The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ALAN D. SOLOMONT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is August 30th, 2013. This is an interview with Alan Solomont. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Alan, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

SOLOMONT: I was born in 1949 at Boston City Hospital and grew up in the town of Brookline, right outside of Boston.

Q: To give a little background: We've already done this one time, and, unfortunately, I had trouble with our recording. To the best of my knowledge, we seem to be recording this beautifully. So could you first give us background on your father's side?

SOLOMONT: Both my parents came from Russian immigrant families. They were the first, I think, in their families to be born here. My grandfather left Russia around 1910 or so – maybe a little earlier, around the turn of the century. He came to the North End of Boston and then moved to Lowell, Massachusetts because there were jobs there in the sweater factories. Eventually, he became a fishmonger, I believe. A small sort of shopkeeper. He settled in a Jewish immigrant community in Lowell, Massachusetts. Very

religious, very pious. And he raised his three sons there. My dad was the youngest of three brothers.

Q: On your mother's side, what do you know about her background?

SOLOMONT: I know a little less, actually. I didn't know my father's parents. They had long passed away when I was born. And my mother's father had passed away as well, years before. I knew my one grandmother, my mother's mother, who was alive when I was growing up. She grew up in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston. Her father drove a milk truck. She went to nursing school at Boston City Hospital, became a nurse, and for many years worked there as a Navy nurse.

Q: In your family, were there any stories about back in the old country?

SOLOMONT: There were a lot of references to my father and his brother's religious upbringing, and the lessons they were taught about honesty, family, and charity. I heard stories about how my grandfather was not a wealthy man. He was actually quite poor. I mean, he couldn't pay for the fish in his fish store. He'd always manage to make sure they got their fish anyhow. Even though he'd get very little, he was always generous in sharing with people less fortunate. And the idea of "tzedakah" (righteous giving) in our religious tradition was something that I grew up with and heard. It was very explicitly a lesson that my father had learned from his father and that he was transmitting to me. And most of the stories were about this tightly knit Jewish community in this working class, industrial city north of Boston. And about the values and the teachings that my dad and his brothers grew up with.

Q: In the Jewish context, what sort of Jews were they? Orthodox, Ultra-Orthodox?

SOLOMONT: They were immigrant Orthodox. They weren't scholars or Hasidic Jews, but they were very religious. They kept kosher; they kept the Sabbath. My father's brothers went to public school, but they were all very pious people. And that was the tradition that they had brought with them. They had escaped from Russia, in part, to escape religious persecution. And so, they were pleased to be able to practice their religion here.

Q: Well, you grew up in Brookline was it?

SOLOMONT: After my dad got married after World War II in 1948, he and my mother settled in Brookline, Massachusetts. His two brothers stayed in Lowell, Massachusetts, and that continued to be where the family roots were. But I grew up in Brookline.

Q: Did you go to a public school in Brookline?

SOLOMONT: I did. We lived in a neighborhood in a part of Brookline that was 95percent Jewish. I remember when the teachers in my grammar school asked who would be in school for the Jewish High Holidays, there was a Murphy family and there was an

O'Brian family. There were a handful of classmates who weren't Jewish. But the overwhelming majority in our neighborhood were Jewish. I went to a synagogue Hebrew school in the afternoon. Then I went to a Hebrew high school, in Brookline actually. It was a little different than most of my friends growing up. The community I lived in, although it was largely Jewish, was not a religious community. It existed around a conservative Jewish synagogue. Most of my friends were bar mitzvahed. But my family observed Sabbath and observed kosher, and that was actually not the case for most of my friends – the kids I grew up with. When I went off to high school, Brookline High School was then probably half Jewish and half non-Jewish. It was a little bit more typical – or more diverse – than the neighborhood I'd grown up in. But it was difficult for me as an adolescent to maneuver, particularly in religious family life and observance, and in the secular world that all my friends and I lived in. So, I was always a little bit different. There were things that my friends did that I didn't do. For example, our high school basketball team played on Friday nights, but I stayed home. I was split between feeling very much a part of my family and being very close to my father – wanting to please him. I went to synagogue with him on Saturdays. I led the junior congregation. I excelled at being a good Jewish son. But I also missed having the kind of normal upbringing that I saw around me. I had three younger brothers. My father became attracted to the teachings of a great Modern Orthodox American rabbi by the name of Joseph B. Soloveitchik, one of the leaders of Modern Orthodoxy worldwide, but especially in the United States. He was considered a great progressive because he believed in Jewish education, not only for boys, but also for girls. He founded a school in the Boston area, the Maimonides School, which was located in the inner city when I was a youngster. They moved the campus to Brookline and built a new school. When my three brothers were of school age, they all went to this parochial school. In some respects, they didn't need to deal with quite the same conflict that I did. They remain to this day all very observant. Again, in the Modern Orthodox tradition. But I moved in a different direction when I went off to college.

Q: Well, as a very young boy, were you much of a reader?

SOLOMONT: I was pretty studious. Nobody in my family had gone to college. My father had gotten a scholarship to go to Northeastern University, but he got in a terrible automobile accident just before he was supposed to matriculate, and he never went to college. His older brother actually didn't finish high school. And their oldest brother never went to college, although he later went to law school and became a lawyer. My mother went to nursing school. My father was very intent on providing a college education for his sons, and actually was very intent on his oldest going to Harvard University – his idea of becoming a successful American citizen. He had a cousin who had been one of the first Jewish kids to go to Harvard for both undergraduate studies and law school. He was somewhat of a family legend, and that was something that my father looked up to. In any event, early on it was drummed into my head – long before I had any idea what it meant – that I was going to attend Harvard College and then Harvard Law School. So I read a lot because I studied hard in school. It was very important for me to do well in school. And for that matter, I wasn't much of an athlete. So, my interest in books had a lot to do with studying and succeeding in school.

Q: So, you were pretty well concentrated on your studies, would you say?

SOLOMONT: I think that's a pretty accurate statement.

Q: And did you have an active, imaginative life of "sailing the high seas" or that sort of thing?

SOLOMONT: Not really. My upbringing revolved around our family: my three brothers, my parents, doing well in school. Then I was trying to be a normal adolescent and fit in as I got older. In high school I was interested in social sciences. I began to do some things that would be foreshadowing later interests. I remember joining the Key Club, which was an organization associated with the Kiwanis Club, which was basically about service.

Q: Yes.

SOLOMONT: I would do very well in social sciences. I did also have a very influential fourth grade teacher. In the fourth grade in grammar school I had a teacher named Dorothy Lamm. I had three great teachers in my life; this was the first one. And she taught us about French impressionist paintings. I remember going to exhibits at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts as a result of having my interest peaked in this class. I remember actually doing a project on Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. She also played a recording of Robert Frost reading his poetry.

Q: Oh yes.

SOLOMONT: I developed a great love for Robert Frost and his poetry. To this day I can recite a lesser known poem of his, the recording of which I can remember hearing as a fourth grader. It's about "An ant on a tablecloth - Ran into a dormant moth - Of many times its size - It wasn't the least surprised." Basically, it's about the death and burial of this ant. And the poem is called "Departmental." It ends by saying, "It couldn't be called ungentle - But how thoroughly departmental." Of course, I also learned "Stopping by Woods in a Snowy Evening" and "The Path Not Taken." This was all a result of this wonderful teacher that I had in the fourth grade. And many years later, I was driving Michael Dukakis around to some events in Massachusetts. It was actually when he was preparing to run for president. I was driving him somewhere and while he wasn't napping we chatted. He grew up in Brookline. He went to the same grammar school I did, several years earlier. And we were talking about the Edith C. Baker School, which both of us attended. And I said, "Who was your favorite teacher?"

And he said, "Dorothy Lamm."

So, we had the same fourth grade teacher. When I graduated from high school he was a young state representative in the Massachusetts legislature. But he was the speaker at the high school graduation. One of my very early political campaigns was when he ran for reelection as governor in 1982. He had served as governor in '74 to '78. He'd been defeated in '78, reelected in '82 and again in '86, and then ran for president in '88.

Q: Let's stay at the grammar school level first. The Boston area is fairly well saturated with Irish-Americans. Brookline sort of stands apart. But did you run across Irish Americans? I say this because I'm not from there, but I went to Boston University for my master's.

SOLOMONT: Mm-hmm.

Q: And I was horrified at running across the newly arrived immigrants who were in the same boarding house I was, about the rather strong anti-Semitism. Did you run across any of that?

SOLOMONT: I really didn't, frankly. My early upbringing was in a pretty homogenous Jewish community. At my high school it was pretty homogenous – white and either Jewish or Irish Catholic. Irish Catholic was the predominant ethnicity in my high school. The majority of my friends were Jewish, and I went to Hebrew high school after my regular high school. But I didn't have a lot of personal experience with anti-Semitism. My dad had talked about some of that growing up in Lowell. One manifestation of it was when the Jewish community in Lowell, Massachusetts wanted a cemetery. They weren't allowed to locate it in Lowell, so they built it in Pelham, New Hampshire, just right across the border. And to this day when I visit the graves of my relatives, and my parents and my aunts and uncles, I go to Pelham, New Hampshire to visit them. On the other hand, I know he played on a baseball team or a softball team as a youngster. The team was called the Star of David. And he was very proud that although it was a Jewish team, he had a lot of teammates that were not Jewish. He served in the U.S. Army. He certainly encountered lots of folks of different ethnicities, but didn't have a lot of stories to tell about experiencing anti-Semitism. He and his brothers were Jews, they had both ethnic pride and also a sense that they were trying to be accepted in this new country that their parents had come to. But in any event, I didn't have a lot of exposure to that myself.

Q: As a kid Israel was a new country. Was this a matter of significance to you and your family?

SOLOMONT: It was of great significance to my family, especially my uncle. My father's older brother, whose name is Tai, was probably the first person in our family to visit Israel. And he used to go back frequently. He began to take my brothers to Israel on his trips. However, he never took me to Israel. He didn't start to take his nephews there until I was probably past the age when he would do that – when I was in high school. But he began to go regularly and to develop close friends. He left instructions that he wanted to be buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, which is where he is. I didn't actually go to Israel myself until after I graduated from college. I was certainly conscious of the conflict and the war that broke out in '67, and I remember the Yom Kippur War. But Israel did not loom as large in my life at that time as it later did. It was important to the family, and so it was certainly something that was present as I was growing up.

Q: Politics in Massachusetts, particularly Boston, can be a fairly all-consuming thing. How about for you? I mean did you get involved or aware of the political currents going around?

SOLOMONT: My whole career is extremely linear. I tell people that my career is a series of jobs for which I was totally unprepared, from being a businessman, to a diplomat, to now, upcoming, a dean. But the one continuous thread was politics. I went off to college from ’66 to ’70, and, at some point during my early collegiate years, we got very politicized – by on-campus activities, opposition to the Vietnam War, and civil rights struggles. In many respects I traded religion for politics. In retrospect, I have felt that I found more meaningful expression for the values that I had been taught and that I grew up with in politics than I did in religion at that point. My religious training and experiences were grounded primarily in following my father’s instructions, wanting to please him. But when I was free from that, I didn’t have the same attraction to religious observance. I became very much involved in political issues. They began to take on the same strong beliefs that I had seen in religious experience growing up.

Q: How did you view the Democratic Party? I mean, I would assume you would go for the Democratic Party, but maybe I’m wrong.

SOLOMONT: I didn’t go off to college with a very sophisticated understanding of politics. I went to Tufts University. Not on the other side of the world from where I grew up, but in some respects maybe it might have been. What excited me was the whole idea of taking control of your own life. The very first political issue that I recall being involved in as a college student was an on-campus demonstration to demand the right to have women in our dorm rooms. We had parietal hours, we wanted to abolish them, and there was the whole issue of “in loco parentis” (Latin for “in the place of a parent,” referring to a legal responsibility). In other words, the university was taking the role of parents, and we were fighting that. It wasn’t a big step to go from that to on-campus, and then off-campus, demonstrations against the Vietnam War, and actually over civil rights issues. In those days it wasn’t a matter of following democratic politics. It was really over issues. In the 1968 presidential campaign, I was attracted to anti-war candidates, but I had a very seminal experience with that. I was very interested in Robert Kennedy’s campaign, wanted to try to find a way to work on it, and then he was assassinated. But I had made plans to go to the convention in Chicago. The father of a friend of mine in college knew a state representative. He got us the opportunity to be pages for the Massachusetts Delegation at the National Convention in Chicago. So off we went. I was on the floor of the convention the night that Hubert Humphrey was nominated and defeated Gene McCarthy. We were all McCarthy partisans at that point, and very much sided with forces within the Democratic Party that were opposed to and wanted to end the war.

Separately, I remember being in Florida on spring vacation at the home of a friend’s parents watching the news and seeing Lyndon Johnson make his announcement that he would not seek the nomination and would not run for reelection. So, I’m on the convention floor when Humphrey is nominated. When the convention adjourned, I participated in a demonstration there led by Theodore Bikel. We marched around the hall

and carried a black sash – a sign of mourning over the fact that McCarthy had been defeated. And then that was also the day of the disturbance in Grant Park: the police attacks against anti-war demonstrators. And so, after the convention, there was a candlelight vigil that took place in the stockyards some distance from the center of the city. So, we all got on to buses and went back into the city. Years later, I began to reflect on having been witness to the splitting of the Democratic Party that very night. And in historical terms, it wasn't until 25 years later, with the election of Bill Clinton, that the Democrats actually recaptured the White House. With the exception of Jimmy Carter, which was arguably an aberration following Watergate, the Republicans controlled the White House from 1968 until 1992. I thought that that night on the convention floor was really a watershed moment in American politics, when the Democratic Party fractured before my very eyes. The next time I was in Grant Park was 40 years later on Election Night of 2008. And 1968 was a very emotional experience, because I felt as though I had witnessed this shift of American politics and the beginning of this period of division when metaphorically a cloud had come over the country. And I felt in 2008 on Election Night that I was witnessing a cloud lifting and America coming together around open change and all that. Partly because of watching what happened to Democrats, my politics moved pretty much farther to the left. During the 1970's when I moved to Lowell, Massachusetts as a community organizer, I wasn't all that interested in Democrats or Republicans; I was interested in how we would change America in ways that we felt that the party system had failed.

Q: Well, this disillusionment with the party system, did this mean that in a way you drifted away from the mainstream of the Democratic Party?

SOLOMONT: Oh, absolutely. I mean, just imagine a young kid who grew up in a fairly sheltered middle class Jewish home: leaves home, goes to college, and first experiences the excitement and power of political activity. It wasn't so much disillusionment. It was exciting to be a part of an effort to have an impact on my own community and the world. Being part of politics was a very positive energy. The biggest political issue on campus when I was an undergraduate had to do with the construction of a dormitory that was being built by Volpe Construction.

Q: Oh, Volpe was a big -- what, he was a governor. But oh, later ambassador to --

SOLOMONT: John Volpe later was U.S. Secretary of Transportation [from 1969 to 1973]. His family business was this construction company, and they were building this dormitory at Tufts University. And there were no minority workers on the site. And this was at a time when the issue of the lack of minority members in the construction unions in Boston was a political issue. The African-American students on campus and the white radicals on campus, or the "white lefties," whatever you want to call us, shut the construction site down, occupied the president's office, and demanded that Tufts rectify this injustice. I was a leader in that and I felt very empowered. I remember organizing on campus, talking to students about this and how it was wrong, and insisting that we needed to make a stand. One of the local daily newspapers, the predecessor to The Herald Newspaper was The Record American. It ran a front-page photograph of the occupation

of the Tufts President's office. There are a bunch of African-American students, and, in the outer room of the office there's this white kid sitting on a desk reading the newspaper with a cap on his head, and it was me.

Q: (laughs)

SOLOMONT: Years later I became a trustee at Tufts.

Q: (laughs)

SOLOMONT: I have a copy of the picture, and I bring it to show to students. The first time I ever went to the president's office I went uninvited. There was actually a film clip. This was CBS News. It was a pretty big campus issue. Walter Cronkite did a story on it one night, and it was footage of a meeting that the president was holding with students in the administration building that we were occupying. And this one student gets up and throws this rhetorical question about "Why are you putting profits in front of people?" or something. And that was me. I gave a speech at Tufts this spring, a lecture on citizenship and public service. And a fellow whom I had engaged to help me with the speech did some research on this, because I told the story. He actually found there was a memo in the records about a phone call that I had made to the president's office *(laughs)* giving what the memo said were "suggestions," but were undoubtedly the demands of the students.

Later on, I became very closely connected to Tufts, I taught there, and I'm actually going there in January as a dean of this college. I was having a really new experience of participating actively in something that I had chosen, believed in, and was meaningful to me. When I graduated, I won a Watson Fellowship, which was this great fellowship for independent study and travel. So, I got, what was then in those days, 1970, a lot: $5,000. The only requirement was that I leave the country and travel. I did a lot more independent travel than I did independent study. But that was also a year when the war was continuing, and I encountered lots of politics and young lefties like myself in Europe. I remember watching the Christmas bombings of Vietnam from an apartment in Helsinki. I went to Copenhagen and lived in housing that a group of young people had taken over. They were squatting; basically, we were squatters. We had claimed these vacant tenements for the people. I got increasingly politicized in my travels overseas as well. That's why I made my first trip to Israel, and it was at the end of my travel, the end of about a year. I landed on a kibbutz in the northern part of Israel and picked apples. I found the lifestyle, the sort of socialist organization, to be very attractive. And when I returned to the United States in the fall of '71, I had given up the idea of going to law school. I had actually applied to law school when I was traveling. I got into a couple of schools, and my father had sent a couple of bucks to NYU to save my place. I didn't get back to the United States until November or so, and I lost the opportunity to go to law school. I wanted to do something political in the broad sense. I met these people that were moving to Lowell, Massachusetts to start a community organizing collective. I moved to Lowell. I knew the city from my family roots. And spent the better part of the '70s living in Lowell.

When I was an undergraduate, my teacher was a woman named Antonia "Toni" Chayes, a professor in the Political Science Department. She taught urban studies. And I became very interested. This was a time when cities in America were blowing up and there were riots. I got interested intellectually in what was going on in the United States in its cities, and in the underlying causes of why people were rioting in Boston, Detroit, and Washington, D.C. I got interested as well in things like the "War on Poverty" and efforts to try to deal with this. I've never done many things in my life in any measured way. So, I got fully engaged in studying this. I was part of a group of students that created a group called the "Tufts Student Urban Studies Planning Committee." We got a little money, and I spent the summer of 1969 on campus developing an undergraduate curriculum in urban studies. My interest was not just in city planning, but in teaching students about what was happening in urban communities. We developed a course in community organizing and in urban poverty. It was substantive and exciting intellectually. It had a political bias to it in terms of focusing on these American problems and how we were going to change in order to fix them. I spent my entire senior year writing a senior honors thesis on citizen participation in community health planning. I did a case study on a neighborhood health center in Boston that was being funded by the War on Poverty. I was interested in studying the impact "of maximum feasible participation" and the War on Poverty.

Q: Well, you know, there was a massive problem during your time in Boston about the busing of students. Did you get involved in that?

SOLOMONT: Not really. It was when I was in Lowell. When I was an undergraduate the first African-American, a guy named Thomas Atkins, ran for the Boston City Council. I remember poll watching for his campaign. That might have been one of my first encounters with electoral politics. And significantly, it was on behalf of the first African-American that had ever run for Boston City Council. I don't think he won that year, but later on he did [in 1967]. He also later became President of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in Boston. Busing of students was not something that I focused on. I watched it from a distance because I was living in Lowell by that time and was focused on trying to organize people there around local issues. I was also trying to avoid issues that would divide people on racial grounds. We were trying to build coalitions of foreign workers. I was part of a group of folks who believed that the way to change our country was to do something on a more sustained basis – not just to end the war, but to change the country, and to make it more progressive and responsive to people's needs, et cetera. We moved into working class cities and worked with people around local issues. We helped people become empowered and gain a foothold in the local political structure and have an influence on City Hall. We felt that would begin to create a political movement that would change the country. Other people whose names you would recognize were involved in those. Ira Magaziner was part of an organizing effort in Brockton, Massachusetts. A guy named Miles Rapoport was involved with a group in Lynn, Massachusetts, called the Red Fist. We were not quite so openly ideological. Folks who were doing this work came in different shapes and sizes. Miles later became the Secretary of State in Connecticut. He ran for Congress there,

unsuccessfully, and then he started a progressive NGO called Demos. I was part of all of that.

So, I graduated. I went off to Lowell, and Ira Jackson, a friend from Brookline, went off to Newark, New Jersey, to work for Mayor Kenneth Gibson, a well-known African-American mayor of Newark. Then he came back to Boston and worked for Mayor Kevin White. He was Kevin White's chief of staff and one of my organizing colleagues was Ira's cousin in Lowell. We used to read about Ira Jackson in the newspaper and we despised him. I mean, he was just a symbol because here we were doing the Lord's work and he had sort of sold out. He was working for Kevin White. He was promoting Kevin White as a vice presidential candidate in 1972.

Similarly, John Kerry came to Lowell in 1972 to run for Congress. He had begun to make his reputation with Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He'd appeared before the Senate Committee and he decided he wanted to run for office. He came to the fifth congressional district, which includes Lowell and other working-class cities north of Boston. We had a community newspaper. We tried to connect the dots between the war and the fact that our economy was too dependent on the war in Vietnam. So, Kerry comes to Lowell and we couldn't stand him. I mean our little groups of lefties. To us liberals, liberal Democrats were the worst because we thought they were so hypocritical. We supported John Kerry, sort of, in our newspaper. I used to say to people that Kerry's got Harvard guys running his campaign and he's got working-class kids from Lowell driving him around. One of the guys with whom we were involved was doing all of the printing for the Kerry campaign. We were supportive. We wanted John Kerry to win the congressional seat because he would go to Washington, oppose the war, and do what liberal Democrats do. Even though we really had this underlying disdain for that kind of conventional political route. I met his brother. I remember going to interview him for our newspaper. Years later, I became good friends with John Kerry as I worked my ass off for his 2004 campaign. I actually expected to serve in the Kerry Administration. I didn't get to work with him long when he was U.S. Secretary of State, but we're still friends. I'm actually going to Washington Tuesday because my brother is retiring from the Commerce Department. His best friend, David Thorne, has just returned from Italy where he served as our U.S. Ambassador.

Q: Well, you know, the problem with being a liberal is you're always running across conflicting currents. I mean there's so much discrimination in the world that you almost have to pick your cause. When you were in Israel, the kibbutz, did the case of the Palestinians arise or was this almost a non-issue to an American Jew in Israel at the time?

SOLOMONT: I landed in Israel after traveling for nearly 12 months. I was tired of moving around. I just left a woman with whom I had fallen in love on an island in Greece. I spent almost all of my time in Israel on this kibbutz in the north picking apples and enjoying the person that I had become. I loved the politics of the kibbutz in the sense of the way it was organized around socialist principles. I didn't see much of Israel at all. I had a brother who was studying at the Hebrew University at the time. He was an

undergraduate at Tufts as well. He was spending a year at the university. The biggest traveling I did was going to Jerusalem to visit him and spending part of the Jewish high holidays with him there in 1971. And being at the Western Wall the night that you complete the fast of Yom Kippur. This was '71 now. I think Israel was still considered a light unto the nations in those days. Interestingly, the next time I was in Israel after the summer of 1971, was in October of 1994 when President Bill Clinton, brought a delegation of American Jewish leaders and American Arab leaders with him to Jordan and Israel to be witness to the signing of the peace agreement between Jordan and Israel. He brought a plane full of folks as part of his delegation. We were on the tarmac at Aqaba witnessing the signing of the peace agreement. I have these wonderful pictures --

Q: Oh yes.

SOLOMONT: I've got this wonderful picture of Bill Clinton with Yitzhak Rabin and Hussein bin Talal. The whole group of them are up there around this desk and they were signing the agreement. Then when we went to the Jordanian Parliament, where Clinton addressed the Parliament, I was there with this Orthodox rabbi, Menachem Genack. He was a young American rabbi in the United States. A leader in the Orthodox movement and very close to the Clintons. We had never met, but we had mutual friends that we discovered in the course of this, and I remember walking into the Jordanian Parliament. I put my arm around him, I said, "Menachem, did you ever think you'd see the day when you'd go to the Jordanian Parliament to see how the President of the United States addressed the members?"

Then we flew to Israel and we went with President Clinton to the Knesset, where he addressed the Israeli Parliament, who were much less polite than the Jordanians had been. What reconnected me to Israel, if I was ever connected really, was the peace process. I got very involved in efforts to support President Clinton's efforts to bring peace to the Middle East. At one point after Camp David had collapsed, people were pointing their fingers that summer over who was to blame. Ehud Barak had come to Washington to the White House. And I think Clinton stood up with him and sort of pointed the finger at Yasser Arafat, which infuriated Arafat. But, with the White House's support, at least tacitly, and I think even with some suggestion from the Barak government, a group of about a dozen leaders in the American Jewish community, of which I was part, flew to the region to try to meet with Arafat. We wanted to deliver a message to him and the Palestinians that if the Palestinians would make peace with Israel, the American Jewish community would fully support the new Palestinian state. The thinking was to try to create in their mind the carrot of having American Jews supporting a Palestinian state the way they had supported the Jewish state. We flew to Cairo and met with Hosni Mubarak and with the foreign minister. And we had a meeting with Arafat, which was most frustrating. I mean, he just went on and on to try to prove the point that he was not to blame for the collapse of Camp David and had no interest in hearing our message. And then we met with Ehud Barak in Tel Aviv. This all happened in the course of about 72 hours. I remember leaving and feeling discouraged. I felt one of the two leaders was incapable of making a deal, which was Arafat. And then the other leader, Barak, was

incapable of making a relationship. I mean, it seemed to me the characters of both of the men.

There were efforts in the waning days of the Clinton Presidency to still make something happen. So, Arafat came to Washington at some point in the fall and asked to meet with the group that he had met with in Palestine. So, we were called together, and we went down to Washington. I remember meeting with him again and it wasn't a particularly satisfying meeting then either. And as we were leaving, Saeb Erekat had been in the room. And he said to us, "We stand between you and terrorists." He was trying to impress upon us the importance of getting Israel to negotiate. Because he said, "We stand between Israel and the terrorists." In other words, we're your only hope, other than having to deal with people who were going to blow you up. Which, by the way, is a pretty good analysis of the situation to this day. In any event, he came to Washington but nothing much came of that.

I was actually honored by an organization just literally the week before Clinton left office, January 10th of 2001. An organization I had been active in called the Israel Policy Forum. It was an organization created to support Clinton's efforts to make peace. And they had a big fundraising gala every year and I was the honoree in January of '01. Clinton was the speaker, and he outlined the "Clinton Principles" in his remarks. He had already published them in The New York Times as the base from which he thought peace could be made between Israel and the Palestinians. It was very special to me to have been both present and also a principal at this event. There is a story that some months after Clinton left office, he got a call from Arafat saying he's ready to take the deal that was offered to him *(laughs)*. And Clinton said, "I'm not president anymore." Or something like that.

Q: Yeah.

SOLOMONT: I actually had encountered Clinton after Camp David at an event we had in Boston. He said to me, "Arafat thought he was brought to a gangbang." He was brought kicking and screaming to Camp David. I mean it was Ehud Barak who had really pushed Clinton to host this. None of the preparation necessary to really get something accomplished and get done. He probably wagged a finger and said, "Arafat, thought he was brought to a gangbang."

I have now fully returned to the Democratic Party. That was part of my experience with Israel and with the Middle East.

Q: Yeah, well, we'll come back to that. But something, I know you have to leave fairly soon, but what about -- I mean as you're growing up and up through college, what about your exposure to foreign affairs? How much was this part of your growing up process and all?

SOLOMONT: Zero. Or close to it. When I was in college I had been very much concerned about the war in Vietnam and had followed that. I belonged to a fraternity at

Tufts. After dinner every night we'd go down into the basement of the fraternity where we had a television room, and we'd watch a story of the war in Vietnam unfold on CBS News. We'd watch Walter Cronkite telling us what was going on there. And I don't remember specifically who the correspondents were that were reporting, but they were probably the likes of David Halberstam or whatever. But aside from that, I think you got to pick your spots. And I was going to focus on domestic issues. I was interested in what was happening in American cities. I was interested in what was happening in terms of poverty in America, race relations to some extent. I was interested in change in our country. And aside from taking one course, which was probably a requirement as a freshman at Tufts, it was an introduction to international relations, Political Science 131-132 – I pretty much decided that it was not going to be an area I was going to focus on or learn a lot about. I had my hands full trying to develop expertise in what was happening domestically.

In the political world I looked for issues that were of interest to me: elder care issues, healthcare more broadly. During the Clinton Presidency I followed the healthcare debate and tried to participate in that as well. In the world of politics and policy, my focus was going to be on issues that had to do with Americans at home. I was not going to learn a lot, read about, or focus too much on things that were international. Which is a great irony given where I wound up. And now, I'm going to try to teach about trends in American diplomacy. The introduction to international relations course I took was taught by a professor named Robert Legvold, who was a Russian and Soviet studies expert. He was a young professor in those days and left at some point to head up a big Soviet studies center at Columbia University. I got to be a little bit friendly with him. He never moved out of the Boston area, even when he went to Columbia. He actually stayed active at Tufts as a trustee. So, I served with him at the Board of Trustees at Tufts, and we had an ongoing relationship. He came to Madrid during my tour. He was there for a conference of some sort. And I was hosting a reception. So I invited Bob Legvold to the residence and I made this big deal in my remarks about how my friend, Professor Legvold, was here. And how the very first course that I ever took in international relations I took as a young student from a young professor named Bob Legvold in what was, it was '66, '67. It was almost 40 years earlier *(laughs).*

Q: Yeah.

SOLOMONT: So that answers your question.

Q: Yeah. Just one last question just to pin you down since we're talking on this. How stand you regarding Syria? Because right now it's the question of the moment.

SOLOMONT: I don't have a good answer for it. I understand the president's reluctance to get embroiled in the civil war there on the basis, first of all, of our experience in Libya and even in Egypt in terms of, well, what comes next. He said, I think all the right things as the rebellion of the Assad regime began. But then as it became unclear as to what and who would replace Assad and what forces were leading the rebellion, I understand our reluctance. And this on the heels of ending the war in Iraq and trying to extricate

ourselves responsibly from Afghanistan. Syria is a very complicated place for us. You could compare Syria to Kosovo in '98. After having tried avoiding getting involved, after the massacre at Srebrenica, Clinton – I think they did it with a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) flag, but it was a U.S. driven effort and actually a successful intervention. Ethnic cleansing led mostly to the settling of that conflict. You could argue that this situation is quite similar, but the situation in the Balkans had none of the proceeding complicating factors. And I think the president boxed himself in on his statement about red lines.

Q: Yeah.

SOLOMONT: Because it's sort of forcing his hand. I happen to agree with those who wonder what military intervention will accomplish. If you're not going to try to affect the balance in the conflict, what good will a bunch of cruise missiles do? I guess one of the nice things about being a diplomat is you don't have to make policy.

Q: Yeah.

SOLOMONT: Execute it. I am a big believer in what I think President Obama's trying to do in the world, and how he has in many respects repositioned American diplomacy. But this is a real conundrum. He's in a situation with no good options.

Q: I agree. I served very willingly in Vietnam. I was consul general there back in the late '60s. But this one, I think the thing, quite frankly, but I don't know, my gut feeling is to say, "all right fellas," and get Congress back in.

SOLOMONT: There's a lot to be said. Efforts to put together an international coalition don't seem to be working out very well. I was serving during the Libya operation. And, in fact, Spain participated. You had all the ducks lined up. You had the UN Security Council. You had the Arab League. You had NATO. I mean you really had all the ingredients for an intervention that had the markings of an international consensus of sorts. This happened two years ago. The timing was different, and therefore the context was different. I think there might have been different options. But, of course, the problem with Congress is I don't think he wants to see this politicized.

Q: No. No. Anyway --

SOLOMONT: I also think he has some fundamental beliefs about what the executive powers are.

Q: Today is September 24, 2013. I was playing over the last part of what we'd done, and we ended up talking an awful lot about Syria and Israel and all, and it's kind of off the chronological chart. So, I think we should probably pick it up again when you're getting out of Tufts.

SOLOMONT: Yep.

Q: All right. So you graduated from Tufts when?

SOLOMONT: 1970.

Q: And then what?

SOLOMONT: I got lucky. I won a fellowship, the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship for Independent Study and Travel. Thomas Watson had created this program to give promising students an opportunity to spend a year traveling and studying abroad. It was actually designed for smaller liberal arts colleges and to find students not just with the greatest GPAs. It was not a Rhodes Scholarship. It was to find students who showed some type of promise. And somehow I fooled them into thinking I was such a student.

Q: Is this IBM (International Business Machines)?

SOLOMONT: It's the son of the founder. He had had an experience when he was a student at Brown University that led him to do this. I had really spent a good deal of my years at Tufts focusing on problems of the city, urban studies, poverty in America. I spent my entire senior year working on an honors thesis about the War on Poverty. I had written a proposal that I was going to look at the relationship between universities, cities, and social change. In the fall of '70, off I went to London. And I spent the next 15 months or so wandering around Europe and a little bit in North Africa. I went to the Soviet Union. I finished actually on a kibbutz in Israel. It was a life changing experience because I was this sheltered suburban kid who'd really not traveled a whole lot in this country or outside of this country and never had lived that far away from home. And all of a sudden, I had enough money in my pocket to buy a Volkswagen bus, a Nikkormat camera, and an Olivetti 32 – the typewriter that foreign correspondents used.

I did more independent travel than study. It was really much more of a personal liberation, and it was kind of like all of my connections and roots and anchors were cut. And I read a lot. I spent a lot of time in London. I drove a Volkswagen bus from London to Marrakesh. I spent a lot of time in Paris. I spent the spring of '71 in Paris imagining that I was hobnobbing with Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. I don't know if you saw the Woody Allen movie.

Q: Oh yes.

SOLOMONT: "Midnight in Paris." That was my story without the girlfriend *(laughs).*

Q: (laughs) Well (laughs).

SOLOMONT: Later on actually I felt in love with a Danish woman. We drove my bus from Copenhagen to Athens, down the Dalmatian Coast, when Yugoslavia was still Yugoslavia, and wound up in Athens. I sold the bus, bought a tent, lived on the Island of Ios for several weeks.

Q: When was this? What year was this?

SOLOMONT: I left in the fall of ’70 and I came back to the United States in November of ’71.

Q: Yeah, so you were in my consular district when I was in Athens. I was consul general there.

SOLOMONT: When I was in Paris I was encouraged to visit the ambassador, Ambassador Watson. I’d never been on my own that way. It was not easy all the time. But I got to think a lot about the world and my politics began to be more and more important to me. Politics in the big sense.

I lived in a commune. Well, actually, with a group of young people in Denmark who were squatters. They had taken over a vacant tenement building and were living rent-free because housing should be a common right. I was certainly exposed to a lot of revolution that was taking place: cultural, political, sexual. It was eye-opening where all my senses were exposed to new things. I did spend about three weeks in Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg, Russia).

I also spent a bit of time in Spain. As we were driving from London to Marrakesh we stopped in Madrid for about a week or so. It was Christmas/New Years of ’70, ’71. And it was the first time I had been to Spain. And when I went back as ambassador it was only the third time. I had gone to the Olympics in Barcelona. So it was an interesting connection. And I used to talk when I was ambassador about the Spain that I saw in the ‘70s. It was a very poor country. I was with a buddy, we had a friend from Tufts, a graduate student at Fletcher who was married to a Spanish woman from Madrid and we sort of stayed with their family. And I remember at night we would have dinner very late, like it still is. And it was sort of middle class -- I mean it wasn’t a poor family, but we would sit around a table because there was no central heat, with a blanket over the table that was the tablecloth and there was a heater underneath. And that’s how we kept warm. It happened to have been a very cold winter that year. They took me out to a cousin’s farm outside of Toledo, slaughtered a lamb on our behalf, and made blood sausage before our eyes. That short picture I got of Spain in that time. The Guardia Civil (Spanish Civil Guard) struck fear. Nowadays they are there to help secure the country, but in those days they were Francisco Franco’s police. I celebrated New Year’s Eve in ’71 in Puerta del Sol (a public square in Madrid), and Franco came to the window of the building that is now the seat of the regional government. I spent that year reading existential philosophy, reading Marx and Lenin, reading Hemmingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, seeing the world in a way that I’d never seen before. I wound up first on a beach in the Aegean Sea in Ios with this Danish woman I had fallen in love with. I’d been traveling for a whole year at this point and I went to Israel and lived on a kibbutz in the north. And just really was intrigued with this collective political model. That was very appealing to a young man who was looking for a better way of organizing society than what he had left back at home.

Q: Well now, you said you were in Leningrad for a while.

SOLOMONT: Yep.

Q: Did you pick up any feeling for how that system worked?

SOLOMONT: Yeah, it was awful. I had been a bit of a student of the Russian Revolution. It was something else to go into October Square and the palaces that had been converted now to museums. But I hung out in a university, and I met a bunch of young people. One of them said to me he was a young student, married. I said, "Are you going to have children?"

And he said, "No, I don't want to bring another sheep into the world."

Q: Ooh.

SOLOMONT: So I mean that was hardly a model.

Q: Yeah.

SOLOMONT: I knew my history well enough to know that this wasn't what some of the idealists had imagined. Although admittedly, I was still young and impressionable. The model I saw in Israel of a kibbutz was something much more appealing that thrived in a democracy. It was a very successful kibbutz, well-to-do. I mean it had a nice swimming pool. And I picked apples for several months. While I was away my father, God bless him, who had always wanted me to go to law school, had encouraged me to apply to law school. So I gave Harvard University the opportunity to reject me for a second time. And I was admitted to NYU (New York University) Law School. And he even sent my $100 deposit in to secure my place. But I didn't bother to come back to the States until November. But I wanted to do something that would help change my country. I found a storefront in Cambridge called Vocations for Social Change. And there was a little note on the bulletin board that said, "We are moving to Lowell, Massachusetts to start an organizing collective. If you're interested in joining us, call Ira and Debbie." So I called Ira and Debbie.

Ira was a recently graduated PhD in Physics from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) who had been very involved in anti-war politics. He had a very good friend who had started a similar collective in Lynn, Massachusetts. By huge coincidence, Debbie was a classmate of mine from Brookline High School. I knew Lowell because that's where my father and his family were from and where I still had relatives. So I took my mattress off the floor of my parents' basement and moved to Lowell. There were four of us: Debbie and Ira, a graduate student from MIT in pure mathematics – a crazy guy named Stuart Mendel, and me. We shared a one-and-a-half-bedroom apartment in this deteriorating building. The basis of our organizing efforts was trying to relate to the local issues in the city that were affecting communities.

For example, there was a proposed highway that would go through this neighborhood of Portuguese immigrants – all of whom were homeowners who had come here and built these homes along the Concord River. They were the kind of solid, working-class people that were growing grapes and making wine in their backyards. And the Chamber of Commerce and the banks were going to connect one of the interstate highways to downtown Lowell. That was our first organizing issue. It was called "Stop the Connector." It was an interesting political time in Lowell. Paul Tsongas was a city councilor. John Kerry would come to Lowell in 1972 and run for Congress. And so we started by opposing this highway, and we won actually. We published a community newspaper called The Communicator. We started a food cooperative. We organized around rent control. We did a lot of stuff on housing and helping tenants learn their rights. And we had raised a little bit of money from what we called "the rich liberals from New York," but it ran out.

We were trying to relate to working people, so it made sense to get a job. I went to a nursing home run by the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa (Grey Nuns of the Cross). It was a big non-profit nursing home called D'Youville Manor, and I got a job as an "orderly" – that was the name in those days for nursing assistant. And in 1972, President Nixon imposed wage price controls. So, the sisters announced to the workers that, unfortunately, they weren't going to be able to give us raises. I was making $2.33 cents an hour. I actually read the legislation and there was an exemption for low-wage workers.

Q: Ah.

SOLOMONT: I started a union organizing campaign, which was actually quite exhilarating in some respects. I was connected with the Union 11-99, which was a very successful union of healthcare workers out of New York City. It would have been started by pharmacists, but it had spread to include mostly minority service workers in the healthcare industry in New York hospitals. Years later it merged with SEIU (Service Employees International Union). It really was a very powerful experience. My coworkers were putting their jobs on the line by organizing themselves. This took a lot of courage and they were really risking a lot.

Q: Well --

SOLOMONT: At some point they fired me. There was a trumped-up charge of smoking a cigarette in the bathroom. And they got rid of me, and that frankly killed the organizing campaign. But I really enjoyed taking care of seniors. I had these disabled men who were very impaired. I would help them wash, dress, and go to the toilet. I really got a lot of satisfaction out of doing this. I needed a job to pay the rent, but I wanted to continue doing political organizing. So I went around looking for nursing programs to enroll in. I went to one community college, and when they told me I have to shave my beard, I walked out of the interview. I met the chairman of the nursing department at the university. At that time, it was known as Lowell State College before it merged [in 1975] with Lowell Technological Institute to become the University of Lowell, which was part

of the UMASS (University of Massachusetts) state system; Years later I became the chairman of the board. So I met the chairman of the department who said, "You've got to get a baccalaureate degree, you've got to come here, you've already been to college, you can do it in three years." I thought I could continue doing full-time organizing and do this nursing degree on the side. And it turned out it was a lot more rigorous. But I really loved it, intellectually. I was also a 28, 29-year-old male with active hormones in school with 19 and 20-year-old females -- who had equally active hormones. It was quite an experience in many respects.

Q: Well, I'm interested in your activities at the first nursing home, which was run by nuns.

SOLOMONT: Mm-hmm.

Q: And yet it sounds like they were trying to pull a fast one on you, you know, misreading regulations or --

SOLOMONT: Well, years later I got to be in their shoes. I became a manager and owner of nursing homes. I don't know if they read the legislation either. You know, there's not a lot of resources that society allocates. The people who work nursing homes are basically poor women. And the people they're taking care of are, by and large, poor women. There's a matter of public policy and social allocation. We neglected that sector for many years. It's gotten a lot better. In the early '70s, most people went to nursing homes because they didn't have families to take care of them. It wasn't that families were dumping them. These were people who either outlived their adult children or never married. There was an unusual number of schoolteachers in the nursing homes in the '70s and '80s in Massachusetts. I finally figured out that married women were not allowed to be schoolteachers in Massachusetts up until some point. So these were women who never married. And because they were never married they didn't have immediate family. If they got disabled in any way, or frail, they wound up in nursing homes. In those days, of course, I said, "This religious order –how hypocritical."

There were organizing efforts like this in working-class cities throughout Massachusetts, and we were sort of a loose network. We were all guided by a similar approach: that if we could help poor and working-class Americans realize the power of collective citizen action around issues that really affected their daily lives -- housing, workplace issues, et cetera, that they could gain a foothold in their local city hall. Then they could gain a foothold in their state houses, and eventually transform America and make it a much more just society. We were all working with the same idea. We – who had been products of anti-war politics and universities – needed to talk to regular folks and to try to help people realize the benefits of working together to change their society. I suppose that that is a thread in my life that has continued to this day.

So off I went to nursing school. I actually really loved it intellectually and socially. I really threw myself into it. I graduated with a 4.0 *(laughs).* I was really pretty good at it. I slowly developed other interests besides political ones. I got very interested in mental

health issues. At one point I wanted to be a male midwife. My mother was a nurse. So I'm sure there was a Freudian component to this. And that played itself out as you'll hear. I had gone back to the city where my father had been born, where he was a businessman. And what was his business? He owned nursing homes. He owned one or two, and at one point I even made an attempt to organize his workers.

Q: Oh-oh.

SOLOMONT: So this was a political excursion and also a Freudian one. I really enjoyed the nursing school experience. I think it broadened me in ways. I'd never been exposed to much science. So then I was approaching graduation and I really had no idea what I was going to do. I was looking into taking premed courses over the summer and going to medical school. I was actually very interested in psychoactive educations. I was talking to a psychopharmacologist at Boston State Hospital who was doing a lot of research into the effect of psychoactive medication. In those days the Haldols (Haloperidols), the Thorazines. But I'd gotten interested in the neuroscience.

My father had always held out the hope I would join him in business. I don't think he ever quite grasped how far away from that *(laughs)* I had drifted. We weren't a wealthy family, but we had a few bucks and put me through college. And I had some money and a trust fund, I mean some bank stocks. Not a lot of money, but I vested myself. I insisted he give it to my brothers. I used to go home for Friday night Shabbat (Sabbath) dinners. As I left to hitchhike back to Lowell, my mother would put 10 bucks in my pocket because I was living on -- in fact, at one time I was collecting food stamps. When I was fired I collected unemployment insurance. I was living the way millions of Americans live. I had a girlfriend in those days who was a nursing assistant. She was a working class kid from Dracut, Massachusetts who used to say to me, "You are crazy *(laughs).* You are so nuts. What are you doing this for? You could be working, you could live comfortably." I lived in a 23-dollar a week third floor walk-up tenement by the river in Lowell. So that was while I was in nursing school.

But as I was approaching graduation I was beginning to confront the fact that I had no plan for the future. My old friends from college were lawyers or doctors. They had enough money to buy a car and they had a few suits hanging in their closets. None of them owned houses yet, but I had really nothing. And I went to hear Elisabeth Kübler-Ross give a talk on death and dying to nursing students at Salem State College. We all have memories that just stick to us like glue. And I remember going to hear Elisabeth-Kübler-Ross. I was interested in death and dying as part of nursing. I'd gone to the first or second convention of the National Hospice Association back in '76 or so. And Elisabeth Kübler-Ross got up there and said, "If I owned nursing homes I would put childcare centers in them."

And I was driving back to Lowell from Salem on Route 495 in my Opel Kadett. And I had this epiphany. I could go to work for my father. He was building a nursing home in North Andover. I think he owned two others and this was his third. He had no company. His health wasn't great. He was very anxious about who was going to run it. I think he

was clinically depressed. I never severed my relationship with my parents even though I did things that were a little bit outrageous or acting out. And he had been saying, "Why don't you come run this nursing home for me?"

And I didn't know the first thing about business and I had not the least bit of interest. But on this trip back from Salem to Lowell, thinking about what I'd just heard, I had a life changing epiphany. I said, "You know, I could do that. And why are you such a schmuck? You know that you could actually put this into practice and wouldn't that be a really good thing to do?"

So my father said, "You can do it your way as long as you don't lose my shirt," *(laughs).*

So in the summer of 1977, we had this nursing home, which was later named Prescott House in North Andover. It was still under construction. I took a course. I became a nursing home administrator and I went into business. On December 14th of 1977 we opened this nursing home. It was actually quite lovely, and for the next eight years that's what I did; I ran this nursing home. I had a golden retriever who had accompanied me from my organizing days through my three years at nursing school, and now who came to work with me every day. And I really loved the work. I loved the idea of taking care of old people and helping families who were struggling with the problem of aging relatives. And I made a few bucks. I didn't have any training in business, but I've always been fortunate to surround myself with people who are much smarter than I am. I've told people my career is a series of jobs for which I was totally unprepared. Totally unprepared for this job, but I had some very good people I was lucky enough to hire early on, nursing director, et cetera.

Q: Well, one of the questions -- I'm in an old folks home myself now with my wife.

SOLOMONT: Really?

Q: Yeah. I was wondering, how did you manage buying food? I mean this was quite an art.

SOLOMONT: I hired a very talented chef. I had a bad experience with him because he turned out to be an alcoholic, we kept giving him second chances, and he kept blowing it. But I hired people who did things. Believe me, I didn't know the first thing about this business. But I hired a woman who had been the director of nursing at the local hospital, Lawrence General Hospital. I work hard; I have good instincts; I'm smart; I know what I don't know; I don't mind relying on people that know more than I do; I'm a big believer in relationships, the power of interpersonal relationships. That's what I'm good at. And I was pretty damn successful running this nursing home. I enjoyed it. But at some point I wanted more. So I decided I wanted to expand beyond the single nursing home. I had started to actually take over the management of the other nursing homes my dad owned. He was getting along and I discovered an opportunity to help both hospitals and non-profit organizations who wanted to be involved in elder care, but for whom it was not their primary business. The elderly population was beginning to grow. We're talking

mid-eighties. And hospitals were beginning to want to build nursing homes in their backyard. They were starting to have a backup of patients who came in for fractured hip and they got repaired. And then there's no place for them to go. And they can't go home. I started to bid on some projects. I started to do these joint ventures with a couple of hospitals. And one of which was Tufts New England Medical Center, the Tufts University teaching hospital. I made an agreement with them to do a three-way joint venture, build a big nursing home on the campus of this hospital in Medford. So it was Tufts -- it was this teaching hospital, this community hospital, and my little company. The person at New England Medical Center who was managing this for the CEO (chief executive officer) was a woman named Susan Bailes. So now I'm growing their company. I've got a couple of nursing homes I'm managing north of Boston, North Andover and Lowell. I've got a couple of joint ventures with hospitals to build new nursing homes. I mean it was basically me *(laughs)*, and I needed to start growing a company. I was looking around for somebody who could help me run the company. I was doing a search, interviewing people, and I couldn't find the right person. I once called somebody for a reference on a nursing home administrator. This guy said to me -- and this is I think indicative of where the industry was in those days, "He's like most nursing home administrators. He teeters on the edge of mediocrity."

So, I'm trying to hire somebody and then one day I had this epiphany. Well, I said to Susan Bailes as we were planning this 220-bed nursing home project, "Would you like to come work with me?"

And so she joined me as president of the company. I was the CEO. I mean I was the outside guy, she was the manager. Over the next 20 years from the mid '80s to the mid '90s we built a really cool company. It was called the ADS Group -- those are my initials -- and we owned and managed nursing homes, rehab facilities, assisted living facilities, senior houses, and homecare. We did consulting, we fixed broken nursing homes. At one time we were doing business with probably half of the hospitals in Massachusetts. I think at one time we were managing maybe 5,000 beds and employing about that number of people. We were managing revenues of probably 300 million dollars. Now, we didn't own it all. We did more management. We weren't highly capitalized. It was a great company, it was very innovative. It was well managed. I learned that there's a marketplace, and if you're going to succeed you have to deal with the market. We treated people well and we were a good place to work, and we invested in the communities where we were operating.

A couple things happened. First of all, I got the opportunity to do policy. I started selling $50 tickets to events at the Red Tavern Inn in Methuen, Massachusetts for a state senator named Sharon Pollard. I met a 26-year-old kid who was the cousin of my nursing director named Jim Shannon who was going to run for Congress. And I gave him 100 bucks, which was a lot of money for him and a lot of money for me, and he won. And he was one of Tip O'Neil's golden boys in the class of 1978. The district was Lowell, Massachusetts, Lawrence, Massachusetts. It was these working-class cities in the what we call the Merrimack Valley. There was a big open Democratic primary, and this kid managed to win the primary and then get elected. This was a seat that would later be held

by Paul Tsongas. It had been held by the Republicans before '72. Kerry ran for it and lost to a congressman named Paul Cronin who had one of the least distinguished Congressional careers in history. He served for one term. Then Paul Tsongas won the seat in 1974. In 1978, Paul announced he was running against Ed Brooke for the Senate, and that opened up that seat. So that's when Jim Shannon ran for the House.

I started realizing that I could participate in politics if I was willing to ask people for money. I started a career that lasted from 1978 to 2008, basically as a political fundraiser. I started selling $50 tickets. In 1996 and '97 I was collecting $100,000 contributions from people who wanted to sit at dinners next to Bill Clinton. My business frankly was the platform – it gave me the wherewithal to do that. It also gave me the opportunity to weigh in on policy. I wound up becoming the President of the Nursing Home Association in Massachusetts and forged a really interesting relationship with the administration of Governor Michael Dukakis. I did some really good things between the public and private sectors. I used to say that when I first went to see people in the Dukakis administration, they had an image of nursing home owners. So, they used to check me out for white shoes and gold chains. And my friends in the nursing home business all wondered what I was doing with these liberal politicians. But we really created a bridge between the private sector and the public sector, and it was exhilarating to be a real player in the policy side of healthcare in Massachusetts. So that was another outgrowth of my business. I started to be able to be philanthropic and started to be able to do a variety of things that mattered to me. Along the way, I got married in 1984; so I started to do things that mattered to me and my wife. I was never all that interested in business per se. But this company that I was able to grow with this partner, who really was the one that managed it, gave me the opportunity to do things that I really was passionate about. I was passionate about the work we were giving to families and seniors. The business side of business didn't really excite me. But politics, philanthropy, and the policy all excited me. It was my good fortune to have this platform with which to do things that really mattered to me.

Q: Well, before we leave the nursing home situation, how did you find regulations during that period?

SOLOMONT: *(laughs)* Awful. We were a very highly regulated industry. As I said, I got very involved in the state association. I think my biggest success is I put an entirely different face on the nursing home industry. One of my partners in this -- not business partners, but in the work that we did -- was Barney Frank's mother, Elsie Frank, who is the head of the Massachusetts Association of Older Americans. That was the lobby group for seniors. Typically nursing home owners and senior citizen groups do not get along. Butt Elsie and I campaigned together to get adequate funding. The regulatory arm I found to be heavy handed and didn't result in meeting its goal, which was to maintain and improve quality.

Q: Well, you know, I got a master's from Boston University and I graduated from Williams. So I've had some Massachusetts experience. I would think that the nursing home regulations and people doing this would be filled with graft and all sorts of stuff.

SOLOMONT: There was no more graft in the nursing homes than elsewhere. I mean the people in the nursing home industry were no better or worse than people in other fields. Sometimes I think they were a little better because they were actually making their living from doing good things and providing a good service for people. And that can be humanizing. On the other hand, we were working with the crumbs on the table of healthcare and it was very frustrating. People on the one hand would criticize bad quality, and there was a lot of it. On the other hand, they wouldn't pay. We used to say they wanted champagne services on a beer budget.

Q: Yeah.

SOLOMONT: We had bad actors, but during the time I was in the industry there were no major scandals. There were a lot more scandals in public procurement. There was a big scandal around the construction of the University of Massachusetts. We ran a really good company, I was proud of it. It wasn't perfect, but we actually, I think, contributed significantly to upgrading not just the image, but the practice in Massachusetts. And as I said, I developed a very good working relationship with the Dukakis Administration. I mentioned I started to become a fundraiser. I started with a state senator, a local congressman. And then Michael Dukakis had been governor from '74 to '78. He had then been defeated in a Democratic primary by a conservative Democrat named Ed King in '78. Michael ran for reelection in '82. Michael lost in '78 because he was arrogant and pissed a lot of people off. He learned a lot from losing. One of the groups he pissed off was Health and Human Service Providers. So when he ran for reelection in '82 there was a state representative who reached out to Health and Human Service Providers to try to build some bridges and get them involved. And I was just a sitting duck. So I got very involved in the '82 campaign for Dukakis. We won, and that gave me the contacts to begin to talk about elder care policy. Then he ran for president in 1988. That was the first time there was a group of us who were Dukakis people.

Michael was an inspiration to me and my generation the way Kennedy was an inspiration to people of his generation. He really demonstrated the importance and the value of public service. There was a whole generation of young people who got involved in government through Michael Dukakis because they really believed it was a noble undertaking. And that was certainly something that happened to me. So then, he runs for president and now we have a taste of the national stage. It was pretty seductive. My dad died during that campaign, but he used to marvel at the fact that his son was actually supporting a man who was running for President of the United States who actually knew his son's name. One of Michael Dukakis' chief fundraisers, a guy named Bob Farmer, in 1991 started raising money for a governor from Little Rock. I was a Tsongas supporter in '91 because I knew Paul Tsongas. However, I didn't think he was going to be President of the United States, so I made some contacts in the Clinton campaign. I learned an important lesson in politics that I used to teach my students: the most exciting experience in American politics is a presidential campaign, except for one thing – a winning presidential campaign.

Q: Uh-huh.

SOLOMONT: So, in ’88, we got a taste of it. ’92 we won. And all of a sudden I knew the guy in the Oval Office. It was because I was still raising money. I remember going to the inauguration. I got involved in the Democratic National Committee. A young guy, an up-and-coming leader in the DNC (Democratic National Committee) – who had not been a Clinton guy, who had been a Dick Gephardt guy, who of course didn’t run in ’92, named Terry McAuliffe – saw me and saw a live one. I became, in some respects, a bit of a protégé of Terry. He and I are quite different personalities. His claim to fame was he was Bill Clinton’s best friend in the White House. Terry’s first job in the DNC in ’93 was chairman of something called the Business Leadership Forum, the BLF. He went from that to being the financier of the DNC and I became the Chairman of the Business Leadership Forum. And then when the reelection happened in ’96, Terry went over to the campaign to be the financier. I just took on increasing responsibility. ’96 was my first really national role. I was running this business leadership forum or democratic business council during the president’s reelection campaign. So we were raising money. When the election was over there was a lot of criticisms leveled against the party for the money that it raised. But it got the guy reelected. In January of 1996 you wouldn’t have thought that Bill Clinton could be reelected dogcatcher. I mean Time Magazine had had him on the cover as, “Is the president relevant?” He came to Boston on January 31st of 1996, and we raised a million dollars for him. It was one of the few places he could still go to. I think that helped establish my national credentials. Then I was raising money during the campaign for people who could contribute $10,000 and $15,000. There were the coffees for $50,000. I raised a lot of money. I used to have Clinton’s time for these dinners for the Democratic Business Council. I used to introduce him at these dinners, and he would come up and give me a squeeze, whisper in my ear, “I love you,” *(laughs)*. It was just a very heady time.

When the election was over, the party sort of imploded. I was one of the few national fundraisers that wasn’t painted by some of the accusations, although eventually I got subpoenaed. I once said to somebody in the White House, “Does the president know I got a subpoena?”

And he said, “You’re nothing in this administration if you don’t get a subpoena.”

Q: (laughs)

SOLOMONT: But I became the national financier of the Democratic Party after the election of ’96, so ’97, ’98. Back home, my business had gotten very successful. I was now competing with much larger publicly owned companies with a lot more capital. We wanted to grow the business. I was looking around for some type of financial or strategic alliance. I wasn’t real sophisticated about it. I think if I had been smarter and better advised I would have found something. But I couldn’t find the right deal to do something that would lead to taking my own company public.

But I had a good friend who was in the nursing business. He, like me, the product of an Orthodox Jewish home whose family had been in the business. My brother introduced me to him because they both ran around together as part of these young Orthodox Jewish college students in New York City some years before. His name was Daniel Strauss, and we were friends. He had taken his nursing home company public. I used to say to him, "If I wasn't doing so much politics and had been doing as much business as you were, I might have bought your company instead of you buying my company."

Daniel came to visit us at our summer home in Truro. He used to be proud of the fact that -- he said he was the youngest CEO of a New York Stock Exchange company. I mean he was in his thirties in those days. But he had built up a pretty substantial publicly traded company. I was actually on his board. I was telling him I couldn't seem to find the right deal. I really wanted to grow my business. He literally took an envelope out and said, "What do you revenue?" So I merged my business, with MultiCare. I mean, I really sold it. I became the vice chairman of the board. I had 17 shareholders of my company that were all family members. So even though we sold the business for about 100 million dollars, everybody thought I put that in my pocket. I made enough money so that it made me financially secure, but everything in life is relative. I then went off to Washington to be the national finance chair of the party. For the next year or so I used to commute to Washington. I'd take a six p.m. shuttle on Monday mornings and come back Friday. And quite separate from this, a very dear friend of mine named Steve Grossman became the chairman of the party. He's now State Treasurer of Massachusetts; he's running for governor. So we had these two Jewish business guys from Massachusetts who were the chairman and financier of the DNC.

Q: Just to go back a bit, what was your wife's background?

SOLOMONT: My wife grew up in Brooklyn. I like to tell people that most girls want to marry their fathers. My wife, unfortunately, married her mother. She grew up in Brooklyn – large extended family. Her mother was very active in the public school system in New York. She actually was the head of the Parents' Association in the '60s during the struggles over community control. She was hobnobbing with Mayor Lindsay and representing parents' interests. She was a fierce believer in public education, so she kept Susan in public schools in Brooklyn. When Susan had gone off to college her parents moved out to Great Neck, which is where they were when I met Susan. Anyway, Susan got out of Cornell in '78 or so, I think probably around the time I was getting out of nursing school. She was a ski bum for a year. She's a follower of the Grateful Dead.

Q: The who?

SOLOMONT: They're a rock band from San Francisco. She's a "Dead Head" *(laughs)*. To this day she listens to Grateful Dead music all the time. So she was a ski bum for a year and then she went out to San Francisco and worked in a record store. She then wanted to come back east, and she came east and settled in Boston. She went to graduate school at Tufts in early child development. So she got a master's degree in education. Along the way, a friend of hers, whom she had met in San Francisco, had also moved to

Boston, and was dating a friend of mine. And this couple, Jamie and Jeff, took Susan under their wing when she moved to Boston. They used to take her everywhere with them. But one night they were coming to my house for dinner and they didn't invite Susan. She said, "How come you're not bringing me to meet this friend of yours?"

And they said, "Oh, you wouldn't like him. He's a flash in the pan."

Q: (laughs)

SOLOMONT: They had an engagement party on Super Bowl Sunday in 1980. My friend lived in Andover. I went to the engagement party, Susan was there, and that's really where we met. We started dating and then got married four years later. She worked at WGBH. She fell into a career in fundraising. After graduate school she got a job as a producer of a children's radio show at the Public Television and Radio Station, Boston WGBH, called "The Spider's Web." When "The Spider's Web" lost its funding she got a job there in development. She spent 15 years there and wound up the director of corporate development at the public television station. She left that job around the time I sold my business, just because I think she wanted a change. She did some consulting for a while. Then she joined a non-profit organization called the Philanthropic Initiative that advises corporations, individuals, and foundations on strategic philanthropy. And that's what she did for the years preceding our move to Madrid. She worked part-time, but she had a portfolio of big family foundations that she advised in terms of how to use their philanthropy for maximum impact.

Q: When you were in campaign financing and all, what was the field like? I say this as someone, back when I was consul general in Athens I found myself serving a subpoena on Tom Pappas, who was involved with Nixon's Committee to Reelect the President (CRP).

SOLOMONT: Right.

Q: And as I was a peripheral character, just exercising my subpoena powers --

SOLOMONT: Right. So as a result of that, the campaign finance laws were reformed in requiring disclosure, putting limits on what individuals could give, outlawing corporate contributions, much of which has been reversed by the recent Supreme Court decision. We operated under somewhat strict rules. We had soft money, which went to the party. During my tenure the biggest checks we usually collected were $100,000. But, everything was disclosed. In the 1980's and '90s, the primary vehicle for running campaigns was paid television advertising. That's what fueled the need for so much money. It was the era of the 30-second commercial. I mentioned earlier, Clinton was unelectable as dogcatcher in December of '95. A brilliant political operator named Harold Ickes was deputy chief of staff at the White House. He initiated an effort through the Democratic Party to raise $50 million to go on television against the Republicans' Contract for America. His idea to fight back against the criticism and the irrelevance was for the president to point out to Americans what Newt Gingrich's "contract" really would do to healthcare, education, and job training. So, he went out and raised this money for

the party – because you can only give $1,000 to the candidate but a lot more to the party. It was not unlimited, and although there were ceilings, he raised the $50 million. If you look at the television buy that the party made and follow that over the next several months and compare it on a graph over the same period with the president's approval rating: the two lines move in parallel. As the party continued to advertise this message on television, the president's approval rating went up. It's a remarkable representation of what was happening politically. So guys like me who were willing to raise money became really important. Arguably much more important than we deserved *(laughs)*. But we were the key to the political prospects of candidates. It's not a very glamorous business. When I was financing, I used to spend days, *days*, in a windowless conference room with a couple of telephones calling perspective donors, leaving voicemail messages, and talking to assistants. I used to describe it as farming. I'd go out into the field, spread the seed, add some water and manure, and then I would wait to see what would sprout *(laughs)*. That was what we did.

There were a lot of good people who believed in what Bill Clinton was trying to do for America, and who were motivated enough by their ideals and beliefs to give us money. There was a lot of ego involved. The Clintons ran a certain kind of White House, and it was pretty heady to be able to hobnob with the president. I'm sitting in my office at home and I'm looking at a picture of President Clinton and me golfing. He's helping me correct my grip. And he says, "To Alan, with thanks. To always helping me keep my grip. Turnaround is fair play. Bill Clinton." I'd never been to the White House *in my life* until I went there as a guest of the president. They opened the doors of the White House to their supporters. We used to call the South Lawn "America's backyard." And I got a front row seat for eight years of the American president. Aside from the thrill of it and the excitement and the feeling of doing good, it was a fascinating opportunity to see the most interesting government institution in the world. I really got to understand the White House, and it was a good education for me. I was a fundraiser, but I wanted to be part of the policy conversation.

So I tried my best to insert myself into the healthcare reform conversation. It was not easy. First Lady Hillary Clinton and Ira Magaziner provide an interesting example. I tried to replicate what I did in the nursing home industry in Massachusetts on a national level. I tried to convince the National Nursing Home Association that we had a lot more in common with the Democrats. We really ought to be more supportive to Democrats because they controlled the purse strings and the Republicans wanted to cut our funding. But all that my colleagues could see was the heavy hand of nursing home regulation. It was a constant battle for me. I used to lobby Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala. I tried to convince her to be more reasonable on the regulatory side – especially in the lead-up to the reelection – so that we could appeal more to this industry for support. And somebody once said that the way Donna Shalala does business is first to knock you down *(laughs)*, so you know who is in charge, and then she'll talk to you. I never had much success there. I sold my business at the end of '96.

Q: Yeah.

SOLOMONT: December of ’96. It was before I went to Washington as the financier. In October of ’97 Wall Street was in love with the sector. There were all these national consolidations. A bigger company came and made a huge offer for MultiCare, $1.6 billion. I still had enough “skin in the game,” so I got another hit. So we sold the business. Within 18 months of that time, 10 out of the 11 publicly traded nursing home companies were in bankruptcy. The industry imploded. Most people in the industry blame Bill Clinton for the Balanced Budget Act of ’97 that cut Medicare spending and blamed him for the demise of their industry. And they blamed me for my association with Bill Clinton. After the Balanced Budget Act was passed, some of the healthcare providers that were damaged by it were trying to get some of the damage mitigated. And I got a call in 1998 from Bob Torricelli, who was a senator from New Jersey at the time and was head of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. He said, “We want to come to Boston with President Clinton and with Dick Gephardt for a joint fundraiser for the DSCC (Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee) and the DNC and the D-triple C (Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee). Would you host it at your home?”

I said, “How much do you need to raise.”

And he said, “We want to raise $800,000.”

I said, “I’ll tell you what. You raise half of it -- and I’ll take the other half and I’ll raise it among nursing home providers. I’ll charge them $20,000 a couple, and then I’ll get 20 of them.” Tom Daschle was coming. He was Senate majority leader. “I want to have a meeting with Gephardt, Daschle, and Clinton to talk about the damage that the Balanced Budget Act did to see if we can’t make some repairs in it.” So he said OK, and that was the deal we cut. So we had this big dinner in my backyard in Weston, Massachusetts. It poured that night and actually the tent leaked *(laughs)* right on Bill Clinton and my mother-in-law. Daschle was there, Gephardt was there, Clinton was there, Torricelli was there. It was the night that NATO (North American Treaty Organization) started bombing Serbia. And so there were actually demonstrators outside my house that were opposing that. I mean it was a real kick to host the President of the United States in your house. We had this talk, and people made their case to the president, Daschle, and Gephardt. They listened, and people were just thrilled. First of all, it was very cool to be with the President of the United States. And we had a great event, and they felt like they had the opportunity to be heard.

The next morning in the president’s weekly radio address, guess what the topic was? Nursing homes. Basically the president announced that the Justice Department was going to impose criminal penalties on nursing homes that violated federal regulations. And my phone lit up like a Christmas tree *(laughs)*. And people [said] bullshit, and I [likewise said] bullshit. I called Doug Sosnik at the White House and said, “Doug, do you have any fucking brains? Last night I raised a shitload of money for the Democratic Party and this morning you decide to trash the people that were my guests? Doesn’t anybody there….” Nobody had talked about it; nobody knew what was going on. You know, you’d think the president might have looked at his remarks ahead of time. That was a vise that I sometimes found myself in.

I was also interested in the peace process in the Middle East. I had been in Israel in 1971 on a kibbutz. My family was very involved. My uncle is buried on the Mount of Olives. I had not been to Israel before '71, and I didn't return there until October 1994. I returned as a guest of the president when he went to the region to preside over the signing of the Israel-Jordan peace treaty. I have this great series of photographs that I took. I was sitting right behind the first lady. It's probably one of the most remarkable experiences I had. The president helped initiate the peace process. Of course it was really started at Oslo. People in the American Jewish community got together. It was to try to provide support for the president in this effort. And so, in the course of the '90s, during his presidency, especially, I started to get very engaged with the Middle East, Israel, and really with the peace process. And with progressive voices, both in Israel and the United States. I was on the board of a civil rights organization in Israel, and I developed this real sense of connection to Israel. My brother had moved there. I went there twice a year for the better part of 10 or 12 years. But I also was very disappointed because Israel -- the promise that, you know, the dream that Israel would be a light unto the nations and would create a democracy that would respect the rights of all Israeli citizens, men and women, Jews and Muslims, et cetera, Christians, you know, was -- especially after Rabin's assassination was --

Q: Yeah, that was a real -- in retrospect, you realize what a tragedy that was.

SOLOMONT: No question about it. It was my first foray into the international arena. I actually got to know Dan Kurtzer, who was Clinton's ambassador in Egypt. He and I had served on a corporate board together in Boston. It was a healthcare board that was started by a physician who was Dan's college roommate. Dan was working for Warren Christopher at the time. He was not on the trip to Aqaba. So as a gift, I brought him back a print, the copy of this photograph that I'd taken of the signing. Six months later, he gave me the photograph back. He had gotten it signed by all the principles, for me. I have it framed in my office. It's just precious. King Hussein signed it, Rabin signed it. Dan became Clinton's ambassador to Egypt. When George W. Bush was elected, he became the U.S. Ambassador to Israel. And I got to know Dan and Martin Indyk pretty well. Most of my initial experiences with politics focused almost exclusively on domestic issues. It was really the Middle East peace process in that period, beginning in the early '90s, when I first began to appreciate America's role in the world.

Q: Well, I want to take you back to domestic politics. First place, did you find it difficult to vet people who wanted to give money? Because usually if somebody gives you a pile of money they have an agenda.

SOLOMONT: Well, I tried to allude to it. First of all, I didn't have to do the vetting, but we did have to get every check vetted. We ran into some uncomfortable situations. We ran into some situations that I differed on *(laughs)*, but there were lawyers. When I got installed as the financier, the party was under attack. Congress was holding hearings. I said everybody was getting subpoenaed. It wasn't exactly the best environment to try to get donations. I'd call people and they'd tell me that the FBI (Federal Bureau of

Investigation) just left their office. Because of the legal expenses that the party incurred, especially during a time when we weren't raising a lot of money, the party had run up bills of about 14 million dollars, largely to law firms. My job, and the job of the party chairman at the time, was to save the Democratic Party from bankruptcy, which we did. It was not easy. Everybody has an agenda in everything they do. A lot of the people with whom I dealt had as their primary agenda a desire to support Bill Clinton and what he was trying to do. There was less money coming in from lobbyists then than I think there is today. That's certainly a part of who funds political campaigns. It was the era of big money in politics. It has a lot to do with what was running campaigns. But I never felt in any way that we had to compromise our principles or do anything that caused me discomfort. We regulated ourselves, we understood the political aspects of what we were doing. Maybe I've chosen fields to go into that caused people's eyebrows to raise, like nursing homes and political fundraising, both of which were a means to an end, never an end to themselves, and at both of which I think I was pretty successful.

I think you can see where this is heading *(laughs)*.

Q: Yeah. But the thing is, on these oral histories I'm trying to get as much "Americana" as I can. Because this is probably the only time I'll get, or somebody will get, you to talk about this. And these are important aspects of the nursing home business, the politics. And so now what I would like to ask before we move on to the international side is the next time you had the Contract for America. And you know, it was one of the nastier periods -- I mean we're going through an even nastier period now -- but in political life. And your impressions of the great passions that motivated people and all.

SOLOMONT: There's an inscription in the lobby of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston that I actually keep on my desk in a frame. It says, "This library is dedicated to the memory of John F. Kennedy, 35th president of the United States, and to all those who through the art of politics seek a new and better world."

Q: Ah, very good.

SOLOMONT: And that's quite honestly among the most continuous threads in my life between the 1960's and today. Through all these other things that I did, you know, that's something that's a bedrock belief that I think is what led me to where I wound up or where I went. So we can talk more about that.

Q: OK.

SOLOMONT: That and the power of citizenship, OK?

Q: OK, today is the 31st of October, 2013, Halloween, with Alan Solomont. And Alan, we left off -- I think we were talking about the time you were involved with a Democratic National Committee?

You might explain what the Contract for America is -- who initiated it, and all that.

SOLOMONT: Contract for America was basically the Republican message during the 1994 congressional midterm elections. And the Republicans ran on this platform created by this rising star in the Congress named Newt Gingrich. It was called the Contract for America, and it was going to reduce spending, restore individual responsibility, and cut entitlements. There was some talk about doing away with the Department of Education and the Environmental Protection Agency. The Republicans won in '94, and they took control of the House for the first time in decades. Newt Gingrich replaced Tom Foley as Speaker of the House. Republicans won on this Contract for America and we saw partisan battles of the kind we perhaps haven't seen until now. It resulted in the shutdown of the government due to a budget stalemate in December of '95. I think it's fair to say that Republicans overplayed their hand. They got blamed for the shutdown. Clinton called its bluff, and it probably led to Newt Gingrich's demise as the speaker. So, Harold Ickes had a plan to raise 50 million dollars to do a television advertising campaign sponsored by the Democratic National Committee to try to explain to the American people how the Democrats saw the Contract for America – basically that it was going to go after three programs: education, healthcare, and job training. It was pretty effective. It was simple, precise messaging. I remember the ads because they showed a very sinister looking Newt Gingrich, with an even more sinister looking Bob Dole in the background. Now, Bob Dole at the time was the leader of the Republicans in the Senate, and he would become the Republican nominee to run against Clinton in 1996. It was no accident that he was in the ad.

I happened to just be coming into my own as a major fundraiser in the Democratic Party. Clinton was just beginning the reelection campaign. He was not hugely popular in some sections, and so there weren't that many cities to bring him to initially. And so the very first city that he was brought to was Boston, Massachusetts on January 31st, 1996. And I remember we had an overflow crowd of a thousand people at the Park Plaza Hotel in Boston. This was an event for the reelection campaign, for which attendees paid $1,000. We raised a million dollars in thousand-dollar contributions. I probably raised 20percent of that. I was a big hero. During the 1996 election period, I operated more out of Washington than Boston. I would bring donors, potential donors, and supporters to Washington for events with President Clinton.

Q: Alan, I wonder if you could just -- we've got, you know, this is going to get wide dissemination eventually, people trying to catch the times. What did you find about how, how to raise this money? I mean were there sort of no-go places, areas, really hot places? How did you find this worked?

SOLOMONT: Well, first of all, it wasn't rocket science. People say, "Oh, you were such a good fundraiser." I've done some training on this. I have this thing called Al's Fundraising Rules. The first rule is: the worst thing anybody's ever said to me is no.

Q: Right.

SOLOMONT: Another rule is: all politics is local and all fundraising is personal. Our national political discussion was mediated by paid television advertising. Unfortunately, one of the few ways that people could participate in these campaigns, if they wanted to, and support their candidate, was by attending a fundraising event, writing a check for $100 or $1,000. This was the year of soft money, so it could be $10,000 or $50,000. But the people who contributed, by and large, were people who could afford to make a political contribution. A relatively small number of Americans do contribute financially to political campaigns. And those days, one and a half percent of Americans contributed $200 or more to a political candidate. But it was also people who did it because of ideas and values. There is a whole cast of people who give money based on personal interest, special interest, lobbyists, et cetera. Whether they represent corporate America or advocate groups, such as the Sierra Club or the NRA (National Rifle Association). I would say that they were not the dominant factors at that time. And they were certainly not the people to whom we were reaching out. We were reaching out to the Democratic Business Council, which was mostly small people, entrepreneurs, and professionals. Our message was, "We have a choice to make in this election as to what direction we want our country to move in. You can participate and invest in that choice, and help affect the outcome by supporting the candidate and direction that you favor." We were having a pretty clear ideological battle over what we wanted the role of government to do. And bear in mind, Bill Clinton was elected by having moved the center of gravity in the Democratic Party into the middle. Another lesson I both learned and tried to teach to students is presidential politics is played in the middle of the field, generally. That has a great stabilizing impact on our general political discourse because in order to win national elections you really have to be a centrist. History is littered with candidates who were not deemed to be centrists, such as Barry Goldwater and George McGovern. Now, you get to the Senate and the House and you expand the political spectrum. We're seeing a good example of that now, where there's extreme voices that can be heard in the House of Representatives. But presidential politics does not work that way, and that's how Bill Clinton became president in '92, and how he was able to be successful in '96: by appealing to a much broader majority of the American people in terms of what they wanted from their government.

So, I got to play on the "first string" in this effort because I was willing to sit in a windowless office in Washington and make phone calls all day to perspective donors and bring people together to meet the President of the United States.

On one occasion, President Clinton was meeting with all these world leaders in the White House and kept us waiting for two hours. But I was like a kid in the candy store. I couldn't believe I was actually at the White House. Because some of the invitees were Jewish, there was kosher food there. I couldn't believe I was at an event at the White House that was serving kosher food. I didn't want to take any silverware, but there was a lot of paper goods, White House napkins, and even in the restrooms White House paper towels. It was a thrill to be there, and so I had this little satchel and I was stuffing it with paper goods. After that, the president finally arrived. After the event there was a smaller event with the Clintons and the Gores across the street at Blair House. A smaller number of people were invited to that. And my wife Susan and I were among them. We crossed

Pennsylvania Avenue in the pouring rain, and we go into Blair House and they're opening everybody's satchels. And I put mine down on the table, and they open it up and there's all these paper goods from the White House.

Q: (laughs)

SOLOMONT: Napkins and paper towels. And they got a good laugh and they said, "You're not the first one that has done this."

The Republicans were furious that they had lost the White House once again to this guy. He had been incredibly vulnerable. I don't have to explain all the reasons why. And they failed to win it back. But they did begin a political assault on accusations of excesses in campaign fundraising. There were allegations that people were invited to the White House for $50,000 coffees. You can't have a fundraiser at the White House. Or that people were invited to the Lincoln Bedroom because they had made big contributions. And there were all sorts of congressional hearings taking place. Republicans still controlled the House, so there were subpoenas flying and investigations. Many people who had participated in the campaign left. It was a tough time, frankly, in terms of finger pointing and allegations. People do this as volunteers because they believe in this. The last thing they want to have to do is spend money on legal fees to defend what they were doing. I had been one of the participants in this effort who wasn't quite senior or important enough or whatever. So I was asked if I would serve as the national finance chair of the party. And I remember having dinner with Harold Ickes and Terry McAuliffe at the Hay-Adams in Washington when they asked me to do this. I said to Harold Ickes, "I don't imagine you'll have very many other candidates."

And he looked at me and said, "Do you know Zabar's on the Upper West Side of New York? It's a very popular specialty foods store and on Sunday mornings it's got lines out the door selling bagels and cream cheeses for breakfast and brunches."

I said, "Yeah, I know Zabar's."

He said, "Well, this is not exactly the counter at Zabar's on Sunday morning."

Q: (laughs)

SOLOMONT: Harold Ickes was a wonderful wit. So, I said I would be the Democratic Party Finance Chairman. The expectation was that Terry McAuliffe, who had left the Democratic Party to be Bill Clinton's finance chairman for the reelection campaign, would return to become the chairman of the Democratic Party. Nobody consulted Terry's wife Dorothy, who had given him up to this campaign. She probably was wise enough to see some of these accusations, and it just was not something she wanted her husband to deal with, having just helped reelect the President of the United States. So I waited around because I wasn't going to be appointed before the party chairman. In December/January of 1997, before the inauguration when we were waiting for a decision about the chairman, McAuliffe finally said he was not going to take the job.

I was at an event with a very dear friend named Steve Grossman, who knew I was tapped to be the finance chairman. The next day Steve called me and said, "I got a call today, Sunday, from the vice president. And he asked me if I would become the party chairman." Of course, Vice President Albert Gore, who would be the presumed nominee in 2000, had a big stake in the party. Steve had earlier served as the Chairman of the Massachusetts State Democratic Party. I had served as his treasurer. Steve says, "I told [the vice president] I would do this, but only if it didn't mean that you would not be the democratic national finance chairman." Because he didn't want to knock me out of the box just because we were both from Massachusetts.

I remember Bill Clinton later saying to me after I said to him, "You made a great choice in Grossman as party chairman." Clinton stuck his finger in my face, and he said, "And you know what [Grossman] told me when we asked him. He said, 'I'm only going to do this if it means that Solomont will be the finance chairman.'"

Q: (laughs)

SOLOMONT: So Steve and I went off to Washington. He became the party chair, I became the finance chair.

My stature had risen measurably. And you know, we got invited to all the best parties. I introduced Bill Clinton at one event and Al Gore at another event. It was one of many examples in my life of feeling like an ordinary person doing extraordinary things. It was very fulfilling. I had gotten to the top of the mountain in terms of being a political fundraiser. I was the chief political fundraiser to Bill Clinton and Al Gore. Every Tuesday morning I had a meeting with the White House political director, and I'd go into the West Wing.

It was a very tough time. We inherited enormous debts. Between the time of the election and the time we were installed just after the inauguration, the party had had to spend a fortune on legal fees in connection with these investigations that I mentioned, and subpoenas. We had something like 14 million dollars in legal fees. We had to raise money for the party to survive. Although we had raised a huge amount of money in the reelection campaign, people were one, tired, and two, with all of these accusations floating around, people were less inclined to contribute. So Steve and I had our work cut out for us. He was a wonderful person, a wonderful colleague, a wonderful chairman. He was among the hardest working people I know. My wife, Susan, is one of the co-chairs of his current campaign for governor or Massachusetts. So that's 20 years later.

Q: Oh yes.

SOLOMONT: We reached out to supporters of the president and to supporters of what we were trying to do. And somehow we clawed our way back to solvency. And in fact, in the 1998 midterm elections, that was the first time in the midterm elections of a president's second term that the party of the incumbent actually gained seats in the House

of Representatives and in the Congress. It wasn't sufficient to win back the majority, but it was actually a fairly historic accomplishment. I served in that position until 1998.

Q: Wondering if you can comment here -- raising of money has become practically the sinew or the guts or whatever you want to call it of the political process.

SOLOMONT: Mm-hmm.

Q: But looking at it as the president and maybe some of the things that elected officials, were they getting anything out of this other than money? In other words --

SOLOMONT: Well, people -- you mean the elected officials?

Q: The elected officials. I mean was it bringing them to meet people? I mean was there another process going on?

SOLOMONT: Sure. People used to ask me, "What do you get out of this?" I did this from the late '70s through the presidential campaign of 2008. I don't think a week went by in that period, or a month certainly, when I wasn't raising money for a candidate for public office. Most often progressive democrats, whether it was at a local or state level. I was involved in four gubernatorial races in Massachusetts. This is something that gave me an opportunity to participate in the process, and in the democracy. My friends used to say to me, "What are you, nuts? What do you get out of this?"

And I used to say, and I mean it sincerely, "What I got out of this was a better America." I'll give you an example of one major donor, whom I won't name, but he was a very, very wealthy man. He was incredibly committed to making peace in the Middle East between the Israelis and the Palestinians. He realized that the security of Israel would best be guaranteed by a peaceful settlement of conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. So he made huge contributions to the Democratic Party during Bill Clinton's presidency, and to Bill Clinton. He would make a $100,000 contribution to the Democratic Party. And he would be seated next to the president at events. During that period I got very involved in supporting the president's efforts in the peace process. I was on the White House lawn for the handshake between Arafat and Rabin.

I continued to work on behalf of the peace process and to try to attract people to be supporters. People who contributed felt they got closer to the possibility of peace in the Middle East. Now, eventually hopes were dashed at Camp David, but there is an agreement to this day between Israel and Jordan, which is incredibly important. We came agonizingly close, and if Yitzhak Rabin had not been assassinated, I think most of us believe that history would have been quite different.

I had sold my business, so I no longer had a direct interest in elder care. But during the time I built the company in Massachusetts I got involved in the policy discussion about elder care and nursing homes. I had become head of the Nursing Home Association, a lobbyist group in Massachusetts. I thought we did an incredibly good job at building a

bridge between the private sector and the public sector, between a very highly regulated industry and an industry that takes care of very vulnerable people. I played a very constructive role because of my understanding of how to bridge the gap, the nexus of business and politics as well as my political connections to the Dukakis administration. We made good policy, and it benefited the commonwealth, seniors, and even the provider community. And our interests weren't misaligned. We all benefited if quality was good and if people had options beyond nursing homes. We all benefited if we could develop rehabilitative services to send people home. So, when I started to become more involved in Washington, I had this hope that I could do something similar in terms of building a bridge between the national provider community and the national government. I was active in the American Health Care Association, which is the major lobbying organization for nursing homes. It is a conservative industry. I dare say that most trade groups in Washington that represent business groups, business sectors across the country tend to be more conservative than say --

Q: Why would it be particularly conservative? I would think that this would be --

SOLOMONT: *(laughs)* Wouldn't you? That was a puzzle because most of our reimbursement came from the government. I tried to deliver that message to the leaders of the industry across the country: that we benefit by having a close partnership with the government because they pay us, and we need to have the door open so we can explain, make our case to them about adequate payment and how that would serve the public good. There were a bunch of reasons why that was a tough sell. People don't like nursing homes. They're seen with a terrible image. Nursing homes are places nobody wants to go to. I understand that. I was defending an industry that people need to hate. We deal with issues that are so threatening, of infirmity, mortality, and disability. One of the reasons I was successful was that people in business do not understand politics. And people in politics do not understand business. I had a leg in both sides. That's really in some respects why I could be effective in that arena. During the reelection campaign in '96, I tried to appeal to my colleagues in the nursing home business and said, "We really ought to support this guy; it's in our interest to do that." At the same time, I was trying to tell people in the administration, basically the Department of Health and Human Services, that this is an industry with which we should try to work. I said that approaching them from a punitive way, from a regulatory standpoint, might not be the best approach, and may not be ultimately in the public's vested interest. Well, I got hammered for that.

There was a very unflattering piece about me in Time Magazine, when I was appointed to be the National Finance Chairman of the Democratic Party. I think it was Michael Isikoff, somebody in the Senior Advocacy Community who undoubtedly said, "Oh, this guy is just a lobbyist for the nursing home industry and he just wants to get regulations less stringent." A piece about me in Time Magazine was called "The Good Provider." Which was really kind of a nasty piece. To the extent that I've been in the news and in the press, I've generally had pretty good standing in terms of public persona. But this was not the case. And when you appear in Time Magazine it becomes a big story in your local community. So that prompted a front-page story in The Boston Globe. It was tough. You can't erase these things. It wasn't a fair portrayal. The fact is I had tried to get my former

colleagues in the industry, if you will, to contribute to Clinton's reelection. I thought it was in their interest to support this guy, but that was not how folks saw it. They got the chance to support someone whose policies may have been more favorable. But as it turned out, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, one of Bill Clinton's great accomplishments in balancing the budget did so largely on the back of Medicare. It harmed healthcare providers that depended on Medicare, including their single providers. This is a separate book we'll write on a different occasion. Many entities had flowed into the post-acute care sector in the mid '90s and the spigot was turned down, if not off, through the Balanced Budget Act. It did do a lot of harm. Wall Street lost its infatuation. Over a period of 18 months, 10 of the 11 largest publicly traded nursing home companies in America went into bankruptcy because they got overextended. They were more interested in Wall Street than Main Street. They bought these big national companies that were not very well managed. They were relying on a stream of funding that wasn't sustainable. But they will tell you the reason [for the bankruptcy] is that Bill Clinton destroyed their business in '97 with the Balanced Budget Act. This was not a story that just played out in the post-acute care sector, but this happened to hospitals and doctors. I think pendulums in public policy swing sometimes farther than their intent, and over the next couple of years after '97 there were changes made to the Balanced Budget Act to try to mitigate some of the damage, including some changes that were made in terms of the post-acute sector.

The point is that people contribute to political campaigns for different reasons; some because they think it's going to be good for them directly. Others for more idealistic reasons. It is true that we have become way over-dependent on money. I became an important player because I was a fundraiser. I tell people I became much more important than I should have been. There is a role for private financing in a political process that I think is healthy because it is a way for people to engage. Advocacy groups give, labor unions give, commercial interests give, and individuals give. And actually, I think in my era individuals were much more significant players.

I think the single worst decision that the Supreme Court has made in my lifetime, in generations, was the Citizens United decision. All of the contributions in my day were reportable, there was a fair amount of transparency. I know people that were prosecuted for violating campaign finance law. Allowing unlimited amounts of money to go into the political process without the need to report has had a very malignant impact on the political process, although I don't think it has worked. If you look at the 2012 election you see all the money. The third party money that went in by and large didn't swing a lot of [votes]… One of the largest individual contributors in the country is Sheldon Adelson. He happens to hail from Boston originally. If you look at the record there's an argument that if it didn't save your money, it isn't helping. But we hadn't entered neither that period nor the 2008 period when millions of Americans started to contribute in small amounts because of the new availability -- and became engaged in ways that people never had. So I think there were some forces taking place that are changing the way money plays in this process. During the time that I was mostly involved in that, in the '80s and the '90s, and actually probably in the early part of this 21st century, the dominant factor in political discourse, at least from the congressional level up, was paid political and

television advertising. That's where a lot of the money went; that's why the networks did so well during election cycles. People like me were activated to raise money to support that dimension of political campaigns. I think that the dynamics are changing. But during my time I would say that was what was driving.

Q: Well, this is an international -- I mean it's a diplomatic oral history program.

SOLOMONT: *(laughs)*

Q: I mean it's important. What I want to know is from -- I mean you've had -- you were on both sides of the thing. You were a diplomat though. Did money make a difference in our diplomacy? Particularly Israel, of course, is the major focus, but other places. Did you see this? Saying, you know, if you're nice to the Bosnians I'll give you this much, and that sort of thing?

SOLOMONT: I think it's more complicated than that. When Michael Dukakis or Paul Tsongas ran for president, they're both sons of Greek immigrants. The Greek-American community rallied to their support and contributed mightily. Not because of their U.S. policy towards Greece at all, but because of pride in the accomplishments of a son of Greek immigrants. The American Jewish community has exercised its political influence historically, and money plays a role in that. I think it's fair to say the American Jewish community is more influential in our politics than its population suggests. But I think part of it is that people in the American Jewish community participated in the process. They historically tended to support Democrats more than Republicans, and they've done a hugely successful job of telling the story of the Jewish homeland, of Israel, in the United States. Israel's done a very good job of creating a very strong brand in the United States and tying our national interests to this country, with whom we have a very special relationship. American Jews admitted to the political process beyond their numbers? Absolutely. Is money the reason why we have such a strong connection to Israel? No. Do elected officials curry favor in the American Jewish community by their support of Israel? Yes. Is that a matter of campaign contributions? No. That would be too simple, frankly. Does it help? Yes. Is it monolithic? No.

I went to a breakfast yesterday in Boston on behalf of an organization called J Street. I had a hand in launching J Street five years ago before I became a diplomat. J Street is an organization that supports the state of Israel but believes what is in Israel's best interest is a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians that will create a two-state solution – with a secure Israel and a viable Palestinian state with peace and harmony living side by side. And J Street believes that it's important that the American Jewish Community deliver a strong message to our representatives in Washington that we want them to support the peace process. We want them to support the negotiations between Israel and Palestinians, because we think that will help secure the Jewish homeland. J Street represents a voice that may be different from other Jewish organizations that are heard on Capitol Hill. And it was created to fill that space.

Q: Basically would you say it's sort of a, a mild antidote to AIPAC (The American Israeli Public Affairs Committee)?

SOLOMONT: Well, that's what everybody says. J Street was created because not enough members of Congress were hearing a voice from the American Jewish community that supported a negotiated settlement. They were hearing a different message from AIPAC. AIPAC's been a hugely successful organization, and hugely successful in telling Israel's story to our elected officials. J Street was created to provide an additional voice that at times differs from AIPAC's voice. It's an organization I want to reengage with now that I'm back. What J Street wants to do is two things: one, it wants to provide financial support to candidates in both parties for Congress, by and large, but not exclusively, who will support an approach to the Israeli Palestinian conflict that backs peace talks, and a two-state solution. And yes, we gave money to candidates, which is one way we established a dialogue with them. So yesterday we had a breakfast in Boston to benefit a congressman from Vermont named Peter Welch, who was one of the earliest people to be endorsed by J Street. An endorsement by J Street means members of J Street will make political contributions to that candidate. So you know, the money thing is not irrelevant. Being able to deliver the message of the American Jewish community, that this is what will best secure Israel's future, is a much more important issue. You know, the amount of money that J Street gives is recognizable and not unimportant, but it's not a game changer. They just had a conference in Washington attended by 3,000 people. Vice President Biden spoke, Nancy Pelosi came and made an appearance. So it's actually developed some legs. And money's a part of it.

You asked about diplomacy. Thirty percent of American ambassadors are what I'd describe as non-career ambassadors, and some people call political ambassadors. This has been something that's been going on for some time. The United States is somewhat different from any other country in this regard, in sending a good number of people to embassies as chiefs of mission who are put there for reasons other than they were career Foreign Service Officers. And I know that this is somewhat controversial and that there are people in the American Foreign Service who think that this is a bad practice. A number of people like me are sent to embassies as ambassadors, are offered decent positions, because of the support that we gave to the president in their campaigns, the political support we gave them.

Now, Caroline Kennedy went to Japan, not because of the money that she raised. By the way, I introduced Caroline Kennedy to Barack Obama. Hold that, but ask me about it later. Michael McFaul, ambassador right now in Russia is not a career Foreign Service Officer; he's a Russian expert and I think comes at it from the world of academia. Also a political appointee, John Huntsman, former governor of Utah, was sent to China. As was Gary Locke, former mayor of Seattle and, you know, as a non-career diplomat. And they didn't raise a lot of money for the president, Lord knows Huntsman didn't. But there were people like Charlie Rivkin who just finished his tour in France, and Lou Sussman in the UK, and Alan Solomont. Or people like Elizabeth Bagley, who went to Portugal in the Clinton administration. There have been ambassadors who were appointed that way who distinguished themselves as superior representatives of the president and of the

country, and there were some who failed. Just as there have been career diplomats who fall into both categories. There are some things that non-career diplomats or political appointees bring to the job, which I think the Foreign Service, embassies, and our foreign policy benefit from. What I know best is the experience of the people that President Obama appointed during his first term. Basically my colleagues. With a couple of exceptions, the ambassadors that Obama appointed in the first term, those of us who have recently come back, did an outstanding job. Take me out of the equation, but our ambassador in Berlin, Phil Murphy; or ambassador in Japan, John Roos; or ambassador in South Africa, Don Gips; David Jacobson in Canada, Charlie Rivkin in Paris; David Thorne in Rome. Every single one of them didn't do just a good job, did an *outstanding job*, and really advanced our interests. I would ask a German diplomat, "Do you know my friend Phil Murphy?"

"Oh, he's terrific, he's doing a *great* job."

I know the work they did. Those of us in Europe, we talked not infrequently, because we were all struggling with the euro zone crisis. Bill Canard at the European Union did an absolutely magnificent job. Now, that's not to say that we haven't had brilliant career ambassadors. Victoria Nuland who just became the Assistant Secretary of State for Europe had been our ambassador to NATO. Nick Burns, who's now at Harvard whom I had breakfast with not too long ago was our ambassador to NATO. Ambassador Tom Pickering is a *giant*, as is Bill Burns. And many, many others. I can tell you, I think without naming anyone, because you know, there are no secrets. I can tell you which of my predecessors in Spain, at least in recent history, did a good job and which didn't – who saw it as just a reward or sinecure and sat on their asses for their time, and who really worked hard at it. And so I'm proud of the colleagues that I had and the work I did. I know I got up every day and worked my tail off, and I was the last person to leave the office at night when I was at the embassy. I did it because I loved the job, I think it suited me, and I brought a lot of tools with me. And I will tell you that my colleagues at the embassy, I mean my deputy chief of mission said I was the best ambassador with whom he's ever worked. And he's worked for -- with some of the best. And it's because I was tireless, committed to the job, and because I had some skills that leant themselves to the job. I studied hard. There was no way to anticipate that I would have done that well in the job. I was not sent there because of my superior potential *(laughs)* to represent us in Spain. I'll be the first one to admit that. But I did serve our country and our president well. And I can tell you that these other fellows I mentioned did an outstanding job on our behalf.

Q: Yeah. I noticed, for example, that whoever's our ambassador to Spain right now, I saw him on TV coming out, having been put on a carpet over the eavesdropping scandal.

SOLOMONT: You have to admit that I have good timing.

Q: He was earning his pay then.

SOLOMONT: For eight years I had an opportunity to participate in the Clinton presidency, for the second term, through the Democratic Party, mostly because of my fundraising activities, but also because of my interest in healthcare policy and in Middle East foreign policy. I got to participate in a more multi-dimensional way. I went on to work in the Gore campaign, and then in the Kerry campaign. I had the freedom to spend a lot of time in the political arena. When I say I worked on the Gore campaign, I mean I worked on it for two years. And I became *deeply* involved in the Kerry campaign. I expected both of them to win. I raised money for Al Gore, I raised money for John Kerry, but I played an important role over those years in international service.

I wasn't in AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), but I spent several years as a community organizer in Lowell, Massachusetts, and in some respects had this community service experience that informed everything else I did in my life. When AmeriCorps was created I was on the South Lawn when President Clinton signed the legislation, November 21st 1993, creating AmeriCorps and the corporation for National Community Service. I was a dear friend to Eli Segal, who was given the task of creating this, and was the first CEO of the corporation. That was what I wanted to do in terms of voluntary public service. Although it took me a while, in 2000 Bill Clinton appointed me to the board. When AmeriCorps was created it – along with all the other domestic service programs with the senior corps – was put into a new federal agency called the Corporation for National and Community Service. This isn't just the federal agency, but it was given the name corporation because we were remaking government. It had a bipartisan board of directors, seven Democrats, seven Republicans, and whoever controlled the White House appointed the eighth member. I was appointed as a Democratic member in 2000. And I was reappointed by President Bush, so I served the better part of nine years. I served from 2000 and I was elected chairman in January of 2009. And so I had the chance over that period to really contribute to the growth of AmeriCorps and National Service. I worked with the bipartisan board. I was vice chairman for a while.

I worked very closely with the Bush administration. To his great credit, when President Bush was elected, rather than rejecting this program that was created by Bill Clinton, although it had also been supported by his father, President Bush 43 really embraced the service. He put his own mark on it. That was the first non-political official position that I'd ever had in Washington working on national policy. And when I was first asked by the Obama transition team, "What do you want to do in the administration?" I said to them, "I want to be Chairman of the Board of the Corporation for National and Community Service. President Obama said in the campaign, 'I want to make service a cause of my presidency.' I'm already on the board, so I don't need the president to appoint me. Frankly, the board elects its own chairman, so I don't even need the president to make me the chairman, but typically the board will elect who the president wants. Thus, I needed his blessing."

And I got an email one day from presidential personnel informing that, "The PE has approved your being the Chairman of the Corporation Board."

I was scratching my head, thinking, "Who's the PE?" Do you know who the PE is, Stu?

Q: No.

SOLOMONT: The President Elect.

Q: Oh-ho (laughs)!

SOLOMONT: Exactly.

Yeah, so we come up to January of '09. Obama's elected and I become Chairman of the Board of the Corporation for National and Community Service." And then somebody said, "Oh and by the way, would you like to go to an embassy?" And then we'll pick that up next time.

Q: Today is December 6, 2013 and this is the continuation of an interview with Alan Solomont.

SOLOMONT: I was talking about how I became ambassador. My career runs in two parallel tracks. One was the way I earned a living as a healthcare entrepreneur. And the other was following my passion for politics. The instrument of which was mostly to fundraise, but that gave me access to the world of policy and public service. And so in 2006, I was asking myself whether I had the stomach to go through another presidential campaign. I had been very invested in the Kerry campaign, and thought that I might serve in the Kerry administration. When that didn't work out I taught this course on the presidency at Tufts. And you know, the field was sort of taking shape. I had a lot of friends in the race. Bill Richardson was a classmate of mine at Tufts in the '60s. Tom Vilsack, the Governor of Iowa with whom I had become friendly and who I thought was a great public servant. Hillary Clinton was in it and was associated with the Clintons – I had worked with them for 16 years. But I'm a big believer that elections are about some*thing* not someone. I had learned from the governor's race in Massachusetts in 2006 that elections were seemingly about change. And this young senator I had met in 2005 was inching closer to becoming a candidate for president. So I started a conversation with him about joining his campaign and I finally made a decision, and sometime in the early part of January of 2007, declared I was going to work for the Obama campaign. I wasn't looking to make a big splash, but I was one of the earliest people on the fundraising side of politics who had some national visibility who had been associated with the Clinton world who decided to cast his lot with the Obama campaign. I wasn't looking to raise any eyebrows, but raised a lot of eyebrows because I think that people expected that I would be on the Clinton --

Q: The Hillary Clinton, yeah.

SOLOMONT: I got involved in what was the most exciting political campaign of my life. I was responsible for organizing New England. I've always believed that fundraising is not about money; it's about organizing. I guess my community organizing experience

served me well in that regard. We built an organization in Massachusetts that we said had nothing to do with money. It was called the New England Steering Committee for Obama. But it turned out we raised more money per capita than any other state in the country on behalf of the Obama campaign. It was a metric that I made sure everybody knew, including the candidate. I worked almost fulltime from January of 2007 until November of 2008. Actually this steering committee that we had met every single week on Thursday or Friday for one hour. We would attract anywhere from 70 or 80 people to 200 people. We'd sit around a big table in a law firm and we would talk about what we were doing for the campaign. We'd usually have somebody call in. We really created an interesting model I will say, something I was very proud of. I went through the roller coaster, the ups and downs of that campaign. I just finished reading, by the way, Game Change, which is the story by Mark Halperin and John Heilemann about the 2008 race. You know, they're the guys who just wrote Double Down, which is about the 2012 race. But I went through the ups and downs and I never stopped believing that this guy could win it because I think he was sticking to what was on the minds of the American people at that time.

So, in 2008 I started to go to Washington to weigh in on transition issues. I had a list of people who wanted to serve in government to whom I was trying to be helpful, mostly campaign guys, but some other volunteer types. When I was asked, "Well, would you like to go to an embassy?" I was not really expecting that. I knew that was something that happened to people like me. I said, "Well, if my wife and I have the opportunity to serve in an embassy, I would certainly want to consider it." I was asked to submit a list of 10 countries where I would want to serve. It was a very eclectic list. Spain was not on it. I was going to put the Bahamas, because my daughter had spent some time in the Bahamas on a high school environmental program and I knew some of the sort of sustainable development issues there. I didn't know where I might get sent. I had Bahrain, I had Morocco, I was interested in the Middle East, I had Italy, I had, you know, Czech Republic.

I showed it to a friend of mine who's a distinguished American diplomat, Martin Indyk, and he looked at my list and said, "Take the Bahamas off. If you put that on they will think you're not serious, that you just want to play golf," *(laughs)*. So I took it off.

So I sent my list in before the inauguration. At some point I got a call in early March of '09 -- or maybe earlier. I had been in touch with the people who were looking at this. I got a call on a Sunday afternoon from David Jacobson, who later became our ambassador to Canada. He said, "Would you be willing to go to Madrid?" I took the call in the office where I'm sitting at home. I screamed. I dropped the phone.

My wife was exercising and I went into the next room and I said, "We're going to Madrid."

That was the beginning of the process. They started to vet me, you know, nothing official had been mentioned. The FBI started poking around. My wife went to this tennis and swim club once and the manager came out and said to her, "Is anything wrong?"

She said, “Why? No.”

He said, “The FBI was around asking about you guys.” When they do that they can’t reveal or they don’t reveal what they are up to.

Anyways, I passed the vet, I got a call from the president in May or so. My Blackberry was buzzing. And the message from my office was, “The President of the United States is trying to call you.”

I called the White House and they said, “The president will call you back.”

And he called me back and he said, “Solomont.”

And I said, “Obama.”

And he said, “Would you be willing to go to Madrid,” and I said absolutely.

I continued going through the process. There had been an issue at the Corporation for National Community Service having to do with the inspector general incorporation. The bipartisan board of directors was concerned about the inspector general sufficiently so that I was asked by the board to go to the White House and express our concern to White House Counsel’s Office, Greg Craig. When I went to see him, he referred the situation to someone else in the office, Norman Eisen, who became our ambassador to the Czech Republic. Eisen made an investigation and terminated the inspector general on behalf of the White House. That ruffled some feathers on Capitol Hill, in particular Congressman Darrell Issa and Senator Chuck Grassley. And so, we slow walked my nomination in order for me to meet with people on Capitol Hill to try to explain these circumstances under which this had taken place. There were accusations that it was political. My efforts were to explain that we didn’t fire the guy; that wasn’t our authority. The bipartisan board asked me unanimously to express this and then the White House took whatever action they took. I thought by meeting with Issa’s and Grassley’s staffs, that we would try to reassure them, and that it wouldn’t negatively impact my nomination. I was nominated in August of 2009. I’d gone to the ambassador seminar in July and I was going through the process of preparation. And in fact, I was hoping to get to Madrid by October 1st for a meeting of the U.S.-Spain Council in Valencia. I’d been in touch with the deputy chief of mission, and I was actually preparing a speech since I was going to be the keynote for this. I went before the Senate of Foreign Relations Committee. I was reported out favorably. The Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee at the time actually introduced me. I did say something interesting to them, which is worth repeating because it’s a reflection of where I was coming from. You get four minutes to tell your story. I was there with three other nominees and I said, “I come before you in an auspicious time in our nation’s history, when the president and the Congress have challenged American citizens to roll up their sleeves and help solve the problems of their communities, their nation, and the world. I come to you as one of those citizens. Nothing more and nothing less.” Which is how I saw my service as a citizen diplomat in the tradition of Benjamin

Franklin and John Jay, who was the first U.S. ambassador to Spain. So I got reported out favorably. We were planning a swearing-in ceremony for I think the 27th of September. Then we were going to leave literally the next day, or two days later to arrive in Madrid on the 1st of October and I would go directly to Valencia to open up this meeting of U.S.-Spain Council.

The movers came to the house on the 21st of September. We started the first day of pack-out, including my winter coat. And that evening I got a call from a friend of mine at the corporation. He said, "Did you know that Senator Grassley put a hold on your confirmation?" And so that began a process where from one week to the next I didn't know what my future was and my winter coat was on the boat *(laughs).* As September went by we tried to get it fixed quickly. But that was not possible. Grassley was in a dispute with the White House over the records having to do with the firing of this inspector general. The White House was claiming executive privilege, Grassley wanted to see all the papers, and he was holding me hostage to that. And Darrell Issa, a member of the House, was similarly exercised over this. He actually was rather, if I may say, mean spirited about it. It wasn't about me really, but it was what it was. I was in regular contact with the Secretary's office. I was talking to the State Department Legislative Affairs and the White House Legislative Affairs Office. You realize in that position you're pretty much on your own. It was not the White House's biggest priority to get me confirmed as U.S. ambassador. I mean obviously they were working, but they were also struggling with Senator Grassley. And the State Department pretty much had to take a backseat to the White House. So I was appealing to the Secretary's office because that was the one person who seemed to have some concern.

So weeks turn into months, October passed, November passed. Around Thanksgiving I got a call from Senator Kerry saying, "Alan, kiss your wife. You're going to Spain. Grassley has agreed to lift the hold." They had worked out something with the White House. I mentioned Tom Vilsack. Tom Vilsack had been Governor of Iowa, he had a pretty good relationship with Grassley. I tried to gauge him. I mean, I would work every conceivable angle I could.

And later the same day I get an email saying, "Well, Grassley lifted the hold but Senator Sessions of Alabama has put a hold on you. And I think he was put up to it by Congressman Issa." So I'm back where I started.

So the Senate session is going to end sometime at the end of December. If I don't get confirmed by the end of December, the Senate doesn't even come back in session until January 19th. We don't know from one week to the next, and I'm still without a winter coat. So Senator Kerry arranged for me to see Senator Sessions. I went down to Washington. This is now the week before the Senate adjourns. And I met with Senator Sessions and I explained the situation and he was a southern gentleman about it. However, I left the meeting feeling as though I didn't move him. I flew back home to Boston, walked into my kitchen, and I got an email message that "Senator Sessions has lifted the hold." It was an emotional roller coaster. My wife and I were going out to dinner that night. We're out waiting for a table and I get an email saying "Somebody else

has put a hold on you and we don't know who it is." This is now the day before the Senate meets for the last session. It turns out it was Senator DeMint, but I was devastated. I mean I'd been going around on a merry-go-round. I was devastated, figuring there's no way I'm getting confirmed, they're going to adjourn tomorrow and it's going to be a month before they even come back. I couldn't sleep. I got up the next morning. I got on my treadmill, put on C-SPAN. They're broadcasting live because the Senate is meeting and is considering the healthcare bill. And at some point at 9:30 or so in the morning I get an email that says, "Senator Kerry brought DeMint and Grassley and Sessions into the cloak room. And I don't know what he said, but the hold was lifted, you're going to get confirmed."

I've told friends, the United States Senate cast two historic votes on that day. One was on behalf of their healthcare plan and the other was to confirm Alan Solomont to be the U.S. Ambassador to Spain and Andorra. We went to Washington the following week, got sworn in by Jack Lew.

We arrived in Madrid on a snowy Saturday on January the 9th of 2010. Spain had been without an ambassador for a whole year and they were getting a little uptight about whether the U.S. cared for them enough. And the chargé d'affaires, who by the way was incredibly talented -- he was the deputy chief of mission and held down the fort for one year. He's currently the U.S. ambassador in Guatemala, and he's been nominated by the president to be the director general of the Foreign Service, Arnold Chacón. He is the finest Foreign Service Officer I've met. And I've met some incredibly wonderful Foreign Service Officers. Our previous ambassador, who had been a Bush appointee, Eduardo Aguirre, left on Inauguration Day 2009. And he had done I think a very good job. He was sent there under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. The Zapatero government had been frozen out of the Bush White House because of the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq. I think he got there in '05, and he left in January of '09. And so from January of '09 to January '10 we had a chargé. Arnold Chacón is -- I can't say enough good things. He did an incredibly good job at helping me become successful as the U.S. ambassador. He was masterful as a mentor to me, helping me leverage the office, making sure that we used the office appropriately. He pretty much controlled what got to my desk and understood that there are certain things that the person with the title "ambassador" as the president's personal representative can get done. And that's what we wanted to focus my attention to. But I jumped into the job with both feet. At one point my wife said to me, "You are driving people crazy. You've got to ease up a little bit." Because I was just so enthusiastic and active and energetic, because it was such a great opportunity to do some important things for our country.

On a Friday afternoon Susan, my wife, and I and Arnold Chacón and his wife were invited to a vineyard outside of Madrid by a family. It was a family-owned vineyard and they had invited us to come out and tour their vineyard, have a little ceremony for the ambassador and what have you. We had a wonderful afternoon and we drank a lot of wine. They served a big lunch with the family, like of 20 people. And they served us these barbequed little lamb chops. Anyways, we ate and drank during the afternoon and

in the car on the way home I fell sound asleep. And Arnold said to my wife, "Now we know how to slow the ambassador down. We give him lots of wine and a big lunch."

Q: (laughs)

SOLOMONT: So that's how I got there.

Q: Well, before we move on, could you explain when you got there, what was the Spanish government like?

SOLOMONT: Spain has had a pretty stable two-party situation. There's a right-of-center party, the Partido Popular, and the left-of-center party, which is socialist. But it really is kind of a Social Democratic Party, the PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party). The PSOE had dominated Spanish politics almost from the beginning of transition, from '92 to '96. But in '96 Prime Minister Felipe González lost to José María Aznar. He led a right of center government. And in 2003, when we invaded Iraq, Aznar joined the Coalition of the Willing and sent Spanish troops to Iraq. He and Tony Blair visited the Bush ranch and the White House and he really embraced President Bush and his foreign policy. He stood for reelection in 2004 and days before the election, on March 11th, 2004, the Atocha subway was bombed. That caused the unexpected election of the PSOE government under José Rodriguez Zapatero. He became prime minister. And one of the first things he did was pull Spanish troops out of Iraq, really without any consultation or coordination. The Iraqi War was thoroughly unpopular in Spain, as it was in many places in Europe. Zapatero pulled Spanish troops out. Then he was accused or reported to have not stood when the American flag passed through a reviewing stand on a national day in Madrid. To the point where our ambassador at the time, who was Aguirre's predecessor, I'm told wouldn't deal with the Zapatero government. Relations really froze between Washington and Madrid. Zapatero was one of the few leaders of a major European country who was never invited to the White House for a one-on-one meeting with President Bush. Aguirre I think really was sent to repair the relationship.

When Obama was elected there was a complete reversal. President Zapatero embraced Obama, to the point where he said in Prague, after Obama gave the major speech on nuclear non-proliferation, "Let's not ask what Obama can do for us, but what we can do to support Obama's ideas." Zapatero was received at the White House for an Oval Office meeting in November of '09. Unfortunately, I was not yet confirmed so I couldn't be in the meeting, although I met in private with Zapatero and his foreign minister at the Spanish embassy in Washington. Zapatero was invited to the congressional prayer breakfast and actually was invited to speak. It wasn't just the relationship between the governments that changed overnight. If you looked at the public opinion polls about the United States, in 2007 the approval rating of our country among the Spanish public was less than 30percent. In 2009, it was over 70percent. These are Pew Center statistics. So the standing of our country almost overnight completely changed in the eyes of the Spanish public.

So they couldn't wait for an ambassador to arrive in Madrid. I arrived on a Saturday and the Foreign Minister, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, lived in Córdoba. He was a member of congress from Córdoba, but he was the foreign minister. He drove to the Foreign Ministry and invited me over to bring copies of my credentials. Not my credentials per se, but just so he could welcome me. They couldn't have been more enthusiastic in receiving me. We landed in Madrid at seven in the morning. We went to the residence and we met the residence staff. I had been in regular contact with the embassy for months. While my confirmation was being held I was still talking regularly with them. I went over to the Foreign Ministry to meet Foreign Minister Moratinos. I remember bounding up the steps at the Foreign Ministry with this incredible feeling of excitement that I'm now the United States Ambassador here. I was met with equal enthusiasm on the other side. I spent a year preparing to go to Spain. And so I spent a lot of time in Washington and a lot of time in the State Department interacting with people around the U.S.-Spain relationship.

Spain couldn't have felt more positively about the relationship with our country. But the attitude in Washington toward Spain was one of great skepticism. I perceived a view in Washington that Spain is not a very reliable partner to the United States and doesn't seem to really have the ability to punch above its weight, even though at the time it was the tenth largest economy in the world and the fourth largest in Europe. Because of the recession it's now the twelfth or thirteenth largest economy in the world. But in any event, there was a negativity in Washington I thought. Especially in the State Department. I think it was for three reasons. One was due to vestiges of a negativity over how the Zapatero government had disengaged in Iraq. Even though we had a new government that was committed to ending the war in Iraq, there was still a kind of residual hostility or residual unhappiness with the way they disengaged. Spain doesn't have a brand that is as strong as it might, or as it deserves. Spain is a wonderful country and success story in many respects. But Spain markets itself very poorly and tends to sell itself short. And I thought that that was also a reason why it wasn't better regarded -- and there is no constituency in the United States for Spain the way there is for Italy, Ireland, Poland, or Israel. Even though there are 50 million Americans who speak Spanish, there isn't a sense in the Latino population of connection you might expect with a Spanish-speaking population that large, with its growing influence, and with the country where the language originated. I came to Spain with the belief that one of the things I needed to do was to make them a better partner, and in a sense, communicate tough love. Spain is an important ally, but the relationship is only to be a strong one if Spain proves itself to be reliable and able to "get the ball over the goal line," as I used to say. So, in my earliest meetings in Moncloa Palace – not with the president himself, but with the president's national advisor, with whom I became very close, Bernardino León – my message was, "I'm here to strengthen the relationship between our countries and our governments. I'm here to be a good partner to you, and I'm here to help Spain become a better partner to the United States because the alliance between our countries should be held in higher regard than it is back home."

And one example of this is as follows. President Obama, when he had met Zapatero, had asked for his help with Guantanamo. We were asking allies to accept Guantanamo's

detainees to resettle them in their countries. I think Obama had asked Zapatero, who then made a commitment that Spain would take five detainees. That was actually the largest number of any country or largest offer that we received at a time when we were still trying to close Guantanamo. In the first few weeks that I was in Spain I heard maybe three or four different versions of what Spain was committed to. The foreign minister was talking about one thing, the minister of interior was talking about another. I went to the president's national security advisor and I said, "Listen, your prime minister, according to our president, made a commitment of five Guantanamo detainees. But this is what your foreign minister is saying and this is what your minister of interior said to me in my meeting with him.

I remember Bernardino actually said, "Look, I'm flying with the prime minister tonight. I will call you later tonight or tomorrow morning." And he called me from the plane and he said, "The prime minister's absolutely committed to five detainees."

I remember when I met with the minister of the interior shortly thereafter, he was currently the leader of the PSOE Party, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba. He said to me, "Look, you know, I'm not enthusiastic, but that's what my prime minister wants. We're going to take five detainees." And we began to work on that process. So I felt that I had a responsibility to try to work on both sides of the Atlantic in strengthening the partnership and in communicating to Washington that Spain is an important partner -- that they will be a reliable partner, and then I had to work with the Spanish government to make them so.

I went through an interesting process when I got to Madrid. This was all very new to me. As long a time as I had to prepare, I felt as though I needed to create a framework for what my job was. But it actually turned out to be a framework that guided the embassy. We described it as the Four Pillars, and they were four Ps. I began to describe not just my job, but our mission in the following way. First, strengthening the partnership between the government of Spain and the government of the United States around a shared agenda based on common interest and common values. Second, we would use public diplomacy as a way of explaining America's foreign policy to the Spanish public so that we could help the Spanish government develop popular support for the policies on which we wanted to partner with them. Third, we would practice economic statecraft, which was a way of putting economics at the forefront of our foreign policy, an expression that Secretary Clinton coined, but which I think we put in place early. The fourth P was protecting the safety and security of American citizens, both in Spain and in the homeland. I mean none of that's rocket science, it's diplomacy 101. But it served as an incredibly useful tool as a way of framing the work that we did and sharing it with everybody in the embassy. I would present this at town hall meetings. One of my goals was to get everybody on the same page: whether we're talking about local Spanish employees who were working in the post office or the economic counselor. I thought it was an important part of my leadership responsibilities to articulate a vision for what we were doing, a strategic vision for what our work was in the context of 2010. And then to get everybody to row in the same direction. And actually it's one of the things I'm most proud of from my tour.

The best praise I got, interestingly, was when the inspector general came for our routine IG inspection in the spring of ’12. The IG actually praised the embassy for having a framework that everyone was up to speed on and that guided the work of the embassy. And I felt, especially coming from the IG, that that was incredibly high praise. But I used that plan for the next three and a half years. We fleshed out the issues, we talked about partnering on: the Iran oil embargo, transnational terrorism, Afghanistan, narcotics trafficking, et cetera. We identified specifically Guantanamo. What were the issues on which we sought the government of Spain’s partnership? Is Spain going to keep their troops in Afghanistan? Are they going to surge with us? So actually Spain increased their troop numbers in Afghanistan by 50 percent when we did, which is not something that every one of our allies or every ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) participant did. Spain used to get 14 percent of their oil from Iran. Spain has no natural energy sources of its own other than sun and wind and water. And yet, they signed up early for the oil embargo, abided by it completely, and also severed banking relationships with Iran. They were very strong supporters of Iranian sanctions. When the Libyan operation took place, not only did they commit their own assets, but they allowed our refueling craft and reconnaissance plane to use their bases. One of the most important things we rely on Spain for is the use of two of their bases.

Now, President Eisenhower restored the relationship with the Franco government based upon an exchange driven by the Cold War. We wanted military bases in the Iberian Peninsula for strategic value in the Cold War, and we were willing to provide the Franco government with economic assistance. That was really the basis on which the relationship was restored in ’53 and the basis on which the relationship continued right up to the present. We have a presence in a major naval base in the South of Spain, Naval Base Rota. And an air force base in Morón. And we use those bases in very significant ways. Probably the single most important diplomatic success that I had was in reaching an agreement with the Spanish government to locate four missile defense capability United States Destroyers at Naval Base Rota. We negotiated this over the period of about a year with the socialist government originally. We got support from U.S. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus; it was a huge deal. When it was announced, people were shocked that: one, we were able to come to agreement with the socialist government on this, and two, we were able to keep it a secret. The first two Destroyers will arrive in 2014, and the following two will arrive in 2015. This is Spain’s role in the NATO missile defense strategy. We’re playing such a key role. It means that when we send our missile defense capable ships from the U.S. to the Mediterranean we house them in Spain. My colleague, the Canadian ambassador to Spain, said to me, “You can mail it in from now on.” He was quite complementary of getting this man in government to this point. Of course, the agreements were finalized with the right-of-center Rajoy government.

So one of the areas of my attention was in working with the Spanish government around issues of both of our country’s national security – and really global security – in getting their partnership with us on our global agenda. I based a lot of this on the fact that I used to quote the president, who said, “The problems of the world today are too big to be solved by America alone, but no big problem will be solved without America.”

I think I said in virtually every speech I ever gave in Spain, "We no longer have national challenges. The challenges that the United States faces and that Spain faces are all global challenges. Again, transnational terrorism, global warming, international crime. None of them can be solved by any country alone, and so the United States has to partner both with likeminded countries and with countries with whom we have differences." So, a piece of my mission, as I defined it, and our mission at the embassy, was engaging the Spanish around these global challenges in order to protect both of our countries' security interests.

Q: How did you find the press during this period? The media?

SOLOMONT: To be honest, I found them easy. I was a big believer that we can only reach so many people directly. One of my four pillars was public diplomacy. Embassy staff and I spent a lot of time talking to Spanish audiences about trying to explain our policies. I think I was more vocal on the issue of Afghanistan than the government itself. I went to Afghanistan twice to visit Spanish troops. When I came back I made a big deal of the fact that Spain was contributing so constructively and so importantly to the mission. I was always one who wanted to speak to the press because I felt that they had a microphone that was able to amplify our message better than we could on our own. So I engaged with the press frequently, in terms of giving interviews. I would take advantage of moments when there was attention being paid to the United States. Because of the State of the Union address, our midterm elections, or the 2012 elections. We invited the press to watch the president's Cairo speech with us live. So I would take advantage of those moments when people were looking at our country, not so much to talk to them about what they were wondering, but to use those as opportunities to deliver our message.

We held regular press briefings. We used to invite the press in occasionally for hamburgers. My three and a half years, I can count on one hand the number of press pieces that I felt were negative or didn't accurately convey the message that we were trying to convey. I worked hard to befriend people in the press. My Spanish was not good enough to do live radio, but there was a live television show that I would do on a regular basis because they would translate it simultaneously. Which turned out to be a really good platform. I traveled the country quite a bit. I mean it was very important for us to get out of Madrid. Wherever I went, if the U.S. ambassador shows up in Valencia or Barcelona, it's a big deal. I would always do an interview with the press because one, we would get good coverage. And two, it would be a big deal for them to be able to cover the U.S. ambassador. I know that there are people whose natural inclination is to view the press with some skepticism and with some caution. My press guides didn't want me talking to them without them around or without the tape recorder going. I used to joke that they were to make sure I didn't say anything I shouldn't. But I had what I felt was a very good relationship with the Spanish press at just about every level. And I would say that I was treated fairly, and generally felt that we were able to generate really positive press.

Q: Well, was there what passes for a core intellectual left, the chattering class, in Spain as there is in England and in France?

SOLOMONT: It was clearly a class of thought leaders. But they span the spectrum. I talk to them all. I mean look, I come from a liberal, politically left-leaning tradition. And the political center of gravity is completely different in Europe and certainly completely different in Spain. They argue over whether people should pay co-payment for their healthcare, not whether there should be coverage. Even the right-of-center government rejects the idea of a co-payment because they say people pay their taxes for their healthcare already. It was interesting to look at the world through the political lens of a country where left and right were actually much more closely aligned than they are in this country. Even though they complain about partisanship and rancor and the failure of the parties to agree on things. I think the base of your question was if there is a left-leaning, chattering class that looked at America negatively. There really was almost no visible opposition for Spain's participation in Afghanistan. When we signed the agreement to bring the Destroyers in the south of Spain every year there are a couple hundred people that go to the U.S. naval base to demonstrate about the U.S. Military on Spanish soil. They're small and marginal. There is a far left party, but they don't have a huge impact. The socialist, the major left party feels as close to the United States as the right-of-center party and was very supportive of the Afghan war. Now, it is true that we did have some negative encounters with them where they tried to exploit issues, to be critical of the United States. But, I didn't find that they were that much a part of the mainstream political thinking.

One of the things that's been happening as a result of the economic crisis is a loss of confidence in politicians and politics in general. I think the latest polls I saw is that 84 percent of Spaniards have no confidence in their political leaders and 87 percent have no confidence in their political parties. The result of which is that I think in the next national elections, 2015, the beneficiaries are likely to be the smaller parties that up until now have exercised very little influence on the political scene. Including the far left. If they got 5 percent in the last national elections they may be polling at 15 percent today, because of the crisis and the lack of confidence in what the government's doing.

Q: Yeah. So often these European governments, the socialists and the conservatives basically have organizations that talk to each other a lot. Was Spain plugged into those, or not?

SOLOMONT: Not a great deal. Actually one of the groups they talked to is the Center for American Progress in Washington, which is a progressive think tank that was started by John Podesta. There was some effort early on in 2009 and '10 to try to work with the Zapatero government to try to broaden the discussion among progressive forces in Europe with our own progressive forces in the United States. But all of us are mired so much now in polarized politics that I saw more coordination among the right-of-center governments – in part because they tend to be dominant right now in Europe. You had Italy, Germany, France under Sarkozy, England, UK, Netherlands, a preponderance. When I got there Spain was one of the few European countries that was ruled by a left-of-

center government. I was more exposed to some of the right-of-center groups, and I think they're probably stronger in Spain. There is one foundation, the Ideas Foundation, but I would not say that we related strongly to them. We talked more to non-partisan think tanks and opinion leaders across the spectrum of political thought. There was a right-of-center think tank, many of whose people joined the Rajoy government. There is a left-of-center think-tank to which many of the left of center government officials retreated after they lost power. I guess the bottom line is we talked to both of them. The big tension politically in Europe during my tour was really the dynamic in the European Union between the southern countries and the northern countries, between Germany and the countries that were bearing the brunt of the crisis, the countries that had already needed European assistance and the countries that were at risk to need assistance.

Q: When you arrived how stood the economic health of Spain?

SOLOMONT: Spain was an incredible success story. When you read about the brutal civil war, it was followed by military dictatorship. It is hard to believe it is the same country that went through those experiences. I had visited Spain in 1971 and I had seen what a poor country it was. In the course of 35 years Spain developed a very vibrant democracy and a prosperous economy. It went through this incredible period of economic growth. As time went on more and more of that was based on real estate and construction and there was a huge housing bubble. It makes ours look tiny. That bubble burst at the same time as the worldwide economic and financial crisis hit. The Zapatero government was slow to acknowledge the depth of the crisis. When I arrived I think it's fair to say that the Zapatero government had not yet come to grips with how badly affected the Spanish economy was. It really wasn't until the spring of 2010 that they began to react and take any steps to deal with it.

You can almost trace the moment when they changed. Vice President Biden came to Spain in May of 2010, the highest level visit we received during my tour. And he was scheduled to have a brief one-on-one meeting with Zapatero, and then a larger meeting with various ministers in the government. But at that time Zapatero's government was not facing up to the depth of the economic crisis that had befallen them. Biden wound up spending an hour with him, partly as a result of our briefing. He communicated this to Zapatero directly. He said, "Listen, we've been through this. We went through our own economic crisis. We weren't out of the woods yet at that point, but we had taken the measures." And his message, and our message, became we've been through our own economic and financial crisis, and we realize the only way to deal with it is bold and decisive action. You have to take stern measures, many of which are unpopular. But there's no choice because you've got to get out ahead of this. And it was, I would say, in large part the result of that interaction, and by the way the finance minister had to be in Brussels that same weekend and was beaten up fairly well by some of her colleagues in the EU, when the Zapatero government began to initiate reform to reign in their public deficits. I think they lowered civil service compensation by 10 percent, froze pensions, began taking a serious look at their banking crisis, and began looking at making their economy more competitive by instituting labor reform. But they were slow to get there. When they finally started to talk about labor reform and reducing public deficits, such

measures were especially unpopular in their base of political support, especially among labor unions, public employees, and people who didn't vote socialist. So their popularity plummeted and eventually they were thrown out of office at the time of the next national elections as they began to turn the ship. But still I would say in a very tentative way. When the right-of-center government took over, they took much more aggressive measures, and they were elected with an absolute majority. So they could pretty much do what they wanted in the congress. Part of the challenge being faced from the outside was dealing with the decisions that the Germans were trying to push on them. The right-of-center government was elected with the hope that they could have more influence in Berlin.

I once asked a visiting official from the U.S. Treasury, "What do you think is the greatest risk to the Spanish economy?"

And he said, "German domestic politics." One of the dynamics that we had to deal with was, first of all, to try to encourage the Spanish government to deal seriously with the crisis. Because Spain was one of those countries that was too big to fail. If the Spanish economy completely imploded then it would put our recovery at risk. So our message to the Spanish is: you've got to deal with this crisis. You've got to deal with it aggressively; you've got to deal with the political fallout, you have no choice. At the same time, we were trying to encourage the Germans to give the Spanish the kind of room they needed to institute changes.

Of course, there's another story that's told about when President Obama was with Chancellor Merkel in Chicago, in 2011 or '12. Merkel was trying to reassure the president and said, "Don't worry, I won't let Europe fall over the cliff."

And supposedly Obama said, "Do you know where the cliff is?"

We couldn't solve the problems of the euro zone. But we had a lot of "skin in the game" and we had a lot at stake. And so, we certainly tried first to exercise some leadership at the G20. But over time, I think it's fair to say that we weren't able to exercise the same degree of leadership with our allies as the euro zone crisis deepened while the Germans and the Northern Europeans took the positions or imposed them on the south of Europe.

Q: Did you have any solid discussions with the German ambassador? How did he see it?

SOLOMONT: Not much with the German embassy in Madrid. There was regular conversation among U.S. diplomats in Europe, U.S. embassy, among the ambassadors, and with Washington. There was a weekly conference call between Washington and a group of U.S. embassies in Europe, typically Germany, UK, France, Greece, Spain, Italy, sometimes Portugal, sometimes the Netherlands. It was a regular weekly meeting, and it was interesting because it was one of the few times that there was real interaction among different agencies. The call was sponsored by the White House – basically the economic advisors in the National Security Council. It included representatives from the White House, Treasury, and State talking to embassies at the ambassadorial level in Berlin,

Paris, Madrid, and London. We were invited to all the calls. Sometimes we were on the call, sometimes not. But everybody got a chance to share with one another what we saw happening in our host countries, which was very useful for all of us to understand. This was all for the purpose of trying to inform the president in terms of both his understanding of what was happening and where the points of engagement might be.

Q: You say that Spain was one of those countries that was too big to fail, but did you see it teetering?

SOLOMONT: In the summer of 2012, the issue is whether or not Spain would continue to have access to the private markets in order to finance their government. I mean their government was having to bail out their banks. Their government was trying to bring down a huge deficit and make the economy more competitive. The real issue was whether the Spanish government could maintain access to the bond market in order to finance itself, or whether it would be able to face bankruptcy without a European bailout? I mean that's what happened in Ireland, Portugal, and Greece. In the spring and summer of 2012 the government was really teetering. We used to measure this daily by the spread between what the Germans and Spanish were paying for bonds. At one point the difference, the risk premium, was 670 basis points. The theory was that anything over 600 or 700 basis points was just unsustainable. And there was the question that summer whether Spain was going to need a bailout? The view of the Spanish government is that a bailout would have been an absolute disaster because there wasn't enough money. And I can remember meeting with the economic advisor to the president. He said, "Listen, you've got to tell your government that a bailout of Spain is absolutely crazy." He tried to communicate the numbers. He said, "You know, we're talking about 800 billion euros." And of course, the backstop and firewall wasn't nearly big enough. This is a point of contention with the Germans. What would they do? The German government was concerned about their reaction to their bailing out Greece, Portugal, and Ireland. They were putting strict limits on what their commitment would be. There was a lot of concern that Spain had lost confidence in the market, that the risk premium was going up, and that they wouldn't have access to private markets. They didn't think their economy was in bad enough condition to warrant that kind of anxiety. They felt that they were taking the measures that were needed; they were bringing down their deficits. I guess they were asking the United States for help with Germany, in reassuring markets that Spain is taking the right measures, and helping to communicate and differentiate the reality from what The Financial Times and The Wall Street Journal are reporting.

Over that summer, because of the measures that the government was taking, Spain came back from the precipice. By the fall of 2012 and then into '13 the risk premium began to come down. Today the risk premium is about 250 basis points. We used to watch it as it went to 400 and 300. Spain never lost access to the private market, and now is actually able to finance its government affordably. There was a need to provide support for the banking bailout, which is something that the European Union did -- they committed up to 100 billion euros. Spain only drew about 45 billion euros, and I think is actually in the process of paying that back. The Spanish economy was never as bad as some people thought. It is coming back. Spanish exports have grown faster than in any other European

country virtually. The Spanish tourism sector has generally held its own and is now doing better. The banking reorganization has actually been fairly successful. The big challenge that the Spanish economy faces is that credit is not flowing, and unemployment remains at 26 percent. They're not creating jobs and the economy is not growing. It stopped shrinking, but it is still somewhat stuck.

Q: Yeah. Why don't we talk about some of the personalities. Let's talk about the unions and the public sector and all. How do we view them? Are they different than in the United States?

SOLOMONT: I came back feeling I had really seen American foreign policy and diplomacy changing to adapt to the needs of the 21st century.

Q: Oh, absolutely.

SOLOMONT: By the way, have you read the book about the Dulles brothers?

Q: No, but I've seen a review of it.

SOLOMONT: I'm just finishing it. It's a very good, important book, and as a student of American foreign policy, it is absolutely frightening and chilling. It was the Eisenhower government, but it's really frightening some of the things that we did, the price for which we are still paying to this day.

Q: I'll try to get a hold of it. Thank you.

It's February 26, 2016 and we are concluding our oral history with Ambassador Solomont. And Ambassador, you did have some ideas about where you wanted to pick up from here, so the floor is yours.

SOLOMONT: I wanted to take a little bit of a step back and put context to my tour in terms of what I observed to be happening in the world and how it affected both Spain and the United States. I think it puts it in the context of what's going on in the world and in our country today.

I served during the period that I would call the ripening of globalization. The world was clearly becoming increasingly interdependent, and with the election of Barack Obama, he announced that he was going to do foreign policy and business in the world in a different way than his predecessor. He said that very clearly in his first inaugural speech, and said we were going to work with like-minded countries and countries with whom we have differences. I think his approach to foreign policy was a recognition that America couldn't accomplish its own goals by itself. Both with respect to issues of national security and also issues of economic security, we lived in a different world and we would have to behave accordingly. Barack Obama saying that the problems of the world were too big to be solved by America alone, but no big problem could be solved without

America. And that's just something also that was echoed by the Secretary of State during those times.

So on issues having to do with nuclear proliferation, especially with respect to Iran and imposing sanctions; so far as our efforts to continue to prosecute the war in Afghanistan, so that it would never be used again as a haven for terrorists, or a platform for people who would do us harm, and then to wind it down responsibly; or issues of piracy off the coasts in the Sea of Aden; or international crime or economic issues; certainly the worldwide financial crisis and our concern about Spain and Europe generally had to do with what impact the crisis and Europe's response to it would be on our own economic recovery. So, on all of these issues, it was my job to work closely with this partner to really bring them along as we tried to deal with our challenges that we faced in the world knowing we could not do it alone and that we did, in fact, rely on the support of like-minded countries, and we saw efforts to work with countries with whom we have differences.

In reference to both the shrinking of the world and its increasing interconnectedness, but also a broadening of the playing field. I grew up in a bipolar world during the Cold War, and foreign policy was mostly concerned with dealing with one other country. But increasingly, we were dealing with 190 countries and the Secretaries of State had begun to brag over the miles that they cover and the number of countries they visit. We certainly had big concerns all around the world. So we were also shifting our attention more to the East and to Asia. We were dealing with non-State actors so at the same time that the world was shrinking, I would say the board on which diplomacy was played was bigger. That affected my job quite a bit, I believe, because it meant that the embassy had more responsibility directly for the execution of our foreign policy. Washington didn't have the bandwidth to be dealing with every country with whom it had an important bilateral relationship, and it meant I had a great deal of authority over the work we did. I was aware that I wasn't there to make foreign policy; I was there to execute it. But all the federal agencies that are part of an embassy, Commerce and Agriculture and Justice and the FBI and DEA and Homeland Security and Defense, all of those federal agencies, with the exception of soldiers in combat, report up to the chief of mission. And unlike Washington, there's not sufficient authority independent of the ambassador so that you don't get into a lot of interagency rivalry.

A friend of mine who was ambassador to the Czech Republic, John Shattuck, told me before I went a little story that I never did understand until I got there. He served under Secretary Albright. She used to say, "John, you have a lot more power than I do because I'm here in Washington and I sit around the table with all these other cabinet secretaries and we compete for resources and compete for the president's attention and the elbows need to be sharp, but in your position you're really in charge." And I was struck by how much authority was conferred on the chief of mission and the fact that Washington really doesn't have the [unintelligible].

Every country is unique, so Spain was important enough to be part of the international coalition in Afghanistan; important enough to want them to play a role in the closing of

Guantanamo; important enough economically, certainly, the fourth largest economy in Europe; important enough to the economic recovery of the United States, but still not like Germany, France, or the UK where the president would regularly communicate with the heads of state. So I was really empowered to be the voice and face of our government and our President. That created opportunity and some tension, because the Spanish government never felt they got the attention from the president that they desired. But I think that was the case with heads of state around the world and I can talk a little bit about that. So I was able to craft our agenda and unite our embassy team around a very specific diplomatic strategy.

At the same time as the exercise of this authority, because I was representing the president of the United States, I had enormous access. Every door in the country was open because the fact is that the U.S. ambassador probably in most countries is certainly a first among equals in the diplomatic corps. So, I was either sought or had ready access to the leaders of government, to the leaders of business, the press. That combination of authority and access that I talked about a fair amount when asked to describe the job, I thought made it a particularly interesting job because I felt as though we really could have an impact. More so than other jobs I've ever had, I felt that I could really make a difference in public service, both in terms of serving our own country's interests and also making a difference in creating a stronger relationship between these two countries which were important allies.

Q: A quick question here. You've been talking about the Washington backstop aspects of being ambassador and the State Department. Did the National Security Council also play? Did you have regular contact with them? Because that also varies from country to country.

SOLOMONT: The short answer is yes. I think I described these weekly phone calls that took place with the group of embassies in Europe who were especially involved and playing important roles relative to the Eurozone crisis. These conference calls with the Department of State, Treasury, and the National Security Council, it was actually the economic advisor on the National Security Staff that would lead these meetings. It was also frankly very apparent, certainly in the first term, and this has been written about, that foreign policy was really crafted in the White House. If somebody asked me "Who is President Obama's chief foreign policy advisor?" I would have said, "Barack Obama." Not that he didn't get advice from any of the others, but I think that there was no question that's where policy was made. It wasn't made at Foggy Bottom on the seventh floor or elsewhere frankly. That doesn't mean there wasn't a strong team, but that was pretty clear. I dealt with the agencies in Washington. I dealt with Defense a lot around the destroyers, missile defense, and the role that Spain played in that. I mentioned the secretary of the Navy being helpful. When my colleague Admiral James Stavridis was the NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, U.S. Forces in Europe helped lobby the Spanish to make the decision that they did. I dealt with Treasury, I think it was Lael Brainard who was the Under Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs and then her Deputy Assistant Secretary who was also a dear friend from Boston, Christopher

Smart, who was a great person at Treasury dealing with the Eurozone crisis. But the decisions were coming out of the White House.

So let me just also talk about how I experienced the White House involvement in the work that I did. The best part of my job was the ability to exercise the authority, the ability to execute the policies, the ability to try to fashion a strategy with my colleagues at the embassy, and we really had a lot of latitude. But I would say that dealing with Washington was probably one of the least satisfying parts of the job. I felt really good to be 3,800 miles away. I didn't have to deal with the bureaucracy. I didn't have to deal with people second-guessing me. You know, anytime I gave a speech in the United States, I had to get the State Department to clear my remarks. I gave a commencement speech at Suffolk University in Boston. I would have asked for forgiveness not permission, but my colleagues who tried to keep me on the right side of things, sent the remarks in and they were fine but I had no such restrictions in terms of my public remarks in Spain. But I also had to deal with the longing of the Spanish government and the Spanish leadership to be both close to the United States and to President Obama, really at all levels. Now this had to do with a lot of different things; there are a lot of dimensions to this. One is their desire that they be important enough to command the attention of the White House.

The first six months of my tour coincided with Spain's presidency of the European Union. This was just post Lisbon, but the rotating presidency was still a bigger deal than I think it is now. And actually this is the first presidency after the Lisbon treaty. It was customary for there to be a U.S.-EU summit, I think every year. Every other year would be in the United States and the other year it would be in the host country of the presidency. So according to this informal schedule, the Spanish felt there should be a U.S.-EU summit in Madrid during its presidency. This was a dominant theme from the moment I arrived. In fact, when I presented my credentials to His Majesty, King Juan Carlos, he said, "You know it's very important that the president comes to Spain for this summit." I had lunch with Deputy Secretary Bill Burns. There was a lot of activity in the first six months, and a lot of U.S. visitors, because Spain was serving as EU president and there were a lot of EU ministerial meetings taking place in the country. So the Director of Homeland Security came, and the Attorney General came, and others, and Assistant Secretary Phil Gordon, and they were coming in not necessarily to deal with the Spanish, but to deal with the EU and the ministers of the EU who were meeting there. During the first month I was in country, Bill Burns came for an EU ministerial meeting, and I had him at the residence for lunch with Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos. It was a fascinating period because these two seasoned diplomats went around the world and hit all the topics, Russia, China, and talked about all the challenging areas of the world and I was a young, newly-minted diplomat, and I just sat there fascinated by the conversation.

Q: When you went into those very high-level meetings, did you go alone or did you have any embassy support?

SOLOMONT: If I went to see Prime Minister Zapatero or for that matter Prime Minister Rajoy, the deputy chief of mission would usually accompany me. In this case, it was just the three of us. We ended the lunch with Foreign Minister Moratinos saying, "You know

Deputy Secretary Burns, it will be a disaster if we have this U.S.-EU Summit and the president doesn't come for it" and it was a matter of Spanish pride and Spanish insecurity and Burns of course being the great diplomat he is, said, "First of all, I know how important it is to get you an answer quickly and I will try to ensure that we do, and I hope it will be the right answer; I hope it will be yes." And, you know, he wasn't going to have to take the bullet.

But it turned out the answer was, no. It was maybe a month later. In the conversation about this, the White House was looking for Spain to make a case for why there should be a summit. What was going to be the agenda, and why on the merits should President Obama come and do that? And they didn't make a case strong enough to sway the White House. There were, interestingly, different views in the White House. The national security advisor was Jim Jones, and he actually cared a lot about Spain having a summit. I remember stating to him, trying to get some clarity, he said, "Oh, yes, there's going to be a summit; it's on the schedule" and that was on a Friday. And on I think that Monday, the White House announced no summit. I wrote in my journal, "the honeymoon is over." I dealt with that. I mean it was a good learning experience. It was also interesting that nobody else was willing to… I was left having to pick up the pieces and control the damage with no assistance. It was Deputy Assistant Secretary Nancy McEldowney who once said to me, "We're here to support you so you can be successful" and all I could think of was, "Nice job." The reason I mentioned it, is that it was really an important challenge for me. Also, it speaks to the way the Obama White House behaved relative to other White Houses.

Just to backtrack a little. Before I went to State, I used to teach a course -- a political science seminar on the American presidency. One of the points I made to students, was that I had had a front-row seat to eight years in the Clinton administration. I had been in five presidential campaigns at that point, and I was fascinated as a student and as an observer of the institution. I told the students that the American presidency was the most powerful institution in the world. It is really an awesome sight to watch it loom and see the resources it commands, to see what happens when a president comes to a city and how it shuts the city down or the vast economic and other power it exercises.

This all resides in the institution, but at the same time the character and the personality of the institution is driven by the single human being who sits in the Oval Office. It was really a fascinating view of history to see the different approaches based on the personalities of the presidents. With President Obama, the fact is that what you see is what you get. He's not somebody who has a lot of patience with the photo op and the making of a call because Zapatero needs to hear from him. He would call if there was some business to deal with and this advisor said, "We've got to buck them up, Zapatero's making good decisions, and it would be useful to put in a call and tell him how much we appreciate it, how much courage we know it's taking…" But the story of the summit is a really good example of the fact that if there wasn't a compelling reason to show up, he was not going to show up just because the Spanish wanted him. I don't think any embassy felt they got as much attention as their host country wanted or as they could have used to do their job. I felt that for sure but it gave rise to another interesting story.

A former foreign minister of Spain, Ana Palacio, once said to me in this regard, "You know, Ambassador, sometimes you have to send a box of chocolates just to remind someone that you care."

Q: I have a question in that regard relative to the issue of the Summit. Did Washington, or was there any effort made, to cushion the blow?

SOLOMONT: Well, yes. Biden came in May. Secretary Clinton came in July. The actual decision not to do the Summit was handled very awkwardly, and actually in a way that undercut me a lot. So, yes and no. On the one hand they handled it poorly in terms of the decision. I think what happened was that somebody leaked the story to the Wall Street Journal. You know how real politics is played. I think there were people in the White House like the national security advisor who were lobbying for this meeting and others who didn't think it was a good idea, and I think somebody dropped a dime on the press, partly to scuttle it. I think there had been a decision they weren't going to do it, but that wasn't the way it should have been done. It was certainly a good learning experience and something that is part of my job. I had to deal with it. I had a press conference the day after the decision, and I had to say, "This is no reflection on our regard for the Spanish; this has nothing to do with Spain; Spain is an important ally, a reliable partner." One of my jobs, I felt, was to help improve Spain's standing in Washington as a reliable partner because that would make them more reliable and when I got to Spain; their press in Washington wasn't that great. So let me just finish the story about the box of chocolates. It won't take long.

I used that metaphor frequently, including at a chiefs of missions conference, and it resonated with other chiefs of missions. So anyhow, in July Secretary of State Clinton came to Spain. When the Secretary of State shows up it's a front page story on every newspaper in the country. Clinton comes in for 24 hours, and it's a successful visit. Then about a week later, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of European Affairs, Phil Gordon, comes to town. Ana Palacio, the former foreign minister, who is quite a hostess and likes to have dinner parties in her home, hosted a dinner party for Assistant Secretary Gordon. You had a couple of dozen leaders of Spain around the table with the ambassador and the assistant secretary and I recalled that we had bars of chocolate left over from Christmas, with the State Department seal. So I brought a bunch of them and I put a bar of chocolate on everybody's plate. When I gave my toast, as would be the ambassador's job at a gathering like this, I recalled what former foreign minister Palacio had once said to me about a box of chocolates and I said, "So I hope on the heels of a visit by our Secretary of State and then our Assistant Secretary Phil Gordon here tonight, I hope the Spanish feel that they've received a box of chocolates from our government.

Q: (Laughter). Very good.

SOLOMONT: You know some of diplomacy is theater.

Q: Of course.

SOLOMONT: I've talked about this notion of interdependence and I mentioned globalization. I wanted to speak about it from an economic and a business standpoint. What was quite apparent when I began to get to know Spain better is how important this group of important multinational companies that had globalized were to the Spanish economy, and for that matter, the world economy. The largest bank in Europe in terms of assets is Banco Santander. The second largest bank in Spain, Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA), has business around the world, and both of them have a large presence in the United States: Banco Santander in the Northeast and East Coast and BBVA in the South and Southwest. Six of the largest construction companies in the world are Spanish companies, and they are building tunnels and highways in the United States and around the world. The high speed rail between Mecca and Medina is being done by a Spanish consortium. So, I knew Spain was a leader in renewable energies but the second largest generator of wind-powered electricity in the United States is a Spanish company, Gamesa. In fact, half of all the money in our stimulus package went to Spanish companies working on wind projects. This is one of the strengths of the Spanish economy, and there are reasons why Spain's business is globalized. I think they first started in Latin America because of the common language and then they migrated to the United States. There were probably 1,500 American companies doing business with Spain –all big exporting companies. Big pharma (the pharmaceutical industry) was manufacturing drugs in Spain for export throughout Europe and auto companies were making cars in Spain for the same reason.

So it became very clear that the practice of economic statecraft, putting our economic policy at the forefront of our foreign policy, was much more important than ever before. I spent a good deal of my efforts not just on matters of national security, or, for that matter, around the issues of the Eurozone, although this was a dimension of it, but also promoting business interests – both U.S. business in Spain and Spanish business interests in the United States. Nineteen percent of all U.S. exports are produced by the American subsidiaries of foreign-owned companies. That accounts for five million U.S. jobs. When Abengoa built the single largest solar facility in the United States, I think in Arizona, with a one and a half billion-dollar loan guarantee from the Department of Energy (DOE), we were contacted by the DOE before it got approved. We lobbied to get it green-lighted, but that one and a half billion-dollar project had a supply chain that covered 22 U.S. states from which they were buying products. I put a lot of effort on both sides of the Atlantic trying to promote business interests, and rather aggressively in Spain.

There were some very significant issues. For example, American pharmaceutical companies have a big presence in Spain. Of course, part of it is that they're using a platform for exporting but they're also selling to the Spanish market. The Spanish market and prices are controlled because they have a national health plan. During the economic crisis, they looked at the drug prices for a place to cut back and this was damaging to our business interests. My job was to protect our business interests, so I would take U.S. companies in to see the minister of health or the president's economic advisor and to impress upon them that it was important. I think one of my talking points was that 10

percent of all research and development spending in Spain is spent by U.S. pharmaceutical companies. I had data on the number of Spanish jobs, so it was interesting. I never expected that I would become a shill for Big Pharma. Spain is the largest livestock producer in Europe, I believe, so they needed to buy a lot of feed grain. I wouldn't know sorghum if it showed up on my kitchen table, but I used to go out to farming co-ops pushing U.S. sorghum. I tell you, I think my business background was supportive of it.

Hillary Clinton gave a speech on October 14, 2010, at the Economic Club of New York. She coined the expression "Economic statecraft" when she said, "We no longer measure the influence of nations or the power of nations by the size of their armies but by the size of their economies." She laid out the theory. Economic statecraft was a very important part of my portfolio, and one of the few areas in which I was criticized, for example, was for being such a strong advocate of U.S. renewable companies. Spain is a leader in renewable energy. It became a leader because of the rich subsidies the government provided for the development of wind and solar, in part, because Spain has neither natural energy resources of its own nor fossil fuel resources. It imports all of that, so the government has helped develop the renewable industry with very generous subsidies. So U.S. companies began to eye Spain as a good place to develop renewable energy projects.

One big company, NextEra Energy Resources (NEER), which is the largest renewable energy provider in the United States, made its very first overseas investment in Spain. I worked very hard for a couple of years on behalf of that project with the minister of Industry and pushed hard to get them licensed and approved. I remember at one point NextEra had gotten their national approval and they were working with the municipal government. The mayor was giving them a hard time. I think it was over housing procedures, or something, and it was a little heavy-handed, but it was holding up and actually jeopardizing the project because of certain other parts of the business deal. The mayor was a member of the *Partido Popular* who just won the election and was just coming into power. And so I called the president's chief of staff with whom I had developed a good relationship and I said, "You've got to help me with this" and he fixed it. He talked to me, then called the mayor, and they fixed it. I was glad; it was not an unimportant part of my job.

Now I wasn't special in every way. Because of the economic crisis, frankly because of the generosity of the subsidies, Spain began to pull back retroactively. So, U.S. companies had made these big bets, and now the ground rules were changing, and I raised hell about it. Honestly, at the end of the day, I lost. I was criticized for being such an aggressive defender of U.S. business. I was there when WikiLeaks broke, but the good news for me is that WikiLeaks ended in February 2010, and I arrived in Spain at the very beginning of January of 2010. So, the extent to which the U.S. ambassador to Spain was subject to any of the WikiLeaks business was my predecessor.

We spent a lot of time on intellectual property protection because Spain is an area where international piracy is a big problem. It's also an area where the U.S. entertainment business, music and film, and for that matter software as well, has been a good market.

The music industry was getting killed because nobody was buying; everybody was just pirating the music. My friend Dan Glickman was the head of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) when I first got there and then Chris Dodd took over at some point [March 2011]. The United States evaluates countries around the world for the level of intellectual property protection and sanctions countries that aren't doing a good job. I can't remember the total list, but Spain showed up on that list, and it was an embarrassment to the Spanish. They were very unhappy, and they were actually working the issue. I managed to get them off the list based on assurances that they would take certain steps. In fact, it was such a big issue that when the Partido Popular came to power I went to the reception of incoming Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. He hadn't even put his government together, but he won a resounding victory. The very first thing he said to me was a reference to intellectual property issues, that they were going to work with us on it because I had made it such a big deal.

So the economic interdependence of the world and global economy loomed very large in my portfolio. I say that, in part, because I was there during the blossoming of globalization. We are seeing the fallout from globalization. I don't think it was yet apparent five years ago, but it is certainly apparent today that globalization, which I believe is unstoppable really, has not treated people necessarily well. A lot of the anger in the United States, and around politics at the moment, is really a function of the impact of globalization. And if you listen to the rhetoric, especially among the Republican presidential candidates, they're really reacting to the changes that I both observed and worked with during my tour. Europe is bending under the strain of this increasing globalization. I think it has also spawned some of the terrorist activity and some of the disintegration of nation states and stress on the European Union from migrants and the reaction to the worldwide economic financial crisis.

I was there during a very interesting transitional time when we were dealing with these emerging forces and having a profound impact on the world and on the United States, Spain, and Europe. It's interesting for me now to see the world reacting. In a way, I think globalization was never explained to people. Its benefits have not been realized by people. I think we've done a lousy job in both communicating what this is about to folks and making sure that the benefits were shared. I would say worse than a lousy job, so those chickens are coming home to roost, and there's been a huge worldwide reaction to this. I think it's fueling a lot of the lack of confidence in public institutions, a lot of the economic stresses.

Q: And, of course, Spain was suffering the structural changes also of globalization with its own growth in unemployment rates and so on.

SOLOMONT: Another piece of the job was to try to export some of the values and culture of the United States that could be helpful to the Spanish as they struggled with this issue. So, part of the Spanish economy had grown quite uncompetitive, in part, because of a lack of entrepreneurship and innovation. I always thought part of my job is also to project American values and offer a positive image. There are a lot of lessons about where America falls short that we've learned and talked about. We talked a lot

about diversity and about our own struggles with that. Actually, Spain could teach us a few things in that regard; they have the largest immigrant population in Europe and they've handled this better than probably most of the other European countries. There's not the level of xenophobia that you see in other nations, or demagoguery around this issue. But the point is that I did devote a certain amount of effort to share with the Spanish why entrepreneurs flourish in the United States, and there was a great deal of interest in Spain in this issue. The Spanish realized that this was a shortcoming, and that in order to restore growth to their economy they had to figure this out. They had these great large multinationals, but they ranked low in international ratings on the ease of doing business. I gave a lot of speeches about entrepreneurship. We also brought in entrepreneurs into the embassy and the residence and tried to be a center for conversation about that.

The other thing that doesn't exist as much in Europe or in Spain that I thought was worth sharing is the strong civil society in the United States and the role that citizens play in volunteering and rolling up their sleeves to help solve problems in their communities. The whole idea of citizen service, not relying on the government for everything. One of the stresses on Spain and Europe is that the model they created – the strong safety net, which in many respects is something we could envy – and the problems they face cannot be solved just by government. We probably don't rely enough on government; they rely too much on government. However, we did try to bring attention to one of the strengths of U.S. democracy, which is that people participate in solving their community problems. As Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out, we're a nation of forward innovations and it's about Ben Franklin having started the first volunteer fire department in Philadelphia even before the republic was formed. Before I was ambassador, I was the chairman of the board of the Cooperation for National Community Service and worked overseas in AmeriCorps, and so that's also part of my personal history. I was an entrepreneur and making things that I knew about and thought were important to our country, and I tried to incorporate them in my work and draw attention to them in ways that I thought would be useful both for the image of the United States and for Spain's efforts to deal with its challenges.

Q: Okay, I completely understand what you're saying about Spain. Spain, although it does have, as you mentioned, one of the highest rates of immigration, they also have a fair amount of emigration. Does the U.S. receive a fair number of Spanish immigrants? Of course, once again, due to the interest in finding paid work.

SOLOMONT: No, is the short answer. The worst manifestation of the world economic crisis and its effect on Spain was the high unemployment rate. At one point it reached over 27 percent, and among young people it was over 50 percent. It is a challenge today even though the economy is growing again, and in fact, is doing better than most European economies. Unemployment continues to be kind of an intractable problem for the Spanish. It's still probably around 20 percent. There is the danger of this lost generation of people who go to university and then can't find employment. One of the things that helped the Spanish through this and continues is the amazingly strong family structure. I think something like 67 percent of young people under the age of 30 still live

with their parents, and many families were supporting both older and younger relatives. I don't think I knew a Spanish family where there weren't some people out of work. And there were young people whose worst manifestation of the world economic crisis and its effect on Spain was the high unemployment rate. There were young people learning German, who set off for Germany or Latin America. It wasn't a huge outflow of people, frankly, but very few to the United States, relatively speaking.

It always was a puzzle to me that the relationship between the United States and Spain is the oldest relationship that we have with a European country. We talk about France being our first ally of the Revolutionary War, but the Spanish history goes back to 1613 with the landing by Ponce de León in Florida. He founded St. Augustine, and while I was there we were celebrating the 500th anniversary, and we promoted this a lot because I thought it was a good message about the long history between Spain and the United States. The Spanish national flag flew over the territory now known as the United States longer than any other national flag in history – longer than 300 years from 1513 to 1826. The cities of San Bernardino and San Francisco, California, were based on missions that were founded by the Spanish missionary from Mallorca named Father Junipero Serra. There are more people in the United States who speak Spanish than there are in Spain. I would get a good laugh line when I said there are 50 million Americans who speak Spanish and my wife and I worked very hard to increase that number by two. (Laughter.)

Q: On the one hand there is a relationship with America and then on the other hand, there is a colonial contact with the North American continent. I just want a clarification about the U.S.-Spanish relationship being old. That's just a striking thing but I wonder if before America was even founded, does that mean it is the longest relationship with America or the longest sort of contact after the indigenous people on the North American continent.

SOLOMONT: No, because the Spanish presence lasted until 1826, they had sovereignty over much of California and the Southwest. They were actually important allies during the Revolutionary War in part because they opposed Britain. There was a famous general, Bernardo de Galvez who basically protected the Mississippi from the British opening up another front in the Revolutionary War, which could have changed the course of history. But having said all that, the Spanish influence in the United States is really not very strong. There is not a really large constituency in the United States like there is for Italy or Poland. The Hispanic community in the United States really doesn't identify with Spain. Fifty million people speak the language, but they identify with Mexico, Argentina, or where they came from. I always felt it was a lost opportunity in terms of the bilateral relationship that we couldn't somehow forge a closer connection.

Spain is still relatively unknown to most Americans. Spain is one of the largest tourist markets in the world -- 65 million tourists go to a country of 47 million. Only about a million and a half of them are Americans. We don't realize that all of the Italian olive oil that we consume is made from Spanish olives. In fact, they are the largest olive oil producer. Spain devotes more of its land to wine production than any other country in the world. We're just beginning to appreciate Spanish wines.

I had a pretty successful run, I think, accomplishing my mission on behalf of our government. I had more successes than failures. I got them to cooperate on Afghanistan, on Iran. We did promote investment here. One of the reasons that I was able to be successful is that I reflected back to the Spanish people and to Spanish leaders, an incredibly positive view of their country. My opening words to the King when I presented my credentials – and we had a little tête-à-tête (private conversation) afterwards – was "Spain has been an incredible success story, Your Majesty. I was here in 1971 – and I saw what a poor country it was and how backward it was – and to think that in 35 years since Franco's death, it has developed such a vibrant democracy and a prosperous economy, is really remarkable." And I would repeat that, that Spain is a great success story. Anyway, I bet it's true despite all of their challenges, and that gave me the ability to also be critical of things and to win them over. You know, part of my job was to try to win their affection. If they liked me, they were more likely to like the United States. I think I did that largely by reflecting to them a very favorable view of their country, probably more favorable than they have.

The State Department does a lousy job at supporting the spouses of ambassadors. They are really marginalized. You know my wife left a career and was a professional, and she picked herself up with me to go serve our country, and there was no role for her. In fact, there was resistance to her carving out a role. I had mentioned earlier that I was very proud of the fact that I got a very good Inspector General (IG) report and the IG was very complimentary to me. Well, the one issue on which I differed with the IG was my wife because we had a job description for the ambassador's staff assistant in which it was written (and I know it probably shouldn't have been) that the staff assistant will also help support the ambassador's wife. And they were going to write this up, and I went ballistic and really argued with them. I got to use salty language quite a bit. But it just frosted me that the ongoing discussion that Susie and I had over her role about how she could carve out her role in our diplomatic mission, which she did. She created a platform for Spanish businesswomen to gather, chaired a committee for Commerce for Spanish businesswomen, and she worked with me around volunteerism, which was really a very important part of the work that we did together and an important part of our diplomatic mission.

Q: Well, you know, Ambassador, a little bit of this is a holdover from a former time when men were graded in part on the effectiveness of their wives in socializing. And so part of the reason that your wife, and female spouses of foreign service officers, don't tend to get any support is in reaction to that old era when the wives were considered sort of support staff but obviously that era is long past and you're right, the State Department does need to now reconsider the value of spouses in promoting foreign policy.

SOLOMONT: I appreciate that. Actually, I am aware of that. People had pointed that out to me. In fact, when I was arguing with the IG, he gave me that history. Let me give you an interesting vignette. So, we go to Washington for the ambassadors' seminar and maybe 14 of the 20 of us had spouses there, and they got out everybody's CV – but only of the ambassadors. It occurred to me that we are working in the State Department that is

run by the most famous political spouse in history, perhaps, who is now the Secretary, and this is how they are treating the spouses, mostly women. There were some male spouses. You know the irony was quite significant. When people ask me what was the best part of this experience, I say that having the opportunity for my wife and me to work in partnership on this project was really an incredibly fulfilling part of the job. It brought us closer together, and it made us more successful. She had her own identity. I used to introduce myself at events as "the husband of the wife of the United States ambassador to Spain."

Q: Yes, the last question that I have, that I ask all ambassadors, is have you maintained any contacts subsequent to your tour or are there are any concluding stories of that nature?

SOLOMONT: I actually had three goals when I came back. I had put all the books on the shelf when I went away, and I had a very busy life here and I didn't want to just pick up where I left off. I started a new career the same month I qualified for Medicare – that's kind of a blessing. One goal was to find new things and not to pick up where I had left off. Secondly, I wanted to wind up at a university. I didn't entirely expect to wind up as the Dean, but I am. I wanted to stay in touch with Spain. So, the fact is, I've been back probably 10 times. I serve on the boards of two U.S. subsidiaries of Spanish companies, one being Pergola and the other being MAPFRE. I am the chairman of the Spain-U.S. Chamber of Commerce which is located in New York. It's sort of a titular thing because I do have this fulltime job, so I ended up maintaining contact with friends there. It was a huge part of our lives. It's also part of the reason why I put my experiences into book form because it was an important experience for me and my family.

The State Department prepares ambassadors better for arrival than for departure. The door closes rather suddenly and they lock it pretty tight. I remember going into the building and having to wait in line. They don't really have any way of showing their affection or their regard for your service -- you get a nice letter, you get a flag and then it's over. And it's frustrating, and I talked to a lot of colleagues about this. Some have had a hard time adjusting. I mean if you still live in this bubble, I used to say to people, "I am simply the temporary steward of an office that traces back in this country to John Jay, that has had many distinguished Americans in that position, but I'm only the steward. My job is to leverage this job that has all this authority and all this access in order to promote my country's interests. But you know it will have a beginning and an end. My wife's a *Grateful Dead* aficionado and sometimes I quote the line, "It was all a dream, my dream one afternoon long ago."

I had a friend who was serving in Portugal. I said, "Bob, you got about a year left. All you're going to have is memories so make sure you make as many as you can." You know that is a plaintive part of this. Because they take you to the airport the day you leave with a police escort. The lights are flashing, the flags are on the limousine, your whole staff comes. The captain of the plane comes up to meet you and then they carry your bags to the plane. Then you cross the threshold over the plane and you put your own bag up and you get home. I remember going to Barcelona frequently and I would get

picked up at the residence, a bag would be taken separately, my security people would take me, they put me on a train. The high-speed train in Spain was incredibly efficient. I'd get off the train in Barcelona. There'd be another car waiting for me. The first time I went to New York when I came back here I took Amtrak. The train broke down outside of Providence. We sat there for an hour. It wasn't going anyplace. Then we had to switch trains to a local train that stopped everywhere. I got out at Penn Station. I stood in the biting cold for about 20 minutes waiting for a cab and all I could think of was, "It's over." And I used to compare my life in Spain to living the world of Oz. And so I'm back in Kansas. But I also feel that just like Dorothy, we had this experience to live over the rainbow and it was really extraordinary, but there is no place like home. So that's it.

Q: Well, great. Thank you very much for making the time to complete it. This is a perfect completion narrative because you did exactly what you intended to do, which is to look back in sort of a larger way of the part Spain plays in the world and the bilateral relationship and how it developed and so on. I really want to thank you.

End of interview