, Idaho -- which, by the way, Howard insisted that we do [01:21:00], because he had this 50-state strategy, that he would do as DNC chairman. He said all these states that Democrats had avoided, he wasn't going to do that. And even though the Boise -- the Idaho primary or caucus wouldn't matter a hill of beans in the nomination, he -- I think we went back -- I was starting to think he had a girlfriend there or something, (laughter) we went back so many times. He didn't, by the way. That was a joke. But he -- I -- it was like we -- literally, in the campaign, we would go like, "What is it with Boise, Idaho?" But we went to Boise. There was nothing but a sea of people there. Seattle -- it was like fifteen thousand. Bryant Park in New York... And we had said we'd raise a million dollars by the time we got to Bryant Park. And we got to New York, and we were like nine hundred and twenty thousand. And it was like an hour and so before the park -- you know, before we were gonna get there. And it just not look like we were gonna make it. And [01:22:00] Nick O'Malley, my webmaster, called me up and said, "Hey, there's a guy on the blog, and he says if Howard will carry a red baseball bat onto the stage -- if we promise him he'll do that, he'll dip into his pocket and do -- and give another 25 bucks right now. And what's weird is, all these other people are saying, 'Yeah, yeah, I'll do that. If he'll carry a red bat onstage, I'll give him a hundred bucks,' or, 'I'll give him 25 bucks.' So, I just went like, you know, out of desperation, I said, "Well, put up on the web he'll be carrying a red bat onstage." And, you know, "Tell them, if they get us to a million, he'll carry a red bat onstage." So, they put it up on the web, and all of a sudden, the odometer on the website just started spinning. People started, from everywhere, giving him enough money -- you know, like, money to see the red bat. Well, now I had the problem -- it's like -- I don't know, it was like 9:30 at night in New York. The event's in half an hour, at ten o'clock. [01:23:00] And where are you gonna find a red bat? I turned to the poor, hapless staffer next to me,



and said, "Go find a red bat." So, he scurries off. We were in a deli feeding the press. We get -- load everybody up on the bus. We get over to Bryant Park. I look up at the screen, and the thing's spinning, and hit hits a million. And just then, Howard -- you know, the music starts up, and the guy on -- you know, the voice of God says, "Ladies and gentlemen, the next president of the United States, Howard Dean." And Howard starts to the stage, and I'm thinking, "Oh, my gosh. He didn't -- he doesn't have the red bat." I mean, he doesn't -- he didn't know yet about any of this. And just then, out of my peripheral vision, I see this kid running with everything he's got, with this red bat in his hands. (laughter) And just as Howard hits the top of the stage, he throws it up to him. Howard catches it, and goes up there, and the place goes crazy. And it was just, like, [01:24:00] you couldn't script a tour like that any better than it all went. It was like, probably, the single most amazing... I'd say winning Iowa with Mondale was -- and Pennsylvania with Mondale, were the only things I would -- I could compare to the Sleepless Summer Tour.

Q: The Gore endorsement -- how did that come about, and did it get you what you hoped?

TRIPPI: No, not what I hoped. (laughs) I mean, I had zero to do with the Gore endorsement. And had I had anything to do with it, I would have -- I would have never done it when it happened. They -- the two of them had, essentially, kept it [01:25:00] a state secret. They did not want it to leak. I'm talking about Gore and Howard. And so, there were very, very few people who had any inkling. I knew they were talking and that kind of stuff, but there were very few people who -- like, maybe three on the planet -- and I'm taking, they're two of them. So, there's not that... I'm sure Roy Neel, Gore's chief of staff. I mean, there -- but very, very few -- maybe Kate O'Connor, the governor's chief of staff. But it was like a state secret, and they were not gonna let -- they were not gonna -- no one was gonna know until they were doing it. And so, you don't have -- I don't think there was a whole lot of political thought put in it -- I mean, strategic thought. It was just about -- it was like -- more things like, "Where are you gonna be on what day?" "Oh, I'm gonna be in New York that day." [01:26:00] "I'll be - - I'm gonna be in New York that day." "Great, well then, we're both there. That would be a -- we can do it." And that's literally how the day -- the timing happened. I think, had we announced that seven days before Iowa instead of whatever it was -- six weeks or four weeks before Iowa... I think that moment put the target -- I mean, that was the -- when all the other campaigns decided, "Kill him now." And I think -- and we got this huge lift in the national polls, and in Iowa, and in New Hampshire. So, had -- from a strategic point of view -- I'm not talking about... But, from a strategic point of



view, I would have done it, like, seven days, six days before Iowa. You -- boom, the campaigns have got maybe four days to panic and freak out and try to kill you. And, by the way, you're gonna be in that euphoria thing in the Democratic primary, where everybody goes like, "Wow, you got Gore." What happened was, you get the benefits of the Gore thing, then people sort of forget about it and start -- [01:27:00] it's on the backburner. Meanwhile, your opponents decide, "Kill him now." Gephardt bear hug -- he pulls the pin out of the grenade and hugs you. And I've been in that situation. I mean, it -- I've been in campaigns -- not in a presidential, but I've been in campaigns where I felt -- you know, where the candidate -- you -- in a multicandidate race, where you've worked your heart out, and you realize that's the guy that took you out. And I've basic-- I'd mostly look at it like you're at the s-- on the 16th -- on the roof of a sixteen-story building, and the guy is shoving you off the building, grab him and take him with you. And that's sort of what Gephardt did. I mean, that's not -- that's what happens in a multicandidate race. That can happen. It's a -- you know, that's -- that wouldn't have been enough to take us out without some of our own mistakes, and [01:28:00] the rest of the candidates, and the 16 phone calls to our people that, you know -- that pounded away on them in a way that made them, you know, hate the campaign that they were gonna support. And not -- a lot of them saw th-- you know, went anyway. But I'm saying -- but, you know, did that cost 5,000? I don't know -- how many votes did that cost us? Did it cost us anything? Is it just my excuse? Well, I'll never know that. But that's what -- how it all happened.

Q: There was some sense -- some thought that, having this mass infusion of Dean volunteers from around the country into Iowa, right before the caucus, wearing their orange baseball caps and so on -- some observations that that might have backfired. What's your sense of that? Because that's where the national meetups and all of that coincided with an actual event going on, for the first time where people are voting. And did it work? Or did it not work?

TRIPPI: [01:29:00] Well, I kind of, like, OK, when I ran the campaign for Walter Mondale in 1984 in Iowa, we had five hundred people from outside Iowa every weekend, bused into the state, whether from Illinois or Minnesota, Nebraska -- usually -- I mean, from the reg-- mostly from -- because of the mechanics of doing it every weekend, who wear blue beanies. And we -- and our unit was called the Hogs. And we got 49% of the vote and beat Gary Hart, the second-place guy, by 31 points. So, I don't buy any of that. [01:30:00] Iowans are the most hospitable people on the planet. The way we did it in '84, there were 500 Iowans who would put them up in their homes. When I went to Iowa in 1979 for Kennedy, from California, [Irv Godine?] -- a farmer in



Monticello, Iowa -- put me up in his house. That's Iowa. And so, I think this is like another one of the press's or the opponents' mythologies about the Dean campaign. I mean, you've got to remember that the Kerry campaign was basically just -- and the other campaigns just thought we were Martians. I mean -- I don't mean Martians because we were -- we had tinfoil hats on, but because it was this web thing. We had people connecting together over the internet, and [01:31:00] using this -- we weren't using TV the way everybody else did, and things like that. But -- and so, everything -- they tried to couch everything as weirdness. And, you know, we were the bar scene out of *Star Wars*, was one of the -- the Dean campaign was the bar scene out of *Star Wars*, according, I think, to some very courageous, anonymous quote by a staffer in one of the other campaigns, because they would never attach their names to any of it, because there were so courageous. So, I th-- I mean, I don't think -- the problem is, when you knock on the door of a one who's decided he's not voting for you or she's not voting for you because she saw her -- your guy yell at a 75-year-old guy, or saw Trippi say something about... Or, [01:32:00] got their phone called 16 times by somebody, I don't think it matters what color their hat is, or where they came from, I mean, or what the -- you know, is going on there. I mean, they're just -- they -- we were losing voters, and we were losing them for a bunch of reasons that had nothing to do with a volunteer coming from Illinois or Alabama or, you know, California. It had to do with -- that wasn't the first time that had ever -- I mean, that's a very normal thing. And the other one would be -- was Paul Simon, who would bus in tons of people from Illinois. Cranston, in '84, was, I mean, literally, Californians were coming in. Gephardt had -- I don't know if you remember, but Gephardt -- we would have -- we had, like, something like two hundred members of Congress come in -- I mean, fly in, get their beanies on, and they were all -- and made this big deal [01:33:00] about three planeloads of congressmen coming to go door to door for Dick Gephardt in nineteen eighty s-- Now, they're congressmen, and, you know, that's different than volunteers with orange hats. But it's not -- that's, like, a very common thing in Iowa.

Q: OK. Well, the story with the scream speech, which you mentioned earlier, is that Dean had a roomful of dispirited volunteers, and he was trying to provide them with some renewed inspiration or consolation or something. And that, in the room, it worked. It was only translated into television that it didn't. What's your take on all that?

TRIPPI: No, if you -- any of the press that was there, anybody who was in that room, you couldn't hear him. He -- I mean, you didn't hear a word he said. The room was



exploding, I mean, in terms of just the cheers and the chanting and the clapping and the... [01:34:00] And that -- that's the fun---- when he walked out on that stage, you couldn't hear anything that he was saying. The -- there was just no way. The din of the crowd was, like, too loud. So, all -- so, he's yelling so that the crowd can hear him. No matter how hard he yelled, you couldn't hear him. And part of that was an advance mistake, or, I mean, you're not -- the advance guy did not know that this moment was going to occur this way, but basically it was a unidirectional mic that only picked up what was coming from here, not from behind the mic. So, the unidirectional mic, which was for the TV crews -- I mean, mostly for -- so the TV stations were getting him, not -- and some of the crowd, but not, like, the crowd. So, the unidirectional mic -- [01:35:00] he's yelling to make sure the crowd can hear him. The crowd can't hear him, because they're too loud. And the TV stations don't get any of the crowd noise -- or hardly any of it -- and only a guy screaming. I mean, that's the -- that's what happened. So, you know, that's -- OK, you call that -- OK, he yells at a seventy-five-year old guy. I blunder into Plains, Georgia. And an advance guy puts a one-directional mic in his hands. And, put on top of that, we lost and took third place. So, I mean, I'm not... But that's how that how that moment happens. It wasn't -- and Howard Dean didn't go up there, you know, trying to do anything but just have the room hear him. And, like I said, I don't think -- there was not a single press person [01:36:00] in that room going, "Oh, my gosh, this is horrible." No one real-- I mean, no one in the room realized that until you got to the bar an hour later, for a beer, to commiserate over the loss. And you looked up at the TV screen, and there was -- and the screen was starting to play -- do its miraculous seven days of hell, because they couldn't -- they just couldn't get enough of running it. And that's when you went -- and the press. I mean, I'm not talking about the press that were in the control rooms during the speech. I'm -- they heard it and recognized it right away. But the press that was in that room -- no one that I know of thinks that anything other than it was a normal campaign event, where a guy's -- can't -- you know, trying to be heard above the crowd. And, by the way, never accomplished that the entire speech, because no one in the crowd heard him.

Q: [01:37:00] You said -- well, I guess we should take this to its conclusion. Are you --

TRIPPI: Yeah, I'm fine for another 5 or 10 minutes.

Q: Five or 10 minutes would be perfect.

TRIPPI: I'm pretty sure.

Q: And that is, Dean goes to New Hampshire, and does not win. Anything -- was it just the fact that -- the snowball of events continued, and New Hampshire was the next



product of that? Or was there something about New Hampshire that also explains why he lost there?

TRIPPI: No, we had -- I mean, look, the problem with New Hampshire always was going to be that it's John Kerry's territory. I mean, John Kerry -- I mean, it's the same as Dukakis. I mean, you've got a governor or a senator from Massachusetts. The Boston media market, pretty much, bathes most of the populous areas [01:38:00] of New Hampshire -- Nashua, you know, and Manchester. So, you're -- you know, he has -- he starts with a big advantage there. He had won Iowa. I mean, it's not like -- you know, Dukakis won the bronze in Iowa, and then went and took New Hampshire. So, you know, you knew, going in -- Gephardt knew this too. The strategy is win Iowa. We would have a shot at New Hampshire because of Vermont's proximity, but nowhere near what the Massachusetts TV market does for a guy in New Hampshire. But it was sort of incumbent on winning Iowa -- our strategy was win Iowa then take the Vermont-neighbor access, plus a win in Iowa, and do battle with Kerry. And, if we're lucky, we beat him there. If not, we take second, and, you know, it's us and Kerry off to the fight. [01:39:00] The problem with that was when, you know, we took third. He won, and now he's going to New Hampshire. And so, he -- you know, it wasn't -- we had a very good chance there. We had a very good organization. We did very well in New Hamp-- I mean, given the pro-- we didn't lose New Hampshire by much to Kerry. It wasn't like a blowout. But we didn't win it, and now you've got -- you know, now you've got John Kerry -- money is flowing to him. By the -- again, people ought to remember the entire Democratic establishment does not want Howard Dean to be the nominee. I mean, they might have a legitimate fear in their heads that he can't beat Bush. You know, that's it not -- you know, that we can't afford to have this guy go up against Bush. We'll lose, you know? Whatever -- I'm not putting, you know, bad [01:40:00] -- you know, from their point of view, why... But they were all -- it was like, the one thing that everybody agreed on was, "Not him." So, now you've got the -- you know, John Kerry has won Iowa, won New Hampshire. Let's all rally behind him, and let's, like, thin it -- you know, make sure this guy never gets off the ground again. And so, you know, it -- basically, that's the way the whole campaign, you know, played out. And so, you know, you look at what happened in 2004. Who was the vice-presidential nominee? Does anybody remember?

Q: John Edwards.

TRIPPI: John Edwards. That's what I'm saying. It's like, "Oh, he just happens to get out?" And, you know, everything starts to move. Everybody starts to roll behind Ker-- Who knows what Dick Gephardt would have been if John Kerry had been elected president.



[01:41:00] I don't know. I'm not saying anything. (laughter) I'm not -- not like the three of them were on conference calls every day. But I'm just saying, like, they -- you know, you've got this whole... Now the whole thing is moving in a way that, I think -- you know, the party saying, "Hey, we're gonna do what..." You know, "Let's..." Like, "We don't want a fight that goes all the way to the convention. And we've got a sitting president who's -- who we've got to stop. And we're not gonna play that game, and we're gonna," you know, "dry up money, do everything we can, and unify behind one guy fast." And, by the way, Kerry did -- the -- I think that decision to go back into Iowa to write that personal check -- I mean, the guy, I think, had a -- I mean, literally, was one of the boldest things I've seen a candidate do. I mean, it -- I mean, because it -- frankly, he was, at that moment, dead. I mean, it was -- you know, he was -- [01:42:00] to think, "OK, I'm gonna make one more run at this, and I'm gonna my own -- everything I..." You know, put it all on the line in the face of what looked like, at the time -- like that -- no way. To -- for that guy to come back from that and become the nominee is a pretty amazing thing. I mean, it tells you something about the kind of president he probably would have been. He wasn't going to -- he didn't -- a lot of guys I know -- and I've worked for a lot of people running for pres-- a lot of them would have caved. I mean, just caved and gone home and licked their wounds. That guy did not do that. So, I -- he deserves a ton of credit for that win.

Q: Let me ask you one last question. And this is really asking you if you still agree with what Joe Trippi said at the Kennedy School Institute of Politics post-election gathering of campaign people on December 15th, 2004. And you said, "In the end, I think the right thing happened. [01:43:00] Us crashing when we crashed was probably the best thing that could have happened to the Democratic Party." And Judy Woodruff then says, "You think Dean should not have been the nominee?" And you say, "I think we would have lost 49 states." Does -- do you still agree with Joe Trippi 10 years ago?

TRIPPI: Yeah, I -- yeah, the -- but the reason I said that is -- I say that is, I -- is the number of things like, "I want to be the first gay president." In other words, there were -- we -- what I think happened -- I became terrified at the things I knew we had said. I don't mean -- I mean, like, we're gonna -- when we got to the lead, and I started to replay -- I know there's tape that says, "I want to be the first gay president." I know there's tape that says, "Osama bin Laden is innocent until he's proven guilty," [01:44:00] despite the fact that we got tape of him saying he did it. I mean, there -- these are some of the things that, early on, in the days when we were cute and cuddly and no one was paying much attention to us, but there was a camera rolling... And so, what I meant by that wasn't that Howard wouldn't have been a good president. What I



meant is, Karl Rove had tape of him saying, “Osama bin Laden is innocent until he’s proven guilty.” He had tape of the guy s-- of my guy saying, “I want to be America’s first gay president.” I think the reality is, again, we -- I think we would have been, you know, a target, you know, in today’s politics. And, look, they won as it was. Look at what they did to Kerry. I mean, how -- they -- you’ve got a guy who’s a hero [01:45:00] fighting for his country in Vietnam, and they somehow turned that into a swift boat... You know, I mean, swift boat the guy. And I’m not talking about the Bush campaign, necessarily. I’m talking about just all the different interest groups and things. And so, what I was starting to worry about is, hey, you know, we’re gonna -- you know, tape of a guy -- of him saying, “Shut up and sit down.” I mean, what I’m trying to say is, that stuff all was in -- was back there. Most of the world hadn’t seen it because we were just starting to emerge as the frontrunner. But that stuff was all gonna be there. And I don’t know -- I think in 2013, almost all that stuff might have helped. (laughter) But, you know, signing the first civil-unions law, being -- [01:46:00] wanting to be the first gay president, you know, all that. But in 2003, 2004? It just shows you how fast both technology and the country has moved on a number of those kinds of issues. In fact, I -- you know... And, I mean, there are many others, I mean, that may seem tiny now. But I remember just distinctly having a fear that... And I think -- by the way, I think that’s why the press -- one of the reasons the press was so anxious to run that tape -- run the scream. Because, you know, I realized the day after he said that, “I want to be America’s first gay president” -- I realized that, you know, thank God. Because, like, the *New York Times* didn’t stop the presses that night and run a banner front-page headline that said, [01:47:00] “Some guy you never heard of and are never gonna hear of announced today that he wants to be America’s first gay president.” That wasn’t the banner headline in the *New York Times*. Why? Because we were somebody no one was ever gonna hear of. And they weren’t gonna stop the pressed to write that story, so they didn’t. And they didn’t write story after story of moments like that. They don’t do it for a lot of candi-- I don’t -- I mean, because a lot of these second-tier candidates -- they don’t think that Carol Moseley Braun is going to be president, so we shouldn’t care that she said this. And, all of a sudden, one day, they all woke up and realized this guy might be running against George Bush. And if he gets nominated, and we never showed anybody any of this tape, and we never wrote any of those stories -- not because we’re bad reporters, but because it just -- [01:48:00] they weren’t stories. They didn’t matter. But they’re gonna matter. And Karl Rove and Swift Boat Veterans for... You know, and all these other guys are gonna become -- are gonna be -- take all that stuff. And are we -- are --



do we -- how do we tell people, "Hey, check this guy out before you..." You know, "Before..." You know, "If the party wants to do this, great. But I didn't do my job." They probably would deny that, but, I mean, that's what I think, sort of, was going on. Was how -- "Give me one more chance to do my job." And we gave it to them.

Q: Well, you've done a great job for us and for all the people who will read and watch this interview. Thanks, so much. This has been enormously interesting and helpful.

TRIPPI: Well, thank you.

Q: What a gift of your time and engagement. Thank you. [01:49:00]

Citation

Joe Trippi Interview, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University, The Election of 2004 Collective Memory Project, 14 October 2013, accessed at <http://cphcmp.smu.edu/2004election/joe-trippi/>

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