

So my name is Jeff Modisett, and I was the District Attorney for Indianapolis and the Attorney General of Indiana. After that I became General Counsel for the Democratic National Convention in 2000 when it was held in Los Angeles, and since that time I've spent most of my time in the high technology area, whether it's as a private attorney or helping with startups.

*Off Camera: We often now talk about attack ads and negative campaigning, and a lot people say they're terrible except that they work. What was your strategy?*

Unfortunately around this time, it was just shortly after attack ads were becoming the main way of campaigning. So it was a bit of a shock to me, because I did not expect to be out there campaigning, talking about these issues, and the first ads that I see being run against me are filled with, you know, misstatements, half-truths, certainly misleading. And you feel very frustrated, but that's nothing compared to the way it is now. So to jump ahead, I would say that that's one of the things we've really got to get our hands around, is how can we in this country learn to work together again? You can still be a Democrat and reach across the aisle, you can be a Republican and try to find compromise, that's something it seems to be lost right now, not just in Washington D.C. but in almost every state capital. And until we learn that we're all in this together and that we all want to advance, you know, our country and our communities, etcetera, it's going to be to our detriment.

That's why it's disconcerting when you hear public leaders talking about how it's more important to defeat a candidate or a President than it is to advance the interests of our country. I mean we are at a critical juncture right now, and we have to come together, we have to have people who are willing to cross the aisle to come up with solutions that are good for the country. You may not get everything you want, but it's better than the deadlock we're in right now, and it's only going to hurt future generations if we don't learn how to work together again like the great statesman of the past.

*Off Camera: Your friend, Senator Bayh, upon leaving the Senate said a lot of the same things. Tell me what you, how you reacted to him essentially saying you can't get much done in the Senate anymore, and one of the reasons he left.*

Well I think that it's true that it's gridlock right now in both the House and the Senate in Washington D.C. and it used to be that people would say, "well that's good, it's checks and balances, you know." That way nobody gets too aggressive, we move at a moderate pace. But it's been this way for so long that nothing is getting done. And the only way that things are getting done is through holding somebody else hostage, an appointment hostage, a policy hostage. That's not the way it's supposed to work. We should have real debates, we should have debates maybe a little bit closer to the way it is in the British Parliament. We need to have people thinking about, for themselves thinking about what are the ramifications of the policies that we're faced with right now. And not just get all of their talking points from any particular cable news show on either side.

*Off Camera: So tell me about that experience in 2000. You moved, you had done this before I guess for college, from Indiana out to Los Angeles.*

Right right, I had moved around before so that was no surprise or no new experience for me but being General Counsel of a convention is very much like being a General Counsel for a company. You never know what issue is going to come up that day. It could be trying to get these contracts done, it could be trying to get a vendor to come on board, it could be dealing with a, a sexual harassment complaint by an intern. There are many many issues.

*Off Camera: How about also, from what I recall in 2000 there were protesters.*

There were the protesters, well before we get to the protesters we, this was Los Angeles and they made a promise of raising a certain amount of money, and a number of people had put up letters of credit to promise it. And in the end, the amount of money wasn't raised and so we had to draw on the letters of credit of some people who were not real happy about that. And so there was litigation that arose out of that. So it was, and it was only the second event ever to be held in the Staples Center. They did the Grammys and then they did the Democratic National Convention. So, and dealing with a brand new stadium, that really had a lot of issues as well. But it was a lot of fun, the convention went over I thought very well, and it was a great experience for me and I met so many fantastic people, and it helped me a lot when I decided to take the move into dealing with politics in Silicon Valley.

*Off Camera: Right so yeah, give me a sense that if you were describing, because you said it's sort of like a General Counsel role elsewhere, so give me a sense of maybe, if you can, a typical day or week maybe leading up to the convention and then, you know, what you did during it.*

A typical day would be dealing with the fact that we had to make modifications to the Staples Center which had just been built. So we had to work with the city to get permits to tear up part of this brand new stadium. It meant dealing with the labor, to make sure we had the right project labor agreements. It meant dealing with all of the requests coming in from all over the country of people who wanted particular hotels, particular transportation, wanted to be treated a particular way with the right security passes. And believe me, there are many Democrats that are not shy about what it is they want at a convention.

*Off Camera: Sometimes your job is saying no.*

Yeah you try, you try to say no without saying no. And that, I learned part of that art when Terry McAuliffe came in to be the chairman, because he was very very good at making everybody feel like he had said yes to them when it might not have been a hundred percent yes. But he's a great guy, and was a great candidate later on even though he didn't win, but a good guy to work with.

*Off Camera: And yeah, tell me what memories stick out from, from that convention. I, I we're going to actually do this where I have pictures I took as a young college student when I was there that we're going to, how exciting it was when Gore.*

Yeah, well it was very exciting, the most exciting for me was probably when I was able to go out and meet the Indiana delegation and they all knew that I had just been Attorney General, and here I was working at the convention, and they were really excited and that got me energized again. But when Bill Clinton would come out to speak, that was such an amazing moment. Then later on, as his speech was ending, for me to be looking up at the security cameras and seeing the LAPD on horseback, tear gas and trying to get the demonstrators to move away from the convention. That was a little disconcerting and that was hoping that that didn't have an impact on the convention. But then by the time Al Gore came out and had "the kiss" with

Tipper Gore that was really a fantastic moment and I knew that we were well on our way to having a really solid campaign.

*Off Camera: Then, the 2008 cycle came around, and tell me about your observations and then participation.*

Well 2008 I was definitely a big supporter of Evan Bayh, and was planning on devoting most of my time to campaigning for him. We did a number of fundraisers out in California, and I tried to pull in as many of the high tech community and the Los Angeles, you know, Silicon Beach area that I could. But then he dropped out and most of his people went to Hillary Clinton. I was a big fan of Hillary but I just decided that if Evan wasn't going to do it I was going to sit out the race and just focus on my career. But then somebody dragged me to a small luncheon with Barack Obama, had an opportunity to hear him and was completely mesmerized, motivated, inspired and said, "all right, I can't stay out of this race." So I joined the Obama campaign and did everything I could to help him, and it was one of the most exciting experiences that I was ever involved in.

*Off Camera: When you started was he still, he was not the front runner Senator Clinton.*

Oh no no no, he was not the frontrunner. They were trying to sell tickets to this event in LA, I ended up sitting practically in the front row and had an opportunity to actually talk with him. But I was so inspired by what he said, and the vision of America that he described for people, that was the vision of America I wanted, I didn't want what I was seeing happening under the second term of George Bush. And I thought if, if we could see ourselves the same way he sees America, and if the rest of the world could see America the way Barack Obama sees America that would be such an advance. And this is the right guy at the right time and it's just unfortunate that he had to inherit the worst economic climate in decades. But that's why when he decided about a second term, because I think he'll finally have the opportunity to do even more.