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COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: MICHAEL DONILON

Thursday, July 31, 2025

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held in room 2335, Rayburn House Office Building,
commencing at 10:09 a.m.

1 Appearances:

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4 For the COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM:

5

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13 [REDACTED], MINORITY DEPUTY STAFF DIRECTOR

14 [REDACTED], MINORITY SENIOR COUNSEL

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1 For MICHAEL DONILON:

2

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1 Mr. Greenberg. All right. We'll go on the record.

2 This is a transcribed interview of Michael Donilon, conducted by the House Committee on
3 Oversight and Government Reform under the authority granted to it pursuant to House rule X.
4 Accordingly, House rule X grants the Committee broad jurisdiction for the Committee to conduct
5 investigations of any matter at any time.

6 This interview was requested by Chairman James Comer as part of the Committee's
7 investigation into President Biden's alleged mental and physical decline, the Biden White House's
8 efforts to hide that from the American people, and any unauthorized executive actions.

9 Can the witness please state his name and spell his last name for the record?

10 Mr. Donilon. Yeah. My name is Michael Donilon. That's D-o-n-i-l-o-n.

11 Mr. Greenberg. On behalf of the Committee, I want to thank Mr. Donilon for appearing here
12 today. The Committee appreciates your appearance for the interview.

13 My name is Jake Greenberg, and I am the chief counsel for investigations for Chairman
14 Comer.

15 Under the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform's rules, you are allowed to have
16 an attorney present to advise you during this interview. Do you have an attorney representing you
17 in a personal capacity present with you today?

18 Mr. Donilon. Yes, I do.

19 Mr. Greenberg. Can counsel please identify themselves for the record?

20 Mr. McQuaid. Nick McQuaid from Latham and Watkins, on behalf of Mr. Donilon.

21 Mr. Veeramachaneni. Vikhyath Veeramachaneni, Latham and Watkins.

22 Mr. Greenberg. Thank you.

23 For the record, starting with the majority staff, can the additional staff members please
24 introduce themselves with their names, titles, and affiliations?

25 Mr. Benzine. Mitch Benzine, general counsel for the majority.

1 Ms. Harker. Margaret Harker, senior advisor for the majority.

2 Mr. Harnice. Will Harnice, for the majority.

3 Mr. Spectre. Peter Spectre, special staff member for the majority.

4 Mr. Grant. Billy Grant, counsel for the majority.

5 Mr. Soto. Matthew Soto, digital director for the majority.

6 Ms. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], fellow for the minority.

7 Ms. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], legal intern for the minority.

8 Ms. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], counsel for the minority.

9 Mr. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], counsel for the minority.

10 Ms. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], senior counsel, minority.

11 Mr. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] deputy director for minority.

12 Mr. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], senior counsel for the minority.

13 Mr. Greenberg. Thank you all.

14 Mr. Donilon, before we begin, I'd like to go over the ground rules for this interview.

15 The questioning will proceed in rounds. The majority will ask questions for up to an hour,
16 and then the minority will have an opportunity to ask questions for up to an hour if they so choose.

17 To the extent members have questions for the witness, they will be propounded during their
18 side's respective rounds.

19 Do you understand?

20 Mr. Donilon. Yes.

21 Mr. Greenberg. The clock will stop if the witness needs to confer with counsel, when
22 counsel for the witness is speaking, and when members are speaking during the opposing side's
23 round of questions.

24 We will alternate back and forth until there are no more questions.

25 There is a court reporter taking down everything I say and everything you say to make a

1 written record of the interview.

2 For the record to be clear, please wait until the staffer questioning you finishes each question
3 before you begin your answer, and the staffer will wait until you finish your response before
4 proceeding to the next question.

5 Further, to ensure that the court reporter can properly record this interview, please speak
6 clearly, concisely, and slowly.

7 Also, the court reporter cannot record nonverbal answers such as nodding or shaking your
8 head, so it's important that you answer each question with an audible, verbal answer.

9 Do you understand, sir?

10 Mr. Donilon. Yes.

11 Mr. Greenberg. Exhibits may be entered into the record. Majority exhibits will be
12 identified numerically. Minority exhibits will be identified alphabetically.

13 We want you to answer our questions in the most complete and truthful manner possible, so
14 we will take our time. If you have any questions or do not fully understand the question, please let
15 us know. We will attempt to clarify, add context to, or rephrase our questions.

16 If we ask about specific conversations or events in the past and you are unable to recall the
17 exact words or details, you should testify to the substance of those conversations or events to the
18 best of your recollection.

19 If you recall only a part of a conversation or event, you should give us your best recollection of
20 those events or parts of conversations that you do recall.

21 Do you understand, sir?

22 Mr. Donilon. Yes.

23 Mr. Greenberg. You are required by law to answer questions from Congress truthfully.
24 This also applies to questions posed by congressional staff in this interview.

25 Do you understand?

1 Mr. Donilon. Yes.

2 Mr. Greenberg. If at any time you knowingly make false statements, you could be subject to
3 criminal prosecution. Do you understand?

4 Mr. Donilon. Yes.

5 Mr. Greenberg. This includes both knowingly providing false testimony but also stating that
6 you do not recall or remember something when, in fact, you do.

7 Do you understand?

8 Mr. Donilon. Yes.

9 Mr. Greenberg. Furthermore, you cannot tell half-truths or exclude information necessary
10 to make statements accurate. You are required to provide all information that would make your
11 response truthful. A deliberate failure to disclose information can constitute a false statement.

12 Do you understand?

13 Mr. Donilon. Yes.

14 Mr. Greenberg. Is there any reason you are unable to provide truthful testimony in today's
15 interview?

16 Mr. Donilon. No.

17 Mr. Greenberg. Please note that if you wish to assert a privilege over any statement today,
18 that assertion must comply with the rules of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

19 Pursuant to that, Committee rule 16(c)(1) states, "For the Chair to consider assertions of
20 privilege over testimony or statements, witnesses or entities must clearly state the specific privilege
21 being asserted and the reason for the assertion on or before the scheduled date of testimony or
22 appearance."

23 Do you understand?

24 Mr. Donilon. Yes.

25 Mr. Greenberg. I would enter as exhibit 1 a letter transmitted to your counsel, dated June

1 24th, 2025, from Mr. Gary Lawkowski, deputy counsel to the President.

2 [Donilon Majority Exhibit No. 1

3 was marked for identification.]

4 Mr. Greenberg. This letter informs you that President Trump has determined not to assert
5 executive privilege over your assessment of former President Biden's fitness for the Office of the
6 President and your knowledge of who exercised executive powers during his administration.

7 The letter also states that President Trump will not assert immunity to preclude you from
8 testifying before the House Oversight Committee.

9 Ordinarily, we take a 5-minute break at the end of each round of questioning, but if you need
10 a longer break or a break before that, please just let us know, and we will be happy to accommodate.
11 However, to the extent there is a pending question, we would ask that you finish answering the
12 question before we take a break.

13 Do you understand?

14 Mr. Donilon. Yes.

15 Mr. McQuaid. Counsel, can I put one thing on the record related to his recollection, which is
16 just that we haven't had the benefit, because he is -- all his records from his work at the White House
17 were archived under the Presidential Records Act -- that he hasn't had the benefit of looking back at
18 his previous emails and things that we would, you know, normally do in preparing someone for
19 testimony today.

20 So this is, you know, based on his recollection, but doesn't have the benefit of that ability to
21 prepare.

22 Mr. Greenberg. Understood and noted, sir.

23 It is also my understanding that you have transmitted to the Committee a testimony. We
24 can mark that as exhibit 2.

25 [Donilon Majority Exhibit No. 2

1 was marked for identification.]

2 Mr. McQuaid. We appreciate it.

3 Mr. Greenberg. Of course.

4 Mr. Donilon, do you have any questions before we begin?

5 Mr. Donilon. I do not. Actually, just one. Could I just get something out of my bag? I
6 want to get a cough drop --

7 Mr. Greenberg. Yes, sir.

8 Mr. Donilon. -- if you don't mind.

9 Okay. Thank you.

10 Mr. Greenberg. All right. My clock reads 10:15. The majority's time will begin now.

11 EXAMINATION

12 BY MR. GREENBERG:

13 Q Mr. Donilon, thank you again for being here.

14 A Yes.

15 Q I would like to just start with your educational background. Can you please just tell the
16 Committee, first, where you did your undergraduate studies and any degree you received there?

17 A Yes. I received an A.B. in English and history from Georgetown University.

18 Q And when did you receive that, sir?

19 A 1981.

20 Q And you then attended -- you later attended Georgetown Law. Is that correct?

21 A Yes.

22 Q And you received a J.D. Is that correct?

23 A Yes, in 1991.

24 Q What did you do in the period between 1981 and 1991, sir?

25 A I was working, and I was -- for part of that time, I was leading a political polling firm, and

1 then for part of that time I was running my own political polling firm.

2 Q Did you begin working for Senator Biden in 1981?

3 A Yes. I believe it --

4 Q Is that the first time you had met Senator Biden -- Mr. Biden?

5 A Yes.

6 Q What were you doing for Mr. Biden, or Senator Biden, in 1981?

7 A Well, in 1981, I joined a political polling firm after graduating from college. The firm
8 was Cambridge Survey Research. I was an entry-level analyst in that firm. And I was -- Senator
9 Biden was a client of the firm. I was assigned to his account. And so that's how I first came to
10 know him.

11 Q From 1981 to when you received your law degree, did you attend law school full-time,
12 or was it like a night-school sort of situation?

13 A It was night school. I went to Georgetown Law at night from 1987 until 1991.

14 Q Okay.

15 And besides Senator Biden, did you work for anybody else between the 1981-1991
16 timeframe?

17 A Well, I was -- as I said, I was part of a political consulting firm, polling firm, and we had a
18 number of clients, so yes. I worked for a number of people who ran for U.S. Senate, Congress,
19 mayor.

20 Q Can you just tell me what you were doing, what your job entailed in that kind of work?

21 A Well, so, as I said, in the initial years in my time with them, I was, you know, first an
22 entry-level analyst, and then I kept moving up. And my job was to help to write questionnaires, to
23 analyze polling results, to put together charts and materials for clients so they could see the polling
24 results. And so it -- and that's what I did for several years.

25 And in 1985, I was made president of Cambridge Survey Research. I was leading the

1 research. In that time, as I said, we worked for a number of clients. I could name some if that --

2 Q Sure. That would be helpful.

3 A Okay. So my memory -- it's a long time. My best memory is that, as I said, I was
4 assigned to Senator Biden's account. At the time, the firm also worked for -- if my memory is
5 correct, I think Senator George Mitchell was elected in a special election around that time.

6 In 1982, I remember working for Mario Cuomo when he ran for Governor.

7 In 1983, I recall working for, I believe, Harold Washington and Wilson Goode. They ran for
8 mayor of Chicago and Philadelphia.

9 In 1984, I remember working for -- I believe Paul Simon was running for the Senate that year
10 from Illinois. We also worked that year for Gary Hart, who was running for President.

11 And then in 1985, which is when I took over the leadership -- in '84, I should actually say, I
12 believe that was the first election that I worked for Senator Biden, because I believe he was up in
13 1984 and then 1990. So I worked for him in that election.

14 In 1985, as I said, I took over leadership of the firm. We worked for Gerry Baliles, who was
15 elected Governor of Virginia.

16 Then in 1986, I remember working for Bob Casey, who was running for Governor of
17 Pennsylvania, Senator Casey's father. I remember that.

18 Then in 1987, I worked on Senator Biden's campaign for the Presidency. And then --

19 Q Can I stop you right there?

20 A Yes, sir.

21 Q Can you tell me what you were doing for Senator Biden's campaign at that time?

22 A Yes, sir. So, in 1987, as I said, I was president of Cambridge Survey Research.

23 Q Yes, sir.

24 A So I was in charge of the polling and research for Senator Biden's Presidential campaign.
25 I was not, at that point in time, in the senior leadership in the campaign. I was, like, a step

1 removed. But I had a specific responsibility for the polling and the research in that campaign.

2 Q You had known Senator Biden at this point for -- at the time of the '88 campaign, you
3 had known him for several years. Is that correct?

4 A I knew him. I knew him in context of being an analyst and being assigned to his
5 account. And I would -- Senator Biden, my memory is that he typically would do at least one poll a
6 year. He sometimes would do more. He sometimes would do in-house polling that he would ask
7 us to oversee. So that would be my contact with him, is in the context of preparing those polls and
8 then providing the results and the analysis.

9 And then my role grew, and I got to meet him more and got closer to him over time.

10 Q And that's what I'm -- that's the vein of the -- the vein of my next questions are going to
11 be just how you developed a relationship with Senator and then Vice President and then President
12 Biden.

13 So, you knowing more about this than me, I'm just hoping that, as we go from the '80s to
14 today, you can kind of fill me in on the development of your relationship as you went from somebody
15 who knew Senator Biden to a very close advisor, is that fair, to former President Biden?

16 A I think that's fair. That's how I would say it.

17 Q So, after the '88 campaign, what was your next -- what was the next job that you had for
18 Joe Biden?

19 A Well, I would first say, because I think it's responsive to your overall question -- but it
20 took place in 1987. That's the reason I raise that, because you just laid out 1988 and time going
21 forward.

22 Q Oh.

23 A But there was an important relationship that was developed, I believe, with myself and
24 Senator Biden in 1987.

25 As I said, I was responsible for leading the polling and research. I was not a member of the

1 inner circle or the highest levels of leadership in the campaign. That was -- my boss was very close
2 to Senator Biden, had been with him since 1972 when he got elected the first time to the Senate.

3 Q And who was your boss, sir?

4 A His name was Patrick Caddell, C-a-d-d-e-l-l. And he was a well-known, well-respected
5 pollster. As I said, he had done polling for Senator Biden in 1972 in what was a very surprising win,
6 and they developed a very close relationship. And that was why Senator Biden was a client of the
7 firm, and that's how I got assigned to do his work.

8 So, in 1987, Senator Biden is running for President and he runs into trouble. He's accused of
9 plagiarism, and the campaign is in a crisis. So, as part of our ability to assess how much damage he
10 had taken and whether he could continue to run, I was asked to conduct a poll in the State of Iowa,
11 and I did that.

12 And the results came back, and they were not favorable. In fact, they had showed a
13 dramatic decline in support for Senator Biden. He had gone from being among those leading the
14 race to being at the bottom or near the bottom, but he was clearly hurt.

15 I conducted that poll. When I got the results of that poll, I was asked by my boss to not
16 share the results with anyone, because they were as negative as they were.

17 On the day I left the office with that instruction, I went home to an apartment in northwest
18 D.C. And, at that time, you may or may not know -- I'm a little older than you, maybe a lot
19 older -- there was no caller ID. You know, we just -- you had a telephone, and you answered it.

20 I was home; I answered the phone. And my memory is this. And I've never -- my memory
21 is, on the phone was Ted Kaufman, who was Senator Biden's chief of staff, and he just asked me out
22 of the blue, like, what are the results?

23 So I was faced with a dilemma. I had to -- I was thinking about how I would answer. And
24 then, moments later, on the phone was Joe Biden. And he said, "Mike, it's Joe. What are the
25 results?" And, in that moment, I chose to give him the results. I gave it to him clearly and directly.

1 He then asked me my opinion. Now, I am at this time 27, 28 years old, I don't know how
2 old. And he asked me our view of the data, and I said I thought that he couldn't be elected
3 President that year and that I thought he should return to being a Senator in Delaware.

4 And I say that only because, in my mind -- and, again, this is my mind -- I believe that's how I
5 first really built my relationship with Joe Biden, which is with a willingness to be frank and honest
6 directly with him.

7 And there were then subsequent meetings -- I was not part of the subsequent
8 meetings -- about what he should do. I can't say I was part of the decision that he made. He
9 ultimately made a decision to leave the race.

10 And so I think that established a foundation, a basis, a kind of framework for our relationship
11 that I tried to keep to for the rest of my time working with Senator, then Vice President, and
12 President Biden.

13 That was before -- do you want me to continue with this?

14 Q Sure. Please do.

15 Well, can I just ask a question? I think, in the answer you just gave, it seemed to me
16 that -- but please tell me if I'm wrong -- that you were proud of giving difficult news to Senator Biden
17 about the poll. Is that a fair characterization? Or, at least, you thought you --

18 A I -- no, I don't think it's a fair characterization that I was proud of it. I don't think that's
19 fair.

20 What I think is fair is, I felt he was the candidate and that I had a responsibility to give him the
21 truth. That's what I thought. But I didn't feel, like, proud or anything else. I just felt it was how I
22 should handle the moment. That's what I felt.

23 Q You think you did the right thing?

24 A Well, I -- I believe I did the right thing. I don't know if Senator Biden thought that. I
25 know my boss at the time was not happy I had done it. I felt it was the right thing to do, and that's

1 what I did.

2 Q Thank you.

3 Now let's move on past -- '88, I think?

4 A Yes.

5 Q Okay.

6 A Specifically with Senator Biden or more broadly with other clients?

7 Q Let's start more broadly. What were you doing --

8 A Okay.

9 Q -- as we approach the '90s?

10 A We have a long time to get through, don't we?

11 Q Well, I'll pick it up. I'll pick it up.

12 A No, I -- you know, sometimes it surprises me, how long I have done these things.

13 At the end of 1987, my boss retired from the business and he moved to California. And so I
14 had faced a choice about what to do, and I chose to open my own political polling firm. So that's
15 what I did.

16 I didn't have much business in 1988. I was working out of my apartment. It was a one- or
17 two-room apartment. It was just me and my wife and one other person sometimes. But that's
18 what I chose to do.

19 But then, in 1989, I was hired by Doug Wilder, who was running for Governor of Virginia.
20 And as you may know, in certain years, Virginia and New Jersey are the only gubernatorial campaigns
21 in the country. So it was surprising, but it was quite an important campaign to get. And it was a
22 historic campaign, because Doug Wilder was running to be, I believe, the first African-American
23 elected Governor in America.

24 So it was surprising that I was hired. I think part of the reason was that I had done the work
25 for the Governor who was elected in Virginia 4 years previous to Doug Wilder.

1 I was also told by Governor Wilder that he was looking for someone who would keep his
2 numbers confidential and not speak to the press without express approval. And I did that. And
3 that was an early lesson for how I approached politics. And I continued over the years to not speak
4 often with the press and often only when it was expressly asked for by the entity, the campaign.

5 And in 1989 Doug Wilder was elected Governor, and it made a huge difference in my career,
6 because, as I said, it was a historic campaign and it was a surprising campaign. Not very many
7 people thought he could be elected Governor, and a lot of people did not believe it could happen.
8 So it was an important moment in my career.

9 In 1990 -- do you want me to talk about both Biden and others?

10 Q Let's talk about the next -- well, first of all, maybe as a baseline just so I know what
11 we're working toward, when would you end up working for Senator Biden again?

12 A Well, so I was getting to this.

13 Q Okay.

14 A In 1990.

15 Q In 1990. Okay.

16 A And 1990 proved to be an important moment again in our relationship, because 1990
17 was the first time Senator Biden was running for an election after the charges he had faced in the
18 Presidential race. And so we knew we were going to have to face the attacks that he had
19 plagiarized and questions about his character.

20 And I did a substantial amount of research with focus groups that I conducted as well as
21 quantitative polling that I also oversaw. And I, you know -- and I came to him and I gave him, you
22 know, what he felt to be uncomfortable advice he didn't want to hear, which is, I said that the people
23 of Delaware were aware of the charges that they made against him, they wanted to support him
24 again, and they did support him in very strong numbers, but that it would be very difficult to
25 convince them that there was no basis to those charges.

1 And he said to me that that wasn't good enough, in his view. He wanted to clearly establish
2 that the charges that were made against him are wrong.

3 So, again, it was a moment of, I thought, candor and clarity and giving him an honest
4 assessment about what he was up against.

5 It was an important election. It was the first time after his Presidential race. He won, and
6 he won convincingly.

7 So that was another -- because in '90, that was the first time I was the lead in the campaign,
8 absent Pat Caddell.

9 Q At this point, you had spent nearly a decade working around politicians. Is that right?

10 A Yes.

11 Q Did Senator Biden strike you as an able politician?

12 A Yes.

13 Q What did you think his strengths were as a politician? Did you think he had mastery of
14 the facts?

15 A Well, I did. And one thing I would say that I think is relevant to a lot of this
16 conversation is, Joe Biden always approached every issue wanting to know more than anybody else
17 in the room. And he had a deep interest in substance and facts and being fully prepared. So, yes,
18 I thought he wanted to master the facts.

19 I think he also -- at that time, he was younger. He was younger, and he was seen as, you
20 know, a charismatic rising star in the party, someone who had enormous personal appeal, was quite
21 likable. He always demonstrated great empathy and understanding of people. He was seen by
22 the people of Delaware as someone who was very attentive to their needs, was seen as a very good
23 constituent-service Senator.

24 So I had a high opinion of Senator Biden.

25 Q Would you have considered him a good orator at that time?

1 A Yes. I think he had a reputation for that, and I believe that to be true.

2 Do you want me to continue, or what do you want me to do?

3 Q Yeah. Let's keep walking through --

4 A Okay.

5 Q -- your relationship with Senator Biden and how it developed.

6 A All right. Well, then, just to keep the chronology in my head --

7 Q Sure.

8 A -- in 1991, I moved from being solely a political pollster to then making television ads.

9 And the first campaign I did that was for Harris Wofford, who was running for -- he had been
10 appointed by Bob Casey, and he was running for election to replace Senator Heinz because, you
11 know, he had died in the helicopter crash.

12 And, again, that was seen as a very important campaign. It was a standout campaign in the
13 country. It was one where people did not believe that Wofford had much of a chance. He was
14 running against Dick Thornburgh. Thornburgh started that race probably 40 points ahead, I believe.
15 And so it was an important campaign for me and my career.

16 In 1992, I worked for Bill Clinton's campaign for President.

17 In 1994, I worked for Zell Miller, who was Governor of Georgia --

18 Q What did you do in Governor Clinton's campaign?

19 A So I joined his campaign primarily as part of his advertising team and what was at that
20 time called his water (ph). So I was part of making advertising for Governor Clinton, and I was part
21 of the team of people who would deal with rapid response in the campaign.

22 Q Would you go on to work with then-President Clinton again?

23 A I did not.

24 Q Okay.

25 A I returned to private business.

1 Q How closely were you working with candidate Clinton during the campaign?

2 A I would say not closely.

3 Q Okay.

4 A I knew him. I met him. I filmed him. I was very close to Alicia (ph) with the
5 campaign, but I did not have a deep personal relationship with Governor Clinton.

6 Q Okay.

7 So, after that campaign, you then -- please -- I didn't mean to interrupt you. Please
8 continue.

9 A Oh. I'm trying to remember.

10 Then, in 1996, Senator Biden runs for reelection. And, again, I -- I worked for his campaign.

11 Q At this point, were you the go-to person for Senator Biden for the work that you were
12 conducting, for polling and for --

13 A Yes. I had really become that person --

14 Mr. McQuaid. Let him finish --

15 Mr. Donilon. Oh, I'm sorry.

16 Mr. McQuaid. -- the question first just so it's clear --

17 Mr. Greenberg. It's okay. I do that too.

18 BY MR. GREENBERG:

19 Q For polling and for ads, were you the go-to person for Senator Biden for any kind of
20 reelection?

21 A Well, I -- my role grew with Senator Biden over those years, and I became more and
22 more, I will say, a trusted advisor to him.

23 Q And, as a trusted advisor, were you talking with Senator Biden at that point most days of
24 the week? Or once a week? Can you give me just --

25 A No. No. During this time, I would speak to Senator Biden mostly when he was in his

1 campaign, whenever that period of time was, and I would speak to him only infrequently in the years
2 when he was not up.

3 And that would depend on -- as I said, we would often do some research every year to plot
4 out the year for Senator Biden. And there might be, at any given moment, an issue that came up
5 that he would ask for my advice.

6 But I was not on his staff, and I was not in day-to-day contact with him, no.

7 Q And you would not be on his staff until he became Vice President. Is that correct?

8 A Yes, that's correct.

9 Q So, if we fast-forward -- and if we're missing any details, key details, please feel free to
10 take me back. But if we move to the 2008 Obama-Biden campaign, can you tell me what your role
11 was on that campaign?

12 A On the Obama-Biden campaign?

13 Q Yes, sir.

14 A Because there'd been a Biden campaign, you know, for President.

15 Q Yes, you're right. Let's actually turn to that one. Did you work on that campaign?

16 A Yes.

17 Q And what were you doing for that campaign?

18 A I was a general advisory role. And I would -- certainly I would -- you know, I would
19 review his polling. I would take a look at statements he would make. I would look at -- he would
20 have debate prep. And I was part of, you know, what I would call kind of a decision-making group --

21 Q You made reference earlier to an inner circle. And I don't mean to imply any kind of
22 nefarious connotation to that kind of phrasing. But is it fair to say at this point that you were part
23 of an inner circle to that campaign?

24 A Well, I think it'd be fair to say that I was seen by Senator Biden as a trusted advisor who
25 he wanted to hear my input.

1 Q Can you walk us through why that campaign ultimately did not succeed for Presidency?

2 A Well -- in 2008?

3 Q Yes, sir.

4 A Well, I thought there were several reasons. I thought most important was, it wasn't
5 his time and he wasn't the best fit for the moment.

6 You had Senator Clinton -- Hillary Clinton was running. She was very strong. And you had
7 Senator Obama, who was, you know, a rising, new voice in the country.

8 The Iraq war was a big part of the Democratic primary that year. Senator Obama had
9 opposed it. Senator Clinton had supported it, as had Senator Biden. So that, you know, was an
10 obstacle.

11 Certainly, on a relative basis, Senator Biden didn't have the resources that they did to
12 compete.

13 But mostly what I thought was, every Presidential campaign, in my view, is in part about
14 who's the best person, the best fit for that moment. And that was Senator Obama. And I think
15 that was the primary reason why.

16 But I also believe that Senator Biden's performance in the primary, while it didn't win him
17 many delegates, I think it did present -- I think it presented to Senator Obama a valuable look into
18 Senator Biden and why he would make a Vice President.

19 Q And, at this time, 2008 -- just checking in on your assessment of Joe Biden as a
20 politician -- did you consider him still an adept politician?

21 Did he -- I'll give you one criteria that I'm using. Did he have knowledge of the facts that he
22 was discussing at that time, at any given moment?

23 A My belief is he did, yes.

24 Q Did he strike you as a capable orator?

25 A Well, yes, I thought he was a capable orator.

1 Q And there were -- President Biden -- or, excuse me -- Senator Biden, in 2008,
2 participated in primary debates with the other candidates. Is that correct?

3 A Yes, I believe he did.

4 Q Did he strike you as an adequate debater at that time?

5 A Yes, I thought he was an adequate debater.

6 Q So, at this point, in 2008, having known Senator Biden since 1981, obviously an older Joe
7 Biden, but would you consider him still pretty much the same Joe Biden that you met originally in
8 1981?

9 I can clarify if you'd like. Would you consider him just as able to do his job for the people of
10 Delaware as he was when you first met him?

11 A Well, I would say yes. I thought he was capable, and I thought there were things about
12 him that were a great asset. As I mentioned, I think he's always had tremendous empathy. I think
13 Senator Obama very much believed his foreign-policy experience as well as his relations in Congress
14 and on the Hill were valuable.

15 I will say, because it occurred in that campaign -- and this was true of Joe Biden throughout
16 his career -- that I think Senator Obama sometimes felt he was not as disciplined as he would want
17 him to be, that he would sometimes talk too long, that he would speak off the cuff, and that that
18 would -- but that has been a characteristic of Joe Biden his whole career, that he -- but, as I
19 understand your question, I thought he was capable, yes.

20 Q And when Senator Obama picked Senator Biden as his running mate, what did your role
21 become in that campaign? Did it change much?

22 A Well, yeah -- "did it change much?" From?

23 Q The work that you had been doing just when it was the --

24 A Biden campaign.

25 Q -- Biden campaign.

1 A I see.

2 Well, it did change, yes. In the Biden campaign, as I said, I think I was seen as one of the
3 leaders of that campaign, and I believe that's how Senator Biden looked at me. I did not have that
4 role in the Obama-Biden campaign. I didn't have a relationship with Senator Obama. I --

5 Q I'm sorry, sir. Just to clarify, a prior relationship? Or are you saying that you didn't
6 develop a relationship with Senator Obama throughout the campaign?

7 A No. My point is that I -- by that time, I had a, I would say, you know, a close
8 relationship with Senator Biden and he saw me as a trusted advisor. I did not have that relationship
9 with Senator Obama, and I was not at the center of the Obama campaign. That was a whole
10 different leadership group. So I wasn't in the same place in the orbit of that campaign.

11 My role was, I would say, I guess -- my memory is, I guess I played probably three primary
12 roles. One was, I was asked by the campaign to travel with Senator Biden, so I did that a lot. I was
13 asked to contribute to his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention and his
14 speeches and remarks in that campaign. And I was asked to participate in his debate preparation.

15 Q The debate preparation for the Vice Presidential debate. Is that --

16 A Yes.

17 Q -- correct?

18 Mr. McQuaid. Just make sure you let him finish.

19 Mr. Donilon. Sorry.

20 Mr. McQuaid. Take your time.

21 BY MR. GREENBERG:

22 Q I don't have an exhibit for this characterization, but I've seen it. And if you reject the
23 characterization, feel free to reject it.

24 In preparing for this interview, I have heard that you have been -- developed President
25 Biden's voice; you have been able to capture how President Biden speaks and write speeches to that

1 effect. Is that fair?

2 A I -- I don't -- I don't think I would characterize it that way. That's not how I see myself.

3 I see myself as -- you know, I've worked for President Biden for a long time. I think I've -- I
4 mean, you know, as a result of that, over time, I think I have developed a sense of how he speaks. I
5 think we have a certain similar background that makes -- you know, that helps us to see things in a
6 similar way.

7 But I think it's -- to me, it's a little -- I don't know what the word is -- you know, presumptuous
8 to think I could be his voice. I mean, I've seen that characterization. I know that that's out there.
9 But how I saw myself was: I worked for him, I was a consultant, I was a staff member, I was an
10 advisor. I had a job to help him succeed. And I did participate in, you know, many of his speeches,
11 and I did have a role in the White House to oversee, you know, his remarks writ large.

12 So I hope that answers it.

13 Q It does, yeah. Thank you.

14 And because you had mentioned the three tasks that you had -- the acceptance speech,
15 travel, and debate preparation -- so, turning to travel, what does that mean? Was there a bus?
16 Was there a plane? What kind of travel were you doing at this point?

17 A In 2008?

18 Q Yes, sir.

19 A So, in 2008, Senator Obama picks Senator Biden to be his Vice President. And so, as
20 the Vice Presidential nominee, I would say most, maybe not all, but most of the travel is by plane.
21 There was a plane for the Vice Presidential candidate, and I would fly on that campaign plane.

22 That's most of what it was, that we would go from city to city, event to event. There would
23 be a schedule for the Vice President -- I mean, at that point, sorry, Senator Biden. And so that's
24 what the travel was. It was mostly by plane. I would assume there probably were some buses,
25 but by that point, you're in the general election and most travel is by plane.

1 Q And how much traveling were you doing at that point? Were you all over the country?

2 I mean --

3 A I --

4 Q Go ahead.

5 A Well, my memory is, a lot. I was with him -- I certainly believe I was with him more
6 days than not. As it got closer to the election day, I think I was with him almost all the time. Every
7 now and then I would try to go home for a day or two. But I would say I spent most of the days, I
8 think, traveling with him, out of the convention and especially as the campaign moved into the
9 September-October window.

10 Q And, having done a few of these interviews, I kind of get the -- I get the pretty obvious
11 impression, I think, that Senator, then Vice President, then President Joe Biden likes being around
12 people. So did he enjoy the travel aspect of campaigning?

13 A Well, you know, there's sort of two pieces. I'm not sure he enjoyed the travel. I
14 don't know that. I do believe he enjoyed meeting people. And I do believe that he -- he would be
15 energized, and he liked the personal interaction. So that, certainly. As to whether he liked being
16 on a plane and traveling, that I'm less certain of.

17 Q That makes sense to me. But energized from going all over the country and --

18 A Yeah. Well, I -- I'm sorry. Were you finished? I didn't mean --

19 Q Energized from going all over the country and meeting people --

20 A I don't want to be causing problems here.

21 I think it's -- my experience with Joe Biden, as Senator, Vice President, President, was, he likes
22 meeting people. He enjoys it. He gets a lot out of it. I think people who see him get a lot out of
23 it. He has really, I think, pretty powerful interactions with people.

24 Q And then the last point that you were tasked with on that, on the Obama-Biden
25 campaign, was debate prep. Is that correct?

1 A In '08?

2 Q Yes, sir.

3 A Oh, yes. Yeah.

4 Q And can you walk me through what that looked like? How did debate prep -- I really
5 know nothing about debate prep, so if you could just tell me how that looked for 2008, I'd appreciate
6 it.

7 A Okay. "How it looked."

8 Q What was the system for preparing Joe Biden for a debate?

9 A Okay.

10 So, in 2008, well, my memory is -- and I was not in charge of it. I was a participant in
11 viewing, you know, the exercise. My memory is, there was a room set up, I believe, in Delaware at
12 a hotel, and that room would have places that the candidates would stand on the debate stage,
13 separate podiums. There would be -- you know, it tried to mimic what the debate night was going
14 to be. There would be the candidates. There would be the people asking questions.

15 Then, behind them, there would be a group of people from the campaign who had different
16 responsibilities. Some, there was always a big team that were responsible for the research and the
17 specific information relative to any questions that were being asked. There would be others who
18 would have more of a communications perspective. There were others, like myself, who would just
19 be asked our opinion of what we were seeing. My memory is, I think it was led by Ron Klain, I
20 believe.

21 And so we would schedule time. There would also be a room set aside to have
22 conversations with Senator Biden. And so we would spend a lot of time going through the
23 substantive, preparing what people thought were likely questions and likely answers. Senator
24 Biden would keep working and reworking them. And then there would be some practice as well.

25 Q I know that was more than 15 years ago, so I'm not holding you to specifics here. But

1 do you know how many -- how long of a period you were preparing for for that debate? Was it a
2 day? Was it a week? Was it a month?

3 A Well, I can't say. I don't think it'd be a month. I think that's impossible to get in a
4 campaign. It was more than a day. I don't think it was a week, but I can't say with any certainty
5 how long it was. It was certainly -- there were at least a couple of days. I can't say with certainty
6 how many.

1 [11:06 a.m.]

2 BY MR. GREENBERG:

3 Q And did Senator Biden enjoy the work? Seem to enjoy the work?

4 A "Did he enjoy the work." My view is just my view. I can't speak for him. My view is,
5 I don't think candidates ever enjoy preparing for debates. They're very hard. You know, it's a
6 difficult thing to go through.

7 So, no, I don't think he enjoyed it. I think he worked at it. I think he, you know, prepared.
8 He -- and so that's what I think about it.

9 Q Did you think he was taking it seriously, though?

10 A Oh. Well, I believe he was taking it seriously.
11 I mean, if you remember, at the time -- I believe I'm right; maybe I'm wrong -- he was
12 debating Governor Palin, I believe. And, as a result, this debate was going to get a lot of attention,
13 more so than most Vice Presidential debates.

14 And so he -- there were a lot of complicated problems associated with it, and, yes, he took it
15 seriously.

16 Q Do you think he performed well during that debate? Do you remember?

17 A I do remember, yes. I watched it in a holding room. I wasn't in the actual room
18 where the debate was held. And I don't know where it was; I don't remember the city.

19 Q Me either.

20 A My memory of the debate was, I thought he had done well, yes. I did. But, as is
21 often the case with debates, now I remember people saw it differently. I can remember, especially
22 people in the room who came out felt that there was going to be a problem and that Palin may have
23 won.

24 My view of watching it from where I sat was, I thought Senator Biden had done well. So that
25 was my take.

1 Q And soon after that debate, Senator Biden would become Vice President Biden. Is that
2 correct?

3 A Yes.

4 Q So, however the debate went, it was not catastrophic for the campaign. Would you
5 agree with me on that?

6 A Well, I -- no, I believe it was -- or, it was certainly not catastrophic.

7 Mr. Greenberg. I think we can stop right there. We'll go off the record. And we'll turn it
8 over to the minority.

9 [Recess.]

10 Mr. [REDACTED] We'll go back on the record. The time is 11:22.

11 EXAMINATION

12 BY MR. [REDACTED]

13 Q Mr. Donilon, my name is [REDACTED]. I work for the minority. I just want to thank you
14 for appearing today for this transcribed interview.

15 Over the past hour, you discussed with my majority colleagues your long history in politics.
16 And you started back with Senator Biden in 1981. Is that right?

17 A Yes.

18 Q And is it fair to say, from 1981 until today, you have worked for a variety of different
19 principals in political settings?

20 A Yes.

21 Q And given your long history in working in politics, is it fair to say that you've developed a
22 good sense of the information that is important to a successful campaign?

23 A Well, I believe I have, yeah. I mean, I do.

24 Q And, similarly, is it fair to say that you have a good sense of what information to convey
25 to a principal when you are in charge of polling?

1 A Well, I believe I do. Yes.

2 Q In the previous hour with my colleagues, you first mentioned -- excuse me. Strike that.
3 You spoke about how in 1987 you worked for President Biden's Presidential campaign. Is
4 that right?

5 A Yes.

6 Q And, during your time, you stated that you developed a willingness to be frank and
7 honest with Senator Biden at the time. Is that accurate?

8 A That's certainly accurate.

9 Q And throughout your relationship with President Biden leading up to today, do you
10 believe that you still have a frank and honest relationship with President Biden?

11 A Well, I -- I believe I do. And I, you know, just -- he has -- I'm not alluding to
12 conversations, but he has -- he's conveyed to me that he believes I have been, you know, someone
13 willing to give him truth and that that's been the basis of our long relationship, that, you know, when
14 you go through a lot of tough campaigns and you go through a lot of tough moments, you know, you
15 often -- you know, there are moments when you are -- that's how someone builds their assessment
16 of you.

17 And I think he -- I think he believes, and I certainly believe, I tried to give him the most honest
18 assessment I can on anything.

19 Q And, in that vein, you also spoke about your time working on the 1990 Senate reelection
20 for Senator Biden. Is that right?

21 A Yes.

22 Q And during your last hour, you mentioned how you gave uncomfortable advice to
23 President Biden, and in this context especially related to the allegations that were lodged against him
24 in his prior Presidential campaign. Is that right?

25 A Yes, it is. That's accurate.

1 Q And, again, similar to my prior question, you know, dating back to 1990 to today, is it
2 fair to say that you have always given relevant, if not uncomfortable, advice to President Biden?

3 A I believe I have, yes.

4 Q Great.

5 We'll go off the record. Thank you.

6 [Recess.]

7 Mr. Greenberg. We'll go on the record.

8 BY MR. GREENBERG:

9 Q Mr. Donilon, I think, before we continue to walk through your history with
10 President Biden, it'd be helpful to take a step back and maybe flesh out what I'm interested in
11 hearing and what I believe the minority was getting at in their questioning, which is, there have been
12 several books and publications released that question or, indeed, assert that President Biden
13 experienced a deterioration in his mental acuity, either over a long stretch of time or in a shorter
14 period of time.

15 And maybe from the jump in this hour, it would be helpful just if you could tell me if you
16 believe that President Biden -- if his mental acuity diminished over the time that you knew him, from
17 1981 to today.

18 A From 1981 until today. Well, I would -- I guess what I would say is that I -- what I saw
19 was someone who, over time, was getting older, but I believed his mental acuity was quite strong
20 until the end of his Presidency. I still believe that.

21 So -- and I think sometimes people look to things that suggested to them an issue, which have
22 been to a varying degree about who Joe Biden was during his whole time in office. He has been
23 prone to speak too long. He's been prone to give discursive answers.

24 And my fundamental belief is, I thought -- I always believed that he was fully capable to be
25 President. I believed he was the best person to be President. I believed that through the end of

1 the Presidency. And I say that as someone who -- I spent a lot of time with him. I've seen him
2 over a long period of time.

3 And while some focus on whether, as he's gotten older, there are some issues associated with
4 that, I think there are a lot of strengths associated with that that are not frequently thought about.
5 I think his judgment has gotten better and better. I think his ability to lead in a crisis has gotten
6 better and better. I thought his ability to lead on the world stage was questionable.

7 And I believe that there's a -- you know, there are certain things that everyone experiences as
8 they age that I believe are known. But what I saw was a President who I believed -- I believed -- was
9 quite good at his job.

10 And we, in the context of this conversation -- in these books, there's been a lot of
11 conversation about how somebody would raise a question about the President and therefore we are
12 concerned.

13 But what I don't believe you find is him -- I think he demonstrated on a daily basis that, in fact,
14 he was doing the job of President day-in and day-out and doing it quite effectively.

15 Q Going back to the three tasks that you were tasked with during the 2008 Obama-Biden
16 election -- I don't have the transcript in front of me, so -- but what I wrote down you having said was
17 that President Biden, in campaigning all over the country, flying all over the country and meeting
18 people, returned energized.

19 Do you remember saying that?

20 A No, I don't think that's accurate. What you asked me, I believe, was, did Joe Biden take
21 energy from personal interactions? The answer to that, in my view, is yes. That's a different
22 question from whether or not the wear and tear of travel makes somebody energized.

23 So what I believe -- and I think this is widely known -- is that Joe Biden takes energy from
24 meeting people, talking to them, hearing their stories. That's energizing. Campaigns are grueling.

25 Mr. McQuaid. Jake, we can look back. I think he said he didn't like the travel, actually, was

1 his answer.

2 Mr. Greenberg. Sure.

3 BY MR. GREENBERG:

4 Q And I accept the distinction that you're making.

5 Would the wear and the tear of campaigning -- did you see that have a noticeable effect on
6 Joe Biden in 2008?

7 A My memory is, my belief is, that he -- that it ground him down. And I think he -- I
8 mean, I don't know of anyone who goes through a Presidential campaign who at the end of that
9 campaign isn't tired.

10 So, yes, I think he's -- you know, you go through a campaign and you have, you know, the
11 day-to-day events that are scheduled, you have issues that come up, you have press stories you're
12 dealing with, you have to -- and you're juggling many things.

13 So I would say, at the end of the campaign in 2008, that the campaign was energizing because
14 it was historic, but the campaign itself was hard.

15 Q What is the longest period of time that you remember, in 2008, recognizing that was
16 quite a bit ago, that then-Senator Biden would need -- let's say you just did a long stint of travel.
17 What's the longest period of time that Senator Biden on the campaign would need back at his
18 residence to be ready to go for the next stint of travel?

19 A Oh, I have no memory -- I have no way of knowing.

20 Q Well, do you remember him ever saying he needed a week off to get ready for the next
21 stint of travel?

22 A I remember it being -- my memory is, it was pretty nonstop. I don't -- I don't know. I
23 don't know whether -- I just don't know.

24 Q Sure.

25 And we're going to talk more about the debate today, the 2024 debate against Donald Trump.

1 We're going to talk about that, and we're going to talk about the preparation period before that
2 debate.

3 But, when we spoke to Mr. Klain, Mr. Klain said he arrived at Camp David to prepare Joe
4 Biden for that debate, and he described him as exhausted.

5 Is that how you remember Joe Biden being -- excuse me -- President Biden being during that
6 week before the debate?

7 A So my memory is that I thought he -- I thought he was tired. He had been to France for
8 the D-Day celebration. Then he came back, and he then went back to Italy, where there was a -- I
9 can't remember if it was the G20 or G7 -- and then he came back. Actually, on the way back, flew
10 directly from, I believe -- and I could be wrong, but I believe he flew directly from Italy. He stopped,
11 I think, at Andrews and then continued on to Los Angeles. Then, after that, I don't remember if he
12 went back to D.C. or -- I don't remember when debate camp started.

13 So he had had a lot of travel. And, of course, you know, his whole Presidency had been
14 quite consequential, I thought, in terms of the number of things he was dealing with, be it at home or
15 overseas.

16 My bigger concern at debate camp was that he seemed to me like he was fighting a cold.
17 And that was proving, I thought, to be a problem, because it impacted his voice and I'm sure it made
18 him feel not so great.

19 So that's -- that's memory of how I thought about things when we were there.

20 Q So -- and, again, we'll talk more about specifics about the debate. But do you think
21 that -- well, let me just say, I think that the consensus after the debate was that President Biden had
22 not performed very well during that debate. Do you agree with me?

23 A Well, the consensus -- what I would say is, I think there was a consensus in the press and
24 in many folks in the political community that it had not gone well for the President. I believed the
25 voters had had a different reaction and that they had much more measured response, I thought, to

1 what they saw. So that's what I thought.

2 Q I asked this of Mr. Ricchetti yesterday, or a version of it. Do you think that the
3 aftermath of the -- what occurred after the debate, with the punditry and the various opinions that
4 came out, do you think this was just an overreaction among the Democratic Caucus and the
5 chattering class and that it was a recoverable debate performance?

6 Mr. McQuaid. Jake, you want to just -- there's a lot in that question. Do you want to take
7 it --

8 Mr. Greenberg. Sure. Sure. Let me break it up.

9 Mr. McQuaid. -- take that down a little bit?

10 BY MR. GREENBERG:

11 Q There was a lot of criticism about President Biden's performance during that debate,
12 and President Biden would eventually drop out of the race.

13 Do you think that that was an overreaction from the punditry about how Joe Biden performed
14 that night?

15 A From the punditry?

16 Q Yes.

17 A I believed -- I did -- I believed that it was an overreaction, yes.

18 Q Aside from the punditry, one of the reactions or one of the consequences of President
19 Biden's debate performance was an increasing number of calls from here on the Hill and leadership
20 in the Democratic Party either for Joe Biden to reassess his reelection campaign or to drop out.

21 Do you think that was an overreaction?

22 A My view was, I understood the reaction of people. I did have a view that I thought it
23 was an overreaction, that President Biden could recover. I believed that. Now, I'm serious.

24 Q And, backing up -- sorry to jump around a little bit, but -- you attributed President
25 Biden's appearance at Camp David during debate prep to a cold. Is that -- or, dealing with a cold?

1 Recovering from a cold? Is that correct?

2 A No, I don't think I said that. I think, one, you asked me a question. I'm trying to
3 remember what you said Ron said, something like he was exhausted or something. Is that right?

4 Q Yes, sir.

5 A I said I thought -- you know, I acknowledge he was tired, but I thought a particular
6 problem was I thought he was fighting a cold of some kind. I don't think that's what you just said,
7 but that's -- so that's how I saw it.

8 Q Do you attribute President Biden's performance during the 2024 debate against Donald
9 Trump, what people saw and their critiques, to the cold?

10 Mr. McQuaid. Jake, just, again --

11 Mr. Greenberg. Sure.

12 Mr. McQuaid. -- there's a lot of little pieces in that. Do you want his assessment of the
13 performance, or the punditry, or --

14 Mr. Greenberg. Sure. Thank you.

15 BY MR. GREENBERG:

16 Q Do you attribute President Biden's appearance during that debate mostly to the cold?

17 A I don't know how to assess a percentage of any impact of the various contributors to it.
18 I certainly think that he was tired and that his schedule, especially his foreign travel, I think,
19 was a factor. I thought his fighting a cold, I thought, was a factor.

20 I thought one of the other factors was how much he had on his plate. If you're an
21 incumbent President running for reelection, you know, you still have to do all that job. And he did
22 it. So that's a heavy grind.

23 And one other factor, a least I believe -- and it's my opinion -- is, I think it's more common
24 than not, I think it's accurate to say, that one of the most difficult moments for any incumbent
25 President seeking reelection is the first debate they have in the general election. And I think if you

1 look at President Obama, you know, he certainly had a difficult debate with, I guess, then-Governor
2 Romney, or former Governor Romney. And, you know, certainly, I think that was true of, really,
3 every incumbent President, maybe less so for Clinton. I don't remember as well. And I think that
4 makes sense, that you are -- you're moving from leading a country in the world to now you're in a
5 political fight on a stage. And I think you'll likely hear people in that situation say something to the
6 effect of, "Look, I just haven't done this in a long time."

7 So, when I thought about it, I thought -- I figure -- as I say, I think it's a very -- it's always a
8 difficult moment in a campaign for an incumbent President in that first debate, first general election
9 debate.

10 And so, when I think about the factors, those are some, and I'm sure I could think about
11 others. But I certainly would think about the wear and tear of his schedule; his physical health,
12 relative to his cold -- I think it was a cold. I don't know for a fact what it was. It certainly seemed
13 and sounded like a cold. And, as I say, you know, the responsibilities he had as President and
14 moving -- I mean, you're President of the United States, and you are going to be treated with
15 enormous respect and deference all over the world, and then you move into kind of a political
16 wrestling match. It's a very different environment.

17 And I thought, in 2020, I thought President Trump had a difficult time in his first debate with
18 the former Vice President. To me, that is a -- that's a bit of a common problem associated with
19 incumbents who are President and candidate. And so I think it makes for, you know, a challenging
20 moment.

21 Q Talking about the factors, Hunter Biden has recently said in an interview that the
22 President was given Ambien before the debate.

23 Are you aware of the President being given Ambien before the debate?

24 A No, I'm not aware of that.

25 Q Are you aware of the President ever receiving Ambien?

1 A I don't know if the President has ever received an Ambien. I'm not a doctor. I don't
2 have anything to do with his -- I don't know.

3 Q I understand. Are you aware --

4 A I mean, in my memory, I can't remember anything. It's just not -- it's not something I
5 deal with.

6 Q Are you aware of the President ever -- any of the medications that the President was
7 taking?

8 A I -- I don't -- I don't remember being aware of any medications that he was taking.

9 Q Are you aware of any person besides Dr. O'Connor or his staff providing medication to
10 the President?

11 A "His staff" being Dr. O'Connor's staff?

12 Q I'm sorry. Are you aware of anyone besides Dr. O'Connor or the staff working for Dr.
13 O'Connor providing medication to President Biden?

14 A I have no memory of anyone, whatever -- I mean, I just don't have any memory of
15 knowing what medication the President was given.

16 Q Thank you.

17 Do you attribute to one of the -- strike that.

18 Still on the factors of President Biden's debate performance in 2024, do you think one of
19 those factors was a lack of preparation for the debate?

20 A In my opinion, in my view -- you're asking me my view -- I don't believe lack of
21 preparation was a factor.

22 What I believe is, there is an approach to debate preparation that is common and was
23 commonly used with President Biden where there's an enormous amount of time spent on
24 substantive answers, there's an enormous amount of information that's prepared and given to the
25 candidate, and it's an arduous, ongoing process to move towards, kind of, a set of answers.

1 And I think sometimes we -- and I think even maybe I better say myself -- I think we spend
2 maybe too much time on the very specific details of substantive answers and not as much time on
3 the stylistic part of the debate.

4 That is part of what Joe Biden is. As you mentioned earlier, he likes to be fully briefed. He
5 likes to have a deep well of information on everything. He is always asking for more information.

6 So I can't say that it was a lack of preparation, but I can say I thought the -- that was the
7 approach he took.

8 Q Is that kind of overpreparation what you would miss at Camp David the week prior to
9 the debate?

10 A Well -- I'm sorry. Did you finish your question?

11 Q I did.

12 A I'm trying not to do that, so hopefully I didn't.

13 I thought it was -- well, this is just my opinion. I thought that -- I thought we spent a lot of
14 time drilling down and drilling down on various specific details and answers. And this isn't
15 uncommon. We've seen it previously in debate preps. It's an approach to debates. And so
16 that's my take.

17 Q Going back to what you said in the 2008 prep for Senator Biden, I wrote down, but
18 correct me if I'm wrong -- you said that Senator Biden spent a lot of time during that preparation
19 session, multiple sessions, working and reworking his answers.

20 A Uh-huh.

21 Q Did you see that at Camp David?

22 A Yes, I saw it at Camp David. I saw that -- I frequently saw that with the President,
23 whether it was in debates or in preparing for events or preparing for meetings. There was always
24 an ongoing effort to be a little more informed.

25 Q Was he engaged, would you say, during the preparation session at Camp David, in the

1 debate prep?

2 A Well, in my view, I would say he was engaged. I would say, you know -- and along the
3 lines I'm talking about, we are -- we had, you know, this continuing effort to shape his answers (ph).
4 So, yes, I thought he was engaged.

5 Q I'm paraphrasing what Mr. Klain told us, but Mr. Klain said that when he, Mr. Klain,
6 arrived to Camp David, it appeared to him that President Biden had not reviewed the materials that
7 Mr. Bruce Reed had prepared for him beforehand.

8 Was that your understanding?

9 A I -- I don't have a memory of that. I don't know that he -- I can't say what the President
10 reviewed or didn't review before it started.

11 Q And then Mr. Klain made reference to various permutations of how they would go
12 about -- how you all would go about preparing the President for the debate during that week, but he
13 pointed to two mock sessions.

14 Is that your understanding? Two mock sessions?

15 A Well, I -- I can remember two mock sessions. I don't -- I don't remember if there were
16 others, but I do remember two, yes.

17 Q And at one point did President Biden say he needed to go get some sun and go out by
18 the pool?

19 A I don't remember him saying that. What I remember is, he felt his time was going to
20 be better used working through the specific details of the question-and-answers than in more mock
21 debate.

22 He did go back to his cabin. I mean, I certainly had a view that rest was a good idea for him.
23 But I don't have a memory of him saying -- what was the line you said?

24 Q That he needed some sun, or something along those lines.

25 A I don't have a memory of that. I don't.

1 Now, there is a pool by the President's cabin at Camp David. He may have gone out there.
2 He likes to be in the sun. But my memory of the dynamic was, the President didn't feel comfortable
3 and wanted to get more comfortable with the specifics and detailed answers than he was in the
4 back-and-forth of a mock debate.

5 Q So was the President overprepared for the debate?

6 A I -- I don't -- I don't know I could say that. I didn't think at the time he was
7 overprepared, no.

8 You know, what I'm saying is, in -- you know, you get limited time with the President. And
9 one of the most important, maybe the most important, part of the Presidency --

10 Q I'm sorry. I just didn't hear what you --

11 A Well, how one uses their time, how is it allocated --

12 Q Sure.

13 A -- what are they doing.

14 And there's a certain amount of time allocated to the debate preparation. There's a certain
15 amount of time allocated, inside that, to mock debates or working on specifics to answers or rest
16 or -- you know, there's -- it's a --

17 So I -- you know, I can't say at the time I thought he was overprepared. I didn't believe at
18 the time that he had been given too little time to prepare. You know, I thought we were going
19 through what, in my experience, is -- debate camps and debate preps are always difficult exercises.

20 Q So, not to put too fine a -- not to play semantics here but just to recap, you did not
21 believe that the President was underprepared for the debate. Is that correct?

22 A I think what I said was, in my view, we could have better allocated our time by spending
23 less time drawing down on answer after answer. That's what I think I said.

24 Q Okay.

25 BY MR. SPECTRE:

1 Q Real quick, Mr. Greenberg mentioned that Mr. Klain did not believe that President Biden
2 had reviewed all the materials. And he mentioned that the President normally made notations on
3 documents that he'd read -- slashes at breath points and other markings like that.

4 Is that your recollection of President Biden's style when he would review a document?

5 A Well, it's not my recollection, but I'm trying to be precise here.

6 When the President would review documents, my experience was he may or may not put
7 slash marks in. When the President would review speeches, remarks, potential answers, then he
8 would, because, I mean, as you probably know, the President had a stutter when he grew up, and
9 one of the ways he found to speak publicly was to use these slash marks as a place to pause to get
10 air.

11 You know, so the reason I am hesitant is, you -- I see those things as different, you know? I
12 just see -- I'm very familiar with him using the slash marks. And, in fact, one of the things which
13 probably isn't well-known but it's relevant to this is, when the President would use a teleprompter, it
14 would be visually laid out in a way that would mimic these kinds of slashes. I mean, it was an
15 important part of how he could effectively speak.

16 Again, I wasn't as -- you know, I didn't have a substantive role in the White House overseeing
17 what he did on any issue --

18 Q And what documents he got reviewed.

19 A I did see a lot of these features. And so, in that sense, that's how I think about it, if
20 that's clear.

21 Q Well, just to be specific, I'm asking because Mr. Klain said that he didn't see those
22 markings appearing on his prepared materials at Camp David during debate prep. Did you see
23 those markings on his materials?

24 A I don't -- I don't remember that. But I -- you know, at -- I mean, I didn't -- I didn't often
25 take it upon myself to look at his books or his materials.

1 Q Had they not been there to you, would that be an indication that President Biden had
2 not reviewed them ahead of time?

3 A No, I don't know that, because, you know, there would've been -- you know, I don't
4 know, for example, whether, was that material available earlier? Was that material sent to him on
5 a plane? Was that material delivered to him at a hotel? I don't know anything.

6 So I have no way of knowing at what point he would've been given -- or when it was available.
7 Because, you know, we often work under very tight timelines. I think there's a lot of effort put into
8 the debate books in advance of the debate. And it wouldn't say to me -- now, this is just my view,
9 but I couldn't know, I don't think, that the President had or had not reviewed or seen just by that
10 effort. I just don't know.

11 Q In your view, during debate prep, do you believe he had a mastery or an understanding,
12 a working understanding, of the materials -- of the substance of the materials?

13 A What I believed was, one, I thought the President was very well-informed all the time.
14 That was my opinion. Much of the -- in much of the debate prep, as far as otherwise, was about
15 issues that, you know, he'd worked on and achieved.

16 My sense of the issue at debate camp was the President getting comfortable with the shape
17 of an answer that he may or may not have naturally gone through.

18 So, for example, we had a constant debate in the campaign and the administration about how
19 much of his campaign should be focused on his economic record -- the number of jobs created, the
20 unemployment rate being, you know, historically low.

21 And there was a constant tension between those who believed -- and I believed -- it was
22 important for him to lay that record out and those who believed that it was not persuasive to the
23 voters and they were in a different place. And we would make a case that he had been an effective
24 President because there had been a record job creation, something in the range of 16 million jobs or
25 so, and the comeback would be, "Well, that's not where voters are."

1 And so I felt the President very naturally moved to some of that kind of defense of his record.
2 He spoke about it every day. He was proud of it. I think, you know, he was getting a lot of advice
3 that it wasn't the best way to speak in the campaign and to make his case in the campaign. And so I
4 thought it made it challenging to get to a place where the President was comfortable and familiar
5 and really bought in to how he was going to approach it.

6 So I don't know if that makes sense to you. But, to me, that's a very different thing, you
7 know, when you're -- and, as I say, it was a constant struggle in the campaign. It was a constant
8 tension. I thought that was reflected at debate camp. I thought that was reflected in the
9 back-and-forth and how the President got to his answers.

10 You know, I believed on occasion it may have been better to have him more naturally answer
11 questions, you know, given his -- he was proud of his record and he believed it was effective. I
12 thought his campaign and I thought his Presidency he needed to speak more on his record.

13 But, obviously, the inflation issue was complicated. It's always a difficult issue. How to
14 deal with that, you know, wasn't simple.

15 And so that's how I saw it.

16 BY MR. GREENBERG:

17 Q Do you think the President's communication skills diminished from the
18 time -- throughout the time that you knew him?

19 A Well, "over the time I knew him" is a long period of time.

20 Q I know.

21 A Well, I would answer it this way. I believe his communication skills changed and in
22 many important ways got better. And what I mean by that is this.

23 In the early 1980s, Joe Biden was seen as a, you know, as I said, you know, a young, new voice
24 in the party. And that's the style of communication.

25 As time went on, you know, he became more deeply ingrained in issues when he worked at

1 the Senate, and he developed kind of a different kind of communication skill, much of it that you
2 would be familiar with if you worked on the Hill, where you're very focused on legislation and your
3 work at the committee. You know, he had been a chairman of Judiciary; he had been a chairman of
4 Foreign Relations. And that could be a challenge.

5 I mean, for example, you were asking in 2008. You know, Senator Obama was quite an
6 impressive communicator. He did not have years of work in the Senate, okay? Joe Biden did.
7 And that's a different skill when you go out on the campaign trail and you're speaking to people there
8 as opposed to on the floor. So he developed a different kind of voice.

9 Then, in my view, as time went on, I thought he got better. I thought one of the benefits of
10 him having been Vice President was -- the only benefit of that office is that you speak a lot, a lot
11 more than you do as a Senator. At least that's my experience. You can get a lot of practice.

12 And I said this to him when he was Vice President; I said it to him as President: I believed, in
13 many ways, he was a much better communicator and a much better public official and a much better
14 candidate having done that job, just because he had gotten that much practice.

1 [12:19 p.m.]

2 Mr. Donilon. And then, you know, you go to 2020.

3 Look, I think he was a very effective communicator. He was elected President of the United
4 States. There were 81 million people who voted for him. More people voted for Joe Biden in
5 2020 than any President in history. To me, that reflects an ability to communicate.

6 And I worked on many of his speeches, and I found him to be the best of his career. And
7 through his Presidency. I believe that work expanded on many of his speeches. I thought they
8 were better than many of the ones he did in 2020.

9 Now, his voice was weaker than it was in 1981. His presence wasn't as commanding. He
10 could stumble more -- I mean, over the words, not necessarily. He also stumbled some physically.

11 But when I think about, for example, some of the moments in the speeches he gave as
12 President, I believe -- I say that as someone who worked on them, and so I may have a bias, but I
13 acknowledge that -- but I think people look back, I think if you look back at the written record, I think
14 if you look back at the videotape, I think you'll see a President who, in my opinion, was a strong
15 communicator.

16 And as I said, I thought he got stronger and wiser and better as a President over time. What
17 he handled day to day was remarkable. You remember, we came into office in the middle of a
18 pandemic crisis. In my view, he led the country through that, and it was a very difficult time for the
19 country.

20 I think he led the country to a better place economically than any country in the world. I
21 know that's not -- I know that's disputed, and I know a lot of the polling data doesn't support it, but
22 that's my view.

23 I thought he did a remarkable amount of [inaudible]. I thought he had done a remarkable
24 job in dealing with the [inaudible]. I thought he had done a very good job in dealing with a very
25 tough situation with Hamas in Israel.

1 I think about some of his speeches at the end of his Presidency, at the very end. In my view,
2 if you go look at the speech he gave at Brookings on the economy at the end, I think you would think
3 it's a strong piece of communication. That was my view. I thought that was true of the speech he
4 gave at the State Department where he laid out his vision of our policy. I thought it was true of his
5 farewell address.

6 So if you ask me, over time, his communication skills changed. He became a different
7 communicator. In some ways there would be things about that that weren't as good or as
8 appealing, you know, when he was 40 years old.

9 But I thought as a President, as someone who had the job of President, I thought he did a
10 good job communicating. And I actually thought his -- as I said, I thought, in many ways, his skills
11 got better.

12 And, look, I had a frustration throughout this whole period of time, the time he was President,
13 where I knew it was very difficult to get past some of the visual things that were causing people
14 concern about the President's age. And I didn't feel like we could get them actually focused on the
15 job he was actually doing and how effective he was at it.

16 Mr. Greenberg. Go ahead.

17 Mr. Spectre. I noticed that in describing his communication style -- and I think you
18 mentioned you may have a bias towards speeches, of course, because you wrote many of them -- but
19 I noticed you mentioned almost -- I think only prepared speeches that President Biden delivered.

20 Do you see the sort of more impromptu or less prepared communication from President
21 Biden to be different from his prepared speeches?

22 Mr. Donilon. Well, unprepared versus prepared. Is that your question?

23 Mr. Spectre. Yes, sir.

24 Mr. Donilon. Well, so what's interesting -- well, let me answer it this way.

25 No, I didn't, and here's why, in my view, again, this is my view.

1 One, we always had a challenge with Joe Biden sticking to his prepared remarks. He often
2 gave substantial portions of unscripted remarks when deciding to give a speech. And that was a
3 challenge.

4 I can remember when he was Vice President, there was more than a few occasions where I
5 had written a speech, he went up to deliver it, teleprompter never moved. He sat down 30 minutes
6 later, he had given a speech, entirely unscripted. He didn't do that as much as President. But he
7 often would go unscripted. That's one thing.

8 Second thing, to go to a point that actually you, I think, and we raised earlier, which was I saw
9 the teleprompter for the President as, one, a way to help him to deal with the issues he had to deal
10 with because of his stutter. There was a -- it was work for him to do it.

11 I saw the teleprompter as a way to discipline the President, try to keep it shorter, try to keep
12 him more focused. He often didn't like to live there. Sometimes he would, but often he wouldn't.
13 That's one thing.

14 But the other thing I would say is this. I'll just point you to at least one, maybe I can think of
15 another, but just one that has popped into my mind.

16 In 2023, I believe -- I may have the wrong year -- in his State of the Union speech -- State of
17 the Union speech is a long, complicated speech. It's one of the most difficult speeches a President
18 gives because, as you probably know, it is chock-full of everything that Congress and the
19 administration want. And I thought we had written the President an effective speech.

20 The most effective moment in that speech was when he, on the spot, impromptu, wasn't
21 written, wasn't scripted, engaged in a debate with the Republicans on Social Security in front of the
22 whole country. It was one of the most effective moments I've ever seen the President have. That
23 wasn't scripted. And that was as high stakes a moment as you're going to get.

24 He didn't go in knowing that he was going to engage in a -- I mean, he knew he was going
25 to -- he was going to meet what you always meet when you have a State of the Union. There was

1 going to be the theatrics and the drama. That was known.

2 But what he did that night, that was entirely off the cuff. To my mind, that was an incredible
3 skill and demonstration of mental acuity, in the moment, one of the most important issues in the
4 country, conducting a negotiation on your feet.

5 Look, you may not -- obviously, you may not share that. But I think it speaks to what you
6 have raised, which is, were there moments, were there times when off-the-cuff you would see a kind
7 of mental clarity and effectiveness.

8 I think you saw it in other places. Look, my memory is when he went to Kyiv, that was one
9 of the most difficult trips any President has ever taken, one of the most dangerous.

10 Joe Biden is the only President since Lincoln, but really, he's the only President that's gone
11 into a war zone that was not controlled by the United States military. He did that in Kyiv. He did it
12 in Tel Aviv.

13 And after a long, long trip on a train walked through that square, and I thought he had a very
14 effective moment with Zelenskyy. I don't remember that being scripted. Maybe I'm wrong. I
15 thought a lot of it was impromptu.

16 So that's how I would answer it.

17 Mr. Greenberg. Thank you.

18 Our hour is up. We'll go off the record.

19 [Recess.]

1 [1:06 p.m.]

2
3 Ms. [REDACTED] We can go on the record now. The time is 1:06.

4 Hi, Mr. Donilon.

5 I wanted to go back to your conversation with the majority. And you're working at the
6 White House. The President has a busy travel schedule. And prior to coming to Camp David for
7 the debate, he had just returned from a trip abroad, had gone to L.A.

8 And you, in your view, you felt that the President was suffering from a cold, that he had been
9 exhausted, he had a lot on his plate, but nothing -- that had nothing -- the way he was -- the way his
10 debate prep was going had nothing to do with the President's mental acuity, correct?

11 Mr. Donilon. That was my view, my view that --

12 Mr. McQuaid. I think his testimony was not that he had a cold, but he was fighting off a
13 cold.

14 Ms. [REDACTED] He was fighting off a cold.

15 Mr. [REDACTED] Mr. Donilon, during debate prep did any concerns arise about President's Biden's
16 mental ability or mental acuity to participate in the debate?

17 Mr. Donilon. Well, not to me, no. What I, again, what I saw was -- I never thought he
18 wasn't going to debate. That never occurred to me. I believed he was going to do well in the
19 debate.

20 There was concern, as there always is in debate prep. There was -- to say I had a concern
21 about getting the President to a place where he was really comfortable with the questions and
22 answers. You know, certainly we -- we all -- I had concerns about how tired he was and about what
23 appeared to be this cold.

24 I had traveled on some of those trips, and I was tired. And, as I say, this was all happening in
25 the context of him carrying out his duty as President every day. That's my view.

1 Mr. McQuaid. Just a moment. Just speak up a little bit.

2 Mr. Donilon. Okay.

3 Mr. [REDACTED] Just so we're clear -- yes-or-no answer -- you did not have any concerns about
4 President Biden's mental acuity during debate prep?

5 Mr. Donilon. I was confident that the President -- I was confident he was going to do well in
6 the debate, and I was confident in his ability to do well in the debate. So I did not have concerns
7 about his mental acuity. I had concerns about his fatigue, his cold, if that's what it was.

8 Mr. [REDACTED] So is the answer to that question no?

9 Mr. Donilon. From my perspective.

10 Mr. [REDACTED] Thank you.

1 BY MS. [REDACTED]

2 Q And going back to your concerns, and you were concerned that the President was too
3 focused on specific details on substantive issues and not -- and should be more focused on style. Is
4 that correct? Did that add to your concerns?

5 A Yes, I certainly thought we were spending an extraordinary amount of time on
6 substance and specifics of Q&A, and so that was a concern I had.

7 Q And do you think someone in cognitive decline would be able to draw down on details
8 and be specific on substantive issues?

9 A Well, I'm not an expert on cognitive decline. And what I saw, my recollection, is that it
10 was a President who was working through a lot of material, really trying to pare it down, not entirely
11 comfortable with the answers, and that he was continuing to work at it. And that's where we spent
12 our time.

13 Q Would it be fair to say that he understood the substantive details, the specific details
14 about information?

15 A Well, I believed he did, yes. I think, as I said before, there would be elements in
16 different answers that you would aim to hit.

17 So in a question about the economy, there would be a balance of how much would be about
18 his record, how much would be about inflation, how much would be about what he had done, how
19 much would be about any forward-looking proposals, how best to -- you take something, for
20 example, like any foreign policy question with Joe Biden, and he has a very deep understanding of
21 foreign policy, he was deeply engaged in Ukraine. Getting that to a 60-second answer, that's
22 complicated.

23 Q And you also said you worked with Joe Biden for a very long time and that over time his
24 communication style changed.

25 But did it change because he got worse, because he got better, he was more experienced, his

1 judgment was wiser? Would you say, was it -- did you feel that it was due to a decline in mental
2 acuity or of mental capacity?

3 A Well, I think what I said was that he had different strengths as a communicator at
4 different points in his career.

5 I thought he had gained certain strengths when he became President and while he was
6 President.

7 I understood many people had concerns. I mean, for example, look, his voice was weaker.
8 I understand that that causes concerns about someone's age.

9 But when I think about what I saw on a day-to-day basis, him doing the job, I thought he was
10 quite engaged, was in command, I thought he was quite effective.

11 BY MR. [REDACTED]

12 Q So, Mr. Donilon, can I ask, throughout your time in the Biden White House while
13 President Biden was in office, was there ever a time where you had concerns that President Biden
14 was unable to fully execute the duties of the office?

15 A I don't recall having that, no, from my perspective.

16 Q And in this vein of -- in your experience, President Biden's communication style changed
17 over time. You mentioned with my Republican colleagues that you noticed that he started to
18 stumble over words again. And I think earlier you mentioned that President Biden has a history of a
19 stutter.

20 Is that right? Can you elaborate on that? What type of stutter did President Biden have?
21 And if you have information about what he suffered from or how it debilitated his speaking, that
22 would help.

23 A Well, I don't know from a medical perspective what it was.

24 Q Sure.

25 A What I recall, what I understood it to be, was he had a very pronounced, maybe you

1 could say debilitating, stutter as a younger child. Not a younger child; I think it was -- I forget the
2 age, but it would probably be into his teen years. And he had worked very hard to overcome that.
3 And he had. He had become, I think, by many people's accounts, a very effective public speaker.

4 And in some ways it was amazing that someone who had a stutter growing up could stand on
5 the steps of the Capitol and give an inaugural address.

6 What I can say about his stutter -- and, again, I'm not an expert in it. And I think the
7 President is quite proud that he believes he's beaten it. But I think he even would say -- and I've
8 said this, I know I've said that -- that some of the problems associated with that become more
9 pronounced the more tired you are.

10 And I think it's hard to be President and not be tired. So I think we would see moments of it
11 coming out when he was especially tired. And that would be true whether it was in scripted
12 remarks or unscripted remarks, interviews. It's just the nature of what he was dealing with.

13 Ms. [REDACTED] That's it for us. We'll go off the record.

14 [Pause.]

15 Mr. Greenberg. We'll go on the record.

16 Mr. Donilon, what steps would you and other senior advisers around President Biden take if
17 President Biden was particularly tired? How would you handle that?

18 Mr. McQuaid. Jake, can we focus it on what he would do? I don't want to -- I mean, he
19 can't speak for other senior advisers.

20 Mr. Greenberg. Sure. I'm happy to focus on that.

21 BY MR. GREENBERG:

22 Q But I am interested to see -- to know what you would observe others doing as well.

23 A If he was tired?

24 Q I believe you were just discussing that with the minority.

25 A Well, my -- that I recall, as I -- I had a -- I had a particular focus on trying to cut back his

1 schedule. To me, that was the biggest issue. I thought he had a very busy, chock-full schedule
2 throughout his entire Presidency, and I thought it would be a challenge for anyone to do it, no matter
3 their age. I can't say I succeeded in it.

4 Others may have focused on other things. But to me, that was the primary thing I would
5 think about, which was how much we were asking him to do. And I -- some of that is the President.
6 He was inclined to keep a heavy schedule.

7 But that was my view. My view was that the best approach for us would be to have
8 lightened his schedule load, and I don't believe I, at least, ever had success.

9 Q And when you say lighten his schedule load, do you mean fewer events in the day?
10 Maybe you can expand on what you mean by that.

11 A Oh, yeah. Well, what I meant was, yeah, sometimes it would be fewer events in a day.
12 But sometimes it would be -- I mean, for example, the idea -- the fact -- this is what I recall.

13 The President flew from Italy to Los Angeles, and I don't think there was a day in between. I
14 think he -- and so he's starting the day elsewhere in the world discussing with world leaders, and he's
15 finishing his day on a stage fundraising.

16 I think that's a lot to ask, and I don't think it's useful. I mean, that's what I mean. And that
17 was a problem.

18 I mean, for example, when the President went to France, he spoke on D-Day, on the 6th. I
19 very much wanted him also to speak at Pointe du Hoc the next day. That was a lot to ask. It was
20 two big, tough speeches in the middle of a lot of travel, and it might have been better if he hadn't.

21 Now, I thought he delivered both of them very effectively. But really, I just think
22 about -- you can think about that idea of you wake up in the morning and speaking to the leaders of
23 Italy or -- I don't know if Zelenskyy was there or who else was there -- and then, I don't know how
24 many hours later, you're on a stage.

25 So that's what I mean by that. I just thought it was a very -- I thought that was common. I

1 thought we frequently put him in that position.

2 Q And besides traveling around the world, when you were back in D.C. and working in the
3 White House, did you make attempts to lighten his load in other ways, just working out of the Oval
4 Office, working out of the West Wing?

5 A Well, I did not.

6 First of all, I should say, I didn't control the President's schedule.

7 Q Sure.

8 A I could make suggestions, for example, if I thought he should give a speech. But I
9 didn't, from my perspective, and I recall I don't -- I don't think I -- I mean, I would be asked. We
10 would have weekly schedule meetings and that sort of thing. But I would not have much of a role in
11 what his schedule is.

12 Q Sure. Understood. But did you ever, in your four years of working at the White
13 House, did you ever have a conversation with anybody and say something along the lines of, "We got
14 to give him a break. I mean, we got to let him rest, we got to" -- anything like that?

15 A Well, I would say this, that I -- there were a number of those conversations. One that I
16 remember, a specific one I do recall, was when Jeff Zients was named chief of staff. He met with
17 each -- I believe he met with each of the members of the senior staff [inaudible.]

18 The Reporter. I'm sorry, what was the end?

19 Mr. Donilon. I said he did that with everyone, you know, because he got a -- he was coming
20 in as chief of staff and was getting ready to lead the operation.

21 And he asked me what I believed was the most important thing to do. And I said I thought
22 the most important thing to do was to get better control of the President's schedule. I thought it
23 was a lot.

24 BY MR. GREENBERG:

25 Q That "it was a lot," meaning the President had too much on his plate?

1 A Meaning, I thought we were asking him to do something that was, if not humanly
2 impossible, something very difficult for anyone to do no matter how old. And it was a constant
3 struggle between things that we felt we had to do, things we should do, things he wanted to do.

4 And so you asked me how I thought about how to deal with the President being tired.
5 That's what I thought.

6 Q Understood. Thank you.

7 I want to step back and talk about some of these theories that are out there. And cognitive
8 decline, mental acuity, these are phrases that are in the news a bit.

9 And I just want to ask you, would it be a problem, in your mind, if President Biden was in
10 cognitive decline?

11 A Well, you're asking me a hypothetical I didn't believe. I didn't believe he was in
12 cognitive decline.

13 Q I want to actually ask you a follow-up on an article that I read this morning. I'll pass it
14 out and give you as much time as you need to read it.

15 Mr. Greenberg. Nick, you want us to pause, go off record or anything like that?

16 Mr. McQuaid. Yeah. Why don't we pause and go off the record for a second just so he can
17 take time to --

18 Mr. Greenberg. Sure.

19 Mr. [REDACTED] Jake, is this an exhibit?

20 Mr. Greenberg. Yes. Before we go off the record, I will mark this as exhibit 3.

21 [Donilon Majority Exhibit No. 3

22 was marked for identification.]

23 Mr. Greenberg. Off the record.

24 [Discussion off the record.]

25 Mr. Greenberg. We'll go back on the record.

1 BY MR. GREENBERG:

2 Q This is an article entitled, "What Kamala Harris's Decision Not to Run for Governor
3 Means for 2028." It's from The New York Times, dated July 30th, 2025. I'm going to read from the
4 second page, the last paragraph, actually.

5 "Ms. Harris, perhaps more than any other Democrat, would have to reckon with her support
6 for Mr. Biden as his acuity deteriorated before the American public. She did not allow any daylight
7 between herself and Mr. Biden while he was still running for re-election. Then, when she became
8 the party's nominee, she said in an interview on 'The View' that there was nothing she could think of
9 that she would have done differently from him."

10 Did I read that accurately, sir?

11 A Yes.

12 Q What struck me is, when I read this, is this isn't an opinion piece. This is just The New
13 York Times news reporting on a current event. And it says, again, Mr. Biden's acuity deteriorated
14 before the American public.

15 Do you disagree with this reporting, that President Biden's acuity deteriorated in front of the
16 American public?

17 A Well, you've obviously just given us the -- so I'll give you my reaction.

18 Do I -- yes, I do disagree with that. And I believe this story is reflective of a basic issue in this
19 conversation.

20 They assert something as a fact that I don't believe is a fact. They don't often back it up with
21 any specific examples. They don't often back it up with other moments that would clearly put in
22 dispute the assertion.

23 I think this conversation is very loose and ill-defined. As I've said, from what I saw, I was
24 confident that Joe Biden could do the job of President, and I believed until the end he was the best
25 person for President.

1 So I think there is a narrative here that is built on, I think, as I said, kind of an ill-defined
2 definition of what they're talking about. And, as I said, as I sit here today, I come to you as
3 someone who saw the President on a daily basis.

4 BY MS. HARKER:

5 Q What sort of evidence would support this assertion?

6 A Well, as I say, I don't know because I don't share it.

7 Q Well, no cognitive exam was conducted of President Biden, so I guess the American
8 people only have their own eyes to rely on, right?

9 A Uh-huh.

10 Q Do you have any knowledge of President Biden's advisers weighing in on whether Dr.
11 O'Connor should conduct a cognitive exam of the President?

12 A What I recall is that, at least from my perspective, I believe that was a medical judgment
13 for Dr. O'Connor to make.

14 Q I couldn't hear you.

15 A I believe that was a medical judgment for Dr. O'Connor to make.

16 Q Are you aware of any of President Biden's advisers weighing in on the decision whether
17 or not to conduct a cognitive exam of the President?

18 A Well, what I'm aware of is I can't point to a specific conversation. It's like there was
19 conversations about whether -- about cognitive tests. There were a number of press inquiries
20 about whether the President would take a cognitive exam. And my view, at least, was that that was
21 a medical decision for Dr. O'Connor.

22 Q Who was a part of those conversations?

23 A I can't name specific people other than it would have been, I think, the members of the
24 senior staff.

25 Q What was your opinion about whether an exam should be conducted?

1 A My opinion was this was a decision for Dr. O'Connor.

2 Q Did any political advisers recommend having a cognitive exam?

3 A That I can't say. I don't know. I don't want to speak for someone else.

4 What I -- again, I come back to something I said a few minutes ago, which is, look, I think this
5 is a very complicated issue. I think this term gets used -- I often don't know why -- and to my mind
6 this, an issue of acuity and cognitive decline, is a medical issue for an expert to decide.

7 Q Do you know if any political advisers expressed an opinion as to whether President
8 Biden should or should not have a cognitive exam conducted?

9 A I don't. I don't recall.

10 BY MR. GREENBERG:

11 Q But you do recall that there were discussions among the members of the senior staff.
12 Is that correct?

13 A What I remember is that we were frequently receiving questions from the press about
14 whether the President would take a cognitive exam, and there would be discussions about that, how
15 to respond to that in the press.

16 But, as I say, what I recall from my perspective, I, as I say, I treated this as a medical issue for a
17 doctor.

18 Q And I just want to be clear that when you are referring to members of the senior
19 staff -- because, actually, we're going to talk about senior staff here in a second. But when you're
20 talking about members of senior staff, would that have included Annie Tomasini?

21 A I can't recall specifically.

22 Q Okay. And do you recall if that would have included Anthony Bernal?

23 A No, I can't recall.

24 Q Would that have included Steve Ricchetti?

25 A I would say that would be -- again, I can't recall.

1 Q Okay. One more. Would that have included Dr. Biden?

2 A I can't recall that.

3 Q Okay. Thank you.

4 Stepping back, turning to your time in the White House, we understand that there were two
5 morning meetings. One occurred at 8 o'clock usually, and one occurred maybe around 8:30.

6 It's my understanding that on the 8 o'clock call, that was the senior. Senior staff would have
7 a call, and then more people would join for the 8:30. Is that how things worked?

8 A My memory is that at 8:15 there would be a small senior staff meeting, and at 8:40
9 there would be a bigger staff meeting.

10 Q Okay. Who would be at the 8:15 meeting usually?

11 A Well, it would have been the chief of staff. He led that meeting. Steve Ricchetti
12 would probably be there. Jake Sullivan might be there, depending on whether foreign policy was an
13 issue of the moment.

14 Bruce Reed probably would have been there if he wasn't traveling with the President. Some
15 press communications people probably would be there, press secretary, communications director.

16 And Annie might -- Annie Tomasini might have been there, depending on her schedule and
17 whether she was traveling.

18 That's what I can remember.

19 Q Mr. Bernal, was he ever at those meetings -- that early meeting?

20 A I believe he was at some of them, but I don't -- he could be at some of them, yes.

21 Q I don't expect you to remember who all was at the 8:40 meeting. It sounds like there
22 were more people at the 8:40 meeting.

23 But just generally, what was the distinction between people -- the cast of characters at the
24 8:15 meeting and then the people at the 8:40 meeting?

25 A Well, I don't know, because I didn't -- I didn't set the manifest. My sense was that the

1 8:15 call was the -- the -- again, I don't know that you can say they're the highest ranking senior
2 officials. But, again, I think it was -- it was a smaller group. Many of them had offices right in that
3 area.

4 And then the 8:40 meeting would be expanded to include, in particular, a lot of people who
5 had responsibility for, like, departments and issues.

6 Q When you made reference earlier to you were having conversations about the -- about
7 fielding questions about a cognitive exam from the press, would you discuss that at the 8:15
8 meeting? Is that where you'd be discussing that with the members of the senior staff?

9 A Well, it might have been at that or it may have been at a meeting called at some other
10 time of the day --

11 Q Okay.

12 A -- to deal with any questions.

13 Q It probably wouldn't be at the 8:40 meeting, though, with a larger group of people. Is
14 that right?

15 A That, I don't know. I don't -- I can't say with confidence it wasn't talked about there.
16 So I don't know.

17 Q Okay. Have you ever heard the term "Politburo" to refer to a group that included
18 yourself, Mr. Reed, and Mr. Ricchetti?

19 A I never heard of it until I read it in a book.

20 Q That book would be "Original Sin" by Mr. Tapper and Mr. Thompson. Is that the book
21 you're referring to?

22 A Yes.

23 Q But before then, you had never heard that term used?

24 A I don't recall ever hearing that.

25 Q Did you have -- did you ever hear the term "pooh-bahs," meant to refer to you or other

1 group of people?

2 A I don't recall that either.

3 Q Did you ever hear the phrase "gray hairs" to describe yourself and any other people?

4 A I don't recall that.

5 Q And that's fine. But was there ever a shorthand in your time in the White House to
6 refer to you, Mr. Ricchetti, and Mr. Reed?

7 A I have no recollection of any shorthand for the three of us, no.

8 Q Would you consider the three of you the closest advisers to President Biden?

9 A Not necessarily. Senior staff is a very close adviser to the President. The National
10 Security Advisor was a very close adviser to the President. The people in communications, they
11 would be close.

12 I don't -- and I thought he saw, for example, the people who led the National Economic
13 Council, very close advisers. He spoke to them a lot, relied on them a lot, whether it was Brian
14 Deese or later Lael Brainard.

15 So my point is, I thought there were -- there were many more close advisers to the President
16 than just the three of us.

17 Q Okay.

18 Mr. Spectre. Sorry for interjecting here, but just a question.

19 Your opening statement, which we marked as, I believe, exhibit 2 earlier, did you all share
20 that with anyone besides us?

21 Mr. McQuaid. We have communications folks we work with who we shared it with so that
22 they could, if they had a question about it, et cetera, they would -- you know, they could share it.
23 But that's the only people we've shared it with.

24 Mr. Spectre. We are just aware that members of the media have it, so is it -- did your
25 communications staff potentially provide --

1 Mr. McQuaid. I don't know if they did, but we had given a copy to them before we came in
2 the interview.

3 BY MR. SPECTRE:

4 Q And based on recent reporting, President Biden was receiving briefings regarding this
5 investigation. Did he review your opening statement?

6 A He did not.

7 Q Did you discuss it with him?

8 A I did not.

9 Q Did you discuss your appearance here with President Biden?

10 A I made him aware that I received a letter from the Chairman and that I was -- my
11 inclination was to go and do the interview. That's the only thing I told him.

12 Q So you did not discuss the substance of the interview?

13 A I did not discuss the substance of the interview with the President.

14 Q Did you discuss the possibility of raising privileges during your testimony?

15 A I did not.

1 BY MR. GREENBERG:

2 Q I want to just get into the process of how decisions were made in the White House.
3 It's been a learning experience for me throughout this process.

4 It's my understanding that a decision book full of decision memos would be compiled by the
5 staff secretary and then transmitted to Ms. Tomasini or somebody working under Ms. Tomasini while
6 she was head of Oval Operations.

7 Is that your understanding?

8 A I can't with any confidence speak about how the decisions or the books were put
9 together for the President. I had no role in it.

10 Q No role in that.

11 Did you ever prepare a decision memo, or is that not part of your responsibilities?

12 A I don't recall preparing any decision memo for the President.

13 Q Okay. And recognizing that it's not your role, just trying to understand what you've
14 seen.

15 Have you ever seen President Biden with the decision book?

16 A I hadn't heard the phrase "decision book" before you. I don't think I've heard it.

17 What I have seen -- what I saw is sometimes the President would be presented a decision
18 memo. Maybe there was a decision book, but I always thought of it as a memo he'd be given. It
19 would be in a folder. And that that's how it was carried out.

20 Q And who would give President Biden that decision memo in the folder?

21 A Again, I can't say for certain. My sense is it was whoever had responsibility for that
22 issue.

23 Q Whoever had responsibility for that issue.

24 A For example, Jake Sullivan was familiar with decision memos dealing with foreign policy,
25 so they would go off and do that. Bruce Reed would sometimes have decision memos he would

1 give him. I assume that's how it worked.

2 Q And understanding still that this is not your area of expertise, it's my understanding that
3 there would basically be a card attached to that memo where the President could check "yes" or "no"
4 or "needs more" -- "need more information."

5 Is that your understanding, or is it different?

6 A I didn't think there was a card. I thought maybe right on the memo there was a place
7 to say "yes," "no," or "more information." So I really was not -- it wasn't my responsibility.

8 Q Sure. And then would you ever see -- let's back up.

9 Did you have access to the residence, the White House residence?

10 A Did I have access to it?

11 Q Yeah. Would you ever go meet with the President in the residence?

12 A Well, I had access in the sense that -- at least what I recall is they would ask me to come
13 over. But I didn't -- I don't remember. Maybe I did. I don't remember just getting up and
14 walking over to go into the residence, that sort of thing, to talk to him.

15 But, yes, I would go there, and we would have meetings, but it would be because somebody
16 called me and said, "The President wants to see you, we're doing a meeting there."

17 Q And do you remember -- it's okay if you don't -- do you remember if any time that
18 decision memos or a folder with a decision memo in it was handed to the President while you were
19 over in the residence?

20 A I can't say with certainty. I think there may have been in the Map Room, there may
21 have been in -- he has an office on the second floor. I don't remember the name of it.

22 Those are the places where we would meet usually. So they may have come in there.

1 [1:57 P.M.]

2 Mr. Greenberg. But your recollection is that these memos would just be kind of at the
3 President's convenience given to him. When you could catch the President, they would be handed
4 to him and maybe he would sign off then or maybe he would take it. Is that your understanding of
5 how it went?

6 Mr. McQuaid. It's a lot of --

7 Mr. Greenberg. I can --

8 Mr. McQuaid. Just ask him what he knows or doesn't know?

9 BY MR. GREENBERG:

10 Q I'm just trying to understand what you've already told me actually, which is I believe you
11 were saying that with these decision memos, the people responsible for the decision would just hand
12 them to the President when they could catch the President. Is that right?

13 A No. That is not what I'm saying.

14 Q Okay.

15 A What I'm saying -- and I don't -- I didn't see it as a matter at the President's convenience.
16 What I saw was -- my sense of it was there would have been a series of meetings and memos where
17 the issue would have been discussed and debated.

18 That would go through several iterations. And then at some point the staff, or whoever was
19 the lead on it, would present to the President a decision memo. Because my sense of things was it
20 wasn't going to happen until he made those decisions. And he made those decisions.

21 And he might say, "I'm not ready to make a decision." Or he may say, "I want more
22 information."

23 But it was -- I don't think it was a matter of when you could catch him. I thought it was a
24 matter of there had been a process. That process has been followed. It had come to a decision
25 point. And then that had to be presented to the President in order for there to be a decision

1 because he had to make it.

2 Q Understood.

3 Did you have any conversations regarding the clemency or pardons of anyone during your
4 time in the White House?

5 A Yes. I was part of a group of people who would -- my opinion would be asked, and
6 they were given.

7 Q And just so I understand your role, was that for every pardon or just some pardons?

8 A What I recall is -- I don't think it was for every pardon. There was a process. It was
9 led by the White House Counsel's Office. They may or may not have included me in the discussion
10 about it.

11 Then there would be a discussion with the President. I may or may not have been included
12 in that.

13 So that's -- but I can't say that I was in every conversation, no.

14 Q Were you involved in any conversations regarding the President's pardon of his son,
15 Hunter Biden?

16 A The President made the decision to pardon Hunter, and he did that, to my memory,
17 without speaking to me. And I think he -- my memory is he had made that decision, and he had
18 made that clear to the staff, that that was his decision.

19 Q Do you recall when he made that decision? Recognizing that you can't read the
20 President's mind. But do you remember when you became aware that the President was going to
21 do that?

22 A Well, I became aware of it after he had done it. And my memory is he did it, I think,
23 over Thanksgiving, I believe, around that time.

24 Q I believe that's right.

25 A And he made the decision, and that's when I became aware of it.

1 Q Did you participate in any conversations regarding the pardons of any other members of
2 President Biden's family?

3 A Again, my recall is no, I did not. Again, he -- he made that decision -- my memory or
4 my recall -- that was very late. I think it might have been on the last day or two he was President.
5 And I had no advanced knowledge he was going to do it.

6 Q And did you have any conversations with anyone about the pardons of Dr. Fauci,
7 General Milley -- and I'll break it up -- or members and staff of the January 6th committee?

8 A I'm sorry. Can you repeat it?

9 Q Sure. I'll go one by one.

10 Did you have any discussions about the pardon that was issued for Dr. Fauci?

11 A Yes. I was at a couple of meetings where the pardon for Dr. Fauci was discussed.

12 Yes.

13 Q And who else was at that meeting?

14 A My memory is the White House counsel, Ed Siskel; Jeff Zients, chief of staff --

15 Mr. McQuaid. Jake, are you going to tie this to a question? This seems like it's pretty off
16 topic.

17 Mr. Greenberg. I actually am. And I can do it now.

18 BY MR. GREENBERG:

19 Q I'm just wondering if President Biden felt adamantly about these decisions or if this was
20 coming from somewhere else?

21 A So the meeting I was just talking about with Dr. Fauci, President Biden was there. And
22 he was presented the case for it, the case against it. White House counsel spoke about the merits
23 of it and any concerns. He always raised any concerns that any pardons might trigger.

24 The president heard the case, and the President made the decision to pardon.

25 Q And is that the same process that went with General Milley?

1 A That is my memory, it was the same process.

2 Q And is that the same process that occurred for members and staff of the January 6th
3 committee?

4 A I recall that it is.

5 But my memory is the President considered Dr. Fauci and General Milley in one meeting.
6 And the discussion about the January 6th people, that group of people he was thinking about
7 pardoning, I don't remember being in that meeting or no.

8 But, fundamentally, yes, the same process for it. The individual or group that was under
9 consideration would be put forward; the case for it, the case against it, concerns that might arise
10 around it. The President would hear the case, and he would make the decision to grant it or not.

11 Q And did the President come up with the idea to pardon these individuals or was that
12 raised by somebody, maybe in the White House counsel's office? To the extent you know.

13 A I don't know. My sense of the process was White House counsel organized the process
14 and presented the names. That's my sense. But it's possible that there were meetings with White
15 House counsel and the President that could have discussed it long before I was engaged.

16 Q Do you know anything about the use of autopens to sign documents or executive orders
17 or pardons? Anything.

18 A I don't recall having any knowledge of the autopen.

19 Q Did you know an autopen was in use for some documents?

20 A I didn't know what the autopen was being used for. I mean, over the years, you would
21 hear it had been used for, you know, constituent response and that sort of thing. But I don't
22 remember any conversation about the autopen.

23 Mr. Greenberg. I think we'll actually -- unless you guys have any questions.

24 Ms. Harker. Did you ever see President Biden receive an IV infusion of anything?

25 Mr. Donilon. An IV infusion?

1 Well, I recall -- I have a memory that -- so I was with the President when he came down with
2 COVID for the second time. We were at a restaurant in maybe Las Vegas. I'm not sure. We were
3 at a restaurant. And he had been speaking to people and walking around.

4 And then COVID came on, and we moved him to a back room with his doctor and his nurse,
5 and I was there. I'm trying to -- I don't remember with certainty if he had gotten an infusion there.
6 But I remember he was -- he had really been hit hard by COVID.

7 So that -- I can't think of another -- I can't recall another -- and I can't recall with certainty that
8 it would have been an IV. But he certainly was -- he was hit hard by COVID in that setting.

9 Ms. Harker. Thank you.

10 Mr. Greenberg. Do you ever recall seeing President Biden in a wheelchair?

11 Mr. Donilon. In a wheelchair? I don't recall seeing President Biden in a wheelchair.
12 What I recall, quite ironically, is he saw me in a wheelchair, and that was not -- I didn't think that was
13 great.

14 But I don't have a memory of seeing him in a wheelchair. I don't know when -- where it
15 would be. I don't know.

16 Mr. Spectre. Do you recall any conversations about the possible need for President Biden to
17 have a wheelchair at some point during his term?

18 Mr. Donilon. I don't recall any of those conversations.

19 Mr. Spectre. None with Dr. O'Connor or any of his staff?

20 Mr. Donilon. I don't recall that conversation, no.

21 Mr. Greenberg. Do you remember any conversations about having to make any kind of
22 physical accommodation for President Biden's physical aging?

23 Mr. Donilon. Well, what I recall is -- and I can't tie it to a specific moment -- what I recall is
24 the President broke his foot between the time of being elected and taking the oath of office and it
25 never healed properly. I don't know if that was because he didn't do what he was supposed to do

1 or whether that's just the nature of what happened.

2 It had a profound impact on the President, the Presidency, because previous to that, no one
3 noticed any issue with Joe Biden's gait or his walk. I don't remember any of that coming up in the
4 2020 campaign. And after that, it was a -- I think it was a big part of the perception of the
5 President's age.

6 I say that because I know at some point -- I don't remember when -- at some point there was
7 a decision made that he would use the shorter steps to go into Air Force One than -- there's one
8 that's quite steep, and there's one that's less so. And I think that's why it was made, because he
9 was less steady on his feet.

10 That's what I recall.

11 BY MR. SPECTRE:

12 Q That was a question specific about -- specifically about physical accommodations. But
13 in terms of other types of accommodations, I know you talked a little bit about teleprompter use
14 earlier in your testimony.

15 But was there a change in the amount of teleprompter use over the course of the Biden
16 administration for President Biden? For instance, during Cabinet meetings?

17 A Oh. I don't recall a teleprompter being used during Cabinet meetings.

18 Q Did you attend every Cabinet meeting?

19 A Oh, I don't know if I attended every one. I attended some, maybe several. My
20 memory was he had a book in front of him and that -- I don't remember there being a teleprompter.

21 Q And did that book, to your knowledge, contain sort of prearranged questions and
22 answers between him and the -- between the President and the Cabinet members?

23 A My memory is yes. It was a very -- it was -- the text was written for the meeting.

24 BY MR. GREENBERG:

25 Q Do you remember -- do you ever recall a teleprompter being used at a fundraising

1 event? That's my question.

2 A Yes, I do.

3 Q Even rather small fundraising events, maybe 30 or 40 people, was a teleprompter used?

4 A I don't remember the -- if there was a cutoff. You know, I think sometimes it would
5 depend on the size of the room and how intrusive that would be if it was a very small gathering.

6 But I do remember moving to teleprompters for fundraisers. And my memory is -- what I
7 recall is one -- we did it because -- again, it was a -- you know, I think what at least I saw it as was a
8 discipline.

9 One of the things that is not uncommon for political candidates is to say things at fundraisers
10 that are particularly problematic. So I thought it was a good discipline for him to do that.

11 And the second reason was, again, it had the nature -- it had to do with the nature of the
12 different demands of the job. And so it's -- I mean, I would think it would be hard to go from a
13 national security meeting about Ukraine to then go into a fundraiser in Potomac, Maryland.

14 So I think it would -- you would use it to help get his mind reset on this is a political event, this
15 is -- that's my memory of it.

16 Q And you made reference to problematic statements that a teleprompter can
17 avoid -- help avoid. What kind of problematic statements would you be concerned about from
18 President Biden specifically?

19 A Well, I mean, I can't remember with specificity. But I can say that over the years the
20 President would say some things that would generate a lot of attention. I mean, for example, the
21 one that I remember is actually -- I think it was in the 2008 campaign. I.

22 I believe he was on the West Coast at a fundraiser, and he made a comment that Barack
23 Obama was going to be tested because he was young. And it caused a firestorm because there
24 were a lot of concerns about whether or not Barack Obama at that time had the experience to be
25 President. So it stepped into a controversy that no one saw coming.

1 And so it's -- so it's not -- it's not new. It's not limited to Joe Biden.

2 And so, as I say, I know there were a couple of things he said in '24. I can't say specifically
3 what they were. But I do remember the one with reference to President Obama because I
4 remember how much controversy it caused at the time because it went to a particular concern that
5 the campaign had about whether Barack Obama would be seen as ready to do the job.

6 Q And you said that the teleprompter helped reset the President's mind. Did you notice
7 you having to do that more often from 2020 to 2024?

8 A No. I didn't see any difference than I saw -- I mean, I -- my sense of that was that was
9 true in 2008 and it was true in 2012. In the reelection campaign, again, Joe Biden was in a
10 fundraiser. Again, I believe he was on the West Coast. And again, he made some comments
11 which caused some controversy.

12 And so this is a -- I think it's a common problem to all candidates. And when I say "reset the
13 mind," what I'm saying is that you are, especially when you're President, I mean, you're moving from
14 questions about NATO to now questions in a fundraiser. And I would think that -- it just helps to
15 remind you, at a minimum, that you are in a political setting.

16 Q But vis-à-vis teleprompters, would you say that there was no change in use with them at
17 fundraisers from 2008 to 2024 for Joe Biden?

18 A Oh. I don't know. I can't recall whether they were used in a -- I don't think they were
19 used in '8. I have a memory. I recall that they were used in 2020. But, remember, 2020 was an
20 unusual campaign. It was COVID. Much of the campaigning was done on Zoom. And so if I had
21 to guess, that they probably were used again, but I can't say with certainty.

22 Q Do you think that the unusual aspect, the unusual nature of the 2020 campaign being
23 conducted by Zoom benefited then-Vice President -- then-former Vice President Biden?

24 A Well, again, from my perspective, I thought it would benefited him and I thought it hurt
25 him. What I mean by that is this.

1 As I've said, I think, several times today, Joe Biden has a tendency to talk for a long time.
2 And he has a tendency to go off script.

3 So I think it's surprising -- I believe this to be a fact, I've never fully checked it -- it is surprising
4 to me that his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention was the shortest
5 acceptance speech ever. And the reason for that was he did it alone in a studio into a camera. He
6 didn't do it in front of 20,000 people.

7 So I find that -- and I think that was helpful. I thought it provided a real discipline and focus,
8 that that -- so I think that helped.

9 But I think it hurt for this reason. As you mentioned earlier in this interview, you asked me
10 questions about whether Joe Biden was energized by meeting people. I think one of his greatest
11 strengths as a political candidate is the personal interaction he has with people.

12 That was all taken away in 2020. So in some ways the single greatest strength that Joe
13 Biden has in politics was denied to him in 2020 because he couldn't be with people.

14 Mr. Greenberg. Thank you.

15 That ends our hour. We'll go off the record.

16 [Recess.]

17 Mr. [REDACTED] All right. We'll go back on the record. The time is 2:35.

18 Mr. Donilon, during the last hour with my Republican colleagues you referenced a meeting
19 that you had with oncoming Chief of Staff Mr. Zients about what you said was a need to get better
20 control of his schedule. Is that an accurate characterization of that?

21 Mr. Donilon. That's fair, yeah.

22 Mr. McQuaid. His schedule, I think, was a reference to the President, not Jeff Zients'
23 schedule.

24 Mr. [REDACTED] Thank you.

25 BY MR. [REDACTED]

1 Q Yes. In reference to the President's schedule.

2 A Uh-huh.

3 Q And, apologies, can you remind me when that meeting between you and Chief of Staff
4 Zients approximately happened?

5 A I can't recall when I -- the time frame I remember was -- I believe it was after Jeff was
6 announced but before he actually started the job.

7 Q Okay.

8 A I have a memory of him coming to my office and him saying something like, "What do
9 you think is the most important thing for me to do?"

10 Q And how did you respond?

11 A Well, as I recall, I responded along the lines -- I just said that -- I said, "Jeff, I think" -- "I
12 think the President's schedule is very heavy, and I think it'd be great if we could make it more
13 reasonable."

14 Q And when you say the President's schedule was heavy, what do you mean by "heavy"?

15 A Well, from my perspective, what I recall is I thought his days were back-to-back-to-back
16 with a lot of continued work in the evenings and that -- of course, that's not even -- I don't -- I didn't
17 have a window into when he read his books.

18 So -- and I thought he, because of what was going on in the world, he had a lot of hard travel.
19 And so I just, as I say, I looked at his schedule, and it seemed to be -- I thought it'd be demanding for
20 anybody.

21 Mr. [REDACTED] Thank you.

22 BY MS. [REDACTED]

23 Q Mr. Donilon, just a few questions for the record.

24 To your knowledge, are you aware of any instance where an executive order issued during the
25 Biden Presidency was signed without President Biden's knowledge or authorization?

1 A To my memory, I have no knowledge of that, no.

2 Q And to your knowledge, are you aware of any instance in which a bill signed into law
3 during the Biden Presidency was signed -- excuse me -- a bill signed into law during the Biden
4 Presidency was done without President Biden's knowledge or authorization?

5 A I have no knowledge of that, no.

6 Q And again, to your knowledge, are you aware of any incidents in which any pardon
7 issued during President Biden's Presidency was issued without his knowledge or authorization?

8 A I don't have any knowledge of that.

9 Q And to your knowledge, are you aware of any instance in which -- excuse me -- any
10 instance in which any order granting clemency issued during the Biden administration was done
11 without President Biden's knowledge or authorization?

12 A I have no knowledge of that.

13 Q And then, apart from any instances in which President Biden delegated authority to Vice
14 President Harris while he was undergoing a medical procedure, did anyone, to your knowledge, ever
15 step in to carry out the duties of the Presidency in Joe Biden's place because he was unable to do so?

16 A From my perspective, I never saw that.

17 Q Thanks.

18 And I want to go back to an issue the majority raised in regards to accommodations made for
19 President Biden.

20 Is it fair to say that these accommodations regarding the stairs on Air Force One were not an
21 effort to conceal mental decline on the part of the President?

22 A Well, I believe that's fair to say. I believe it was an accommodation for a physical -- I
23 thought it was about -- yeah, I don't think it had anything to do with his cognitive issues, none.

24 Q And rather, it was a physical --

25 A I thought it was a physical issue regarding his -- his walk, how stable he was, and the fact

1 that for anyone -- I don't know how many people in this room have been on Air Force One, but I
2 found going up the steps tricky. So that's -- I think it was done for a physical reason.

3 Q And other Presidents have had problems going up the stairs.

4 A Yes.

5 Q Okay. Yeah.

6 A I believe they have.

7 Q Okay.

8 And last one. You're not -- you were never a part of Dr. O'Connor's medical staff, correct?

9 A I was not a part of Dr. O'Connor's medical staff.

10 Q Did you ever advise Dr. O'Connor not to administer a cognitive test to President Biden?

11 A I did not. I have no memory doing that, no.

12 Q And you weren't responsible for President Biden's medical care, correct?

13 A Correct. I was never responsible for his medical care.

14 Q And you did not determine which medical tests should be performed on President
15 Biden, correct?

16 A Correct, I did not, as I remember this.

17 BY MR. [REDACTED]

18 Q Just one last question.

19 Going back to the pardons that you discussed with my majority colleagues, you mentioned
20 that you were part of the process in issuing those pardons. Is that fair to say?

21 I guess what I'm getting at --

22 A I think that -- I think that exaggerates my role. I was a voice, that people may or may
23 not have asked my opinion. I wasn't -- I had a limited role.

24 Q Fair enough. And what I'm getting at, ultimately, the decision to issue any pardon was
25 President Biden's. Is that right?

1 A From what I saw, I believe all the decisions for the pardons, clemency, were made by
2 President Biden.

3 Q President Biden himself?

4 A President Biden -- well, President Biden. I mean, others were there, but he made the
5 decision.

6 And my view was, for all four years, I never had any doubt for a single moment, and I never
7 sat in a meeting anywhere, where it wasn't clear to me who the President of the United States was.
8 And it was Joe Biden.

9 And he -- I saw -- he never -- I never saw anyone in any situation where it wasn't clear to me
10 and everyone else in the room he was the President, he would make the decision, and he did.

11 Mr. [REDACTED] Thank you. We'll go off the record.

12 [Pause.]

13 Mr. Greenberg. We'll go on the record.

14 BY MR. GREENBERG:

15 Q Just returning to the conversation that you had with Mr. Zients, what was his reaction to
16 your suggestion to lighten the President's load?

17 A I don't remember that he had a response. I think he was in the mode of just asking
18 people their opinion. You know, Jeff, he's a remarkable manager, and I'm not. I would not
19 pretend to know how to do that.

20 So I don't know. I just know I had a view and I conveyed it to him.

21 Q Thank you.

22 And I said we'd return to the debate, the 2024 debate. I want to do that. I don't think we
23 need to dwell on it. But I do just want to know, do you recall where you were when you were
24 watching the debate?

25 A My memory is -- what I recall is I was in Atlanta. And I believe I was in a holding room

1 watching it, I think. I don't think I was actually in the hall where -- that's my memory, that I
2 watched it in a holding room.

3 Q Do you remember anyone who was in that room with you?

4 A I don't remember. I don't remember. I think Ron traveled to Atlanta. I don't know
5 if he was in the room. I don't know who was in the room. I'm sorry.

6 Q Do you have any recollection if Steve Ricchetti was in the room with you?

7 A I don't have that recollection. Steve did not travel often. I'm not -- so I don't have a
8 recollection of whether he was in the room, no.

9 Q There is an anecdote that Mr. Klain semi-confirmed -- he couldn't remember
10 exactly -- where, at the point where President Biden said something along the lines of, "We finally
11 beat Medicare," Mr. Klain stood up and said, "We're effed," but he didn't say "effed."

12 Do you remember anything like that occurring?

13 A I don't. I don't. I know Ron had strong reactions in the debates. I don't remember
14 him saying that. No, I don't.

15 Q Do you remember -- and I'm asking just generally -- what the people or what the mood
16 was around you while you were watching that debate?

17 A My memory of the mood in the room?

18 Q Yes, sir.

19 A Is that people were concerned. The moment that you're referencing was the worst
20 moment in the debate. And it had, in my view, a big impact -- and obviously lasting impact -- on the
21 perceptions of the debate.

22 And so as I watched the debate -- and I've watched it since -- I thought that answer was a
23 problem. I actually thought on much -- and many of the exchanges that followed -- because if my
24 memory is right, that was a relatively early moment in the debate.

25 Q Yes, sir.

1 A I actually thought President Biden had pretty good answers.

2 Stylistically, I was worried about his voice. And I had been around enough debates and
3 campaigns to know that sometimes a moment or a feel can drive the narrative about the debate
4 when I think a fairer assessment of what happened would be different.

5 Q And Mr. Klain used the phrase "uniquely bad" during his interview with us to
6 describe -- he was describing -- I had asked the question, "Had you ever seen President Biden behave
7 this way?" And his answer, in short, was, to summarize, "No. It was uniquely bad." Mr. Ricchetti
8 had agreed with that, that that was a uniquely bad moment for President Biden.

9 Did you see President Biden ever behave the way that he did during the time of the debate
10 around the "We beat" -- "We finally beat Medicare moment"? Had you ever seen that before?

11 A Well, I can't recall seeing another moment like that in a -- you know, that, I can't. I
12 looked at the debate quite a bit. My sense is what he wanted to say was, "We beat big pharma,"
13 and he said, "We beat Medicare."

14 Again, I thought it was a bad moment. But I felt there are a number of exchanges that
15 followed that were pretty good.

16 I was not blind to the fact that there was a strong likelihood that there would be a runaway
17 narrative against us.

18 But remember, one of the things -- look, we've -- at least I -- we had been through tough
19 debates with Joe Biden before. Joe Biden nearly lost the nomination in 2020 because of a debate.
20 We came back from it.

21 So, no, I'm not saying it was the same circumstance. What I am saying, though, is we had
22 had tough debates. We had had rough moments that posed a mortal threat to the candidacy. I
23 mean, people forget it now, but Joe Biden almost lost the nomination in, I think, the summer of 2019
24 after a debate.

25 And so we were -- you know, this is how you erase -- this is more damaging, but it was -- no,

1 I -- I hadn't seen Joe Biden have a moment as bad as that.

2 BY MR. SPECTRE:

3 Q The New York Times reported in 2022 -- or reported later -- but that in 2022 you told
4 President Biden that, quote, "Your biggest issue is the perception of your age." Do you recall saying
5 that to President Biden?

6 A Well, I can't say I recall saying specifically that or when I said it. What I can say is I did
7 convey to him that I believed that his age was the biggest thing we had to overcome.

8 The age issue was a big issue in 2020. There were a lot of people in 2020 who said he
9 couldn't run because he was too old. That was a common point of attack.

10 And so I -- look, I had a clear sense throughout his Presidency, and I conveyed it to him, about
11 what I believed to be these kind of sort of observational problems that people were latching on:
12 That his voice wasn't as strong. That his gait was -- wasn't as strong.

13 And so it's fair to say that early in his Presidency -- and I -- look, one of the reasons I think
14 President Biden trusted me was because I didn't talk about our conversations. I didn't. And
15 so -- and I'm not comfortable doing it. That's just -- that's how I -- that's how I worked.

16 But, yes, it is fair to say that I had conversations with him about what I had believed to be the
17 perceptions of his age and how it continued to be an issue.

18 Q And some of the other folks that have testified have pointed to having the debate
19 earlier being a way to quell concerns from the American people about his age.

20 Was that part of the calculus of having the debate at all, or especially having it earlier in the
21 cycle than had been done before?

22 A Well, from what I recall, from my perspective, because you referenced others, that
23 others said this, I don't know that others said it.

24 What I thought was that it could be an opportunity for the American people to see him on
25 stage and to reassure them about his age. Yes.

1 Q Do you think that it did reassure them?

2 A Well, I think if you look at polling and focus groups on the night of the debate and the
3 days that followed, what I think the public reaction was -- I think they felt Donald Trump had won the
4 debate. I think they had concerns about the President's age. I think they had strong concerns
5 about President Trump. And from what I saw, there was little change in the vote choice in the race.

6 And then, in fact, if you go back -- again, this is by memory. I hope I'm right. I think I am.
7 I remember getting a report the night of the debate along those lines. I remember following the
8 public polls in the days that followed. My memory is that the FiveThirtyEight aggregator actually
9 had the race tighten by a point or two.

10 So you asked me what the public response was. And I think the public response, as I've said
11 before, was measured. I think when people looked at the debate, the conversation was solely
12 focused on President Biden in terms of the press and punditry.

13 I think the voters evaluated both candidates, and I think they walked away from that debate
14 with concerns about both. And I do not believe with the voters that it produced a substantial
15 change in the horse race.

16 Q You spoke at a Harvard Institute of Politics event in February of this year. Is that right?

17 A Yes.

18 Q And it was reported that you said that the Democratic primary voters chose Joe Biden to
19 be the nominee of the Democratic Party, but that, quote, "The Democratic Party leadership and the
20 biggest funders in America didn't."

21 Is that what you're sort of getting at in your last answer, that the American people didn't lose
22 faith in Joe Biden's ability to be President, but it was that the media or the elites or the funders that
23 drove the narrative?

24 A Well, no. I don't think that's what I was getting at in the last answer. I think in the
25 last answer, what I was getting at is you asked me, what was the -- as I heard it -- what was the

1 impact of the debate on voters? What did they take away?

2 And my read of the data was they had a measured response, that it did not fundamentally
3 change the race, that President Trump had clearly won the debate, concerns were created about
4 President Biden, and concerns were created about Donald Trump. So that's what I thought I said.

5 Q Sort of delineating, though, that the polling in terms of the differential between the two
6 candidates, to me -- and certainly, you're the expert in polling -- but to me that sounds like a different
7 question than whether the American people were more concerned about President Biden's age or, in
8 my view, the things that come with age, I think is underlying that. Do you not see those two things
9 as separate?

10 A Well, what I see is that I think when people make a -- express a view about who they're
11 going to support, that that is a -- they have taken inside that a measure of the things they like and the
12 things they worry about for either candidate.

13 So I do not dispute that the debate -- that there were concerns about the President's age as a
14 result of the debate. What I'm saying is for the voters, they had those concerns, and they weighed
15 them with a number of other factors, and that it didn't change the vote support levels, at least to my
16 mind.

17 Q You also reportedly told colleagues that -- colleagues who fretted about President
18 Biden's age that, quote, "He's going to get elected again, even with people thinking he's too old."

19 Is that what you're getting at there as well, that the American people were very concerned
20 about the President's age but that that wasn't a problem?

21 A No. I don't think that's a fair statement.

22 I think what I am intending to say there, I think, was that I thought that there would be people
23 who would vote for Joe Biden, even with concerns about his age, because they supported his agenda,
24 because they thought his record was good, because they thought he shared their values more,
25 because they thought he was a better President.

1 So I think you frequently see -- I don't know of any candidate who gets elected without
2 people having some concerns about them.

3 So I think that's what I was saying, is that I do -- I thought -- as I said, I thought people were
4 worried about the President's age. I thought, over the course of the campaign, that we could have
5 gotten the majority in electoral margins, that President Biden could have won.

6 Q Did you think it was necessary to hide the signs of President Biden's age, or things that
7 come with age, to hide them from the American people?

8 A Well, there had been -- I don't -- I don't believe I felt that. In fact, like, one of the
9 ironies of this is, as you mentioned, Joe Biden didn't have to debate.

10 In theory, he didn't have to debate. Just speaking for me, I wanted him to get in front of the
11 American people. That's what I wanted. I have long believed, and I said to many people, that if
12 the American people could see the President I saw every day, I thought they would be reassured.

13 So the notion that you're trying to hide a President and then willingly put him on stage in
14 front of 20, 30, 40 million people in the summer, that doesn't add up to me, to say that that reflects a
15 concern or a desire to keep him hidden.

16 Really, I believed -- as I said, I thought -- my operating view with the President was for people
17 to see more of who he was, not less. And that's why -- I can't say I came up with the idea to do the
18 debate, but I supported it.

19 And to me, the fact that the debate took place is a statement, at least from my perspective,
20 that we wanted people to see Joe Biden. We did not want to hide him.

21 BY MR. GREENBERG:

22 Q Was it really feasible, though, to not have a debate or have a later debate if there were
23 questions that you wanted to put to bed about the President's age? I mean, those wouldn't have
24 been ameliorated at all if Joe Biden had refused to debate Mr. Trump, right?

25 A Well, as I heard, there's two parts to your question, to me.

1 Q Sorry. I do that.

2 A That's okay.

3 You said essentially, was it feasible not to do a debate or do a debate. It was clearly feasible
4 not to do it early. That was a choice, right? We could have had that debate in September or
5 October.

6 So I think the answer to, "Was it feasible to have done the debate later?" I think the answer
7 to that is -- at least in my mind -- is clearly yes. It was the earliest debate ever, and it was a choice.

8 So now, as to your other part of your question, was it feasible not to debate? That was a
9 debate in the campaign and in the party. There were some people who believed he didn't have to
10 debate. I believed he was going to have to debate, okay?

11 But was it feasible for him not to debate? I think there are, yes, I think there are a number
12 of people who will tell you they didn't think he should debate.

13 So it wasn't my view. But as I say, he certainly could have debated later. And, to my mind,
14 I thought he was going to have to debate.

1 [3:07 p.m.]

2 BY MR. GREENBERG:

3 Q Was part of the reason for having an early debate due to a consideration that the
4 debate might not go well and you would have more time to fix the fallout of that debate if it were
5 held earlier?

6 A Well, I think I said it earlier, as I think about this, my memory, my recall is I did have a
7 concern about what I thought was the history of bad debates for incumbent Presidents in general
8 elections. I thought that was more common than not. So, from my view, I thought, if that was
9 going to happen, it would that it happened earlier than say October 20th. So, yes, in part, in my
10 view, seeing how previous debates are going for incumbents, I thought there could be an advantage
11 in Arizona --

12 Q After the debate -- I don't want to spend too much time on it, but I do want to
13 understand the time period between the debate and July 21st, when the President drops out of the
14 race. Were you encouraging the President to stay in the race during this time period -- or,
15 alternately, had the President said he's staying in the race, and you saw it merely as your duty to
16 execute on what your boss wanted to do?

17 Mr. McQuaid. You want to just break that down to one at a time?

18 Mr. Greenberg. Sure.

19 BY MR. GREENBERG:

20 Q Were you encouraging the President to stay in the race after the debate?

21 A My memory is -- my view was that I wanted him to stay in the race.

22 Q And the second part of my question is simply, did President Biden also say that he
23 wanted to stay in the race?

24 A My recollection is yes.

25 Q And you saw it as your job to do what you could to make President Biden's election

1 chances as favorable as possible. Is that fair?

2 A It's fair to say that it was my job. I had made a political judgment that I thought he was
3 the best -- even after the debate, he was the best Democrat to run. I had a strong substantive view
4 that I thought he would be the best President. I thought his experience working in legislation, his
5 experience on the world stage, his proposals for the future I thought they're the best for the country.
6 I guess what I'm saying is I thought he would be the best President.

7 Q And, at this time, you were working on the campaign itself or at the White House?

8 A I was on the campaign.

9 BY MR. SPECTRE:

10 Q How much were you paid for your role in the campaign in 2024?

11 A I was paid just a little bit short of \$4 million.

12 Q I am sorry? How much?

13 A \$4 million.

14 Q And was -- and I'm not familiar with how these sorts of pay arrangements work on
15 Presidential campaigns. Was that all guaranteed upfront, or was it dependent on any given
16 advertisements, or was it paid out throughout the campaign? How does that work?

17 A Well, in this situation, it was paid out in monthly payments in the campaign.

18 Q And were those payments dependent on the campaign continuing, or were you
19 guaranteed the \$4 million through the end of the race regardless of whether President Biden finished
20 the race?

21 Mr. McQuaid. Counsel, are you going to tie this to mental acuity?

22 Mr. Spectre. Yes.

23 Mr. McQuaid. How?

24 Mr. Spectre. We'll get to it.

25 Mr. McQuaid. Okay. Well if you could, you know, explain how you are going to tie it?

1 BY MR. SPECTRE:

2 Q Well, I'm just curious because you're saying that you believe that the President should
3 stay in the race, and then you advocated for that. And I think, you know, I'm just curious if your
4 own final stake in the matter had any -- was a factor in any way in your advice to the President?

5 A Well, I don't believe that. I don't believe it was a factor in my advice to the President.
6 I had given the President advice for a long, long time, and I believed in him. And so that's my view.

7 Q Just to be clear, would the amount of pay you received for your role on the campaign,
8 would that have changed, depending on how far into the race President Biden made it?

9 A My sense is that, that he -- in my view, the money was -- it was a guarantee, the
10 campaign, that we had a negotiation, and that's my memory of the agreement.

11 BY MS. HARKER:

12 Q You never received a bonus -- depending on the way the campaign went, was that a
13 possibility?

14 A How the campaign went?

15 Q Were there any circumstances in which you would have received a bonus?

16 A Yes, it was.

17 Q What were those circumstances?

18 A That Joe Biden would have been reelected President of the United States.

19 Q What would the bonus have been?

20 A I believe it would have been \$4 million.

21 Q In addition to the \$4 million that you were already paid?

22 A Yes.

23 BY MR. SPECTRE:

24 Q Do you consider \$4 million to be a significant sum of money?

25 A I thought it was a -- I thought it was a fair agreement that we had reached.

1 Q Do you think that the prospect of a significant payday, say, of \$4 million could impact
2 someone's judgment in general?

3 A Well, I think, under the circumstances you're discussing, the incentive was to keep the
4 President in the race. At the end, I gave him my judgment that he should withdraw.

5 Q At what point did you determine that you believed he should withdraw?

6 A Well, I think that judgment on the weekend that he made that decision.

7 Q So, up until that point, you continued to advocate that he stay in the race?

8 A Yes.

9 BY MR. GREENBERG:

10 Q Mr. Ricchetti -- do you know how many children Mr. Ricchetti has?

11 A I -- I don't. I think three.

12 Q He has four.

13 A Ricchetti? Okay. Fine.

14 Q Do you know how many worked in the Biden administration?

15 A I don't. I know his daughter worked in the administration. I don't remember who
16 else might have.

17 Q Yeah, he let us know yesterday it was -- it was four.

18 Was Mr. Ricchetti also advocating for President Biden to stay in the race?

19 A Well, I don't -- my sense is that Steve supported him staying in the race, but I don't want
20 to speak for him.

21 Q At what point -- and you can speak as much as you'd like about what you were facing
22 during this time period -- did you come to the conclusion that the President should withdraw from
23 the race?

24 A I came -- he got out of the race, I believe, on the 21st?

25 Q Yes, sir.

1 A I came to that view on the 20th.

2 Q Did President Biden himself, coming to that conclusion, perceive your conclusion?

3 A My memory of the weekend is that I gave the President a clear and honest view of the
4 situation. I told him that I thought he could still win. I told him I thought it would be difficult.
5 And then, you know, I raised the issue of I thought it would be a divided party if he stayed. And my
6 read of him was that he didn't want to divide the party.

7 So who got there first? I mean, in part I -- I could have left that weekend. And I still
8 believed he could have won. But he made the decision. And I told him, based on what I had said
9 and saw in him, that I felt, given his views about a divided party, that he shouldn't go forward.

10 Q When did you arrive at Rehoboth to -- that weekend of the 20th/21st?

11 A My memory is I arrived midday on the 20th.

12 Q Who was there, if you recall?

13 A I recall that -- "there" meaning?

14 Q At the Rehoboth residence?

15 A My memory is Annie Tomasini and Anthony Bernal, Steve Ricchetti, myself, the First
16 Lady, the President. I think that was it. I mean, as you probably know, there's always -- the
17 President has a lot of staff and Secret Service around him. So there were others.

18 Q How many discussions were there about possibly dropping out of the race on the 20th
19 and the 21st, if you can remember exactly; if not, just an estimation?

20 A Oh, I haven't discussed this. I guess the way I would think about it is I think that the
21 conversation went on for several hours. And it was -- my memory it was we had a long
22 conversation throughout the day, broke for dinner, and came back.

23 Q And, by this ongoing conversation, was every one of the people that you
24 listed -- yourself, Ms. Tomasini, Mr. Bernal, Mr. Ricchetti, Dr. Biden, and the President -- were they all
25 participating in this conversation?

1 A My memory is that Steve Ricchetti was in the conversation, I was in the conversation,
2 the First Lady was in the conversation, and the President.

3 Q Did at any point any member of the President's family besides Dr. Biden join the
4 conversation, either in person or remotely?

5 A My memory is that Hunter Biden joined it by phone.

6 Q And were you and Mr. Ricchetti both on the same page regarding the advice that you
7 were providing to the President?

8 A I can't say with, you know, certainty. I think we were. But, you know, Steve and I, we
9 had very different roles. You know, I looked at it especially as the president of the polling and data.
10 And Steve, of course, had a lot of contact with Members of Congress. So, again, I don't want to
11 speak for him, but I -- so I shouldn't.

12 Q And what was Hunter Biden's advice or contribution to this conversation?

13 A My memory is he was supportive of the idea that the President should withdraw from
14 the race.

15 Q And the First Lady, what was her perspective?

16 A My memory is she was going to support whatever decision the President made.

17 Q Sitting here today -- we're more than a year out from that weekend -- do you think
18 President Biden should have withdrawn from the race?

19 A It's hard to speculate. As I've said, he was in a difficult spot, but I thought he could
20 have won. I also know how much he did not want the party to be divided.

21 Q Do you, sitting here today and with the benefit of hindsight, and also recognizing that
22 the President has -- the former President has announced his cancer diagnosis, do you believe
23 President Biden was physically and mentally capable of serving another 5 years as
24 President -- another 4 beginning with his term?

25 A Well, you're -- and you're stipulating things I learned about at the time. But my view is

1 that he could've been President for 4 more years.

2 BY MS. HARKER:

3 Q Neurologist Dr. Kevin Cannard visited the executive mansion eight times in 8 months
4 between 2023 and 2024. Are you aware of those visits?

5 A I don't recall being aware of those visits, no.

6 Q Did you have a role in drafting President Biden's speech for the 2024 State of the Union?

7 A The 2024 State of the Union? Yes, I did.

8 Q What was your role?

9 A My role was I was -- I was one of the speech persons.

10 Q Did you help President Biden prepare to deliver the speech?

11 A Yes.

12 Q How did you help prepare him?

13 A Well, we were at Camp David for mostly -- and then back at the White House. And we
14 had both -- we had a series of meetings about the substance of the text. And then we had a series
15 of practices where he read the speech.

16 Q Do you have any knowledge about the medical care that President Biden received in the
17 weeks and days leading up to the 2024 State of the Union address?

18 A I don't believe I had any knowledge.

19 Q Do you have any knowledge -- do you know if, in the weeks or days between the 2024
20 State of the Union, White House staff discussed the need to medically treat the President so that he
21 would be able to deliver the address to the Nation?

22 A I have no recollection of that.

23 Q Do you know if, in the weeks or days before the 2024 State of the Union, President
24 Biden took any amphetamines or stimulants?

25 A I have no knowledge of that.

1 Q Thank you.

2 Mr. Spectre. For the record, who was responsible for President Biden's medical care?

3 Mr. Donilon. Well, from my perspective it was Dr. Kevin O'Connor.

4 Mr. Spectre. And, for the record, he pled the Fifth in this investigation. So I just wanted to
5 state that there.

6 BY MR. GREENBERG:

7 Q Do you know if any member of President Biden's family who was a doctor, a medical
8 doctor, ever provided any kind of medication or treatment to President Biden?

9 A I -- I don't know that.

10 BY MR. SPECTRE:

11 Q We spoke a little bit about "Original Sin" by Jake Tapper and Alex Thompson earlier.
12 Did you ever speak with, write with, or otherwise correspond with Jake Tapper and/or Alex
13 Thompson for their book "Original Sin"?

14 A I spoke to Jake Tapper.

15 Q What did your conversation consist of?

16 A He came to interview me. We spoke about an hour.

17 Q Do you recall when that was?

18 A I believe it was in January, very close to the end because I remember he came to my
19 office, and all of the pictures and furniture were gone.

20 Q Were you a source for that book?

21 A Well, I don't believe I was a source of that book. I did have a conversation with him.

22 Q My apologies if you answered this earlier, but have you read "Original Sin"?

23 A I have read much of it, yes.

24 Q Do you recall what the substance of your conversation with Mr. Tapper, what it focused
25 on specifically?

1 A Well, I can't -- you asked me a lot of questions in over an hour. He -- so I mean -- he
2 asked me about -- well, as I say, it was a wide range of conversation.

3 Q Do you know any of the names of the unnamed sources that Jake Tapper and Alex
4 Thompson quoted in "Original Sin"?

5 A I don't believe I do.

6 Q Similarly, did you ever speak with, write with, or otherwise correspond with Chris
7 Whipple for his book "Uncharted: How Trump Beat Biden, Harris, and the Odds in the Wildest
8 Campaign in History"?

9 A Yes, I believe I had one conversation with Chris Whipple.

10 Q Do you recall when the conversation with Mr. Whipple occurred?

11 A That I don't. It was before the one with Jake Tapper. So it was probably a week or
12 two before, but I don't remember.

13 Q Do you remember if you were a source for that book?

14 A I don't. As far as a source for the book, the extent of my involvement with these books
15 was one conversation with the author. I had one conversation with Whipple, and I had
16 conversation with Tapper. I don't know what you mean by "source."

17 Q Have you read "Uncharted"?

18 A Uncharted?

19 Q The book by Mr. Whipple, have you read it?

20 A I've read some parts of it, yes.

21 Q In the parts you've read, the discussions you had with Mr. Whipple, do the contents of
22 those discussions appear in the book?

23 A I don't recall.

24 Q And, finally, the same question for the book by Josh Dawsey, Tyler Pager, and Isaac
25 Arnsdorf, "2024: How Trump Retook the White House and the Democrats Lost America." Did you

1 correspond with those authors?

2 A I had. I spoke to Tyler Pager on the phone.

3 Q And the same question, I guess I'll be more specific to start out with. Have you read
4 that book?

5 A I've read parts of it, yes.

6 Q And, to the conversation you had with the author, does the substance of that
7 conversation appear in the book?

8 A Well, it appears in the sense that he asked to quote me, and he ran the quote and asked
9 me and asked if it was accurate, and I said yes.

10 Q Do you know what quote that was?

11 A I believe it was along the lines of saying that I thought there had been a strong
12 overreaction to the debate and that I thought the President could have won.

13 Q And, finally, have you spoken with Ms. Jean-Pierre for her upcoming book?

14 A Her upcoming book? I don't believe I've talked to her about it.

15 Q Any other books about the Biden administration?

16 A I don't think so, no.

17 BY MR. GREENBERG:

18 Q Can I just ask, I think that, the earlier part of this interview, you expressed some degree
19 of reticence about speaking with the media throughout the course of your career. What motivated
20 you to speak with these authors at this time?

21 A In each case, my memory is that communications people in the White House felt that it
22 would be helpful if I did that. So I did it because they asked me to. That's my memory.

23 Mr. Greenberg. Do you have anything?

24 We will go off the record. Thanks.

25 [Recess.]

1 Mr. [REDACTED] We'll go on the record. The time is 3:52 p.m.

2 BY MR. [REDACTED]

3 Q Mr. Donilon, I want to thank you again for appearing today. I know it's been a long
4 day, but we appreciate you answering our questions.

5 I'm going to jump around a bit, and we'll be covering a few different topics. So if you could
6 just bear with me over the next few minutes, I'd really appreciate it.

7 A Sure.

8 Q So, first of all, I'd like to circle back to after President Biden participated in the
9 Presidential debate. And I just want to make sure the record's clear. It was not your view that,
10 following the debate, President Biden was incapable of serving as President. Is that right?

11 A That was not -- no, that was not my opinion. In fact, I had the exact opposite view. I
12 believed he was capable of being President.

13 Q And, in fact, you saw a pathway to victory after the debate. Is that accurate?

14 A Yes.

15 Q Now, again, apologies; I'm jumping around a little bit. Did anyone, to your knowledge,
16 ever step in to carry out the duties of the Presidency in Joe Biden's place because he was unable to
17 do so?

18 A I don't believe that ever happened.

19 Q Did Hunter Biden ever carry out Presidential duties on his father's behalf?

20 A I don't think that ever happened.

21 Q Did he ever make official decisions for his father?

22 A I don't -- I don't believe that happened. I -- no, I just don't think any of that happened.

23 Q Do you believe there was an effort by Hunter Biden to usurp the Presidency?

24 A I -- I don't believe that, no.

25 Q How about Dr. Biden?

1 A I -- no, I do not believe that.

2 Q And did you, sir, ever step in to carry out the duties of the Presidency in Joe Biden's
3 place because he was unable to do so?

4 A I did not do that, no.

5 Q Are you aware of a conspiracy among senior staff to cover up President Joe Biden's
6 mental condition while he was in the White House?

7 A I don't believe that happened. No.

8 Q In the last hour, my Republican colleagues touched on a bit about your compensation
9 with the Presidential campaign.

10 A Uh-huh.

11 Q And, again, just so the record's clear, did your compensation from the Biden campaign
12 have any bearing on your views as to whether President Biden should have continued with or
13 withdrawn from the Presidential race?

14 A I don't believe it did.

15 Q Did it have any bearing on the counsel you provided to Joe Biden during the campaign?

16 A It did not have any bearing on it, no.

17 Q Did it have any bearing on what information you gave Joe Biden during the campaign?

18 A It did not, no.

19 Q Did it have -- strike that.

20 Did the compensation from the Biden campaign have any bearing on your views as to
21 whether President Biden had the mental acuity to serve as President?

22 A It did not. I believed -- I believed -- throughout his Presidency until the last day, I
23 believed he was capable of being President.

24 Q And I believe you said during the last hour as well as earlier in the interview that you
25 held the belief that he was the best person to be President. Is that fair to say?

1 A I do believe that.

2 Q Jumping around again, my colleagues raised with you a series of books that have been
3 written about the 2024 Presidential campaign, and one of those was the "Uncharted" book written
4 by Chris Whipple. Do you recall that?

5 A Yes.

6 Q In a recent Fox News interview, Mr. Whipple stated that there is, quote, "no evidence
7 that Biden was unable to fulfill the duties of Commander in Chief."

8 Do you agree with that statement?

9 A I agree with that statement.

10 Q And, in the same interview, Mr. Whipple went on to state, quote, "The notion that this
11 was somehow, you know, Biden's last year was 'Weekend at Bernie's' and that there was non
12 compos mentis and there was a cabal running the country with an autopen is just silly."

13 He also stated, quote, "The notion that they're going to be able to prove that this was a
14 dastardly coverup on the part of Biden's inner circle is just crazy to me. I think the answer is that
15 this thing goes nowhere."

16 And, finally, Mr. Donilon, on my end, you were asked about "Original Sin" by Jake Tapper.

17 Do you believe that book is a complete and accurate reflection of the 2024 campaign?

18 A I don't believe that's a fair and accurate description of the campaign or the Presidency
19 or the President.

20 Ms. [REDACTED] Mr. Donilon, I am marking as exhibit A a Truth Social post by President Trump in
21 which President Trump quotes the use of autopen during the Biden administration as, quote,
22 "treason at the highest level" end quote, and writes that, quote, "Something very severe should
23 happen to these treasonous thugs," end quote.

24 [Donilon Minority Exhibit A
25 was marked for identification.]

1 BY MS. [REDACTED]

2 Q Mr. Donilon, are you aware of that Truth Social post?

3 A Well, I don't know that I was aware of it before. I am aware now.

4 Q Okay.

5 And that social media post is dated May 20th. And 2 days later, Chairman Comer sent his
6 first round of letters requesting transcribed interviews in this matter. Were you aware of that?

7 A I was not aware of that, no.

8 Q And then on June 4th, 2025, Chairman Comer also sent you, Mr. Donilon, a letter
9 requesting your appearance at a transcribed interview.

10 On the very same day, on June 4th, 2025, President Trump issued his memorandum directing
11 an investigation into President Biden's mental health.

12 Were you aware that those two items were issued on the same day?

13 A No, I was not aware of that.

14 Q And, lastly, I am marking as exhibit B a July 23rd, 2025, Punchbowl News article stating,
15 quote, "The GOP-controlled House is an arm of the White House. We don't want to harp on this for
16 too long because it's so evident if you're a Congress watcher. Under Johnson and Trump, the House
17 simply isn't an independent branch of government anymore. Whether it's on Russia sanctions, the
18 Jeffrey Epstein files, or voting for a \$5 trillion debt-limit increase, House Republicans do whatever
19 Trump tells them to do," end quote.

20 [Donilon Minority Exhibit B

21 was marked for identification.]

22 Mr. [REDACTED] Thank you again, Mr. Donilon.

23 We'll go off the record.

24 [Whereupon, at 3:59 p.m., the interview was concluded.]

Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing ____ pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded.

Witness Name

Date