

Memorandum

Date: June 17, 1993

To: Senator Dole

From: Alec Vachon 

Re: News Clip/Carol Rasco

In the Living Section of *The New York Times* today, there was a profile of Carol Rasco, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, and her experiences with raising a child with cerebral palsy, including dealing with government bureaucracies. That article is attached.

I prepared a short note to Mrs. Rasco for your signature, expressing your regard for her advocacy on behalf of her son and your interest in disability. If you wish to send this note, please sign and return.



BOB DOLE  
UNITED STATES SENATE

June 17, 1993

Dear Mrs. Rasco,

I read in *The New York Times* today about your experience in raising a son with a disability, and I want you to know how much I admire your determination. I know something about having a disability myself, and whatever differences folks in this town may have on other matters, this is one issue that has no party, and is always nonpartisan and personal.

If there are any initiatives that my office can be helpful with in this area, please let me know, or my Legislative Assistant for Disability Policy, Dr. Alexander Vachon.

With best regards,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Dole", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above the printed name "BOB DOLE".

BOB DOLE

Mrs. Carol Rasco  
Assistant to the President  
for Domestic Policy  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

The New York Times, Thursday, June 17, 1993; C1

**AT HOME WITH**

Carol Rasco

# She's the Advocate She Once Needed

By JASON DePARLE

**A**T first glance, it seems a simple portrait of privileged Southern living — a sparkling backyard pool, a family gathered in a comfortable den, a four-foot-wide television that flickers with camcorder images of a relative's sprawling new home.

Only one thing suggests that Carol Rasco has seen more than suburban comfort. That is a figure strapped in a wheelchair. It is her son, Hampton (he is called Hamp).

He is probably the only mentally retarded 19-year-old to have taught a Presidential confidante. Ms. Rasco, the White House domestic policy adviser, says nothing has taught her more about the need for responsive Government than the challenge of raising a son born retarded and with cerebral palsy.

"My children so much form the core of what my view of domestic policy is about," said Ms. Rasco, who also has a healthy 12-year-old daughter, Mary-Margaret.

Ms. Rasco can tell excruciating stories of getting the runaround from Government agencies, and she often does. Her long and lonely road as a mother has shaped one of her policy goals, which she says is to "help all parents be the best they can be."

Some women in power might view their domestic lives as an inappropriate topics for inquiry; profiles of the President's men, after all, do not usually focus on their roles as fathers. But Ms. Rasco invites such inquiries, turning questions about her policy views into a conversation about motherhood.

She did that recently before a group of company chief executives. She scrapped her prepared remarks on global competitiveness to extemporize on reasons why their future labor force, today's children, needed strong advocates.

She remembers thinking, "Oh dear, do I risk this?" But knowing that other speakers would cover abstract statistics, she told the executives how her experiences had led her to see the need for child advocacy. "Without a strong advocate, my own son would not have gotten what he needed," she says.

As a former elementary-school teacher in a White House thick with Rhodes Scholars, Ms. Rasco occupies an odd Presidential niche. She

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Carol Rasco and her son, Hamp, 19, at home in Little Rock, Ark.



Mike Stewart for The New York Times

AT HOME WITH

Carol Rasco

## She's Become the Advocate She Herself Once Needed

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has nothing of the national reputations enjoyed by her two counterparts, Robert E. Rubin, the economic policy adviser, or W. Anthony Lake, the national security adviser.

She is happy to describe herself as an implementer of policies rather than their grand architect, and she seems to have taken a back seat on major issues like the budget and health-care reform. Her colleagues often grasp at straws when trying to describe her ideology, or even, sometimes, her policy positions.

But virtually all agree that she has at least one coveted credential: a deep reserve of Presidential trust, earned during a decade spent as a senior aide to Mr. Clinton when he was Governor of Arkansas. "He loves her," said John Podesta, the White House staff secretary.

Ms. Rasco began as a human-services aide to Mr. Clinton in 1983 and rose to the point where she ran much of the state's daily business for the year that Mr. Clinton was out campaigning for the Presidency. She now provides him with daily briefings on staff and policy developments across the domestic agencies, and she has shown a talent for brokering disputes between warring bureaucracies.

Still, no one is quite sure what Ms. Rasco intends to do with her access, which seems to have remained undiminished by the recent White House

upheavals and the arrival of David Gergen as Presidential counselor.

If her colleagues call her views mysterious, Ms. Rasco says that's fine with her. "I don't expect that in four, or hopefully eight, years, people will say, 'Carol Rasco is the godmother of X policy,'" she said. "The Clintons know that I'm in tune and that I can help coordinate their goals."

Asked for a definition of an underclass, for example, she answers, "I'm not going to give you big streams of words." Asked whether she identifies with so-called new Democrats or the old ones, she contends that neither camp has given "a very specific definition of what all that encompasses."

Ms. Rasco, who is 45, has a form of Southern charm that sometimes seems more evocative of the Junior League than the Oval Office. She has a sixth sense for putting guests at ease. She uses words like bumfuzzled, as a synonym for confused.

But she can also be unusually direct. The conversation turns to her son, and the air suddenly fills with vivid images: misshapen hip sockets and a broken femur, body casts and their effects on body smells. Ms. Rasco shows no hesitation in showing a visitor a toilet and fumbling with imaginary straps to illustrate the complexities of her son's daily living.

Her father, Frank Barnes Hampton, said he admired what he called his daughter's purposefulness. "She's learned that a million tears don't change anything," he said.

Ms. Rasco grew up in De Witt, Ark., 65 miles southeast of Little Rock, the daughter of a pharmacist and a homemaker. At the University of Arkansas she worked for a fellow student who was campaigning for student-body president. That student, Thomas F. McLarty 3d, is now Mr. Clinton's chief of staff.

In 1969, at 21, she married Terry Rasco, who is an architect in Little Rock. Four years later, an uneventful pregnancy culminated in a traumatic 24-hour labor. It was a Saturday, her doctor was out of town, and today's health-care reformer found herself in the hands of what she calls an inattentive hospital staff.

"I've always wondered if there wasn't more interest in the Razor-back game that afternoon," Ms. Rasco said, referring to the state's passion for the University of Arkansas football team. She still believes that the doctors should have performed a Caesarean section, though she cannot say for sure that it would have prevented the brain damage.

Hamp turned 5 before he talked, and he was 6 before he was out of diapers. With her husband at work, Ms. Rasco's life shrank to a thousand daily tasks — bolting her son's sandals onto his tricycle, sticking Velcro on his forks and spoons. "There were nights I was so tired, I would think: 'Why am I doing this? Is it ever going to show fruition?'" she said.

She said her son's subsequent development represented their mutual

triumph over doubters and unhelpful bureaucrats. She ignored doctors who suggested she institutionalize him as an infant. She fought the elementary school that had wanted to separate him from nondisabled children. She chased the school-bus bureaucracy until it provided him with a seat belt.

Her fights, she said, gave her empathy with those who were reliant on government, from the elderly to young mothers on welfare.

Ms. Rasco's efforts reached a milestone on June 2, when her son attended graduation at Hall High School and received a certificate of attendance and a standing ovation from his classmates.

Hamp speaks slowly, with a hint of a slur, and he has been announcing, with a hint of mischief, the onset of a new disease: "senioritis."

"That's when seniors want to get out," he said.

Hamp left home last summer for an Easter Seals group house, where the staff gives him help when necessary. He said he is looking for a job that will allow him to use his "social skills."

A training program has taught him to fold napkins and stack sugar baskets, and at restaurants he is quick to fault imperfect ratios of sugar and artificial sweeteners. "It's a hoot," his mother said.

His favorite activity is to listen to his portable police radio (his sister, her eyes rolling, notes that he carries it even to the mall).

Hamp attended the news conference at which his mother's appointment was announced, but he took some Kleenex with him, knowing it meant her departure from Little Rock. His old friend Bill Clinton, alarmed at his emotion, waded into the audience to soothe him afterward. Hamp will not reveal what they said. "I call that personal," he said.

Ms. Rasco describes their separation as the kind of difficult-but-healthy experience that all parents

and children go through. They stay in touch through visits, phone calls and the fax machine in Hamp's room.

Ms. Rasco's daughter plans to move to Washington in the fall, but her husband's architecture practice will keep him, along with Hamp, in Little Rock.

Ms. Rasco first met Mr. Clinton in 1976, when he was a candidate for state attorney general and spoke to a neighborhood coffee gathering. She later befriended Hillary Rodham Clinton as a fellow member of the First Methodist Church.

During his first term as Governor,

### Clinton's listening.

Mr. Clinton appointed Ms. Rasco to a state board that ran homes for the disabled. She pushed for programs that placed more disabled people in mainstream settings, like those her son has enjoyed. When Mr. Clinton returned to the Governor's office, in 1983, he brought Ms. Rasco as his liaison to the departments of human services and health.

She brought her mediating talents to bear on the nations' governors, helping forge the consensus for the 1988 Family Support Act, which required some welfare recipients to seek education or training.

But she was also overseeing human services policy when the state's foster-care system reached a crisis, with reports of abuse because of a lack of trained workers. A threat of a class-action lawsuit forced Mr. Clinton,

then an embarrassed Presidential candidate, to take action.

Ms. Rasco said a tightfisted Legislature prevented the changes from coming sooner. "Any time there are children dying, you always *should* be doing more," she said. "Could we have done it faster? I question that."

The low profile, but high access, that Ms. Rasco brings to her current work can be seen through her role in immunization policy. Earlier this year, Department of Health and Human Services wanted to distribute free vaccines to all children, regardless of family income; the Office of Management and Budget wanted a cheaper plan that gave free vaccines only to the needy.

The decisive moment came in March, when Ms. Rasco went to the President and came back with his decision in favor of the more expensive option, which was subsequently rejected by Congress. She said Mr. Clinton understood the risks and made his own choice. Ms. Rasco's own views have to be discerned by reading between the lines. She says she wasn't "passionately and vociferously" for the plan, but she "would have been happy to have it go through."

A memorable moment in Ms. Rasco's call for a more helpful Government occurred last winter at a Camp David retreat, when she told her colleagues about a woman she had known in Arkansas. The woman, calling a state agency, had been hung up on by a worker eager to get to lunch. She had gone to Federal buildings that were marked "handicapped accessible," only to find they were not. She had seen her child rejected by state programs for the disabled because he was not indigent and the family was not allowed to pay.

Ms. Rasco caught her colleagues by surprise when she explained why those images would never leave her. "Because," she said, "those experiences were my own."