

Interview

Financing the Road to the White House

An Interview with Terence R. McAuliffe,
Chairman, Hillary Clinton for President Committee, Washington, DC



Terence R. McAuliffe

EDITORS' NOTE *The Chairman of the Democratic National Committee from February 2001 to February 2005, Terry McAuliffe is the author of the New York Times and Washington Post best-selling book, What A Party! My Life Among Democrats: Presidents, Candidates, Donors, Activists, Alligators, and Other Wild Animals. He is currently the Chairman for the Hillary Clinton for President Committee. He has also served as Finance Director of the Carter-Mondale re-election committee, National Finance Chairman of the Gephardt for President Committee, and National Finance Chairman and then-National Co-chairman of the Clinton-Gore re-election committee. He was Chairman of the 53rd Presidential Inaugural Committee and Chairman of the White House Millennium Celebration. In 2000, McAuliffe chaired the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. He was appointed by President Bill Clinton as Ambassador and Commissioner General of the Korean International Exposition, and is a board member for the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Foundation. McAuliffe started his first business, McAuliffe Driveway Maintenance, at the age of 14. He has successfully started over two dozen companies in the fields of banking, insurance, marketing, and real estate. McAuliffe served as Chairman of Federal City National Bank and, most recently, was an owner and Chairman of American Heritage Homes. He received a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.*

You must be in a very frustrating business – raising money for people running for public office.

No. I love it. I'm a full-time volunteer. I leave five little children at home so I can go out and do it. I'm just passionate about the Democratic Party. Passionate about its candidates. With raising money, what's the worst thing they can say to you? I've never been shot, never been beaten up, never been thrown out of a building; the worst they can say is no.

Still, people don't give money without expecting something in return. What do they get?

A good government. In order to raise money, first of all, you have to convince people your candidate is going to win, because no one is going to support a loser. Second, you have to get them passionate about your candidate, so they then go out and get people to help you raise money. The most one person can give a candidate is \$2,300. So you really try to find people who can find 10 friends, who then find 10 more friends, who find another 10 friends. It's a gigantic pyramid system of people all over the country raising money. When I was Chairman of the Democratic National Committee [DNC] during the Kerry-Edwards campaign, we collectively raised over \$1 billion. People want to change the course of the country. They want to help the presidential candidates they believe in.

The life of a public figure has become a battlefield. Is that causing young people to no longer be enthusiastic about taking part in public service?

It has turned very negative. It has turned personal, and I don't blame people who say, "I don't want any part of this." You need to have a very thick skin to have your life examined, and to have people make all kinds of allegations against you. But you pay a price for anything that you want to accomplish in life. I think the 24-hour news has been so damaging for politics, because they have to fill the airways with point-counterpoint conversations. The whole thing is set up to have people fight each other. I got into this business when [Thomas P.] Tip O'Neill was the Democratic Speaker of the House, and Bob Michel was the leader of the Republicans in Congress. They would fight all day on the floor and then go have a beer and a cigar together. I still live in that mode; the Chairman of the Republican National Committee and I will duke it out on TV, but when we're done, we'll

go have a beer and a cigar. You shouldn't make it personal. But unless you're going to change the way the news is presented, it's only going to get uglier. Unfortunately, I think the 2008 presidential campaign is going to be as ugly as it gets. Look at what they did to John Kerry in 2004 – attacking his patriotism after he served twice in Vietnam – and what they did to John McCain in 2000 – alleging that he had fathered an illegitimate child. My point is, you have to be strong and tough. When you run for President, people want to see you get knocked down – that's just human nature. But, they also want to see if you are willing to get back up, dust yourself off, get back in the arena, and start swinging again. That's what you need to do when you're running for President; because you're representing millions of people who have no voice in politics.

Senator Hillary Clinton is battling the impression which some people have of her that she is a loud, pushy woman. How do you correct something like that?

I think women are held to a different standard. This is the first time we have a serious female candidate running for President. It's exciting: Of the two Democratic frontrunners, one is a female and the other is an African-American male. I just think that's great for America; it sends a great signal all over the world. This is the first time Hillary is running for national office, and she's way up in the polls. So obviously, her message is working.

Who will the vice presidential candidate be?

I will say, as Chairman of the Clinton campaign, we're not going to be presumptuous enough to say we're picking our VP. Our focus is winning that nomination. We're single-mindedly focused on doing that, and after we win the nomination, Hillary will sit down and determine who she is compatible with, and who could take over running the country without missing a beat. As a campaign chairman, I'm interested in a Vice President who, regionally, could actually help you win the election.

And you never thought of running for office?

I love politics; but for eight years I was with President Clinton. After the 2000 elections, I was so mad that the Republicans stole the election, I decided to run for Chairman of the party. I took over a party that was bankrupt and had no infrastructure and, when I left four years later,

we were out of debt for the first time ever. We had built a new national headquarters and had 178 million people in the DNC's database. We brought the party into the 21st century. Now I'm chairing Hillary's campaign, but I'm still young. I just turned 50.

Have you decided what you're going to run for?

I haven't. If Hillary wins, I'd love to go into government – as a Secretary of Commerce or something like that. I would be great at selling business for America. The one thing I've learned is you can't plan your life out too much, because if you do, you're going to miss opportunities. When opportunities have come my way, I've jumped at them. I'm never pre-set. I like to keep my options open every day. I've worked on so many great and exciting political and business deals. I travel the world now, and I love it.

What are Hillary's faults?

I think people know she's strong, tough, principled, and experienced. They know she knows every world leader by their first name. But what people don't know about Hillary is her personal side. And if we've made any mistakes, it's that we have not let people get to know the real Hillary. She has the greatest sense of humor in the world, which I don't think most people know. She's got the best belly laugh in the world. The important part of this campaign is to let Hillary go be Hillary. I have one message for her when I talk to her: Go have fun, be spontaneous, and do what you want to do. Now it's her turn to tell her story. I think it's very important for people to understand what a great mother and family person she is. They know how smart and experienced she is, but they have to see the personal side. I always call it the beer test: Who would you rather have a beer with? People have to like you. I know that Hillary is likeable, has a great sense of humor, and is so much fun to be with; but people have to see that in her. That's what we're going to do. Hillary radiates her joy of life. Hillary will be a tremendous President. Our country needs her now. I've always thought she was spectacular, and that's why I'm willing to give two years of my life to her campaign – because I believe in her.

Will she balance the budget?

She definitely will, just like her husband did. She, like her husband, will inherit record-budget deficits, and she'll get the economy going again.

You put up the money for Bill Clinton's house in Chappaqua, New York. Your friendship goes beyond politics and money. Why? Is he that great of a guy?

He is that great of a guy. He was an amazing President, and I was always amazed at how they went after him from day one. This guy never had a break from the second he got elected. He was a moderate democrat, but he elicited such anger from the conservatives, which I never quite understood. But he never lost his sunny disposition. People ask me all the time why we're such good friends; and it's because we're two kids who don't think the glass is half-full – we think it's overflowing. I'll stick by my friends through thick and thin. Unfortunately, in politics and in business, there's not a lot of loyalty left



Terry McAuliffe with Senator Hillary Clinton and his children Mary, Jack, Dori, and Sally at his 50th birthday celebration

anymore. Everybody's with you when you're winning; I want to know who's with me when I'm down. At the time the President needed the money, I offered to help him, and he said, "I don't want you to do it. You've already done enough, and the press will kill you for this." And I looked him in the eyes and said, "Let me tell you something, Mr. President: You're my friend. I really don't care what the press says. I'm not going to determine my friendship with you based on what some reporter thinks." So I lent him the money, and it became such a fuss. But I'd do it again today. The bottom line is: Your friends are your friends, in good times and bad, and you have to stick with them. And Bill Clinton is my friend.

President Clinton and Senator Clinton are very proud of the way their daughter has grown up. She has become a very fine, young lady. How about your children? Do they miss you? Are they growing up well?

Well, that's the hardest part about all of this. I have a 15-year-old, a 14-year-old, a 12-year-old, a 7-year-old, and a 4-year-old.

When did you have time for them?

I was very good about taking the children with me when I was Chairman of the party. I took them on weekends with me when I would do political events. They got to go all over the country with me. I usually had one or two of the children with me. So I've included my family in everything. I was gone about six days out of most weeks, but I always made it a rule to be home on Sundays. After I left the DNC chairmanship in 2005, I was around a lot. I made sure I went to a lot of ball games. Last year, I was writing my book, so I was around all the time. I was able to make up for an awful lot of time, but it's hard. My children see their daddy more on television than they do in person. However, I always make an extra effort to be there for them. That being said, my kids have had some great experiences because of my work: Thanksgiving at Camp David with the Clintons and riding in the lead car at the inaugu-

ration. I have the greatest children in the world, and I give a lot of credit to my wife, Dorothy. She knows how I am; I've been this way since I was born. In my book, I tell a great story: I was pronounced dead when I was born. The doctor said, "The baby has no heartbeat." After a few minutes of whacking me around, I finally let out this huge scream. And I haven't stopped screaming since.

You are very upbeat.

I've always been like this. I've never touched a drug in my life. Could you imagine me on some kind of drug? I'd be jumping out the window right now. I just love life. When I started raising money for Jimmy Carter, I had no experience and no background. On my first trip for the Carter campaign, they sent me to Orlando, Florida, and said, "Go raise \$100,000." We ended up raising \$300,000 at that event.

What frustrates you the most?

I'm not a guy that gets frustrated much, because if there's something that frustrates me, I change it. I don't sit around; it's not my disposition. I have the greatest life in the world. I'm a very positive guy. I don't ever sit around and worry. I don't believe in sleeping. I drive my wife crazy.

But you're a natural salesman.

I am a natural salesman. It wouldn't matter if I were selling the President of the United States of America, or a bar of soap.

You never stop, do you?

I'll sleep when I'm dead.

How do you stay healthy?

I work out every day. I've run 14 marathons. I'm always going and always excited. I think that keeps you healthy. If you have a happy disposition and you love your life, you're going to be healthy.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I'd like to be President of the United States, the Pope, the King, a world leader, and a do-gooder. How's that? I just think the horizon's open for anybody. ●