



## Hillary's Hit List

The Clintons keep a favor file of saints and sinners, according to this excerpt from *HRC: State Secrets and the Rebirth of Hillary Clinton*.

By [JONATHAN ALLEN](#) and AMIE PARNES

January 12, 2014

Inside a cramped third-floor office of Hillary Clinton's once-bustling presidential campaign headquarters in the Ballston neighborhood of Arlington, Va., Kris Balderston and Adrienne Elrod put the finishing touches on a political hit list. It was late June 2008, and Hillary had dropped her bid for the presidency earlier that month. The war room, where her brain trust had devolved into profanity-laced shouting matches, was empty. The data crunchers were gone. The political director had drifted out. A handful of Hillary's aides had already hooked up with Sen. Barack Obama's campaign in Chicago.

Balderston's salt-and-pepper beard gave him the look of a college English professor who didn't need to shave for his job. Then in his early fifties, he had been with Bill and Hillary Clinton since their White House days, serving as a deputy assistant to the president and later as Hillary's legislative director and deputy chief of staff in her New York Senate office. The official

government titles obscured Balderston's true value: He was an elite political operator and one of Hillary's favorite suppliers of gossip. After more than a dozen years spent working for the Clintons, he knew how to keep score in a political race.

Elrod, a toned 31-year-old blonde with a raspy Ozark drawl, had an even longer history with the Clintons that went back to her childhood in Siloam Springs, a town of 15,000 people in northwestern Arkansas. She had known Bill Clinton since at least the age of five. Her father, John Elrod, a prominent lawyer in Fayetteville, first befriended the future president at Arkansas Boys State, an annual civics camp for high school juniors, when they were teenagers. Like Bill Clinton, Adrienne Elrod had a twinkle in her blue eyes and a broad smile that conveyed warmth instantaneously. She had first found work in the Clinton White House after a 1996 internship there, then became a Democratic Party political operative and later held senior posts on Capitol Hill. She joined the Hillary Clinton for President outfit as a communications aide and then shifted into Balderston's delegate-courting congressional-relations office in March. Trusted because of her deep ties to the Clinton network, Elrod helped Balderston finalize the list.

For months they had meticulously updated a wall-size dry-erase board with color-coded symbols, letters and arrows to track which lawmakers were leaning toward endorsing Hillary and which were headed in Obama's direction. For example, the letters "LO" indicated that a lawmaker was "leaning Obama," while "BD" in blue denoted that he or she was a member of the centrist Blue Dog Coalition on Capitol Hill.

As one of the last orders of business for a losing campaign, they recorded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet the names and deeds of members of Congress. They carefully noted who had endorsed Hillary, who had backed Obama, and who had stayed on the sidelines—standard operating procedure for any high-end political organization. But the data went into much more nuanced detail. "We wanted to have a record of who endorsed us and who didn't," a member of Hillary's campaign team said, "and of those who endorsed us, who went the extra mile and who was just kind of there. And of those who didn't endorse us, those who understandably didn't endorse us because they are [Congressional Black Caucus] members or Illinois members. And then, of course, those who endorsed him but really should have been with her ... that burned her."

For Hillary, whose loss was of course not the end of her political career, the spreadsheet was a necessity of modern political warfare, an improvement on what old-school politicians called a "favor file." It meant that when asks rolled in, she and Bill would have at their fingertips all the information needed to make a quick decision—including extenuating, mitigating and amplifying factors—so that friends could be rewarded and enemies punished.

### **The Sevens**

Hillary Clinton's staffers made a list of Democratic members of Congress, rating them from 1 (most helpful) to 7 (most treacherous). Here are some of the 7s—those whose support of Barack Obama was particularly galling to the Clinton team.

#### **Former Sen. John Kerry**



"Barack Obama can be, will be and should be the next president of the United States. ... Who better than Barack Obama to bring new credibility to America's role in the world and help restore our moral authority?" (Jan. 10, 2008)

**Sen. Ted Kennedy**



"I believe there is one candidate who has extraordinary gifts of leadership and character matched to the extraordinary demands of this moment in history. ... I'm proud to stand with him here today and offer my help, offer my voice, offer my energy, my commitment to make Barack Obama the next president of the United States." (July 28, 2008)

**Sen. Jay Rockefeller**



“Barack Obama is the most qualified person—Democrat or Republican—to lead our country in the face of enormous challenges—the very real threat of terrorism, economic uncertainty and instability at home and abroad.” (Feb. 29, 2008)

**Sen. Claire McCaskill**



“This is a man who has incredible intellectual heft ... who is not afraid to figure out a new and different way to tackle problems ... Only once in a generation does a leader come along that has that particular gift. ... Barack Obama is, I believe, right for the country this time.” (Jan. 13, 2008)

**Sen. Bob Casey**



“This campaign is a chance for America, a chance for America to chart a new course ... I believe in my heart that there’s one person who's uniquely qualified to lead us in that new direction, and that is Barack Obama.” (March 28, 2008)

**Sen. Patrick Leahy**



"We need a president who can reintroduce America to the world and actually reintroduce America to ourselves ... I believe Barack Obama is the best person to do that." (Jan. 17, 2008)

**Rep. Chris Van Hollen**



"I enthusiastically support Senator Obama. He will be our nominee, and now it's very important that we all unite behind his candidacy. He has energized millions of new voters, and if we can sustain that momentum by coming together, he will be the next president of the United States." (June 4, 2008)

**Former Rep. Baron Hill**



"If we are going to develop real solutions for Hoosier families, for America's families, we have to move past the partisan gridlock. I believe both Senator Clinton and Senator Obama want to do that and I believe both are formidable candidates. But, I also believe that only one of them truly can. ... I have decided to support Senator Obama." (April 30, 2008)

**Rep. Rob Andrews**



“There have been signals coming out of the Clinton campaign that have racial overtones that indeed disturb me. ... I had a private conversation with a high-ranking person in the campaign ... that used a racial line of argument that I found very disconcerting.” (June 3, 2008)

Their spreadsheet formalized the deep knowledge of those involved in building it. Like so many of the Clinton help, Balderston and Elrod were walking favor files. They remembered nearly every bit of assistance the Clintons had given and every slight made against them. Almost six years later, most Clinton aides can still rattle off the names of traitors and the favors that had been done for them, then provide details of just how each of the guilty had gone on to betray the Clintons—as if it all had happened just a few hours before. The data project ensured that the acts of the sinners and saints would never be forgotten.

There was a special circle of Clinton hell reserved for people who had endorsed Obama or stayed on the fence after Bill and Hillary had raised money for them, appointed them to a political post or written a recommendation to ice their kid’s application to an elite school. On one early draft of the hit list, each Democratic member of Congress was assigned a numerical grade from 1 to 7, with the most helpful to Hillary earning 1s and the most treacherous drawing 7s. The set of 7s included Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.), Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), Bob Casey (D-Pa.) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), as well as Reps. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), Baron Hill (D-Ind.) and Rob Andrews (D-N.J.).

Yet even a 7 didn’t seem strong enough to quantify the betrayal of some onetime allies.

When the Clintons sat in judgment, Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) got the seat closest to the fire. Bill and Hillary had gone all out for her when she ran for Senate in 2006, as had Obama. But McCaskill seemed to forget that favor when NBC’s Tim Russert asked her whether Bill had been a great president, during a *Meet the Press* debate against then-Sen. Jim Talent (R-Mo.) in October 2006. “He’s been a great leader,” McCaskill said of Bill, “but I don’t want my daughter near him.”

McCaskill regretted her remark instantly; the anguish brought her “to the point of epic tears,” according to a friend. She knew the comment had sounded much more deliberate than a forgivable slip of the tongue. So did Hillary, who immediately canceled a planned fundraiser for McCaskill. A few days later, McCaskill called Bill Clinton to offer a tearful apology. He was gracious, which just made McCaskill feel worse. After winning the seat, she was terrified of running into Hillary Clinton in the Capitol. “I really don’t want to be in an elevator alone with her,” McCaskill confided to the friend.

But Hillary, who was just then embarking on her presidential campaign, still wanted something from McCaskill—the Missourian’s endorsement. Women’s groups, including the pro-choice women’s fundraising network EMILY’s List, pressured McCaskill to jump aboard the Clinton bandwagon, and Hillary courted her new colleague personally, setting up a one-on-one lunch in the Senate Dining Room in early 2007. Rather than ask for McCaskill’s support directly, Hillary took a softer approach, seeking common ground on the struggles of campaigning, including the physical toll. “There’s a much more human side to Hillary,” McCaskill thought.

Obama, meanwhile, was pursuing McCaskill, too, in a string of conversations on the Senate floor. Clearly, Hillary thought she had a shot at McCaskill. But for McCaskill, the choice was always whether to endorse Obama or stay on the sidelines. In January 2008 she not only became the first female senator to endorse Obama, but she also made the case to his team that her support would be amplified if Govs. Kathleen Sebelius and Janet Napolitano came out for him at roughly the same time. McCaskill offered up a small courtesy, calling Hillary's personal aide, Huma Abedin, ahead of the endorsement to make sure it didn't blindside Hillary.

But the trifecta of women leaders giving Obama their public nod was a devastating blow. *Hate* is too weak a word to describe the feelings that Hillary's core loyalists still have for McCaskill, who seemed to deliver a fresh endorsement of Obama—and a caustic jab at Hillary—every day during the long primary season.

Many of the other names on the traitor side of the ledger were easy to remember, from Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) to Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), the civil rights icon whose defection had been so painful that Bill Clinton seemed to be in a state of denial about it. In private conversations, Bill tried to explain away Lewis's motivations for switching teams mid-campaign, after Obama began ratcheting up pressure on black lawmakers to get on "the right side of history." Lewis, because of his own place in American history and the unique loyalty test he faced with the first viable black candidate running for president, is a perfect example of why Clinton aides had to keep track of more detailed information than the simple binary of "for" and "against." Perhaps someday Lewis's betrayal could be forgiven.

But Kennedy (another 7 on the hit list) was a different story. He had slashed Hillary most cruelly of all, delivering a pivotal endorsement speech for Obama just before the Super Tuesday primaries that cast her as yesterday's news and Obama as the rightful heir to Camelot. And Kennedy did it in conjunction with a *New York Times* op-ed by his niece, Caroline Kennedy, that said much the same thing in less thundering tones. Bill Clinton had pleaded with the Massachusetts senator to hold off, but to no avail. Still, Clinton aides exulted in *schadenfreude* when their enemies faltered. Years later, they would joke among themselves in harsh terms about the fates of folks they felt had betrayed them. "Bill Richardson: investigated; John Edwards: disgraced by scandal; Chris Dodd: stepped down," one said to another. "Ted Kennedy," the aide continued, lowering his voice to a whisper for the punch line, "dead."

For several months, Balderston and Elrod had kept close tabs on an even smaller subset of targeted members of Congress, who were still undecided after Super Tuesday. Because Hillary and her team made such an intense effort to swing these particular lawmakers in the final months of the campaign, they are the first names that spring to mind when Hillary's aides today talk about who stuck a knife in her back and twisted it. For Balderston, the betrayal of Rep. Jim Moran (D-Va.) was perhaps the most personal. The two men were social friends in the Del Ray neighborhood of Alexandria, about six miles from campaign headquarters. They were even in the same book club. For months Balderston had casually pressed Moran about his endorsement. Moran played coy. He praised Hillary but came up short of promising an endorsement. Then, in January 2008, Moran left a voice message for Balderston: I'm all in for Hillary, he said.

Naturally, Balderston was excited. The courtship of delegates hadn't been going well, and adding a new name to Hillary's column was welcome news. But Balderston's joy was short-lived. "What the fuck?" he exclaimed a couple of weeks later as he read the news that Moran was set to endorse Obama. He called the congressman. "Do not ever call me again!" Balderston said. He stopped going to the book club. ("It's an accurate account. But we're friends again, and I plan on making it up to him in the 2016 campaign since I've always been in love with Hillary," Moran said. "I simply thought that given the opportunity, it was too important that this country elect an inspiring black president.") Bill Clinton was particularly incensed at Rep. Lois Capps (D-Calif.). He had campaigned for Capps's husband, Walter, who had knocked out an incumbent congresswoman in 1996; delivered the eulogy the following year at Walter's congressional memorial service, calling him "entirely too nice to be in Congress"; and then helped Lois Capps win her husband's seat in a special election. The Cappses' daughter, Laura, had even worked in the Clinton White House.

"How could this happen?" Bill asked, after Lois Capps came out for Obama at the end of April.

"Do you know her daughter is married to Bill Burton?" one of Hillary's aides replied.

Burton was working for Obama as a high-profile campaign spokesman and would go on to join Obama's White House staff, but this did little to assuage the former president's frustration. Bill and Hillary were shocked at how many Democrats had abandoned them to hook up with the fresh brand of Barack Obama. The injuries and insults were endless, and each blow hurt more than the last, the cumulative effect of months and months of defections. During the spring and summer, the Clinton campaign had gone days on end without a single endorsement.

It reached the point that Hillary—in a stale, sterile conference room at the Democratic National Committee headquarters—asked uncommitted "superdelegates" to give her their word, privately, that they would back her if it came to a vote at the convention, even if they weren't willing to take the political risk of coming out for her publicly ahead of time. Unlike the regular delegates who were elected in state party primaries and caucuses, the superdelegates, a group of lawmakers, governors, and other Democratic officials, could support whichever candidate they wanted at the convention. As a last resort, Hillary pleaded with them to simply refrain from adding their names to Obama's column. Bill would make that pitch, too, in phone calls and when he crossed paths with lawmakers. Please, just don't endorse Obama, he cajoled.

Balderston and Elrod recorded them all, good and bad, one by one, for history—and for Doug Band, Bill Clinton's tall, balding, post-presidency aide de camp. A former University of Florida frat boy, Band had a fierce loyalty to the former president, along with a knack for accumulating wealth and status. Most important for politicians, donors and journalists alike, he became the gatekeeper to Bill Clinton until leaving in 2013 to focus full-time on the firm he had created in 2007. Few question Band's strategic vision in setting up Bill's post-presidency philanthropic empire, and he counts Huma Abedin, Hillary's top personal aide, among his close friends. But some in Hillaryland took a dim view of Band's influence on the former president. He could be so abrasive that Maggie Williams, Hillary's former White House chief of staff and the person closest to her over the course of her Washington career, told friends at one point that she quit working at the Clinton Foundation in 2004 in large part because of Band. Band was in charge of



the Clinton database, however, a role that made him the arbiter of when other politicians received help from the Clintons and when they didn't.

"It wasn't so much punishing as rewarding, and I really think that's an important point," said one source familiar with Bill's thinking. "It wasn't so much, 'We're going to get you.' It was, 'We're going to help our friends.' I honestly think that's an important subtlety in Bill Clinton, in his head. She's not as calculated, but he is."

It would be political malpractice for the Clintons not to keep track of their friends and enemies. Politicians do that everywhere. The difference is the Clintons, because of their popularity and the positions they've held, retain more power to reward and punish than anyone else in modern politics. And while their aides have long and detailed memories, the sheer volume of the political figures they interact with makes a cheat sheet indispensable. "I wouldn't, of course, call it an enemies list," said one Clintonworld source when asked about the spreadsheet put together by Balderston and Elrod. "I don't want to make her sound like Nixon in a pantsuit."

Another one of Hillary's longtime advisers sought to diminish the long-term relevance of the naughty-and-nice records kept by Band. "I'm sure Doug does have some sort of fucking memo on his Blackberry like the rest of us," the adviser said. "But the notion that it is updated, circulated, disseminated and relied upon is absurd."

In the summer of 2008, Hillary couldn't have known whether or when she would run for president again. But she knew who was on her side and, name for name, who wasn't.

*Jonathan Allen is Politico's White House bureau chief.*

*Amie Parnes is the Hill's White House correspondent. They are authors of the forthcoming [HRC: State Secrets and the Rebirth of Hillary Clinton](#) (Crown Publishing, Feb. 11), from which this excerpt is adapted.*

[http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/01/hillary-clinton-hit-list-102067\\_full.html?print](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/01/hillary-clinton-hit-list-102067_full.html?print)