Today is July 18, 2008. I'm Mel Steely, Director of the Georgia Political Heritage Program at the University of West Georgia. Today we're interviewing Mr. Randy Evans about his work with the Georgia Republican Party and as an adviser to Speakers Gingrich and Hastert.

Mr. Evans, last time we interviewed you ... I think this is the second or third tape that we've done with you ... we finished up talking about Gingrich leaving the office of Speaker. And you had talked about his decision on why he was doing that and so forth. Immediately, after our interview, Congress went into session and they began the struggle to get a new Speaker, which would have been a Republican Speaker. That was quite a contentious undertaking. Could you tell us a little bit about Newt's role and your role in that effort, up to the point where Mr. Hastert came in as Speaker?

Well, I think originally what has happened was Newt decided to step down and immediately Bob Livingston from Louisiana emerged as the Speaker-designate. Bob began the process of putting together his team and was moving toward becoming the next Speaker. Somewhere along the process ... and I can't remember whether it was before or after, I think it was after ... Larry Flynt has posted a one million dollar reward for anybody who could find basically dirt on any member. But he was clearly targeting Republican members.

Mr. Flynt of Hustler magazine.

Of Hustler magazine. And at that moment in time I remember basically being called ... We were working somewhat with Speaker-designate Livingston’s office. At that time he was just the designate. He'd never in fact become the Speaker because the vote on the Speakership didn't occur until the Congress reconvened.

We got a call saying he was going to make a speech from the well, which in and of itself was noteworthy. It was very unusual for the Speaker to ever take the well. The Speaker would only...
take the well if it was on a very important vote. We know that
there weren't votes at that particular moment in time that were
of that kind of consequence.

Randy Evans: 02:54 
Livingston went to the well. He made a very impassioned
speech. And he talked about that the right thing for President
Clinton to do in light of the Lewinsky scandal was to step down.
From the gallery back bencher Democrats started screaming,
"Well, you step down. Will you step down?" And he proceeded
to give the speech and they carried on and continued to give	heir shouts of discouragement from the well. And then he
reached the end of his speech. There was a long pause, and he
basically said, "You know, and I would not ask that a standard
be imposed on the President that I would not meet myself. And
I will not stand for the position of Speaker in the next Congress."
There was just a huge hush because it had been kept very quiet,
which was very unusual for Washington. Something of that
magnitude had to be kept within a very small circle of folks.

Randy Evans: 04:10 
Immediately after that then was this whole ... Turmoil is
probably not the right word, but just total uncertainty about
what would happen next. Because Newt had been a very
influential Speaker who had led the revolution, and was the
leader of the cause, and had stepped down. Livingston had led
the revolt following on the heels of an earlier coup attempt
which had implicated virtually the whole balance of the
Republican leadership. And it was noteworthy that none of the
leadership that had participated in the coup were considered
front runners for the Speaker-designate position that Livingston
had, much less what would happen if Livingston stepped down.

Randy Evans: 05:06 
So you had this enormous vacuum created. You had a vacuum
where the designate wasn't running, where it was clear at that
time ... The majority leader was Tom DeLay who had
participated in the coup attempt, was not the one who led the
cause to have Gingrich step down, who no one regarded as a
viable candidate for the Speakership. Actually I think DeLay was
the whip. Dick Armey was the leader.

Randy Evans: 05:37 
So Dick Armey was the leader. He wasn't the one. DeLay wasn't
the one. And so you just had a vacuum. At that moment the
question was: Who was the person who could best listen to all
of the different factions of the conference, assimilate a team,
had some experience in the leadership? Hopefully had had
experience in the whip team just because that's an important
part of the position, which is counting votes and keeping votes
in line. And, significantly, was scandal free. Which was not small
criteria. Was to have somebody who nobody thought and who,
in fact, did not have a working scandal that the Hustler, Larry Flynt, million dollar reward might call into play. And the consensus, there was largely a consensus. The consensus was that Denny Hastert, the Congressman from Illinois, who was the Deputy Whip to Tom DeLay, was the person.

Randy Evans: **07:00** Newt reached out to him and said, "I think Denny you’re the one. I think many other people have reached the same conclusion." Upon being talked to, Denny called his wife Jean, as he was apt to do throughout his Speakership, and talked to her about it. And then he went to the chapel and prayed about it, which said a lot about the man even before he came to the decision that this was something that he would do. And once he had decided this was something that he would do there was very little opposition. Now I won’t kid you that there were many who believed he was a custodian Speaker. It would have never occurred to him that he would eventually become the longest serving Republican Speaker in the history of the Congress.

Randy Evans: **07:59** So there were those who were eager for the job but thought that the time wasn’t right for them to get the job. So they were happy with Denny Hastert. You had folks who just wanted a calm listener who was an effective manager, so he fit the bill. You know there were those who thought that this was a custodial relationship and at any time it would be removed and given to whoever the next heir apparent to Newt Gingrich would be. So everybody had their own motives for it, but regardless of the motives Denny Hastert then became the Speaker.

Mel Steely: **08:43** What was your role in any of this? Were you active in it?

Randy Evans: **08:48** Well to candid with you, I didn't have much. I didn't know him. I'd been in leadership meetings with him. But really ... I mean he was from Illinois, and the fact is that I had gone back to Atlanta and I was sitting at my desk and just thinking to myself it had been a great ride. Newt had become the Speaker. He had brought me in to serve a very prominent role. I had worked closely with the team and been involved in many of the day-to-day decisions. I had been very helpful, I think, in resolving the ethics piece so that it would never be the issue that really was the part that resulted in him stepping down.

Randy Evans: **09:38** So I was honestly of the opinion that, wow, this was pretty cool. I had fun. You know West Georgia graduate goes to Washington, serves as the counsel to the Speaker, and then comes home. And the phone rang. I picked it up and it was Denny Hastert. I said, "Congressman, how are you?" We had
some small talk and he said something like, "I hear that you have a very unique expertise." I said, "Well, I have a lot of unique expertise but I'm not sure which expertise you're looking for." And he said, "I hear that you are the only lawyer that's alive today that has experience in representing a Republican Speaker of the Congress." I said, "Yes, that's true." And he said, "Well, I wonder if you would be willing to continue and serve as my counsel, my outside counsel, as the Speaker?"

Randy Evans: 10:51  
Which I knew was pretty momentous. There is enormous pressure on folks in Washington to either use a Washington lawyer or to use a lawyer from their home district. And for him in Batavia, Illinois to use a lawyer who at that time was based in Atlanta was pretty noteworthy. I told him that I would be as helpful but that I recommended that we sit down and we talk about what he needed from me, whether I could be helpful, and if I couldn't be helpful then I'd give him the name of people who I thought could do what he needed done. And he said, "Well, I've pretty much made up my mind. I want you to do this. But I'm going to follow the first advice you're giving me, which is that we sit down and talk." And we then scheduled a meeting for the following week. Actually I think it was the following couple of day when I got on a plane and flew to Washington.

Mel Steely: 11:58  
And it all worked out. You became in a sense a legal/political advisor to Hastert as you had been to Gingrich.

Randy Evans: 12:09  
I did. I became the counsel, the outside counsel, to the Speaker. We went up and sat down in what used to called ... When Newt was there it was called the Dinosaur Room. After Speaker Hastert took over it became the Lincoln Room. We met there and then we went into his main office. I basically said to him ... I said three things. I said, "First of all I need to know what you want me to call you," because I couldn't quite figure out. He kept introducing himself as Denny. And with Newt of course, I called Newt, "Newt," because I had just known him so long. I said, "Am I supposed to call you Mr. Speaker? Am I supposed to call you ... What is it?" He said, "You're in the group that calls me Denny because I never want us to get sidetracked."

Randy Evans: 13:04  
One of the greatest fears, Dr. Steely, in Washington, is politicians get surrounded by echo chambers. I don't know if your viewers know what an echo chamber is. So I'm going to take the liberty of explaining what an echo chamber is. An echo chamber is one where a politician only hears back what they say among all their advisors because everybody's afraid of losing their position or status. So they're yes people. Hence the term
echo chamber, which is a politician says, "I think we should cut taxes." And it's, "Cut taxes, cut taxes, cut taxes."

Randy Evans: 13:48 So he was very afraid of that because he had felt that in some respects that was part of the problem that existed. One way to cut through the echo chamber was to understand that there was a small group of us, me and Scott Palmer, and Ted Van Der Meid, Mike [Stokey 00:14:07], just a small group who were in that group.

Randy Evans: 14:09 I think the second thing we talked about was ... I told him, at that time I loved to smoke an occasional cigar, that I wanted to right to be able to go on the balcony and smoke a cigar when I wanted to. He said, "I'm assuming that's what you use to think and I want my lawyer to think, so the answer is yes." And then the third one was just to talk about the challenges of being the Speaker. What I had witnessed with Newt. What I had started to see emerge with Speaker-designate Livingston. And then what I expected to happen for Speaker Hastert. And we talked in some brutal detail about the hard knuckles of what happens in Washington when you're in that position and how difficult it is, how lonely it can be, how challenging it is. It was a really good, long talk.

Randy Evans: 15:02 When we finished I said, "If I'm the guy you think can help you then I'd love to serve and be happy to serve." And he basically said, "I can't imagine anybody that I'd rather have than you as we go through this." And, boy, did we have the battles to go through, between Medicare prescription vote and the Foley matter. Just any number of things. The chaplain ... It was one thing after another. But to his credit-

Mel Steely: 15:41 This was all in your first year there.

Randy Evans: 15:42 It was. Well, Foley was in the last, but to his credit he was very good. It was very systematic. Newt's become this way now. He wasn't that way back then. But Speaker Hastert was very good, that he would hear from everybody and then there would be a moment when we would finish. And then he would call and the two of us would have a very, distinct conversation about what's this about. Little did I know, honestly, that we were on the verge of one of the most historic moments in the history of the Speakership, and that being the 2000 presidential election. I couldn't have foreseen that. But that was just on the horizon.

Mel Steely: 16:32 I don't think anybody foresaw that at all. Who pays for an outside attorney? I don't think that's a personal thing. Does
Congress pay for it, or the party? Or his campaign? How is that handled?

Randy Evans: 16:47 It’s actually a blend, because as the outside counsel of the Speaker, which is not an official title. I don't want to mislead anybody. There's not a real position. It's just one that has evolved over time as lawyers have become much more important and a part of public life. But how it worked with Speaker Hastert was there are basically three categories of things that you do. You do things that involve the official operations of the House. And early in Newt's tenure there were ethics complaints filed against Newt based on the involvement of Joe Gaylord saying you had somebody who was political, who was also participating in the official activities. And while the committee didn’t find an admonishment or say anything, they said you’ve got to be very careful here about that.

Randy Evans: 17:44 So there’s this first bucket which is official activities. And the way we addressed that was I went on the official payroll for the Office of the Speaker. Which was helpful because it enabled you to get in and out of the building. It enabled you to deal with things where really it was limited to staff, and if you weren't staff it would have been difficult to explain why you're sitting in a room with members of the Justice Department talking over the [Jesperson 00:18:14] raid on a Saturday night. So that was one piece.

Randy Evans: 18:20 The second bucket’s a political, which is he is the leader of the party in the House. He is a candidate for reelection. He holds many political responsibilities. And those fees were largely paid on a systematic way. I can't remember if it was a flat or how it worked. But there was a formula that was used that both he and his political organizations would pay that were commensurate with the amount of time that they took.

Randy Evans: 18:51 And then there were personal things. You know, a book which he wrote while he was in the Speakership. And those would be paid personally. So you had a blend of official, political, and personal. And they largely reflected the activities.

Mel Steely: 19:11 While you were representing first Newt, and then Hastert, you also had a number of other political people that came to you for advice on various things. And then some, I think, did contracts with you for books. And in the process you became kind of a subspecialist in your normal ethics work that you did in book publishing. Selling a book and producing it, and that kind of thing. Did that just happen because you’d done some of that for Newt?
Randy Evans: 19:43 I think that's right. I think what happened was, without going too far, Newt had a contract before I became involved which was not very good. You know, I'm going to be polite. And so the second contract came along, and Newt asked me if I would handle the negotiations and put it together, which I then did. And then it turned out sufficiently well ... I think it was Lessons Learned the Hard Way, that book.

Mel Steely: 20:25 But he had already begun some negotiations for Fox News and that kind of [crosstalk 00:20:28].

Randy Evans: 20:28 That's right. No, because he couldn't do it while he was the Speaker.

Mel Steely: 20:32 Oh, that's right. Yeah.

Randy Evans: 20:34 But immediately after he left Speakership obviously Fox was a huge piece and books. But really it all started ... The core question is how had it started? It started with Newt's first book contract. And then in my world success breeds success. It turned out to be a great contract. It did very well. Newt said nice things. The publisher said nice things. And then other people who had books said, "Gee, he did a great job on that, let's see what he can do with ours." And obviously the one that was the most surprising was Senator Miller's. Senator Zell Miller's book.

Mel Steely: 21:16 Who was a Democrat but somebody that you had known in Georgia, at least in passing certainly. I understand Newt recommended you to Miller.

Randy Evans: 21:27 That's right. I think Newt recommended me, and independently he had read somewhere about what we had done. I smile because it was like the Denny Hastert call which was completely unexpected. I'm at my desk and the phone rings. I pick it up and it's ... I said, "Randy Evans." And he said, "Hi, Randy. This is Zell Miller." As you know, Dr. Steely, I had spent twenty years trying to beat Zell Miller. And truthfully he had beaten me to a pulp year after year as he was elected Lieutenant Governor and then he was elected Governor. And then he was reelected Governor, and then he became Senator Coverdell's replacement. So my response was to say, "Senator Miller, are you sure you have the right Randy Evans?" Because I was so surprised that he was calling me.

Randy Evans: 22:32 He said, "Oh, no. I'm know I have the right Randy Evans." I said, "Okay." And he said, "I have this book." And he said, "I can't
seem to get it published and I wondered if you would be willing to help me?" And I said, "I'll tell you what I tell other people. Send me a copy. I will take a look at it. I will read it, and then I'll see if I can be helpful." And it was very important because he wanted it out before the presidential election. Of course, it eventually led to him being the keynote speaker.

Mel Steely: 23:16 This was a Party No More, or National Party No More?

Randy Evans: 23:20 I was going to tell you that part. So he sends me the transcript and I read it. You know, the book publishing business is a little tricky. There's nothing normal about it. I know that publishers when you send them a transcript ... When you send them a document saying, "Here's my book. Here's a text," they normally only read about the first three chapters. If it doesn't sing to them in the first three chapters, then it doesn't matter how good your book is, they're not going to do anything with it.

Randy Evans: 23:55 So he sent me the book and I read it. And the first three chapters were about growing up in north Georgia and how his mother had taken pebbles out of the creek and built a home. It's a very touching story. But at that moment in time biographical books just weren't working. They do at some times. They weren't working at that time. But after that part there were these phenomenal chapters talking about the corruption in Washington. How many had become basically streetwalkers selling their services for cast. And how the Senate operated where 41 votes beat 59 votes. It was just hard hitting. And I thought, "There's no way this book can't sell."

Randy Evans: 24:48 What we need to do is there are a few chapters we need to work on. We need to move these hard hitting chapters to the front, then move some of the biographical to explain how he came to where he is. And then end strong. And then I needed to get that book in the hands of conservatives who would be astonished by it. Conservatives like Sean Hannity and Karl Rove and Rush, and other people. Because I think this book if it's there would be huge. I also know we needed to get that book out during the election environment. So as opposed to going with a New York publishing house which would take six to nine months to get a book turned around, we went with Cecil Staton's publishing company, Stroud and Hall, which was located in Macon, who gave us total editorial discretion, and could meet a time deadline where we could turn it around in no time.

Randy Evans: 25:46 Now, you've got to remember this is a very different model. The normal model for a New York Times bestseller is that you go
with a New York publishing house. You have months and months of lead-in. Advertisements. Billed. You have a huge launch date and a release. This whole process could take two years, and we were trying to create something that would happen within a couple of months. And it worked. We got the book done. I remember reading the final... In fact I have his final manuscript which he was kind enough to sign for me. We got it to the publisher. They got us books. We got preliminary copies out to important commentators, talk show hosts, Fox News folks, other cable news folks. And it just exploded. It just exploded.

Mel Steely: 26:46  Gave him some of the financial security that he'd been looking for for quite a while.

Randy Evans: 26:53  I think so, but I'll be honest. I don't think it was ... My job is to make people millionaires. I had no doubt that when Senator Miller left office, like many of the other folks that I represent, that wouldn't be hard to do. Between speeches, a television contract, some board memberships, I just didn't think it would have been a challenge. So the book piece was a good part of that, but it really wasn't the goal. Dr. Steely, he had a core message. He believed the country was at a critical juncture, and that if he didn't lend his voice at that moment in time the country would have made a horrible mistake.

Mel Steely: 27:52  This was around 2000. Leading up to the 2000 election.

Randy Evans: 27:55  That's exactly right. And he so passionately believed it. I'll be honest. The only thing that I would do differently of all of that is I did not exercise more control during the convention, afterwards. Because I probably would have not let him do the Tim Russert interview, just because it had been an exhausting day. He was worn out and he was tired. And I knew that whether it's Newt or Denny, any of these folks, when you add all those together you're going to end up with a potentially unpredictable and not good result. It wasn't the end of his career. It didn't change anything. We still had great stuff, but it was a moment that we could have lived without.

Mel Steely: 28:58  I always thought of it as the moment when people began to look at him as the crazy old uncle.

Randy Evans: 29:02  Yep.

Mel Steely: 29:05  Who is this guy, geez?
Randy Evans: 29:06 And he was just tired. As I said, it's not unique to him. I don't want that to overshadow an otherwise pretty dominating performance throughout the election. But it's no different than Newt talking about ghetto talk, if you remember that. Or referring to the presidential candidates as pygmies. Those are moments when I've let the schedule get too far out of control and you have folks who get tired. And no matter who we are, if you get tired enough there'll be mistakes that happen that aren't reflective of everything.

Mel Steely: 29:51 Well, your work with Newt during this period was at a critical juncture in his own career. Because he had just left the Speaker's office. He was not carrying with him any of the tangible accoutrements of the power. No office or anything of that nature. And so what he had was reputation and his own voice. Of course, that's is mined. I don't think there was ever a moment when he didn't believe he was going to do well. He had very great confidence in himself.

Mel Steely: 30:30 As a result of that he comes out of the Speaker's office not immediately going into the lobbying business or that kind of thing. I remember I was up there when a number of people came by to see him. Bob Michaels and a whole group of difficult folks came in to talk with him about lobbying for them. Bob Dole was one. And Strauss. A whole group of them. And he just didn't want to do it. So that means he's got to go out and make a living, and decided to develop what we came to call Newt Inc, which has kind of exploded in and of itself.

Mel Steely: 31:10 You had just gone through defending him in the crisis over ethics and national television and all of that kind of stuff. You had advised him on what he should do about the Speaker, whether or not he should step down. Or at least you listened to him talk about it. Now, he's getting ready to move in a new direction. Talk a little bit about his decision to move off into the consulting and publishing and all of that, and what your role in that was.

Randy Evans: 31:47 It was just an unbelievable time. 2000 was just an unbelievable ... Of my career it's the one year I think back to of, "How did all that get done?" We had, you're right ... Truthfully, Dr. Steely, the ethics part was largely behind us. If you remember we had brought it done. Eighty-three of 84 had been dismissed. We had one that related to a letter his lawyer wrote. And then we had the tax issue which we eventually prevailed on. We then had the Dole loan, where Senator Dole comes in and agrees, which was really pretty phenomenal. I mean he had actually an offer
by former presidents to all join together and just pay the
assessment. That had come and gone.

Randy Evans: 32:52 We had then reached the end of the year. We were now in the
Presidential year. And you had these things happening. You had
Newt stepping in and starting a new business enterprise. You
had Speaker Hastert beginning what would turn out to be the
longest serving tenure as a Republican Speaker. You had
Senator Miller deciding to turn the political world upside down
by being a Democrat who talked about the problems of the
Democratic Party in a book, A National Party No More. And all
of these are concurrently happening.

Mel Steely: 33:27 Along with the Georgia Republican Party beginning to surge.

Randy Evans: 33:32 Georgia Republican Party beginning to surge. And the
presidential election which turned out to be no small thing. That
one year was a pretty amazing year. And what happened was
after Newt stepped down, Newt asked me to chair his
companies. He said, "I'm going to set these companies up and I
want you to chair them."

Randy Evans: 33:57 We started with a pretty simple model. We had a holdings
company and that holdings company owned two companies.
One was a communications company through which we would
put speeches, books, publications. Anything that involved what I
referred to as celebrity. And then we had a consulting company
where people wanted to hire him. And the one ground rule that
Newt set, the one ground rule he set was, "I will not lobby. I am
not going to lobby. I am not going to register as a foreign
agent."

Randy Evans: 34:35 And you're exactly right. The numbers that were waved in front
of him were enormous. I mean after all he is the one who led a
revolution. It was clear that the Congress would be controlled
by the Republicans for at least two more years.

Mel Steely: 34:54 And arguably in the long history of Speakers, certainly in the top
five, maybe in the top two or three.

Randy Evans: 35:03 Right.

Mel Steely: 35:04 Just depending on how you interpret it.

Randy Evans: 35:06 But he would not hear of it. And it was one of those kind of
things. You worked with him. You've been there so you know
exactly what I'm telling you. There are moments when Newt
makes a decision and you know never revisit it. Because if you do, bad things will happen.

Mel Steely: 35:25 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Randy Evans: 35:27 Because that's one of those ironclad, line in the sand, "We're not going to talk about that anymore." And that was one of the issues.

Randy Evans: 35:37 So we start this process. Now we've got a couple of challenging circumstances to deal with. That's a challenging circumstance. You're going to turn away the most lucrative component of your future. We had a challenging circumstance in that the reports regarding Callista Bisek, who he turned out to marry, emerged. We had a nasty divorce from Marianne, his second wife, which was then about to emerge and occupied all of 2000. And we had the residual cloud, even though ethics had been put behind, the fact that you had a $300,000 assessment said to people there was something there. That there was potentially unethical conduct involved.

Randy Evans: 36:41 And so it was kind of interesting. I was charged to go out and build this new company. And told, but you can't go with where the most lucrative money is. And we have to deal with the scandal of a divorce and of a mistress, and all of this going. And on top of that we still have the lingering effects of the ethics battle. But, "I want you to go out and let's build a company."

Randy Evans: 37:13 So it was just one of those challenges. And I think the things that made it happen were that Roger Ailes and Fox loved Newt. Newt was great television, even amidst the horrible stories that were emerging as we progressed through the year on the divorce, they were good and solid. We negotiated what I considered to be at that time a really good contract. It's probably now a contract I wouldn't give the time of day to. But it was a good contract at the time. And we built companies. We built a consulting company based on his ability to give them unique expertise and thought about what they should do and how they should do it.

Randy Evans: 38:07 And we started with a group, that wasn't the final group. Nancy Desmond ran our work with Steve Westbrook and Joe Gaylord and Steve [Hanserd 00:38:21] to do the consulting group. I'm trying to remember, who did we have do communications? I think I may have just did communications myself at that time before I was the chairman of the board. And I think we just may have-
Mel Steely: 38:35 Jackie Sue wasn’t involved in that? Not that early?

Randy Evans: 38:39 I don't think so. I'd really actually have to go back and look. I prepared these power point slides in 2000 that lined up all of who did what. And as I sit here I don't remember who we had at communications.

Mel Steely: 38:54 Do you still have all of that stuff?

Randy Evans: 38:54 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 38:56 That's coming to the archives I assume at some point.

Randy Evans: 38:58 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 39:00 Good.

Randy Evans: 39:02 To answer your question, that was the start. Oh, I remember. Then we had the Washington Speakers Bureau who stepped in early and gave speeches. It had to be the most uncertain period of Newt's career. He had taken on giants before but here all the odds were stacked against him. They really were. It was only his sheer performance. He was very good on television. He was very good at working through problems and helping clients of the consulting team. And he gave great speeches.

Randy Evans: 39:53 And so pretty soon while it took Roger giving him a step in the door for Fox, and while Harry Rhoads at the Washington Speakers Bureau gave him ... What did I say? Roger gave him the step in the door at Fox, and Harry Rhoads gave him the step in the door at the Washington Speakers Bureau. It really was Newt's performance that carried the day. They just got him in the door. But he was great television and he was a really good speaker. That kind of got us through 2000.

Mel Steely: 40:34 And he married Callista and got that end of it stabilized.


Mel Steely: 40:40 So that all worked out, eventually certainly.

Randy Evans: 40:45 It did. It was a really challenge. Newt had one criteria. Domestic practice is not my area. I'm not a divorce lawyer. We brought in, what is his first name? Browning is his last name, in Marietta. Tom Browning I think it was. We brought him in. He was a domestic lawyer. But Newt's number one goal was, "We've got to get this done. If this goes on for years it will do more damage
than anything. And even if it means we have to take more chances and do harder things, but it will get it over faster. I’m prepared to endure the pain but we have to get it over."

Randy Evans: 41:40 And I remember there came a point where I said, "We're just going to have to go transparent. We're just going to have to tell what happened. When it is you started dating Callista. What the arrangements were. Because otherwise we will get paper cut to death. There will be a dribble a day, and it will destroy our ability to have speeches. It will destroy our ability to do television. So we're just going to jump in the deep end and we very well may drown. But if you're number one priority is to get this over, that's what we have to do." And we did it. And he came to Atlanta to fire me over it.


Mel Steely: 42:29 What was your venue for doing it?

Randy Evans: 42:31 Well, what we did was we were being constantly threatened. John Mayhew, who is a very fine lawyer who represents spouses who are in the midst of divorce, was very effective. And he knew that he would just use the story of the relationship with Callista as a club. And anytime we were trying to make any progress, he'd just hit us with the club. And the big club that they threatened us with the most was, "We're going to take the deposition of Callista Bisek. We're going to take her deposition."

Randy Evans: 43:11 And it went on. And every time we would try to get it out of the way so it would stop being a distraction to our businesses that are operating, it'd get put off. And so finally I said to Newt, "We're going to go in. We're going to have this deposition. And if they don't show up, which they didn't, we're just going to ask the questions ourselves. And then we're going to tell everybody what the answers were. And it will be a horrible day because it will be transparency. But it will be over. We will then within a short period of time, but it was a very short period of time, we will have this done."

Randy Evans: 43:57 And everybody was like, "This is insanity," etc. etc. And I said, "Well, if the criteria is to get this over, we have to face the knife." So we did. We scheduled it. They didn't show because they knew that the fear of the unknown was killing us far more than what had in fact happened, which was pretty routine honestly in the scheme of these kinds of situations.
Randy Evans: 44:29 We did it. We came out. We told. And it was bad. It was really bad. And Newt flew to Atlanta.

Mel Steely: 44:38 And Callista was terribly upset I would imagine.

Randy Evans: 44:42 You know, I don't know. I don't know.

Mel Steely: 44:46 At any rate, he comes to Atlanta.

Randy Evans: 44:47 He comes to Atlanta. We go to a conference room at Arnall Golden & Gregory. And I'm sure everybody that knew him had told him, "This is horrible. You're getting bad legal advice. This is being handled horribly. You need to get somebody who does this," etc. But the fact was his single most important criteria was to get it over and that was the only way you could do it.

Randy Evans: 45:16 So we met. And basically I told him, "We'll now have it over. It'll be over here quick now, because their club is gone. They have nothing else to hit you with." And I don't know why. I remember we patched in some folks and they were all upset. And I said, "Your criteria is to get this over. I'm going to get it over." I said, "And I told you this was going to be a really, really painful day, and it has been." But then within no time, we were done. It was exactly what I said would happen, happened. And we were done. It turns out his instinct was exactly right, which was had we permitted that to go on for two years we would have bled to death. Instead he suffered a broken arm. He suffered some real pain but we got it over and then by 2001, it was done and we were off to the races.

Mel Steely: 46:26 2001, he was pretty well ensconced in his new corporate situation.

Randy Evans: 46:33 Well, we were in the midst of transition. We were growing. We were growing at that point.

Mel Steely: 46:40 At that point, by 2000, the country begins to move towards a national election and considerable concern about what's going to happen in the House and Senate. Because you already had very narrow margins in the Senate, and the ones in the House were not huge at all. There was a lot of questions about House members. Mr. DeLay, by 2000, was beginning to raise questions and people wanted to investigate him. It hadn't peaked yet but it was starting. And you're with a new Speaker who's trying to figure out how to deal with all of this. Talk to us a little bit about how the Speaker and you interacted in trying to get a grip on how do we enter the 2000 election year.
Randy Evans: Well, going into it I think we were just trying to weather it. I mean it was a divisive year. The margins were pretty close. And we were focused on just making sure that we retained control of the House. The largest part of my job leading up to the election, candidly, was making sure that the Speaker stayed within the boundary. The federal election laws are very intricate. They're very difficult. It was a very time consuming task to address a Speaker who was committed to visit hundreds of House districts just to help his members.

Randy Evans: We had a great election. We lost some seats but we held on. It was a comfortable enough margin. Everybody knew the Speakership was at play. There was a sigh of relief. We almost thought we had kind of made it here, and then of course we had the presidential race, which languished on. I would say of all of the parts of my career where the most historical moment came would have been following the election.

Mel Steely: A week or two after the election.

Randy Evans: Week or two after the election.

Mel Steely: Where were you on election night?

Randy Evans: You know, I really don’t even remember. I remember just being exhausted. You know how it is. We kind of knew we were going to retain control the weekend before. We saw enough numbers. We felt fine on it. And it was really the presidential race. So I think I may have been in Atlanta. I’m pretty sure I was probably in Atlanta.

Randy Evans: And we started the work of getting ready for the next Congress. The Presidential race remained open. And then a whole different thing started to happen with Florida. As we saw them starting the process of counting the votes and recounting votes and opinions and Katharine Harris's decisions in Florida. We'd reached this point.

Randy Evans: The way it works is interesting, is that the electors, the electoral college actually meet at a joint session. I think that year it was on January 6th of 2001. They meet and they vote. There was a question about Florida, whether Florida would be available. The margin was such that President Bush got 271 votes but that included Florida's electoral votes. If Florida couldn't be decided then there was a question of what would happen.
Because the worry was that the joint session of the Congress would meet to count the electoral votes. There would be a challenge to Florida, that while they were sorting out the Florida, the days would pass. And one of the little known things is that on January 20, you get a new president no matter what. Bill Clinton's term ended. And so the question that emerged was what happens if the Supreme Court goes 5-4 the other way? They rule in favor of Vice President Gore. If they rule in favor of Vice President Gore it means that all of the ballots get recounted in Florida.

If the ballots all get recounted it can't be done between January 6th and January 20. But we know Bill Clinton must leave on January 20. What happens? We don't have a president. We can't elect a new president because Florida is still outstanding. What happens? And what happens is the Speaker then becomes the acting President of the United States.

And so amidst all of this, they call me and they say, "The Speaker wants to talk to you about all this." And I literally got on a plane and I fly with Ted Van Der Meid to Batavia, Illinois. And I get in this big Suburban with the Speaker. And we start talking about the peaceful transition of power of the most powerful nation on the planet, and the circumstance where the election result remains outstanding. And hence the Congress can't do its job of certifying the results of the Electoral College. And there is a gap. What do you do in that moment?

Speaker Hastert describes this in some detail in his book. About how we sat there and we talk about this. We talk about what it means to be the acting president, and how he would have to choose an acting chief of staff, an acting outside counsel. And we talked about all these things and what it would mean. We finished and he turned to me, and he said, "You have one job. And your job is to make sure that I don't become the acting president."

And it wasn't because he didn't want it, but because of what he worried for the country. It would mean a divisive election with a caretaker president. And I told him then. I said, "My firm belief is the decision will be 5-4 and my firm belief is the Court will decide to end, because I think the Court will recognize the risk that an ongoing dispute like this would have." But just that moment.

I remember, Dr. Steely, actually pinching myself because to think to yourself, "You have been brought from Dublin, Georgia to a Suburban riding with the man who after the Vice President
becomes the President, talking about what happens in the event the Congress can't select and validate the election of the next President of the United States. And what all that means in the context of this Constitutional transition of power, where we entrust the people to make those decisions and we have vehicles to decide all of that peacefully." It was just one of those moments.

Mel Steely: 54:36 And you decided to do what at that point, to keep it from happening?

Randy Evans: 54:39 Well, there really wasn't much I could do to keep it from happening. The best I could do was to prepare him for what would happen. We prepared for what would happen if he became the acting president. We prepared for what would happen when the joint session ... I mean it's a very elaborate procedure that happens. The Congress convenes. If there is a challenge to a delegation then the two bodies retreat to their separate houses, and they take votes. It's just a very elaborate ...

Randy Evans: 55:12 So we prepared these quite detailed scenarios, which is here's what happens if Florida isn't decided. Here's how you go about reconvening. There are very strict time limits on how long the Congress can recess. And then it grown increasingly short as you move towards January 20.

Randy Evans: 55:35 Then what happens on January 20 for the Speaker? In order to become the acting president, you, in fact, have to resign your seat from Congress. And then the question was, Well, if Congressman Hastert resigns, he serves as the acting president for sixty days or six months, ever how long it takes. And then the new president is elected. Then what happens to his seat? And what happens to the Speakership? Do you create a custodial Speakership, or do you in fact elect a successor Speaker? And what about getting him reelected back to Congress? And how do your work ... I forget the Governor of Illinois' name at this time. But how-

Mel Steely: 56:21 Ed Thompson?

Randy Evans: 56:23 I don't remember, but how do you work with him to schedule the special election so that you can both ... I mean there were a lot of moving parts.
Mel Steely: 56:34 What, in fact, would have happened insofar as the Speakership is concerned? Would you have put in a successor? What did you recommend on that?

Randy Evans: 56:44 I think we had reached the point where we were talking about largely a custodial. Remember the Speakership is kind of odd. You don't actually have to be a member of Congress to be the Speaker. So there was some thought, not seriously considered, of putting somebody in who was not a member. There was thought of basically having Armey at the time serve as the custodial Speaker or somebody else. David Dreier maybe. Somebody who was well-respected in the conference.

Randy Evans: 57:19 And then there was the thought of just leaving it vacant during the period of the acting presidency. And I think that's where we would have ended up. I think we would have probably had ... because we wanted to create ... I think Speaker Hastert was committed to the concept that it was a temporary job. He had no intent of becoming the acting president and staying the acting president. Nor would the Constitution contemplate such a thing. So to get it over with as quickly as possible. But it was one Supreme Court justice vote away. If the Supreme Court rules 5-4 the other way, he would have become the acting president. There's no way Florida could have completed it by the twentieth.

Mel Steely: 58:02 Yeah. All right. This a good time to stop this? You tell me. We've got less than a minute left? Okay. Let's don't start another question.

Mel Steely: 58:13 We'll stop here and then pick up with the new disc after we come back at 1:30. Is that about right? You've got less than a minute?