

## Mitch Daniels Interview

I don't know if you can call me an accidental candidate. But I was more circumstantial than intentional, let's put it that way. I'd never been a career planner and really thought that elected office would never be in my future. But the way things fell together, I was surprised to find myself working back in the public sector, was drafted to service more or less in 2001 and my first decision really was a more personal one - whether to go the full four years or to leave my duties in mid-2003. I'd always had the view of having worked in one previous White House that a person ought to either do one or the other, not leave for instance in a reelection year when they'd have to train somebody new under the pressure of events. So the first decision was whether to wrap up my duties at OMB. I did and sought my honorable discharge, so to speak. The second decision was what next, and there were people clamoring for me or I should say asking me to run for office in Indiana and I took the decisions in that order.

Question:

[1:43] I probably wrestled with it longer than most people do. Again, I'd never been obsessed with running for office, had thought that any chance that that was in my working life had passed a long time ago. I had a family that wasn't very high on the idea. But again having decided to come home, I wanted to be home for the last year of high school of the youngest of our four daughters, I was very worried about the condition of our state. We'd been going nowhere for a long time, really slipping backwards, and I wasn't the only one. And so there was a pretty boisterous group casting about for a candidate. People kept calling, writing and coming to see me, and I finally decided and persuaded my wife that this was an appropriate thing to do.

Question:

[2:53] Ours is a family that had enjoyed private life. I had been in somewhat more public positions early on and having seen both, I think they, and I share this by the way, enjoy the privacy and the flexibility of schedule that goes with private life. But again this just seemed like the right moment. The state was doing poorly. No one was doing anything about it. I didn't see alternatives on the - in either party that looked to me energetic enough and change oriented enough to make the necessary difference. So shook it all together. Again it came at a moment in life when I was going to be doing something different anyway and concluded that this was a right decision and I think the family went along. I will tell you this, I had a rather climactic conversation with Cheri and I said, Listen, if I do this, I'm going to do a lot of things differently. I don't like the way people run for office. Going to go at it very differently than most and there's no rule book for you and me either. I told her that night that I would never ask her to attend a single campaign event and I would certainly never pressure her or public event if we happened to win. Where are we? Nine years later, I've kept that pledge. She does those things that appeal to her, leaves the rest to me and it's worked out fine. But I think that she had a natural apprehension that her own life might be dominated by mandatory formations and I said, No,

you're not running; I am.

Question:

[5:08] Oh, I think I reflected on the inevitable untruths and unfair and distorted criticisms that come the way of anybody who offers himself up at almost any level of our politics these days. That probably made me hesitate a little bit. And I'd enjoyed business and had as far as I was concerned had given another three years to public life and there was some thought that I ought to go back and resume providing for my family's future. Finally decided that neither of those was a reason to pass on an opportunity to try to really grab this state by the lapels and shake it into a higher gear.

Question:

[6:14] Ah, it's impossible to say. I don't know what I'd have been doing. I'm sure it would have been something interesting and fulfilling. I wouldn't know at this point what would have been possible. We believe and I think I can say this objectively that we've made more change in Indiana in seven years than had been made in decades before that, if ever. This is rather commonly said in our state. But I didn't know at the time we'd be able to move as much dirt as we have and make as many things happen as we have and so I wouldn't have known what I would have missed.

Question:

[7:16] Oh, I was excited of course but apprehensive. I didn't know what was out there. Again, I had been telling fellow Republicans for a long time that I thought the way they went about seeking public office could stand a lot of improvement. Our party drags around this stereotype which is in most cases completely untrue but in any event, it's a reality and the caricature of course is that Republicans are disconnected from the lives of average people and don't have enough empathy for the problems of low income and average people. And I used to say to candidates all the time, "Don't whine about that. Go do something about it. Prove it isn't true." So that day at Hinkle Fieldhouse, I knew we were about to embark on an attempt to do something I'd been offered unsolicited advice about for a long time. And I had no idea of knowing how it'd work, but I thought it'd be an adventure to find out and it was certainly that.

Question:

[8:44] I think more excitement. I tried to maintain a mentality - and obviously there were grouchy days and here and there a down moment - but I tried to maintain an attitude, if this works, great, and if it doesn't, that's fine too. Maybe it's the Presbyterian in me. I don't know. But I told everybody who was going to be part of it, we are, as we said, aim higher. We're going to tell this state what we'll do if we get a chance and if we happen to win, we're really going to go for it in every way. And my life won't be over if we don't get elected and it won't be over if we then try to make these changes and come up short. I think most days since then I've kept

that outlook. As long as you can, you're a better candidate, you're a better office holder. I sometimes have said - people say to me all the time, Oh, my gosh, if you do that, if you try that, if you propose that, don't you know how angry this or that interest group will get? And I always say something like, What are they threatening to do? Give me my life back?

Question:

[10:15] Oh, I think it was the heart of the campaign. People use words like iconic now to talk about it and it's eight years later. I get asked all the time - I always say people were more interested in that vehicle than they were in me and I still get asked where is it? What kind of shape is it in? We were everywhere. It was the - part of defeating the Republican caricature was to be so much more visibly in personal contact with Hoosiers than anybody else and especially including my opponent. And so this was no stunt, this was no weekend listening tour, we were out almost every day for 16 months, went all the places that they say people never go, stayed in homes that started as an exercise in campaign thrift but became really part of the learning experience. Really, every day of doing it, I think advanced our chances of winning but it also really helped prepare me for this job. So we feel that it was absolutely the right course to take. I was fortunate enough that I could do it every day. Used to say back then, I've got a great advantage in this campaign - I'm unemployed. Meaning that I could stay out there on the road all the time and make contact with probably an unprecedented number of, as I always term it, my employers.

Question:

[12:06] Yeah, we really busted it back then. I feel sometimes these days I feel lazy, keeping a schedule that most people I guess think is pretty full but not compared to what we did back then. I remember and I can still name them if I took a minute the ten towns - one day we hit ten towns and I don't mean just blowing through, I mean stopping and doing things, visiting people, maybe there's a speech here and there. It was very common for us to be in six or eight on a given day. Get up in the morning maybe on some hog farm somewhere, breakfast in the nearest town diner, travel through several other places. Usually we'd try to have a fixed event or two during the day at the speech or two or three, but a lot of our stops were impromptu. And to this day I go back to diners and stores and saloons and places that we first visited just because they were there and we were out trying to meet anybody we could.

Question:

[13:36] Almost all of it was unexpected in the sense that so little of it was planned. I mean, just fabulous memories that fill that book and some of those TV shows. People we met. Obviously mishaps with the RV itself. It was pretty banged up by the time we got through that. That vehicle wasn't built to do what we did which was not stately interstate leisurely cruises but back roads, gravel roads and lots of starting and stopping. We had a lot of funny mishaps. It was just me and two young college, recent college graduates out there. And it had the feel sometimes of a rolling fraternity house or locker room. But it was -

Question:

[14:45] Yeah, no, I mean, I'm not against or oblivious to the value of experience, but I just hate so much of what goes into American campaign politics and a lot of what I dislike is the formulaic nature of it. You got these people who make a living doing it. They do the same thing over and over. Make the same ads over and over. They believe strongly that you have to be very negative about the opponent. We didn't believe any of that. We never made a negative ad, least in the modern sense of impugning somebody's motives or character or background. The know it alls will say, Don't waste your time. Do the arithmetic. No matter how many people you meet out there, there's all this emphasis on personal campaigning is not a good investment. You gotta be on the phone raising money. Well, we found a way to raise money but I just became a firm believer in the value of being as visibly intent as we could be on knowing the people of this state, knowing all the different communities and economies that make up this state and as a practical political matter, by the way, I still remember toward the latter stages one of the people who take these polls came in in terms of wonder and said that on this rather standard question of who is more in touch with people like me, I was ahead by 20 points or something like this. They said for a Republican even to be within 20 points is unusual. So as best we feel it, we were able to write some new rules in the way we ran that campaign, the way we approached the whole endeavor and I think we were right more often than wrong.

Question:

[16:59] We took fewer polls and we have continued by the way to take almost no polls since that first election. Probably took fewer than any campaign that you will cover. Yes, they took measurements now and then. I didn't spend a lot of time on it frankly. I thought I was getting a pretty good sense just out there on the road how we were doing. But sometime around Labor Day as I recall there was evidence that we had caught up and I began to believe at that point it might actually come true. By the way, we I promise you this, we never then or since took a poll to figure out what our position would be on any issue. We tried to fashion a program and a position on questions of the day that we thought was right for the state, that we believed in sincerely and I didn't waste money asking people what they thought so we could decide what we thought.

Question:

[18:28] Yeah, it's very different of course. You don't know if you'll be any good at it until you try. I had worked really with two elected officials, Richard Lugar and Ronald Reagan. They were both I would say conviction politicians, that is, they didn't take or need surveys to tell them what they thought and they were very authentic in their views that way and I was determined to emulate that. I did have this feeling that I've expressed often that Republicans ought to try to work a little harder, try to break out of these conventional campaign tactics, get down at street level and do the things we wound up doing. I thought that this would be both better politics and better preparation for office if it came. And I came away from 2004 utterly convinced that that's the

case. But it's not for everybody. I talk to people all the time who said, I couldn't stay overnight in somebody's home. I've done it 120 times and find it sort of fun. People say, I couldn't get in a fairly grungy, beat-up vehicle like that and go meet literally tens of thousands of folks face to face, well, again, it's to each his own. But I found it enormously rewarding, still do, made a point of not changing our practice after we did succeed.

Question:

[20:13] I wouldn't say it's fun raising money. We were very successful at it, but I don't think I can take the credit for that. I think people just became very, very excited about the prospect of change in Indiana and rallied to that. But, no, those events were not my favorite, let me put it that way. The - if you do what we did, of course there are days when you get a little grumpy and days when you run into people who are just very negative about what you're saying or doing. I had to learn to master my temper along the way. But I don't think it's just the fact that time has passed. I think I'd have told you election night '04, too, it was just a terrific experience. I already at that point had so many new friends from every station of life. I've tried to stay in touch with them. I knew I'd have great, great memories whether it worked out or didn't.

Question:

[Side talk]

Somebody's making a speech or something. We're going to try to keep it off your tape.

Question:

[22:20] It's funny. Election Day '04 is a little hard to remember. I didn't do very much. There's an old convention out here that says the candidate ought to rush around from polling place to polling place. I think I went to a few in inner city Indianapolis. We had a sense that we might outperform and we did among black voters and inner city voters here, but in general I didn't do too much. What I do remember is the last ride home, the last trip of this 16-month odyssey, stopped at a little diner called the Nine Mile as I recall because that's how far it was from the county seat in little northeastern Indiana County. So the very last of the very last trip was a pretty nostalgic one for me and the two young guys, one or two of my old buddies came along, I remember, that time. We had a beer and just thought about everywhere we'd been and all the time we'd put in and wondered what the morrow would bring. Election Day itself, I was in a - best I recall, I was in a pretty calm frame of mind. When you've done everything you know how to do, no sense much in worrying, just nothing more you can do about it and so I waited as I recall with some peace of mind for the evening. I also had begun to believe, I know our people believed firmly at that point, that we were going to prevail and so I faced the evening with optimism.

Question:

[24:15] We went to the home of some of our closest friends who happen to live fairly close to

the Hinkle Fieldhouse where we would be going to either concede or to celebrate, and I remember rehearsing my concession speech. I had a pretty clear idea of what I'd say if it didn't work out. But Indiana polls close at 6 PM which is a little earlier than some places and we're in the Eastern time zone so in a Presidential year we're generally the first returns to come in. Because we did win that race by a pretty clear margin, it didn't take a long time before the drift of things became clear. I remember that we got a phone call from down the southern part of the state which is less populated but historically Democratic in its tendencies. And we had worked really hard down there, felt we had a lot going, felt that frankly I had more in common with people there than my opponent who was a big city Democrat from northern Indiana. We got a phone call well before the networks had made their predictions that told us that in two of the most populous counties right down opposite Louisville, we had essentially broken even. When I heard that, I remember saying to somebody, If we did that in Clark and Floyd County we're going to win. And that turned out to be accurate. So from that moment on, I began to think harder about an acceptance than concession speech.

Question:

[26:15] Well, I probably didn't use those words. I think I was mentally prepared. There was I guess a moment of relief that all that work and all those miles had been worth it. But again as I believe I communicated throughout that campaign, I believe I communicated later that evening, this was all preface. Winning the election was not the catharsis, this was not the success we were after. We were already looking forward to trying to make the difference live up to the words and the lofty aspirations and all the proposals we'd been making to our fellow citizens. So I was happy of course but very, very intent on diving into the work of making Indiana a lot better place. We had the transition committee that I assembled met the following morning and the work, the real work of building a better state began then.

Question:

[27:40] That's probably a question best put to others. Certain things you do get better at. I mean, I'm - I think, I've done a lot of public speaking before but I - surely I'm better by virtue of all those talks I've given since. I have learned sometimes the hard way to control my tongue and temper, that as a candidate it's generally less effective. It may feel good for a moment, but it generally doesn't leave a positive impression on people if you speak too sharply or sarcastically or just fire back at someone and certainly in office I've learned that. People expect a little more civility out of you. But I always found it from the first day on, I didn't find it difficult to meet new people for the first time, to have a conversation with people regardless their walk of life or income or education level but no question after you've done it tens of thousands of times, you're better at it.

Question:

[29:12] They don't know to trust their own instincts. These people who again with no investment in the future or the success of your city, your state, afterward want to tell you exactly

how to get elected. I mean, if the only reason you're doing it is to get elected, I suppose maybe you let these people tell you what to do. But if you're on a little bigger mission than that, then let that dictate how you conduct yourself, where you go, how you meet people and how you attempt to motivate them to help you get things done. I guess I see too many people in politics who are too ready to accept the pat counsel of the day which is, Make money, raise money, make commercials, attack your opponent and worry about the details of governance later.

Question:

[31:06] No, no, I'm thinking here. I'm trying to think. Sorry about that. [31:25] I know you want that one little magic anecdote. I'm sort of casting about for what it might be.

Question:

[32:12] Well, he's a fine guy and he'd been a very successful political figure and I - he began his campaign with full confidence, he and his party, that they would win. He had been the lieutenant governor and the outgoing governor had passed away and so my opponent became governor and then the candidate and this was a tough moment for us. Let me back up, Jeff, I'll tell you this story in a better way. It kind of goes to your last question. One surprise and tough moment of our campaign came about two months in when the incumbent governor who was term limited died suddenly, and his lieutenant governor who had decided not to run became governor and changed his mind. And there was great euphoria in the Democratic Party; they thought this was by far the strongest situation they could have. There'd be goodwill and sympathy for the new governor, as there was. And he was a well-established, longtime political figure in his own right. So that seemed like a big setback to us. Not an open seat anymore, but now (we were) campaigning against incumbent. No incumbent had ever lost for election in Indiana. So but over the long haul that worked out all right. I think that first of all our opponent could not escape the fact that he was part of an administration that we were claiming could have done much better and part of a status quo in Indiana that wasn't adequate. Secondly I just don't think they ever saw us coming. I remember giving a speech, the speech at the Republican State Convention where I made a mock apology to our opponents. I said, We are not the people they expected us to be. They expected us to be out of touch with average Hoosiers, but we know them better than they do. They expected us to be negative but instead we're only about making life better in Indiana and we're the ones full of positive proposals while they have nothing new to say. I think the combination of their campaign being married to the status quo, ours being very different than any that people had seen here. This was reflected by the way in the big advantage we had among young people. The first time I really began to believe we were going to win the campaign, I was at the latest of a long string of parades in the summer. I'm there, my opponent's not. I'm walking the route. We've got 50 young kids in green t-shirts, handing out whatever we handed out. And I remember looking around, asking my young sidekick, Ben, like "where's the other team?" And it was some geriatric old sourpuss standing there in front of my opponent's sign, maybe the union sent him down there or something. I began to think, you know, this has got to mean something. A lot of these kids can't even vote but all the energy, all

the novelty is on our side here. And it's going to translate, and I think it did.

-End of file-