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Alan J. Stone Oral History

Alan J. Stone's internships included co-chair of the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council, and what became the National Welfare Rights Organization, after going to law school at George Washington University in Washington, DC. He worked as one of the organizers of the Poor People's March on Washington. After law school Stone went to work as the junior counsel on Senator George McGovern's U.S. Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs. He went on the work on legislation that made School Breakfast, WIC, and Summer Food Service and Child Care Food Program all permanent programs in America. Stone later became a speech writer for President Bill Clinton, and later became Vice-President of Public Affairs at Columbia University.

JB: I'm Jeffrey Boyce and it is October 16, 2016. I'm here in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with Alan J. Stone. Welcome Mr. Stone and thanks for taking the time to talk with me this evening.

AS: I'm glad to be with you.

JB: Could we begin by you telling me a little bit about yourself, where you were born, where you grew up?

AS: I grew up in Chicago. I was born on what they call the Near North in the city, and in third grade moved to the suburbs and was raised in Skokie, a near suburb. I went to college at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and then went to law school at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

JB: OK. What did you do your undergraduate in?

AS: I was a dual major in government - now of course we call it political science - and American literature.

JB: And was there a break between that and law school?

AS: No, in those days people had the money to go straight ahead, and it was quite common to. Looking back, it might have served me to take a break, but I went straight ahead.

JB: What was law school like? What did you enjoy most about it?

AS: You know, it was not a slam dunk success for me. I missed college. I missed my friends. I was enormously active and had a variety of friends, and it just ended too quickly for me. I wasn't one of those people who wanted to get out quickly to their career. I wanted to read more and write more and think more. So it took me a while to get into the spirit of law school, but I found my niche when I found a core of students interested in activism that were prepared to do civil rights law, anti-poverty law, and of course in those years, the late 60s in Washington, there was an enormous amount of anti-war activity and The New Mobilization, and the Poor People's March. It was just a wild time to be in D.C. going to law school and to be an activist, so I'd say I had an uncharacteristic law school career, and I didn't get deeply interested in corporate law and then clerk and then go on to a firm, but I found a niche that turned out to be enormously important to me and powerful, and actually launched me on my lifetime career.

JB: Elaborate a little bit on the late '60s in D.C. That would have been toward the end of the - well

actually it was several years before the end of the Vietnam War.

AS: It was an unbelievably transitional time, culturally transitional. When I started law school, in my section of two hundred guys there was one woman. Five years later a third of the class were women. Ten years later half or more were women. So things changed. When I started we had to agitate to get a clinical program - one. Now clinical programs are de rigueur at almost every law school. The city was a magnet for everyone seeking change on huge issues. So the first Poor Peoples March, which I worked on with somebody I was working on it with as part of an internship in law school, all the anti-war activity, everyone trying to levitate the Pentagon, everyone trying to stop the war, and it just was - you never knew who was going to be sleeping on your couch and your floor in law school, from what town, a friend of whose. You never knew when some place near your apartment was going to be teargassed and teargas would come into your window. And of course all the ancillary things were going on at the same time, the women's movement, the beginning of the environmental movement, introduction of recreational drugs, the ascendancy of rock-and-roll in everyone's life. It was just a wild time that is very much still on my mind and in my heart in many ways, notwithstanding the fact that there isn't one of those activities I could physically withstand any longer.
[Laughter]

JB: You mentioned the Poor People's March.

AS: Yes.

JB: That went on for several months, right? Wasn't there an encampment along the Mall?

AS: Yes, there was a big encampment. My first internship I was a co-chair of something called the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council with a fellow named Tom Tureen, who went out to do Native American law in Maine. And through Law Students Civil Rights Research Council I got an internship with a group that went on to become the National Welfare Rights Organization. And they were, along with Dr. King and along with many others, organizers of that march. So I spent many weeks that summer in a seminary with activist members of the Catholic Church, and Quakers, and various members of the clergy that were devoted to change, plus a lot of activist students, managing what would be the arrival of hundreds of buses full of poor people, mostly but not entirely black, from the South for the Poor People's March. I have mementos from those days and photos and personal memories, and it was a good precursor for me to learn a little bit about what would become my professional life, because it was working for a cause. It was teamwork. It was mostly for poor people's issues. And it was people from all over, with complete un-empowered people who were able to make a statement that is still a matter of news around the world when people think about it. But the lift that it took for people who had only sweat equity, and sharp minds, but no capital, to pull off was pretty extraordinary. I'm glad I played a small role in it.

JB: What year did you start law school?

AS: '66.

JB: '66. So you were there for the '68 election. What was that like?

AS: The '68 election was in Chicago, and I'm from Chicago, so I went home thinking I would join - some of

my friends I knew were going to protest it because it sort of was the lightening rod of anti-war activity, and many of us had been for Gene McCarthy, and Bobby Kennedy was shot. And I thought I would live with my parents in the suburbs and I'd go at night to Lincoln Park and participate. And it turned out that at the first night I went it was - Mayor Daily sent his fire trucks in with guys with big sticks and no nameplates, and I could see what was coming was going to be fruitless, and part of me wanted to stay, but part of me wanted to leave. And I left to go to a very, very close friend's wedding in Hawaii. It was about as far away as you could get. So I wasn't in Chicago for the actual, terrible denouement of the election. I was there for the 1972 nomination of George McGovern. I did work in Chicago for George McGovern, who lost badly, but not my precincts in Chicago in '72. I had been a delegate from Colorado, because I was with legal services then. I went to the Miami convention. I helped nominate him, and then I had sort of a choice of jobs, and I didn't want to go to Washington, and I didn't want to go to headquarters. I wanted to go to the precinct I was born in in Chicago and work it. And I did, and we lost the overall election terribly, but then I went back to Washington and got a job with Senator McGovern as the junior counsel on his anti-hunger committee, and that's what really launched my career.

JB: Was that the official name of the committee?

AS: No. That's what the newspapers called it, because the actual name was too long for the newspapers to always say, which was the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, and it had been created

to examine hunger in America, and to make recommendations to get rid of it.

JB: Who were some of the other major members of that committee?

AS: It was led by many legendary Senators. . . George McGovern was the Chair, and Hubert Humphrey, when he stopped being Vice-President came back to the Senate, was ranking but, Ted Kennedy was junior on the committee. Phil Hart was a giant of a man and a liberal, died young, from Michigan. He was on the committee. On the Republican side it was Bob Dole, who ended up, of course, coauthoring with George McGovern a lot of anti-hunger legislation. Henry Bellmon from Oklahoma, Chuck Percy from Illinois. I don't think there was a non-famous, non-powerful person that didn't come through that committee. Senator McGovern chaired it but Hubert Humphrey of course treated it like he chaired it, because that was his wont, and we did a lot for him, as well as for George McGovern. There would be times when we would have a junior senator interested in something. I remember, I think just before Summer Food Service became a permanent program, I think a year before, so it must have been 1974, a junior senator from Iowa named Dick Clark, who was on the committee, who loved our issues, and said to me, "Look, if there's an amendment that I can do for poor kids that one of the senior senators doesn't take, let me know. I'd love to introduce it." So he ended up owning the Summer Food and Childcare Programs.

JB: How well did the parties work across the aisle during that time?

AS: Much better then. There was a lot of division, but again, it was mostly around budget concerns - didn't

want to spend on poor kids - and on philosophy. There were still people that thought people that got these programs didn't deserve them. But there wasn't the rancor and the demonizing there is today. And a lot of things got done. On the Agriculture Committee, which was the authorizing and appropriating committees that these child nutrition bills went through, there was a ready alliance between the conservatives and the liberals. The farmers and people that were interested in price supports and those kinds of things needed alliances with the cities; the cities wanted the social programs; and they worked together. Democrats and Democrats; Republicans - Republicans; and Republicans and Democrats. The most major to this day reform in the Food Stamp Bill, which was the late '70s, '76 I think, '77 maybe, was done because McGovern and Dole got together. And Dole got what he wanted, which was a ceiling on some people that were on strike, using Food Stamps, who he thought it was an abuse of the labor unions, and the others, McGovern and Humphrey, Ted Kennedy, got what they wanted, which was an elimination of the entry price to get into Food Stamps. The poorest of the poor couldn't get into Food Stamps before that because you needed some money to enter, which of course was keeping out those who needed it the most.

JB: Exactly.

AS: So that big amendment, which let a lot of really poor people into Food Stamps was possible only because McGovern and Dole made alliances. And you wouldn't see that today. Of course there was regular order then. You had appropriations committees. The authorizing committees did their stuff on time. Appropriations committees had a huge amount of turf, loyalty, they met their marks. The budget committee came in later, and it

was taken seriously, including sometimes cutting programs I liked, but now you know, we've gone almost ten years without a budget, without regular appropriations bills or a budget, and there aren't any opportunities for horse trading now, not that there would be, because there's been a breakdown in regular order in the committee system in Congress, so there's no opportunity for people to say, "I'll give you this. You give me that." And plus, they don't communicate the same way. They were around more. They didn't have to spend so much time raising the money they have to raise now. They weren't busy demonizing each other. We didn't have cable, and everybody making an industry out of creating bad guys all around. It was just a different era. And it was also a different era in another way, although to an extent I think it's this way now, which is senior staff, if they won the respect of their bosses, really had proxies to do a lot of things on their own. So I had proxies. I mean I always sent a memo to the Senator. I always said, "Here are our plans for the next hearings. Here are what I think should be the next range of amendments when the Child Nutrition Act comes up. Here's what I think is a hearing we should have that the press and the public will like, that would help you and help everyone on the committee." And he almost always signed off on it. He trusted me. I earned his trust. But you were in effect then enormously empowered to do your best work.

JB: And this was Senator McGovern?

AS: Yes, and I worked feverishly those years. I was young and I loved it and I would have paid them to write legislation to feed tens of millions of low-income kids, but they paid me very modestly. But it was fine. And I remember - I had a great group of friends

and a social life, and as I said it was wild times there - but I remember once in '74 or 5 on a winter day I drove into my office, which they gave the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs offices in the worst falling down building. It was called Senate Annex II. It leaned a little. And it's since been knocked down. But I loved it. And one winter day I went there and it was cold and there were snowflakes and I remember working away on something and walked outside and there was a police officer, one of the guards, out in front. It seemed kind of slow. I didn't really pay any attention to it. And he was having a smoke break and just went out to get some air. And he looked at me and he said, "They're making you work in Christmas too?" I completely lost, I completely lost track of the days. You know, I'm Jewish, I don't observe Christmas, so I - but I still should have known. But that's how much fun work was and how important it was to us.

JB: Tell me about the day to day of it as you were writing legislation and working on the bills.

AS: You know, it was always - we had a sense from our bosses that the more we gave them that was important and fun and interesting, the better. And we were time limited we knew, because we were a select committee, which meant we were authorized only for a year, and we were supposed to get our work done. I guess they thought we'd solve the problems with hunger in a year, but we kept getting re-upped and then finally in the late '70s they stopped us. It was a great run, and I was thrilled to be staff director at the end. But it could be anything. It could be planning a hearing, having a hearing, putting the witnesses together, doing the statements. It could be writing a big bill. It

could be writing a floor amendment. It could be writing the speeches around those, having the hearings around those. It could be writing an op-ed. It could be spending time on a big committee report or a little amount of that. It could be sitting down and thinking 'What will make the point that we want to make today that won't cost as much money to do, that will be fun?' And we'd think about - I remember one day we decided to call a number of inner-city emergency rooms and ask the doctors what percent of infants or toddlers they thought came in malnourished. And the number turned out to be very high, and that was a report. So having the imagination to be creative about ways, because you're not an authorized committee, you're not an appropriating committee. You have to be creative. On the other hand, our chairs sat on the Agriculture Committee, and they sat on the Appropriations Committee, so they took what we did right over across the hall, but it made us have to be very nimble. And I look back at what we did, it was just an extraordinary - my colleagues were just so productive. The numbers of bills and amendments that we wrote, the numbers of hearings and reports that we did, the amount of attention we got for this little bitty staff, probably the smallest in the Senate, with no press person, and this office out in the suburbs far away from power, is pretty remarkable. We were just motivated and we had enormously brave bosses who liked the idea of us giving them a new idea. And that gave us enormous incentive. We were incentivized every day. Now we had a lot of just big lifting on the routinized work, you know, Child Nutrition will get reauthorized, Food Stamps will get reauthorized. We were always fighting until they became permanently authorized. We were always fighting to save or broaden Summer or Child Care or Breakfast.

If I did one report on how the poorer schools with the greatest need weren't participating in a breakfast program, I wrote ten. I see some now because I'm on the board of Food Research Action Center, which is a big anti-hunger group, and I'm very proud to be part of them -

JB: Is Jim Weill still the director?

AS: Jim Weill is still the CEO, a very close friend and colleague, and they're still writing reports about breakfast, so some things take a lot of time. So we had our normal lift, which was the day to day, bills expiring, bills on the floor, etc., and all the hearings and the floor speeches, and reports on that, and then there was another agenda that we always had going in a parallel fashion, which was new things. It wasn't on our agenda to make sure that the food package for WIC was dealt with in X way from USDA, but in the course of the early years of WIC you saw, well there's lots of waste on a minor program, and one of them is on the regs, and so something would come up that we hadn't planned, like the food package, so it was an endless stream of the stuff that was regular order and then the new stuff to push the envelope, or the other category of new stuff, which was to protect things. So the first two years of WIC when Nixon didn't spend the money we just had to maximize attention to how wrong that was and illegal and how many people were on waiting lists, etc. So it was just like constant activity in pursuit of big goals. Sometimes the task was small but the goal was always big.

JB: What was your proudest moment during that time?

AS: I had a lot of proud moments. Going to work my first day with my first adult job, and it was writing

anti-hunger legislation for George McGovern, and I don't think pride is necessarily an attractive human attribute, but I was really proud of myself, and I still feel that day, although it was now forty-five years ago. I think in terms of legislation and the work of the committee my role in making WIC a permanent program, because it so expansively services America's low-income children, pregnant and nursing low-income mothers, is the proudest thing in terms of my work there, although there are many things I did that I look back on with humility and pride that I was given a chance to be part of this.

Someone pointed out to me recently that in 1975 I wrote the legislation that made School Breakfast, WIC, and Summer Food Service and Child Care Food Program all permanent programs in America. I hadn't ever put this together quite like that and obviously I am very grateful to have played this role.

JB: Well share some of those with me.

AS: As I said to you, we often thought of things that if the senators liked them we ran with them. Well, our mandate the first four of five years had been mostly anti-poverty, hunger related things, as it should have been. But as we were getting more and more involved in those that work, we began to hear more and more about how low-income people had bad diets and how it affected their health, and then how all of America had bad diets, so it kind of was on our radar. And then I talked to my friends from the dietitians' association and people from Harvard School of Nutrition, and other people I knew. And with the senators' OK we launched a series of hearings on the connections between diet and health. And we had a continued full load on all the lunch, breakfast, WIC, Food Stamps. All of those were

continuing to be legislated, hearings, reports, floor amendments, etc., fights over appropriations. We kept those, and added this thing. And we ended up under my leadership and the leadership of my co-counsel Marshall Matz hiring some very good writers and thinkers in diet and health, and getting some great consultants from Rockefeller and Harvard and other places, and we wrote "Dietary Goals for the United States," which was the first government-related agency to ever say eat less salt, fat, sugar, and eat lean meat. And of course now every knowledgeable well off person in the world has as a mantra there's a link between diet and health and that these things are at the core of it, and USDA and HHS now get together every few years and do a dietary guideline for the US. But the first one was under my direction with my colleagues and signed off by the senators. And George McGovern led the fight, and he was from a state that was ninety percent Ag - the economy was agriculture and most of that was meat, and he was enormously brave to do this, and I'm enormously proud of that. So when you ask me to list some other things I'm proud of - I was called a socialist by the Grocery Manufacturers of America. I got an angry letter from the AMA because I wasn't a nutritionist or a scientist, and I led this. The senators all got beat up and it was very hard in that chair, because we had to have a round of hearing apologizing and writing another one, which we didn't move very far back from our original. But in the course of it I made the case to the Senator that - he said, "Alan, this is making me nervous. I'm going to do it, but it's making me nervous." And he said, "You tell me what the biggest upside of this is and what biggest downside of it is." I said, "The biggest downside is that we get so beat up by the industry and by the cattlemen and by everyone that you don't recover

at home." He said, "Well that's a pretty terrible downside." He said, "What's the upside?" I said, "The upside is that you start the next big consumer movement in the western world - diet and health."

JB: That's a pretty big upside.

AS: He said, "I'll take it."

JB: And he represented South Dakota, right?

AS: Yea, which was a huge agriculture, still is.

JB: You mentioned Nixon not funding for a couple of years.

AS: Yea.

JB: What was it like in those last days of his administration?

AS: So weird, because McGovern's staff - he had just creamed us in the election, and then less than a year later I was sitting there in the Senate Annex, oftentimes walking over to the main buildings, and we didn't have cellphones and we didn't have social media, and they weren't televising the House and the Senate then, and you have a black and white TV in your office, and try and figure out what was going on. Or you watched the AP wire, that's what we did. And it was gossip, but we weren't exactly close to Nixon's staff. Later on I met some of Nixon's speechwriters. I later on became a presidential speechwriter. We'd have meetings with other speechwriters and I met them. But I didn't know any Nixon people then. I knew plenty of the staff on the committee to impeach him, but I didn't know him. But it was kind of surreal because McGovern was going about his business. He was thinking about running in '74 and could he win his Senate seat, retain

it after losing so badly. We were doing our job, which was trying to grow the anti-hunger programs. And in the midst of it we watched the fall on this man, who at the end was a little whacked out. And his cronies, who had been so smug about what a weakling McGovern was and how they had to smash him, well we watched this guy crash and burn into flames, the flames of history. And McGovern lived into his nineties, wrote five more books, and was revered by many, and wrote enough anti-hunger legislation that's now fed hundreds of millions of people, not just in America, but around the world. And I knew that McGovern was a plodding guy, but very smart and knew what he wanted to do with his power, would survive and thrive, get done what he wanted to get done. His life was not without tragedy, but it's kind of a morality play that he ended up doing as much good as he did and having as full a life as he did. And Nixon went out in a blaze of ignominy.

JB: And so how long did you stay with McGovern?

AS: I stayed until the committee was unfunded. You asked me what I liked and what I was proud of. I think the saddest moment I had was when we - as I said, there wasn't communication between the floor and your committees, so I had to come back to my staff after we lost our vote to be extended for that last year and tell them we were done. And that was really terrible, because we were all so engaged. But you know what, you don't get to do just what you like in life all the time. So my co-counsel Marshall Matz went out to the Agriculture Committee, which continued to do some of the issues, and he remained in Washington. He's still doing them in private law practice. And I went to work on international hunger. I wasn't quite done with my

hunger life. I went to work at AID and worked on international hunger.

JB: USAID?

AS: Yea, worked on international hunger, and then I continued working on and I was counsel to the Senate Democratic Caucus when Senator Byrd was leader, and then I went the House side and began and ran for several years a committee that George Miller had called the Select Committee on Children and Families. I'm kind of a select committee expert it turns out. And that ended for me in the late '80s. I stayed on the Hill quite a long time.

JB: Tell me about your work there with that committee.

AS: That was enormous fun. George Miller just retired last year. He came in in the Class of '74 and is from East Bay. He and I met because he was an anti-hunger guy in California before he was elected. So I knew him before he was elected. That committee was enormous fun. It dealt with many of the same issues of poverty and children and stresses on working families that I was familiar with and that no one in Congress had really ever dealt with before. And we were powerful. Again, we had great leadership. In addition to George we had Lindy Boggs. We had Pat Schroeder. We had Barbara Mikulski. Barbara Boxer. But we highlighted several things - how families were changing and how much child care was a need and people weren't getting it. We had an enormous bucket or cluster on family violence. People weren't talking about family violence in Congress. So that was drug and alcohol, runaway, etc. And we dealt a lot with foster care and that system, which is eternally broken. So it was basically about the modern family and the stresses it's under, and we

always did three things at every hearing. We brought some real person, some family that was involved in the problem. We always brought some researcher with the best data on the problem. And we always brought someone from a program that could tell a positive story - 'Yes, we know how to address this. Kids and alcohol, we know how to address this. Spousal abuse - we know how to run the best centers. Child care - here's the best example of a big corporation doing child care right.' So it was always positive. You always described the problem, you made the issues more clear, you had the best data. And it was again, the same thing, bright staff working hard on a million things. The difference was on the nutrition committee what we did we almost always led to legislation. On the 'Kiddies Committee' as it was called on the outside, we were already entering the era where there was less legislation, less movement, less agreement, so while we helped impact some legislation, we mostly influenced things through use of the bully pulpit.

JB: On both committees who were your allied partners? Did you work with the School Nutrition Association?

AS: Well, yea, the truth is, especially when I first started I got - my portfolio was all the child nutrition legislation and WIC. And Marshall and other people had Food Stamps and diet and health, although I did diet and health too. So when I first got there especially, the people that were the Washington representatives of the School Food Service Association as it was called then -

JB: American School Food Service Association.

AS: Yea, were in my office every day. It took me a week to understand Josephine [Martin] because of her accent.

But we got along great and they were enormously helpful, and they had lobbyists that were helpful, and I don't think the first time or two I wrote a bill or wrote an amendment I didn't really know what I was doing, but they got me through it. And the Senator trusted them and the members trusted them, and Republican senators trusted them too because people would come from their district and tell them the truth, and tell them, "Here's what's going on. Here's what we need." And so it was basically bipartisan. But they were enormously technically smart too about amendments and bills and appropriations. You know the school food service ladies came in with, "Oh, we're just little old ladies." They were the smartest. There was no one smarter than them lobbying. And if I gave one talk to a school food service association in those years I gave thirty. I was always going. I went to New Mexico. I went to North Dakota. I went to all the Southern states. They'd have an annual meeting and they'd call the committee and say, "Hey Alan. Would you come and tell us about the legislation?" And I loved doing that because I got to meet them. And then long after I was no longer on the Hill I got invited to come back and give the keynote at their annual meeting in Washington, which was a lot of fun.

JB: And so when did you leave this?

AS: I left - the end of the '80s I left the George Miller committee. I had a really skilled deputy who was long ready to do it. She could have done it from the beginning, and I was getting anxious to do other things. All my friends had gone to practice law, and other things. I was late. I just loved the Hill so much I couldn't leave. And then I did the one other thing I

really loved as much as being a legislative activist and that was I went to be a writer.

JB: OK.

AS: I went to try writing in Los Angeles, screenplays and teleplays and things. I was old to do it at forty-five. I should have done it at twenty-five. But I thought I'd try it and I did that for a while, and then, and I thought I was done with Washington. I'd spent twenty-plus years there counting law school. And when I was in LA Tom Harkin, who was a Senator from Iowa and a great champion of child nutrition programs, and authored the Disabilities Act and many other things, I'd been friends with him in Washington, and he ran in that '92 primary with Clinton and lost. But he came out to LA and said, "Would you work for me, be my speechwriter and my policy guy?" And I'd always, of all the things I hadn't done in politics I'd always heard that being in a presidential primary was the most fun. Little plane, Unitarian meetings, union hall meetings, retail politics, it turns out it's true. I had enormous fun. And Harkin lost on Super Tuesday, and a couple of months later, I think, Clinton asked him, "Who were your top people?" Clinton had just won the nomination in July and was putting together his senior team for Little Rock, to be a speechwriter, and I went to Little Rock to write speeches for Bill Clinton. He won. You know everyone I had ever supported for president up 'til then had won one or two states. But I knew he was going to win the first ten minutes I was with him. And then I went to the White House and worked for him for a few years.

JB: What made you think that?

AS: The first day I went to Little Rock he did an uplink - in those days you did an uplink - on tax reform, and he was interviewed by a bunch of people. And from the waist up he had a nice coat and tie, jacket on. From the waist down he had old Bermuda shorts and flip-flops. And I had only seen him against Harkin, and he was very talented. And I knew he was talented, but I watched him look at the notes, and sort of talk to Jim Carville about Arkansas football, and sort of ask his wife if the laundry was done. And then he does this uplink for an hour on tax reform and it's perfect, perfect. Policy mixed with politics mixed with charm and storytelling, and I thought 'This is an unusual, once in a lifetime talent.' That was early in the campaign and I stayed another two or three months. He won. Then I went back to LA. And then they asked me to try out for a position of speechwriting at the White House. And the tryout was you had twenty-four hours to write your version of what his inaugural address should be.

JB: Wow, twenty-four hours.

AS: Twenty-four hours, pretty intense.

JB: Well, you must have done well, because I understand you got the job.

AS: I got the job, yea, and then I did that for another two or three years.

JB: Did you have any interaction with Secretary Clinton during that time?

AS: Yes, but mostly her staff. It turns out her staff I knew better than his staff, because Maggie Williams, her chief of staff, had come from the Children's Defense Fund. So I knew her from my old life, and

Melanne Verveer had been active in women's issues and anti-poverty issues, so I knew her top staff, so I was always in the office. And Lissa Muscatine, who wrote a lot of her speeches, was probably my closest friend at the White House. So I was always around The First Lady, but I never really interacted with her. I was in a few prep sessions with her. She's impressive. She's all business. And I loved her staff, but I wouldn't - I was in fifteen meetings with the President where we exchanged something like, "Why did you write this?" or "Can you rewrite this?" I can say I had a working relationship with him, but I didn't with her.

JB: How was that? Was he pretty open to suggestions?

AS: Well, you know, the truth is it was kind of ridiculous being his speechwriter because he changed so much of every draft. We used to have a joke among the speechwriters not counting the articles like a, an, and the, how much of what you wrote did he keep, and often it was zero. On big speeches you'd interact with him, but most speeches you'd have a day at most to write and the President gives five or six, seven speeches sometimes in a day that don't get any attention, like the thirtieth anniversary of the Children's Immunization Act, an uplink to the Wheat Growers Association because he can't make their meeting, you just do these part of being President. The Saturday morning radio address is another example, So after a while you kind of know what he wants, and you have his voice if you're good. And everyone's good at that level. And even still he would immediately take the best phrase or the best data point and keep it, and the spine if he liked it, to follow the story, he'd keep that. Everything else he'd make his own. And except for the Joint Sessions, the State of the Union speeches,

and the big healthcare speech and a few big speeches every year, and also a lot of stuff that has to do with international relations, because a lot of those words are code and you have to be careful. Otherwise basically everything was just him using what he saw that you gave him as a memo to help him get going.

JB: Was he as notoriously tardy as the press made him out to be?

AS: I don't think the press knew the half of it. He was one of those brilliant guys who could catch up no matter how behind he was. Luckily there were a lot of brilliant people running things that were on time, so the other stuff, the outreach to governors, understanding which radio buys to make for your program, the people doing advance, scoping out the rooms for the next visit, the inner workings of the White House, they all can do what they have to do without him being on time.

JB: And so you said you stayed with him about two more years?

AS: I left in early Fall 1995 from the White House - two and a half or two and a quarter years there and another three or four months in Little Rock, so maybe three years altogether.

JB: And then Columbia?

AS: Then I became Vice-President of Public Affairs at Columbia, which combined government relations, PR, media relations, communications, and community relations. The idea being that the message to the outside world should all be coordinated in one place, and so if your lobbyist is talking to members they should know what you're saying to the press and what

you're saying to the community. It's a good theory and it can work and it worked for me at Columbia. And I had never worked for higher ed before, but I was quite in love with the notion of Columbia, which I had enormous affection for historically, and I needed a change, and there's nothing like New York. And I did that for six or seven years and then I got hired to do the same thing at Harvard, which is why we're sitting here in Cambridge right now.

JB: What were some of the biggest challenges at Harvard?

AS: Harvard is just a big challenge period, because it's got one of the two or three most well-known brands in the world. And it's a target. You could have a faculty member have some kind of mistake at a small school in Iowa, some kind of a sexual conduct or a plagiarism or something, and it's not going to make the front page of the New York Times. If it's Harvard it will. So you're playing defense at an enormous level, plus it's huge and sprawling. The faculty of Arts and Science alone at Harvard has an endowment that would make it a top ten university in the world. So the big, powerful parts of Harvard are so big and powerful that it's like in the early days of the nation and trying to manage what was going on in the states from Washington. I remember one day driving somewhere with the president when we first started and reading in the Boston Globe that one of the schools was breaking ground for a new building and neither one of us knew about it. So anyway, it's difficult to manage message. It's quite open to attack, so you're playing defense a lot. On the other hand the virtues are so overwhelming. They're always getting the best students, the best faculty. They do great things. They get great gifts. They build

wonderful buildings. Their reach in the world is enormous. They're essentially a well-meaning, almost always do goody place that is held in such high regard that when it isn't perfect it's come down on more harshly than almost any place else. But you know what? My colleagues would often say to me, "I can't believe they want us to be perfect here, and we made them a small mistake. We're still doing something good." And I said, "Look. It's the price of admissions. If you want to work for a place that's this good you've got to take the downside with it." But it was not easy. The truth is that maybe twenty, thirty, forty years ago the great universities and their presidents and leaders were put on a pedestal, and they weren't criticized, they didn't have people investigating them, they didn't have Congress questioning their endowment. That's all gone. They're targets now. At any given moment there's a blog or two going that exists only to find dirt on the faculty and the president. It's just a different world that we live in. It's a sad thing but it's the way it is. But still I look back at where I came from and think where I've been and I realize how lucky I am.

JB: Were there skills or experiences that you learned in the Washington days that carried over to the Columbia or the Harvard days?

AS: All of them. All of them. Take everyone seriously. Be a good listener. Know what you want. And work like a dog. Here's one of the huge lessons I had. I didn't realize until I was in the middle of my university life - this may be the biggest thing. When you're on Capitol Hill you learn to have complete devotion to your boss. You have their back no matter what. You do anything to prevent you being the cause of them not looking good. Your job is to make them look good and to do good deeds

on their behalf. And once they know that you're given a lot of license and maybe even their proxy. I internalized that early on. I loved my bosses. They were powerful, sympathetic people. They allowed me to write legislation that helped countless people. And I learned when I got to university life that the presidents and the trustees and the chairs of the universities I was doing the same thing for. And they got it. They saw it. So you thrive in one environment knowing who you work for, always protecting them, making their goals your goals, and it's the same in universities as it was in the House, and in the Senate, and in the White House.

JB: Sounds like an amazing career.

AS: It's been a great ride. Thank you.

JB: Anything else you'd like to add today?

AS: I don't think so. I've enjoyed it and I appreciate you taking the time. I'm aware of the fact that the battles to feed the people that need to be fed in America are never over. As I said, I'm on the board of FRAC, that is I think the best advocacy group in Washington to solve hunger. So I'm still doing what I can, but I think in part why I do it is I want to make sure that just like I was given an opportunity to protect and serve the people who don't have a voice, that the next generation is empowered to make the same fights, because they're always going to be necessary. The people that will get in line first in this country for things are not going to be low-income children. They're not going to be really poor elderly adults. They're not going to be pregnant and nursing low-income mothers. That's not the way our system works. We've shown that through advocacy and organization and

nimbleness of foot we can get them in the line, but it takes constant vigilance. And if I can leave one final word it would be how much I wish well to those who when I'm gone will pick up this fight as they have already and continue to do well.

JB: Thank you so much for sharing with me tonight.

AS: It's been my pleasure. Thank you.