

“I Wouldn’t Play Poker Against Him”

Participant: Tom Perez

Interviewers: Russell L. Riley, Michael Greco (A/V), Barbara A. Perry, Saladin Ambar

Interview Date: January 26, 2024

Project: Barack Obama Oral History Project

Tom Perez served in the Obama administration for all eight years. He began as an assistant attorney general for the Justice Department’s Civil Right Division and then became secretary of labor. Perez recounts situations in which the president’s emotions shone through.

Interviewer (Perry): Is it ever helpful for someone who is zenlike on occasion to depart from that to get people’s attention to really make a point?

Tom Perez: One time when that happened, and it wasn’t contrived, was after Sandy Hook [Elementary School shooting]. Another time it happened, and it wasn’t contrived, was down in South Carolina after those brutal hate crimes. You saw the side of him that maybe wasn’t as visible. But just because someone is a little more even-keeled doesn’t mean they don’t have passion. He just, I think, projects it a little differently. That was a big part of who he was. I wouldn’t play poker against him. [laughter]

End of excerpt.

Interview 2 with Tom Perez, January 26, 2024, Barack Obama Oral History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.
URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/tom-perez-oral-history-interview-2>