



Center for a
New American
Security

BIG ENERGY MAP

INTERVIEW WITH

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SHARON BURKE: I know Christine sent you some questions that we wanted to pose and we can go by the questions and be free as well but one of the things – you know we are a national security think tank and a non-profit 501(c)3 so we're totally independent, we do have some friends in the Obama Administration, including our entire leadership, so we're going through a transition as well – but we're a totally independent organization and this particular project is funded by a family foundation, so there's no-

DR. JACK GIBBONS: Is it publicly known, the foundation?

BURKE: Yes, it's called the Markle Foundation.

GIBBONS: Markle, I've heard of that.

BURKE: And what they're most interested in actually is information, and information technologies and how better information can affect difficult policy environments.

GIBBONS: Great.

BURKE: So, we think that's important just because in the energy space there are so many people who have investments to protect. So, in our initial findings – you know our point of view is national security-influenced – and we felt very strongly that one of the missing ingredients in the country's energy security, which we consider must include climate change concerns, is there's no strategy, there's no national policy that ties everything together. And that the most important elements were going to be a national strategy, executive leadership, and then coordination across the agencies, Congress, and the most important parts of the economy if you are going to achieve the kinds of goals that the Obama Administration has put out. We wanted to ask you what you thought about this idea that you need to have a strategy – a national strategy – a point, a focal point in the Executive Office of the President to helm that strategy so that, so you have an agent for the President basically to marshal the federal government, and then also that that person will be, play a coordinating role. Do you think that's a correct way of looking at this or even a sufficient way of looking at it?

GIBBONS: I think it's an important way of looking at it. We utilized that quite a bit during the Clinton years, and I don't see how we could have done the things we were able to do without that kind of direct link to the President. First of all, it signifies that what we were working on was of that level of importance to the President. Secondly, that meant that when we called a meeting or called on different of the executive agencies, they responded because I was, in a sense, speaking for the President. And if I didn't have that link, we could not have had the kind of cooperation we had between these agencies, who usually are in competition with each other.

BURKE: This is – we had this later in the order but as long as we're talking about it, on energy and climate change issues did you play a lead role for President Clinton? My understanding is there were other actors as well, there was a climate change coordinator, and the Climate Change Science Program came under you, correct?

GIBBONS: Mmm-hmm.

BURKE: Did you play a lead role on that?

GIBBONS: We did. I think the – the issue of climate change, and energy, is perhaps the most confounding issue that we face as a people because it implies, in order to resolve them, that we're going to have to change a lot of things that we hadn't thought about before – in agriculture, in commerce, in environment, energy, defense – you can go all the way across the federal agencies and find a role, an important role, in each of these agencies. So how do you capture the collective capability there and put it to work in a coherent way? It also involves linking to federal government, the federal agencies and agencies of other federal governments, and to the states. You know a lot of jurisdiction about how we use energy and how we manage climate are global. And so how do you bring this whole thing together in a way that enables us to devise a truly sensible strategy? And so how do you organize – the way you organize things influences very much how you go about doing the work – so I think we need to come, in the case of environment and energy, we have to first understand the challenge as best we could, then figure out what our goals would be, and so defining goals is a way then to develop the strategy, and then once you develop the strategy then you can go to work and parcel out the responsibilities. And finally, the Congress, you know, you can't – the Congress is that other branch, and we found it very important to work with the Congress in devising these things.

BURKE: Well it seems that – in our report we suggested that the President either needed to create a single White House role that coordinated all those elements that you were talking about, or designate somebody as the coordinator. And we, you know we said the National Security Advisor is a possible candidate for that, the science advisor, but that, or the head of CEQ, but that someone needed to be designated as the coordinator across all those elements. Do you agree with that concept, that there needs to be a single coordinator in the White House that plays that role you're talking about?

GIBBONS: It depends a lot on who the President is and how he or she wants to go about getting things done, but in my case, under Clinton, we first – in the very beginning of his administration – we proposed a Presidential priority that had to do both with climate change and with oil, and obviously other environmental things. That is the whole business of the automobile, so we devised what we called a Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles. And this required us to organize across about six federal agencies, to coordinate with the Congress,

and also to link ourselves to the states, and to other friendly governments. And I had the responsibility to set that thing up, and I told the President that I thought he should organize it so that for at least the defining of the goals of the automobile, advanced automobile, he should find someone who knows science, and also could be located in an agency that was most appropriate to deal both with the science part and the move towards the commercialization. That's what we were after – our goal was to make, to help create this new generation of vehicles – so we chose a scientist... do we have a lot of time? No we don't have a lot of time-

BURKE: As much as you have sir.

GIBBONS: We chose a scientist who was excellent – she was President of the American Chemical Society and other things. And I went to the President one day and I said I think I found the person to be in charge of this thing, all the interagencies. And he said, "What is her name?" And I said, "It's Mary Lowe Good, G-double O-D." And he said, "I know her." Turned out, she was also from Arkansas, so I was really lucky, and he said of course, we'll do that. So I persuaded Mary Good to take on the job of coordinating amongst the federal agencies, the work on the new generation of vehicles.

BURKE: Where did she actually sit?

GIBBONS: She sat down at Commerce, and we chose Commerce because we were after a commercialization; you don't do that at NSF, or Energy, you do it over at Commerce-

BURKE: So you defined the most important part of the process-

GIBBONS: Yes, it identified our end goal was not just research and development, or a new technology. It was a newly commercializable technology. So it took a little thinking about how the government works and what you want to happen with the information you develop.

BURKE: Is it – you know, looking at it that way it makes me wonder if many – if defining energy security as a broad goal is too broad a goal.

GIBBONS: Don't think so. Energy security is, like few others, a ubiquitous form of security. And, I think energy security is important, but not just in military terms – it's our national economic security, it's our national social well-being, it's a way to share resources amongst other nations. So it's an international diplomacy issue, but it is a national – we defined national security in those broader terms while I was at the White House too, and it was very well-received, people in the military caught it right away.

BURKE: And in fact, if I remember right, the NSC actually had a senior director for environmental security, which was dismantled after President Clinton left office.

GIBBONS: Yes, I talked to the head of NSC about it. An appointment of one of our people to the NSC as a senior director, but we paid her salary and she was actually a, hired at OSTP, because I wanted to link the White House offices together in the way that would be most helpful.

BURKE: Did that work – on a practical level, having somebody wear two hats – did it work?

GIBBONS: It worked as well as I figured it might, because these – in the White House it's a whole bunch of fiefdoms after their territory. They're very competitive, and you – that's the reality of the White House.

BURKE: So let's talk about this White House, and if this is not something you want to go on record saying, that's fine, but right now how the President has set it up is – he has Carol Browner as the energy and environment advisor, but also General Jones as the National Security Advisor is supposed to have a big piece of the energy and climate policy. And then John Holdren of course is a very strong hand on these issues. These are some pretty strong fiefdoms,. Do you think that this is going to sort itself out? Is this a workable model?

GIBBONS: I think that depends on the President. If the President wants it that way, it can happen that way, but all these people are reporting to the President and the President is in pretty close touch with all of them, I hope, and he's going to use his chief advisor in the White House to sort of give the marching orders. But I think the people that have been assembled and appointed are very much more inclined to take it on this way than to fight each other. You always have problems with the economists because they know everything, and scientists only know little things, and, you know, it's that presupposition that goes with any job. But you have to remember that inside the White House, the competition for the President's time is immensely high, and you have to have people that respect the President's time and don't overuse his availability. But people will scramble for the opportunity to be with the President. I had a different opinion, I said, "as long as I'm doing my job right, and I know what the President wants me to do, I don't need to see him very often." And for me that worked out very well, other people said, "why aren't you with the President alone more?" and I said, "because it wouldn't be worth his time." And I think you need people that are old enough to not overvalue their private time with their boss...

BURKE: One of the things – you indicated that you felt you had a strong sense of what President Clinton's direction was on energy and climate change. Do you think that helped make policy more effective and made your job easier? Did it make managing OSTP easier, to have that sense?

GIBBONS: Yes. He is a very rapid reader, and when I went out to meet him in Little Rock before everything happened in Washington, we spent a little over an hour talking about what he thought was important, and he queried me on what I thought was important. And so I knew going in how he felt about these things and I also knew Al Gore from times working with the Congress. So I had the great fortune of having prior experience in Washington, as many people don't in that job, and the knowledge of the two individuals that I would be most working for. And that was enormously helpful, so yes, it is important to know your boss and what your boss is thinking about, and it's also important to communicate with your boss. I think if I made – I made a lot of mistakes but, unlike some other people who came later and never made any mistakes – but one mistake I made I believe was that I did not, I overprotected the President's time in terms of what might've been available to me. And therefore I, sometimes I didn't see him for a month. Other times I would see him twice a day. And some people said "oh that's terrible that you didn't see the President privately, all the time." And I said, "that would have been wasting his time."

BURKE: One of the things you also alluded to that I think is very interesting is that the agencies are where the real resources are – the people, the money, and the legal authorities. Did you find that sometimes what the President wanted or what you wanted at OSTP was difficult to actually line up with the agencies and their resources and their people?

GIBBONS: Yes.

BURKE: Can you give us-

GIBBONS: I remember we had a Republican-dominated Congress after 1994, and that doubled-up the complexities of the job because usually the Congress was against what the President wanted to do, rather than backing him. So I'm a little envious for John Holdren, who doesn't have that problem – he has other problems. But I found that with the President and with the Vice-President I was never, first of all I was never turned down on any request I made, and they were always very supportive, and they always read the material I sent to them to read. One day I asked the President, "Oh, am I sending you too much stuff?" He said, "Mr. Gore and I are wonks. Send us all you want, we'll decide whether we'll read it or not." But every time I sent him something he would send it back to me, within a couple days, where he hand-wrote annotations in the margin of my memo to him to feed back to me. So we had a written communication that went on all the time, and that was very helpful to me and I think it saved him some time.

BURKE: Did you show the agencies the memos? You know, did you use that as a, as help in getting the agencies on your side?

GIBBONS: No but they knew what my standing was. I remember one day, we decided, we were talking about this Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles, and I recommended that the activity be under Mary Good and located over at Commerce, where individuals from other agencies would gather, and they would have an office – an interagency office – over there. And, I um, let's see, what was it I was going to say? That's a penalty of getting older. You were asking me about, start that again.

BURKE: Well, just curious about that, did the Department of Transportation balk at that at all? That you wanted to put a transportation program at the Department of Commerce?

GIBBONS: Oh yes, the questions was about interagency jealousy about where things were located. There's fierce competition to be the locus of leadership on this issue, a typical Presidential initiative involving half a dozen federal executive agencies. And I knew Commerce would logically be the one to object if we were focusing on commercialization and commercial partnerships. I had a great resistance from the Secretary of Energy, who thought that it ought to be over there. She said, "That ought to be my job." And I went to the President and told him of my problem, he said, "Well, just go sit down with them and work it out," so I did. But, when I went to see them, they understood my standing, of coming at the request of the President. Had no problem, although she threatened to resign, the Secretary threatened to appeal directly to the President, and I said "Be my guest, that's your prerogative as a Secretary," but she never did because she knew I was acting for the President. So you have to be courteous and diplomatic but also make sure you've someone standing behind you. Has more firepower.

BURKE: So it really, we, one of the things we felt very strongly about was, especially on this issue because of the complexity of it because it's domestic and international and it engages so many different institutions, you – there is no substitute for the President – you must have the President.

GIBBONS: That's right. In fact the reason the Office of the Science Advisor is in the White House and OSTP is basically in the White House complex, is because that proximity to the President is an outward and visible sign of where you stand. Where you sit – where you stand depends on where you sit, and that, time and time again we could assemble the principles of four or five agencies at the White House. And we would never be able to get them together downtown somewhere.

BURKE: Let's see. Some of these questions are mine and some are Christine's. Well, okay, so one of the things that she wanted to know is that, you know the Department of Defense has this Quadrennial Defense Review, which ideally is supposed to be a real planning document and that money is procured against and all of that. It doesn't always work that way in practice but

sometimes it does, and do you think that that kind of periodic update of a national energy strategy would be useful or important as far as aligning what the agencies are doing and the nation sees as its marching orders?

GIBBONS: Well frankly if the Defense Quadrennial Review had been successful, then I would argue maybe that's a good model. But if you look at the reviews they've given over the past, say, 20 years – including when I was over in the administration for five, over five years – it's rather unimpressive. It's the same old same old. The same individuals, but they're not looking beyond breaking and killing. I can't blame them for putting that first, but the notion of energy as an important Department of Defense issue did not occur to them – there were a few, like Bill Perry and others, that it did – but only recently has DOD really taken this on. We went, one day, up to Detroit to the Army Tank Command, where one of our important military operations was in heavy tanks, for things like fighting wars in deserts. And the tanks would get about five gallons to the mile, and so they had to have a supply truck right behind them, just to keep up with them. Well that reminds me and reminded them ultimately that, you know, they are so energy dependent that they're going to sink in their own weight. So we went up there and we started talking with the Army about working with NASA, NSF, Energy, Commerce, other agencies, on these advanced propulsion methods for automobiles, and for trucks and the likes, which was directly relevant to the Army. And they were interested, and excited. When I got back to town – to Washington – very shortly down came the word that the Armed Services Committee, I believe it was, said “No way is the Department of Defense going to spend any time or money on your silly energy conservation things.” It was a misunderstanding, or lack of understanding on the Hill about the relevance of these things to the Defense Department, of global climate change and energy security as a part of our national defense security. It's still just dawning on some places on the Hill.

BURKE: And in DOD. And that's something, you know, that's more where we do our work, so we spend a lot of time in our report looking at how the Department deals with these issues, and one of our major findings was that the Department is, as you points out, one of the largest consumers of energy in the world.

GIBBONS: 94% of our federal government energy goes to Defense.

BURKE: Right, and they have a different role to play than any other federal agency, because they're the only really significant consumer, but they don't, they haven't really played that role yet, and that one of our major recommendations was it's time for the Department of Defense to be a voice in this area.

GIBBONS: I just heard someone from DOD a few hours ago talking about the mission redefined, in a sense, or broadened at DOD namely that energy availability, globally, was a

fundamental priority for the Department, not just for us, but for our allies and others. So defense is trying to step up to it, and I think properly so. They can start with looking at energy efficiency in their own operations, which has finally begun, about 20 years after it should have been recognized.

BURKE: Sometimes it's depressing to think about. You know, what you could have done in those 20 years. All of the emissions that have gone up in the air that could've been prevented. You know, one of the things that we found elusive when we were looking at the Executive Office of the President was the actual mechanics of how it runs, and in particular, the Climate Change Science Program seems to have been moved around a little bit. Could you tell us a little bit about, on these issues the actual mechanics of how you got direction from the President, gave direction to the President, and how you coordinated with the Climate Change Science Program and CEQ and other entities that were in the space, so, just because, we had a little trouble, you know if we wanted to draw it as a wire diagram, a lot of trouble figuring out how you would do that. Do you have any words of wisdom on the actual sort of nuts and bolts of that operation?

GIBBONS: One thing we tried to do was to give in the spring, in anticipation of the fall budget's missions, a letter that the head of OMB and myself jointly wrote and signed, with instructions to the agencies about the President's priorities in research and development for the coming budget year. And so we tried to try to make it very explicit about what the President – and the President reviewed this before we sent it out – of their role in energy efficiency and other energy-related matters. I think that helped. We didn't do enough work, I'm afraid, in the Congress on that, with, say, the appropriations committees.

BURKE: How about with OMB? How was your – how did that work with OMB?

GIBBONS: Very well, because Leon Panetta and I worked pretty closely together and we – I did the drafting of the letter but he, with a few small changes, always signed it, and we always sent it out in time that it could affect their budget cycle in the agencies. So you need that kind of, not management but steering from the White House to give the guidance to the agencies with enough advance notice that they can actually have it show up in their budgets' missions. That makes it a lot easier for OMB, because when they come in, we could always say, "Did you read our letter?" Or not. And it's the timing of these things that's very important.

BURKE: That's interesting, because we haven't had that conversation with anybody else about the importance of timing everything right. It sounds too like the personal relationships matter, that if you and Leon Panetta are on the same page and get along well, then it works.

GIBBONS: It's all human relations.

BURKE: Which is hard to map. Which we found much to our peril that the thing that we really wanted to do couldn't be done, that we wanted to map relative influence, and we wanted to map connections, but some of those things are not truly mappable because the connections are – how do you map that you and Leon Panetta had a good rapport? You can't.

GIBBONS: You can't. It's interpersonal and needs to be taken into account in making appointments of people, and in making decisions about divisions of authority. So each administration is going to be different because you have different actors in the lead. That's one reason, for instance, that some science advisors were basically sent out of the White House down to NSF or somewhere. Because they weren't considered important. During Nixon's years, for instance, Guy Stever was instructed to go on down to the Science Foundation – they didn't need him around the White House. Well, that's a personality situation.

BURKE: Well, now it makes it hard to answer this next question then, because, well it seems to me that if we're looking at the role of OSTP now, in the Bush Administration, it, science was a problematic issue. So I imagine that the science advisor's role was probably problematic.

GIBBONS: It was closely circumscribed as I understand it, and I haven't talked with Jack about this – Jack Marburger – for a long time, but I have a feeling, strong feeling, that his role was rather well-circumscribed to focus on science, not Presidential initiatives or things like that. Not interagency drum-beating but the science budget. So to me, that was underutilized because it was an office of science and technology policy, and we framed that in terms of technology is the engine of economic growth, and science is the fuel for that technology, and you can't separate them, you should not try to separate them. That's why I worry a little bit, honestly, about how well Carol Browner can be czar on climate change and energy without a rather well worked out and defined *modus vivendi* with John Holdren, with the Science Office...

BURKE: Agreed. It sounds like those relationships within the Executive Office of the President work better when they are a council of equals.

GIBBONS: I think, if I were doing it – if I were the President (laughs) I would ask, and we're talking about just this issue of climate and energy, I would call, at a minimum, Carol and John, and say, "Why don't you two get together and tell me how you'd like to work this out because I need both of you, and both your areas are important. And then come back to me and tell me what you think." Now that may be too deliberate, but I think it's very important to work these things out. It's a little bit like marriage. You really need to work a lot of issues out before you go up to the altar or you get into trouble pretty soon.

BURKE: Well if there is a national policy, or a national strategy, do you think there needs to be a single person though who's responsible for making sure it's executed. Like, is there someone who needs to be the President's touchstone on that?

GIBBONS: That's difficult to say on an issue as all-encompassing, ubiquitous, and complicated as climate change and energy, which are to me, the more I get to know them, they're the most complicated issue we have, we are facing as a global society, that we've ever faced. But, that having been said, you can't – I think it's difficult to say, "well just, let's appoint a czar, not just for climate and energy, but let's appoint that czar with authority that can bypass the cabinet, and can bypass the assistants to the President," because that gives the President only, in a sense, one shot at advice. And one shot at, one person giving advice is a very traumatic thing [unintelligible]. So I don't know whether I've answered that question or not-

BURKE: No it's an interesting, especially – I actually served in the State Department during the first term of the Bush Administration, and I can tell you that when you only have one person giving you advice, it doesn't work out very well. I think we all know that now. One of the things that we found really interesting were how many people used the word 'tribal' to describe how energy policy is made, and that there were different tribes in the different agencies who were doing their piece of the truth, and that it's really a challenge to try to bring all those people together and get them moving in the same direction. Do you think that's a fair description or, and is it necessarily a bad thing?

GIBBONS: I think our whole society is tribal. You can find it in any community. So parties who share interests and therefore form a smaller community of interest, and that's not necessarily bad, it's a way to resolve issues. But I think what we face in climate and energy, in the broadest sense of our global security, is so complex that we have to devise a way of doing it – of pulling it together at the top, because what do we have? We have climate as affected by population growth, by the way we make things, our whole economic production system, our limited natural resources such as energy, clean air, clean water, they're all related to the number of people and our economic activities, and we can't resolve it unless we approach it from that perspective because we've gotten so big that we're affecting the entire planet now. That didn't use to be the case. So we are challenged to be very creative in the way we think about how we can practice governance in a time where that comes to be the king of the road. It's, as it were, a physicist would say, we've moved, or we're moving from a linear system to a non-linear system, and that means there are all sorts of interactions that you have to take into account.

BURKE: Do you really think, can we do that? Can we build a management structure that can actually take those interactions into account?

GIBBONS: We need to try.

BURKE: Any ideas about how to do that?

GIBBONS: Well the thing we did – I told the President once that we needed to work on partnership notions, and I said partnerships should arrive out of mutual self-interest. And I reminded him of what we used to call barn-raising over in the Shenandoah Valley. Farmer needs a barn, he doesn't have all the help to build a barn, so he calls his neighbors, they come over and help him build the barn. And then the next year another person needs a barn, and he goes over and helps build that barn. It's the strength and power from cooperative ventures, where you have recognizable self-interest. That's what we tried to do with the Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles, where there was public interest in having a safe and efficient machine and private [indecipherable] in collecting private capital and making the manufacturing and delivering those goods. Mutual self-interest. Fully defensible therefore to have the federal government and the industry share in the expenses of developing some of these things that, given only the industry working on it, they would not be able to justify making some of those more venturesome investments.

BURKE: I wanted to ask you about a specific kind of partnership. We had suggested that, you know, in the energy sphere industry's going to be particularly important and has been a significant barrier to date with all the investment – vested interests. One of the things we suggested though is that it might be helpful to have some kind of presidential advisory board that's drawn from industry and you have a lot of direct experience with that, with the National Bioethics Advisory Council and other, and really OTA was, had a series of advisory councils-

GIBBONS: And the PCAST as well. I encouraged the President to allow us to expand industrial participation in these advisory councils and he, he knew right away that's what they should try to do.

BURKE: Does it work?

GIBBONS: It worked very well for us. The place it didn't, that industry didn't work very well for us is when we really tried to get in real partnership with them on making major investments in advanced automotive technologies. And I had to devise a way that they could be fully engaged with the Federal Government, but it would all be filtered once each year at the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, who would receive reports from the federal laboratories, and the industries, all of whom were involved in R&D and the likes. Worked on indentifying the most promising options for the new kind of car and then-
[Kitchen Noise]

BURKE: Can you ask them to be quiet please?

GIBBONS: -and then judging the efficacy of the work that was done, so that's an external peer review from industry and universities. And then making recommendations about what to do in the forthcoming years. Sort of like a visiting committee, and we found that very helpful because the academies were fully representative of both industry and academia. So I think the academies were well – served that function very well. And we know that the same thing happens in the defense area, down in the academies, so I think there are mechanisms for tying across in neutral but expert territory to judge the efficacy of the work, and make these midcourse corrections.

BURKE: So do you think that, that the President should use those existing structures, or create something specifically to look at energy?

GIBBONS: I would say use those examples, and then tailor them to what he feels are the most important needs. And Holdren could help do that, so could Carol, for instance. But advisory is a very important way of participatory democracy. If you go out and find a representative group of the most well-informed people on that issue and gather them together, first of all, they like to serve their government that way. Secondly, we need all the help we can get in government. [door squeaking] And so I was very encouraging both at OTA and in the White House in drawing in the public in a very carefully-devised way, so that we could tap the best of the wisdom.

BURKE: I still come across people still today that were on advisory panels at OTA.

GIBBONS: Do you?

BURKE: Yeah, you know, it's always fun because I actually have a pretty good memory for names and faces, so one gentleman, Glen Prickett, who was at the Natural Resources Defense Council, who's, you know, moved, long gone from that job, I was at a meeting with him and said, "Oh, you were on an OTA panel 20 years ago and-." But, so no, I found them to be very helpful for the work we were doing. When we looked at the infrastructure for making and carrying out energy policy, there were some specific things that we were interested in. One is that cap-and-trade, if it is created, and we'll get to Congress in a minute. If it is actually created, it needs a home. It'll be a very large program generating a significant amount of revenue and there's not a clear and natural home for that, and we thought that it was important for GAO or for another agency to figure out who's the home for a significant new program like that. Otherwise, we thought, it'll just go somewhere, and it's not clear that the agencies can expand to do that-

GIBBONS: Yeah it should not be allowed just to float and then light somewhere where the mountains went up higher – I haven't thought my way through that, in fact I've been wrestling

with the whole idea of cap-and-trade because I know that when you do cap-and-trade, you invite people to play games with it, especially the economists and the lawyers. I'd rather not just hide behind the charade of calling it cap-and-trade and rather have it as an energy, emissions tax based on CO₂, or the greenhouse gases. That may not be politically possible, if that's-

BURKE: Well let's talk about that-

GIBBONS: The case that's a terrible conclusion-

BURKE: -Because you were, were you involved in the BTU tax, the effort to-

GIBBONS: We tried.

BURKE: Can you tell us a little bit about how that fell apart and what lessons you maybe took from that that?

GIBBONS: Well it fell apart because it never came together. The argument was let's have a gasoline tax, and we can rebate the income back through payroll tax, so it'd be net zero change of tax income, but we would shift as a, the economist Kenneth Boulding once said, you may recall, he said "let's tax the bad, and not tax the good." And so we said alright and we figured maybe 18 cents would really help; this is Arab oil and – no this wasn't, this was after the Arab oil embargo, but it was at a time where we knew energy was underpriced, a lot of externalities that weren't being covered. And Fritz Hollings was, I guess, a key person in the Senate in that regard, and we argued back and forth and the economists at the White House said "you'll never get it through, it's too much" – because we were talking about 18 cents a gallon – even if it was rebated through the payroll tax. And the President and Vice-President knew how important this was as a mechanism for getting people's attention about the cost of driving. We finally sort of handed it over to Fritz at the Senate to work out what he thought he could get through the Congress, and he worked very hard. He told me once it's the hardest thing he ever tried to do – and they ended up with four cents a gallon. That's the best they could do, because there is this predisposition that putting more price on gasoline, which is close to everyone's heart somehow, is just not, it's not patriotic. So we failed, and we had to back off with one of, what should be one of our best options, namely let the market price dictate how you behave.

BURKE: Well it seems like the idea of a net zero gas tax is now coming back. Do you think it'll fare any better this time?

GIBBONS: You'll have to ask on the Hill, because it failed up on the Hill. The committees of Congress are so well-defined, and so zealous of their authorities – just like the White House offices – that the committee that would have been in charge of the gasoline tax revenues was a

different committee that would be in charge of tax rebates on payroll taxes, and they didn't trust each other. And therefore they said no deal. So our, we have ossified in our organization, up on the Hill as well as to a degree downtown, and we have to get away from that. We've got to understand that you make progress – it's a little bit like the turtle – you only make progress by sticking your neck out. And we're not too happy to do that, organizationally.

BURKE: No, government doesn't seem built for that, does it?

GIBBONS: Sadly.

BURKE: I, it seems-

GIBBONS: But Thomas Jefferson said, "Our laws and institutions must change with the times."

BURKE: Do you think we'll be able to?

GIBBONS: I pray we can.

BURKE: I personally, and I don't think that my time in OTA was formative in this, but I personally take a dim view about whether or not Congress can change. That it's got so many actors – it's the same thing you said, it's not a linear institution – and, again, they're clinging to what they have. But it seems from what you're saying that they have played a very important role in policymaking in these areas. How do you get around this problem? Or how do you deal with it?

GIBBONS: Repeated encounter with the realization of what you can do if you would but get around them. And then some wise politicians should be able to figure out a way, if we identify point B we want to get to, and they identify point A where we are, and they identify some alternate ways to get there, that they could make the right political choice, and go with it, otherwise they're going to be sitting here when we need to be there. And that, it's, I know it may not seem rational, maybe it isn't, but I can't believe that time and circumstance dictate that we do nothing. Time and circumstance dictate very seriously that we do a lot of what may seem to be traumatic things, but if we don't do them, things will get a lot more traumatic than we ever dreamed.

BURKE: I think one of the changes that you've recommended would help, that would allow us to stick our necks out a little bit, we really were fascinated to see this – the Earth Systems Science Agency that you and a group of writers recommended. Could you tell us a little bit, so

that we can include it in the site, a little bit about what the Earth Systems Science Agency is, and why we need something like this? And the fact that we don't have it right now.

GIBBONS: Well that was a quick study we did as the time was moving toward the election, and we were trying to think ahead, as you all have, about what we could say that might be worthy of giving at least a look, and one of the people – I think it was probably Mark Schaefer – who had experience at USGS, and another one of our people, Jim Baker, who had been in charge of NOAA, others in that list of people were saying that as time goes on, more and more of the work at NOAA and at USGS is like this. And if we want it to be more effective, efficient, and productive we need to figure out a way to get the organization to match the natural overlap and interweaving of responsibilities. And so the most traumatic thing we could think of – which is always what you do at the beginning of an administration – was to say “let's merge these agencies.” Why is NOAA down at Commerce? It's because Nixon liked the Secretary of Commerce and he said “let's put it down there,” that was basically it. So why not propose that there be a confluence of those two agencies because of complementarity of their responsibilities. I doubt that it's going to go anywhere because you're moving too many things around, and I know that we have an experience with national homeland security that, it's an abject lesson that the fastest way to act like you're doing something is to reorganize. And it's the fastest way to waste time and money unless you have some very compelling reasons for it. So I think something like this, we need to be cognizant of the opportunities of a more successful outcome if we take certain actions, but they need to be very deliberate. Maybe we can move step-wise in that direction by a formal sharing of analysis and decision-making between the directors of those two agencies, which are in separate departments, after all. So I'm not saying we ought to do it this year, but it's an idea about where changing times and changing technologies, and changing rural conditions dictate that we try to think about re-optimizing the way we're organized.

BURKE: Well tell us a little bit about the need for this. Both of these institutions collect Earth observations that are not being used optimally? Or are they not collecting the right observations?

GIBBONS: I think they may not be. They are likely not being as appropriate as needed to understand and face reaction to climate change, number one. To react and respond to the changing scene in oceanography, and global geophysics, that sort of thing. I mean NOAA has the satellites, and they have to depend on NOAA to get information down for USGS people to use it on the ground, there's a lot of back-and-forth, and I would, the first ask is, “How well is it working now?” And I would assemble a small working group and go after it. And have them come back with some specific suggestions, and about the goals that they feel this would contribute to.

BURKE: How would this relate to, and I assume you're familiar with the proposals for a National Climate Service-

GIBBONS: Yeah, I'm a bit puzzled by that, but.

BURKE: But it seems to me like it's a similar – identifying a similar need, just a very different emphasis, which is, there's bits and pieces of information all over the place and they're not being put together in a way – and sometimes they're not saying exactly the same thing, and to a lay user like me, if you're getting one piece of information from NASA, and a different piece from NOAA, and they sound like they're saying different things, it's very confusing. So my understanding of what they're trying to do is say you need to knit together that community of information to better support users and decision-makers, who right now don't have access to what they need.

GIBBONS: What we tried to do at my shop when I was at the White House was create the National Science and Technology Council, which was a cabinet-level council designed to bring these agencies together at the White House. You have to do it at the White House or it won't work. Bring them together to make sure that their programs and priorities match up to the overall need as expressed by the President. And I think weather service might well be – you might even throw weather service and USGS and NOAA together and ask, what should you do together that right now you can't seem to get done. Because, well I remember one time a Congressman told me that he had to have an argument in the hall with one of his colleagues because he said his colleague had said to him, "I'm really mad and I'm on the Appropriations Committee and I'm going to take care of this thing because why in the world do we need to send government money to send up satellites – weather satellites – when we've got the television weather right there?" He did not know where that information came from. So there's a gap between what exists and what is imagined.

BURKE: How do we close that gap?

GIBBONS: A lot more time in communicating with people. A little bit like the President did a few days ago when he talked to us, what's the reality of our present economic crisis.

BURKE: Do you think that's – what are some other ways that this kind of information can be usefully communicated? You know, is the President really the only place?

GIBBONS: Well the President has the bully pulpit of the nation, and, Roosevelt used it very well, and it is a complicated world and people need to have a sense of what's going on. People, too many people are more distant from the critical actions of government today than they were 50 years ago. It's out-distancing the ability of people to keep up with the reality of what's

happening. And that's one job of government is keep the people informed; it's their information, they're paying for it, and we need to spend more time in that communication. That was one reason I was so unhappy with Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney, because their feeling is that the power of government comes in sequestering of information, not sharing. And I just have a fundamental disagreement with that.

BURKE: One of the things about the Earth Systems Science Agency that I think is really interesting as well and I wonder is one of the purposes is it does seem like there's a gap between the information that's being collected by the science and technology community and what's known on the policy side. How do we close that gap? Do you think it's by creating an institution where that's part of its mission?

GIBBONS: In my experience the big failing there is that everyone is more busy than they need to be, and that we don't communicate appropriately, we don't value sufficiently this time spent in talking with our colleagues. I didn't spend nearly enough time up on the Hill when I was in office. When I was up on the Hill I didn't spend nearly enough time downtown. So I – it works both ways, but I think it's that making sure people have a chance to come to a degree of understanding of issues that they can effectively handle the information that's available to them.

BURKE: I guess OTA was really an unusual entity in that respect because it was a translator. It was trying to translate science into policy for the policymakers. I'm not, I mean I guess the National Academies do that.

GIBBONS: The Academies do it, but OTA had an additional charge, namely, not only to deliver to the Congress, our customers, but to the American people. Everything we did, except for classified work, was in the public domain at the same time it went to the Congress. And you know, if you do something at the Congressional Research Service, for a member, it's up to the member to decide whether he ever releases that or not. But if that had been OTA, it automatically is released to the public, unless it's classified. And I think this open government is a very important thing. Then we need to have people who are the translators, and, I worry about just depending on Rush Limbaugh or some other folks to translate what's going on. We need people who can translate effectively, and that means they need to have standing, and respect. And I think our university people under-do that. We think of people who come to Washington as people who are trying to lobby for something, rather than trying to be a part of the political process. Oh I'm running off too much, I'm sorry-

BURKE: Oh no that's okay, I actually remember it being a running theme at OTA that, that the science community wasn't creating communicators. And that communicators often didn't have any science background, and that it was an important problem, I don't remember that we solved it, but-

GIBBONS: We worked on it but it's true. There are things like the Knight Ridder Fellows, Science Fellows, who come and work with newspaper journalists and the likes. And there are a few more scientific types in journalism, but the journalism community, the print community, is firing people, not hiring people, and that's a problem. Where are our translators and communicators going to be working? The federal government needs to know that that's a responsibility of government. And that's why I lament that we don't have an OTA; it's why I feel the President is right in taking his precious time to be speaking from the bully pulpit. There's no substitute.

BURKE: I gather too that this President has decided to create a chief information officer.

GIBBONS: I think so, and I'm delighted if that's the case.

BURKE: You think that'll help?

GIBBONS: Yep.

BURKE: Is it just one more person in the EOP though, that-

GIBBONS: Well it depends. You know, you could have a chief information officer which translates to a chief person to obscure what's really going on.

BURKE: Hopefully not. Now, you know, by the way, the NSTC, we got the impression from our conversations – we had a lot of our interviews while Bush was still in office, President Bush was still in office – that they, they really fractured that as an institution, and it wasn't functioning the way it was meant to. But it seems to me that perhaps this administration will rehabilitate that as a mechanism. Did you find that the NSTC worked very well as a coordinating mechanism?

GIBBONS: Between the agencies, yes. NSTC was not directly involved in public information, except our reports – for instance, I was trying to think of one in the defense area on nuclear weapons proliferation, some of the other things that had to do with defense interests – were communicated, and I think NSTC did a nice job in that regard. But I don't think that's a function of NSTC. The function of NSTC is to bring the relevant agencies, participating agencies on a Presidential issue together under the auspices of the White House to make a – assure that the resources of the agencies are most effectively brought to bear on that topic.

BURKE: Did you find it useful? Did it work well?

GIBBONS: Yeah it was still fairly young when I left, but it was working in a number of areas. We did a lot of work both at PCAST and at NSTC in pulling these threads together. I remember one time we did some work on plutonium, U.S. and Russian plutonium, and we delivered the results. We briefed the President and the Vice-President on these results in the Oval Office. I asked John Holdren to make the briefing because he was a member of the PCAST committee. He did a beautiful job on this study, and the President and the Vice-President sat there for an hour while they questioned, and listened to this. I was very proud of PCAST and of Holdren in that regard. Ten days later the President met with his counterpart in Russia, and guess what was on the agenda? Plutonium. And we had worked out in advance a very appropriate way to approach the difference between Russia, and what they wanted to do with plutonium, and what we did. And we did it in an amicable way that still holds.

BURKE: Do you think there are systematic lessons? You've given a couple of examples, like with plutonium and with the advanced car project. Do you think that these are individual cases where things worked, or do you think that you can systematize some of these lessons about how you approach a problem, and get the President's time, and engage all the relevant players, find the appropriate home for it. Do you think that that's something that could be systematized?

GIBBONS: I think you can systematize it, but it's always a bit of an ad hoc process, because each one of these is a different scene. But to be able to faithfully represent the interests of the President, and to the extent he delegates his responsibility to the Vice President, to make sure you're on board with how they feel about the issue, and that therefore you can faithfully represent them in a meeting of the top people in the cabinet agencies. Once you have that assurance, and pull these people together, then you can – then you have the authority to tell them what they need to be doing in terms of their allocation of financial resources down the road. And it doesn't always work. For instance, I had the Secretary of Agriculture and the Deputy Secretary of Energy together basically in my office one day, working on how Agriculture could work with DOE in developing the techniques for processing of biomass materials, and how they could, how Agriculture could develop crops and techniques to provide the input to make Synfuels. And how this in turn could use the economic modeling of the Department of Agriculture to see how this would affect in a positive way the economy of our rural areas, because you can't afford to ship corn stalks very far, it'd just use up all the gasoline. We got them together and the person from Agriculture – it wasn't the Secretary, it was one of the Assistant Secretaries – he thought that was a great idea. He thought they'd go back and they could do it and the Deputy Secretary of Energy said, "I'll even put some money on the table for this thing," and so "Oh boy" I said, "hot dog, I've got it going. I'll just leave it in their hands now and they'll come up with a marvelous proposal for a joint venture." Well, it turned out that the structure within Agriculture was such that none of their bureaus would admit to having any kinds of resources that they could divert as a Presidential priority to do this new kind of activity. They said, "Send us new money, we'll do it." And we said, "We're not sending you money,

because we're trying to cut our deficits." And Agriculture said, "No deal." So you can't tell where you're going to run into troubles. In this case, we had them at the top but by the time they got down three layers to the working people in the field, they nixed it.

BURKE: And that was that?

GIBBONS: That was it.

BURKE: Is there any way to hold the leaders that made the agreement accountable, or is it just, when they just don't have the purchase-?

GIBBONS: You just can't – they didn't have the clout to do it. And, you know, that's the realism of a democratic process. And a smarter person could've done something probably, but at the time we didn't feel it was worth trying to escalate it to have the Vice President or the President rap their knuckles.

BURKE: You have to choose your-

GIBBONS: You have to choose your fights.

BURKE: I just had two more questions, and I know we've taken up a lot of your time, but one was that you were in government in different branches during a variety of crises, and I'm wondering about – is it more or less difficult to make institutional changes? Whether it's fixes within or big changes like your proposal during a crisis and, you know, obviously right now we've got an economic crisis and I think the President has quite smartly tied moving on energy policy to fixing the economic crisis. Do you think that we're going to be able to make institutional changes or do you think that it's more difficult in such circumstances?

GIBBONS: I think in exceptional circumstances is the very most appropriate and opportune time to bring forth some well thought out ideas and suggestions and lay them on the table. That means you have, like OTA, a responsibility for anticipation of situations, and therefore think your way through it before you get to that sudden moment in time. I think our President right now is capitalizing on this crisis to get a lot of things done through Congress and through his administration that would be much more difficult it weren't – well we got a lot of time, let's just put that off – so it's important to take advantage of things. What is it, what is the Chinese statement that – there's a single symbol in Chinese that has two meanings, one is danger, and the other is opportunity; it's the same word. And I think the same in structuring policy. I remember it took me not many hours, one weekend, to write a memo to the President – I guess it was the President – during the Arab oil embargo of '73, and I suggested that we devise a way, with Congress, to be able to turn right on red after stop, because, just as you burn extra gas if you go

too fast on the highway, you burn a lot of extra gas and pollution by sitting at a stoplight with your motor running. And it went through Congress because we were in this crisis – the Arab oil embargo, and it stayed for a long time.

BURKE: Still can do it here. So you think if you have more targeted ideas like that that you can-

GIBBONS: You need some well thought out ideas where you look through the ramifications, you've thought about the pros and cons, and you can present a succinct – one page if necessary – description of a proposed action. And if you haven't taken the time to think through these in advance, then you're left around saying, "Well, let's ask the boss what he wants us to do." And the boss never wants to tell you what to do, the boss wants to hear what you feel it's important for him to do. Or her.

BURKE: Just as a final question, I'm wondering what advice you would give this administration, as far as how to actually accomplish the kinds of changes we need in the energy security sphere, and I'm obviously mindful of the fact that you have an unusual experience in that, you know, institutions of government don't get eliminated all that often. They're pretty hard to get rid of. Congress is a little different, and Newt Gingrich was a little different.

GIBBONS: Not much different.

BURKE: Yeah. But I mean it's unusual. OTA – and not only that, of course, I mean OTA had a lot of utility, it wasn't the smartest thing to eliminate in the world – but, do you have any advice for them about, especially about institution creation and, you know, if you're going to combine institutions about how to proceed, and to how to get this done?

GIBBONS: One is to do some careful thinking about alternatives before you go to the table and try to make a proposal, because if you go in with a lousy proposal, you're not going to be invited back very soon. Secondly, it needs, you need to be able to have thought through the kind of roadblocks and barriers that lie down the road if you choose that path so you can make the person, you can reacquaint the person with the kind of problems they're liable to run into if they take this course. But also the promises of that action, and that means a lot of homework, quiet homework, in the back room about how to respond to the situation. I'm being fuzzy I guess, but I'm-

BURKE: Well this administration's pretty fast out of the gates on some of this.

GIBBONS: They are and they're – I think they're remarkably on target. There are a lot of things we're doing that we just don't know that much about. This financial crisis, no one knew

what to do. We had, someone said they're only two people in the world that understand international finance. They're absolutely the only two in the world. And they disagree with each other. And that's about where we are on some of the crises we're in now.

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