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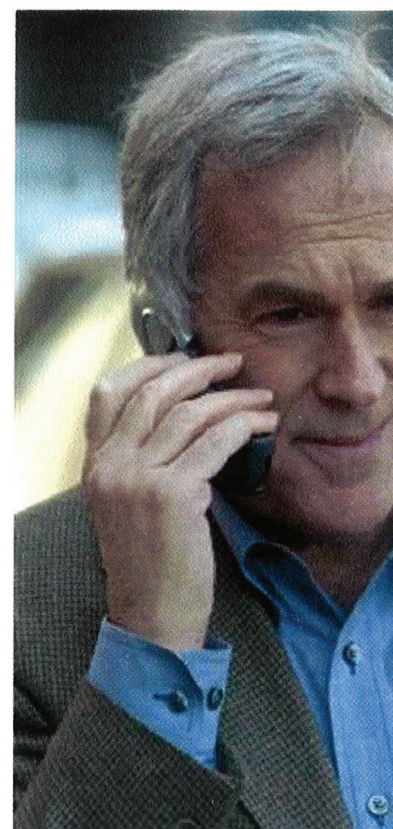
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Those stirring words, uttered by Robert F. Kennedy in South Africa 40 years ago, were heard again at a huge funeral this week in Massachusetts. They were among the favorite quotations of Eli Segal, an extraordinary public servant who died Feb. 21 of mesothelioma (an asbestos-related disease) at age 63. Segal gave meaning to RFK's line. Although he was almost unknown to the American public, he deserves credit for two tiny ripples that became the most lasting accomplishments of the Clinton presidency.

I met Segal in 1992, after he had run several successful toy and crafts businesses and become chief of staff for Bill Clinton's now-legendary campaign. He was, as Jack Lew (later Clinton's budget director) put it, "the most beloved person on the campaign"-a soft-spoken organizer always ready with a smile or helpful piece of advice. While James Carville and George Stephanopoulos got the glory for strategy and communications in the "war room," it was Segal who managed the operation day-to-day. Had someone less talented been in charge, the campaign might well have imploded under the weight of scandal and dissension. Clinton would have ended up an obscure ex-governor teaching law at the University of Arkansas.

Before Clinton, Segal backed only losers. He had major roles in the campaigns of Gene McCarthy,



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George McGovern and Gary Hart. But he changed history even then, co-writing the key report that reformed party nominating rules to take power away from bosses in smoke-filled rooms and give it to primary voters. In the 1972 campaign, he hired Clinton, just out of law school, to run Texas for McGovern, who won just 17 percent. When Clinton hired Segal in 1992, Segal said, "The only thing I can promise you, Bill, is that I'll do better for you than you did for McGovern in Texas."

He did, but I remember having dinner with Segal in Little Rock not long after Clinton's victory and learning to my surprise that he had no interest in a major post in the new administration. Instead, he wanted to use his entrepreneurial skills to help Clinton fulfill his campaign promise to create a national service program. He was given a tiny office and no money but within months he established the Corporation for National Service, which became Americorps. By structuring the program with local control and managing it carefully, Segal built a base of political support and gave an idea loathed by Republicans a fighting chance of success.

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