



President George W. Bush Oral History Project

BRIEFING MATERIALS

Nicholas Calio

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Presidential Oral History Program

MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED OR CIRCULATED

NICHOLAS CALIO NEWS TIMELINE

Prepared by Christopher M. Loomis

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 01/14/2011

- 1975** Nicholas E. Calio earns a B.A. from Ohio Wesleyan University. (*2001/Fall Federal Staff Directory*, Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2001, p. 1147)
- 1978** Calio earns a J.D. from Case Western Reserve University. (*2001/Fall Federal Staff Directory*, p. 1147)
- 1989-1993** Calio serves under President George H. W. Bush as deputy assistant to the president for legislative affairs and then assistant to the president for legislative affairs. (*2001/Fall Federal Staff Directory*, p. 1147; *The New York Times*, 07/04/1992)
- 1993** Calio co-founds the lobbying firm of O'Brien Calio with Lawrence F. O'Brien III, a Democrat who worked in the Carter Administration. (*2001/Fall Federal Staff Directory*, p. 1147; *The New York Times*, 01/04/2001)
- 2001**
- January* Calio's appointment as assistant to the president and director of legislative affairs is announced on the 4th. Calio helps hire not only his own staff but also staffers for cabinet departments to better coordinate congressional relations. (*2001/Fall Federal Staff Directory*, p. 1147; Robert Draper, *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush*, New York: Free Press, 2007, pp. 100-101; *The Washington Post*, 01/05/2001, 04/22/2001; *CQ Weekly*, 12/14/2002)
- During its first week in office, the Bush Administration announces its No Child Left Behind education initiative and a \$1.6 trillion tax cut proposal. Margaret Spellings heads education reform, and tax reform is led by Lawrence Lindsey and Calio. (Shirley Anne Warshaw, *The Co-Presidency of Bush and Cheney*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 135; *The Washington Post*, 1/24/2001)
- Calio becomes a member of the informal "Strategy Group" with Andrew Card, Condoleezza Rice, Lindsey, Spellings, Karen Hughes, Josh Bolten, and Mary Matalin. (John P. Burke, *Becoming President: The Bush Transition, 2000-2003*, Boulder: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2004, p. 71)
- March* After Calio reportedly receives pressure from conservative Republicans and coal and oil industry leaders, Bush backs away from limiting carbon dioxide emissions – a policy he supported during his campaign. (*The Washington Post*, 03/15/2001)
- May* After Senator James Jeffords (R-VT) leaves the Republican Party on the 24th to caucus with Democrats as an Independent, which hands control of the Senate to

the Democrats, the media criticizes Bush's congressional relations operation. (*National Review*, 05/23/2001; *The Washington Post*, 05/24/2001, 12/18/2002; *CQ Weekly*, 12/14/2002)

Congress passes a \$1.35 trillion tax cut on the 26th, and Calio's work with Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) helps secure a dozen Democratic votes for the legislation in the upper chamber. When Calio met with Bush in January, Calio urged him to be flexible on the preferred \$1.6 trillion in proposed cuts, but Bush remained firm, arguing that "the longer we say it, the less we'll end up having to back off." (Draper, *Dead Certain*, pp. 118-120; *The Washington Post*, 04/29/2001)

August After the Senate passes a version of the patients' bill of rights opposed by Bush, Calio, Chief of Staff Andrew Card, and Deputy Chief of Staff Joshua Bolten broker an agreement with Rep. Charles Norwood (R-GA) – who leads a bloc of moderate Republicans in the House – concerning patients' legal options against their health care providers. Bush personally closes the deal in the Oval Office and holds a press conference with Norwood. The agreement on the House bill forces the legislation to conference committee and forestalls a veto of a popular measure. (*The Washington Post*, 08/03/2001, 08/05/2001; *New Republic*, 08/20/2001)

September Al-Qaeda launches the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Calio is in the president's Emergency Operations Center below the White House with Cheney, Rice, Bolten, Lindsey, Hughes, John Bridgeland, Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, Director of Cabinet Affairs Albert Hawkins, Matalin, Director of Presidential Personnel Clay Johnson, and Lynne Cheney. (John Bridgeland, *Heart of the Nation: 9-11 and America's Civic Spirit*, CreateSpace, 2001, pp. 25-38; Warshaw, pp. 136-137)

October Angered by a story in *The Washington Post* on the likelihood of another terrorist attack, leaked from a congressional briefing, Bush instructs Calio on the 5th to relay an order to Congress stipulating that only the "Big Eight" leaders will be briefed on such classified information. Calio warns the president that the move will be a "disaster," and Bush eventually rescinds the instruction. (Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002, pp. 198-199)

On the 26th, Bush signs the Patriot Act into law.

November Talks on the patients' bill of rights resume between the White House and Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA). Calio monitors the negotiations, which remain centered on patients' rights to sue, as well as caps on damage awards. The talks proceed fitfully until August 2002, when Kennedy and his co-sponsors – Senators John Edwards (D-NC) and John McCain (R-AZ) – abandon the negotiation after unsuccessful efforts to reach an agreement. (*The New York Times*, 01/14/2002, 08/02/2002; *New Republic*, 02/25/2002)

2002

- January* On the 8th, Bush signs the No Child Left Behind Act.
- March* On the 27th, Bush signs the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act.
- April-June* Calio is one of a small group of top-level aides who develop a plan for a new Department of Homeland Security, which Bush announces on June 6th. (Draper, *Dead Certain*, pp. 170-171; *The Washington Post*, 06/07/2002, 06/09/2002)
- May-June* In early summer, Rice asks Calio to “feel out” several important congressmen about Iraq. He begins researching how members had voted on Iraq as far back as 1991. (Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004, p. 169)
- July* Bush approves roughly 30 projects by the end of the month to prepare for possible U.S. military operations in Iraq. Bush consults with Calio on the programs, which total about \$700 million and include tasks like improving Kuwaiti airfields. Most of the funds come from existing appropriations and are reprogrammed without substantively involving Congress. (Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 136-137)
- August* On the 6th, Bush signs a bill enabling him to strike foreign trade deals without congressional interference, an arrangement known as “trade promotion” or “fast-track” authority. Calio lobbied the fiercely contested bill through the Democratic Senate over the summer, at one point lining up ten phone calls from Bush to lawmakers between 8 p.m. and 3 a.m. (*The New York Times*, 05/20/2002, 08/07/2002; *CQ Weekly*, 12/14/2002)
- September* On the 3rd, Card convenes the first meeting of what becomes the White House Iraq Group. The group, which meets weekly, includes Calio, as well as Karl Rove, Hughes, Matalin, Rice, Stephen Hadley, and I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby. Card outlines a strategy to persuade Congress to approve a resolution authorizing the use of military force in Iraq before the midterm elections. Bush’s instructions to Calio are “Nicky, get the votes.” (Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 168-169)
- On the 4th, Bush discusses Iraq with eighteen senators and congressmen at the White House. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO) tell Bush that he needs to get “aggressively engaged” in order for his resolution to pass. Bush jokes, “Are you saying Nick Calio’s falling down on the job?” The president tells the group that “Doing nothing is not an option.” (Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 169-170)
- Also on the 4th, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld makes the Administration’s case against Iraq in a closed-door meeting attended by more than two-thirds of the Senate. Calio’s assistant reports that the meeting “destroyed all of the goodwill and groundwork that the president accomplished during his meeting this

morning,” with Rumsfeld reportedly refusing to share intelligence or discuss issues in depth. (Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 170-171)

On the 19th, Bush holds a meeting with eleven House members rallying their support on Iraq. He tells them, “We will work in a bipartisan fashion but we want maximum flexibility and we are looking to you all for your help.” Calio closes out the meeting, and later that day, the White House releases its proposed language for a resolution authorizing the president to use military force against Iraq. (Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 186-187)

On the 20th, Calio writes congressional leaders that the White House will support the establishment of an independent commission to investigate the 9/11 attacks. In the letter, Calio states that the commission should focus on non-intelligence issues like border security and commercial aviation but also could examine “coordination between the intelligence community and non-national security agencies.” The letter comes after the administration, which had long opposed creating such a panel, came under increasing pressure from victims’ families and Congress. (*The Washington Post*, 09/22/2002)

Sept.-Oct. To secure votes for the resolution on Iraq, Calio organizes intelligence briefings for vacillating or influential congressmen in both the Capitol and the White House – including the Situation Room. The meetings are run by CIA Director George Tenet and Deputy Director John McLaughlin and overseen by Rice. By the time Congress votes on the resolution on October 10th, Calio organizes such briefings for 71 senators and 161 representatives. Calio and his deputy David Hobbs reportedly “marveled at the legislative branch’s lack of inquisitiveness during these uniformly noncontentious get-togethers.” (Draper, *Dead Certain*, p. 177; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 185-186, 203)

October On the 1st, Bush and Calio work out final changes in language in the Iraq resolution as Rove handles last-minute lobbying with congressional Republicans. Bush holds a Rose Garden press conference the following day to announce agreement on the resolution. (Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 200)

During negotiations to create the 9/11 Commission, Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT) calls a meeting in his office on the 16th attended by Calio and Jay Lefkowitz. Family members of the victims confront Calio and Lefkowitz about the delays in launching the panel. Bush signs legislation creating the commission at the end of November. (*The New York Times*, 11/02/2002, 11/28/2002)

November On the 26th, Bush signs into law a terrorism insurance bill that requires the federal government to cover most insurance losses from a terrorist attack. Although conservative Republican leaders had opposed the measure because of a provision permitting the right to seek punitive damages, Calio helps engineer a deal in an all-night negotiation before the election recess between Calio’s staffers, Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT), and Rep. Michael Oxley (R-OH). (*The New York*

Times, 11/27/2002; *CQ Weekly*, 10/12/2002, 12/14/2002; *The Washington Post*, 10/15/2002)

December Citing financial reasons, Calio resigns on the 17th. (*The New York Times*, 12/18/2002; *The Washington Post*, 12/19/2002)

2003

January After working his last day at the White House on the 10th, Calio joins Citigroup as Senior Vice President for Global Government Affairs. He is replaced by Hobbs. (*The New York Times*, 01/05/2003)

TIMELINES

- Nicholas Calio News Timeline, prepared by Christopher M. Loomis, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 01/14/2011.
- Timeline of the Bush Presidency, prepared by Justin Peck and Bryan Craig, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 04/30/2010.

ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

- Bradley H. Patterson, "The Office of Legislative Affairs," in *To Serve the President: Continuity and Innovation in the White House Staff* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2008) pp. 82-92.
- Bertram Johnson, "Shifting Sands: President Bush and Congress," in *Ambition and Division: Legacies of the George W. Bush Presidency*, ed. Steven E. Schier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009) pp. 131-150.
- Juliet Eilperin, "Bush Team Veteran Returns to the Court; Calio to Sell President's Agenda on the Hill," *The Washington Post*, 01/31/2001.
- Frank Bruni, "Returning to the Action as Bush's Lobbyist to Congress," *The New York Times*, 02/12/2001.
- Ryan Lizza, "Royal Treatment," *New Republic*, 02/26/2001.
- Alan K. Ota, "Calio's Assertive Style Moves Legislation, but Hill Republicans Have Paid a Price," *CQ Weekly*, 12/14/2002.

KEY ISSUES AND EVENTS AS DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Tax Cuts

- Robert Draper, *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush* (New York: Free Press, 2007) pp. 118-120.
- Ryan Lizza, "Double Play," *New Republic*, 05/14/2001.

James Jeffords

- Ryan Lizza, "Tough Luck," *New Republic*, 06/11/2001.

Patients' Bill of Rights

- Dana Milbank and Juliet Eilperin, "On Patients' Rights Deal, Bush Scored With a Full-Court Press," *The Washington Post*, 08/03/2001.
- Amy Goldstein, "The Patients' Rights Fight, Round 2; Bills Have Passed House and Senate. Now it Gets Rough," *The Washington Post*, 08/05/2001.

Trade

- Elisabeth Bumiller, "Measure for Measure, a Fun Job at an Unmeasured Pace," *The New York Times*, 05/20/2002.

Creation of the 9/11 Commission

- Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton with Benjamin Rhodes, *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) pp. 16-21.
- Dana Priest and Dana Milbank, "9/11 Panel Asks What Briefers Told Bush; White House Retreats on Independent Probe," *The Washington Post*, 09/21/2002.

Homeland Security Bill

- David Von Drehle and Mike Allen, "Bush Plan's Underground Architects; in Silence and Stealth, Group Drafted Huge Security Overhaul," *The Washington Post*, 06/09/2002.

Terrorism Insurance Bill

- JOSEPH J. SCHATZ, "ISSUE OF PUNITIVE DAMAGES STILL THWARTS COMPROMISE ON TERRORISM INSURANCE BILL," *CQ WEEKLY*, 10/12/2002.
- Elisabeth Bumiller, "Government to Cover Most Costs of Insurance Losses in Terrorism," *The New York Times*, 11/27/2002.

Iraq

- Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004) pp. 168-172, 185-187, 200-201, 203.
- Robert Draper, *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush* (New York: Free Press, 2007) pp. 177-179.

NICHOLAS CALIO SUGGESTED TOPICS

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Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 01/14/2011

Origins of Relationship with Bush

- When did you first meet George W. Bush? What were your early impressions of him? Did you have any involvement in his 2000 presidential campaign?

Director of Legislative Affairs

- Discuss your appointment as director of legislative affairs. Describe any discussions you had with Bush about your new job.
- How did you organize and manage the White House Office of Legislative Affairs?
- What lessons did you apply from your service under President George H. W. Bush, as well as your work as a lobbyist in the private sector? In what ways had the Office of Legislative Affairs changed since the first Bush administration, with respect to both its institutional role as well as the political climate in which you operated?
- Describe your day-to-day duties. How did you divide your time between the White House and Capitol Hill? With which other members of the White House staff did you work closely? Comment on your participation in the “Strategy Group.”
- How did you coordinate your office with that of Vice President Richard Cheney?
- With whom did you work most closely in Congress? How did you establish and build relationships with Democrats, in particular Senators Max Baucus and Edward Kennedy?
- Discuss Bush’s role in the legislative process. To what extent did the president engage in setting legislative priorities and formulating tactics and strategy? How did you decide when and how to use Bush himself to move legislation forward? How often, and under what circumstances, did the president meet with leaders and members of Congress? Tell us about the meetings.

Domestic Policy

- Describe your approach to pushing the administration’s initial tax cut through Congress. What were the principal challenges facing the legislation and how did you surmount them? How did you go about securing Democratic support on the measure? Assess the president’s strategy of holding fast to his original \$1.6 trillion proposal for as long as possible.
- Comment on Senator James Jeffords’ defection from the Republican Party. Was the administration surprised by his announcement? How did the Democratic majority in the Senate affect your approach to moving legislation?
- Discuss some of the administration’s other domestic initiatives, including No Child Left Behind, the patients’ bill of rights, “fast-track” trade authorization, and Social Security reform.

National Security and Iraq

- Describe your experiences on September 11th. What were your responsibilities in the immediate aftermath?
- Comment on your involvement in designing the new Department of Homeland Security, as well as launching the 9/11 Commission.
- Discuss the administration's approach to the Iraq resolution in 2002. Comment on the role of the White House Iraq Group. Assess the effectiveness of your briefings for legislators in the lead-up to the vote, as well as the administration's efforts to court the Democratic leadership.
- Tell us about your decision to leave the administration.

The Bush Presidency in Retrospect

- What do you consider your most significant accomplishments as a senior member of the administration?
- What were Bush's greatest assets as president? Assess his strengths and weaknesses as a communicator, domestic policymaker, a legislative leader, and a leader of public opinion. Which of his attributes served him best in the presidency?
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Bush presidency. What features of the Bush presidency were overlooked or misunderstood by the press and public?
- How should the Bush presidency be viewed in history? What were its most significant achievements?