

White House Interview Program

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INTERVIEWEE: PETE ROUSSEL

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar with Terry Sullivan

[Disc 1 of 2]

PR: —even though I was with [George] Bush for six years, in four different jobs. I was two years in the [Gerald] Ford White House, and 1981 to 1987 in the [Ronald] Reagan White House. I might add though, for your benefit, in neither case did I come in at the start. I came in under unusual circumstances in both cases. Maybe that's something to look at, too, for people, because that's always going to happen.

TS: The notion of start is what we're focused on, how the administration starts, but start has several definitions. Obviously, for a person who comes into the office it's their start, whether it's at the very beginning of the administration or later on in the administration.

PR: Sure.

TS: So those sorts of experiences are worthwhile as far as we're concerned, as well. Some of the things we're mostly interested in are: how the office works?, and things like—how do you know when it's time to leave? What your daily life is like? And things like that.

PR: That one I'm more than happy to address, having had the benefit of doing it twice. The second time, I was much more prepared to answer that question than the first time, which most people don't get a second—

TS: —chance at.

PR: Yes. Didn't y'all interview my colleague, Larry Speakes?

MK: Speakes and [Ron] Nessen as well. And Marlin Fitzwater.

PR: I don't know if there's anything I can add, if you've touched all those bases.

MK: We want to know not just the [press] office but the various positions within it, so that the positions you held, people that will come in to take your same position, will be able to get an interview that has your perspective. It's different.

PR: You're right about that. And I'm sure there's a tendency on the part of everybody to say, "Well, they did it this way; we're going to do it this way, because we think this way is better." You always think there's a better way to build the wheel.

MK: But usually it goes back to the same way.

PR: You come back to some pretty basic—

MK: Right.

- PR: Particularly in the White House, just given the nature of that situation, and what you have to deal with, and how you have to deal with it. As we all know it's gotten even more—I'm thinking of it strictly from the vantage point of what I was involved with which, of course, the second time was the press operation, which, to me, is unique among White House offices. I'm sure Larry addressed this, but it's the only one where you have to—in a sense—serve two entities. One, the President and the staff you're working with and, at the same time, you have to be equally responsive to the press corps.
- MK: You really have three, because you have the president, the White House staff, and the press.
- PR: Yes. And anybody else in the White House, in any other job, you can go hole up in your office and just do your job. You don't have to deal with the press if you don't want to. Now, as we know, other people do deal with them there. But you don't have to; so you can actually concentrate on your job whereas anybody else—I'm kind of getting ahead of the game here.
- MK: Additionally, what is unique about the Press Office is that your constituents are in the building and there's no other office in the White House that has that situation to deal with.
- PR: That's true.
- MK: So that's something I want to get into. Can we start with how you came in, and the positions—?
- PR: I didn't mean to jump ahead there.
- MK: That's fine. Just give you an idea of the terrain. So when you first came in, how did you come in to the White House, and when?
- PR: As I said, I came in twice, to two different White Houses.
- MK: Let's look at both of them.
- PR: Okay. The first one was the Ford White House. The way I came in to that—the years are starting to pass by; one's memory—
- MK: August, 1974, was when he came in.
- PR: Right. I came in that Fall, so it probably would have been September. The way it occurred was: I had been working for George Bush, who I had originally gone to Washington with, when Bush was a Congressman. I went to Washington in 1969, as his press secretary, and then was with him from that point forward. Then we came back here [Texas] in 1970 and he ran for the Senate; then we went to New York for two years, when he was ambassador to the United Nations. Then we went back to Washington again, when he became chairman of the Republican National Committee, in January of 1973. Then he served there, January, 1973, until shortly after Ford took office. Then Bush left to be the chief of the U.S. liaison office in Beijing. At that point I thought, "It's been a great ride here; I'm on my way back to Houston now." It turned out, though, that when we were at the Republican National Committee, the then-assistant to President [Richard] Nixon, and to Ford, for political affairs, was Dean Burch, who was a good friend of Bush's, and with whom we'd worked closely when Bush was chairman of the Republican National Committee, a natural liaison thing. So I had gotten to know Dean a little bit, and he was somebody I had a lot of respect for. It

just shows you how fate works sometimes. Bush was getting ready to go to China. I said, "I'll be in Houston if you need me..." basically. I can't remember how it happened, whether Burch did it or he did it; I'm sure he [Bush] probably did it. He said, "It would be a nice thing if you could go to a state dinner at the White House before you leave town." I said it sure would.

The next thing I know I got invited to go to a state dinner. While I was roaming around the floor there, the state room floor there over in the White House, I ran into Burch. He said, "What are you up to?" I said, "I'm getting ready to go back to Houston in a couple of days." He said he would be leaving the Ford administration right after the midterm congressional elections, which would have been in November of that year, and he said, "Why don't you come over here and help me through then." He said, "I'll be leaving then just so you know." I said, "Why not?" It would be a chance to work in the White House, which I'd never had. So I did that. I told Bush that, and he said, "That's a terrific idea." So I went over there and was an assistant to Dean Burch through the congressional elections.

Then, indeed, he left right after that, and I thought that was it for me in the White House. And, again, it just shows you how fate sometimes comes into play in these things. I was walking down through the West Wing there, and I ran into Don Rumsfeld, who was then Chief of Staff, and he kind of said, "What are you up to?" And I said, "I'm getting ready to leave and go back to Houston." He said, "You've been working for Dean, haven't you?" I said yes. He said, "Why don't you help me out?" Great! So, a long story, short, was I then ended up becoming an assistant to Don Rumsfeld, and Dick Cheney was the deputy.

[Off the record]

So it was a great opportunity for me. There I was working for the Chief of Staff. So that's how I—. Then, about January—I'll say it was January—the Ford campaign then ultimately came to be. It was probably about January of 1976. Once the Ford committee was set up, I then went over there. I transferred over there initially, for a couple of months, as an assistant to Bob Mosbacher, who is my friend from here, and Bush's friend, who was the finance chairman, even though that is not my area of skill at all. Nonetheless, he was a friend and gave me the opportunity to help him out, and I did that.

Then, shortly after that, then the primaries began going on, and Ford was up against Reagan, and Reagan was winning the primaries. I actually came down here and worked in the Texas primary. They dispatched me down here, and Reagan took that one from Ford. So it looked like the sun was beginning to set on us. And it was shortly after the Texas primary that Jim Baker—in fact, he called me that night; he was in Connecticut that night. He called me down here in Austin, I remember, and he said, "What's going on down there?" I said, "Nothing good." He said, "I've been asked to take over the Ford"—it was then a delegate operation basically because we were trying to get delegates. He said, "What do you think about that?" I said, "Well, when the President asks you to do something, you have two choices. Either you say "Thank you, Mr. President, I look forward to serving you in that post..." or you extend the hand of friendship. So, then I became one of his assistants there, and served out the duration of the campaign as his assistant.

TS: On the delegate operations?

PR: Yes. And then, later, once we got the nomination, then it became a full-fledged Ford re-election. Then, when the election was over, we all came back to Houston, Texas. So that was how I came into the Ford White House.

- MK: That campaign, sometimes its success is masked by the fact that he didn't win. But it was a campaign which really brought together very effectively the White House operation and a campaign operation in a way I think that previous White Houses have not been able to do. The campaign was very successful because, really, it took him from low, low, low in the polls and almost to a winning position. It did so, I think, in part because of the ability to integrate the two. So you were back and forth between them. How was that accomplished?
- PR: I wasn't really back and forth because once I went over there—
- MK: Well, in a sense you'd been in the White House—
- PR: —I never went back to the White House.
- MK: —so you had a good sense of how it operated.
- PR: I knew the players in the White House. Certainly, that's true. I'll tell you, to me, there's no mystery about all that. If you go back and check the *New York Times*, there was an article at the time called "Miracle Man"—I lay it [Ford's come-from-behind close finish] at the feet of Jim Baker. The credit has to go to him for just tremendous organizational skills and coming in there when it was about gone, and he managed to turn the thing around. He put together overnight a team there which included Peter McPherson, who is now the president of Michigan State University, and Paul Manafort who is a long-time Timmons consultant in Washington, and a bunch of really capable [people]. As I recall, Bill Timmons was in there.
- MK: Yes. And Peter Kaye was doing the publicity.
- PR: Peter Kaye, yes. Because he's (Jim Baker) one of my other mentors in all this—he did. There was a guy who only a year earlier had been Undersecretary of Commerce and an unknown entity in Washington pretty much, a man who also later ran another presidential campaign against Reagan, and became the Chief of Staff in the Reagan White House. I'm stating the obvious here, but it says a lot about his abilities.
- MK: Everybody talks about his organizational skill. What are the elements of it? You've mentioned one, is people. Are those all people that he knew, or people that he was able to persuade—even if he didn't know them—to come on?
- PR: You mean, in the case of that Ford [operation]?
- MK: Yes.
- PR: I would say it was both in that case. The thing about that situation was, there was such a short time frame there. As I recall, the Texas primary occurred and we were up against the wall then. As I recall, there was a gap of about two weeks there, and the next primary was Michigan and we said, "Gee, Ford—"
- MK: Was this March?
- PR: It probably would have been, yes.
- TS: So he had to win Michigan, or that was the end of it.

PR: Yes. It was important to do so.

TS: He couldn't win Michigan....

PR: But it gave him just enough window of time there, to put that team together and start—. Jim Baker has always had a great ability to surround himself with talented people, with good people. I'm not talking about myself now, but he has. And he's secure enough that he has no problem with that. Some people—you know in Washington everybody's turf-conscious. Secondly, he's a very smart guy. He's very smart. So that lends itself to great organizational skills. Three, I've always found him to be a very good delegator. He wasn't afraid to let you—"Here. This is yours. You take it and run with it. I have total confidence in you. I'm not going to micro-manage this." And that tends to inspire people to do good work, I think, in Washington, whereas a lot of times that it is not the case. You get somebody, "Why did you do it this way?" and all that.

TS: Did he express that explicitly?

PR: Not really. You pick it up.

TS: So he gave you a task—.

PR: There's a guy, in my view—. There are some people, you walk in to a room, you sit down at a meeting and the meeting is conducted, you kind of go, "Okay," and you walk out. There are other people, you walk in; somebody's conducting a meeting. You walk out and you say, "I want to work for that guy." That's kind of a nebulous way to describe something, but that's the best way I can describe it. It's an intangible quality he has. I don't think you can write that into a plan. Now, maybe some of the things he did, you certainly can but sometimes, as we all know, the force of one's personality comes into play and inspires people.

MK: One person indicated that, in his Commerce experience, that he developed a very good sense of how a White House worked, because [Secretary] Rogers Morton was sick a good deal of the time—

PR: That's absolutely true.

MK: —and he came to the White House. He was in meetings in the White House, so he had a sense of how the place worked.

PR: Whoever told you that, I think, is absolutely right. Because that's exactly what happened.

[Off the record]

MK: So, in a sense, he was able to know well what moves a White House, and what kind of resources there are.

PR: I think that, and got to know, again, individuals and who was doing what. And they got to know him and, conversely he began acquiring the respect of people there, which certainly was helpful down the line.

TS: When you came into this campaign after the Texas primary, did you have a sense that he had a plan, or did you have a sense that his Plan was to put together good people who could then come up with a plan?

PR: That's a good question. Again, it was all—that was a unique situation, where it was just happening. He “stepped into a flying airplane.” What he had to do—at that point, it was chasing uncommitted delegates. That's what it was down to. My sense and my memory now is—and he could tell you better than I could—that he sat down and said, “Here are the states with uncommitteds. Here are how many uncommitteds there are here, here and here. Here's how we're going to do it. You're going to take Louisiana and Missouri and those six you're gonna...” Pretty much, it flowed from him, I remember, because Louisiana and Missouri and Virginia were my three. That's why it's indelible in my memory. But he pretty much came up with a plan for the rest of us to implement, which was basically: “Let's see if we can get these uncommitted delegates.”

The other thing that he did in that was, he put his credibility on the line, because every time we would—and this was important I think—secure a commitment from an uncommitted delegate, we would publicly announce it. We'd have a news conference and call the press in and say, “Mrs. Joe Smith, of St. Louis, announced that she's going to go with President Ford. Here's her phone number. You can call her up and ask her that.” So there wasn't any ‘smoke and mirrors’ about, ‘We think we now have six more...’, and all that.

MK: When you got those delegates, did you tell them that the press would call them?

PR: I think we did. I think we said, “Do you have any problem with us announcing this? We're making public...”, and it was to show momentum, obviously.

MK: Right. So the communications plan was very effective, and it was integrated with both things, with the President Ford committee, and with the White House.

PR: I love the way y'all look at these things so orderly and, as you know, at the time you're doing some of them....

TS: Sometimes, at the time you're doing something, it may not appear orderly—

PR: That's true.

TS: —but there are other times when the very same sense is that it isn't orderly and it isn't orderly!

PR: Right.

TS: So, sometimes it's useful to be able to step back away from it and say, “There's chaos but there's a pattern to this chaos...”, as opposed to “this chaos” where there is no pattern.

PR: You're absolutely right about that. In retrospect, when you look back at it, you see there was more of a flow there—at the time you're dealing with moment-to-moment issues.

MK: And the key person there was David Gergen, because Gergen moved in to the communications spot.

PR: You mean at the Ford—?

MK: At the White House, yes.

PR: Well, for me, personally, I guess I met Dave then. Of course, I worked with him a lot in the Reagan White House. I guess he was. He was somebody I had very little contact with, if any, once I was over at the campaign. When I was in the Ford White House, my life was pretty well rooted to Rumsfeld and Cheney and what they were doing.

MK: Let's go to that experience.

TS: What is it like to be the "Baby Chief?"

PR: Well, first of all, I was very fortunate, as you've heard. I just happened to be walking down the right hall at the right time. That doesn't happen to everybody. Hopefully I had worked hard for Dean Burch, and I don't know that he did, [but] maybe he said something to Rumsfeld about me: "Here's a guy you might want to keep around..." or something. I don't know that that was the case. It was a unique experience. Here I was working right—

MK: What were your responsibilities in both of them?

PR: Writing the job description for that one would not be easy. I had a little office up on the second floor of the West Wing which was a great office. It was a little—I don't even know if it's still there or not.

MK: It's probably smaller.

PR: It was a little cubicle. Jack Marsh's operation was on one side and then Phil Buchen, the Counsel's office, was down at the other end of the hall. So this was the only office in that hallway. Yes, it's probably smaller now. No windows. You were in a mid-hallway office. A lot of things I did were press liaison. I did press liaison for Rumsfeld and Cheney. You know how it is; in the course of a day you'd get thirty, forty pink slips on your desk from reporters. As we all know, as anybody knows that works in a key position in a White House, you can spend all your days just returning those phone calls, and not doing the work you're supposed to do. I used to remember Baker, when I would go into his office when he was Chief of Staff—and, as you know, every reporter expects you to call them back—although I guess they get used to the fact that you're not going to, sometimes. But a lot of it was handling those, to the extent I could, and get those off their desk. The ones they needed to address, I would come and brief them: "Here's what he's doing a story on..." And, in many cases, I would actually set up interviews for Rumsfeld with key reporters, and I would sit in on the interviews, because it was helpful for me to hear what he was saying, because then when some reporter would call me and say, "What's going to happen on this?", it was, like, guidance. It was helpful to me.

So a lot of what I did was press-related. I worked on some speeches that—. A lot of it was directed particularly at him and helped ease his life, so he could spend his time helping the President. I worked on some speeches for him because, as every chief of staff does, he was getting numerous requests to come speak at various places. As you recall, at that time, there was a case where everybody really had to put their nose to the grindstone because here was a president who had come in under unusual circumstances. Let's see. What else? It was just a lot of day-to-day. A lot of it was taking his phone messages. "You come back to me in four hours and let me know which of this—you handle what you can." So he was giving me authority, which I would [use]. A lot of it I would delegate out to where it needed to go. A

- lot of it was, somebody called up from Illinois, “We want to have the President come speak here.” “Okay!” Get that into the schedule. You send a memo off to scheduling; stuff you can get off his desk.
- MK: What kind of coordination was there—in the relations with the press and the responses you were giving to the press—with the Press Office itself?
- PR: You mean me, personally, dealing with reporters?
- MK: Yes. Or Rumsfeld or Cheney?
- PR: In my case, having been Bush’s Press Secretary for seven years, I knew a lot of reporters anyway, in Washington, a lot of whom were now in the White House and still around Washington. So a lot of them would just call me directly. As you know, once you get into a position like that, every reporter cozies up to you, too, for obvious reasons. I maintained those relationships, and it was helpful to me, too, because I knew a lot of them. I worked with Larry Speakes and [Ron] Nessen, needless to say. I don’t recall that I—in fact, I don’t remember other than once or twice, even going in to the Press Office down there.
- MK: Did you ever go to any meetings in the Press Office?
- PR: That’s a good question.
- MK: Would he ever have you come in for anything in particular that might—?
- PR: I honestly don’t remember ever doing that. You mean that Nessen was having?
- MK: Yes.
- PR: One of the few times I remember being down there, was the night of the 1974 congressional off-year elections, and Burch had to go do the briefing that night to explain the results. We were down there compiling all that information so he could make his case there. But I’d go down there occasionally. That’s how I got to know Larry Speakes, actually. I would go down to the lower [press] office sometimes just because he was there; it seems there were one or two other people—sometimes I would go down to see a reporter in the press room. But to answer your question, no, I don’t remember ever going to a meeting in—
- MK: What kinds of calls could you answer on your own hook for reporters? What kinds of questions would you be able to answer and take care of?
- PR: “I need to see Rumsfeld today at three o’clock. Can you set that up?” I guess what happened, too, in some cases some reporters ordinarily would channel that request—although most of the time reporters will go directly to a chief of staff on that kind of thing. Occasionally somebody will go through the Press Office. In my case, some of them that knew me and knew I was working there, for him, it was a natural course of events that they would call me. A lot of it was scheduling interviews.
- MK: How many reporters would call a day?
- PR: That varies. It depends on what’s going on, obviously.
- MK: But, say, in a routine kind of week.



[Interruption]

PR: Certainly I found that to be the case when I was in the Press Office.

TS: I think one of the things we're interested in is a comparison between what it would be like to be in the national Republican committee, a job that somebody might think, "I've arrived and done a lot of work; I've been working in Congress or I've working in the Republican national campaign; now I'm moving in to the White House." So we're interested in the juxtaposition of those experiences.

PR: Having done both those, I can assure you, more calls from reporters came in those White House positions than [they] did in those entities. The reason being because—obviously when you're in Congress, when you're at the UN [United Nations], when you're at the RNC [Republican National Committee]—pretty much you're dealing with the beat reporters specifically for those beats, for the congressional beat, for the political beat. So you don't have to deal with the universe that you do in the White House. There you have this whole spectrum of reporters who are interested in the White House and what the White House is doing. So it was a new world for me in that sense, of dealing with a much broader—although in those other jobs you would get the call occasionally from the *New York Times* guy or the *Washington Post* person, but usually they were working the track that your person was involved with, whether it was politics or Congress or diplomacy, or whatever it was.

I'd say, to answer that question, on an average—I do remember one of my first things with Rumsfeld was he had, like two days' worth of calls. Dick Cheney gave it to me and said, "Here. Go through all that and see if you can bring any order." I remember I sat and made up a chart; I did a graph: about two-page[s], name, organization, purpose of the call, when it was. Some of the calls were going back a week at that time. So I thought: "What's the simplest way for him to digest all this?" So I gave [it to] him and he quickly went through it and checked off these—"Okay. Do this one. Call this one. Set this one up. Call this guy back and say no, can't do this." There were probably, at that time, thirty or forty calls that I went through and called each reporter back. I must say I remember at the time they were all grateful that somebody called them back and said, just understand, he's covered up right now and it's called priorities.

MK: Did both of the chiefs of staff you worked for have regular meetings they scheduled with a group of reporters as individuals? For example, say Jim Naughton who was then the White House correspondent for the *Times* or Tom DeFrank. Well, the magazine people you all did once a week?

PR: Right. We did those in the Reagan White House. Larry saw them once a week. I don't recall—maybe Dick Cheney did later; I don't know. I can't speak to that. But Rumsfeld, we didn't have a regular—

MK: You didn't do the magazines?

PR: We did them but it was more on an individual—

MK: Not once a week?

PR: We probably did but, again, it was probably "Tell DeFrank I'll see him at four-thirty," [and] the next day whoever it was at *Time* at the time, Doug Brew or whoever. I can't remember

- now. I don't recall we did it as a group, which to me made a lot of sense in the Reagan White House. As you know, Larry did that once a week, and they had no problem with it. It was a pretty efficient way to do it for everybody, it seemed.
- MK: But there were also individual staff people that did them. In addition to Larry there were individuals that did them as well.
- PR: Yes. And I assume in the Reagan White House probably more.
- MK: Did the *Times* and the *Post* have an entree to the Chief of Staff that would probably not be matched by other news organizations? And in what circumstances?
- PR: Probably the simple answer to that question is: the *Times* and the *Post* have probably always had an access to—. I always tell people - when you're in the White House, you come back to your office - and there are ten pink slips there. Okay. One of them is from the *New York Times*; one of them is from the *Washington Post*; the rest are from the *Des Moines Register*, et cetera. Which ones are you going to return first? Well, which ones would you return first? You're going to return the ones that you think are going to have the most impact. If it's CBS, you're probably going to return that one. If it's the network, you're going to go to those first. Or, if it's deadline-oriented—which is another reason when I was in the Reagan White House I always went out of my way to try to help print reporters from other market papers just so—
- If I had ten pink [call] slips and one of them was from the guy at the *Joliet Herald*, I'd call him first, just to show, "We don't play any favorites here and you're just as important as everybody else." Sure. The temptation is always to call the *Post* and the *Times* back, because they're so widely read, and opinion molders, and all that. And, as we know, they have excellent reporters working for them. And, as you know, too, a lot of times that's driven by what the particular question is about, too. There are times that you'll want to return that call right away, and other times you may not want to return that call at all.
- MK: When the call comes in, you don't necessarily know what it's about?
- PR: No. Although, sometimes, I think some reporters—to encourage return—they're so you do know and that's helpful in both ways because....
- MK: What kind of resonance do you see the *Times* and the *Post* as having? When you spoke to them, in a sense, who were you speaking to?
- PR: In terms of?
- MK: The audience you would get to. For example, taking a policy story and the details of policy you might want to—for example, if it's an environmental story. At that time Phil Shabecoff was doing environmental stories, as well a White House reporter for the *Times*—second person to Naughton. So, if you want, you could then talk to him and get a good story written, one that's going to be accurate. Where, then, does that story appear besides the *New York Times*? Where does it go to? For example, did you see the *Times* as driving television, that television would sort of redo the *Times* for the evening news?
- PR: Well, one thing about both those publications, too, you're not just talking to a local audience. On a lot of occasions, you're going to end up on their wire service. So you're going to get much broader coverage out of it. I know the *Houston Chronicle* here every day, I read a story

“...the *New York Times Wire Service*”, “...the *Washington Post Wire Service*”. So, in effect, you’re getting a broader spread on that. I don’t know what else to say about that, other than—like all organizations—you develop relationships with some of those reporters, too, and, as we know, the *Times* and the *Post* have excellent reporters. You mentioned Jim Naughton. I miss seeing him, actually.

[Off the record]

MK: A very funny guy.

PR: He had an incredible sense of humor; a very good reporter.

MK: Were you there for his chicken soup?

PR: No, I wasn’t. He’s probably retired by now.

MK: He was at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Now he’s at the Pointer Institute in Florida. I think he’s running that.

PR: I believe Jim Naughton—and I think I have the clipping in my stuff somewhere—is the one who wrote the story at the convention in 1976 where we called Baker, “The Miracle Man.” And he wrote a story to that effect.

MK: In the press relations that you did in the Reagan White House, can you tell us how you came in, and how they would differ with the kind of contacts you would have in the Ford White House?

PR: Well, it was certainly different for me, because I was in a different office. You talk about “stepping into a flying airplane.” The Press Office in any White House, if you want to work long hours and have an interesting life, I recommend it highly. Again, I came in to the Reagan White House under unusual circumstances. I guess that’s been the story of my life. Mine won’t fit into a normal package. As you know, most people work in a presidential campaign and then, if that candidate wins, they’re on the track to ending up in Washington. I didn’t do that in either case. The first one you’ve heard about.

The second one was: I was back here in Houston during the 1980 presidential campaign. My father who had been a lifelong drama and music critic here for the *Houston Post*, had gotten ill and had a stroke, and was in the throes of a lingering illness. I had a chance to go into the Bush campaign, and I just couldn’t do it. So I was here in Houston. I had—somewhere in the back of my mind—that I might want to take a run for Congress, having done all these other things. So I thought the place for me now is Houston, to get exposed here now. So I was here during that campaign and I went to work for what was then called the Houston chamber of commerce—it’s now the greater Houston partnership—as their director of governmental relations. At that time the president of it was a former five-time mayor of Houston, and he said, “If you’re interested in a political future, maybe this will be a good place for you to establish your roots back here.” Which made a lot of sense. And I was there. Then the Reagan and Bush ticket gets elected.

I did go to the convention. Bush called me up—which was an interesting kind of footnote. It was right after my father passed away. It was right at the time of that convention, in fact, which would have been July of 1980. And he said, “Look. Why don’t you come to the

convention with us. We have no role. It's Reagan's convention. Who knows what's going to happen on the VP [Vice President] thing. I don't have any earthly idea." It was a nice gesture on his part, because he knew my Dad has just passed away. So I went up there and basically we just sat there in a hotel room for about four days. Bush did some interviews and things, one thing and another.

MK: Did you work on those interviews, setting them up and what-not?

PR: A little bit. Pete Teeley was Bush's campaign—[Press Secretary]. I had known Pete in Washington; we were friends. He asked me to help him out a little bit. I remember I set up a *CBS Morning News* interview, kind of got the old adrenaline going again; did a little of that. But it was unlike any other convention I've ever been to. We went to the movies in the afternoon. We didn't have any—it was just kind of sitting and waiting. In fact, I was with a friend named Bill Schuette, who later became a congressman from Michigan. We [were] sitting on the top floor, having a beer, when somebody came up to us and said, "Did you hear what happened at the convention hall? Reagan's gone over there and announced he's taking Bush." We thought he was kidding and said, "Yeah' right." He said, "Really!" About that time we saw the Secret Service agents heading downstairs to Bush's suite so....

But the way it happened was—again, you can't chart a course like mine for anybody. I was working for the Houston Chamber of Commerce as the director of governmental affairs when, in April of 1981, the phone rings one day and somebody says, "Did you hear what just happened in Washington?" I said, "No." "Well, Reagan's been shot and Jim Brady's been shot." Well, Brady was a friend of mine. I'd known Jim Brady in Washington, a great guy. Well, of course, everybody's horrified. You turn it on. Some of the media came to me here because they knew I'd worked in the White House. And they asked: "What do you think is going on?"

A few days later, the next thing I see is my friend Larry Speakes standing there at George Washington [University] hospital, doing this briefing. I thought, "Golly, this is a tough situation." About a week later, as I recall, maybe a little longer, maybe a couple of weeks, Jim Baker called me up one day. He was then Chief of Staff. He said, "Brady's gone down. His situation is tough. Larry is swamped. You have worked in the White House before. You know Larry. You could come up here and help us out right now." Who's going to say no to that? I said, "Of course." He said, "I've got to give a speech down there in two weeks. Why don't we talk about it then?" I said, "Fine." He came down here and gave a breakfast speech at the now-gone Shamrock hotel. So I go over to meet him; we're sitting there visiting that morning. I said, "Of course, I'll come up and help out." Then, just as a joke—this is stuff that would never appear in any of your work but it would be a good anecdote for somebody's book some day, maybe—probably mine if I could ever do one.

Jim knew my mother real well because my mother and his mother were contemporaries. That whole generation of women is gone now, but they were all contemporaries. My mother used to have a fig tree in her backyard and she used to make fig preserves. Baker loved fig preserves and she'd send them to him. So I was sitting there and I said—I did it as a joke—"If my mother thinks I should do this, I'll do it." He said, "Let's go see her right now." I said, "Yeah, right." He said, "Let's go!" Here with the Chief of Staff of the White House, we get in the car and drive over to her house, right here in West U[niversity]. We walk in—she's sitting there in the living room. She looks up. Nobody says a word. She looks up and she goes, "Jim, you know he's going to do it." "Thank you for that strong defense, mother." I said, "Okay. You've got your fig preserves, Baker." What I originally told him—I do remember this because I still had the fleeting thing in the back of my mind

about running for Congress—“Why don’t I come up for sixty days, just until y’all get over the hump?” He said, “That’s fine. That would be great.”

So now, to finally reply to your very direct question, with this long meandering answer, I then came up there. I reported for work—I want to say fourth of July weekend—because I remember there was a fourth of July party on the south lawn, and I believe my first day was that following Monday, following the fourth of July weekend. The reason that is very indelible in my mind is because I was just getting organized in my little office—I will say that office that I had, I believe, is the best office in the White House. It’s certainly one of the smallest, but it’s truly a window on the world. You’re right there by the West Wing portico where every visitor pulls up. You’re physically close to those coming to see the President. You’re closer than we are. You also can see what all the press is doing on the lawn. You can see anybody that’s talking to the press. There’s no other office in the White House like it. That office is unique. That’s something to keep in mind for somebody in the future, too. That’s such a tiny office but it is a—

MK: Say the press secretary’s office is here, and then there are two offices here. It’s the farthest one. So you can watch the [press] stakeout.

PR: Right. You can see the world there. I can’t tell you how many times I appreciated having that vantage point just for interest reasons, and also for monitoring reasons. A lot of times I’d see some reporter out there; “There’s Andrea Mitchell. We need to get to her. She’s getting ready to do her standup. There’s one other point in this story.” Anyway, I’m digressing.

So I started to work that Monday. I had just gotten there and Baker called me. It was like early afternoon. Baker buzzed me and said, “Come back to my office right away.” I went back to his office. He was on the phone. He hung up the phone. He said, “Come over.” We’re [now] a little closer. Anybody who’s been around that environment enough you quickly get a sense that something’s going on. He said, “Get on a plane right away and go to Phoenix, Arizona.” I said, “What on earth are you talking about? I just got here.” “Come a little closer,” he said, “I just hung up the phone. Tomorrow morning, at ten a.m., the president is going to walk into the briefing room here and announce the appointment of a woman named Sandra Day O’Connor to the United States Supreme Court, a historic appointment; the first female Justice,” he said. “I just hung up with her. She’s going to be swamped with press when this gets out. I’ve told her you’re on the way; you’ll handle it.”

At that point, I had two thoughts: basically the first one was, “Hey, pal, your first day here and you’ve been handed an assignment that will never happen again; you’d been given a front row on history, in a sense.” The second thought I had was a much less positive one, and it was emphasized to me by Baker as I was walking out the door and—this goes to the whole issue of working with the press in the White House—what he basically said was in essence, these weren’t his exact words: “Right now only a handful of people know about this. You can count them on your hands. So if this gets out before ten a.m. tomorrow morning, good luck.” Not a real reassuring thought at that point, knowing that such things can happen.

And, as a matter of fact, when I left his office I started running down the hall there just to get my stuff, because it was late in the afternoon; I’m going to have to fly all night to get to Phoenix. Who’s the first person I encounter in the hallway? The then-Vice President of the United States, my ex-boss, George Bush. I started to rush up to him and go, “Gee, isn’t this great about this woman being named to the court?” And I went, “Wait a minute!” At the

same time I wasn't going to lie to him. He said, "Pete, how are you?" I said, "Great to see you, Mr. Vice President," blah, blah, blah. I finally said, "I'll see you. I have to go." He said, "Well, what are you up to?" I said, "I'm on my way to Phoenix." He kind of looked at me like I had an eye affliction or something and he said, "Really? Is the President going to Phoenix?" I said, "I'll see you. I've got to go."

MK: Did Bush know?  
[Off the record]

If he did, he didn't give me any indication, and I certainly didn't tell him. He may have been on his way to see Baker right then. For Baker to tell him.

Anyway, I ran back to my office—you'll appreciate this. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. We had put a news lid on for the day, so most of the reporters had drifted off. Virtually everybody was gone; everybody was off somewhere. So I grabbed some stuff and started to go out of my office and there, standing in the doorway, physically blocking my exit from the doorway, was, of course, the last person I wanted to see at that moment.

It was [top wire service reporter] Helen Thomas. I physically couldn't get by her. Meanwhile, the clock's ticking. My plane is going to be leaving in a few minutes. Finally I said, "Helen, is there something I can do for you?" And she said finally in a very slow tone of voice, "Pete, I've been around this White House a long time." "I know you have Helen." "It sure was a slow news day today." I said, "Well, it's just a Monday, Helen. There's not much going on, I guess." She said, "I've been around here long enough to know when it gets this slow, I get an ache in my bones," she said. "Right now, that ache is telling me something is going on here." I thought, "Oh, no!" My career in the White House is going to be a one-day career. I couldn't even look her in the face at that point. I put my head down and just kind of shot past her, pushed her out of the way. And I said something like, "You never know, Helen," and I was gone.

Two days later when I got back from Phoenix, she was the first one into my office. She came in and said, "You knew. You knew and you didn't tell me." I said, "You're right. Had I told you, I would have immediately booked passage back to Houston, Texas, for I'd no longer be employed here." I often look back on that and I'm glad that happened to me on my first day there in that Press Office because—what it reinforced to me was—these were major league reporters. They're so good that they work off instinct. She couldn't nail it, but that little antenna was already up. And it taught me, in the future, remember: these people are the best at what they do. Sometimes they can look at you, "Something's going on, isn't it?" And you do get that. Body language even.

[Off the record]

MK: Did you find that you could find out things from them? That they may have known things that were going on, that you didn't know?

PR: Occasionally.

MK: Can you think of any examples?

PR: Let me see if I can think of a good one. Yes. Well, I can think of one where—I'm trying to think if that came from—you mean where a reporter would say if—

TS: [Inaudible]

PR: I'll give you one where many times—

MK: Where they had information.

PR: —where they're chasing something.

MK: They're chasing a story, right.

PR: Sometimes it proves nothing, and sometimes it's for real. I was in Augusta, Georgia, with Reagan in October of 1983 on a trip when he's out playing golf, and a gunman crashes the gate, and holds Lanny Wiles and David Fisher, who was Reagan's personal aide, hostage in the pro shop.

[Off the record]

That weekend we weren't expecting any news. They were just going to play golf and they were going back to Washington. Then I have to go do two briefings into the night there—all about what happened with this gunman and that Reagan was never in danger. It gets to be midnight. Larry Speakes had asked me to take the trip, suggesting it would be quiet from a news standpoint. It shows you that my advice to anybody in any future White House is there is never a slow day, even if there's a slow day. It just doesn't happen there.

Finally it got to be midnight; I said, "What a day." I go to my room and the phone is ringing. I pick it up and it's Deborah Potter who was then a CBS reporter. I believe she's with CNN now. She said, "Pete, we've just had a report that two hundred and fifty Marines have just been killed in Lebanon. Do you know anything about that?" When you get a call from a good reporter like that, you usually perk up. I said, "Deborah, I don't know anything about that. Let me get back to you." I put the phone back down and it started ringing again. I didn't even have a chance to dial. I picked it up and it was Bud McFarlane, then the NSC [National Security Council] director. He said, "Pete, you need to come down to my room. We've just had an incident in Lebanon involving some Marines." I said, "Bud, CBS just called me about it. They're already on to it." It just shows you, again, for your purposes, how the life in that operation changes moment to moment. That trip started out on the premise that Reagan and George Shultz and some people were going to play golf; there wasn't going to be any news the whole weekend.

I'll go back one step further on that one. Forgive me for digressing on all these, these old White House stories. When you get people like me, they always like to go back. But actually—the previous day, on Saturday, before the gunman intervened there—I talked to the press and said there wasn't much going on. I said, "Look, y'all. I'll go out and see the President and if it's all right out there we'll put a lid on for the rest of the afternoon and you can enjoy Augusta here." Everybody said fine. I went out to the golf course but there was one story. There was one story on the front page of the *Post* that day—I believe it was on the front page attributed to "sources"—that Reagan was considering a possible switch where Jim Baker would become director of the national security council and Mike Deaver would become Chief of Staff in the White House. And it was in the *Washington Post*, so everybody in the press corps was keying off of it.

So I went out there. I went out to the golf course; here came the President and Shultz off the ninth green. I said, "Mr. President, there's not too much going on today, issue-wise, and if you don't have any problem, I'm going to stand down with the press for the rest of the

day.” He said, “No problem.” I said, “There is one story kicking around though”—I was holding the paper, in fact. [Mr. Roussel had a photo of that moment, as a memento, in his office at the time of the interview.].

Reagan said something like, “How does something like that get in the paper?” Finally, I said maybe the best thing for me to say is: “It serves no useful purpose for me to comment on speculative stories like that.” He said that’s fine. As you know, that’s an answer where I’m neither confirming nor denying it, because I didn’t know; maybe there was something afoot. In that job the one thing you have to offer, the most important thing you have to offer, is your credibility, and I wasn’t going to knock it down hard because—at that point—I didn’t know one way or the other for sure. That way, with an answer like that, I was safe to let the press, if they want to, get on the phone and chase it with Baker and Deaver. Let them do that, neither of whom were on that trip. So then I went back; then the gunman thing happened; then we had the Marines killed in Lebanon.

TS: By the end of the weekend, it was a major thing.

MK: He immediately went back to Washington.

PR: There’s a weekend that started with Larry Speakes coming to me Friday afternoon: “Will you take this trip to Augusta? It’s going to be a quiet weekend.” “No problem, Larry.” Instead, we end up with two major stories bumping up against each other. Then I had to go back downstairs about 3:30 in the morning, gathered all the press together and told them what we knew at that point about what happened in Lebanon, based on guidance I got from Bud McFarlane. About four o’clock in the morning, Jim Baker, who was back in Washington, he called me up. He said, “What do you think—would it be too difficult to just come on home right now, get everybody together?” I said, “No problem. Everybody’s up. We’re all sitting right here.” I said, “Sure, why not?” We did. Everybody was there. We formed up a motorcade about four-thirty in the morning and drove right through the middle of Augusta, Georgia. It was raining; not a soul on the street. Probably one of the few times in history a presidential motorcade went through the middle of a city and nobody was there. It was kind of eerie, actually.

[Off the record]

MK: Was it you that called [John] Poindexter, or Larry that called?

PR: It would have been Larry. So there was a case where one, two, three, four stories just—but that’s life in that office. That all goes back to how I came into the White House.

TS: Yes.

MK: When you came in—

PR: If you asked me what time it was, I’d tell you how to build a watch.

MK: —was there anything you read?

PR: Let me just say in summation: I’m a person who came into the White House both times under unusual circumstances.



MK: Well, there are going to be a lot of people—most people who come in seem to come in in some way that's similar. They don't have a lot of time. It may not be an emergency sort of situation, but it's one where they may be hired on a Friday and come to work on a Monday.

PR: I will say, and maybe this is helpful to future Press Offices: many of the people in that press office had followed the full path of the Reagan campaign. The dynamic that was interesting about that—there was a guy, Robin Gray, who was, I think, the first person hired in the Reagan campaign—going back two years or whatever it was. Here I was dropped down into their midst and I was clearly identified as a Bush person. So there was that kind of dynamic.

MK: How do you deal with that?

PR: Well, you try as quickly as you can to earn people's confidence by showing you're there to represent the best interests of the President of the United States, the man you're serving, and by doing good work and by totally being credible and not playing games there within the White House. Particularly in the Press Office—I think there's a perception among many people that work in White Houses that people who work in the Press Office leak. That would be the worst place to leak. You can't, because you are in constant contact with the reporters. If you worked in the Press Office and were a leaker, it would get around, I think, very quickly. It would get back to other people in the White House after a while, probably.

As an example, here I was, identified as a Bush person, even though I wasn't there working for Bush; I was there working for Reagan. I was sensitive to that, so I went out of my way to try and show people that I was there to do my best for Ronald Reagan. Also, I was identified as a Baker person, and thereby a Bush person, which, in my case had pluses and minuses; probably more pluses than minuses, but it was a plus in that I had pretty good access to Jim. He was the person who brought me in there. So I could usually get him to call me back pretty quick on something. That, in turn, would be helpful to Larry sometimes when we were at the last minute trying to get guidance on something. Occasionally, Larry would say to me, "Why don't you go ask Baker this?" knowing that I had a relationship there. Not that Larry didn't. It was just certainly a helpful thing to have.

Now, as an example, the other Counselor to the President there was Ed Meese, who was a long-time Reagan stalwart. It just shows you how things work though. I could see how Ed and his staff would have viewed me: "That guy's a Bush guy and a Baker guy." But then one weekend—again, this shows you can't draw Fate on a chart—his son was killed in an automobile wreck on the GW [George Washington Memorial] Parkway. I just happened to be in the Press Office that weekend. Jim Jenkins, who worked for Ed [Department of Education], called me and asked if I would handle the press, because there were a lot of calls, and I did. I think Ed appreciated the way that I handled that. From then on we were the best of friends. Hopefully, I earned his confidence.

MK: When one comes in, even at the beginning, for those people who come in who are not campaign people, but are brought in from some other stream, should they just sort of keep their head low, just keep your head low and do your work?

PR: If you come in like I did?

MK: Yes.  
[Off the record]

MK: What kinds of things?

PR: —keep your head down; work hard; do substantive work. My experience was, in the White House, if you showed people you could handle substance, you would earn the respect of the people you were working with, and you would not only sustain your position but—if you were interested—could elevate yourself.

MK: What kind of substance? What were the kinds of things that you did it by?

PR: Well, I'd say—in the case of the Press Office—that would, first and foremost, apply to issue substance. If you showed you could handle a variety of issues; but it's hard because, gosh, when you're a press spokesman, you're dealing with thirty, forty issues in a day. How can you become an expert? You have just time enough to get a little bit on all of it although, obviously, on some things you become more skilled than others. And I don't know that a spokesman can become an expert unless he or she has a specific interest in some area. But, to the degree that you can become substantive beyond saying—"That's a policy we're reviewing"—the fact that you can then say, "Let me tell you what the three key elements of this policy are..." then you're beginning to be more a substantive person, and confident that you can talk to reporters and others, knowing what can be said about an issue. We used to say that to the people in our lower press office. We used to say, "You want to move up the ladder, become a spokesman." "How do I do that?" "Well, learn the issues."

MK: Is a good portion of that the development of a very specific "rolodex" that has information on the agencies and the departments, who to talk to in each of those, and issues?

PR: Yes, that's very important, because those people are a knowledgeable resource—and that's how we got a lot of our guidance, both on foreign and domestic issues. We had what we called "the most important paper of the day." We called it the MIPOD. It was my job to put that paper together for the senior staff meeting every day. It would list issues—the first thing on it would be, "Here are the five key domestic issues and the five key foreign issues we're going to have to deal with today from a press standpoint." And then, to gather the guidance—for instance, they might be introducing a new program at HUD [Housing and Urban Development]. What would I do? I'd call the press liaison person at HUD: "What are the key points with this plan?" Boom, boom, boom. And we'd do a conference call with all those people, too, before the briefing.

MK: Would you have the names of people on specific things? Say, during the day—if you need to turn something around in a couple of hours—say there was an issue that came up with the National Parks, would you know who the person was to deal with, so you'd just go straight to them?

PR: My answer to that would be, "Yes." Not always, but many times. As anybody knows, the longer you did this work the more kinds of those people you identified.

TS: Would they be press office people in the park service, or would they be specific agency and bureau heads?

MK: No. I'm talking about people who [inaudible] person.

PR: And in my case it was most always a press office person or public affairs person. Maybe once in a while they might say, "Well, I need to talk to so-and-so here, who is the person handling that issue." But usually you would deal directly with them, rather than deal with—

TS: You'd deal directly with the press office person?

PR: Yes. And to me the reason we did that was that sets up a good two-way flow. I know if I was a person out in an agency and one of the White House press officers called me, I'd perk up and say, "The White House is calling me to ask my views and get our input on this!" That's good. And I'd say, "Don't hesitate to call me when there's a heads-up on something you've got, or if we've got something wrong." And, it worked pretty good. We found it was a good way to keep from being blind-sided. Every now and then, though, Larry would be standing at the podium and I'd be sitting over to the side and somebody would ask him a question, "I heard they're going to cut the XYZ program at HHS [Health and Human Services]." And Larry [would say], "We don't have anything here on that. Let me make a phone call." So you'd throw a pretty big blanket out there every day, but you're always going to have a few unanswered questions. [Reporter] Sarah McClendon was always good at asking every president something they didn't know.

MK: In an agency or department.

PR: It's usually Social Security, or something like that.

MK: Or Veterans [Affairs]. She asked Nixon about veterans and that led to some real action.

PR: That's right.

TS: When Larry looked over at you and you jumped up, was the expectation that you would try to get an answer by the time the briefing was over, or just some time in the next couple hours? How immediate was his interest?

PR: The former.

TS: So he had the expectation that you would come back immediately with an answer.

PR: Much of the time, I could; but some of the time, I couldn't. And if I couldn't, I'd just go up and tell him on the podium, "Have them come see me after the briefing, because I'm working on this; it may take a couple of hours." But we tried to answer that question—when something would come up, that we didn't have an answer for in a briefing, we tried to get an answer during the briefing, in most cases, to lay it to rest right there, get it out then. But you can't always do that.

TS: Did you have a way of communicating—?

PR: Sometimes something would be breaking. You'd walk in there and say, "Did you all hear what just happened on such and such?" Where was I? I can't remember now. There was one day where we got totally blind-sided on one and two or three of us went to the phones.

MK: Let's go back to the original paper that you put back at the beginning.

PR: I'm sure you covered all that with Larry.

MK: Everybody always has a different perspective of it.

PR: Is mine matching up with theirs, I hope?

MK: Yes. Sometimes it's slightly different—

PR: Are we speaking with one voice?

MK: —between administrations. That is very similar. Today in the briefing there would be times when [Joe] Lockhart or [Mike] McCurry would turn to somebody and they would do that. That has been consistent.

PR: I've seen them do it. When we were there we didn't have C-SPAN doing the briefing.

MK: That does have a lot of implications.

PR: In my personal view—Larry may have gone into this—a lot of times what we would do was: when we had a big announcement, something major, we'd have TV at the first, and do a little of Q&A. Then we'd cut them off, on the theory that if you do that a lot, pretty soon the press spokesman is more visible than the President. The press spokesman's visibility gets to be pretty high up.

TS: He gets too high in the tree.

PR: Yes. There's that Baker tree again.

MK: I'd like to go back to the stories and how you determined the five stories that were going to be the big stories. How did you make that determination at the beginning of a day and how was that used in the senior staff meeting?

PR: Two good questions. It's been so long. The way the issues were determined were two ways. One, I'd do a quick read about six o'clock in the morning of the *Post* and the *Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, a quick skim of those. Secondly, the news summary office; I'd touch base with Bill Hart, who was editor at the news summary, who's seen the overnights and the wires. I'd get his input. Third was taking into account what reporters may have called me about either the previous night or that morning.

MK: When would they start calling you?

PR: That never ends. I tell people now that are thinking about wanting to work in the White House, I say, "If you want to work in the Press Office, you might as well be a doctor. You're on call twenty-four hours a day. It never stops." You go home ten o'clock at night and you think the day's work is over. It doesn't happen that way because, first of all, then you're on European time and stories are starting to break on European time. "This is the night guy at the AP [Associated Press] desk. We've got a story out of Berlin that says such and such. What's the White House reaction?" "Man, I'm at home; it's ten-thirty; I'm trying to get something to eat." "We've got to get some reaction."

We moan and complain about that, as I did one time here when I was home, to my mother. And she said, "Well, what are you complaining about? That's your job. If you don't like it, quit." She was right. You accept that. It didn't mean I liked it. A lot of times you'd be up all night. If one of the Russian presidents died, the next thing you'd have thirty calls.

Also, we had press duty officers. They had night and weekend phone duty. Let me go back. I'm finished answering your question about the two [ways]. Those were the sources of the input in determining pretty much—

MK: Was television part of it, also?

PR: Yes. You'd watch the morning [TV shows]. I'd be sitting there in that little office as I'm reading the papers and watching those morning shows. The senior staff meeting was at eight o'clock. So, by eight o'clock, we had a pretty good handle on the five key issues in both areas for the day. So that was how it worked from the input standpoint and the issue determination standpoint.

TS: You didn't get any input from NSC?

PR: Yes, on the foreign stuff.

TS: So were they preparing that side of it separately, or were you responsible for doing both?

PR: I was responsible for doing both.

TS: So they just gave you input.

PR: Yes.

TS: They weren't saying, "Here are the five"?

MK: No, he would do it.

PR: No. It was me. Sometimes I might say to somebody, "Is there anything else we should be concerned about today?" Sometimes, whoever it was would say, "There may be an announcement out of the Middle East." A lot of times they'd say, "No, it seems like you pretty much have it there." Much of the time, too, there's a story of the day in the White House and, whether it's domestic or foreign, the press will be focused on that one story. And number two, three, four, and five...the beat reporters that are chasing those. But that's how it worked from the input side.

Then we would go to the senior staff meeting. Baker, [Don] Regan, whoever was Chief of Staff, would be chairing the meeting. The meetings usually—whoever was chairing the meeting would have their agenda to cover. We were a part of that agenda. And usually, as I recall, we were either first up or right there at the top. In fact, we were, I think, always the lead off. It got to where I went to that meeting a lot for Larry. And they'd say, "Okay. The first thing up is the Press Office. What are the issues today?" And I'd sit there and go through it; as a hypothetical example, I might say, "On the domestic side, number one, as you saw the lead story in the *Washington Post* today says, we're going to cut the USIA [United States Information Agency] budget by twenty per cent." As you went through each issue the appropriate person at that table would say, "Well, that's not correct. Here are the facts." So it was very helpful because that's where we'd get a lot of our guidance—at that meeting.

It was the one time of the day, too, you had everybody together, so you could get consensus there, too. But it was very helpful. That would help us. I would not have to sit there on the phone then, an hour later, chasing people down for guidance. So it was a very orderly way to do it, and very helpful. When there were errors in these stories, people could point them out. Every now and then, though, somebody would also say, "You better just 'no comment' that one for today." But a lot of the time they'd say, "There are just some things going down right now that we just can't comment on"—and you understand that. And there's code

language to the press. Instead of “no comment,” you say, “I have nothing for you on that.” That’s not “no commenting;” that’s not saying we’re not doing it and that’s not saying we are doing it. I found a lot of the good reporters in the White House, they pick up on that real quick; there may be something going on. So, instead of sitting there and asking thirty more questions on that in front of everybody else, an hour later they’ll sidle up to your office: “On that thing you were kind of side-stepping, can you help me out on that a little bit?” But that’s the way that process worked. Every White House probably thinks they’ve got the best way to do it but, we sure found using the MIPOD approach was a good way to do it for us.

MK: Did you ever put—?

PR: Let me just add one other thing. There were other elements to that paper, too. Once we got past the issues, we’d have on there: who was going to be on what [TV] interview shows; we’d have the lineup for the day or that night, and for the next Sunday, for the Sunday shows. Because people were always interested in that. That was helpful, too.

TS: Was that because you were scheduling it?

PR: Yes.

MK: Did you ever put, as issues, points that you want to get some answers on?

PR: Sure. Yes.

MK: And it wasn’t that it was going to be the number five issue, but you just couldn’t nail people on it, so you had them there.

PR: A lot of times what I’d do is I’d say: “number one, foreign, is the story on the Middle East.” And I’d just kind of push back; I wouldn’t say anything. I’d wait to see what flowed back, rather than saying, “Here’s what I’m going to say.” Nine times out of ten, somebody would say, “Here are three things to keep in mind...,” boom, boom, boom. Which was very helpful. That’s kind of how you become an expert on a lot of these things, too, because it goes back to my thing about trying to become more substantive. That helped us become more substantive, because you’re hearing it right from the person that knows it best. That was very helpful.

A lot of times we’d do the briefings—I don’t know about others. A lot of that stuff you just get to know by osmosis, and like anything in life, doing it every day. But sometimes you’d have one or two sentences of guidance lines on something, and you’ve got to go out and explain this with those few sentences. That’s not easy to do sometimes because those are the toughest reporters in the world; they’re going to come at you a lot of different ways. I’ve just written a novel drawing on that whole experience, more from a humorous standpoint than a serious standpoint.

MK: What percentage of the time, of a senior staff meeting, is spent on talking about press and press issues and publicity?

PR: My recollection is that meeting usually lasted about—I know it was usually about thirty minutes. It was only scheduled for thirty minutes, because then we always had our press staff meeting directly after that.... I’d say the first ten, twelve minutes of the meeting.

MK: Did it set a tone, in a way, or a way of thinking, for the rest of the senior staff meeting—?

PR: Sometimes.

MK: —that publicity would be a big portion of it?

PR: Sometimes, yes.

TS: But not always.

PR: Sometimes, there'd be a big story on the front page. It would start right out—somebody would say, "What is this doing in the paper?" It would be attributed to "sources". I think, sometimes, there's a feeling on the part of some that—just because you're a press spokesman—you know how these stories occur. We'd say, "Look, it's a White House source or government source. You're asking me to identify that person; I don't have any idea who that is."

TS: Did you get a sense that the senior staff, in these situations, expected the answer was that that source was in the Press Office?

PR: I think, sometimes, there's that feeling, just because they know you—

TS: Know the press.

PR: Yes, and work with the press all the time. There's a feeling that, therefore, you must be the source of stories to the press, which we weren't. We spent a lot of time trying to convince people of that. That's why, also, it's sometimes difficult to get information from people in the White House—that you're merely trying to get so you know something about the issue, not so you can transmit all that out to the press, but to know what not to say. I think people are leery to let go of that sometimes because "the guy's going to be on CBS tonight."

I remember one day I was sitting in my office—many days [wire service reporter] Helen [Thomas] and [TV reporter] Sam Donaldson would just camp out in my office. They'd come up there; it was kind of like a lounge for them. Not that I liked it, but that was to show we had a total open-door policy, anybody could walk in, which was a signal we wanted to send to reporters: "Hey, come on in." Now it worked against you because they'd sit there for long periods, sometimes. You're sitting there trying to work and talk to people on the phone. Every now and then you'd say, "Do you mind stepping outside for a minute?" What made me think of it is, I remember one day Sam was sitting in my office. We were just sitting there chatting back and forth about nothing, and somebody from the senior staff happened to walk by there in the outer office and about an hour later that person asks me, "I saw you talking to Sam Donaldson. What were you telling him?" I said, "Would you relax? That goes on every day." "It does?" And that made an impression on me. See, that's another world, almost, to some people in the White House. They think, just because you're sitting there talking to Sam Donaldson, you're telling him everything the White House is going to do. And, of course, you're not. But that made an impression on me, that that person linked me with Sam Donaldson in that way.

MK: Is part of your role in the Press Office to persuade White House staff that they do need to provide you with information, but they also need to talk to reporters? And under what circumstances they do? That it's in everybody[s] interest, actually, for them to be coming up with information. What happens when you're blind-sided?

PR: The first part of what you just said. Larry probably told you this a thousand times, and I'll say it now about five times: As a press spokesperson in the White House, you are only as good as the information you are given. You cannot operate without information. "Hey folks, it's pretty basic. If you walk out with an empty briefing book what can you possibly accomplish?"

TS: So how did you get them to—?

PR: And we used to fight to get access to meetings and to information, for that reason. Not to leak it but to know how to go out and to advocate the position in an effective way. "If you don't want that said, we won't say that; you tell us how you want it. You work with us in shaping that. We have a message that works without giving away the store." But what you just said, my advice to any future White House is: trust your press spokespersons. Trust them. They're there to help you. They're there to advocate the policies of your administration, your president. They're not playing games with the press. They're carrying your water with the press.

The other part of the equation—and you addressed it in the second part of that is: yes, you have White House people who are dealing directly with the press, on their own, outside the realm of the Press Office. We all know that goes on, of course. Then you, as a press spokesman, are forced to react sometimes to what those people are doing, because then either stories appear on television or in the paper, attributed to "sources." "Wait a minute. You can't confirm that. It says 'White House source.'" We had a simple answer for all those things which is, "We don't respond to speculative stories, non-attributed stories." "Well, is it true?" "I can't tell you. That's a speculative story."

No reporter likes to hear that answer, but what else are you going to say? I don't like to go out and say that, but I'm also going to protect my credibility. Because the one thing you have to offer in that job, in my view, is your credibility: your honesty, your word, your bond. The first time you tarnish that either by misleading or knowingly lying, that press corps will be on you in a second, and it will get around pretty quick. You're probably toast then.

MK: Did it happen to you?

PR: Well, I never lied.

MK: Were you misled? For example, in the Grenada thing, Larry Speakes was.

PR: What you sometimes have to do, what I did sometimes, to protect my credibility—when I would get some pieces of information from somebody else, rather than putting it in my name—I'd say, "Well, Joe Smith here tells me we're going to do the following." Well, two days later somebody comes back and says, "You lied. As it turns out, you're not doing that." "Go back and look at what I said. Peter Roussel didn't say that. Peter Roussel said Joe Smith told him that." So, to me, that was the simplest way to protect one's credibility. It's like anything in life. Somebody tells you something: why do I feel uncomfortable passing that on in quite that way? In that job, you step out on that podium or you're sitting in that office, telling a reporter something: you better not lie. You just can't do it in that job.

MK: Can you think of cases where you had to persuade people to talk to reporters, that you felt it was in the president's interest for them to be dealing with them?



- PR: There were times when we argued: it was the president that should be doing it, do certain interviews. Probably one of the most classic cases of all was right after the Reykjavik summit and the perception coming out of that immediately was that it was a failure. Larry and I literally on the plane home put together a press plan where we had everybody out talking to the press the next day or that very night. So yes, there were many cases where you'd go and say, "So-and-so is doing this story. It would be a good thing for you." A lot of times what I'd say is, "I've taken them as far as I can. You know more about it than I do. I'll be glad to set it up for you, and my sense is it would be a good thing for you to talk to them." And I will say I found a lot of people in the White House, if you, the press spokesman, come and put it in that context, they respect that because they respect your knowledge either of that reporter or of the situation. And they figure, "He wouldn't be saying that to me if he thought that was a bad idea..." obviously.
- TS: So that was an effective route to get them to talk?
- PR: Yes. And, sometimes, we'd even get them to come in and do a briefing on some issue. We'd say, "Probably the best thing of all would be to have you come out the first ten minutes of the briefing." A lot of times it would be on some specific issue or something. And I think all White Houses have done that to some degree, where you have the expert on that issue. "Okay. We're going to do a reorganization of the senior staff. Here to do the briefing is Jim Baker or Don Regan."
- MK: And you would do that as part of the regular briefing? You didn't—
- PR: Yes. Many times we did that. We'd say, "Tonight there's a state dinner with the president of Brazil. He'll be meeting with the President this afternoon at two o'clock. Here on background to brief you about the subjects they'll be talking about at that meeting is Joe Smith, undersecretary for South American affairs." Boom. And a lot of times you'd have reporters over from State or the Brazil press. You'd do that for ten minutes, "Anything else?" "No. That's it. Thank you." A lot of times those reporters would leave and we would continue with the regular briefing for today. "The announcements for today are..." blah, blah, blah, and go on with the regular briefing.
- MK: In the press plan that you all developed after the summit, who were the people that you wanted to put out, and who were the reporters and news organizations that you wanted them to talk to?
- PR: A lot of it was immediately geared to the [TV] morning shows, the very next morning: the "Today" show, "Good Morning America". The people we put out were all the people that were there, George Shultz, John Poindexter. I can't remember now. The key policy personnel who were on the trip.
- TS: It was everybody.
- MK: But it was policy.
- PR: Don Regan. Yes. And the word was: everybody did agree so it made our life—all we had to do was construct the plan and plug the holes.
- MK: Particular people.

PR: It was a week-long. I remember stories being written at the time, “I’ve never seen a PR [public relations] blitz like this in the history of Washington. You can’t turn on a television show without seeing somebody talking about it.”

TS: Did that help in the White House?

PR: Yes.

TS: For them to feel like—

PR: Yes. Everybody agreed: it was the thing to do.

MK: How do you measure success of a press operation in terms of a particular event that you’re constructing a press plan for?

PR: That’s an interesting question. I’d say the election of a president to two terms is one pretty good measurement. That’s a simple answer, but seriously.

MK: So that’s a long-term goal.

PR: How do you measure success of a press plan of something you’ve done?

MK: For example, did you go through clips of papers?

PR: Sure.

MK: For example, in one that might be a target in a region—like, say, Reagan went to Atlanta to discuss education—because it was a big education blitz that Deaver put together. Would you look at what happened on television, what had been on television as a result of it, how much time he got, what kind of stories there were in the *Atlanta Constitution*? Was that done on a regular basis, as a part of each press operation you put together?

PR: I’d say so. Of course, the news summary office would do most of that for us. A lot of times, on some issues, we’d get an instantaneous version of that, where they’d give us the wires and anything that was on television the last hour or two; particularly, I know, on foreign trips, where we were out of touch. Nowadays, you’re much less so with computers and everything. But where we wouldn’t have the benefit of seeing the network news, they’d constantly be faxing us the transcripts of what people were doing. And, I must say, I found that beneficial—in terms of one thing. Which was, when you read the transcripts of the nightly newscasts of the reporters, you get people saying these reporters are biased and all that. I found, when I read the transcripts as opposed to watching them, it came across. I’d say, “That story’s right on target; I don’t have any problem with that!” Sometimes, when you’re watching it—again, just by the way they’re looking, or their facial expression—you’re watching them more than you’re listening to the words, sometimes. But, yes, we certainly did what you’re suggesting. We’d get the clips. How you measured success was: “What was the play? Was it positive, negative? Was it fair? Was it accurate?” All those things. And if it wasn’t, particularly in the case of the networks, we’d challenge it.

I can remember times, in some cases, on the networks, we’d call them while they were right on the air.

MK: Did you watch the Baltimore—?

PR: *Sun*?

MK: No.

PR: The Baltimore stations.

MK: Yes. Did you watch the Baltimore stations and then try to get into it for the Washington cycle?

PR: Well, the news summary office would. They'd alert us.

MK: I mean that night. When the *Evening News* went on, Baltimore had it early. So then what you could do was call them and tell them they needed a correction for the one that went out of Washington.

PR: I can remember where we would call Dan Rather when he'd go to commercial break. We'd call the producer right there and say, "That's not correct, what he just said; we want a correction to that." Sometimes they would, but sometimes they wouldn't. I can remember—I'll give him credit—where they came back from commercial and he'd say "We've just been informed by the White House that what we said on such-and-such is not correct." Now they wouldn't always do it. The reason we did that was not only for accuracy—we certainly did it for that reason—but, secondly, it told them we were watching carefully everything they did. If you have a marginal call on something and you're putting these stories together, you may think next time, "Remember last time we did this, they called us on it; maybe we should play it safe on this story." So I think it was good in terms of their accountability. It just let them know that we were watching and listening very carefully to what they did.

TS: Did it make a difference to you in print, if your side of the story led or if your side of the story followed up? In other words, would you sit there and say, "At least the story started with our side. The reporter is talking about something else now but started in this story."

PR: The main thing was: did it have our views, were we represented in there? Sometimes you have to call a reporter and say, "Why didn't you check with me before you wrote that?" "Well, I didn't think to. I didn't think you'd have anything on that." "Why didn't you at least call me and let me tell you I didn't have anything on it? I could have plugged you in with somebody who could have...." So, yes, it was always.... And I can't really remember many cases—. I have to say, when I give speeches now, people always say, "Don't they make a lot of mistakes?" I can't remember many cases where somebody had something wrong and you had to say, "Hey, get that out. That was totally wrong. Why did you print that?" Look, y'all know, you're dealing in most cases with very skilled reporters.

MK: When you were—?

PR: Although, I must say, lately, I see—not out of the White House but just the general state of journalism—going on the air with no regard for accuracy and then people having to come back and say, "We didn't have that quite right."

MK: Well, cable—

PR: It's all now; just get it on first. But then, again, I'm not involved with it anymore, so there's nothing I can do about it. Why should I worry, right?

TS: You didn't have that sense.

PR: It troubles me, being brought up in a journalistic family, where I was taught [to] get the facts of the story and make sure it's accurate. It troubles me to see stuff sent over the airwaves that—

TS: But you didn't have that sense when you were in the White House that, every day, you were having to face stories that were being rushed out, you couldn't get into the stream because [inaudible].

PR: There's kind of an interesting—. Read my novel. I hope I captured this correctly in my novel. I'd say about the four to four-thirty right up to five o'clock period in the White House press room every day is an interesting—there's kind of a veil of angst that hangs over both the carrels and up in the Press Office. It's the eleventh hour each day. And you'll see it—I don't know if it still goes on, but reporters making a last-minute sweep.

MK: It's all day.

PR: Yes. But it comes to a boiling point then because they're on deadline, they're getting ready to go out and do their spot. "Does anybody have anything I don't have?" It's that: "Am I missing something?" And you can see the angst in their faces. In fact, Larry and I used to say, "Golly, they got producers on their case. What a way to go through life! What pressure!"

TS: Was it something you and Larry thought about: "What can we do to work with this, or take advantage of this?"

MK: Well, they had to be available.

PR: Go jogging about four-thirty was....

MK: Well, you had to be available for them.

PR: That's right. We tried not to leave the office late in the day—there was always somebody there. We never did play that kind of game: "Let's go and leave them high-and-dry."

TS: There wasn't anything where you said: "This is the time to get our side in to the story, they're in a hurry."

[Off the record]

What I was going to say was, I remember one time there was that period in there where the three Russian leaders all died pretty close [together]: [Leonid] Brezhnev and [Konstantin] Chernenko and [Yuri] Andropov. I can't remember which one it was—it might have been Brezhnev—it occurred on our time, like about four-thirty in the morning here. I got called at home. One of the network reporters said, "I've got to have some White House reaction." It's four-thirty in the morning! So I called the Sit[uation] Room at the White House first thing and checked there. First of all, "Is this correct?" A lot of times you get reporters—one of the oldest games is, "What's your reaction to what so and so just said, the Secretary

of Labor just said?” “Well, that’s not true. Why would he say that?” And then, as I learned from walking off that bridge a couple times early in my career, “You know what, let me get back to you on that.” The first thing I’m going to do is go call the Labor secretary and say, “I’m being told this is what you said...” and “What did you say?” because a lot of times, it’s not quite that way. So I called the Sit Room, supposedly they’re playing Rachmaninoff on radio Moscow. “Is this true? Reporters are calling that Brezhnev died.” “Well, let me check.”

Later that morning, one of them called me back from the Sit Room and said, “You can confirm that the U.S. Embassy in Moscow is confirming that. You can say that.” Great. That’s all I need. So I call this reporter back and say, “Yes, you can go on the air and say the U.S. Embassy in Moscow—.” She said, “We’ve already got that. What’s the big deal about that?” I said, “Look, it’s six o’clock in the morning. What do you want me to do, call the President and wake him up?” [Where, in their minds I think they do want you to do that.]

TS: They would like you to do that.

PR: Sure. So I said that’s all I—I said: “We probably won’t have anything else on this until the briefing.” She said, “I’ve got to go and do the morning show right now. I’m on the air in thirty minutes. How am I going to fill all that time?” I’m not her producer. My job is to do what I just did. You don’t say that, but that’s what you want to say to them. Then I hung up the phone. By then I was up; I thought I might as well go in to work.

I got to thinking: About a week before then, Reagan had gone out to Dixon, Illinois, to do a ceremony to commemorate his childhood home there. In his speech there, there had been almost a paragraph there where he talked about dealing with future Russian leaders and how he would deal in the future in terms of our relationship and all that. I thought that’s exactly what—

So I called her back and said, “Were you on the Dixon trip?” “Yes. What about it?” “Do you still have your speech text from that?” “Yes. It’s here somewhere.” “Go look at the third paragraph of that.” “Okay. Goodbye.” I drive in to the White House; I get there. I’m sitting in my office; I look out on the lawn. I can see her; I can see the lights. That used to be an interesting kind of thing from that office, because you turn on the TV and you’re watching the person there and you can see your office; it was in the shot. Sometimes I had to watch that I didn’t get in the shot. They kick it to her from New York: “Now we go to the White House...”, blah, blah, blah. The next thing you know, “The White House is confirming that Brezhnev died...”, blah, blah, blah. “Well, what can we expect out of the White House, in terms of the relationship with any new Soviet leader?” “Well, I think the President’s approach to this...” whereupon she proceeded to use those Dixon speech references.

MK: Her analysis?  
[Off the record]

MK: In putting together communications strategies—.

PR: I will say, while I’m thinking about it, one of the best pieces of advice I was ever given—when I left the White House I came back here. My intentions were to get back into corporate life. A guy here gave me a good piece of advice. He said, “You ought to go be a visiting lecturer up at Texas A&M before you do that.” “I’ve never done that.” One thing led to another and I ended up doing it for a while, and it was great. It was a perfect way to

transition out of that environment, without going cold turkey, back into the private sector. I commend it to anyone coming out of the White House because, what it allowed me—first of all, I think you have to decompress. I can't speak for others. It took me about six months to mentally, physically, emotionally get back to being a normal person again. You're so intent in that work there, at least I was in the Press Office, I'd come back here and be at dinner with people and they'd say, "What do you think about what happened in Washington today?" And I'd say, "Let me tell you. There's three things you have to look at on that. You have to look at this, this and this. Then there's two alternatives. And this is off-the-record now." All of a sudden they'd go, "Whoa! I just said, 'What'd you think of that?'" Then I'd go, "They're right; relax, buddy." You're still in that White House mode.

TS: [Inaudible]

[Off the record]

My point being that, when I did that visiting lecture thing it was on, "The Press and the Presidency." That was the smartest piece of advice just about anybody ever gave me, because it allowed me to just gradually come down. Here I was talking to students who asked very good, penetrating questions; it was like facing the press corps again, but in a collegial environment. And it allowed me to talk just like we're talking here. So by the time I got back to all this again, I was fine. It was a great bridge.

In fact, I talked to somebody. Somebody could probably start a business in Washington of—I'm serious.

TS: [Inaudible] profession.

PR: Yes. A counseling thing. All they do is counsel people coming out of the White House. Basically all you do is sit there and listen to them, kind of let them go.

MK: What are the pressures that are different? You've been in a lot of different kinds of positions, political positions and, within different institutions, like the Congress or the Party and a campaign. What are the pressures that are different in a White House from those other places? And what are the central pressures there?

PR: That's a good question. You're right. My career was a little unique in that I got to face the pressures you face on Capitol Hill and Congress; I've been through a number of campaigns, that kind of pressure, the diplomatic arena and those pressures - which are different kinds at the UN - and then the partisan party pressure at the RNC during Watergate. If that isn't pressure, I don't know [what is]. So by the time I went in to the White House I had some pretty good on-the-job training for pressure situations, as opposed to being a citizen who suddenly was thrust in to the White House. I think sometimes some people are—if you came from this directly to that, you'd be a little taken aback the first day; this is kind of overwhelming, I guess.

I don't know that the pressure is that much different, other than that there is more of it. At the White House, there's more of it. I guess the simplest answer I can give to that is: it's more immediate. I'm talking strictly now about the pressure of the work I did with the press. The pressure is immediate, and it's constant. It's there day and night. Whereas in those other areas, the pressure was there during the day, but at night you go home. At the UN, it's there during the day, and sometimes at night, but normally you go home and have a

social side to it. When you're a press spokesperson in the White House, there isn't much down time. In my view you have no other life pretty much. And that's pressure.

The other side of the pressure is that every word you utter you have concern for. I can't tell you how many times I'd get a phone call—I'd be at home asleep and the phone would ring at three in the morning. [I'd] pick it up and the guy would say, "This is so-and-so at Reuters. I'm looking at a story moving on the wire and you're being quoted as saying..." Right away you think, "Nobody's calling me at three in the morning to give me good news." Right away you'd feel like you had a piece of twisted rope inside. I'd shudder upon hearing the next words, "...you're being quoted as saying..." So that's pressure. That's why I think I was the way I was, when I first came back here, because you just get so—

TS: Every word.

PR: Every word.

TS: No matter what time of day?

PR: No matter what time of day. And you can't even—you have to internalize it all. What else are you going to do?

MK: What about the opposition that, in the White House, the opposition is strong out there? Your opponents are after you and that adds another element to pressure in a White House.

PR: You mean your political opponents?

MK: Yes.

PR: Well, sure. You're always cognizant of that, and a lot of times you get asked during the course of the day or at the briefing: "What's your reaction to what Joe Jones just said? He said that in the off-year election you're going to lose ten seats..." Or whatever it is. Sure. You have to deal with that, no question about it. But sometimes you give as good as you take. It's a political game, too.

MK: Did you find that, sometimes, you would have to fight for your story, that others would try to get into it? Let me give you an example from the Hill. One of the techniques that Chris Matthews brought to his job—as the spokesperson for Tip O'Neill—was: because he felt that Congress wasn't getting that much coverage, he would try to get into a White House story. So he would have reporters available when Tip O'Neill came in in the morning, so that O'Neill would say something perhaps at that time. Those reporters would then call their White House counterparts to ask questions [on their behalf] in the briefing.

PR: Which they would do quite often.

MK: Were you aware that that kind of strategy was being done and undoubtedly was happening from other places as well?

PR: Well, Chris Matthews is a very able guy, so that doesn't surprise me in the least. Plus you would get, "What's your reaction to what Senator Jones said this morning at the [Rowland] Evans-[Robert] Novak breakfast?"—that same kind of thing. But pretty much, not always but pretty much, our answer would usually be what I indicated earlier: "I wasn't there; you're telling me that's what he said, but I don't know—get me a transcript and then we'll react to

it.” In the case of Evans-Novak or the [Godfrey] Sperling breakfast—there’s all those groups in Washington—we just kind of made a blanket thing: “We don’t respond to comments made,” and that was one way you could thwart that. Otherwise you would get in to the very thing you’re suggesting. And that’s what they want. You’d be reacting to them and getting into that. So you have to out-think them a little bit and out-strategize them a little bit. If I were on the Hill I probably would have been trying to do—.

MK: One of the consequences of people having served in a White House and having served in Communications positions is: that they take that expertise outside the White House once they leave and then use it against a White House, as in his case because he [Chris Matthews] was a speechwriter for [Jimmy] Carter.

PR: I didn’t know that.

MK: He was. So he knew how the press functioned through that. And then there are people who are working in interest groups and elsewhere on the Hill that are doing much the same thing.

PR: Just to extend that one step further, you also take things you learn from that experience—I apply them every day to work we do here. You can ask people in this office, “Does Peter says a lot of times, ‘Here’s what worked in the White House when we had a situation like this?’” There were techniques and things that....

MK: Did the connections you make in a White House help you later on?

PR: The professional—?

MK: Yes. The people you meet.

PR: It can’t hurt. Now I’ve been very sensitive to, and careful about, not trying to exploit those, calling somebody up and saying, “I’m in business now, help me out” - or something like that. I think if you do good work and people hear about it, and you keep your lines of communication open, sure. The question I get all the time, from a lot of people, is: “Do you miss it?” The honest answer—I could lie but the honest answer is, “Sure I miss it.” Anything that’s been as much a part of your life as that, “Yes.” Now do I miss all aspects of it? “No.”

MK: What do you miss?

PR: What I miss personally is the camaraderie. I miss that part of it. The working with a team. When I say camaraderie, I include the press in that, because a lot of them are my friends. I’m not going to say some of them couldn’t make my life miserable on days. But I miss being with that body of people every day and, on the White House side, working with a team toward getting through a day and accomplishing some things. At the same time I liked the challenge of working with the press. I enjoyed that. I did it for thirty years in various jobs. I must have liked it or obviously I wouldn’t have done it. So I miss the people.

What I don’t miss is what you suggested earlier. I don’t miss the pressure because that takes a lot out of you. I don’t miss having to be on all the time. That’s what it is: you have to be on all the time. You can’t let your hair down ever. In Houston, Texas, I can let my hair down, and nobody cares. I couldn’t do that there, and you couldn’t do it even out in public, when I wasn’t at the White House. You go to a restaurant you’re like this [gesturing stiffly]



because everybody knows. Washington is a small city: “I know that person works at the White House; look at him. Let’s tune in to what he’s saying.” So I don’t miss not being on all the time, but I miss—. I’ve got a lot of friends there, and I miss seeing them. I miss the change of seasons. In Houston you’ve got hot and hotter. But I’m very happy now. You find after you get past the six-month thing life goes on for you and then you realize: “I think we did a good job; I walked out with my head held high; we did it right.” You’ve got to move on in life and find a new challenge.

I scratch the itch every now and then. We do occasional projects for the Bush Library and I get to see some of those people again, from time to time. That’s the way I kind of scratch the itch. Another way I scratch the itch is much more in a minor way than Chris’s. The local TV stations sometimes use me here, to do commentary about politics and government. You go on there for thirty seconds and try to say something that sounds profound. Occasionally they even pay you to do it. It’s over a lot quicker than standing thirty minutes on the podium at the White House, trying to get something across. And that helps kind of scratch that itch, too. Bush saw me during—I think—the 1988 or the 1992 [election]. He said, “I saw you on television this morning. You look great.” I said, “What about what I was saying?”

MK: Did you find it was an environment where there was a great deal of backbiting, that that was a factor of life?

PR: That’s a factor of politics, isn’t it?

MK: Well, is it more so than in other positions?

PR: On the one hand, I say that, and yet I was saying to somebody the other day: “Sometimes there’s more politics in other areas of life, than there is in politics.” By that I mean: you find that everywhere, obviously. Is there more in that arena? Possibly, just because of the competitive nature of it. That’s another part, I might add, that I don’t miss: protecting one’s turf, looking over one’s shoulder. Those kind of things I don’t miss at all. But you have that in everything. It’s in business; it’s in life. It’s in education. I hate to say it but, as we know, that’s a part of our society. It may be more there because there’s more klieg lights on that environment so, therefore, it becomes more magnified there - and also there are reporters who like to write about that.

Now, what I discovered, and as you well know: when you’re there, you think the whole world is revolving around that stuff. You get ten yards west of the Potomac and that’s not the case. I come back to Houston and say, “Did y’all hear what happened today in the West Wing?” “Yes, but what about the Astros game? The real estate market here is really...” There’s a whole other world of other interests. “You mean you don’t care what happened in the West Wing of the White House?” But everybody in Washington seems tuned into all that stuff. Now they’ve got a whole TV series on it, I guess. I haven’t watched it yet, this TV series “West Wing.”

MK: I haven’t had a chance to watch any of them yet. Did you try to put together—the Press Office being part of it but the Chief of Staff’s office being part of it as well—any kind of Communications plans where even the Chief of Staff was involved or a deputy for the Chief of Staff, of figuring out how they were going to play a particular piece of legislation that the President was going to promote, or something? Or a foreign initiative?

PR: The simple answer to that is: yes, absolutely. We were talking about Reykjavik. We'd use Regan or Baker. Absolutely. You'd put them on morning shows. You'd use them in print interviews.

TS: But were they in the strategy-making?

PR: You mean when they were actually formulating the press plan? Yes, sometimes. Either that or it would be a case where we'd go to them sometimes, and say, "We think maybe we need to put together a plan. We're getting ready to announce the new crime initiative." You'd kind of talk about it and then out of that would come, "You handle the Congressional piece; you handle the press piece. What are y'all going to do?" "Well, we're going to have a ten-point plan, and here's what we're going to do. We're going to have the attorney general talk to these four reporters and be on these three shows." Sure.

MK: Would you develop a plan that would keep a story moving for several days? For example, you might give the story about the piece as an exclusive to the *Washington Post* so then you would have front-page coverage there. Then you'd be able to deal with it with other newspapers that next day, for the next-day cycle. So you would have a story be able to move and live for several days.

PR: Let me just say, if you gave it exclusive to the *Post*, I wouldn't want to be the press officer who then had to listen to the wrath of his competitors, who would let you know they were not happy about that.

MK: It happens all the time. It's a regular, regular feature.

PR: I understand. I've been on the receiving end of that wrath, believe me.

TS: Is that to say neither deny or confirm? Is that to say, as a practice, you tried not to do that in these plans?

[On background]

PR: Again, it depends on what the issue would be. Certainly the tailoring of the plan would be dictated. Sometimes it had a much narrower focus than other times. But, yes, ordinarily you're going to go to those from whom you can get the most impact; let's face it. That's just a fact of life. Yes, there were times when it would have a—it might be a week-long thing or a month-long thing. It might have certain elements to it that strung it out, moved it out over a period of time where you did try to sustain it.

Now the difficulty you have with that in a White House is: immediately after you launch something like that and want to sustain interest in it, the reporter's interest is gone. Many is the day we'd go out and open the briefing with, "today we're announcing the President is going to do such-and-such." Everybody would just sit there, and not a pen is on a pad. Is that it? Wait a minute. The President is going to do this and this and this. Okay. Is that it now? Two more things. We'll have a handout here at the end in the packet. Are you finished now? Okay. Now what about the story that was on CBS this morning about the President's going to Iran, or whatever it is. Boom. Their vision is: "What's the lead story today?" not, "What can I do with a story about the President's crime initiative?" That's buried. I'm on to this. So getting reporters off the story of the day at the White House—because sometimes it's a story you don't want to deal with. So you try to do things—it's punch- and counter-punch, of course.

TS: Do you have anything that you thought that worked—

PR: Things that worked?

TS: —in getting them off a story?

[Off the record]

MK: And they finally do.

PR: —you'll finally say something. I finally got it. It took me forty-five minutes. Finally out of pure [frustration] you'll say, "Okay. Look." "Wait. That isn't what you said fifteen minutes ago." That goes back to that thing about pressure. Boy, you get home at night....

I remember one time I used the word constructive on something relating to the Russians and a Russian press guy called me and said, "What do you mean, 'constructive.'" Golly, what have I said? That's a constructive word.

MK: When you had bad news, what were some of the strategies that you would use if you wanted to de-emphasize something? For example, did you put stuff out on Friday afternoon?

PR: That's an old Washington technique: about four-thirty on Friday, toss it over the transom and run. A lot of people have done that one.

MK: In fact, in this White House it's just so standard a feature that everybody has to stand around.

PR: That's certainly one of the techniques. That one. I think a lot of people have done that one.

TS: Redirection?

PR: Yes.

MK: What about developing some kind of positive story to try to layer it under?

PR: Yes. That's what we often tried to do. "Well, you're asking about the latest economic indicators. Have you seen what we're doing over in South America?" You try to accentuate the positive. There are just days, though, where you have to stand out there and take it. You can say that much—to me the most effective way when you've got a tough story that's not going to go away, from a White House standpoint, is to say as little as possible. Because, the more you say, the more that advances the story. Then they can say, "...the White House reacted by saying—." There they go; they've got a new lead! Whereas, if you say, "I cannot help you any further," it's hard to take it any further with that.

MK: What would be the drawback of just saying, "Well, there's nothing else we're going to say today?"

PR: I've done that.

MK: Is there a value in having reporters ask, in many different ways, the same question? Because it vents steam on their part; that, if you were not to do that, that their dissatisfaction would

be directed in another way? Is there a feeling within the Press Office that you've got to stand out there and take it?

PR: First of all, you have to stand out there until Helen [Thomas] says, "Thank you." As you know, there's an unwritten rule—I don't know how it got started but it does exist—kind of an unwritten code there. It's not chiseled in stone anywhere, that you don't walk off—I don't know if following groups have adhered to it; we certainly did. You don't walk off that podium until the senior wire reporter says, "Thank you." Therefore, that means you have to stay out there and sometimes take it. And I have stood there with my eyes pleadingly looking down at Helen: "I've given you everything; there's no sense in us continuing here"—without saying that; just looking at her. What she'll do is turn around and look at the other reporters. I respect her for it; she'll say, "I've got some other stuff I want to ask you about." She's not going to let you just walk off there. So there's that thing of not violating that. If you walk off there, they'll—I don't remember it ever happening in our days, that anybody did that. If you did, I think your respect factor with that press group would quickly be diminished.

MK: You were there when the restructuring—

PR: I thought of something else and now I've forgotten....

MK: Well, the release of pressure, that that's one of the values of the briefing.

PR: Right. And they will, many times, sit there and ask you the same question many different ways. And you try not to lose your cool. After a while you want to go, "Look. Now you've tried me about twenty-five different ways," but you can't. Larry had a very good axiom on that, which I tried to adhere to, which was: The more whipped up that they get, the more laid back you get. If you once buy into their emotional fervor, then one of two things is going to happen. Then they're going to smell blood, and you're more likely to say something then that may not be well thought out. Whereas, if you just keep your cool—

Actually, I had a situation like that that day I alluded to earlier, down in Augusta, with the gunman. That happened over at the [Augusta National] golf course. I went back over to the Press Office because I said the best thing for me to do—because I knew the President was on the back nine of the golf course; I knew also I'd have to go right by that pro shop to get to the President. In a situation like that, until you know the facts—that guy [gunman] could have stepped out of there as I walked by; I didn't know. So I figured what I'd do is go back over to the Press Office we had at the hotel and get hold of Dave Fisher on the phone, the President's aide, so he could say, "the President is fine; you can tell the press that."

Well, I got back over to the Press Office, and as soon as they saw me it was like I was physically engulfed by about fifty people. It was like a swarm. We moved into another room and I said, "Just wait, please; everybody wait one second." I finally sat at a phone and they were like this; this close in to my face. And I'm dialing the White House operator to get Dave Fisher. Everybody is saying, "Quick, tell us." And the first word I'm going to utter—I have to be very careful about it, especially in a situation like that where you don't know what's going on. I'm trying to get the President—

Well, it turned out Dave Fisher was one of the hostages being held in the pro shop. The operator, on the third try—I'm sitting there with all these reporters—she kept coming back and saying, "I can't get him." I said, "Get him; I'm sorry. I can't take no for an answer."

Finally she came back and said, “Mr. Roussel, I’m sorry. Mr. Fisher is a hostage at this time.”

Well, I finally got hold of somebody out there at the golf course who said, “Yes, the President is fine.” But there was a case where they were ready to write anything. When you’ve got a situation like that, with a president where his physical being is involved—needless to say, that has potential impact immediately on economic markets, on foreign governments, on national security, everything. So the first words you want to get out hopefully in that case are: that the President was and is in no danger and is perfectly all right. Then things will calm down a little bit.

Yes. I can remember many times—actually the first briefing I ever did in the briefing room was Jim Baker deciding at the end of the first year of the Reagan administration that he’d take all the senior staff and they’d go up to Camp David for kind of an assess-the-first-year session. So about mid-morning that morning, Larry came to me and said, “We’re all going to Camp David; you’ll have to do the briefing. This is your first time in the tube; good luck.” So I said, “Quick. Tell me. What’s this meeting about?” Well, it basically was kind of just let’s review how we did in the first year and, kind of, the game plan for what lies ahead.

Well, as soon as all that senior staff were gone, needless to say, the press was onto that real quick—that something was happening, and by the time I got out on that podium at noon, we had rumors running in ten different [directions]. Rumors like: it was a mass shakeup and reorganization; everybody’s resigning. That was a good experience for me, though, because I learned from that, again: picking your words carefully, and yet trying to be responsive to their questions. I grew up in a press family. I respect the needs of the press. I’ve often said, the toughest job in the White House is being a spokesman—because, unlike any other job in the White House, as I said at the start of this, you have to serve two entities. You’re in the middle of a giant taffy pull: on the one hand, a voracious press corps and, on the other hand, a White House that’s saying, “Tell them this.” And the press are saying, “Tell us everything.” Somewhere in the middle of this, you’ve got to find a way to do business every day. Anybody who says that is easy, tell them to come see me. Whereas anybody else in that White House, in any other job, if they don’t want to deal with that, they don’t have to. They can go lock up in their cubicle and do the work they’re supposed to be doing. They don’t have to deal with two entities. So that’s my speech on that deal. Notice I get going on that one, but it’s the absolute truth.

TS: [Inaudible].

PR: That’s why I have great respect for anybody that does that in any White House.

MK: In a White House, you have to deal with a lot of different institutions—both internally and then externally. In your case, what were the various offices that you dealt with within the White House, on a very regular basis, and what were the institutions outside the White House that you dealt with regularly?

PR: Inside, all the key offices that you’re familiar with, probably on a regular basis. Certainly the Chief of Staff’s office; the Congressional office quite a bit. The National Security Council. The travel office, the advance office, trip stuff, and scheduling. Whoever the domestic policy counselor is. All those. The legal office, on many occasions. I’d say virtually on a daily basis I interacted with most of those.

MK: What would the legal office be involved with?

PR: A lot of times it would be something like: when you release the President's income tax returns, and those kinds of things. If there's some investigation of some kind, somebody from the Counsel would be involved with that. A lot of times it was more the tax return issue and that kind of thing.

MK: What about outside?

PR: Well, certainly, all the key agencies and departments, not necessarily on a daily basis. Although we did do a daily conference call. We just did that first thing in the morning and that—

MK: How long was your conference call?

PR: Usually that one lasted about ten minutes or so. We'd say, "Here are the things we think we're going to have to deal with. Now, Joe, you're over at HHS, tell us, are we on track? Here's our guidance on that," boom, boom, boom. "Is that right?" "Yes, that's right." Or, "Here's two other points." So you'd kind of focus in. Then you'd get to the end, "Is there anything else from anyone else that we need to be alert to today?" "Yes. This is Sam over at the State Department. Were you aware of this?"

MK: Who would be on that conference call, every day? Who would be on it and then, who were the others that were on it sometimes?

PR: Well, it would be myself and Larry, from our office, and whoever our domestic and foreign spokespersons were. Then, on the other side, it would usually be the public affairs officer for that agency or department, or his or her deputy. It would be somebody—

MK: Did you have a regular call each day that brought in Defense, State, CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]?

PR: I didn't but, as I recall—whether it was Mort Allin or Ed Djerejian or Dan Howard, whoever was doing our foreign guidance—they would do that circuit, either as a conference call or, certainly, individually. They would do that on their own. The way we had it set up, we had a deputy for domestic affairs and a deputy for foreign [affairs]. Then Larry and me; we were just kind of across-the-board. Those two individuals, they had the best relationships of all, obviously, with those officers; in the case of foreign with those departments and in the case of domestic, all the other cabinet departments. We found that worked very well.

TS: Is that before or after the senior staff meeting?

PR: That was after.

MK: It was before the briefing.

PR: Because then we'd do a—I'm trying to think; there was one other meeting. We'd do the senior staff meeting at eight. Then at eight-thirty—

MK: Would you have your own Press Office meeting?

PR: Yes. It seemed to be, there was another meeting in there at eight-thirty, and then the Press Office. I guess that was it. We'd do the senior staff at eight and the Press Office staff meeting at eight-thirty. That was good, too, because we'd flow out of that meeting with all the guidances we could give to all our staff. We'd share it with our staff so they didn't have to sit there through half the day—kind of in the dark about stuff, because they'd get peppered, too, down in that lower [press] office. We kind of adhered to the theory—Larry's approach to managing that office was that every person, every person in that office, was a spokesman for the President and, therefore, should be informed on the issues. That's right because by nine o'clock—we did the first briefing at nine-fifteen every morning. We did two every day: at nine-fifteen, and noon, usually. Nine-fifteen would be where we'd just call them up there to Larry's office. I don't know if that tradition is still going on.

MK: It's called the gaggle.

PR: Is that what it is now?

MK: The gaggle is at nine-thirty.

PR: I was told by Ted Knapp, who is a long-time Scripps-Howard reporter—you remember Ted—he told me that that started with Bill Moyers, as I recall. But you'll get varying versions of that.

MK: Well, for two briefings you can go back to George Akerson who was [Herbert] Hoover's press person and was the first press secretary. He had two briefings a day.

PR: See, I didn't know that.

MK: And then [Stephen] Early had them and [James] Hagerty did, too. They were just two regular briefings. What's happened over the years—?

PR: Where did they do those?

MK: In their office.

PR: They used to be in the West Wing, over there in the lobby.

MK: They would come over in to the Press Secretary's office.

PR: So they just did them right there.

MK: Right. And it was such a smaller press corps that was there on a regular—

PR: Thank you very much. I get that question all the time when I give speeches: what about...? Let me put it this way. Did you know when FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] was president, he could call the press in there, and when Lyndon Johnson was, even, you could call down to the press room and tell George Christian, or whomever: "Bring them all up to the office, the President's got something he wants to tell them." And you could. You still had a predominantly print, pencil press corps then. If you did that today, you're going to have to do it in five or six waves, because it's now dominated by electronic media. There are a lot of cameras now. It's just gotten totally unwieldy from a physical standpoint, and it's a shame that it has to be that [way]. But I don't know what the answer is. You've had that shift, as

you're aware from studying all this, from coverage predominantly by print to coverage predominantly by electronic media now. Now maybe with computer, some guy is going to come up with some thing where it will all be on some micro-dot....

TS: It will be a chat room.

PR: Who knows twenty years from now what will—who knows? Could be.

MK: One of the purposes that the gaggle today performs is that, with a televised briefing, there are things that you can't do, there are arrangements that you can't work out publicly, in a briefing, that say you can in the gaggle. Because, even though people can record the gaggle—they can't use the sound on the air. But there'll be times, like, say, for example, Tony Blair. When he came to the U.S., which was around the time of [Monica] Lewinsky—it was early February. And it was going to be the first time that Clinton met with the press. A reporter in the gaggle about three or four days beforehand asked McCurry if it was possible to try to get the President to talk about the issues, the Lewinsky stuff, before that press conference with Blair because otherwise the press conference with Blair was going to be nothing but Lewinsky. And reporters discussed that. That's the kind of thing that has to be done in an informal way.

Were there occasions where you all would talk with reporters? Was it just in both briefings you could do that, like reporters would say, "We look at the schedule, and we need something from the President, and I see no pool is going to see him today. Is there a way you could do that?" Could you do that in the briefing or is there some other way that you regularly did that kind of thing?

PR: It would usually be before the briefing, on stuff like that. Although, sometimes, during the briefing, when we'd go through the schedule for the day, we'd say: "Here's the President's schedule—." And they'd say, "Why can't we have coverage of that?" We'd try to explain why not. Although, usually, at the senior staff meeting we had told everybody—we'd determined that at that meeting. A lot of times we'd say, "Here's what we recommend to be the coverage events today." In some cases it was pretty obvious what they would be, and everybody would agree that that's the case.

What's interesting about that nine-fifteen, where it was particularly useful, was you got a different group of reporters at that meeting, first of all. The reason we did it was mainly for the wire services.

MK: Wires, and television and radio, is what it is predominantly.

PR: It gives the wires a chance to update their overnight leads. The other thing is, though, that's the first news out of the White House every day. Radio stations and everybody around the country doing the news, that's the first impression formed out of the White House on many days and it comes out of that nine-fifteen meeting. The makeup of the reporters, yes. It was usually wires, the network correspondents and then not many of the daily—

MK: What about radio?

PR: Yes, some radio. A lot of times people wouldn't show for that. You could always count on Helen and the usual people being there. A lot that came in at noon wouldn't be there at the nine-fifteen and you wouldn't—I guess one of the many downsides is, sometimes, a reporter at the noon briefing would say at the nine-fifteen, "You say such-and-such," and then some



guy in the back would say, “Some of us weren’t at the nine-fifteen; we don’t know that and blah, blah, blah.” So you get a little of that.

Where I found it particularly helpful was it, again, was a signal to us of what was on their minds, what the lead stories of the day were. And that would help us. Then we’d have a couple hours before the noon briefing. You’d listen to the questions you’d get there, and it was a pretty good microcosm of what you’d face later on. So it gave you a chance then, if there was something asked that you didn’t know the answer to, you could go chase that down in the meantime. We’re probably going to get similar stuff at noon; it would help you formulate your answers for the noon briefing. I thought it was real helpful. That nine-fifteen is underestimated, I think. Maybe it’s not.

MK: No. It’s seen as important within the White House.

PR: Sometimes more news came out of that than did at the—

[Disc 2 of 2]

PR: —aspect to it. So whereas that nine-fifteen, although other people got on to it and it became less intimate, it got to where it grew. I think the word got out that the nine-fifteen is the one to be there for.

TS: Sometimes, people could bring up a story that they wanted information on, but they were trying not to let everybody else know about it as well. So, the nine-fifteen is where they did that.

PR: Sure, because there were fewer people there. Although, invariably, the really good reporters—somebody would come up to your office after either of those and say, “There’s something I want to talk to you about.” And you saw them sit through the whole briefing without asking a question. That person is a good reporter.

TS: They’re afraid they’ll find Helen Thomas standing in front of their office door: “My bones are telling me you’ve got something.”

PR: That happens. She not only stood in my door; she sat in there on many occasions. I haven’t even thought about a lot of this stuff in a long time. It will be interesting to go back and listen to it. You forget about all those long days and nights.

MK: After the nine-fifteen—

PR: I’ll tell you—there were nights where I’d sit—Larry had a couch. He’d leave. It would be about nine-thirty by the time we finally got out of there, a lot of times, later. A lot of times you’d just sit there; I’d sit there for about thirty minutes. I remember, there’s a blinking light out there on that corner of Pennsylvania Avenue, and I would just sit there for about twenty minutes

TS: And watch it.

PR: Yes. Okay. Now I’m going to go home.

MK: After the nine-fifteen was over, did the staff get together and then parcel out assignments of who was going to get information on various issues?

- PR: Yes. Usually it would be the deputies. We'd sit there and say, "Are we okay on this? You heard her asking about that; we've got to chase that down." Yes. So it was very useful in that way. It was useful for them, and useful for us. That's a two-way street, that one. They'd get a fresh lead—usually on something Helen or Terry Hunt, whoever was there from the wires.
- TS: If there was a story that you were suddenly—you'd already had the top-five-stories session. Now you're in the nine-fifteen briefing, and something big comes up.
- PR: That we didn't have on the Top Five. That happened, certainly. Something would break.
- TS: How would you take that story up? In other words, how would the senior staff find out—?
- PR: It would jump from nowhere to number one on the list?
- TS: Well, what was the process? Who would you call and who would you talk to?
- PR: Again, it would depend on the story and the magnitude. Say it was a big story. Say it's something big that broke right then. That happened, certainly. Normally, usually, somebody from the Press Office would come in there and pull one of us aside and say, "This just happened." I'd either leave or I'd tell Larry, and we'd stop the nine-fifteen. We tried not to do that because that immediately—you might as well put meat in front of a piranha. Usually I'd just slip out because I'd be standing there. That nine-fifteen we just had everybody scattered around; there was no formal physical structure to it so you could slip in and out of the room without being real noticeable. A lot of times I would just step out and see what it was. Depending on what it was, I would try to wait until the nine-fifteen was over. That was a case where the two of us had such a good relationship we could look at each other. If I came back in the room and was in the back—he's still sitting up there talking—he could look at me and by just the look on my face would be [know to] wrap this up as quick as you can; we've got something big breaking. Or, if I'd just shrug, he'd know it was no big deal and know how to conduct himself. So it's like the theater; you work out your cues a little bit.
- TS: I was asking about—there's a story that everybody seems to be asking about and y'all hadn't picked up on it.
- PR: I see what you're saying.
- TS: How would you get that up to the senior staff, that everybody's talking about this issue?
- PR: Then I would just get out there; I'd walk right out of the room and either go directly to whoever the Chief of Staff was or get on the phone—if it was some foreign thing, call Bud McFarlane or whoever was in the NSC if it was a foreign thing—right away and say, "We're in with the reporters right now and we're being asked about..." That wasn't uncommon at all. I'd say, "We're getting asked right now about thus-and-such. What is our guidance on that?" Most of the time, whoever the person [was], foreign or domestic, would say, "Here's what you need to say", or, "Here's the guidance on that." Then I'd go back in and I'd either quickly type it up and hand it to Larry and let him do it, or some times I'd step back in the room; Larry'd see me and he'd say something like, "Pete, did you have something to say?" I said, "You're asking about: 'Is the President going to Russia next week?' Here's what I can tell you about that right now." So that's the way we would do that right now.

MK: There's a particular case—that I wonder how it was handled—that came to you from the press, and that was Iran-Contra. How did that develop, and what were your first impressions of it as a story and how it had to be handled? What did your instincts tell you?

PR: My instincts told me to handle it very carefully because we didn't know the facts. You're only as good as the information you're given. I hate to keep repeating that bromide, but it's true. You've got people saying: "There's a story in a Middle East paper", and you're asking people for guidance, and they're saying, "You ought to just 'no comment' that. Sometimes people are helpful to you and they'll say things like, "Don't get too far out on a limb on that one," which is a way of telling you to be very careful. On that one, we just didn't know. I was down here in Houston. I came down here at Thanksgiving. I remember Larry, he said, "We have to be careful what we say on this because we don't know the facts." So that was my instinct on that one, certainly.

We left then in February of 1987, not because of that. Larry had gotten a job, and I felt it was time for me to leave, too. We'd done our thing. But right away your antenna said, "This looks like it's going to be a major story and we need to be careful." As that proved to be the case, it certainly was. And as a spokesperson, you needed to be cognizant of that. Once you've been around that environment, I think most people would agree, you pick up a pretty good instinct right away on stories. What's going to have legs to it and what isn't. I guess it's like any job in life, you develop an instinct for how to conduct yourself in that line of work. It's a pretty specialized line of work I'll admit, but it's like any other job that you do, I think.

MK: Is part of that instinct what you know about people—

PR: Yes.

MK: —and what you know about the particular people so that—in maybe other meetings you had—had you known Oliver North, that a story was starting to unravel that has people that you've watched work, that you have a sense that some people are going to be getting themselves in to more trouble than others?

[Off the record]

TS: Sometimes they have the sense that guys like [Howard] Hunt were going to be trouble.

PR: I'm trying to think if I've been in any—you know what helped me more than anything on that was having early instilled in me in my early political career by George Bush primarily—he helped instill those good instincts in me which were: always conduct yourself on the up and up; always tell the truth. They sound like platitudes, but they're true. If you do right, you'll come out all right. If you do wrong, you'll come out less well. Particularly when he was chairman of the Republican National Committee during Watergate, I can't think of a more thankless task than to be chairman of the Republican National Committee during Watergate, when you didn't know all the facts, once again. Here he was out being a spokesman for the Republican Party. What he did very wisely, I think, at the time, was to say, "I'm not going to go out and defend Watergate, because I don't know all the facts—this is all being investigated now. What I'm going to do is point out to people that the Republican Party did not cause Watergate; Watergate was committed by individuals. I'm going to defend the Republican Party and keep it separate from that and hope people will

make that distinction.” Now that’s a pretty fine distinction in some people’s minds and it was a difficult one to make because you went out at the time and said, “I’m a Republican.”

My point is, for me personally, I sat at the knee of some pretty good folks, in terms of their integrity. There was also a man who later became the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency when it was under fire. So I had the benefit of the counsel or the advice, whatever you want to call it, of people like Jim Baker and George Bush, who always put ethics at the top of the chart in terms of the way they conducted themselves. Baker said to me one time, “If you’re ever in a position where there’s the slightest doubt in your mind in terms of which way you’re going to err, err on the right side.” Again, you can say that’s simplistic advice but it stayed in my mind. Even if you think nobody will ever know about it, if I did this or whatever it is, don’t do it, Pal. He was right. At least that’s the way I conducted myself. I guess maybe some people would disagree with that. But, hey, I’m here today and I’m happy.

MK: Did you have a chance to go into another White House?

PR: Yes, I did. Actually the Bush White House. They called me. He and Chase Undermeyer called me. We talked about a few things, but I had just come out of two stints in two White Houses. I was kind of wrung out. And I was on the verge of being a visiting lecturer. I hadn’t at that point. But I did that shortly after that. What I said to him at the time was, “I appreciate very much that you’d consider me for something. Why don’t I think about that; if I come up with something, I’ll let you know.” I said, “Let me think about it.” And the more I got back here and got involved, I said, “Hey, actually I find I can live without all that.” It’s very intoxicating. Helen Thomas once said, “All roads lead to Rome,” meaning, if you’re going to work in Washington, work in the White House. And I agree with that; that’s the ultimate.

For me, I fulfilled my ultimate ambition. The first day I went to work as a press secretary on Capitol Hill with George Bush—there I was a press secretary for a congressman. In those days, I don’t know if it still is, your ultimate ambition was: “Some day I might be the Press Secretary, or in the White House.” I guess I thought so a little more than some people, at some point, because already at that point there was speculation about Bush, that he was kind of a comer and somebody to keep an eye on. Even as a second-term congressman, he was certainly in the speculation when Nixon picked his VP at the 1968 convention. Bush was one of the names. So that specter is in mind. But then he lost the Senate race and I thought, “That’s the end of the road.”

Then I end up at the United Nations; a totally different experience. And at the time the PRC [People’s Republic of China] came in there, which was a fascinating experience to watch unfold there. People who had been isolated in China for years are suddenly, one day, sitting in Mao jackets in New York City, at a desk at the UN. It was kind of a fascinating experience. And then to help run one of the two great political parties in this country. Then there’s Watergate. Then there’s the speculation that Ford would take Bush or Rockefeller for VP. Well, he took Rockefeller, and Bush goes to China. I thought that was it, the end of the line for me finally; back to the real world. As you know, I end up going to the Ford White House and then, through totally unforeseen circumstances, I end up being a spokesman for the President of the United States in the Reagan White House. So the day I walked out of there, for me personally, I said, “Hey, very few people get to make the full circuit that I did. Most people go to Washington and they’re there for four years in an administration, or eight years, in a department as undersecretary or whatever it is, or they’re in a White House, whatever that job is. But I got to do the whole panorama.” I was very fortunate.

So, to answer your question, yes, when that opportunity came up to go back into the Bush White House or in his administration, I thought about several things. I thought, I have to do what I want to do, and I'm sitting here trying to think of something else, and I really can't think of anything else I want to do at this time. So I told him I'd get back to him.

In the meantime this thing about being a visiting lecturer came up, and then Bush picked Houston to be host of the 1990 economic summit, which was the first time that that had been hosted in a major American city. Ford had it in Puerto Rico, and Reagan had it in Williamsburg [Virginia]. So it was a great opportunity for an American city. One of the captains of industry here, Ken[neth L.] Lay who is chairman of the Enron Corporation here, was one of the co-chairs of the Houston host committee. He called me up and said, "You've been in the White House. You did five of these, I understand. You could help us plan this one here." I said I'd be more than happy to.

Well, he threw me together with a woman named Roxann Neumann, who was going to be the executive director. They made me the communications director. It was a logical position for me. So he brought me together with Roxann Neumann. So, for six months we helped plan Houston's hosting: working with a Washington team of course. I knew many of those people. So I did that. So that occupied me outside [Washington], and yet I got to scratch the itch again by doing it, because I saw a lot of people. Then I see the reporters come here, and I end up interviewing some of them. We were doing a thing for the municipal channel here and I got to do role reversal. It's kind of fun. But then that person that I was thrown together with is now my business partner, Neumann-Roussel. We created a firm as a result of that. So you never know where fate is going to lead.

Now the one [question] I'm getting all the time these days is: Aren't you helping George W. [Bush]? Aren't you involved in that campaign? Why aren't you...?

[Off the record]

My answer to that is, "Yes, I've known him thirty years. I think the world of him. I'm all for him. But I've helped run presidential campaigns, and I've been in the White House twice. I'm kind of enjoying life now. And also, you've got to be young to do that. It helps to be young."

MK: Is it just physical stamina?

PR: That's part of it, physical stamina, certainly. And also, your perspective changes. As we all know, as you get a little older your priorities in life—I'm sitting here thinking: it's not going to be much further, I'm down the road to retirement. When you're younger in life, that's so far off in your horizon, you think, "Yes, I'll go off and do another campaign tomorrow, and I'll do this and do that."

I guess for me personally, though, if I went back in to that campaign tomorrow, I'd be retreading ground I've already trod now several times. Say he got elected tomorrow, and was in the White House, and said, "Come work with us in the White House," it would for me be redoing some of the ground I've been over before. That's not to say that I wouldn't do it and that you don't always leave the door slightly ajar, although—here's the old White House Press Office line on things—"I have no plans at this time to do that." Everybody would always pick that one apart and say, "Why am I troubled by the phrase 'at this time'?"

- MK: When somebody goes back into a White House—?
- PR: Read my novel. I've got a thing in there about the ten most used phrases to bail out, the bail-out phrases.
- TS: We've talked to people who have said: they have then stuck up on their wall pat phrases that they could talk on the phone with. Did y'all have things like that?
- PR: I remember Sam one time—a favorite of the State Department, which I always liked, which was a good one was, "I have nothing for you on that." If you listen to that, it's not saying "No comment," it's not saying you're not onto something, but it's not saying anything, basically. Well, as I was standing out there one day at the podium, getting battered on something finally I said, "I'll try that." I said, "Sam, I have nothing for you on that." He looked at me and said, "What?" I said, "I have nothing"—he said, "That is the most preposterous statement. You've told me nothing." I said, "You catch on fast." See, I'm using that in my novel in a humorous way, and yet it was used in a serious context. I don't know about those people: they have them on the wall?
- MK: It was in the NSC.
- PR: I wish I had had that list.
- MK: Actually it was a junior staff person so that when he had answered the phone he made sure—
- PR: As I say: "Your comments are noted;" "Your question is noted;" "I have nothing for you;" "That's an interesting question."
- MK: "We'll get back to you."
- PR: "We'll get back to you." I remember, one time, we said that in the briefing, and somebody said—I think it was Bruce Drake, who used to be with the *New York Daily News*, and is now with NPR [National Public Radio]. He turned to the reporter that asked and said, "Have they ever gotten back to you on anything?"
- MK: That one does tend to daunt people. When people go back into a White House they have to come in doing a different job, or—if they're going to be in the same area—they have to go in to a more senior position in that area. People that you know who have—
- PR: Say they've been there, and they go back in?
- MK: Yes. Even in your case, did you—
- PR: I went back at a higher—
- MK: And was that important?
- PR: To me it was.
- MK: If you were doing the same thing, you wouldn't be going back in.

[Off the record]

MK: One of the difficulties of putting a new team together is if you're going to bring people in with White House experience, that the people that you're going to bring in—

PR: Everybody wants to be chief of staff.

MK: Nobody wants to do the job that they got their experience doing.

PR: I'm sure you're right about that.

TS: Or they end up wanting the jobs that they're really not that capable at.

PR: Everybody shoots for the—

TS: They end up negotiating for a job that, if they get [it], they can't do.

PR: Now that's interesting. Once in it they really can't fulfill the—

TS: Because maybe it's not what they're talented at.

MK: Or—

PR: It's not what they thought it was. And I can understand that. And you know, too, it's been shown, and you've know better than anybody, some jobs in the private sector, that skill that you think might fit that job in the White House for one reason or another just doesn't work out that way sometimes.

[Off the record]

Actually, I ran into some of that when I came back after the Ford White House. I went around, had a few interviews, and they would say, "I'd give anything to have seen and done what you've done." And then they'd say, "But you don't want to work here; you'd be bored here." You say, "No, I'd really like to work; I need a job. I need money. I need to get paid." But I ran into some of that. They'd say, "We make widgets here, and you'd be bored in a widget factory." It's interesting how it doesn't translate, sometimes. I don't know why that is.

[Off the record]

Now this is. Most corporations have a vice president for public affairs. It comes under a lot of titles, but that area is not hard to translate out into the—that's interesting what you say.

And also a lot of people who have worked in the campaign, in my experience any kind of campaign, congressional, senatorial, gubernatorial, there's an excitement—let's face it—an aura to a campaign that's unique to that existence. And that existence is usually a year, maybe two years in the case of a presidential campaign—a year, really, when it's rolling—and we all get caught up in it. It's exciting; you get the adrenaline going. You're running around the country; you've got the press following you. Then one day it becomes Wednesday morning and that ends; that's over with. And the next thing you face is the sobering reality of the next step. Say it's Congress. The next thing you move into a congressional office. You know, up on the Hill, it's physically—and it's a very disciplined environment where you have people doing case work, doing legislative research, all these things, and it's a discipline. I used to see people that had been in a campaign come to the Hill thinking: this is going to

- be an extension of what they came out of. And four months later, they were out of there: “I need to go get involved in another campaign.”
- MK: What about in the White House? What do you find are some of the common characteristics of people who excel at a campaign, and then the people who excel in the White House? What are some of the qualities that they have? Compare the two.
- PR: I’m like a broken record because I’ll keep coming back to Baker. Certainly organization is a skill. There’s no question that skill does you well in both those environments. To come in to my area, certainly an ability to deal with the press, having press ability if you want to call that. That comes into play, even for non-Press Office people in the White House. So you’re going to be confronted with that, whether you want to or not. You’re going to have to deal with that, to some degree. So, that skill. If you want to acquire that skill during the campaign, which most people do—let’s face it, reporters are in your face all during a campaign. I would say certainly, just the physical aspect of a willingness to work hard. Let’s face it; both of those are very hard, long-hour, six- and seven-day-a week work. You better not be averse to hard work and long hours.
- MK: What about the nature of the work?
- PR: To work at the White House is a twenty-four-hour-a-day deal, almost.
- MK: Is there a different kind of person needed in the two? In campaigns, one person was saying there is a chief and a lot of indians. You don’t have the same kind of requirements for experience in a campaign, because a lot of it is carrying out.
- PR: That’s true.
- MK: In a White House, it’s somewhat different, in the sort of backgrounds that people need and the qualities that you need.
- PR: That’s true.
- MK: In a campaign, you have a specific mission, and each day your actions are geared toward that mission, whereas, in a White House, when you’re working a lot of different policies and things, it’s different.
- PR: During the campaign, you’re going to be doing the radio actualities to Iowa and New Hampshire every day. Okay. We won. The campaign’s over. Let’s see where would we put you in the White House.
- TS: I think another aspect of that is: there [is] a personality that’s great in a campaign but is death in a White House, because that personality just doesn’t fit in with the kind of work that a White House requires. Your example of the undisciplined person [who] can’t stand the congressional pace.
- PR: And I would apply that to the White House, too. I don’t care what anybody says. It’s a disciplined environment. You have to be self-disciplined, if you’re going to work there, I think, otherwise—. So, to answer your question, campaigns do attract a lot of personalities sometimes, particularly creative people, a lot of whom you don’t see end up in a White House. Now, for one reason or another, a lot of times they don’t want to be confined because, I think, they realize, “In there, I’m going to have to answer to people, and I’m going



to be in a structured environment, whereas in a campaign I'm a free-floater; I'm a consultant to this deal. I'm doing whatever...." And I can see it that way. If I was that person, I'm not sure I'd want to go into the White House. Why would I want to give up—I can make a lot more money doing this. I can go on to the next campaign, or whatever. Why would I give this up to go do that?

Now the converse of that is: because you then can spend the rest of your life saying, "I was once in the White House; I worked in the White House." If that means something to you, if having that on your résumé means something—I guess it did, one, because my friends were there; two, it was something that interested me; three, yes, I saw it as an honor and a unique opportunity. Because, as we all know, an infinitesimal amount of the population ever sets foot in the building, much less works there. So I was very fortunate; I got to do it, not once but twice. Most people don't even get to do it once. Rumsfeld gave me a good piece of advice, too, early on. He said, "Look. Let's face it. Your tenure in the White House is a possible four years. Eight maximum. My advice is give it everything you've got every day, until it's over, because then you've got the rest of your life to get on with. This will be just one slice of your life, but you'll be able to look back and say, 'I had a great experience there and gave it my best shot. I feel good about what I did and now I can go on and be content.'" I thought about that a lot of times when I'd be sitting there.

TS: Watching the blinking red light.

PR: Or I'd say, I've got to do these ten things before tomorrow at seven o'clock. Or you'd be out on the road on these trips, which are long sometimes. Sometimes those foreign trips you'd be out two weeks, going to Japan and China, and stuff. You literally—some of those trips you never went to bed, really. You'd be working around the clock. You'd be dragging along and think, "This is murder, why am I doing this?" And then you think, "Why am I doing this? I'm getting to see the world. I'm here in China. I just met Gorbachev....," or whoever. "Would I have ever had this chance in the private sector, heck no. I think I can stand this for four years. I think I can hang in there."

MK: What benefits are there at the end of it? What benefits did you find of having served there?

PR: On that one, I can give you probably the most direct answer I've given you all day. I know I haven't given you many direct answers.

MK: You've given us just what we need.

PR: That scares me to hear you say that. What did the others say?

MK: We need to know how the place works, what are the gears and levers.

PR: Surely you haven't heard me say anything you haven't heard from anybody else, have you? You better not have.

The biggest benefit for me, I'll tell you exactly. It was that after having done what I did and particularly having walked out on that podium and faced the toughest reporters in the world, having sat there day-to-day and faced the toughest reporters in the world on a daily basis, having to utter the words I had to utter with the responsibility that came with that, knowing that the slightest misspeaking on your part can do sometimes major things—imposes a tremendous amount of responsibility on a person. So having done that, and hopefully having done it well—as I say, hopefully the day I walked out, I walked out with my head

held high. I got some nice letters unsolicited, which I appreciated, from reporters who I respected a lot, who told me they appreciated the way I conducted myself. Helen even wrote a story about me, which I thought was a very nice thing to do. But, what it did for me was, from that day forward, the next day after I walked out, there is no experience in life, none, that will ever faze me again, or intimidate me again, after having done that. That, to me, was the toughest—what could have been tougher than that? I'm glad I did it. The biggest advantage is it prepared me for the rest of my life without any fear of the future.

I remember during the economic summit here one day, we were walking to a meeting and somebody in the car—they had all the major CEOs gathered for a meeting—“Pete, you've got to go into this meeting and brief the CEOs about this economic summit. Aren't you nervous?” I said, “Are you kidding? This is fun. This is a day at the beach compared to what I've been through.” They kind of looked at me and said, “Really?” “But they're all big CEOs!” I said, “Trust me.” But that's what I meant; compared to that experience—that helped my confidence. In meetings I used to go into: “This is a nail-biter; I hope I do this right, and say this right.”

We do presentations for new business all the time, and I can't wait to get in them, because of what that did for me. It disciplined me mentally, and I guess emotionally, too, in ways that no other experience—none—in life, I don't think, could possibly do. So it was a great value to me in that way and I commend it to anybody else that does it for that reason.

[Now certainly there were other things, friendships that exist to this day, press relationships that exist to this day that I can occasionally still draw on, all those things. Just from a thing that our office did—I don't know if it's unique or not—the Reagan Press Office, and Larry may have mentioned this, starting the first year after Reagan was out of office, 1988, 1989. I think our tenth year anniversary is coming up, so we must have started in 1989. Every year at Christmas, some time during the holiday period, we have an annual reunion lunch in Washington of the members of the Reagan Press Office staff. We do it in Washington.

Until recently Bob Sims who was on our staff for a while and Dale Petroskey, who was on our staff—they were both in the hierarchy of the National Geographic Society—they would host it over at the Geographic. Dale has left to become the president of the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. But Bob's at National Geographic. So they usually host it. And we do it every year. It's a neat thing. We gather, have lunch, tell a few war stories. Mainly, we look at each other to see how everybody's aged and we kind of compare notes on: “Did you see what the Clinton White House did the other day? Remember when we had that situation?” We compare notes. I think it's a neat thing. We said, at the last one, unfortunately we've lost a couple of people from it, by passing away. But, we're going to keep doing it until there's just one of us. Like I say, we made that pledge, at the last one, that this was a neat thing that we started, and we're not going to let it die. You may have interviewed her—there was a person who was in that office and in the office of every—

MK: Connie Gerard.

PR: Of course.

MK: I interviewed her for my book.

PR: Connie's the glue. Every transition, they'd say: “Everybody clean out.” Except for Connie. She's the only one—did she ever tell [you] that she was hired by [Pierre] Salinger, but he told her, “Come back next week,” and it was the week of the assassination. So she didn't actually

- work in the White House under [John F.] Kennedy. She was hired under Kennedy but reported for work the following week. She's an incredible person.
- MK: I have not seen her for a while.
- PR: Have you interviewed her for this?
- MK: Not for this. I interviewed her for an earlier book I did.
- PR: You should. She won't talk, though.
- MK: I interviewed her during the Ford Administration.
- PR: For this kind of thing?
- MK: It was a book on the White House and the press.
- PR: Did she say anything? Connie won't talk. She's—
- MK: Actually she was helpful.
- PR: She might, now that she's out of all of it. She's a great person.
- MK: But it was basically talking about various kinds of operations.
- PR: There's a truly unique career. You should interview her for this, you really should.
- MK: In comparing the two jobs that you had, did you feel the same thing about the job you had during the Ford White House as the one in the Reagan one, the kinds of preparation that it gave you?
- PR: I think so. I was doing different things.
- MK: But the kinds of pressures that you're dealing with are somewhat similar?
- PR: There was certainly pressure. In the case of the Ford White House there was the pressure to perform, and do well for those that I was working for. In that case, Don Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, President Ford. So there was that pressure. In the Reagan White House, it was the dual pressure of the press and the White House. I hate to keep harping on that, but that is a fact of life.
- TS: When you started the job in the Reagan Press Office: the day before you went in, did you think, "I've already been in the White House, I know how to do this," or did you think, "Oh my God, here it comes?"
- PR: Actually, as I recall now as you're mentioning it, I went up there after Baker came down and talked to me about it, and we agreed I was going to do it. He told Larry I would be coming up. Actually I think I went up there to see Larry. Actually, I called Connie, because I had known Connie for years. I said, "Connie, should I do this?" She said, "Of course you should." I went to talk to Larry, just to say, "I've had this discussion with Baker and he said he told me—he said 'I need you' and all that—and to kind of get a feel a little bit for what he

was thinking about me doing so I wouldn't walk in and be totally unprepared." So we did visit. He kind of laid out for me who was doing what there, and how it was working.

But I will say—and then, of course, the first day I was thrown into that thing with Sandra Day O'Connor out in Phoenix, the next two days. I have to say, in retrospect and even at the time, I thought what a plum deal to have been handed right off the top here. That kind of set the tone for the rest of my time. I started on a high there and really never came off it. That may sound a little trite. I won't say there weren't plenty of days where you think you've got an anchor dragging on you or something. But I started on a high note so that was a neat way for someone to start their service in a White House like that.

TS: So how did you know—?

PR: I'll never forget. I got to Phoenix, got out there and I'd flown on the red-eye all night. I got there and it was in the morning. I just dumped my bags at a hotel and called O'Connor. She lived out in a suburb there. She said, "I know you're supposed to be coming; come on out here." She sounded pretty businesslike, so I drove out there all the way on the edge of—I got there and she's on the phone. She's going, "Uh huh, uh huh." She hung up. It was her three sons and her husband; they were all having breakfast. She said, "Sit down and have some breakfast with us." There's a situation where nobody knows anybody and you're kind of—we had some small talk; I can't remember now. Finally she said, "What are we going to do on this?" I assumed Baker or Fred Fielding or somebody—then I realized she was really challenging me. In retrospect, I know that was a test. "Does this guy have anything on the ball?" I said, "Judge"—she was a superior court judge—"I think what we need to do is this. At ten o'clock this morning, Washington time, the President is going to make this announcement. Obviously, there's going to be tremendous interest in you as soon as that occurs. I think what we should do is, thirty minutes after he makes the announcement, that we have a news conference here in your chambers with your family arrayed there with you, whereupon you can express to the press and the American public what this appointment means to you personally and can outline anything in your background. We'll prepare your biography here. They'll be interested in your background. You can tell them what your career has been like. Then on any other question you have one answer and that is, 'I will be addressing that at my confirmation hearings before the United States Senate,' because you're immediately going to get asked what your position is on abortion and all these things that come before the Court. In my view you shouldn't, and I feel you would agree with me, get into any of that because you'll be addressing that before those who are going to vote on your confirmation." She kind of looked at me and said, "Let's do it."

MK: Why is it not done in Washington at the White House?

PR: It may have been a logistical thing. I've never asked that, frankly. It may have been—why didn't they bring her back to Washington? She did come. About three or four days later she came and we did a Rose Garden ceremony. I don't know. It may have been to prevent any leakage. Somebody could have seen her there. My guess is that was probably it.

TS: Keep it small.

PR: I do remember we got in the car. She said, "We better get going," and we got in a car to drive to her office, to her chambers. It was morning rush hour and we were in a traffic jam in downtown Phoenix. About that time I looked at my watch and I noticed it was about ten-thirty Washington time. I clicked the radio on and the guy said, "And that was President Reagan at the White House announcing the appointment of Sandra Day O'Connor to the

Supreme Court.” I looked over at her and said, “Nobody is ever going to believe where you were at this moment. But let me be the first to congratulate you.” I reached over and kissed her on the cheek and said congratulations. We were in a traffic jam in downtown Phoenix. By the time we pulled up to her office there were, of course, a swarm of reporters there.

The question originally was something about—I can’t remember.

TS: It was whether or not you had the same kind of lift of confidence out of working for Ford that you had out of working for Reagan.

PR: The pressure was the same. The confidence was hopefully the same. In the Reagan White House there was just more of it, I guess, for me—because I had more responsibility and I was there longer.

MK: You served under four different chiefs of staff. What difference does it make who’s chief of staff, as far as a White House works? In what ways is that felt? Compare them.

PR: Well, obviously, everybody is a different personality. So personalities change.

MK: What impact does personality have?

PR: Well, personality has an impact on all of us. It has an impact on you; it has an impact on me. Somebody might walk in here right now and you might say, “That’s a more engaging person than I am,” just by the mere force of their personality. So personality, certainly. It’s like anything in life. I think the people change but the job—you’d have to interview ten chiefs of staff on this, who might disagree with me on that, but I think pretty much the responsibilities of the job don’t change much. There may be some fine-tuning that some of them do and some of them take a little more in this area, or a little less in this area, or that kind of thing, but it’s pretty much—there’s a table of organization there that comes under a chief of staff. The Press Office comes under him. So each one is going to be responsible for that. So that’s not going to change.

Like in my case, Jim Baker was a friend of mine. I got to be good friends with Don Rumsfeld. I got to be good friends with Don Regan. I found them easy—of course, in the case of Rumsfeld, I was working directly for him so I got to know him quicker. I got to know Regan—and this would be true of anybody working in a White House Press Office—because a press office does so much with the chief of staff, whoever it is, even the people in the lower press office get to know that chief of staff. He starts calling them by their first name. That’s kind of a neat thing for them. It makes that person seem a lot less distant.

MK: When does the Chief of Staff interact with people in the Press Office? When you all got to regular meetings, obviously, you’re going to be seeing him.

PR: Yes.

MK: What about the rest of the people on the Press Office staff?

PR: Say Andrea Mitchell from ABC was going to do an interview with Don Regan that we had set up. Mark Weinberg or Kim Hoggard or Robin Gray from the lower press office goes back—“Andrea, Regan’s ready for the interview now.” “Okay. Here’s my crew.” “Get your sound guy and your camera guy; let’s go.” Then Mark Weinberg and Robin Gray, they take that crew up to Don Regan’s office. “Mr. Regan, the crew is here.” Then knowing

Regan or Baker or whoever it would be, they're going to ask that person and say, "It's Andrea, right?" "It's Andrea. She's going to be interviewing you about the Geneva summit." "Right." Often, they ask, "What is it you do down there?" "Well, I'm responsible for putting the pools together every day and...."

TS: While they're setting it up?

PR: Yes. And that's how it happens a lot of times. The next thing you know, Don Regan when he's going down the colonnade, sees Mark. "Hey, Mark. What are you doing?" Mark feels pretty good all of a sudden. But that's because the Press Office, compared to most offices in the White House, is constantly, not constantly but certainly on a regular basis, not just the spokesperson, interfacing with these other people, and they get to know him. It's just a fact of life there. A lot of times, then, they come in there to do the briefing on some issue, as we were talking about earlier. You physically have to go by those desks right there and sometimes there's an unwritten law there, not a law, a rule. There's a sliding door there, wooden door. You don't open that door until you're ready to go in there and do your thing which means, a lot of times, even the president has to idle down there amidst these staff people in that lower office. They sit there and visit with them. They get to know the faces, get to know them. Taking pools into the Oval Office all the time for photo ops. After about the fifth day any president is going to sit there and say, "I keep seeing this same young woman or this same young guy. You work with these press people?" "Yes." "Okay." Pretty soon the Press Office people get known, probably around the White House, probably more so and quicker—I don't know any other office, really, where you'd have that exposure to the totality of the experience.

TS: When you first started talking about Jim Baker, you said—

PR: Let the record show, if I'm not his biggest fan....

TS: —you could go into a meeting with several different people running those meetings and come out with no impression. But if you went into a meeting and Jim Baker was running that meeting, you would come out and say, "This guy really knew what he was doing, this guy really knew how to run a meeting." Would you say, across the other chiefs of staff that was a common characteristic of them, or was Jim Baker, even among those people—?

PR: In terms of running staff meetings, I would have to say they were all pretty similar. I saw staff meetings run by Regan and Rumsfeld. They all had an agenda there. "Let's go to number one." It probably would be fair to say, to me, I didn't see much difference in that managerial snapshot, in terms of that. I think maybe what I was referring to, on Baker, went back to his days—and whoever told you that was exactly right—when he had been Undersecretary of Commerce and started coming over there to those meetings at the Roosevelt Room, and started participating in those meetings. It was like cream quickly rising to the surface. Somebody said, "This is a sharp guy." And he was an unknown quantity at that time, to a lot of people. All of a sudden people are going, "Who is this guy? This guy is pretty knowledgeable, pretty wise, pretty smart." So I think that's where maybe that distinction—they all pretty much in terms of the way they did the meetings, I don't remember anything much different about that.

TS: Much different about their judgment?

PR: I'm just talking now about the way they conducted—

TS: So they're pretty common in how they conduct meetings?

PR: Yes.

TS: But across the chiefs of staff would you say there are differences—?

PR: In the way they made decisions and decision-making?

TS: Right.

PR: I'd have to say, no, because, again, I think—. Again, you would know better than I would if you interviewed ten chiefs of staff, which I'm sure you did for this—that that process is pretty much, I don't think it does; I don't know this for a fact. I can't imagine it changes much from—because there's a certain process you go through to ensure you're crossing all the T-s and dotting all the I-s before decisions are made in terms of getting input from all the appropriate people, before it moves forward to a president for a decision. So I would think anybody who came in as chief of staff said: "Here's how we're going to do...." It's going to be me and two others, that just doesn't work. That's why you have a staff secretary, so you have an orderly paper flow. And that's for everybody's purpose; that's a good thing to have.

TS: So, you're saying: these chiefs of staff all had in common, that they protected the process.

PR: From what I observed, yes. That's a good way to put it; they protected the process. And there was an orderly process that I saw. Maybe there were other things that I didn't see, but from what I saw, the simple answer is, yes.

TS: Did you ever get the impression that, in addition to protecting the process, sometimes some of them would like to push the process in a particular direction?

PR: That's always said. The press likes to—

TS: That they become advocates rather than protectors of the process.

PR: Again, I can only talk about what I saw, witnessed which is just a small—

TS: [Inaudible].

PR: I'd have to say no, because I thought—. It was always interesting to me that you present to the president the options, and you give him the pros and the cons, whether it's in writing or in person. That, to me, was the way that job functioned. It wasn't advocacy. It wasn't an advocacy role. It was: you're the president, here it is; here are the three arguments for and here are the three against.

TS: Your call.

PR: Yes. And, to me, that's the way it should work. That's why you elect the person, for them to make the decisions based on....

MK: Do you have anything that you would—?

PR: Is this it?

MK: Yes. This is it.

PR: This is like going to a briefing. This is as tough as the briefing. This is tougher than a briefing.

TS: There is one other question. You initially promised us that you had some lessons that you absolutely knew you'd learned about when it was time to leave.

PR: Lessons? I said I knew when it was time to leave.

TS: Yes.

PR: Now you're already making some link up: "Such and such happened so he..."

TS: We know you left when Speakes left.

PR: Yes. And that's what really—I'd been there with Larry. There was, what, a year left. And, fortunately for me, I had worked in the Ford White House. Of course, as I say, I went over to the campaign, but by the time I got back to Houston, in early 1977, I wasn't anxious to face the private sector again. I'd come out of that, and I was mini-wired. I wasn't as wired as I was when I came out of the Reagan White House. So when I said, "Gee, I've got a second chance to work in a White House. I think what I'm going to do is exactly what Rumsfeld said. I'm going to give it everything I've got; do the best job I absolutely can. But maybe I'm not going to stay the entire eight years. If Reagan gets re-elected I'll certainly stay through that, if they want me to, but maybe there's something to be said for leaving before it's all over." I don't know. By then, too, we'd done everything we could. After a while you think: "I've given it my best shot; let somebody else have a crack at it now."

TS: So no catastrophic event. You didn't wake up one morning and say, "I can't believe I did that yesterday?"

PR: Mine was, primarily, Larry's leaving. This makes sense for me. Like I said, I felt good about the job I'd done. I felt fulfilled. I guess you can stay "too long at the fair." Also, Marlin was coming in. Marlin's a good friend of mine, but I thought: "Hey, it's his deal now and he may want some other people in these jobs. That's his call." Like I say, I felt very fulfilled the day I walked out. I think I did it right. As I said, I got some nice letters from reporters saying that, so that made me feel good about what I'd done.

Actually another factor was—and this was a mini-factor at the time—my mother was very elderly then. I thought, "If I stay here much longer she's going to be gone." The last ten years I had hardly seen much of her at all. So that was kind of in my mind, too: "Maybe I need to go see her." She was by herself down here; then eighty-nine years old. Actually I got back here in February or March of 1987 and she passed away about three months later. So I felt very good that I got to spend that time with her. I thought, "You never know what the divine voice tells you to do something." But I felt very good that I got to spend that time with her. Who could have foreseen that? At the time I thought about that a little bit.

MK: Thank you.

PR: Thank y'all.



[End of Disc 2 of 2]