

February 1, 2008

Shenon Talking Points, Qs and As in response to Shenon

Talking Points

- The 9/11 Commission had two responsibilities: To tell the story of 9/11, and to make recommendations.
 - The facts of the story in the 9/11 Commission Report have not been challenged.
 - Some 80 percent of its recommendations have been enacted into law.

- A recent book does not call into question the content of the report, but focuses on the Executive Director.
 - The point here is that Phil Zelikow did tremendous work for the Commission.
 - He led an investigation of 85 highly talented staff who helped us produce an excellent report.
 - He is a person of integrity, and made an enormous contribution.
 - He served the Commission honorably and well.

- The Report is the responsibility of the 10 Commissioners.
 - The 10 Commissioners are responsible for its findings and recommendations.
 - The judgments within the Report are solely our own.

Questions and Answers

Q. Did Zelikow hide part of his resume and past record from you?

A. No. We knew his history and background before he was appointed. We knew of his work for the Bush transition team. It is completely appropriate that Philip recused himself from the Commission's investigation of the 2000-01 Presidential transition. Philip supported that recusal. So did the General Counsel. So did we.

Q. Did you know about Philip's phone calls with Karl Rove?

A. Yes. We knew that Philip was in touch with the White House. He and several senior staff – including the General Counsel – were in constant touch with the White House. That contact was essential. We needed to talk to the White House in order to carry out our mandate.

To get access to documents and to people, you had to go through the White House.

We wanted to make sure that the White House would support or at least not oppose what we decided to recommend.

The Commissioners took the lead in dealing with the White House. Philip and General Counsel Dan Marcus were the key staff in supporting that work.

Q. Didn't Philip call the 456 number – the White House – all the time?

A. Yes, and so did General Counsel Dan Marcus and his Deputy Steve Dunne. And so did we. We were dealing with the White House on almost a daily basis on the questions of access to documents and Administration officials whom we wanted to interview.

Q. Did Philip try to sway the report to protect the Administration?

A. No. Philip is a historian of integrity, dedicated to the full airing of the facts. We see no evidence to support such a charge.

We had a highly talented staff of 85 and 10 Commissioners looking at the same documents, participating in the same interviews, examining the same record. No staffer did control, or could control, the judgments that the Commissioners reached.

It should be remembered here that Philip was not the White House's choice. We did not hire candidates put forward by the White House.

It should be remembered here that Philip was a very tough negotiator with the White House. He was so tough that, after their first meeting, White House Counsel Gonzales refused to meet with him again.

Q. Wasn't this a Commission of lightweights, and didn't Philip dictate the report and recommendations?

A. Philip played an important role as Executive Director. He made a huge contribution. So did the 85 staff.

The most important role was that of the Commissioners. Each Commissioner made a distinct contribution. Each Commissioner went over the report not once or twice but many, many times.

Every sentence was reviewed for fact and interpretation. Commissioners spent hundreds of hours discussing, editing and re-writing this report.

Q. Didn't Philip try to dictate outcomes to team 3, looking into the policies of the Clinton and Bush Administrations?

A. The staff preparation of the draft chapters relating to the policies of the Clinton and Bush administrations (chapters 4 and 6 of the Report) was overseen, line by line, by all of the staff front office (deputy director Kojm, general counsel Marcus, and Zelikow), working by consensus with the relevant staff team and with senior adviser Ernest May.

We were fully aware of differences of interpretation among staff. Those differences were not about politics, but differences over the factual record and what it meant.

By and large, such differences were useful, because the debate helped to illuminate the issues for Commissioners.

Commissioners debated for hours – and days – over what those facts meant. The judgments about those facts are solely and exclusively judgments made by the 10 Members of the Commission.

Q. Didn't Bob Kerrey threaten to resign because of Philip: "either he goes or I go?"

A. Bob Kerrey considered declining Senator Daschle's appointment to the Commission after reading Mr. Zelikow's memorandum for the record dealing his relationships with the Bush Administration. He discussed this with Chairmen Kean and Hamilton, re-read the memorandum, and decided to accept the appointment because he believed it was possible for Mr. Zelikow to be independent. Senator Kerrey never considered leaving the Commission again because Mr. Zelikow's performance demonstrated independence.